The Elements of Myth and Legends in Selected Malay Historical Manuscripts

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Abstract: The writing on history is not considered as new in the Malay world. It was written ever since the 14th century or may be earlier in time. Certain scholars disagree to the fact that the writing process did not occur in the traditional era. Names like J.C. Bottoms, Winsstedt, Wilkinson and many more did not acknowledge the content of the books as worthy of science or literature except for mere leisure reading. To them, the Malay writings are not historical facts since it combined many myths and legends in its contents. This research will discuss on the reality of myths and legends in several traditional works in the Malay world such as Sejarah Melayu, Bustan al-Salatin, Tuhfat al-Nafs and many more. In addition, the historians’ awareness of the said issue will also be elaborated.

Keywords: Manuscripts, History, Myth and Legend

Myths and Legends in the Malay Society

The traditional Malay society in general was attached to the main concept of myth similar to legends and reality. The word reality in particular is different in a sense it is considered as the actual happenings in a certain period of time that can be proven by several sources. Mythology can be best defined as facts on the origins of names of places, men and other creations. According to Ismail Hamid, the Malay mythology is based on narration of the Malay world before the coming of Islam. The Malays before were Hindus who believed on the supernatural powers or miracle that can control all souls as well as the world. Dick Hartoko on the other hand mentioned on the myth that surpassed the method of narration with its more concrete content versus entertaining happenings. Myths are unlimited on just reports of phenomenon, fairy tales and enchanting places but also included the role of man in every occurrence. Legend on the other hand differs from myth since its chains of events are related to famous figures in a certain place and time. Those figures may be alive in the local history or their histories cannot be proven true. Nonetheless, the society trusted that the selected figures existed and even exaggerated on their abilities with myths when narrating about them promoting them as people with exceptional power and strength.


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