

PIERRE-YVES MANGUIN *

“A Real Seafaring People”: Evocations of Sailing in Malay Literature

“Most of the inhabitants of the thousands of islands of the Archipelago are eminently maritime in their habits, a real seafaring people. The Malays are more especially so, and this character is strongly impressed on their language.”

(John Crawfurd 1856, p. 291, s.v. ‘Navigation’)

Introduction¹

In an essay entitled “Shipshape societies” published some decades ago, I tried to document a set of representations shared by coastal polities of Insular Southeast Asia, in which the boat and the boatload (i.e. the crew) were used as a metaphor for the social order, which largely shaped their relationship with the wider world. I could thus establish that such representations had been persistently activated over all the Austronesian speaking societies of maritime Southeast Asia, at various levels, from the village to the state, even in societies now considered as basically agrarian, with no specific maritime orientations (Manguin 1986).

A few years later, while following up on one theme I had come across in this first essay, that of the legendary shipmaster Puhawang, I showed how the

* EFEO, CASE

1. The author is most grateful to Henri Chambert-Loir who read early versions of this essay. The consequently improved version published here owes much to his critical and constructive comments. It goes without saying that any remaining omissions or misinterpretations remain my own.

foundation myth of harbour polities, which survived in widespread tales, again pointed to the major role played by maritime trade in their state formation process (Manguin 1991). I also followed up on another recurrent theme, that of the large sailing fleets sent overseas by the rulers of these same polities (as regularly described in epigraphic and literary sources), which provided the reader with full-fledged local representations of these states, with all their constituents gathered around their ruler when circumstances requested such a theatrical exhibition (for war, marital alliances, rites of passage, etc.). This allowed me to develop a political model for these “amorphous” polities, which, rather than representing themselves within a set territory, preferred to pose as a moving fleet of vessels converging towards a ruler (Manguin 2002).² Among all these social groups of the Austronesian speaking world, the Malay speaking polities of Sumatra, the Thai-Malay Peninsula, and Borneo loomed large in past times, and some had kept alive such sets of representations involving the sea and seafaring well into modern times, if not to the present day, as in Riau.

These tropes of the sea and of the ship, as expressed in Austronesian speaking societies, and more specifically in Malay or Javanese discursive formations, were otherwise explored from different perspectives by Denys Lombard (1980), Henk Maier (1992), I Kuntara Wiryamartana (1992), and more recently by Peter Worsley (2012), Jiří Jákł (2019), and Romain Bertrand (2019). They described and analysed the numerous representations appearing as poetic vignettes, their symbolic values, or the quasi-universal metaphor of the crossing of the sea used to reflect on the passage of man in this world, as in the often quoted 16th-17th century Sufi philosophical *Syair perahu* or “Poems of the boat” (Braginsky 1988, 2007).

Many of the texts on which these authors based their essays, however, offer another level of reading. To take one extreme example, in the Rencong version of the *Syair perahu*, the author’s explicit purpose is to present, in philosophical terms, a set of Sufi doctrinal paths. However, because he does so by using the metaphor of the ship, he needs to compare these paths to more than thirty precisely designated parts of the ship or members of her crew, thus preserving one of the more complete sets of Malay nautical vocabulary (Braginsky 1988). Much of the vocabulary thus provided in a precisely dated and well understood context is shared with contemporary Malay texts belonging to various literary genres, but a few of these technical terms are found only in this version of the poem (as discussed below).

2. The recurrent and flourished accounts of Malay sailing fleets has also been noted by Vladimir Braginsky (2006), in an article defining the literary process he describes as a “chain-description”.

The present essay will completely leave aside the symbolic or metaphorical level explored in all previous studies of the “theme of the sea.” Based on Malay texts (written down or orally transmitted), it will explore the far more explicit and pragmatic references to sailing practices of Modern times. I will also seek complementary data in Early Modern word lists (on which see Linehan 1949) and in lexicographic glosses and annotations by pioneer authors of the 19th and early 20th centuries, compiled when pre-steam sailing practices and associated vocabulary were still vivid.

The commonplace and very tangible lexical references to the operation of sailing ships for transport, trade or fighting at sea or along navigable rivers, to the specific technologies involved in sailing in a wide variety of boats and ships, point to the day-to-day relationship some Malays entertained with seafaring activities. It is a fact that operating sophisticated sailing vessels, many of which were of considerable size and tonnage in Early Modern times, entailed the apprenticeship of specific techniques, and the mastering of an elaborate nautical vocabulary to describe the equipment in use, the actions involved when under sail, and the transmission of orders from the shipmasters and lower rank officers to the crew. In 21st century European societies, few people outside seafaring social groups familiar with sailing (now mainly yachtsmen) would be able to describe the precise configuration and function of the multiple lines and ropes that make up the complex rigging of a sailing ship, a specialised vocabulary that is usually not shared with landlubbers who barely know a stay from a halliard or a shroud. Such terms, however, we will encounter in regular Malay usage, showing that those Malays who read or listened to readings of the texts quoted below were clearly attuned to the meanings and connotations of seafaring terminology. This is a rejoinder to Barbara Andaya’s remarks about the passing into the many texts produced by 16th and 17th century Malays of the sensory experiences they encountered in everyday life (B. Andaya 2011, p. 19).

This work is mainly based on Malay sources dating from 15th to 18th centuries, with a few excursions into earlier or later times. It is therefore an essay on the history of the social activities of the people who produced these sources, during this particular Age of Commerce so well described by scholars such as Denys Lombard, Anthony Reid or Barbara and Leonard Andaya (Lombard 1988, 1990; Reid 1988-93; Andaya & Andaya 2015). It is however necessary to be more specific about which Malays it is dealing with. It is based largely on sources either written in Malay or collected by a variety of scholars from Malay-speaking informants. The data thus gathered emanate from or deal with those Malay speakers that lived in mostly urban environments, in the harbour city-states that thrived along the coasts of Sumatra, the Thai-Malay Peninsula, Borneo, and Sumbawa, all places where Malay was spoken and written on a daily basis, by both ethnic Malays and people from a wide variety

of ethnic groups of Insular Southeast Asia (or further overseas) who used Malay in their daily, mostly seafaring activities.³

A large share of the literary corpus used as a source for this essay was produced in court circles. The economy of these coastal city-states was essentially based on maritime trade, regional or long-distance. These nautical activities would have involved, on land or at sea, most strata of their population: the merchants (the rulers themselves are known to have been major investors in maritime trade), the shipmasters and their crew, the shipbuilders or carpenters, all those city and neighbouring coastal dwellers (free men or slaves) who were employed in harbour duties, handling the merchandise and the supplying of ships, not forgetting the fishermen. The examples given below are conveyed mostly by the available literary corpus, which emanates from literate elites and are necessarily fragmentary, leaving aside representations that would have been those of the petty traders, the lower-class crews (free men or slaves) and the fishermen. The characters of the tales told in these texts are constantly on the move along the sea-lanes of a loosely configured Malay world, from the Strait of Melaka to *pesisir* Java, Sulawesi, Borneo and further east, all the way to the Moluccas.⁴

It is remarkable that in the earliest texts written in Malay, i.e. in three Old Malay inscriptions engraved in the 680s in South Sumatra, when the polity of Srivijaya was being founded, seafaring activities (for trade and war) were mentioned and vocabulary referring to them made its first written appearance. The Sabokingking inscription, a representation of the political structure of the Malay polity, introduces two characters who will often remain associated in later sources as the main agents of maritime trade in the region: the shipmasters (designated in Old Malay as *puhāvam* [*puhawang*], a vernacular term also known in Javanese, which gave place in Islamic times to *nakhoda* (of Arabo-Persian origin), and the sea merchants (*vaṇiyāga*, a term of Sanskrit or Prakrit origin) (Casparis 1956, pp. 32, 37; Kulke 1993; Hoogervorst 2017, p. 413). Both the Kedukan Bukit and the Kota Kapur inscriptions tell us about war fleets sent to establish the authority of the newly founded polity, with the first appearance of the name of a specific boat type: the term *sampan*, under

3. Other ethnic groups speaking dialectal forms of Malay (such as, in Sumatra, the Redjang and the Besemah), occupied territories inland from these coastal city-states, with which they interacted economically, providing them with the commodities that were in high demand in maritime trade networks. These inland people had a different perception of the sea and maritime economy. For the Besemah Malays living in the higher valleys of South Sumatra (whose oral literature was recorded by William Collins), the coastal areas were the domain of the *raja* settled near the mouth of the Musi River, who controlled the complex upstream-downstream exchange network, and served as interface with the outside world (Collins 1998, pp. 55-57; Manguin 2017, pp. 100-101).

4. On this “loosely configured world”, see Barnard & Maier 2004, pp. ix-x and Vickers 2004, pp. 43-47.

the Old Malay form *sāmvau*, that will be at the origin of so many cognates all along Asia-wide trade routes (Cœdès 1930, pp. 34-35, 47-49).⁵

As a rejoinder to the Srivijaya inscriptions quoted above — and confirming the central place they reserved for maritime trade —, Malay texts of Early Modern times always list the twosome of shipmasters (*nakhoda*) and sea merchants (*vaniyāga*, later giving place to *saudagar* or *dagang*) among the essential members of society in Melaka and other harbour-cities. They happen to be the main actors of maritime activities, and therefore prominent in such urban societies. The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* puts this in a nutshell, when its author portrays the composition of the port-city’s population:

“One sees how numerous the people are, the merchants (*saudagar*), the notables (*orang kaya*) and the shipmasters (*nakhoda*) of this city of Melaka”.⁶

At the court of Aceh, in the early 17th century, the whole society of the Sultanate is repeatedly described in set phrases such as

“all the merchants and all the shipmasters and all the envoys and all the people, thousands in numbers.”⁷

The *Hikayat Banjar* similarly refers to “All the shipmasters that carry the king’s trade.”⁸

Melaka and her people, who considered themselves direct inheritors of the Sumatran polity of Srivijaya, played a prominent role in this 15th and early 16th century maritime cultural landscape. Tomé Pires, one of the best-informed early 16th century Portuguese actor in the region, expressed these circumstances in so many words. He first confirmed in his *Suma oriental* that

“the merchants and sea-traders realised how much difference there was in sailing to Malacca, because they could anchor safely there in all weathers, and could buy from the others when it was convenient.”⁹

5. Terms used to designate specific boat or ship types, for trade or war, appear on a regular basis in our corpus of texts in a matter-of-fact way, practically never accompanied with technical descriptions that could be used to figure out exactly what they were. I have already dealt with this vocabulary and categories in contexts of war fleets (Manguin 2002, 2012). I will therefore not delve into these matters in this article.

6. *Demikianlah perinyakebanyakan rakyatnya dansaudagardan orangkaya-orangkaya dan nakhoda dalam negeri Melaka itu (Hikayat Hang Tuah, Kassim Ahmad, ed., 1971, p. 522).*

7. *Sekalian dagang-dagang dan segala nakhoda dan segala antusan dan segala ra`yat yang beribu-ribu or segala nakhoda dan segala antusan dan segala dagang-dagang (Hikayat Aceh, Teuku Iskandar, ed., 1958, pp. 123, 129).*

8. *Segala anakhoda yang perdagangan raja itu (Hikayat Banjar, Ras, ed., 1968, p. 295).*

9. *Suma oriental, Cortesão ed., 1944, vol. II, p. 246.*

This empirical observation is echoed in the Malay phrase used to characterise a good trading port: *Perahu bertambatan dagang bertepatan*, that is a place “where boats may safely moor and traders live secure” (as recorded in Wilkinson’s dictionary, s.v. *tambat*).

In an often-quoted remark, Tomé Pires added that:

“Men cannot estimate the worth of Malacca, on account of its greatness and profit. Malacca is a city that was made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world; the end of monsoons and the beginning of others. Malacca is surrounded and lies in the middle, and the trade and commerce between the different nations for a thousand leagues on every hand must come to Malacca.”¹⁰

Jorge de Albuquerque, Melaka’s second Portuguese captain, pursued this very same idea when he wrote to his king in 1515, expressing this in a nutshell: “Melaka has nothing of its own and has everything of this world.”¹¹

The geo-political magnitude of the Melaka polity turned the harbour-city into a central place of a vast maritime network reaching the whole of Southeast Asia and further east to China and west to India and beyond. Moreover, Melaka was a harbour-city that, contrary to many others in the region, had no true hinterland of its own, and therefore depended almost exclusively on communications by sea for its survival.¹²

Considering such exceptional geographical position and historical conjuncture, it comes as no surprise that the contents of so many of the Malay texts that emanated from the court of Melaka and from neighbouring coastal polities bear testimony to the fact that seafaring was their lifeblood. Journeys that led Malay ships across the whole archipelago, not to speak of earlier crossings of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, were essential for the creation of identity and social alliances.¹³

As we will see, most of the texts that provided us with references to seafaring belong to literary genres, and rarely if ever deal specifically with the technical intricacies of daily economic life or of life aboard large ships (the various versions of the maritime laws are the only exception). They do, however, largely emanate from a mercantile milieu and their close reading, as illustrated below, does provide us, almost inadvertently, with a rich set of

10. *Suma oriental*, Cortesão ed. 1944, vol. II, p. 286; Wheatley 1959 was the first to elaborate on Pires’ description of Melaka and to quote this passage.

11. Bulhão Pato 1903, p. 134 (*mallaqua nam tem nada de seu e tem todollas cousas que a no mundo*).

12. This model of a polity without a hinterland, but at the centre of a broad sphere of maritime interactions that could be qualified as an “umland” is more extensively discussed in Manguin 2002, pp. 75-77.

13. On a similar approach of seafaring as social action in the Adriatic during the Neolithic and the need to give proper consideration to studies of maritime activity, see Farr 2006.

contextual information for the vocabulary they use in passing, proving how familiar they all were with these seafaring matters.

Sailing in Malay literature

Among the texts composed in or around Melaka, the first one that comes to mind is the maritime code known as *Undang-undang laut*.¹⁴ Its first purpose was to establish a set of rules applicable on-board large trading ships (*jong*). It was reportedly composed under Sultan Mahmud Syah (1488-1511) of Melaka, and resulted from an agreement (*muafakat*) reached between experienced shipmasters and sea merchants (*nakhoda yang tuha-tuha dengan segala saudagar*), giving all authority to the shipmaster considered “as a king once he is at sea” (*nakhoda itu upama raja ia di laut*). This is a short text,¹⁵ but one that has a high density of nautical vocabulary of various categories: terms for components of the ship, for crew members, for navigation, and for trade. Being a very specialised text, it provides a precious context for these terms, and more often than not the means to precisely determine their meaning at the turn of the 16th century (which is rarely the case in literary texts). Its mere existence, as a compilation that was needed to regulate shipping activities, does tell us how important these ventures were for the life of the sultanate. In the centuries that followed its inception, it inspired many comparable codes in other harbour-cities of the Malay world, along the Peninsula and all the way east to Bima (and at least one code composed in Bugis in Sulawesi, known as the *Code of Amanna Gappa*).¹⁶ As such, these maritime laws no doubt contributed to the shaping of Malay as a language associated with shipping along Insular Southeast Asian maritime routes. However, being such a specialised text, compiled by and for seafarers, it cannot be used per se to demonstrate how common nautical vocabulary was in use in daily Malay life.

We therefore have to turn to other contemporary or later texts to determine how technical terms associated with boats, ships, navigation and life aboard sailing vessels became so familiar to Malays of Modern times that they permeated most of their literary genres. In such popular texts as the *Sejarah Melayu* (*Sulalatus Salatin*) or the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* — both written to glorify the rulers and main

14. The following remarks stem from the analysis by the various authors who published these *Undang-undang laut*. They are complemented by my own work on a scanned version of the text published in Liaw Yock Fang (2003), as analysed with a concordance programme.

15. The *Undang-undang laut* has 5 926 words (in the Liaw Yock Fang 2003 edition), a short text if compared to the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (172 332 words for the Kassim Ahmad 1975 edition) or the *Sulalatus salatin* (*Sejarah Melayu*) (94 069 words for the Samad Ahmad 1979 edition) (figures given in the MCP- Malay Concordance Project).

16. Baharuddin Lopa 1984, Tobing 1961; Logan 1855; *Bo 'Sangaji Kai* (ed. Chambert-Loir & Salahuddin 1999, pp. 92-101).

actors of this major polity —, or in less political literary texts emanating from the same sphere, it does not come as a surprise that the protagonists whose actions are depicted constantly board and disembark from sailing vessels. Whichever their assigned mission, carrying letters to neighbouring rulers, leading a ship or a whole fleet overseas to another harbour-city for trade, war, diplomacy, religion, or at times to meet their beloved, the passages describing these actions almost invariably start with phrases carrying the term “sail” (*layar*). A query in the Malay Concordance Project [henceforth MCP] on this root word produces 218 hits in some 60 texts, covering all the periods considered here.¹⁷ Most occur in verbal forms *belayar* (*berlayar*) or *dilayarkan*, or more rarely in nominal forms, such as *pelayaran* or in the expression “hoist the sail” (*menarik layar*). The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* — a popular text describing cultural hero, shipmaster and fleet commander (*laksamana*) Hang Tuah’s multiple actions in the service of the Melaka Sultans —, has much of its rhythm given by such recurrent phrases marking the moments of departure and arrival of overseas crossings. A typical episode in the *Sejarah Melayu* or in many other contemporary or later texts would be initiated with set phrases such as “They weighed anchor and sailed away” (*Maka bongkar sauh lalu belayar*) or “he then boarded the ship and sailed away” (*lalu turun ke perahu lalu belayar*), followed by the relation of the crossing, and ending when the anchor is dropped (*berlabuh*) at the place of destination.

These are of course very common terms that do not need a specific knowledge of nautical practices to be understood. Others, however, less numerous but nevertheless recurring, have a restricted nautical usage, usually reserved for those who know how a sailing ship is operated.

The various components of the rigging of the ship are among the most common such terms. They are at times used in a matter of fact way: in the *Undang-undang laut*, the main task assigned to the petty officers (*tukang*) was to oversee “the halliards and the shrouds” (*bubutan dan temberang*).¹⁸ The *Misa Melayu*, an 18th-century text (queried via MCP) has one technically correct remark about a sheet that gets taut when the wind rises (*turunlah angin*

17. Except when indicated otherwise, all MCP queries referred to below are made on all Malay texts (prose, poetry and letters, but excluding newspapers and manuals) dating from 1300 to 1850 (after which date steam engines came into the scene, profoundly modifying the context). The total corpus of texts amounts to 91. Not all the occurrences of quoted terms will be given in this article, as such queries are easily replicated on the MCP web site (<http://mcp.anu.edu.au/>).

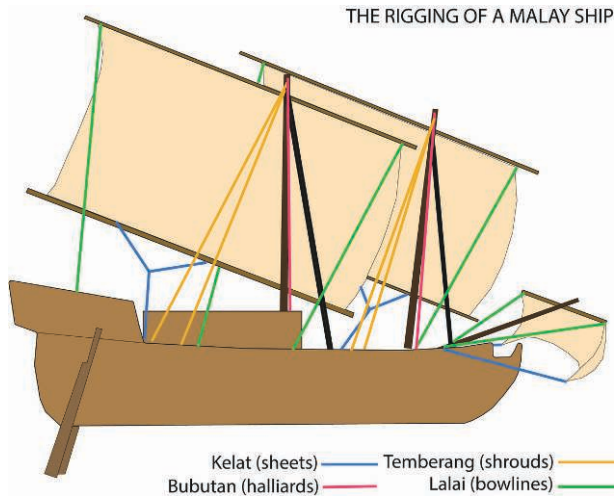
18. *Bubut(an)* designates the halliards (French: *drisse*), i.e. the cordages used to hoist or lower the sails and top yards; Haex’s dictionary of 1631 glosses both *bubut* and *bubutan* as halliards (s.v. *boeboet/boeboetan*: “*tali singsing lajar*”). *Temberang* designates the shrouds, i.e. the ropes extended from the mast-heads to the right and/or left side of the ship, holding the masts upright and enabling them to carry sail (French: *hauban*); in Western ships, these are standing (fixed), but in Southeast Asian traditional sails (today or in earlier times) they can be moved when tacking, as illustrated in the next quotation, from the *Misa Melayu* (see note 20).

menegangi kelat).¹⁹ In another passage, the same text provides a vivid and technically faultless description of a ship made ready to sail (showing also that propitiatory prayers played a role in daily activities of sailors):

His highness ordered the sail (*layar*) to be hoisted. The oars (*dayung*) were readied in position. Prayers were said, wind was pleaded for, shrouds (*temberang*) were shifted,²⁰ the sail was hauled in, and they truly made their way towards Pulau Katak.²¹

In the 17th century *Hikayat Banjar*, we are told that the founder hero’s mythical ship was

adorned with marquetry of gold; her sails (*layar*) were made of the finest scarlet cloth; her halliards (*bubutan*), her shrouds (*temberang*), and her sheets (*tali klat*) of heavy silk, with tassels of pearls; her rudder (*kemudi*) of copper and gold alloy; her oars (*dayung*) in iron-wood with bands of gold; the cable of her anchor (*tali sauh*) was made of undamascened iron.²²



19. *Klat/kelat* designates the sheets (French: *écoutes*), i.e. the ropes attached to the lower parts of the sails (with or without a yard) that are used to adjust the angle of a sail in relation to the longitudinal axis of the vessel, depending on the wind’s direction.

20. *Alih/aleh* implies the shifting of position of the shroud(s). When putting to sail, the windward shroud(s) must be made taut. In simple rigs, the same shroud(s) can be moved from side to side when changing tack.

21. *Baginda pun menyuruh naikkan layar. Sekalian bersiap dayung diletak, mengucap selawat, angin dipinta, alih temberang, layar disentak, betullah menuju ke Pulau Katak.*

22. English translation adapted from J.J. Ras (*Hikayat Banjar*; Ras ed. 1968, pp. 296-297). *Dan malangbang itu bartatah amas, layarnya sakhlat `ainalbanat, tali bubutan dan tamberang dan tali klatnya mastuli, sama barumbai-rumbaikan mutiara; kamudinya timbaga suasa; dayungnya hulin bartabu-tabukan amas; tali sauhnya basi malila.*

The enumeration of the various ropes or lines of the rig provide Malay authors with a particularly rich array of images that refer to their functions, and often also to the sounds they make.

One of the older occurrences of such terms appears in the *Sejarah Melayu*, in the first half of a *pantun* sung by Tun Talanai when questioned by the Sultan about his fleet of ships (with a large measure of poetic licence, and not much technical sense, but indicating that his fleet is being prepared for sailing)²³:

Bowlines (*lalai-lalai*),²⁴ where are the halliards (*bubutan*)? / Halliards are being drawn in (*dikelati*).²⁵

The famous 19th century author Abdullah Munsyi, who was not a sailor, has nevertheless constant references to sailing practices in his *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan*, a crossing made on a sailing ship skipped by a Chinese, from Singapore to Kelantan. In this travelogue, he published many *pantuns* he collected during his journey. In one of these, the rig is also given a speaking role:

The halliards (*bubut*) asked the bowlines (*lalai*), / is the parrel (*kelendara*)²⁶ with us?
The wind blows from west, the waves have settled, / hoist the anchor, off we sail.²⁷

23. The text is corrupt in the manuscript Winstedt transcribed (*Sejarah Melayu*, Winstedt ed. 1938, p. 98). See Brown's translation of this version (Brown ed. 1970, p. 60 and n. 302). It is corrected in Samad Ahmad's edition (1979, p. 101), from which I quote.

24. *Lalai-lalai mana bubutan? Bubutan lagi dikelati. Lalai*, as far as I could determine, only appears twice with this nautical meaning in the texts I queried via the MCP. It is found again in the following quotation from Abdullah Munsyi. It does not appear at all in Bading's nautical dictionary (1880). In Smyth's glossary (1906, p. 114), *tali lalei* is glossed as "vang, controlling the end of the yard" (vang is a term used in large square-rigged ships). Wilkinson's dictionary also translates as "vang," referring to this same passage in the *Sejarah Melayu*. These vangs, also known as bowlines or braces (French: *bouline, bras*) are fixed at the extremity of the top yard of square sails and reach downwards to the ship's side. Together with the sheets, they thus serve to trim the sails as needed. The traditional *layar tanjak* of Indonesian seas needs such a line to be drawn in, as do square sails of European vessels. Klinkert's dictionary (s.v. *lalai*, II) confirms this meaning: "*bras (scheepsterm); tali lalai, geerde, brastouw*."

25. [*Tali kelat*] is usually a substantive designating a sheet. Wilkinson (s.v. *kelat*) also gives a verbal form: *mengelatkan layar* is "to draw in the sheet". This is possibly the etymological meaning of the term *kelat*, meaning to brace, to draw in. This is confirmed in Badings (1880), which gives Malay *kelat* for both entries "Bras" and "Schoot" (under which it is more precisely translated as *kelat bawah, kelat kaki*). Both lines serve to draw in or brace the sails.

26. Wilkinson glosses *kelendara* (and regional variations) as the "parrel or ring (round mast) to which the yard [of the sail] is attached" (French: *racage*). A query in MCP only refers to this same *pantun*, as given by Abdullah. It does not appear at all in Bading's nautical dictionary (1880), which gives instead the Laskari term *sār* (s.v. parrel).

27. *Bubut bertanya lalai, / kelendara ada pada kita / Angin barat, gelombang selesai, / bongkar sauh, berlayarlah kita (Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan, Sweeney ed. 2005, p. 157).*

The same Abdullah Munsyi, while sailing to Mekah on a large sailing vessel, complained that “all that could be heard was the hum of the ship’s rigging.”²⁸ The “singing of the rigging” vignette is also often found in Western sailing accounts, as when Joseph Conrad in *Mirror of the Sea* (chap. 39) recalled “the song of the wind in a ship’s rigging,” or in *Lord Jim* (chap. 1), the “rigging humming in a deep bass.”

In the *Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina*, a text from around 1800 (as queried in MCP), the poet plays with similar images:

Sails the ship day and night, carried by currents and waves, every day the sails are spread, the shrouds (*temberang*) sound as a viola.²⁹

In the oral epic poem *Panglimo Awang*, as recited in Riau and transcribed in the late 1980s by Will Derks (1994), references to ships and sailing are ubiquitous. Riau is a Sumatran province which has preserved to this day many of the earlier sets of representations related to sailing and ships, as we will see below. This passage about a legendary *lancang* vessel under sail is one of the richest in nautical terms we encountered:³⁰

The anchor (*sauh*) is weighed, the sails (*laya*) are set / The rudder (*kumudi*) is turned around, then the sailing begins / When the sails are set the wind rises too / The wind pushes harder and harder / The wind strikes the cabin (*kurong*) wall / The ship’s rigging (*tali-tumali*) jingles / The bowsprit (*tiang topang*)³¹ touches

28. (...) *tiadalah apa yang kedengaran melainkan segala tali-tali kapal itu berdegung-degung* (*Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Mekah*, Sweeney ed., 2005, p. 276).

29. *Berlayarlah kapal malam dan siang, dibawa arus dengan gelombang, sehari-hari layar terkembang, seperti biola bunyinya temberang.*

30. My translation is based on that by Will Derks (*Panglimo Awang* (Derks ed., 1994, pp. 44-45), with slight modifications (the transcription is in the Riau dialectal form of Malay): *Diumbuik sauh lo tio direnyat laya / Dipaliang kumudi lo na lalu dilayakan / Laya turenayat tio angin pan tibo / Angin munulak tio na munumpukan / Angin munopuk tio ku dinding kurong / Tali-tumali lancang budonting-donting / Tiang tupang cocah-muncocah / Unuk-unuk tuanguk-anguk / Tali tumerang lo tio budongong-dongong / Tali ogung sayang budogum-dogum / Liang kumang somuo-munyomuo.*

31. I translate *tiang topang* by bowsprit [rather than Derk’s “front mast”]. *Topang* is used to designate various fore masts (such as mizzen masts). These often have a slight forward rake (the literal meaning of *topang/tupang* is a spar set at an angle) but could never reach the surface of the sea. *Topang* appears to have also been used for a bowsprit, a fore mast with a very strong rake that could touch the surface of the water in heavy seas (Badings [1880], s.v. “stag” gives, among others, Malay *temberang* (...) *tiang tupang* as “shrouds (...) of the bowsprit”), thus following literally Haex’s 1631 dictionary (s.v. *toepang/topang*). Large sailing boats of pre-Modern and Early Modern times all carried such a bowsprit, to which a spritsail was hanging (as in the ships depicted on the 8th century Borobudur reliefs or in 16th century *jongs*). The term appears in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* as *layar topang* (Kassim Ahmad ed. 1971, p. 112). Such bowsprits disappeared from the local scene when large ships were no longer in use.

the water slightly / The ship's bow pitches heavily³² / The shrouds (*tali tumerang*) are droning / The main rope (*tali ogung*)³³ sound like a gong / The scupper-holes (*liang kumang*)³⁴ are spouting.

The action of steering by turning the rudder (*kemudi*) appears often enough in texts (which only rarely carry further details on navigation practices):

“[While sailing in the Red Sea, the pilot] was requested by Amir Hamzah to turn the rudder of their *bahtera* in the direction of that place.”³⁵

A variety of other technical terms for parts of the vessels appear here and there in the texts consulted. Two terms that specifically belong to the shipbuilders' vocabulary only appear in the *Rencong* version of the *Syair Perahu* : *pasak* and *galam* (Braginsky 1988, pp. 280, 284, 285, 290). *Pasak* designates, to this day, the treenails or dowels used in traditional shipyards to fasten planks together or to frames. *Galam* (standard Malay: [*kulit*] *gelam*) designates the inner, paper-like bark of *Melaleuca leucadendron*, which is inserted when joining two planks together, to make them watertight (a process known as “luting”, practiced in traditional shipyards of Java to this day).³⁶

The two terms for the stem or bows (*haluan*) and stern (*buritan*) of a sailing vessel are naturally encountered in our texts. Positions or actions aboard ship are often qualified in relation to where they take place: the stern cabins, for instance, are out of bounds to ordinary crew members. Their usage may be allegorical: in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the *laksamana* Hang Tuah explains the need for governance of his Malay followers to a Siamese harbour-master with a nautical metaphor:

The Malays are like a vessel: if it is not properly steered (*berkemudi*), it is surely as if it has no stem (*haluan*) [i.e. no direction].³⁷

32. For this verse (*unuk-unuk tuanguk-anguk*), I have kept the substance of Derk's translation (“the ship's bow is going up and down”), following Wilkinson's gloss for *anggok* (but I could not find the term *unuk-unuk* in standard dictionaries).

33. I cannot figure out what is the precise meaning of *tali ogung*, literally the “main rope”; possibly a line (a halliard?) associated with the main mast (*tiang agung*).

34. *Kumang* must correspond to standard Malay *kumbang* (see s.v. in Wilkinson's dictionary, who glosses *liang kumbang* as: “scupper-hole, limber-holes” [scupper-holes are water-ways pierced to carry the water off from the deck into the sea; limber-holes are carved out of the bottom part of ribs to allow bilge water to flow to the deeper part of the hull and be pumped out]). See also Smyth's glossary (1906, p. 111).

35. *Maka disuruh oleh Amir Hamzah belokkan kemudi bahtera itu ke arah tempat itu.*

36. The verse is *Galamnya habis di manakan sampai*, which Braginsky (1988, p. 290) translates as “For if the oakum is gone, where wilt thou reach?” Oakum, as used in Western or Chinese shipbuilding for caulking, is made of pounded vegetal fibres, therefore a different material from *gelam*, but it serves the same purpose.

37. *Adapun akan hamba segala Melayu ini umpama perahu; adapun itu, apabila*

One other term that is often used in our texts under various allegorical guises is *timba*, with cognates found in most Austronesian languages to designate a bucket to draw water or, in verbal forms, the action of drawing water, or pumping. In such a concrete context, *timba* refers to one action that is compulsory aboard any wooden boat, which is to bail out, by hand in small boats or by mechanical means in larger vessels, the water that always accumulates at the bottom of any wooden hull (whether it comes from imperfect water-tightness of its planks or from water coming in from above, from rain or waves). It appears as *panimba* or as *timba* in the *Syair Perahu*, as an indispensable tool that provides the Sufi poet with a metaphor for prayers (Braginsky 1988, pp. 280, 294). In 18th century Perak, the court texts represent their city-state explicitly as a ship, with the ruler acting as the shipmaster, and various ministers as specific members of the crew, one of them being equated with “the person who bails the ship (*timba ruang*) if she leaks”, i.e. who removes any danger threatening the country (Shellabear 1885; Andaya 1979, p. 28; Manguin 1986, p. 193). This composite expression *timba ruang* occurs for the first time in the *Undang-Undang Laut* where it always refers to a place on the ship situated midway between the bows and the stern, therefore “amidships.”³⁸ It appears with this meaning in the *Sejarah Melayu*, in a passage where a smallish boat is described:

“three servants [in a boat]: the one named Si Berkat paddles from the stern; Si Amat, as is his name, sits amidships; and the one named Si Tuakal paddles from the bows.”³⁹

In the *Misa Melayu* (as queried in MCP) we come across another derived meaning of *timba ruang*, which again shows how such technical terms can generate a variety of expressions that appear to have passed into common language. A strong wind is said to *menimba ruang*.⁴⁰ In other occurrences, it is qualified as an *angin timba ruang*. Klinkert and Wilkinson concur in their

tiada berkemudi, nescaya tiadalah betul haluannya (Hikayat Hang Tuah, Kassim Ahmad, ed., 1971, p. 417).

38. All early dictionaries of Malay confirm this meaning and explain it by the simple fact that, in large ships, bilge water collects in the deepest part of the hull, which is situated amidships; the bilge pumps, which we know existed on large 16th century *jongs*, accessed this bilge via a well, named *timba ruang*. Hence the common derived meaning of amidships. See for instance Haex’s dictionary, which translates *timba ruang* into English as “under hold” or French “*fond de cale*”.

39. (...) *dan budak tiga orang, Si Berkat namanya, berkayuh di buritan (...); Si Amat seorang namanya, duduk menimba ruang (...); Si Tuakal seorang namanya, berkayuh di haluan (...)* (*Sejarah Melayu, Samad Ahmad, ed., 1979, p. 264*).

40. *Turunlah angin menimba ruang.*

dictionaries on the reasons for this usage (s.v. *angin* and *timba*): both gloss the expression as a strong (side-)wind “that empties the bailing well” by making the vessel heel over. Abdullah Munsi uses this expression when describing his 1854 journey to Mecca:

“On Thursday at dawn we weighed anchor and sailed off, and Allah provided us with a good *menimba ruang* wind.”⁴¹

Another metaphoric rendering for a fresh breeze at sea calls upon the image of a “wind that tautens the sheets” (*angin kencang kelat*, or *angin tegang kelat*).⁴²

This leads us to consider how this corpus of Malay texts refers to sailing conditions and haven finding, that is to navigation practices. Many of the smaller ships and boats that were used as vectors of trade in the whole of Insular Southeast Asia were propelled by both sails and oars. All the “long” vessels so often referred to in Malay or Javanese sources (*lancang*, *kelulus*, *penjajap*, etc., and the Mediterranean galley-type *ghorab* or *gali* that appeared during the 16th century) were oared ships that could be used with no wind or contrary winds, when it was needed, for trade or war (Manguin 2012). There is however no possible sailing without wind in “round” trading ships, much too heavy to be moved by manual force alone. Winds that were too strong or too feeble forced ships to remain at anchor, waiting for better conditions and favourable winds, qualified as *angin paksa*, an expression that appears in the 14th century *Hikayat Amir Hamzah* and is found again in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Many narratives in our texts that entail sailing start with a set expression indicating a rising wind (*Turunlah angin*).⁴³ A quick look at the extensive “wind” (*angin*) notices in 19th and early 20th century Malay dictionaries shows how essential it was to have a knowledge of the various winds that propelled all these vessels. One assistant pilot aboard the 15th-16th *jongs* is thus called a *malim angin*, whose name clearly defines his function (*Undang-undang laut*, Liaw Yock Fang ed. 2003, p. 93).

It should also be remarked here that, if the regular monsoon winds provided an overall rhythm for overseas trade in the whole of “Monsoon Asia” — as noted in simplistic term by almost every single author —, there are many more kinds and directions of winds that had to be taken into consideration by seafarers. Passages referring to such sailing technicalities are rarely encountered in our texts. Navigators could sail against the general monsoon winds if good use was made of land breezes (*angin darat[an]* or *angin tanah*, in the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu* and the *Bo’ Sangaji Kai*).

41. (...) *maka kepada hari Khamis awal subuh dibongkar sauh lalu berlayarlah, diberi Allah angin baik menimba ruang (Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Mekah, Sweeney ed. 2005, jilid 1, p. 290).*

42. Wilkinson’s dictionary, s.v. *kelat*.

43. Whereas in English the wind is said “to rise” (“*le vent se lève*” in French), the Malays see their wind as “descending” (*turun*).

And, of course one could tack to move against the wind: “They weighed anchor in Topejawa and tacked against the east wind” (*berlayar gergaji*⁴⁴ *angin timur* in *Bo’ Sangaji Kai*).

The *Bo’ Sangaji Kai*, a text compiled in Bima between the 17th and the 19th centuries describes courses taken by ships in far more detail than others, in certain passages very much in the fashion of a ship log:

“(…) then there was no more favourable wind, except for a feeble wind rising from the west. On Tuesday after dark they again left the harbour of Lu’u, and they rowed and set sails following a land breeze that was blowing towards southeast [?]”⁴⁵

Or again:

“they sailed, pushed by a soft land breeze, but they veered course a bit, so that they steered due north during the night.”⁴⁶

One also needs to take into consideration the currents, some of which were strong enough to slow down, push forward, or push off course any ship crossing large expanses of water. The *Hikayat Tanah Hitu* recalls that one ship “was carried by wind and current” on her way to Seram (*lalu belayar dibawah oleh angin dan arus*).

Navigation in pre-scientific times, particularly so when sailing close to land as was often the case in an archipelagic environment, required the regular measuring of the depth of the sea, for which a sounding stone (*batu duga*) was used, tied to a sounding line (*tali duga*). The broader meaning of *duga* is “to probe” or “conjecture”; its nautical meaning is recorded in pioneer Malay dictionaries but appears in one text only, in the mid-18th century *Syair Hemop*:

“(…) sailing true north / sounding night and day / also sailing night and day / speeding as a flying bird / as if the mast would break / (...)”⁴⁷

44. The expression *berlayar gergaji* (literally “sail as a saw edge”) is found twice in the *Bo’ Sangaji Kai*. It must be understood as sailing right and left, i.e. tacking against a contrary wind. This meaning is confirmed in the *Syair Hemop* where the expression *angin salah digergaji* (they tacked against a contrary wind) is repeatedly found (as queried in MCP).

45. (...) *ketika itu tiada angin ketentuan datang daripada angin barat hampir turun. Maka pada malam Arbaa sudah waktu isa meninggal lagi labuan Lu’u, maka berdayung serta dilayarnya angin darat menyisir (tjgr) laut*. There seems to be a mistake here: *tjgr* maybe read as *tenggara*, but “*tenggara laut*” does not exist as a direction of the wind rose (as noted in *Bo’ Sangaji Kai*, ed. Chambert-Loir & Salahuddin 1999, p. 181).

46. *Maka berlayarlah ditiup angin tanah yang lembut jua, akan tetapi uluannya jatuh sedikit hendak mengambil utara semata pada malam itu*.

47. (...) *berlayar tuju [menuju] mata utara / malam dan siang duga-duga / berlayar juga malam dan siang / lajunya sebagai burung terbang / seperti patah rupanya tiang / (...)*. Shellabear (1910, p. 156) translates “heave the lead” as *buang duga*.

In marked difference with references to the sea in Old Javanese court poetry, as recently discussed by Jiří Jákl (2019), shipwrecks appear not to have become a poetic trope in the literature we examined. Dangers inherent to sailing which fed the imagination of so many writers and artists around the world are clearly acknowledged and expressed. However, even in longer passages such as in very popular 17th century *Hikayat Indraputra* and *Sejarah Melayu*, references to tempests remains strictly factual and formulaic, with set phrases that will be found repeated over and over in the same or in different texts, starting in the 14th century *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* and then in many later texts:⁴⁸

One night, by Allah's will, came a very strong wind, as a hurricane, and lightnings flashed, and the waves were huge. The ship broke, and fifteen other vessels broke along with Naim's ship.⁴⁹

(...) and Indraputra brought down storm, hurricane, thunder, and lightning strikes. And all the *lancang* and the *pilang* of the king's followers, which were less than forty, were shattered; some had their mast broken, and some their rudder, and some of the ships of the king's followers were wrecked.⁵⁰

Then one night, a huge storm came down, with rain, wind, thunder, and lightning. And all the ships were broken up and sent asunder.⁵¹

Pantuns and proverbs

The term *duga* discussed above directs us to two other kinds of discourses involving seafaring: poetic *pantuns* and proverbs. Both express common statements or precepts in concise, metaphorical or figurative forms, formulate a practical and banal truth of experience, or a piece of popular wisdom that may be common to an entire social group. In our Malay world, they frequently use seafaring terms or contexts, again confirming how familiar these were to Malay coastal societies.⁵²

48. A query on *ribut* and *taufan* in MCP reveals many such examples of descriptions of storms, not all of them taking place at sea.

49. *Syahdan, kepada suatu malam, dengan takdir Allah, maka datanglah angin ribut taufan yang amat keras, serta kilat petir sabung-menyabung, ombak pun teramatlah besarnya. Maka kapal itu pun pecahlah, lima belas kapal yang pecah bersama-sama kapal Naim (Hikayat Bayan Budiman, quoted from MCP, query on taufan).*

50. *Maka datanglah angin ribut, taufan, guruh, dan petir kilat sabung-menyabung. Maka segala lancang dan pilang anak raja-raja yang kurang esa empat puluh itu rusak, ada yang patah tiang, ada yang patah kemudi, ada yang carak-larak berharubirulah segala perahu anak raja-raja itu. (Hikayat Indraputra, Muliadi ed. 1983, pp. 179-180).*

51. *Maka pada suatu malam, turun taufan terlalu besar, dengan hujan, ribut, guruh, petir. Maka segala kapal itu pun habislah pecah cerai-berai ke sana sini (Sejarah Melayu, Samad Ahmad ed. 1979, p. 17).*

52. Salleh in his 2011 article "Sailing the Archipelago in a boat of rhymes: Pantun

Duga, with its nautical meaning, appears in such an aphorism in the *Hikayat Kalilah dan Damimah*: “The deepest sea can be sounded; who can fathom the depths of the heart?”⁵³

Sailing conditions being what they were in earlier times, and hygiene on board probably far from modern standards, it is not surprising to find in Klinkert’s dictionary (s.v. *baoe* [*bau*]) the expression: “He stinks as if he sailed for a full year” (*Baunya satahun pelayaran*).

One proverb collected by Klinkert (s.v. *kemoedi* [*kemudi*], “rudder”) is ushered when all hope is lost:

The rudder is broken, and so is its crossbeam (*Patah kemudi dengan ebamnya*)

In the same vein, a saying collected by Collings and Swettenham in their dictionary (s.v. *ajong*) describes a “sorry case”, which is “as a junk [broken] on a reef” (*Laksana ajong di-atas karang*).

One other proverb collected in this same dictionary (s.v. *ajong*), also refers to such disasters, this time with a humorous twist, signifying that the misfortunes of the great are often the sources of profit to the poor:

“When a junk breaks, the sharks get a belly full” (*Jung pecah, hiu juga yang kenyang*)

More politically minded aphorisms are given in Perak, where the “ship of state” theme is so relevant; the dangerous situation brought about by the existence of two rulers in one single kingdom is discouraged, by reference to a comparable situation at sea:

“You know how it is in a ship with two shipmasters and in a country with two kings”⁵⁴

To conclude this brief presentation of seafaring terms and motifs appearing in literature and in daily sayings, it is fit to recall how *pantuns*, being a reflection of Malay social life, often refer to such situations. A few were already quoted as we went.⁵⁵

in the Malay world” says nothing about nautical vocabulary, insisting only on the possible role of Orang Laut in the diffusion of *pantuns* to the whole Malay world, as if Malays themselves could not have mastered such a maritime culture.

53. *Laut yang dalam dapat diduga; hati orang siapa tahu* (as quoted in Wilkinson’s dictionary, s.v. *duga*).

54. *Lebih-lebih maktumlah satu perahu nakhoda dua dan satu negeri beraja dua* (*Tuhfat al-Nafis*, Matheson & Andaya eds., 1982, pp. 203-204).

55. In his *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan*, Abdullah Munsyi found it fit to publish some forty *pantuns* he collected at Kelantan and among those he refers to as “sea people” (*orang-orang laut*). Many of these refer to trading in port, sailing, winds and waves, ships, shipmasters and pilots.

As a follow up of the preceding aphorism, we can quote the famous *pantun* from Riau, which warns that, in times of danger, an unenlightened ruler may bring about the collapse of his polity:

The Lancang Kuning sails at night
Her bows towards high seas
If her shipmaster is ignorant
She is bound to be wrecked

*Lancang Kuning berlayar malam
Haluan menuju kelautan dalam
Kalau nakhoda kurang paham
Alamat kapal akan tenggelam*⁵⁶

One last *pantun* may be considered to sum up the contents of this article. It is often quoted today in Indonesia, now that the archipelagic situation of Indonesia is finally recognized by its government. For long, it remained written on a wall of the then derelict Museum Bahari in Jakarta, obviously failing to convince local authorities of its contents:

My ancestors were seafarers
They enjoyed sailing in open seas
No shaking, no fear
They used to endure storms

*Nenek moyangku orang pelaut
Gemar mengarungi lautan luas
Tiada gentar tiada takut
Menempuh badai sudah biasa*

Discussion

All these written or oral examples show how seafaring terminology and practices were commonplace in pre-19th century Malay society. As John Crawfurd observed when he lived in the region in the first quarter of the 19th century, seafaring was still then “strongly impressed” in the Malay language of those times, as it was during the three or four preceding centuries of literary production by Malays and Malay speakers. The resonance of water transport was still confirmed in places in the 1850s, when Alfred Russel Wallace, spent time for his botanical survey in Palembang and South Sumatra:

“The natives [of Palembang] are true Malays, never building a house on dry land if they can find water to set it in, and never going anywhere on foot if they can reach the place in a boat.” (Wallace 1898, p. 94)

⁵⁶ The “yellow *lancang*” represented the Riau polity in Sultanate times and remains to this day the symbol of the Riau province. On the still very lively references to seafaring in Riau, see Tenas Effendy 1969, 1972, or various local websites (querying on *lancang kuning*). A recent sung version of this *pantun* can be found at: <https://soundcloud.com/user195318125/lagu-melayu-lancang-kuning> (accessed February 2021).

The total number of terms attached to accessories and parts of a sailing vessel that are commonly employed in the texts quoted above may however appear to be rather small. Only some 20 such terms were quoted in context. One may explain this small amount by noting, for instance, that the four different ropes of a relatively simple traditional Malay rigging (compared to later European square rigs) are in fact all accounted for in our texts (see the illustration). One should also take into account, as noted above, the very frequent occurrences of a few verbal forms describing operations of the various parts of the sails and other components of a sailing vessel, or the navigation itself (such as *bongkar sauh*, *berlabuh*, *belayar*, etc.).

I also have not dealt in this essay with names for boat types, but it is worth noting at this point that the generic term for a boat or a ship (*perahu*) occurs some 900 times in the 91 texts used as our corpus, an exceptionally high figure for any non-grammatical word. To this term one may add the less frequent occurrences of many other vessel types (*jong*, *sampan*, *ghali*, *ghurab*, *lancang*, *lancaran*, *kelulus*, *penjajap*, etc., on which see Manguin 2012). Their ubiquity does constantly remind the reader (or listener) of the seafaring undertakings of the protagonists in these accounts. So does the recurrent titles carried by these protagonists, many of which are related to shipping: shipmaster (*nakhoda*), commander of the fleet (*laksamana*), sea pilot and all its metaphorical meanings (*mualim*). Sea merchants (*saudagar*, *dagang*) are also often mentioned aboard sailing vessels. Names for lowly members of the crew rarely appear except in generic terms such as *kelasi* or *awak perahu* (the only texts that provide detailed context for crew duties and activities is, for obvious reasons, the Melaka *Undang-undang laut*, and its partial transcription in the *Bo' Sangaji Kai* of Bima). It is therefore the frequency of references to the crossing of maritime expanses that provides the seafaring scenery and overall context of many of the episodes recounted in our texts, more so than just occurrences of specific vocabulary.⁵⁷

One may evoke another reason for not finding a larger variety of technical terms used in shipbuilding or while sailing in the texts considered: such textual references to nautical practices were clearly not aimed at preserving or transmitting a technical knowledge, which would rather be learned in traditional Malay and neighbouring societies by demonstration and imitation.⁵⁸

57. One may verify this by querying the MCP on a combination of *layar* (and its compounds) and *perahu* or *jong* in proximity (within 9 words on both sides) resulting in 296 hits in 38 texts (out of the 91 queried texts); or in combination with *sauh* or *angin*, both queries resulting in 60 to 70 hits, in more than 20 texts. A query on *layar* alone results in hits in 63 different texts, thus two thirds of the 91 queried texts.

58. A comparison of Malay and other nautical vocabularies of Insular Southeast Asia would possibly tell us more about the matter of this essay. However, as only South Sulawesi languages have been studied with a similar approach, this would need considerably more research and it therefore falls outside the scope of this article (Liebner 1992).

The intimate association that these observations induce between the Malays and the sea — their everyday maritime environment and their cultural behaviours, practices and representations —, is treated in most texts examined above as if it was so predictable that no author made an effort to enrich these expressions with either technical or dramatic extensions. This no frills relationship with the material world of sea and shipping is in contrast with the ideal relations that these populations maintain with their marine environment and with the rich set of symbolic processes alluded to in the introduction to this essay, which no doubt also provided a vibrant expression of the maritime identity of most cultures of Insular Southeast Asia.

Then, more surprisingly, we cannot fail to notice the total absence of the kind of dramatic usage of such motifs that is frequent in literary corpora elsewhere in Southeast Asia or in the wider world. The Malays hardly marvelled at the sea: it remained incidental, as if it was not an element worth associating with pathos or emotions. It was simply the framework of the stories told in the texts, the stage where the heroes could exhibit their feats and prowess. The fiction was clearly not about the sea.

One possible explanation of this total absence of tragic or emotional features, as proposed by Amin Sweeney, may stem from the fact that all the texts considered above — including those that were written down — were meant to be read to audiences and thus preserved many of the formulary features of oral expression (stereotypes, stock situations and clichés).⁵⁹

This is in marked difference with Javanese texts presented in Peter Worsley's (2012) or Jiří Jákl's (2019) essays, which were composed in court circles ruling over a largely agrarian society and economy, where seafaring was not consubstantial or present in the collective imagination. Different forms of sensitivity appear to have blossomed among the inland Javanese, leading to the poetic valorisation of the waves, the admiration of storm scenes or the spectacle of ships with their sails unfurled, of the abandoned wrecks along the shores.⁶⁰ One may also note, following Simon Leys (2018, p. xxviii), that neighbouring societies whose maritime ventures were no less considerable, as England in France, maintained the memories of seafaring into their languages and civilisations in strikingly different ways.⁶¹

⁵⁹. Sweeney (1987, pp. 19-20, 37-38) also sees romanticism and its own set of clichés as a reaction against earlier, formulary literary modes.

⁶⁰. One may remark here, without trying to push such comparisons between widely different worlds too far, that much of the Romantic fad for marine lyricism is more often than not the work of authors who have little or no experience of the sea (with notable exceptions such as Joseph Conrad or Herman Melville). Simon Leys (2018, p. xxxiv) goes as far as stating that “the awkward loquaciousness of the improvised sailors is matched by the silence of the real men of the sea.”

⁶¹. With the exception of the *Sejarah Banten*, no texts emanating from pre-colonial Javanese coastal, *pesisir* environments have however been preserved to allow for a

I do not mean in this essay to enter into the long-drawn debate about a contested Malay identity.⁶² It has often been said that Malay identity, as perceived in the past two centuries, is largely a product of colonial times, when mobility was considerably reduced, when land-based, rural features were brought forward, and surprisingly little references to the earlier maritime orientations and mobilities were retained.

This essay has simply concentrated on one facet of this multiple identity, which illustrates the clear maritime inclinations of *pesisir* Malays when their identity was largely formed at sea, an awareness which delivered a constant invitation to travel, the opening to the world and the development possibilities it offered. The common usage of a nautical lexical register thus provides another way of defining or just understanding this facet of Malay identity, which predates those new identities that were forged in colonial times.

All this vocabulary and sets of expression belong, for obvious reasons, to a supra-local register which is common to most *pesisir* societies of the times. Many technical terms appear to have belonged to the Malay lexicon, but speakers could well have been of a variety of ethnic origins.⁶³ One concrete example of such cosmopolitan usage of Malay lexicon is given in the Portuguese book-keeping documents kept after the purchase of two *jongs* in Pegu in 1516, in a joint venture by the Melaka based Indian merchant Nina Chatu and the Portuguese crown. This commercial venture was pursued following Malay commercial practices, where the Portuguese captain of Melaka simply took the entrepreneurial place of the former Sultan. The Portuguese accountant (the well-known Tomé Pires, author of the *Suma Oriental*) used common Malay terms (known from numerous other sources) to designate various parts of the ship or members of the crew. The latter, however, were not all Malays but mostly Javanese, with others originating from Pegu and a few only from Melaka (Thomaz 1966). This nautical lexicon again points to the role of seafaring people of various ethnic origins in forging this pre-colonial “Malay” identity.

During the 19th century profound social changes in the Malay World and the local shipping scene transformed the earlier relationship between the Malays and the sea. In colonial times, Europe’s expanding trading fleets in the Indian Ocean and further east employed a multi-ethnic work force of sailors (now called *laskar*) with East African, Indian, Chinese, Southern Europeans,

balanced comparison between Malay and Javanese speakers.

62. Malay identities have been discussed at length by many authors, among which see Sweeney 1987, Maier 1992, Reid 2001, Sutherland 2004, Barnard & Maier 2004, Milner 2004, Vickers 2004, Leonard Andaya 2010.

63. See, for instance, the discussion on the identity of the “Makassar Malays” of the 18th century by Heather Sutherland (2004): those seafarers that were considered as “Malays” might be Minangkabau or Moor (Indian Muslims), from Johor, Patani or Banjarmasin, all specific origins that could be subsumed into Malayness.

and some Malay origins, always commanded by European officers. Seafarers adopted a creolized language known as *Laskari*, where Malay vernacular words got lost in a sea of words of Indic, Arabic and European origin (Ghosh 2008; Amrith 2013; Hoogervorst 2018). The 1880 lexicon by Badings entitled *Woordenboek voor de Zeevaart in het Hollandsch-Maleisch-Fransch-Engelsch met verklarenden Hollandschen tekst, ten dienste van zeevarenden, die de Indische wateren bezoeken*, despite its title, illustrates the fading of Malay nautical terminology into this much more cosmopolitan lingua franca now used aboard ships (Hoogervorst 2018).⁶⁴ By then the “real seafaring” Malays so admired by John Crawfurd were marginalized and largely cut off from those activities that had essentially participated into the earlier forging of their identity, when their shipping abilities and practices were prominent.

REFERENCES

Malay Texts

Malay texts referred to in the article but not listed below were quoted using only the Malay Concordance Project [MCP] repository (Australian National University) <https://mcp.anu.edu.au/>

Bo' Sangaji Kai

Chambert-Loir, Henri & Siti Maryam R. Salahuddin, (eds.), 1999, *Bo' Sangaji Kai: Catatan Kerajaan Bima*. Jakarta: École française d'Extreme-Orient / Yayasan Obor Indonesia (Naskah dan Dokumen Nusantara 18).

Hikayat Aceh

Teuku Iskandar (ed.), 1958, *De Hikajat Atjeh*. 's-Gravenhage (VKI 26).

Hikayat Banjar

Ras, Johannes Jacobus (ed.), 1968, *Hikayat Banjar. A study in Malay Historiography*. The Hague: KITLV (Bibliotheca Indonesica, 1).

Hikayat Hang Tuah

Kassim Ahmad (ed.), 1975, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Hikayat Indera Putera

S.W.R. Mulyadi (ed.), 1983, *Hikayat Indraputra: A Malay Romance*. Dordrecht, Leiden: Foris, Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Bibliotheca Indonesica 23).

Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah dari Singapura ke Kelantan

Sweeney, Amin (ed.), 2005, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi*. Jakarta: Gramedia, École française d'Extrême-Orient, jilid 1, pp. 93-168.

Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah dari Singapura ke Mekah

Sweeney, Amin (ed.), 2005, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi*. Jakarta: Gramedia, École française d'Extrême-Orient, jilid 1, pp. 273-293.

⁶⁴. See Roebuck's (1811) *Laskari Dictionary*. The famous *Hobson-Jobson* glossary by Yule and Burnell (1903) also provides a large array of such *laskari* terms.

Panglimo Awang

Derks, Will, 1994, *The Feast of Storytelling: On Malay oral tradition*. Jakarta, Royal University of Leiden.

Sejarah Melayu (Sulalatus Salatin)

Brown, C.C. (transl.), 1952, “The Malay Annals translated from Raffles MS 18”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, 25(2/3), pp. 5-276.

Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Sulalatus Salatin (Sejarah Melayu)*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979.

Winstedt, Richard O. (ed.), 1938, “The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, 16(3), pp. 1-226.

Tuhfat al-Nafis

Matheson, Virginia and Barbara Watson Andaya (eds.), 1982, *The Precious Gift— Tuhfat al-Nafis*. Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press.

Undang-undang laut

Dulaurier, Edouard, 1845, « Droit maritime de la Mer des Indes, de la Presqu’île Malaye et de l’Archipel d’Asie: Codes Malais », in Jean-Marie Pardessus (ed.), *Collection de lois maritimes antérieures au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: B. Duprat, Vol. VI, chap. 38, pp. 389-480.

Liaw Yock Fang (ed.), 2003, *Undang-undang Melaka dan Undang-Undang Laut*. Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan.

Winstedt, Richard & P.E. de Josselin de Jong (eds.), 1956, “The Maritime Laws of Malacca”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, 29(3), pp. 22-59.

Dictionaries / Glossaries

Badings, A.H.L., 1880, *Woordenboek voor de Zeevaart in het Hollandsch-Maleisch-Fransch-Engelsch, met verklarenden Hollandschen tekst, ten dienste van zeevarenden, die de Indische wateren bezoeken*. Schoonhoven, S.E. van Nooten & Zoon.

Collings, Hugh & Frank Swettenham, 1894, *The Malay Language. Malay-English*. Taiping: Government Printing Office.

Haex, Davidis 1631, *Dictionarium Malaico-Latinum et Latino-Malaicum, cum aliis quamplurimis quæ quarta pagina edocebit. Opera & studio Davidis Haex*. Romae, Typis & impensis Sac. Congr. de Propag. Fide.

Klinkert, Hillebrandus Cornelius, 1947, *Nieuw Maleisch-Nederlandsch woordenboek, met Arabisch karakter, naar de beste en laatste bronnen bewerkt*. Leiden, Brill.

La Dage, John, 1962, *Kamus istilah pelajaran = Dictionary of nautical terms*. Djakarta, Departemen Perhubungan Laut.

Marsden, William, 1812, *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language*. London: Cox & Baylis.

Roebuck, Thomas, 1811, *A Laskari Dictionary or Anglo-Indian Vocabulary of Nautical Terms and Phrases in English and Hindustani, Chiefly in the corrupt Jargon in use among Laskars or Indian Sailors*. Calcutta.

Shellabear, William G., 1912, *Malay-English Vocabulary, containing over 7000 Malay Words or Phrases with their English equivalents, together with an Appendix of Household, Nautical and Medical Terms, etc*. Singapore, Methodist Publishing House.

Smyth, Herbert Warington, 1906, [Glossary in:] “Boats and Boat-Building in the Malay Peninsula”, *Indian Antiquary*, 35, pp. 109-115.

- Wilkinson, Richard James, 1959, *A Malay-English Dictionary (romanised)*. London, Macmillan (1st ed. : Mytilene, Salavopoulos & Kinderlis, 1932).
- Yule, Henry and A.C. Burnell, 1903, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*. London, 1903 (2nd. ed., rev.).

Studies

- Amrith, Sunil S., 2013, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.
- Andaya, Barbara Watson, 1979, *Perak, the Abode of Grace. A Study of an Eighteenth Century Malay State*. Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press.
- Andaya, Barbara Watson, 2011, “Distant Drums and Thunderous Cannon: Sounding Authority in Traditional Malay Society”, *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 7(2), pp. 17-33.
- Andaya, Barbara Watson & Leonard Andaya, 2015, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830*. Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Andaya, Leonard Y., 2010, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka*. Singapore, NUS Press.
- Baharuddin Lopa, 1984, *Hukum laut, pelayaran dan perniagaan (Penggalian dari bumi Indonesia sendiri)*. Bandung, Penerbit Alumni.
- Barnard, Timothy P. (ed.), 2004, *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Barnard, Timothy P. and Hendrik M.J. Maier, 2004, “Melayu, Malay, Maleis: Journeys through the Identity of a Collection”, in Timothy P. Barnard (ed.) *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. ix-xiii.
- Bertrand, Romain, 2019, « De la mer et autres démons. Savoirs nautiques et imaginaires maritimes en situation de “premiers contacts” (Hollande-Insulinde, XVI^e-XVII^e siècles) », in Gérard Le Bouëdec (ed.), *L'Asie, la mer, le monde: Au temps des compagnies des Indes*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, pp. 91-118.
- Braginsky, Vladimir I., 1988, « A Preliminary Reconstruction of the Rencong Version of ‘Poem of the Boat’ », *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 77, pp. 263-301.
- , 2004, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A historical survey of genres, writings and literary views*. Leiden, KITLV Press (VKI 154).
- , 2006, “Flying the Flags, Firing the Cannons: The departure of the ‘theatrical fleet’ of Johor for Patani as a ‘chain-description’”, in W. van der Molen (ed.) *Milde regen: Liber amicorum voor Hans Teeuw*. Nijmegen: W.-J. and R. van der Wolf, pp. 1-28.
- , 2007, *...And Sails the Boat Downstream: Malay Sufi Poems of the Boat*. Leiden: University of Leiden (Semaian 24).
- Bulhão Pato, Raymundo António de (ed.), 1903, *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*. Lisboa, Academia Real das Sciencias, vol. III.
- Buti, Gilbert & Alain Cabantous, 2018, *De Charybde en Scylla: Risques, périls et fortunes de mer du XVI^e siècle à nos jours*. Paris, Belin.
- Casparis, Johannes G. de, 1956, *Prasasti Indonesia, II: Selected Inscriptions from the 7th to the 9th Century AD*. Bandung, Dinas Purbakala Republik Indonesia / Masa Baru.
- Cœdès, George, 1930, « Les inscriptions malaises de Çrīvijaya », *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 30, pp. 29-80.

- Collins, William A., 1998, *The Guritan of Radin Suane. A study of the Besemah oral epic from South Sumatra*. Leiden, KITLV Press (Bibliotheca Indonesica 28).
- Cortesão, Armando. (ed.), 1944, *The Suma oriental of Tomé Pires: An account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515*. London: The Hakluyt Society (2 vols).
- Crawfurd, John, 1971 [1856], *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Countries*. Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Oxford University Press.
- Farr, Helen, 2006, “Seafaring as social action”, *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*, 1(1), pp. 85-99.
- Ghosh, Amitav, 2008, “Of Fanas and Forecasts: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(25), pp. 56-62.
- Hoogervorst, Tom, 2017, “The Role of “Prakrit” in Maritime Southeast Asia Through 101 Etymologies”, in Andrea Acri, Roger Blench and Alexandra Landmann (eds.), *Spirits and Ships: Cultural Transfers in Early Monsoon Asia*. Singapore: ISEAS, pp. 375-440.
- , 2018, “Sailors, Tailors, Cooks, and Crooks: On Loanwords and Neglected Lives in Indian Ocean Ports”, *Itinerario*, 42(3), pp. 516-548.
- Humphreys, J.L., 1914, “A Collection of Malay Proverbs”, *Journal of the Straits Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, 14, pp. 95-123.
- Jákl, Jiří, 2019, “The Sea and Seacoast in Old Javanese Court Poetry: Fishermen, Ports, Ships, and Shipwrecks in the Literary Imagination”, *Archipel* 98, pp. 69-90.
- Kulke, Hermann, 1993, “‘Kadātuan Śrīvijaya’ – Empire or Kraton of Śrīvijaya? A Reassessment of the Epigraphical Evidence”, *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient*, 80(1), pp. 159-180.
- Leys, Simon, 2018, *La Mer dans la littérature française*. Paris, Bouquins éditions.
- Liebner, Horst H., 1992, “Remarks on the terminology of boat-building and seamanship in some languages of southern Sulawesi”, *Indonesia Circle*, 59-60, pp. 18-44.
- Linehan, William, 1949, “The Earliest Word-lists and Dictionaries of the Malay Language”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, 22(1), pp. 183-187.
- Logan, James Richardson, 1855, “Translation of the Malayan Laws of the Principality of Johor”, *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 9, pp. 71-95.
- Lombard, Denys, 1980, « Le thème de la mer dans les littératures et les mentalités de l’archipel insulindien », *Archipel*, 20, pp. 317-328.
- , 1988, « Le sultanat malais comme modèle socio-économique », in D. Lombard & J. Aubin, *Marchands et hommes d’affaires asiatiques dans l’Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine, 13e-20e siècles*. Paris : Éditions de l’EHESS, pp. 117-125.
- , 1990, *Le Carrefour javanais : essai d’histoire globale*. Paris, Éditions de l’EHESS (Civilisations et sociétés, 79), 3 vols.
- Maier, Henk M.J., 1992, “The Malays, the waves and the Java Sea”, in V.J.H. Houden, H.M.J Maier and W. van der Molen (eds.), *Looking in Odd Mirrors: the Java Sea*. Leiden, Rijksuniversiteit (*Semaian* 5), pp. 1-27.
- Manguin, Pierre-Yves, 1986, “Shipshape Societies. Boat Symbolism and Political Systems in Insular South-East Asia”, in D.G. Marr and A.C. Milner (eds.), *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*. Singapore: Australian National University / Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 187-213.
- , 1991, “The Merchant and the King: political myths of Southeast Asian coastal polities”, *Indonesia*, 52, pp. 41-54.

- , 2002, « The amorphous nature of coastal polities in Insular Southeast Asia: Restricted centres, extended peripheries », *Moussons*, 5, pp. 73-99.
- , 2012, “From *lancaran* to *ghurab* and *ghali*: Mediterranean impact on war vessels in Early Modern Southeast Asia”, in Geoff Wade and Li Tana (eds.), *Anthony Reid and the Study of the Southeast Asian Past*. Singapore: Nalanda Sriwijaya Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 146-182.
- Milner, Anthony, 2004, “Afterword: A History of Malay Ethnicity”, in Timothy P. Barnard (ed.) *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 241-257.
- Reid, Anthony, 1988-93, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680. Volume One: The Lands below the Winds / Volume Two: Expansion and Crisis*. New Haven / London, Yale University Press, 2 vols.
- , 2001, “Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Sources of diverse modern identities”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32(3), pp. 295-113.
- Salleh, Mohammad Haji, 2011, “Sailing the Archipelago in a boat of rhymes: Pantun in the Malay world”, *Wacana*, 13(1), pp. 78-104.
- Shellabear, William G., 1885, “Titles and Offices of the Officers of the State of Perak”, *Notes & Queries*, I, published with *Journal of the Straits Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, 14, pp. 6-8.
- Sutherland, Heather, 2004, “The Makassar Malays: Adaptation and Identity, c.1660-1790”, in Timothy P. Barnard (ed.), *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identities across Boundaries*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 76-106.
- Sweeney, Amin, 1987, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Tenas Effendy, 1969, *Tjatan tentang ‘Lantjang Kuning’*. Pekanbaru, Badan Pembina Kesenian Daerah Propinsi Riau.
- , 1972, *Sedjarah Lantjang Kuning (di daerah Riau)*. Pekanbaru, Badan Pembinaan Kesenian Daerah Propinsi Riau.
- Thomaz, Luís Filipe F.R., 1966, *De Malaca a Pegu - Viagens de um feitor português (1512-1515)*. Lisboa, Instituto de Alta Cultura, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarino.
- Tobing, Ph.O.L. (ed.), 1961, *Hukum pelajaran dan perdagangan Amanna Gappa*. Makassar : Jajasan Kebudayaan Sulawesi Selatan dan Tenggara.
- Vickers, Adrian, 2004, “‘Malay Identity’: Modernity, Invented Tradition and Forms of Knowledge”, in Timothy P. Barnard (Ed.), *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identities across Boundaries*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 25-55.
- Wallace, Alfred Russel, 1898, *The Malay Archipelago*. London, Macmillan and Co.
- Wheatley, Paul, 1959, “A City that was Made for Merchandise: the Geography of Fifteenth-Century Malacca”, *Nanyang Yenchiu / Bulletin of Institute of Southeast Asia*, 1, pp. J1-J8.
- Wiryamartana, I Kuntara, 1992, “The ‘sea’ in Old Javanese literature”, in V.J.H. Houben, H.M.J. Maier and W. van der Molen (eds.), *Looking in Odd Mirrors: the Java Sea*. Leiden, Rijksuniversiteit (*Semaian* 5), pp. 97-111.
- Worsley, Peter, 2012, “Journeys and landscapes: Some preliminary remarks on ancient Javanese perceptions of the environment”, in Alexandra Haendel (ed.), *Old Myths and New Approaches: Interpreting Ancient Religious Sites in Southeast Asia*. Clayton: Monash University, pp. 103-117.