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# Marsden's Malay Manuscripts: Reassessing a Colonial Collection

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## Abstract

This article investigates European collecting of Malay manuscripts during the colonial era to address two inter-related questions: was this collecting instrumental in destroying the Malay manuscript tradition, and are colonial collections accurate representations of Malay manuscript culture? It makes the case that while European intervention was certainly destructive, in fact the majority of Malay-language literary texts survive only in colonial-era collections. It also considers whether colonial collections, precisely because they are high in Malay literary texts and low in Arabic religious texts (known as *kitab*), are unrepresentative of Malay manuscript culture in the nineteenth century and earlier. Taking Marsden's seminal collection of Malay manuscripts as its case study, the article provides a fuller account of how this collection was assembled, and traces the individuals known to have acquired manuscripts for Marsden. Newly documented manuscript collections that remain in situ in Indonesia and in Malaysian institutions are discussed as a counterpoint.

## Keywords

Malay manuscripts – William Marsden – colonial collecting – genre – Islamic texts – vernacular literature

Despite epigraphic evidence of writing in Malay going back to the seventh century CE, and at least 500 years of an Islamicate textual tradition, there are not many surviving Malay manuscripts. Estimates of the number of texts in the Malay language held in institutional collections in Europe and in Southeast

Asia range from 10,000 to 15,000.<sup>1</sup> This number is so low that, as Ian Proudfoot wrote, they would only “have stocked one middling library in other parts of the Muslim world.”<sup>2</sup> Whether this comparatively small amount, at least in terms of the superlatively “bookish” societies of the Muslim Middle East,<sup>3</sup> is due to cultural or climatic factors, or both, remains a puzzle. Also problematic for understanding the remaining corpus is the fact that the most studied Malay manuscripts in these institutional holdings come to us from European collectors active in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From the few dozens amassed in the sixteenth century, when Erpenius and Archbishop Laud first started to acquire Malay manuscripts, right up to the many thousands in the late nineteenth century, when Snouck Hurgronje, Winstedt, and Van der Tuuk were mopping up what remained of a dying scribal culture, most of the Malay manuscript collections best known to researchers, and therefore most formative for the present understanding of the Malay manuscript tradition as a whole, were assembled by Europeans and are stored in colonial-era repositories.<sup>4</sup> In Proudfoot’s words again, we are

uncomfortably dependent upon the interests and collection policies of a few nineteenth-century Europeans and their local collaborators, and with little reason to think that we have been bequeathed an accurate snapshot of the manuscript tradition even in its last phase. This makes it important to know as much as possible about how manuscripts were collected and collections formed. For the formation of the major colonial collections, this means understanding the interests of European collectors as well as the social circles and inclinations of their local collaborators, and how they went about the business of collecting.<sup>5</sup>

1 Perhaps the most recent estimate is that of Warnk, who suggests 13,000–15,000 manuscripts, of 800–1000 titles. Holger Warnk, “Collecting Malay Books in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in *Libraries and the Malay World*, eds. Rohani Rustam and Zawiyah Baba (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2009), 25–46, 32. Proudfoot suggested a figure of 10,000. Ian Proudfoot, “From Recital to Sight-Reading: the Silencing of Texts in Malaysia,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 87 (2002): 118.

2 Proudfoot, “From Recital to Sight-Reading,” 118.

3 Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: a Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 1.

4 This includes not only institutions in Europe, but also the Malay manuscripts in the Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, which came originally from the Bataviaasch Genootschap.

5 Ian Proudfoot, “An Expedition into the Politics of Malay Philology,” *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 284 (2003): 2–3.

Along with Proudfoot, Kratz<sup>6</sup> and Jones<sup>7</sup> also cautioned that European collecting often involved the destruction of the tradition itself, that the collections were shorn of essential contextual information, and that the genre profile of the collections was unrepresentative of what texts actually circulated in the Malay world during the manuscript age.<sup>8</sup>

This article re-examines the claim that colonial-era collections are unrepresentative, with reference to a seminal collection of Malay manuscripts, that of William Marsden, now held in the library of SOAS University of London, and in light of the collections amassed latterly in Southeast Asian institutions, as well as those that remain in the field and are now being documented by the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) and the Digital Repository of Endangered and Affected Manuscripts in South East Asia (DREAMSEA).<sup>9</sup> This reassessment of the importance of Marsden's collection within the larger corpus is significant not only within Malay philology but more broadly within the debate about colonialism and the production of knowledge. In their introduction to a volume exploring "colonial knowledge," Rocque and Wagner write that the "question of how we relate to the epistemic legacy of European imperialism, and what constructive use to make of its fragments, is in fact critical to contemporary historical and anthropological practice."<sup>10</sup> To these disciplines ought to be added philology, a practice often heavily dependent on "the epistemic legacy of European imperialism" and, especially, on the archive formed during that era. Much has of course been written on the colonial archive, and its determinative effect on what history can be recovered—what has been termed epistemic violence.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Malay manuscripts, it is important

6 E.U. Kratz, "The Editing of Malay Manuscripts and Textual Criticism," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 137 (1981): 236.

7 Russell Jones, *Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim ibn Adham: an Edition of an Anonymous Malay Text with Translation and Notes* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1985), 5.

8 By Malay world is meant the geographical region through which Malay (Melayu) was used as a language of diplomacy, scholarship and literature, spanning present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and parts of southern Thailand and the Philippines. Malay was never the only language in use in this area, of course, nor was the language exclusively used by the ethnic group now termed Malay. The manuscript age in this context extends to the end of the nineteenth century.

9 <https://eap.bl.uk/> and <https://dreamsea.co/>.

10 Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, eds., *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

11 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 270–304; Anjali Arondekar, "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 (2005), 10–27; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 16–17.

to observe that while the material in some cases entered the colonial archive through acts of (physical) violence, it was created and originally consumed within its own episteme, and it remains possible to recover some partial sense of that original context precisely through reading the manuscripts themselves. Marsden's manuscript collection is therefore not a colonial archive in the sense advanced by Risam: "material [that] tells the story of British colonialism from the perspective of the colonizer, unmatched by accounts from the colonized subjects."<sup>12</sup> Rather, these manuscripts are texts written by Malay writers for Malay readers, who were often not subjects of colonialism but rather of local polities, and were usually entirely indifferent to the interests or perspectives of Europeans. This article thus contributes a rather more literal intervention into the debate about colonial knowledge, considering not so much what colonial philologists made of the Malay manuscript tradition (though Marsden's views of Malay literature will be discussed below) but rather the formation of the archive itself: how a colonial collection was assembled, and how it compares to collections formed later.

Closer attention to Marsden's means of collecting manuscripts shows that it was more haphazard than driven by any particular scholarly agenda. He indeed profited from the expanding exercise of British power in insular Southeast Asia, whether on the level of military might or in more intimate domestic relations, in order to assemble his library. The greater understanding of Malay literary culture that Marsden gleaned led him to radically revise upwards his estimation of Malay literature between the first and the second editions of his influential *History of Sumatra*. Finally, while Marsden's Malay manuscript collection appears relatively low in Arabic-language Islamic texts in comparison with the collections that remain in situ in Southeast Asia, this imbalance is somewhat redressed when we correct for an artifact of the data in the way the surviving manuscripts from the Malay world were categorised, by Marsden and his scholarly heirs alike. Marsden's catalogue is organised by language, with Arabic-language manuscripts collected in the Malay world appearing under Arabic. The modern catalogues are similarly segregated: Marsden's Arabic-language manuscripts from Southeast Asia, for instance, are in an entirely different catalogue from those in vernacular languages.<sup>13</sup>

12 Roopika Risam, "Colonial Violence and the Postcolonial Digital Archive," in *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 48.

13 Manuscripts entirely in Arabic are catalogued in Adam Gacek, *Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1981).

But codicological evidence shows that some of Marsden's Arabic-language manuscripts are from Southeast Asia;<sup>14</sup> this then brings the genre profile of Marsden's collection more in line with collections that remain in the field. Comparison with these collections underscores the reason why colonial-era collections like Marsden's cannot be dismissed: they preserve the bulk of the Malay-language literary corpus. Without colonial collecting—however problematic its aims or methods—there would be very much less Malay literature from the manuscript age.

### Survivors of Colonial Spoliation

There are a number of instances in which European intervention led directly to the loss of manuscripts or to the destruction of literary centres in island Southeast Asia, such as the British sack of the Yogyakarta *kraton* in 1812, which resulted in some 70 manuscripts entering UK collections, and the attack on the Sultanate of Bone, in south Sulawesi (34 manuscripts).<sup>15</sup> Most fateful for Malay manuscripts was perhaps the 1824 wreck of the ship *Fame*. Carrying the British colonial administrator and gentleman scholar Stamford Raffles back to England, the *Fame* caught fire and sank a few days' sail out of Bengkulu, west Sumatra. Raffles' collections of artifacts and natural history specimens amassed during his eight-year sojourn in Sumatra went down with the ship.<sup>16</sup> But the greatest loss, lamented Raffles' Malay scribe Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, was the manuscripts: five leather chests filled with texts in Malay, Javanese, Balinese and Bugis—"all completely gone, without leaving a seed behind, for they were all written by hand."<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that, even without these

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Manuscripts containing Southeast Asian languages are catalogued in Ricklefs, Voorhoeve and Gallop, *Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain*.

- 14 For instance, on codicological grounds the following Marsden Arabic manuscripts are of Southeast Asian origin: SOAS MS 43265, MS 12145, MS 12096, MS 11660, MS 12225.
- 15 Annabel Gallop, "The Royal Library of Bone: Bugis and Makassar Manuscripts in the British Library," January 2020, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2020/01/the-royal-library-of-bone-bugis-and-makassar-manuscripts-in-the-british-librar.html>, accessed September 9, 2022.
- 16 Alexandra Green, "Sir Stamford Raffles—collecting in Southeast Asia," September 19, 2019 (<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/sir-stamford-raffles-collecting-in-southeast-asia>), accessed September 9, 2022.
- 17 "...sekaliannya habislah hilang, tiada lagi tinggal benihnya karena sekaliannya itu tulisan tangan," Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi. Jilid 3: Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Amin Sweeney (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,

five chests of manuscripts, a significant amount of Raffles' material survives in the Royal Asiatic Society and the British Library. Nor should Abdullah be taken as entirely accurate: not all the material would have been unique, and a good amount of it would likely have been fresh copies made by Raffles' scribes, as may be surmised from examining those of his manuscripts that do survive.<sup>18</sup> However, the loss of specifically Sumatran material was nonetheless considerable. Raffles was also implicated in the disappearance of a perhaps even more important collection of Malay manuscripts. During the British interregnum in Java (1811–16), these were transferred, likely on Raffles' orders, from the Court of Chancery to the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, never to be seen again.<sup>19</sup> Proudfoot judged this "probably a greater disaster than the sinking of the *Fame*,"<sup>20</sup> particularly as this collection may have included manuscripts from the seventeenth century, which number only a few dozen in the surviving corpus. A final example of colonial spoliation is the looting of the renowned library of the Sultan of Palembang, not once but twice: by the British in 1812 and the Dutch in 1821.<sup>21</sup> Some 60 manuscripts survive, now dispersed across the world, out of a library that must have contained at least several hundred.

Beyond these examples of violent intervention, it has been argued that even apparently benign purchase of manuscripts from willing sellers had a deleterious effect. Proudfoot suggests that the "incursions of European collectors also began to undermine the tradition they sought to capture, by divorcing manuscripts from the social contexts that produced them and breaking down the conditions of access to manuscripts which had hitherto applied."<sup>22</sup> In other words, contrary to the idea that European intervention in the writing traditions of Southeast Asia preserved what would otherwise have vanished had it remained in situ, European collecting may have hastened the collapse

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École française d'Extrême-Orient and Perpustakaan Nasional RI, 2008 [1842], 422. My translation.

18 Jessica Rahardjo, "The Development of Islamic Intellectual Tradition at the Sultanate of Palembang (c.1750–1825): The Evidence of Manuscripts" (Unpublished MPhil Extended Essay, University of Oxford, 2018), 15.

19 Petrus Voorhoeve, "A Malay Scriptorium," in *Malayan and Indonesian Studies: Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on His Eighty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. John Bastin and Roelof Roolvink (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 266.

20 Proudfoot, "An Expedition," 27.

21 Teuku Iskandar, "Palembang Kraton Manuscripts," in *A Man of Indonesian Letters: Essays in Honour of Professor A. Teeuw*, eds. C.M.S. Hellwig and S.O. Robson (Dordrecht: Foris, 1986), 67–72; G.W.J. Drewes, *Directions for Travellers on the Mystic Path* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 198.

22 Proudfoot, "An Expedition," 2–3.

of indigenous textual traditions even as it sought to preserve them for philological study. In addition, because they took little note of provenance,<sup>23</sup> those manuscripts that did survive were severed from their original social and historical milieu—what Carey termed their “cultural ecology.”<sup>24</sup> It is as if the stuffed birds of paradise and the snakes pickled in alcohol that the likes of Raffles also collected came without information of their ecological niches, rendering them rare and marvellous, but, without context, opaque. The practice—common procedure both at the Bataviaasch Genootschap and by British collectors—of commissioning clean copies by in-house scribes also means that many of the manuscripts in colonial-era collections lack any paratextual or codicological information. In most of these colonial manuscripts there are no illustrations, commentaries, marginalia or other marks of reading, other than those left by colonial scholars themselves. This therefore removes material clues for the use or context of manuscripts, rendering them pure text, abstracted from place or time of composition and reading.

One corrective to these distortions is, as Proudfoot suggested, greater attention to how, by whom and why these collections were formed. Yet, since Proudfoot's call there has been little progress. The useful but necessarily limited capsule biographies of the major collectors provided in Ricklefs and Voorhoeve's catalogue of Indonesian manuscripts in Great Britain are in most cases yet to be improved upon.<sup>25</sup> Some incidental light has been shed on the practices and policies of individual collectors in the course of research on particular manuscripts.<sup>26</sup> Much more knowledge remains tacit on the part of researchers who have worked with these collections—a sense that John Leyden had a taste for folkloric romance, for instance, or the assumption that

23 For instance, Van Ronkel, who compiled the catalogue of the Bataviaasch Genootschap manuscripts in 1909, is said to have remarked that manuscript provenance was of no importance. In Drewes, *Directions for Travellers*, 198.

24 Peter Carey, *The Cultural Ecology of Early Nineteenth-Century Java: Pangeran Diponegara, a Case Study* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1974).

25 M.C. Ricklefs, P. Voorhoeve and Annabel Teh Gallop, *Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain* (Jakarta: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, and Yayasan Pustaka Obor, 2014 [1977]), xxiii–xxix.

26 For information on H.N. van der Tuuk, see Marije Plomp, “Never-Neverland Revisited: Malay Adventure Stories, with an Annotated Edition and Translation of the Malay Story of Bahram Syah” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014), 10–22; for Roorda van Eysinga, H.C. Klinkert and H. von de Wall see Mulaika Hijjas, “Victorious Heroines and Virtuous Wives: the Disguised Heroine in 19th-century Malay Syair” (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 2007), 40–46; for Mackenzie, see Seda Kouznetsova, “Colin Mackenzie as a Collector of Javanese Manuscripts and Manuscript BL MSS Jav. 29,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 106 (2008); for Valentijn, see Vladimir Braginsky, “Newly Found' Manuscripts that were never Lost,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 112 (2010).

Snouck Hurgronje's material came exclusively from religious circles. This lore remains largely unspoken and untested. This article attempts to move towards the holistic overview that Proudfoot called for and that remains so necessary, by providing a closer look at and new information about one of the foundational collections of British studies of Malay manuscripts, that of William Marsden.

### William Marsden and the Formation of His Malay Manuscript Collection

Author of *The History of Sumatra* (1783, rev. ed. 1811), *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language* and *A Grammar of the Malayan Language* (both 1812), William Marsden (1754–1836) has been described as “among the founders of modern scholarly study of the Malay-Indonesian area.”<sup>27</sup> Born in County Wicklow, Ireland, to a relatively well-to-do family, at the age of 16 William was sent to join his older brother, John (1746–86), who was employed by the East India Company in Bengkulu, west Sumatra. William Marsden remained in the service of the Company in Bengkulu for eight years, returning to London in 1779. After his return to London he directed an East India agency concern, while at the same time pursuing a career as a scholar.<sup>28</sup> *The History of Sumatra* appeared in 1783 and established his reputation. In the same year, he was elected to the Royal Society, ushering him into the company of the luminaries of his age, including Joseph Banks, William Jones and Hans Sloane. From a genteel but not exalted background, and having been prevented from taking up a place at Trinity College, Dublin, Marsden rose to the heights of the British establishment. The scholarly aspect of this ascent was achieved through the publications arising from his time in Sumatra, and is based on what he learned in the field (language, history, ethnography, and geography) and from studying

27 William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra* (London: printed for the author, 1784), revised edition 1811; *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language: in Two Parts, Malayan and English and English and Malayan* (London: Longman and Black, 1812); *A Grammar of the Malayan Language, with Introduction and Praxis* (London: Longman and Black, 1812). For Marsden as a scholar of Malay and his contribution to British Enlightenment scholarship, especially linguistics, see Diana J. Carroll, “William Marsden and Patterns of British Scholarship in the Malay Peninsula,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 114 (2011), 269–94; Carroll, “William Marsden, the Scholar Behind the History of Sumatra,” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 137 (2019), 74–28; Mary Quilty, *Textual Empires: a Reading of Early British Histories of Southeast Asia* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash Asia Institute, 1998); and Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

28 Bastin, *The History of Sumatra* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), vi.



manuscripts that came into his hands after his return to Europe. In Marsden's case, to evoke Said's famous citation of Disraeli as an epigraph to *Orientalism*, the east was most certainly a career.

In 1835, Marsden presented his entire collection of rare books and manuscripts to the library of King's College, London. Comprising thousands of items, ranging from numismatics to early European printing, these works were inventoried by Marsden himself in the suitably voluminous and imposingly titled *Bibliotheca Marsdeniana philologica et orientalis: a catalogue of books and manuscripts collected with a view to the general comparison of languages, and to the study of Oriental literature*.<sup>29</sup> In the early 1920s, Marsden's material pertaining to Asia and the Middle East was transferred from King's College to the recently established School of Oriental Studies. Included in this transfer were Marsden's manuscripts from island Southeast Asia. The relatively small number and modest appearance of these items belies their significance, for they were immensely important to Marsden's ascendance as a scholar in the latter part of the British Enlightenment, as well as to the formation of conceptions of Malay language and literature, both in Marsden's time and ours.

Although the history of Marsden's Malay collection is well known in the outlines sketched above, and the holdings have long been catalogued, as Kratz remarks, "[i]nformation on how the Marsden collection came into being is almost nonexistent."<sup>30</sup> In his preface to the reissue of Marsden's *History*, Bastin wrote that Marsden's "main reliance was not so much on printed sources as on material collected during his eight years' stay in Bencoolen and on information derived from his friends in west Sumatra."<sup>31</sup> However, as this article will show, it appears that the bulk of Marsden's Malay and other insular Southeast Asian language manuscripts were probably not collected during his sojourn in Sumatra, but rather were obtained after he left Sumatra, from friends and connections active in that island and beyond. Certain of the manuscripts can be demonstrated to have informed his *History*, *Dictionary* and *Grammar*, and therefore to have been in his possession before 1812 at the latest. Other manuscripts, however, date from after 1812, showing that Marsden continued to collect Malay material even after he stopped working on Malay topics. Moreover, closer attention to the sources, where known, of Marsden's manuscripts suggests that he collected them primarily through his network of personal contacts, including 'native informants,' and that he did so not following any

29 William Marsden, *Bibliotheca Marsdeniana* (London: Printed by J.L. Cox, 1827).

30 E.U. Kratz, "Like a Fish Gasping for Water: The Letters of a Temporary Spouse from Bengkulu," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 100 (2006): 253.

31 Bastin, *A History of Sumatra*, v–vi.

particular policy but rather haphazardly. Nevertheless, his interests did shape the collection, which shows a strong emphasis on works in local languages.

Marsden's own writing contains only a few scant indications of how he went about assembling his collection. His memoirs mention how he scoured catalogues of sale and kept a weather eye out for unusual books and uninformed sellers.<sup>32</sup> His *Bibliotheca Marsdeniana* provides only a succinct and rather idiosyncratic description of a given text, an indication of the size and number of volumes, and nothing at all about provenance. For example, his entry for the ten volumes of what is now known as the Light letters, over a thousand documents, reads in its entirety "Malayan Correspondence, consisting chiefly of letters from the Rajahs and principal native merchants of the Peninsula and neighbouring islands, addressed to Capt. Francis Light and Capt. James Scott of Pulo Pinang. In several Portfolios."<sup>33</sup> The researcher is left to surmise the personal relationships between Marsden, Light and Scott, perhaps with the intermediary of Raffles, which led to this great trove of letters passing into Marsden's hands.

Elsewhere in his *Memoirs* Marsden provides further information about how he came by his materials for his scholarly work on Sumatra. While in Sumatra, he asserts that he gathered information about "whatever was striking in the productions of the country, or peculiar in the manners of the natives," but that he did not actually collect materials at that time.<sup>34</sup> In the preface to the *Grammar*, Marsden further recounts that, guided by his elder brother, he "devoted somewhat more than the common attention necessary of all strangers, to the attainment of the language of the country," including "mastery of [the natives'] epistolary correspondence," but only turned to the study of Malay texts after his return to England in 1779.<sup>35</sup> Marsden's stress upon his epistolary abilities in Malay explains why (though not how) he may have acquired the Light letters, which were most likely in his possession by 1812.<sup>36</sup> We will return to John Marsden's facility in Malay below.

Marsden's discussion of Malay literature in *The History of Sumatra* itself, which differs substantially between the editions of 1783 and 1811, confirms that most of his reading in it occurred between those dates. A comparison of the two editions reveals that Marsden substantially revised his evaluation—upwards—of Malay literature between the first and the second editions.

32 Elizabeth Marsden, ed., *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of William Marsden* (London: privately published, 1838), 72.

33 Marsden, *Bibliotheca*, 304. The letters are now catalogued as SOAS MS 40320.

34 Marsden, *A Brief Memoir*, 15.

35 Marsden, *Grammar*, xlix.

36 Marsden, *Grammar*, ix.

The following passages, taken from identical points in the two editions of the *History*, are worthy of attention. In the 1783 edition, Marsden noted: “[t]heir books are for the most part, either transcripts from the Alcoran (*koraan*) or legendary tales (*kabar*); of little merit as compositions.”<sup>37</sup> In 1811, however, he conceded that “[t]he Malayan books are very numerous, both in prose and verse. Many of them are commentaries on the *korān*, and others, romances or heroic tales.”<sup>38</sup> Again, in 1783, he wrote:

Like other people of Sumatra, those of Menangcabow are entirely without records or annals: none such, at least, have ever been spoken of in the various negotiations we have had with them. They are expert at writing, in the Arabic character, but their literature amounts to nothing more, than transcripts of the *koraan*, and *cabar* or historic tales, resembling our old romances, but having less ingenuity. Songs, called *pantoon*, before mentioned, they are famous for composing. These spread throughout the island, and though they are likewise invented in any other parts, are held in first esteem, as coming from the Muses' most favored seat.<sup>39</sup>

But by 1811 he amended the same passage to:

Malayan literature consists chiefly of transcripts and versions of the koran, commentaries on the mussulman law, and historic tales both in prose and verse, resembling in some respect our old romances. Many of these are original compositions, and others are translations of the popular tales current in Arabia, Persia, India, and the neighbouring island of Java, where the Hindu languages and mythology appear to have made, at a remote period, considerable progress. Among several works of this description I possess their translation (but much compressed) of the *Ramayana*, a celebrated Sanskrit poem, and also of some of the Arabian stories lately published in France as a Continuation of the “Thousand and one Nights,” first made known to the European world by M. Galland. If doubts have been entertained of the authenticity of these additions to his immortal collection, the circumstance of their being (however partially) discovered in the Malayan language, will serve to remove them. Besides these they have a variety of poetic works, abounding rather with moral reflections and complaints of the frowns of fortune or of ill-requited

37 Marsden, *History* (1783), 163.

38 Marsden, *History* (1811), 199.

39 Marsden, *History* (1783), 276.

love, than with flights of fancy. The *pantun* or short proverbial stanza has already been described. They are composed in all parts of the island, and often extempore; but such as proceed from Menangkabau, the most favoured seat of the Muses, are held in first esteem.<sup>40</sup>

Thus it is clear that the 1811 edition contains a fuller, more positive, and indeed more accurate account of Sumatran writing traditions. The 1783 edition reflects what Marsden learned during the course of his time as an EIC functionary in Bengkulu, especially as a court ‘writer,’ responsible for recording legal proceedings, coming into contact with orature (*pantun*) and religious texts (the Qur’ān) but apparently not much else. Marsden of 1783 scants the literary achievements of Sumatran peoples (“of little merit as compositions,” “their literature amounts to nothing more ...”) but Marsden of 1811 records that written texts in Malay are numerous, of diverse forms and genres, and include “original compositions” as well as adaptations from Arabia, Persia and India. Indeed, Marsden of 1811 even allows that the existence of a Malay version of the *Thousand and One Nights* may be used to validate the authenticity of Galland’s translation, so fashionable in eighteenth-century Europe. This radically changed evaluation must have been based upon the additional materials which came into Marsden’s hands *after* he left Bengkulu.

### Marsden’s Network of Informants

Marsden’s own annotations within the manuscripts name five individuals: Alexander Dalrymple, Thomas Forrest, Joseph Banks, J. Griffiths, and William Fitzwilliam Owen.<sup>41</sup> These five men, four of whom can be identified as Marsden’s colleagues and contemporaries in British naval and Orientalist circles, provided him with material long after his departure from Southeast Asia. Dalrymple (1737–1808) was sometime hydrographer to the Admiralty and functionary of the East India Company. He had taken part in the British occupation of Manila (1762–4) and served as Provisional Deputy Governor there during 1764. The British occupation involved the sack of the city, including of Catholic monasteries and churches, which is presumably how Dalrymple came by manuscripts on Philippine languages compiled by Spanish clergy. He passed at least six such manuscripts on to Marsden, apparently intended

40 Marsden, *History* (1811), 346–7.

41 Ricklefs, Voorhoeve and Gallop, *Indonesian Manuscripts*: 185, 187, 247, 248 (Dalrymple); 106 (Forrest); 85, 157 (Banks); 157, 158, 163 (Griffiths); 38, 95, 156, 165 (Owen).

as a contribution towards the latter's linguistic studies. A notice pasted in *Arte de la Lengua Tagala*, partly obscuring Dalrymple's own bookplate (see Figure 1), records that Dalrymple presented the book to Marsden. That this notice is printed of course suggests that there were a fair number of books to which it was affixed. A handwritten note signed by Marsden reads "Afterwards bequeathed to me."

Another member of this circle was Thomas Forrest (1729–c.1802), also an old Sumatra hand, having joined the East India Company in 1763, after some twenty years as a private merchant.<sup>42</sup> Forrest would later write with warm approval of Marsden's *History* that it was "faithful, curious, and exact; and, as I have passed many years of my life in trading voyages to that island [= Sumatra], I read it with great pleasure and satisfaction, as it recals [sic] many scenes of manners and customs to my memory, by time and absence almost obliterated. Mr Marsden understands the Malay tongue better than any European I ever knew."<sup>43</sup> Joseph Banks, then President of the Royal Society, was another source of material for Marsden's collection, giving him two word lists including Javanese, Malay, Sulu, Savu, Malagasy and the language of the island of Panaitan.<sup>44</sup> These formed some of the materials that would eventually lead to Marsden's identification of the Austronesian language family. They also indicate once again how information was shared between a small, inter-connected group of men who had both field experience and scholarly ambitions.

Two other men who contributed insular Southeast Asian manuscripts to Marsden were not members of this scholarly circle: a Mr J. Griffiths and Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen. Griffiths is the source of *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, some *pantun* from Lampung, and a *Hikayat Budak Miskin* from Penang.<sup>45</sup> The connection to Griffiths is established in the first two instances by inscriptions in the manuscripts, and in the final one from Marsden's catalogue.<sup>46</sup> Although *Syair Perang Mengkasar* relates events in south Sulawesi in 1667, the manuscript dates from considerably later, and may, like Griffiths' other two contributions, have been collected in the western archipelago. Griffiths himself has not yet been identified. Captain Owen is the source of a *syair* on sin and the

42 D.K. Bassett, ed., *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas* by Thomas Forrest (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969), 106.

43 Thomas Forrest, *A Voyage from Calcutta* (London: Sold by J. Robson, I Owen and Balfour, Edinburgh, 1792), 59–60.

44 SOAS MS 12156, and SOAS MS 12153.

45 SOAS MS 40324, MS 12168, MS 12260.

46 "With Mr Griffith's compliments to Mr Marsden," SOAS MS 40324: f37a; "Romantic tale in the Malayan language ... from Mr Griffiths," SOAS MS 12168 title page; "received from Mr J. Griffiths," Marsden, *Bibliotheca*, 304.



FIGURE 1 Flyleaf of King's College Library Marsden L3/6, *Arte de la Lengua Tagala*  
IMAGE COPYRIGHT AND USED BY PERMISSION OF KING'S COLLEGE LONDON,  
FOYLE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY

afterlife, a Lampung vocabulary, a miscellaneous manuscript from Tambora, Sumbawa, and a Malay translation of an Arabic historical work, *Kitāb Futūh al-Shām*.<sup>47</sup> Captain Owen's annotation on the flyleaf of this last manuscript makes clear its provenance: "From the Sultan of Palembang's palace 28th April 1812" (see Figure 2 below).

Another manuscript,<sup>48</sup> with very similar binding and "Susuhunan Ahmad" (presumably Ahmad Najamuddin I, 1757–76) given as the owner, likely also came to Marsden from the Palembang palace via Owen. At least five manuscripts, of which copies are now in the Raffles collection at the Royal Asiatic Society, may also have been taken from the palace at the same time.<sup>49</sup>

A final person who emerges as a source for Marsden's manuscripts stands in stark contrast to the British officers and adventurers discussed above. This is Ence' Lena, John Marsden's common-law wife in Bengkulu, with whom he had three children. Ence' Lena was in effect William Marsden's sister-in-law, and the three girls his nieces. This striking fact is known not through any attestation by Marsden, who is entirely silent about the existence of Ence' Lena or her daughters, but through Kratz's study of the Light letters. John Marsden spent sixteen years in Bengkulu, returning to London in 1783 with the two youngest children, called in the letters Nona Kete' and Nona Gadang (Little Miss and Big Miss). Along with one of her letters of 1784, Ence' Lena records that she is sending the manuscript of a *syair* to "my master, Mr [John] Marsden." "I am sending you a couple of umbrellas and a pair of cushions and a box filled with bonito fish and

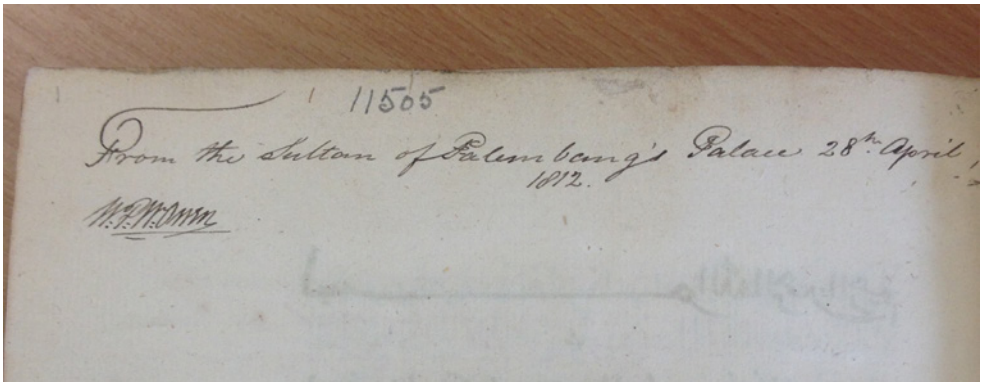


FIGURE 2 William Fitzwilliam Owen's signature and inscription on the flyleaf of SOAS MS 11505  
IMAGE USED BY PERMISSION OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, SOAS LIBRARY

47 SOAS MS 46198, MS 11979, MS 12159, MS 11505.

48 SOAS MS 12225.

49 Rahardjo, "The Development of the Islamic Intellectual Tradition," 15.

a copy of the *Syair Si Lindung Delima*. According to the Malays, this is the *syair* with the best message.”<sup>50</sup> Although it was assumed that this manuscript came to King’s with Marsden’s original bequest of 1837,<sup>51</sup> an inscription on the fly-leaf states: “presented by Mrs Martin Leake, June 1851.” Mrs Leake was William Marsden’s widow, Elizabeth, who subsequently remarried.<sup>52</sup> It was some fourteen years after the rest of Marsden’s books had been given to King’s, then, that Elizabeth gave the library the copy of *Syair Selindung Delima*. Ence’ Lena had of course originally sent the manuscript to John Marsden, perhaps also intending it for their children.<sup>53</sup> Hicks has noted that Ence’ Lena’s choice of this particular *syair*, with its “plot warning of the possible maltreatment of a young girl separated from her mother” may have been quite pointed.<sup>54</sup> John Marsden died in 1783 and nothing further is known of the children. The manuscript of *Syair Selindung Delima* presumably passed to William, thence to Elizabeth, and belatedly, after the rest of the collection, to King’s College Library.

William Marsden’s biography, which Elizabeth prepared for publication, makes no mention of John Marsden’s Bengkulu wife and their ‘natural’ daughters—though it would be unwise to extrapolate from this that women like Elizabeth were ignorant of the relationships their husbands and fathers had formed in Asia. While no evidence has emerged of liaisons William Marsden may have had in Sumatra, it was common for men in his situation to cohabit with local women. In illuminating contrast to Marsden’s *Memoirs*, which Kratz has described as “a highly public document in the spirit of the times in which both Marsden and his widow were concerned to evoke a 19th century image of high-minded nobility of spirit and soul,”<sup>55</sup> a far more candid series of letters from another Englishman in Sumatra has recently come to light. Written between 1823 and 1828, thus some two decades after John and William Marsden left Sumatra, these letters are from William Day in Bengkulu to his father Charles in Southampton. William Day’s own mother was in fact a

50 SOAS MS 40320/2, no. 77; trans. by Kratz, “Like a Fish,” 257, 264.

51 Sarah Hicks, “*Syair Selindung Delima*: a Literary and Philological Study” (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 2006), 62; SOAS MS 40322.

52 Benjamin Anderton Marsden, James Aspinall Marsden and Robert Sydney Marsden, *Genealogical Memoirs of the Family of Marsden* (Birkenhead: Printed for the authors, E. Griffith & Son Ltd., Caxton Works, 1914), 110.

53 This suggests of course that Ence’ Lena and presumably her daughters were literate in Malay. For a discussion of female literacy in the Malay manuscript tradition, and of the association between women and romances in particular, see Mulaika Hijjas, “Not Just Fryers of Bananas and Sweet Potatoes: Literate and Literary Women in the Nineteenth-Century Malay World,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 41 (2010): 153–172.

54 Hicks, “*Syair Selindung Delima*,” 195.

55 Kratz, “Like a Fish,” 250.



local woman, Ence' Jannin. Though William Day scrupulously avoids mentioning Ence' Jannin in his letters to his father, and is also always careful to send his best regards to his father's new (English) wife, he sends his father a copy of his will in which he names as heirs "my natural Daughter Ellen Day of Bencoolen," as well as his mother Ence' Jannin, and his "Housekeeper See Jeune."<sup>56</sup> By implication and the evidence of the accompanying letter,<sup>57</sup> See Jeune is Ellen's mother, and probably one of William Day's slaves. Despite the decades separating William Day and William Marsden's sojourns in Bengkulu, the existence of Ence' Lena, her daughters, Ence' Jannin, See Jeune and Ellen Day, makes clear the pattern of relations between Englishmen and local women.

The impact of these intimate relations on the British study of Malay is, as we have seen, completely unspoken in Marsden's own account, though one may read with different eyes Marsden's account of the relationships "by no means of a confined nature" between EIC personnel and locals.<sup>58</sup> Ence' Lena and the others like her who furnished Marsden with linguistic definitions and usages, as well as keeping house, providing sexual services, and bearing children, are never mentioned in Marsden's own account. The intimate local informants so formative of Marsden's knowledge of Malay, thus of the compilation of his dictionary and grammar, and the development of his theory of language families—forms of knowledge production so essential to the British Enlightenment—are almost entirely erased. That traces of Ence' Lena and others survive only in Marsden's papers, but in so effaced a form, is a painful consequence of the colonial formation of knowledge.

### Marsden's Manuscripts from Insular Southeast Asia

Marsden's collection of manuscripts from insular Southeast Asia numbers 70 items (listed in Tables 1, 2 and 3). Excluding manuscripts composed by Europeans and documents leaves 50 items, representing ten languages (in a variety of combinations). Where there is a place name associated with a manuscript in the Marsden's collection, this is almost always somewhere in Sumatra. The only manuscripts indisputably from elsewhere are the Bugis diary from Bone, two from across the Melaka Straits, a collection of documents from Tabora, Sumbawa, and a copperplate inscription possibly from Banten,

56 Thomas Day, *Letters from Bencoolen, 1823–1828* (Aylesbeare, Devon: Hardinge Simpole, 2008), 57.

57 Day, *Letters from Bencoolen*, 42.

58 Marsden, *A Brief Memoir*, 15.

Java.<sup>59</sup> As may be expected, the manuscripts are mostly in Malay (47 items, of which two are in a south Sumatran *surat* script,<sup>60</sup> and the remainder in Jawi, the adapted Arabic script used for Malay), and of Sumatran and western archipelago material in general.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, there are also significant subsets of material in Javanese (six items, including a copperplate inscription) and in Arabic or in Arabic plus a Southeast Asian language (thirteen). In this respect, Marsden's collection may quite accurately reflect the linguistic diversity of manuscript cultures in the region, where scribes, reciters and listeners were often proficient in multiple languages. It also illustrates the impossibility of drawing sharp borders around the 'Malay world'—not, after all, a solid area on a map, but a crosshatched overlay that coexists with other linguistic worlds.<sup>62</sup>

The division into genres presented in Table 1 may, of course, be debated, but it attempts to retain what was within the manuscript tradition itself an important distinction, that between literary works (including historiography) and religious treatises or *kitab*. The term *kitab* covers works on the core subjects of Islamic education—Arabic grammar, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and the like.<sup>63</sup> In Marsden's collection, *kitab* and vernacular literary texts are almost equally represented, with 22 of the former and 18 of the latter.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the most significant way in which a colonial-era collection like Marsden's differs from later ones is in the proportion of *kitab*. Warnk's statistical breakdown of genres in the Leiden collection, almost wholly collected in the colonial era, gives only

59 Respectively, MS 11398, MS 12227, MS 12232, MS 12159, and OS Misc. 12140.

60 Using the "commonly used indigenous term" as proposed by Kozok, who rejects other terms for this group of scripts (rencong or ka-ga-nga) as problematic. Uli Kozok, *A 14th Century Malay Code of Laws: The Nitisārasamuccaya* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 129–131.

61 See Tables 1–3.

62 Marsden's two Batak *pustaka* included in Table 1 as a separate category, as they are likely to come from a geographical, religious and ethnic milieu significantly different from that of the other manuscripts, namely the animist highlands of Sumatra. Nevertheless, they are part of the island's textual heritage, and have thematic and codicological crossover with manuscripts from the Islamic coastal regions.

63 It is not possible here to engage sufficiently with the question of what constitutes an Islamic text. For the present purposes, a working definition based on Braginsky's identification of Malay genres is adopted, maintaining a distinction between 'belle-lettres' and 'learned treatises' (*kitab*). See Vladimir Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004), especially Chapter IV, "Self-Awareness of Malay Literature in the Classical Period," 203–299.

64 That there is only one copy of the Qur'ān, a fragment only, is also noteworthy. This was most likely the section of the Qur'ān Marsden used for swearing in witnesses when he was court writer in Bengkulu (see Marsden, *Bibliotheca Marsdeniana*, 301).

10.7% *kitab* (here termed theological works).<sup>65</sup> Writing in the 1970s, Ismail Hussein provisionally divided the 5,000 manuscripts known to him from institutional collections in Europe, Indonesia, and Southeast Asia into “150 prose fiction works of all sorts, 46 Muslim legends, 47 historical, 41 law, 116 poetic works, 300 theological writings and the remaining 100 under miscellaneous,”<sup>66</sup> thus giving 37.5% *kitab*. Thus it appears that manuscripts from insular South East Asia that are wholly or partly in Arabic are in the minority in collections formed during the colonial era. This may be due to the fact that colonial philologists, on the hunt for material to use for dictionaries, histories of local polities, and digests of customary law, tended not to be interested in material in Arabic, a language they saw as foreign to the region.

The genre profile is quite different in the collections composed in the post-colonial era. Since Hussein's estimate in 1974, however, the number of Malay manuscripts in institutional collections has doubled, thanks to major acquisitions by the National Library of Malaysia and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia from the 1980s to the present.<sup>67</sup> The 900 or so manuscripts described in the first volume of the *Handlist of Malay Manuscripts in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia* are, with one exception, all *kitab* texts. This is not surprising, since the IAM collection is in fact that of Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM).<sup>68</sup> Less expected is the fact that the approximately 5,000 Malay manuscripts held by the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (PNM) are also overwhelmingly *kitab* texts. Scouring the volumes of the catalogue available to me, which describe over 4,000 manuscripts, turns up only 159 literary and historiographical texts—a mere 3.8%.<sup>69</sup> Recent large-scale documentation and digitisation efforts of manuscripts that remain in private or community hands in Indonesia, through the EAP and DREAMSEA projects, have turned up

65 Warnk, “Collecting Malay Books,” 33.

66 Hussein, *The Study of Traditional Malay Literature*, 11–12.

67 I am most grateful to one of this article's reviewers for this important observation.

68 Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, *Handlist of Malay Manuscripts in the Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia: JAKIM Collection, Volume 1* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2010), 6.

69 Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, *Manuskrip Melayu Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia: Satu Katalog Ringkas* [4 vols] (Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 1987–97) and *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu: Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia* [11 vols] (Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 2000–2018). I have been unable to access the seventh volume in the second series (*Tambahan Keenam*), covering some 800 acquisitions made between December 2005 and September 2008.

troves of thousands of manuscripts that again show the total dominance of *kitab* material—possibly, as Gallop suggests, as high as 95%.<sup>70</sup>

A satisfactory answer to why the profile is so different, and which one is more representative, requires information about provenance, unfortunately almost as lacking for the postcolonial as the colonial collections. The PNM's catalogues suggest that a significant amount of material was assembled between the 1980s and 2018, and by casting the net beyond Malaysia's borders to include such places as Aceh and Pontianak in Indonesia, and Patani in Thailand. Several of the very few literary texts in the library's collection appear to be associated with the Pontianak royal family, such as a copy of *Hikayat Inderaputra* bearing the seal impression of Sultan Sharif Hamid bin Sultan Uthman of Pontianak.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, courtly centres were obviously central to the preservation and transmission of Malay literary material, as indicated by the case of one small but significant collection of Malay manuscripts formed in the postcolonial era, that of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), the Malaysian state agency for the national language. Put together in the 1960s and 1970s, it includes significantly more literary works: of the total number of 177 manuscripts, some 62% are *hikayat* and *syair*, the main genres of Malay literary prose and poetry respectively.<sup>72</sup> That there are only two Qur'āns, two works of *tafsīr*, and fewer than ten other kinds of *kitab* suggests that the focus was on collecting Malay-language literary texts. Among those recorded as donors or sellers of manuscripts to DBP are individuals connected to the royal families of Kedah, Perlis, Selangor, Perak, Kelantan, Riau-Lingga, and Brunei. It may be possible to discern here the last vestiges of a courtly manuscript culture that was once the main patron of Malay literary texts.

But what finished off this courtly tradition was not colonial depredation. Of the sultanates just mentioned, only Riau-Lingga and Perak were ever in armed conflict with a European power. Indeed, many of the Peninsular Sultanates emerged from the colonial era with greater financial resources than before. And as we have seen in the case of Dewan Bahasa's collections, there were still royal literary manuscripts to be purchased in the 1960s, while the evidence from the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia's collections indicates that there were

70 Annabel Gallop, "Shifting Landscapes: Mapping the Intellectual Writing Traditions of Island Southeast Asia," at the British Library Asian and African Studies blog, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2018/02/shifting-landscapes-mapping-the-intellectual-writing-traditions-of-islamic-southeast-asia.html?p=2>, February 2018, accessed 9 September 2022.

71 Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, *Katalog Manuskrip Melayu: Koleksi Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia. Tambahan Kedua* (Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 2002), 79.

72 Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, *Katalog Manuskrip di Perpustakaan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1983).

hardly any by the 1980s. What changed over the course of the twentieth century was modernity, and a radical shift in the cultural style of the royal families.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, on the east coast of Sumatra, the Malay palaces were the target of communal violence following the collapse of the Japanese occupation,<sup>74</sup> and the sultanates themselves were abolished in independent Indonesia. Changing attitudes to their own textual heritage are suggested by the anecdote related by Ismail Hussein, from a Dutch friend who went to Sumatra in search of Malay manuscripts after Indonesia's independence: "He entered a remote village, met a young man, and he told him of his search ... The young man sensitively replied, '*Kami sudah tidak ada itu, tuan, kami sudah pandai!*'—"We no longer have those [manuscripts], sir, we have become clever!"<sup>75</sup> Literary texts, in this man's view, had to be jettisoned as a shameful legacy of backwardness. Another hint of the how social change differently affected aristocrats and religious scholars, leading to the disappearance of vernacular literary manuscripts but the survival of religious texts, is suggested by the 2004 observation made by the cataloguers of Palembang manuscripts that remain in private hands: "The owners of religious manuscripts are generally of Arab descent, and most of them [still] work as religious teachers ... whereas the local nobility appear to have sufficiently adapted themselves to changing times."<sup>76</sup> The local nobility were able, it seems, to move on to new forms of consumption, prestige, and pleasure, leaving their old literature behind.

In contrast, over the course of the twentieth century the tradition of learning embodied by *kitab* manuscripts has increased in prestige within both Indonesian and Malaysian society, with the growth of a new Islamic consciousness. The Islamic educational establishments that propagated *kitab* texts—Patani *pondok*, Acehese *dayah* or Minangkabau *surau*—remain in existence today, and their students read many of the same texts as they did in previous centuries.<sup>77</sup> It is these Islamic institutions that are home to the bulk of the EAP and DREAMSEA material. Though much more research is required here,

73 Donna Amoroso, *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014), 65–98.

74 Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1979).

75 Hussein, *The Study of Traditional Malay Literature*, 2.

76 "Para pemilik naskah keagamaan pada umumnya berketurunan Arab, dan kebanyakan bekerja sebagai guru mengaji ... Apabila keluarga bangsawan lokal nampak cukup menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan zaman ..." Achadiati Ikram, ed., *Katalog Naskah Palembang* (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2004), 10.

77 For a list of these texts, see Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990): 226–269.

these appear to be the reasons for the great abundance of *kitab* manuscripts collected by the IIAM and PNM in Malaysia, and documented by the EAP and DREAMSEA projects in Indonesia, and the great dearth of vernacular literary texts in both. Whatever the causes, this situation throws into sharp relief the significance of Marsden's collection.

### Conclusion

We end by returning to Proudfoot's questions: what can now be said about the impact of "the interests and collecting policies" of Marsden on "the way we now see the manuscript tradition"? Do colonial-era collections represent "an accurate snapshot of the manuscript tradition even in its last phase?"<sup>78</sup> As an answer to the first question, this article has traced the means by which Marsden acquired his material, and shown that most of his manuscripts for which provenance is known were acquired not during his sojourn in Sumatra but later, through his network of contacts—mostly Englishmen in EIC service, but also through his brother's common-law wife, Ence' Lena. His acquisitions appear more opportunistic and haphazard than dictated by prejudice or preconception. Indeed, we have seen how his estimation of Malay literary culture became more positive, as a result of the manuscripts he acquired. To the second question, the answer is that neither colonial-era collections nor the newly documented EAP and DREAMSEA collections are themselves accurate representations of Malay literary culture in the manuscript age. Both need to be taken together, with a better understanding of the social institutions which sustained different genres remaining a desideratum. Colonial-era collections retain an essential place in understanding Malay manuscript culture, since, for reasons we can only hypothesise for the time being, they preserve the majority of all Malay-language non-*kitab* texts—not only prose and poetic romances, but also dynastic annals and codes of law. Marsden's collection in fact contains a sizable proportion of *kitab* texts, once Arabic language material is taken into account, and so may be reasonably representative of the types and breakdown of genres that once existed in the Malay world. The survival of vernacular literary material in colonial archives such as Marsden's is of great significance not only to our understanding of the past in insular Southeast Asia but also to contemporary constructions of identity, where Jawi-script manuscripts are increasingly characterised as exclusively and prescriptively Islamic. Despite the ethical and methodological concerns that weigh upon colonial collections

<sup>78</sup> Proudfoot, "An Expedition," 3.

such as Marsden's, and which necessarily figure in any interpretation of the manuscripts they contain, doing without them risks another form of erasure.

### Notes on the Tables

The information is derived chiefly from the catalogues, namely Ricklefs, Voorhoeve and Gallop (2014) and Gacek (1981), and supplemented, where possible, by examination of the manuscripts. The assignment of genres may of course be debated, and a manuscript may belong at the same time to more than one genre (i.e. *Syair Perang Mengkasar* is both historical and literary). However, for clarity, I have selected one genre as the most salient for the present purposes.

Documents and letters appear in Table 2.

Manuscripts authored by Europeans on South East Asian topics appear in Table 3.

### Acknowledgment

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TABLE 1 Marsden's manuscripts from insular South East Asia, by genre

Genre	Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Notes
Qur'ān	SOAS SOAS MS 12096	Qur'ān fragment	Arabic	late 18th c.?	Bengkulu (Sumatra)	This is the betel-stained Qur'ān mentioned in Marsden 1827: 301.
	SOAS MS 11398	Bone diary	Bugis	1768–7	Bone (Sulawesi)	
Historiography	SOAS MS 11505	<i>Kitāb Futūḥ al-Shām</i>	Malay	1769	Palembang palace (Sumatra)	From Captain Owen, from the Palembang kraton in 1812.
	SOAS MS 12916	<i>Silsilah segala raja-raja</i>	Malay, Acehnese	1194/1780	Aceh (Sumatra)	Marsden 1827: 304. Extracts in Marsden 1812: 212–214.
	SOAS MS 40324	<i>Syair Perang Mengkasar</i>	Malay		Makassar (Sulawesi)	From Mr Griffiths.
	SOAS MS 11576	<i>Sijāt dua puluh</i> and misc. <i>kitab</i>	Javanese, Malay	1797	Palembang? (Sumatra)	
	SOAS MS 11648	Sufi treatise	Malay	17th c?	Pasai (Sumatra)	
<i>Kitāb</i>	SOAS MS 11660	Sufi treatise	Malay, Arabic, Javanese			



TABLE 1 Marsden's manuscripts from insular South East Asia, by genre (cont.)

Genre	Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Notes
	SOAS MS 12139	"Collection of tracts"	Malay, Rejang			Now missing;
	SOAS MS 12145	<i>Mukhtaṣar Bā-Faḍl</i> or <i>Muqaddimat al-Ḥadramī</i>	Arabic, Javanese		Palembang palace (Sumatra)	
	SOAS MS 12151	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Malay, Arabic	1784		
	SOAS MS 12188	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Malay, Arabic	1779		
	SOAS MS 12193	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Malay, Arabic			
	SOAS MS 12210	<i>al-Tibyān fi Ma'rifat al-Aḍyān</i>	Malay, Arabic			
	SOAS MS 12225	<i>Umm al-Barāhīn</i> and others	Malay, Arabic	1774	Palembang palace (Sumatra)	Owned by Susuhunan Ahmad
	SOAS MS 12232	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Malay, Arabic	1737	Melaka (Malay Peninsula)	Written for Haji Abdul Jalil of Melaka
	SOAS MS 12247	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Malay, Arabic	1783		
	SOAS MS 12914 A	<i>Hikayat Makah Madmah</i>	Malay, Acehnese	1713	Aceh? (Sumatra)	

TABLE 1 Marsden's manuscripts from insular South East Asia, by genre (*cont.*)

Genre	Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Notes
	SOAS MS 12915	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Malay, Bugis, Makassar			
	SOAS MS 40321	<i>Hidāyāt al-ḥabīb fī al-targhīb</i> by al-Rāmī	Malay			Now missing.
	SOAS MS 41754	<i>Rawiyaton Sabeitah</i>	Acehnese	1090/1679	Aceh? (Sumatra)	trans of al-Raniri, Akhbar al-Akhira
	SOAS MS 41755	<i>Fasal</i> on marriage, "sajak perkataan alif," and misc	Malay, Acehnese		Aceh? (Sumatra)	
	SOAS MS 43265	<i>'Aqā'id al-Nasafī</i>	Javanese, Arabic		Sunda? (Java)	
	SOAS MS 46198	<i>Syar' on sin and afterlife</i>	Malay	1254 AH = 1789		From Captain Owen.
	SOAS MS 7124	"Malayan tracts"	Malay, Acehnese	18th c	Aceh? (Sumatra)	Marsden 1827: 304
	SOAS MS 7124	Misc <i>kitab</i>	Acehnese, Malay, Arabic		Singkel? (Sumatra)	Marsden 1827: 304 "Malayan tracts"
	SOAS MS 9886	Treatise on women and marriage	Javanese			

TABLE 1 Marsden's manuscripts from insular South East Asia, by genre (*cont.*)

Genre	Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Notes
Literary	SOAS MS 11911	<i>Kaba Malim Demam</i>	Minangkabau			
	SOAS MS 12158	Pantun	Malay English	1782	Kampung Kalawee (?)	
	SOAS MS 12168	Pantun	Malay	1812	Krui, Lampung (Sumatra)	From Mr Griffiths.
	SOAS MS 12179	<i>Hikayat Dewa Mandu</i>	Malay			
	SOAS MS 12180	<i>Hikayat Isma Yatim</i>	Malay			
	SOAS MS 12209	<i>Hikayat Ghulam</i>	Malay	1777	Muko-Muko, Bengkulu (Sumatra)	Possibly in a European hand.
	SOAS MS 12227	<i>Hikayat burung barau- baru &amp; pantun</i>	Malay		Bandar Selangor (Malay Peninsula)	
	SOAS MS 12260	<i>Hikayat Budak Miskin</i>	Malay	1810	Penang (Malay Peninsula)	From Mr Griffiths.
	SOAS MS 12899	<i>Serat Menak Jayengrana</i>	Javanese			

TABLE 1 Marsden's manuscripts from insular South East Asia, by genre (cont.)

Genre	Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Notes
	SOAS MS 12900	<i>Hikayat Dewa Indera Layangan</i>	Malay	1788, 1793		
	SOAS MS 12902	<i>Hikayat Seri Rama</i>	Malay	1791, from original of 1739		Read by Marsden in 1809, extracts published in 1812
	SOAS MS 12913	Minangkabau legend	Malay (Minangkabau?)		Minangkabau?	
	SOAS MS 12914 B	<i>Syair Ken Tambuhan</i>	Malay Bugis	1793	Bengkulu (Sumatra)	From Ence' Lena to John Marsden.
	SOAS MS 40322	<i>Syair Selindung Delima</i>	annotation Malay		Bengkulu (Sumatra)	
	SOAS MS 40323	<i>Hikayat Nakhoda Muda</i> and misc	Malay		Minangkabau and elsewhere (Sumatra)	Later translated and published by Marsden.
	SOAS MS 41394	<i>Burung Pingai and Syair Perahu</i>	Malay (rencong)		South Sumatra	
	SOAS MS 41516	<i>Si Dayang Rindu</i>	Malay, Lampung		Lampung (Sumatra)	Copied for a European.
	SOAS MS 9883	<i>Damar Wulan</i>	Javanese			

TABLE 1 Marsden's manuscripts from insular South East Asia, by genre (*cont.*)

Genre	Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Notes
Batak pustaha	SOAS MS 12250	<i>Pustaha</i>	Batak			
	SOAS MS 41836	<i>Pustaha</i>	Batak			
	Oxford Bodleian MS Malay d. 1	Misc. astronomical and divination texts	Malay, Javanese, Arabic	1773	Palembang palace (Sumatra)	
Scientific	SOAS MS 12917	Divination	Malay			Possibly in a European hand.
	SOAS MS 40779	Misc, medical etc	Malay, Arabic			

TABLE 2 Marsden's manuscript concerning insular South East Asia, compiled by Europeans

Class mark	Title	Languages	Date	Notes
SOAS MS 12261	<i>Arte de la lengua pampanga</i>	Pampanga, Spanish	18th c	From Alexander Dalrymple
SOAS MS 11959	<i>Arta de la lengua tagala</i>	Tagalog, Spanish	1736	From Alexander Dalrymple
SOAS MS 12191	<i>Vocabulario de la lengua bisaya</i>	Visayan, Spanish	1698	From Alexander Dalrymple
King's College London Marsden M2	<i>Vocabulario de la lengua iloca</i>	Iloko, Spanish	17th c	From Alexander Dalrymple
King's College London Marsden L3	<i>Arte de la lengua tagala</i>	Tagalog, Spanish	1697	From Alexander Dalrymple
King's College London Marsden M2/17	<i>Bocabulario tagala</i>	Tagalog, Spanish	1580	From Alexander Dalrymple
SOAS MS 40325	Vocabulary	Malay, English		Probably compiled by Marsden.
SOAS MS 40326	Vocabulary	Malay, English		
SOAS MS 12300	Vocabulary	Misc		
SOAS MS 12156	Vocabulary	Savu, Pulau Panaitan, Javanese, Sulu, Malagasy	1771	From Joseph Banks.
SOAS MS 12918	Specimens of scripts	Tagalog, Pampanga, Javanese, Balinese, Kerinci, Buginese, Makassar, Lampung, Batak, Rejang, Bugis	1791	Probably compiled by Marsden.
SOAS MS 11979	Vocabulary	Lampung, English	1812	From Captain Owen.
SOAS MS 41520	Specimens of scripts	Batak, Lampung, rencong, Javanese, Bugis		Probably compiled by Marsden.

TABLE 3 Marsden's letters and other documents from insular South East Asia

Class mark	Description	Languages	Date	Place of origin	Type	Notes
SOAS O.S. Misc. 12140	Copper-plate inscription	Javanese	1690?	Banten? (Java)	Inscription	
SOAS MS 9881	Letter on palm leaf	Javanese			Letter	
SOAS MS 12159	Charms, commercial notes, certificates, letters	Bugis, Makassar, Malay	1798, 1807	Tambora (Sulawesi)	Unknown	Marsden 1827: 302. From Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen.
SOAS MS 40320	Light letters	Malay and others		Very diverse, but perhaps mostly western archipelago.	Letter	
SOAS MS 41395	Rencong letter	Malay ( <i>surat</i> script)		South Sumatra	Letter	Now missing.
SOAS MS 44788	Letter, accounts, prayer	Malay, Arabic			Unknown	
SOAS MS 44789	Letter from Sultan of Muko-muko	Malay		Muko-muko, Bengkulu (Sumatra)	Letter	Possibly sent to Marsden by a European.

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