I. Introduction

Founded in about 1400, the port of Melaka existed for little more than a century under Malay rule, yet it left an indelible imprint on local memories. A hundred years after its capture by the Portuguese in 1511 descendants of the Melaka line still envisaged a time when they might return as rulers, and in the 1930s Malay nationalists invoked the name of Melaka as a symbol of the dominant position Malays had once held. Melaka’s unassailable position in the Malay mind is unquestionably attributable to its impressive achievements. In the fifteenth century, as the most prosperous and prestigious port in the region, it became the driving force behind the use of Malay as a *lingua franca* in regional trade, while its court emerged as the arbiter of Malay culture. Arguably the most significant ele-
ment in the Melaka-sponsored projection of Malayness, however, was Islam. Admittedly, Melaka was not the first Muslim port in the region, for that honour belonged to Pasai; from some perspectives the 'Islamic' claims of the seventeenth-century centres of Aceh (north Sumatra) and Banten (west Java) would appear to be superior. In the historical literature, however, Melaka's reputation has eclipsed that of its rivals because of the way in which its rulers actively promoted Islam and because its trading links, penetrating deep into the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, provided a vehicle for the dissemination of the new faith. Nonetheless, the success of Islam in Melaka was based on significant adjustments to a physical environment and mental milieu that was very different from that prevailing in the cities of the Middle East which my colleagues are so ably describing. Whether it can be classified as an 'Islamic city', therefore, is highly contingent on the criteria adopted.

In the late 1960s the publication of a provocative article by the great scholar G.W.J. Drewes reopened debates on the question of Islam's arrival in Southeast Asia. Its appearance coincided with discussions in the wider field of Islamic studies that focussed on the long-standing issue of 'the Islamic city'. Ripples from these discussions were soon felt in historical research on Southeast Asia. Although a monograph on 'the Southeast Asian city' had appeared in 1969, the author had seen 'trade-oriented cities' like Melaka merely as 'the precursors of the colonial cities of the nineteenth century' and accorded little attention to Islam as such. The re-evaluation of old stereotypes in the volume edited by A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern seemed to open up new possibilities for urban comparisons across Islamic cultures. Historians of Indonesia and Malaysia were understandably enthusiastic about a framework that could link what is often treated as a marginal region with the Islamic heartlands.

From the Southeast Asian perspective, Melaka initially seemed a prime candidate for inclusion in a larger discussion on urbanism and Islam because of its prominence in regional history. In 1976 A.H. Johns concluded that Melaka, like several other Islamic port towns in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, displayed features similar to those listed by Hourani in his 'Islamic city' model — a fortress, a royal compound, a mosque, a commercial area, and residential divisions on the basis of ethnic groups. On this basis, he argued, Melaka and other Southeast Asian ports should be included in any larger study of the Islamic city. Ten years later, an article by J. Kathirithamby-Wells was developed within the same general framework, albeit in a more qualified mode. Although she discerned a tradition of 'Islamic cities', she considered that the adoption of Islam in Southeast Asian towns did not fundamentally change their existing structures, whether maritime or agrarian.

By this time, however, the re-examination of urbanization in Islam had gathered
pace among Middle Eastern scholars, who were beginning to challenge the very bases on which the Islamic city model was constructed. They growing list of qualifications, exceptions and contradictions, while immensely refining academic discussions, also engendered a certain unease about the value of generalizations, which may mask more than they reveal. It is perhaps not surprising that among the small band of Islamic specialists on Southeast Asia this period also saw a retreat from the early euphoria. The mood of Southeast Asian studies now favoured greater emphasis on local adaptations of outside ideas, which inevitably shifted the criteria for judging ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’.

Published in 1983, an ambitious two-volume study of Melaka from early times to the present day made no attempt to identify possible ‘Islamic’ influences in the city's topography, and a decade afterwards urban comparisons made by Anthony Reid in his much-cited work are with Europe rather than the Middle East. Even though a Malay scholar, Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, asserted the importance of Islam in his detailed survey of fifteenth-century Melaka, it seems that he too did not see any value in a comparative framework. In short, historians of Southeast Asia had apparently decided that the ‘Islamic city’ concept was of relatively little assistance in explaining Melaka's development and the manner in which it functioned.

I have been emboldened to return to this question by Toru Miura’s recent call for ‘a new horizon’ in urban studies of Islam and new methodological directions that might accord greater attention to areas like Southeast Asia and west Africa on the periphery of the Islamic world. In the context of this special issue, I wish to suggest that the problem of categorizing Melaka as an ‘Islamic city’ arises from Islam’s very success in adjusting to a specific political and economic culture. At the same time, it is within the social networks that developed, particularly in relation to trade, that we find some of the closest parallels with the ‘diverse and pluralistic’ demographies of Middle Eastern cities. It is likely, of course, that a number of features associated with ‘urban Islam’, like semi-autonomous religious and ethnic quarters, represent logical solutions to the problems of applying order to cross-cultural trade, since they were common in most Southeast Asian towns. Yet while we all recognize that Muslim cities may not be as distinctive as once thought, we must not assume that in Southeast Asia the idea of ‘the Islamic city’ was a culturally unmarked category. The study of urbanized Islam may indeed be a product of Western Orientalism, but I suggest here that pre-modern Malays also thought of Melaka as an integral link in a chain of Muslim settlements that stretched beyond Mecca to Istanbul, which became for them the epitome of the great Muslim city.
II. Studying Melaka

In contrast with the Middle East, India and China, 'urban' centres began to develop in Southeast Asia only during the first millennium CE. Scholars have long drawn a distinction between the 'agrarian-based sacred cities', most evident in mainland Southeast Asia, and the maritime-based 'market towns' typical of the island world. Though this dichotomy has sometimes been over-simplified, it is generally agreed that 'market towns' did have a particular character because they were normally located on some river close to the coast and because their hinterlands allowed only limited space for expansion. Little remains of these cities in architectural terms since buildings were mostly constructed of wood and rulers rarely controlled sufficient manpower for long-term construction projects. In many cases commercial reputations proved equally ephemeral. Because the fortunes of market cities were so dependent on international trading patterns, a decline in demand for certain products, the emergence of a successful rival, the siltion of a river or harbour, could signal a rapid decline.\(^{(12)}\)

The modern town of Melaka, known today primarily as a tourist destination and an applicant for world heritage status, fits this pattern nicely. Scholars generally accept that it was established in the closing years of the fourteenth century, since by 1403 it was sufficiently prestigious to receive a special insignia from the Chinese emperor. As far as the Portuguese were concerned, the capture of Melaka in 1511 was crucial to their planned (but unsuccessful) hegemony in Asian waters. Under Portuguese control the town remained an important node in regional commerce, but it faced formidable rivals in Islamic ports like Aceh and Banten, both of which had attracted Muslim merchants alienated by Melaka's new Christian regime. The steady descent into commercial obscurity was confirmed in 1641, when Melaka fell to a siege mounted by the Dutch East India Company, whose directors had decided that Batavia (modern Jakarta) was to be the seat of their operations. In 1824 it was transferred to the British, and was only returned to Malay control when Malaya (now Malaysia) gained its independence in 1957.

Melaka thus differs from most other 'Islamic cities' in that its independent existence under Muslim rule was short-lived. This very fact makes its enormous reputation the more remarkable. Yet despite the prestige still attached to its name, our understanding of how Melaka functioned during its heyday is limited. There is a glaring discrepancy between its acknowledged fame and the dearth of documentary material that explains how that fame was parlayed into actual practice. Even the physical appearance of the town can only be reconstructed in general terms, and the lack of historical sources such as contracts, wills and court decisions is a serious impediment in tracking the specifics of com-
commercial operations. A glance at any study will show that historians draw primarily from two sources for details of Melaka’s foundation and subsequent history. The first of these is the so-called Malay Annals (Sejarah Melayu), of which the earliest extant copy dates from the early seventeenth century.\(^{13}\) The second, the Suma Oriental, was written in 1512 by Tomé Pires, a Portuguese apothecary who had spent more than two years in the region and who saw the conquest of Melaka as critical to the Portuguese commercial enterprise in Asia.\(^{14}\)

Though they were compiled at different times and for very different audiences, there is a substantial overlap between the accounts of Melaka’s origins in the Sejarah Melayu and the Suma Oriental, despite variation in detail. Increasingly, too, the archaeological record is coming to support the broad narrative these sources lay out. The most important factor in reconstructing the background to Melaka is the assertion that its founder came from southeast Sumatra. This claim assumes added significance in view of the fact that other references in Chinese, Indian and Arabic material associate the term ‘Melayu’ with the Jambi-Palembang area of Sumatra’s southeast coast. More specifically, it is now absolutely established that a port of considerable importance, known to the Chinese as ‘Sanfochi’ or Srivijaya, was located in the Palembang region from at least the seventh century onwards.

Returning to the texts, we find that both Pires and Tun Seri Lanang, the Malay chronicler, describe the departure of this individual (called Paramesvara by Pires, Seri Teri Buana in the Sejarah Melayu) for Singapore, where he sets up a settlement. Once regarded as an example of Malay mythology, the identification of Singapore’s early importance appears to have been confirmed by recent archaeological finds, which provide irrefutable evidence that an important trading port operated here sometime around the mid-thirteenth century.\(^{15}\) The two texts go on to relate how Paramesvara/descendants of Seri Teri Buana later moved to Muar, about eight kilometers south of Melaka, then to Bertam, a league or so upstream, and finally to Melaka itself, the site of which was chosen because of a mousedeer’s peculiar behaviour.\(^{16}\)

This essay will also draw principally on the Suma Oriental and the Sejarah Melayu. However, my purpose is not to establish a sequence of events, but to examine Melaka’s claim to be an ‘Islamic’ city, and in so doing to convey something of the nature of the cross-cultural networks that help explain its success both as a trading centre and a disseminator of Islam. My discussion is divided into two sections. The first will examine the geographic and cultural environment in which Melaka was established, arguing that this laid the ground for a distinct style of governance that was well established before the third ruler’s conversion to Islam somewhere around 1430. The second section will explore the
way in which the commerce of 'Islamic' Melaka operated in a Southeast Asian world where Islam was present only in a few beach-head states. In both contexts the personal relationships between local women and migrant or foreign men, and the environment in which their children were reared, lie at the heart of the cross-cultural contacts that underpinned Melaka’s success.

III. Melaka before Islam

Kingship has not been a dominant theme in studies of urban Islam, but in the case of Melaka it is absolutely crucial, for the prestige of the town and its Islamic status was intimately connected with its rulers. As noted earlier, however, for at least a third of its existence as a Malay port, until about 1430, Melaka was ruled by non-Muslim kings who were not local in origin. In a study of the Sejarah Melayu, one authority has even suggested the term ‘Melayu’ referred exclusively to the descendants of those who arrived from Sumatra. The comparative historian will immediately be struck by parallels with the political order of many Middle Eastern and Central Asian cities, where it has been said that local inhabitants generally regarded rulers as ‘foreigners’ in origin or ethnicity, even when they were Muslim. Though the Pacific island of Fiji is a long way from the Middle East, this depiction resonates with notions of the ‘stranger king’ model proposed by Marshall Sahlins, whereby marriage connections enable the outsider chief to serve as a conduit for interactions between the ‘foreign’ and the local. Sahlins’ formulation is also very applicable to Melaka, where the ruler was actively involved in the historical processes by which Islamic political models and their religious justification were brought to bear on pre-existing ideas of powerful spirits, watchful ancestors and sacral kingship.

In examining the ‘mental world’ behind the evolution of Melakan-style Islam, we need to try and establish the kind of belief system that the first ruler and his followers brought from Sumatra to their new environment. As Jacques Le Goff has reminded us, any attempt to reconstruct a society’s imaginaire is a difficult and risky business. It is particularly problematic in the Melaka case because there are so few manifestations of the imagination such as monuments, art, and even literature. We can, however, reconstruct something of the attitudes towards kingship that would have formed part of Parameswara’s heritage. We know, for example, that Srivijaya had close connections with the east Javanese kingdom of Majapahit during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and some historians have even detected earlier marriage relationships between the royal houses of Srivijaya and central Java. This means that the Srivijayan elite were also part of a Hindu-Buddhist
environment that may also have been infused with Tantrism. Specifically, this kind of Buddhism gave a special place to the position of kings, and the East Javanese ‘portrait sculptures’ representing Hindu gods are thought by some to represent actual individuals. We also know that Srivijaya was a centre for Buddhism, and although the sources reveal little of its doctrinal leanings we can speculate that concepts of kingship were influenced by the prevailing mood in east Java, including an interest in Tantric Bhairava practices. Closer to hand, the central Sumatran kingdom of Minangkabau (whose rulers had also appropriated the term ‘Melayu’) would have provided another conduit for Javanese influences. Indeed, it was apparently connections with east Java that inspired a fourteenth-century Minangkabau ruler to depict himself in the demonic form of Siva (Bhairava).

Various sources testify to beliefs in the special powers of rulers. For example, Srivijayan inscriptions warn those found guilty of disloyalty (using the Sanskrit-based word derhaka) that they will be killed by the supernatural force of the royal curse. In other contexts we can also see evidence of cultural convictions that the actions of rulers could have cosmological implications. According to a Chinese account, on certain days the Srivijaya king could not eat grain; if he did so, the rains would not come and rice would be dear. By the same token, a great flood would result if he should bathe in ordinary water rather than rose water. In other words, the line between gods and kings was porous, and the belief that rulers are possessed of supernatural powers (not of course, unique to this region) became an important element in the Sumatran attitude towards kingship. An ambitious reconstruction by the late O.W. Wolters has argued that sometime in the late fourteenth century the ruler of Palembang offended his overlord in Java by undertaking an abhiseka ceremony, by which in effect he elevated himself into a Bodhisattva, a Buddha-to-be. It was this show of hubris, he believes, that led to Javanese retaliation in 1377 and the Paramesvara’s flight from Palembang.

But ideas about kingship were not just a product of the ruling classes or inspired by imported religions. Zhao Rukua, a Chinese customs official, nicely captured the ruler-subject relationship when he commented that the populace commonly shaved their heads as a public display of grief when the king died. The followers who accompanied the founder of Melaka carried with them attitudes that would also have been a significant element in the creation of Malay-Islamic ideas of kingship. According to both Pires and the Sejarah Melayu, these followers included the ruler’s most loyal subjects, the ‘Selatters’ (from Malay Selat = Straits) or orang laut, the boat-dwelling peoples who had long served a crucial role in patrolling the waters of Srivijaya/Palembang and guiding foreign vessels into its harbours. As the core of the new settlement at Melaka, they came into direct contact with other peoples who were also to prove vital in Melaka’s survival — the indigenous for-
est-dwellers, ancestors of the various orang asli ('original people') who inhabited the area in more modern times. Collectors of exotic jungle produce, these groups were also imbued with notions that conceived of leaders as gifted individuals who could tap supernatural forces. Only certain men, for instance, were granted the secret knowledge that would enable them to recognize a tree whose diseased heart contained the precious camphor, and it was only these individuals who knew how to propitiate the forest spirits so that collecting expeditions would be successful.

Yet rulers, like any leaders, were also dependent on the support of their followers if they were to govern effectively, and in Malay statecraft this imposed a cultural brake on arbitrary rule. The reciprocal relationship between ruler and subject is personified in the Sejarah Melayu, which relates how Seri Teri Buana, the ancestor of Malay kings, weds the daughter of his chief minister, Demang Lebar Daun, who had formerly been Palembang’s chief. Minister and king then conclude a solemn covenant which ensures that Malays will always remain loyal to their kings, who must repay them by just rule. In short, concepts of kingship in pre-Islamic Melaka were not vague and undefined, but fused imported and local ideas into a rich cultural alloy. While an essential element was the belief in a ruler’s extra-ordinary powers and the absolute loyalty his subjects owed him, the notion of reciprocity was equally important. Opposition to the ruler was indeed derhaka, a heinous crime, but a faithful follower, bound to a lord through real or fictive kinship, had the right to expect due recognition and reward for loyal service.

**IV. Islam and Kingship in Melaka**

It was into this environment, then, that Islam moved in the first part of the fourteenth century. Although Muslims had been present in the region for a hundred years or more, Melaka’s reception of Islam was a gradual process extending over several decades. In 1414 the second ruler adopted the Muslim-style regnal name of Iskandar Syah, but the final conversion and the stabilization of Muslim power did not occur until mid-century. As Christopher Wake emphasized some years ago, in the third reign there was still a group of nobles who remained true to the Hindu-Buddhist tradition and who were hostile to the religion and political aspirations of Muslim traders. The influence of the latter and their allies at court grew steadily, but even as the royal dynasty of Melaka was moving towards the reception of Islam, 'the traditions of the Hindu-Buddhist past were not forgotten. [and] Srivijaya was taken as the natural standard in establishing the institutions of the new kingdom.'
Pires treats ruler’s conversion to Islam as a pragmatic decision based on the expectation of trading advantages that was promoted by the presence of Islamic traders, and stimulated by the example of Pasai, a rival port across the Straits.\(^{(29)}\) The Sejarah Melayu sees it as a miraculous event, when the ruler’s acceptance of the new faith was fostered by dreams and portents that subsequently became ‘reality’. While the basic nature of government does not appear to have been radically altered by these developments, Islam introduced new justifications for kingship, and a new vocabulary to express royal power. The Malay word *daulat*, taken from the Arabic *dawla*, where it was used in honorific titles, evolved into a central element in Malay expressions of royal power, apparently replacing the Sanskrit-derived term *sakti*. Those guilty of *derhaka* would be ‘struck’ (*kena*) by the ruler’s *daulat* and suffer often agonizing punishments. The Sejarah Melayu also develops ideas of the ruler-subject relationship by adapting Qur’anic verses and paraphrasing Arabic and Persian quotations to compare kings and their people to trees and their roots, or to a flame and the wood that feeds it.\(^{(30)}\)

In a society where the ancestors of the king were often better known than an individual’s own grandparents, the mnemonic device by which Melaka’s cross-cultural *imaginaires* was legitimized and rendered comprehensible was the ruler’s genealogy.\(^{(31)}\) The ways in which this genealogy incorporated Melaka’s mixed heritage are recorded in several different sources. The most elaborated version is that contained in the Sejarah Melayu (more properly entitled *Salalul’s Salatina*, the descent of kings) which transforms Alexander the Great into Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain, a great Muslim conqueror who marries an Indian princess. The descendants of this prestigious line are linked by marriage to Indian maharajas, to Chinese emperors, and even to underwater kings, until finally the prince Seri Teri Buana magically appears on a hill in Palembang. He then becomes the king of local Malays, and marries a daughter of the local chief, Demang Lebar Daun. After a time the couple sail to the islands of Bintan and Singapore, in the heart of *orang laut* waters, where Seri Teri Buana is taken as a son by the queen of Bintan. It is his descendant, another Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain, who comes to rule in Melaka.

The oral traditions collected by Pires, though offering a more simplified account, strengthen the links with Java, making the wife of Melaka’s founder a daughter of the Javanese ruler, an ‘enchanted queen’ believed to live on Gunung Ledang, a spiritually-charged mountain some distance from Melaka.\(^{(32)}\) The Sejarah Melayu connects her with later rulers, while other legends depict her as the last ruler of Melaka who had a special relationship with the jungle dwellers; she was even said to have fled to join them following the Portuguese attack.\(^{(33)}\) These kinds of mythical connections were critical in linking a Muslim ruler to non-Muslim communities who inhabited areas beyond the city proper.
instance, we know that through the fifteenth century the boundaries of Melaka expanded, stretching the ruler's authority into places where Minangkabau migrants from Sumatra had laid claim to land through intermarriages with orang asli groups. These migrants were unlikely to have been Muslim, since in 1512 Pires notes that one of the three Minangkabau rulers had only become Muslim fifteen years earlier. Though the social and cultural order that developed in Melaka's environs was not a duplication of that in Minangkabau, an important element was the persistence of non-Islamic traditions, such as matrilineal inheritance of land. Yet ties between their leaders and Melaka appear to have been close. According to oral tradition, the chiefs of what was later termed Negeri Sembilan, descended from unions between Minangkabau men and Jakun women, owed fealty to Melaka; indeed, in 1641 the Dutch assumed that their conquest of Melaka meant they had inherited those rights. Another thread of the royal genealogy, the close connections between Palembang/Melaka rulers and the sea-going orang laut, is implied in the Sejarah Melayu but made explicit in European sources. According to Pires, the founder's son married the daughter of the orang laut leader, from whom the kings of Melaka were thus descended 'through the female side.' Even in modern times an orang laut community in the Melaka Straits told a French anthropologist that 'the first king of this country was one of ours.' This comment can be placed against that recorded in the mid-nineteenth century, when local forest dwellers claimed that 'Malacca... belongs to us. The Malays came into our country.' These relationships are affirmed in other contemporary sources. João de Barros, an early Portuguese chronicler, recorded that initially the migrant group form Sumatra and the local inhabitants (whom he called 'native Malays') stayed apart, but a shortage of women drew them together. It was this intermarriage that produced the 'fidalgos' (aristocrats) of Melaka. Even the Chinese connection was not forgotten, and in the early sixteenth century an Italian traveller, Ludovico di Varthema, was told that 'Melaka was founded almost eighty years ago by the king of the Chinese.'

Regardless of the genealogical variations and discrepancies which have puzzled some historians, the point here is that the Melaka rulers of Melaka could trace a line of descent that displayed impeccable 'Islamic' credentials but was also tightly integrated into the local environment. An important survival of the eclectic world of the fifteenth century is a stone found not far from Melaka, where the inscription is written in Javanese and Arabic, but where the dates are Islamic-inspired. Furthermore, the connections symbolized in the ruler's genealogy reflected important economic relationships between the incoming migrants and surrounding populations. Like the Fijian chiefs described by Sahlin, the ruler of Melaka was a 'generator of cultural totality,' representing the land to the sea people and yet, as an immigrant, standing as a sea person relative to the local land
people. As such, he became the symbolic axis of commercial exchange by which sea and foreign goods were traded for indigenous land products.\(^{43}\)

As Hodgson has emphasized, the Muslim world of the fifteenth century was willing to embrace a variety of Islamic beliefs and styles of religiosity.\(^{44}\) This fact helps explain why Malays could consider Melaka ‘Muslim’ even though outsiders were sometimes critical of what they saw as an unacceptable degree of accommodation between the new faith and pre-existing ideas. While recognizing this kind of continuity, however, A.C. Milner has cautioned against emphasizing pre-Islamic ideas to the detriment of Islamic political thinking. In particular, he argues that Melaka rulers would have been attracted by two features that had emerged in mediaeval Islamic writings. The first projected the Persian-inspired model of a society that revolved around the institution of sacral kingship. The second was a strand of Sufi teaching that elevated the monarch high above ordinary mortals as an exemplar of the Perfect Man, the saintly figure who has realized his ‘essential oneness’ with the Divine and who has the capacity to guide his disciples along the spiritual path.\(^{45}\) At the same time, it is also clear that Melaka was steadily becoming more ‘Islamic’ as the fifteenth century progressed. In the reign of Sultan Mansur ((863-4/1459?-882/1477) the daily prayers were made obligatory for Muslims, and the legal system began to favour Muslims, especially as witnesses and in property disputes. The adoption of Islam became increasingly necessary in order to maintain high positions in the administration. For instance, while Muslim merchants recorded in early Portuguese sources bear noble titles, Hindu merchants always have the title \textit{nina} or \textit{naina}, perhaps indicating that they were further removed from power. Although able non-Muslims could still rise to power, many eventually converted to the new faith.\(^{46}\) Royal encouragement of Islam was exemplified in the building of a great new mosque for Melaka, and Sultan Mansur was himself making preparations to make the haj when he died.\(^{47}\) It is evident that Melaka was developing into an important focus for intellectual exchange among Muslim scholars, and even the \textit{walis} who spread Islam in Java are said to have studied in Melaka.\(^{48}\) At the beginning of the sixteenth century, therefore, the town’s ‘Islamic’ status was regionally unchallenged.

\textbf{V. Melaka’s Urban Morphology}

In the preceding discussion I have argued that the ability of Melakan kingship to be ‘Muslim’ while at the same time retaining significant elements of the indigenous heritage was of utmost importance, even though this very synthesis has persuaded some scholars
that Melaka's 'Islamic' status requires some qualification. A similar line of argument can be developed when we turn to examine Melaka's urban morphology. Again, it is worth remembering that the early development of the town occurred quite independently of any Islamic influences. While the mouth of the Melaka River was not the preferred site of the refugee prince and his followers (they went first to Singapore, and then to Muar, a district south of Melaka), ultimately the decision to relocate here was completely vindicated. One decisive factor would have been a naturally defensible position, for a prominent hill just behind the settlement provided an excellent vantage point from which to view the estuary and the Straits themselves. In other aspects, too, this location was highly strategic because the Melaka Straits served as what one Chinese called a 'gullet', through which all shipping between China and India had to pass. Although there was no harbour as such, vessels could safely anchor in the Melaka roads, and the approaches were free from shoals and mangrove swamps. Lying in the lee of Sumatra, Melaka waters were also more sheltered from storms than rival ports in east Sumatra. Most importantly, the cycle of monsoon winds, which allowed shipping from India, China and the archipelago to arrive on one monsoon and leave on another was decisive in enabling Melaka to emerge as an international entrepôt. For some merchants and crews there was an enforced wait before they could return home, as the monsoon changed direction or gained force; other traders, taking advantage of different wind systems, needed to wait only a short period before they left. For all, however, Melaka proved ideally suited as a stapling port where goods could be stored, ships re-provisioned, and cargoes sold and purchased quickly. By tropical standards, the climate was pleasant; there were good stands of timber of masts in the jungles nearby and to the northeast was a supply of potable water. A portage route linked the upper Melaka river with the gold mines of inland Pahang, and pathways led through into the interior and across into Kelantan and Terengganu. Indeed, in describing the town and its upstream environs 'now greatly cultivated', Pires spoke in nothing but superlatives. As he put it, Melaka was 'a land of such freshness, of such fertility and of such good living, as anyone . . . can see, for it is certainly one of the outstanding things of the world.'

Melaka's basic plan was thus already laid out by the time Islam began to penetrate the region. Earlier views that 'the Islamic city' was characterized by the existence of certain public buildings are thus not particularly convincing in relation to Melaka. Not surprisingly, in a culture where river bathing was absolutely the norm it is impossible to locate the (now discounted) coincidence of public bath, mosque and market which William Marçais listed in the 1928. Although smaller mosques are mentioned, it was not until the enhanced Islamic mood associated with the reign of Sultan Mansur that the great mosque was constructed. Even a depiction of commercial exchanges as being concentrat-
ed in a market complex breaks down in the Melaka case, for many transactions took place on board ship, and petty trading was conducted on the streets and outside homes as well as in designated markets. Invoking Hourani’s inventory would seem to undermine Melaka’s ‘Islamic’ status even further. In the first place, it lacked the ‘citadel’ that he identified as a feature of Islamic cities. In the most commonly used version of the Hikayat Hang Tuah, which was probably compiled in the seventeenth century, the word kota (fortified settlement) is never applied to Melaka until its defenses were strengthened under the Portuguese. The indigenous term used to refer to Melaka is negeri, which can be applied to a country as well as to settlements of quite varying size. The absence of city walls in Melaka meant there no symbolic separation between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ (probably overstated even in cases where this division was present); not only was there considerable trade between Melaka and its hinterland, but wealthier residents often spent time in their estates further upriver. It is evident that the initial settlement was modelled after the upstream-downstream (ulu-ilir) pattern found in so many Sumatran ports — that is, with the ruler living someway up river, and a settlement at the mouth inhabited by sea-going groups who patrolled the nearby waters and served as pilots, guards and newsbearers. According to Pires, for example, Paramesvara decided to build his residence upstream from Melaka proper, at Bertam. Although Paramesvara’s immediate successors maintained a residence on Melaka Hill, they too lived mainly in Bertam, going to Melaka only to settle disputes or dispense justice. Only later in the fifteenth century did the ruler live more or less permanently downstream, but in 1512 Pires still termed the upstream area of Bertam ‘the residence of the kings’. Even as the commercial heart of the city re-oriented itself towards the Straits rather than the Melaka River, we can still discern traces of earlier conceptualizations in the fact that one suburb retained the name Ilir (downstream). The fit between the Melaka situation and Hourani’s conception of ‘the royal compound’ is thus only partial.

Some years ago Janet Abu-Lughod suggested an alternative approach to the topic of the urbanism-Islam nexus, which involved thinking about relationships between the state and its populations rather than the identification of a specific urban morphology. This approach is potentially very useful in comparative discussions of a town such as Melaka, where the climate, terrain and local culture were very different from the Islamic heartlands. Furthermore, it is patently clear that the effective organization of people lay at the heart of Melaka’s commercial existence. By the beginning of the sixteenth century Melaka’s population had swelled to something between 100,000 and 200,000 people, many of whom were merchants from overseas who were resident only part of the year. By the time Islam was adopted by the court, the most obvious feature of Melaka was its linguistic
diversity, and Pires claimed that in a single day he heard eighty-four different languages.\(^{(57)}\) Among the foreign traders the largest groups were Muslim Gujaratis, Hindu Tamils, Javanese and Chinese. In addition, there were many smaller communities of traders from nearby areas such as the Philippines and from places much further afield, like Armenia. Crews from ships transporting cargoes such as rice from Java, Pegu (Myanmar), Ayutthaya (Siam) and elsewhere, and bringing spices from the eastern archipelago, added to the town's ethnic diversity.

In this regard, of course, Melaka was similar to many cosmopolitan ports, and its subdivision into smaller quarters with approximate boundaries that remained relatively constant over time resembled residential patterns in Middle Eastern and North African towns.\(^{(58)}\) It seems, however, that the basis for what Abu-Lughod has termed 'neighbourhoods' in Melaka was primarily ethnic, although religious differences certainly played a part in determining residential patterns. Foreign merchants were grouped in a settlement known as Upeh, situated to the north of the Melaka River, on the opposite bank from the Great Mosque. Upeh itself comprised numerous semi-independent kampung or villages, with one of the most influential being the Javanese settlement, a centre of Islamic scholarship; another was Kampung Keling, where the Indian Hindus from Coromandel lived; Kampung Cina is also mentioned. This kind of residential pattern was found in most Southeast Asian towns, but in Melaka there were additional demographic sub-pockets where Islam acted as a 'creator of boundaries', for Pires notes that resident Muslims from different areas – Parsees, Bengali and Arabs – had their own mosques and maintained their own jurisdiction. In some cases a simple matter such as food preferences (for instance, the Chinese ate pork, which came to be seen by Malays as 'a filthy habit') would also have encouraged spatial separation between non-Muslims and Muslims.\(^{(59)}\)

Transversing and often overriding these religious and ethnic affiliations were other urban forms that were based on more personal connections. For example, the retainers and followers of prominent officials clustered around their patron, apparently with their own meeting hall. One finds, therefore, references to the Kampung Bendahara (the kampung of the Prime Minister), or the Kampung Temenggung (the kampung of the chief magistrate).\(^{(60)}\) Streets and alleys were also assigned to different officials as a kind of appanage, from which they collected revenues from petty traders, mostly women.\(^{(61)}\) This would have meant the development of other relationships of debt and obligation, which may not necessarily have coincided with ethnic or religious divisions.

The persistence of the pre-Islamic mode of commercial organization, in which trading partners were usually selected on the basis of kinship and ethnicity, also helped to dilute distinctions between Muslim and non-Muslim. Well before the arrival of Islam it had
become customary to group foreign merchants according to their place of origin, with certain officials, normally individuals fluent in several languages, appointed as overseers. Although this practice may have been encouraged by the arrival of Islam, since the term used for the official involved (Syahbandar) is obviously of Persian origin, similar positions are found throughout Southeast Asia. The Syahbandar supervised the anchoring of trading vessels, allocated fire-resistant underground warehouses (godowns, from the Malay gedung, or building) to traders, and collected taxes. It was understandable that he was frequently a member of the ethnic group they supervised, or was connected to this group by marriage or other kinship ties. For example, Raja Mendeljar, who was made Syahbandar of all Melaka, during the reign of Sultan Mahmud (1488-1511) was an Indian.

By the late fifteenth century a smooth-working system was in place whereby one Syahbandar was in charge for the (largely Muslim) merchants from Gujarat, while another supervised the Indians from southern India and Bengal, who were mostly Hindu, despite some Muslim admixture. This latter group also included traders from Pegu (lower Myanmar) and from Pasai, an important east Sumatran port which had in fact adopted Islam well before Melaka. It is likewise interesting to see that individuals from Champa, many of whom were also Muslim, were under the jurisdiction of the same Syahbandar who supervised merchants from the Ryukyu Islands and China. We can now confidently assume that the latter group would also have included Muslim Chinese. Traders from Java, the archipelago and several other neighbouring areas formed the fourth category. However, these broad divisions would have comprised congeries of more closely knit traders. We know that Tamil trading guilds, for instance, were operating in the northern Peninsula and east Sumatra well before Melaka's founding; the evidence of Sufi influence in Melaka also points to the existence of brotherhoods (tarikat), whose religious associations would have extended into commercial activities as well.

It is in official attitudes towards intermarriage that the state's lack of interest in promoting the physical segregation of Muslims and non-Muslims is particularly evident. Melaka rulers actively courted a cosmopolitan population, and foreign merchants who took up residence enjoyed a reduction of import duties, paying only three percent ad valorem instead of six percent. Sultan Mansur in particular was noted for the 'liberties' he granted to foreign merchants. As Luis Filipe Thomaz remarks, there were probably several reasons behind this policy. Larger numbers of merchants meant an increase in trade and thus in state revenues, and wealthy foreign traders were more likely than locals to have access to investment capital. In particular, they could tap into extensive overseas networks and could supply detailed information about the political and commercial climate
in their own countries.(69)

One important way of encouraging foreign merchants to become residents was to encourage marriage across ethnic boundaries. As we have seen, rulers themselves set the style, taking secondary wives of Chinese, Indian and Javanese descent. Aristocratic Malay females (themselves descended from unions between the original orang laut followers of the founder and local women) were also given in marriage to wealthy foreign traders. The Sejarah Melayu, for instance, mentions a rich Indian merchant named Mani Purindan, who came to Melaka, married the daughter of a prominent aristocrat and subsequently became a minister.(70) Ordinary traders, too, would have found it advantageous to take a local wife, especially in a region where women were heavily involved in trade and where kinfolk were always the preferred trading partners. The Indian merchant, Tambi Kecil, mentioned in an eighteenth-century Malay history who had ‘one wife in Perak and another in India’ was typical of generations of traders whose livelihood depended on relationships grounded in trust.(71) While it is unlikely that many Muslim merchants bothered about legal niceties, any who might have been concerned could invoke the custom of temporary marriage, or nikah al-muta‘a, which allowed travellers to take a wife for a short period of time.(72) It is noteworthy that in Melaka intermarriage was sufficiently extensive to arouse comment from outsiders. Writing in 866 AH/1462 CE, the Arab author Ibn Majid was particularly critical of the frequency with which Muslims married ‘infidels’, and of the fact that divorce was not regarded as a religious act.(73) From his comments we can infer that many Muslims, both local and foreign, were living in homes where the domestic arrangements were supervised by women who were non-Muslims. It is hardly surprising, then, that the same author also condemned the failure to observe Islamic restrictions against certain foods, especially the eating of dogs and drinking of wine.(74)

In time, this miscegenation came to be employed in the service of Islam. Sultan Mansur, for example, ‘took all the beautiful daughters of the Parsee merchants and the Klings who pleased him to be his concubines, made them turn Moors when he had to give them in marriage, and he married them to mandarin’s sons and gave them dowries; and this custom of marrying people of different sects causes no surprise in Melaka.’ [emphasis added].(75) Nevertheless, Melaka’s family law did place increasing emphasis on correct procedures in Muslim marriage and divorce. Regulations relating to guardianship, marriage witness, marriage annulment and divorce are clearly translations of Muslim Syaf‘i law, and the possibility that they were drawn up separately from the principal legal code points to the state’s concern to ensure that correct procedures be followed.(76) A marriage was only considered valid if a bride was given away by her guardian (walli), and qualified people were present to act as witnesses. It should also be accompanied by a ceremony in
which the words denoting *ijab* (offer) and *kabul* (acceptance) were uttered. Islamic law and the longstanding custom of contracts and matrimonial gifts also helped develop Malay conceptions of *mas kahwin*, the presents given by a man to his bride. As later studies of Sumatra have shown, this type of specified exchange was very different from the heavy payments which a bride's family expected of men in non-Islamic areas. Pires noted that when marriages occurred between Muslims 'the man must give the women a certain amount of gold as a dowry', which was retained under her control. 'And if the husband wishes to leave her, the said dowry and the clothes remain in her possession, and each of them may marry whomsoever he pleases.'

While regulation of marriage meant that Islam became a dynamic element in what some European historians would see as the 'invention' of the Malay family, one must also recognize that the legal codes represent the state's aspirations, rather than a description of the lived lives of men and women. Even at the beginning of the sixteenth century Pires could note that when 'heathens marry with Muslim women and a Muslim with a heathen woman [they each follow] their [own] ceremonies.' The continuing toleration of non-Islamic customs would have considerably facilitated cross-cultural unions, and may provide a partial explanation for the apparent lack of hostility between ethnic communities. Evidence of 'defensible neighbourhoods' protected by gangs which scholars have identified in some Middle Eastern contexts does not emerge in Melaka sources.

Abu-Lughod noted a second aspect of urban life where the influence of Islam was visible: Islamic cities could be immediately identified, she suggested, because of a greater tendency towards gender segregation. Indeed, she was even willing to assert that 'the creation of male and female turf is perhaps the most important element of the structure of the city contributed by Islam.' By dividing functions and places on the basis of gender, Islam helped to structure space in a manner that was different from non-Muslim towns. In the Middle East and North Africa this appears to be very evident in the architectural plan of houses; in Southeast Asia a 'Muslim' design can also be discerned in Malay homes, albeit in a more modified form. In Malay residences the interior and rear of the house is traditionally the domain of women, while the steps and veranda are public and 'male'. A possible shift from earlier styles where women occupied the middle of the house is suggested in areas in Indonesia where Islam has been introduced relatively recently. Here, one authority noticed, the hearth and women's section have moved from the centre to the rear of the house, while the front is designated as the place of men.

It is not possible to reconstruct the precise design of ordinary Muslim homes in Melaka, or hypothesize the extent to which they may have differed from the houses of non-Muslims. The 'maleness' of the steps and veranda must have been at least temporarily
diffused because frequently a stall was set up in front of the house where the womenfolk sold food or vegetables. The ideal layout is presumably represented in the royal palace, where there were certainly separate female quarters where men were not permitted. For example, one episode in the Sejarah Melayu, describing the kraton (palace in Java), refers to 'the pavilion reserved for the ladies of the court (balai larangan, the forbidden hall').

Godinho de Eredia, writing in the early seventeenth century, refers to 'traces of the royal orchard of Sarvarrallos, which resembled a terrestrial paradise' located in upstream Sungai Baru, about twenty kilometers from Melaka. The word Sarvarrallos was evidently taken from an archaic Portuguese word meaning 'royal harem.' Elsewhere, however, I have argued that the designation of interior space as 'female' was deeply rooted in pre-Islamic Malay society, and the seclusion of women encouraged by Islam was not a radical departure from earlier attitudes. In indigenous terms, authority, status and power for women (and in some cases for men) was associated with immobility and the 'inside'. The well-born should properly remain physically aloof from their inferiors, so that seclusion became a proclamation of status which set high-ranking women apart from ordinary people.

In Melaka, as in Islamic cities elsewhere, 'you shall never see the wives of the important people in the land' and they rarely went outside 'except in covered sedan chairs.' For lower socio-economic groups, however, the situation was quite the opposite. As petty traders, women were highly visible, selling, says Pires, 'in every street' and even maintaining their own night market. Indeed, it was revenues from these sales that help support a charitable institution, the poor people's hospital — possible the first waqf.

The extent to which Islam influenced the engendering of space was thus very much determined by socio-economic context.

A third element noted by Abu-Lughod is the system of property laws that governed rights and obligations between property owners themselves, and between property owners and the state. An examination of Melaka's laws, the Undang Undang Melaka, does indeed show a preoccupation with regulation of ownership, goods and property. Several sections deal, for instance, with the Muslim law of sale and procedure. A painstaking analysis of Malay legal manuscripts has led to the conclusion that Melaka's property laws were based upon Arabic texts and commentaries, even though the technical terms were often imperfectly understood. According to Liaw Yock Fang's authoritative study, the inclusion of these property laws in virtually all recensions of Melaka's legal code indicates that they were widely applied. In his view, they represent 'a kind of manual of Muslim law' to which kadi or judges could refer when deciding on cases of dispute.

The influence of Islam is less evident in regard to criminal punishment and sexual offences. Though drawn up by Islamic jurisconsults and modified over several reigns, they
often include two penalties for the same crime, one following custom (adat) and the other said to be that of 'the law of Allah.' In fact, the latter was often adapted from shari'a law to conform to local conditions. Generally stricter than Malay adat, Qur'anic fiqh was apparently regarded in Melaka as subsidiary law, which could be invoked when a situation called for a more severe punishment. The expression 'this is the custom of the country, but according to God's law . . . ' (itulah adatnya negeri; tetapi pada hukum Allah) occurs more than twelve times in the Undang-Undang Melaka, and always to introduce a harsher law as an alternative. For example, customary law generally treats sexual offences lightly, and a man who seduces a virgin is only required to marry her and pay a fine. However, it was also possible to invoke Islamic law and so that a Muslim could be stoned to death and a non-Muslim subjected to eighty lashes. (89)

This fusion of Islam and Melakan custom was encouraged as local religious scholars and scribes took over the task of rewriting and amending the existing law code. Thus, while some sections of the Melaka laws appear to have been copied verbatim from Islamic law books, the language was not uncommonly corrupt because shari'a law was not always fully understood. (89) This process of translation and recontextualization inevitably had its effect on the application of Islamic law. Even apostasy, regarded as a major crime, is viewed with some tolerance and the transgressor given three occasions for repentance. Nor do we find here any evidence of discriminative taxation against non-Muslims, or of exemption from customs duties granted to vessels coming from Muslim countries, as was the practice in some Indian ports. (91) In sum, it is clear that in the development of this urbanized Melaka-Malay culture, Islam's great strength was its willingness, within certain limits, to tolerate many non-Islamic beliefs and traditions.

VI. The City as Association

Though Abu-Lughod's categories are certainly less restrictive than earlier concentrations on institutions and structures, the range of possible exceptions means that questions still arise about the extent to which Islam imparted a distinctiveness to urban centres. (92) At the extreme end of the spectrum, some scholars, while accepting the validity of the 'Islamic world' concept, have favoured eliminating the term 'Islamic city' altogether. (93) In many respects the call for a greater flexibility opens up further possibilities for the inclusion of urban centres in Southeast Asia and tropical Africa, and for comparison with other cities elsewhere. Increased attention to the linkages that connected a city with its hinterland is obviously highly pertinent in regions where urbanized areas were in many respects
villages writ large. In Melaka, as in the case of many other areas, the ‘city’ was marked off by the existence of a court culture which was manifested in specific styles of language, dress and protocol as well as in literature, the arts and intellectual debate. Yet this culture was by no means isolated from the village. The idealized standards for the behaviour of ordinary people projected by the court did exert an influence on ordinary people, while oral legends and folk stories collected at the village level throw up themes that are similar to those found in the ‘high culture’ of the elite.

The idea of the city as an association that evolved from social structures and reflected notions of authority that were themselves highly contextualized is also very relevant to the Melaka case. New frameworks, like that proposed by Haneda and Miura, attempt to deal with an ‘overlap of pluralities’ by considering the city in terms of local understandings of urban space; as a point of intersection of goods, people and information; as an ordered association of very diverse groups and individuals; as a means of understanding historical change; and as a focal point of a ‘culture’ that also encompasses ideas about behaviour and values. This kind of culturally inclusive framework, they suggest, has the potentiality to inject a new energy into studies of the Islamic urban environment because it invites comparative work on a global scale. Of course, there is always a danger that the problems we discern in employing a term such as ‘Islamic city’ may encourage the imposition of new categories that are themselves based on criteria generated from the outside. In the process, we may underestimate significant self-perceptions in the very communities we are attempting to understand. It is to this point that I wish to turn in my closing remarks.

VII. Concluding Comments: Melaka and the ‘Islamic City’ Category

A generous audience would not oppose the inclusion of Southeast Asian cities in a broader review of Islamic urban societies. Nonetheless, the above discussion makes it very evident that generalizations which have some applicability in the Islamic heartlands can only be used in the Melaka case with considerable qualification. In this regard we need to consider the source of any judgement, and in our search for the historical imaginaire it may be salutary to take the local viewpoint into consideration. There can be little doubt, for instance, that Malays at the end of the fifteenth century regarded Melaka as an ‘Islamic’ city, and its prestige was so great that the last ruler, Sultan Mahmud allegedly claimed that the town could become the equivalent of Mecca itself. In other words, Malays did not see Melaka as a marginalized part of the Muslim world. What is of interest to the historian is the ways in which this sense of being Muslim was asserted. For example,
one episode in the *Sejarah Melayu* demonstrates Melaka’s superiority, noting that the people of the east Sumatran port of Aru could not recite the Qur’an correctly. In another sequence, the older Islamic centre of Pasai is relegated to second place when the learned *imam* of Melaka successfully solve a conundrum that has baffled Pasai scholars. On a later occasion, the ruler constructs a strategy to obtain Pasai’s assistance in reconciling two conflicting Arabic phrases without demeaning his own status or undermining Melaka’s reputation.\(^{(96)}\)

As Malays came to identify the features that made Melaka ‘Islamic’, it becomes clear that ultimately its prestige was not dependent on the tangibility of public buildings or the management of private space. Rather, Melaka’s status was derived from the fact that its ruler was descended from that renowned ‘Muslim’, Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great).\(^{(97)}\) A character in the *Sejarah Melayu*, for example, is made to express this view quite explicitly. A Muslim Indian decides to leave his country, but though he has associations with Muslim Pasai he feels he can do no better than go to Melaka. ‘For the Raja of Melaka is the great Raja in these days, and it is right that I should own him as my lord, for he is sprung from the line of Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain.’\(^{(98)}\)

Significantly, Pires was also struck by this emphasis on kingship. He, however, saw an incompatibility between cosmopolitanism and local loyalty, for ‘where the people are of different nations, these cannot love their king as do natives without admixture of other nations’.\(^{(99)}\) I would argue, however, that social order was maintained in Melaka precisely because the royal genealogy legitimized Malay kingship by tying it to notions of universality which reflected both the Islamic world-view and commercial realities. As the Melaka law code explains:

> This is a treatise on *kanun* [Qânûn] law which is followed in all great countries and by all great kings . . . These customs have down to use from the time of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain who ruled over all mankind until the time of his son Sultan Iskandar Syah, the first ruler to open up the land (*negeri*) of Melaka, bearing the title of Sultan Mahmud Syah, the Shadow of Allah on Earth. He was the first ruler to embrace Islam and to codify royal customs and rules.\(^{(100)}\)

The *Sejarah Melayu* reiterates the same point: Melaka became a great city, foreigners arrived in large numbers, and princes from all countries came to present themselves before the Sultan ‘who was sprung from the line of Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain.’\(^{(101)}\) Even the mightiest potentates must acknowledge Melaka’s extraordinary authority. When the Emperor of China requires obeisance from the Melaka envoys, he is immediately struck
by the force of *daulat*, and falls ill. He can only be cured by drinking water used to wash the feet of the Melaka king.\(^{102}\) Made palpable in the person of the ruler, the royal descent and family connections not only affirmed Melaka's pre-eminence, distinguishing it from smaller settlements and lesser kingdoms, but served as an ever-present reminder of the international trading links that underwrote the city's wealth and prestige.

The connections that Malays saw between the Melaka they personally knew and the 'Islamic cities' they imagined are no better conveyed than in one chapter in the epic life of the Melaka hero Hang Tuah. First written down in the early seventeenth century, but undoubtedly including oral accounts from earlier times, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* recounts how the ruler of Melaka wishes to send an envoy to Rum (Istanbul) to purchase cannon to celebrate the installation of his daughter Puteri Gunong Ledong as his successor. While other courtiers excuse themselves from making the long journey 'because the ruler of Rum is a great king and the representative of Allah as well,' the ever-loyal Hang Tuah agrees to go. He first visits Aceh in northern Sumatra 'since Aceh and Melaka are like the two rays of a single jewel'.\(^{103}\) From Aceh Hang Tuah sails to Mocha, and from thence to Jeddah, where the local lord is anxious to hear news of the Malay world. A visit to the grave of Siti Hawa (Eve) gives him the spiritual protection to travel to Mecca, where he impresses local officials with his fluent Arabic. In Mecca and Medina he undertakes all the activities in the pilgrim's calendar, visiting the holy sites and the graves of numerous prophets and saintly figures — Abu Bakar, Ibrahim, Halimah, Fatimah, Sayyid Othman, and others.\(^{104}\) He stops for some time in Egypt, where he is very much impressed by the walled and moated cities (*kota paritnya berlapis-lapis*), and its great wealth. He recognizes that Egypt is two or three hundred times as wealthy as Melaka, and decides that if he cannot reach Rum, as his ruler commanded, he will buy the cannon in Egypt.\(^{105}\)

After passing many countries and islands, mountains and straits, Hang Tuah finally reaches Rum, which is at the edge of the ocean surrounded by numerous other settlements. Again the officials who receive him are amazed at his knowledge of the Rum language, and are pleased with his request to be instructed in appropriate ways of behaving when he is taken to the royal audience in Istanbul. It is clear that now he has reached a country that represents the pinnacle of temporal power, for the city of Istanbul is surrounded by seven walls and moats, and a journey around the perimeter takes an entire year. The immensely wealthy Sultan of Rum inhabits a magical mountain in the middle, but despite all his efforts Hang Tuah finds it impossible to obtain an audience, even after nine months. In frustration, Hang Tuah tells the Prime Minister, 'It is the custom (*adat*) of Malays and the lands below the winds that all envoys, from whatever country, are received by the ruler so that they are able to convey information about the greatness of this or that king.'\(^{106}\)
Finally, Hang Tuah is able to catch the Sultan's attention as he goes to Friday prayers in Istanbul's magnificent mosque, and a royal audience is granted. Delighted with Hang Tuah's elegant speech in the Rum language, and pleased with the presents he has brought, the Sultan entertains him at a great feast, and gives him the cannon and arms he requested.\(^{(107)}\)

What this episode suggests is that Melaka's links to the wider Muslim world were refracted through orally-transmitted stories that had become profoundly 'true' because they were inspired by Islamic teachings and texts. Hang Tuah, for instance, knows about Egypt because 'this is the place where the Prophet of Allah Yusuf was thrown into the Nile by his brothers.' It is this process of imagining that made it possible for Malays to draw mental connections between Melaka and the great cities of Arabia, Egypt and Turkey. They too have Syahbandars, their inhabitants too eat rice and rendang (meat cooked with coconut), they too employ Chinese craftsmen. Indeed, the representation of the palace of the ruler of Rum is remarkably similar to the descriptions associated with the enchanted dwelling place of Puteri Gunung Ledang.\(^{(108)}\) These mental connections, which fused a familiar imaginary with the unexperienced, are personified in heroes like Hang Tuah, who returns from his mission not only as a successful envoy, but also as a haji. Perhaps the most culturally significant gift that Hang Tuah brings back with him, however, is a set of splendid clothing which the Sultan of Rum had once worn and which he now sends to the Melaka ruler.\(^{(109)}\)

Linked through their rulers and through their shared Muslim faith, the distant 'Islamic' world of walled cities, of great wealth and high culture was both imaginable and a realization of what Melaka aspired to be. And yet Hang Tuah is not completely overawed, for his behaviour arouses the respect of all and in the correct reception of visitors and the extension of hospitality Melaka has something to teach even Rum. The message embedded in the Hikayat Hang Tuah is clear: while the categorization of Melaka as an 'Islamic' city may have been problematic from the perspective of some outsiders, from the viewpoint of local Muslims it was axiomatic. And indeed, it is useful to remember that this perception was shared by many other visitors. As a Chinese remarked sometime in the fifteenth century, 'the king of the country and the people of the country all follow the Muslim religion, fasting, doing penance and chanting liturgies.' Albeit in a more hostile vein, the same view was expressed by the Portuguese, who believed that the Malays regarded them as 'infidels' and that their own conquest of Melaka meant 'Muhammad will be destroyed, and destroyed he cannot help but be.'\(^{(110)}\) The demolition of the great mosque was a Portuguese priority, and symbolically it was on this site that they built their fort, the renowned A Formosa.
Like its rise, the precise reasons for Melaka's fall in 1511 are still debated. Most authorities attribute the Portuguese conquest simply to superior firepower, the military skills of Afonso de Alburquerque, and poor Malay leadership. It could be, however, that the internal confusion Pires ascribes to the 1509-1511 period represents a break-down in the cross-cultural toleration that had characterized Melaka for so long and that had permitted Malays to see their city as 'Muslim' even while remaining highly tolerant of non-Muslim practices. There appears, for instance, to have been a growing intolerance towards the position and influence of Hindu merchants, perhaps reflecting tensions already developing in India. Luis Filipe Thomaz has also argued that the reign of the last ruler of Melaka saw a tendency to stress the Islamic component of Melaka's policy. In his reconstruction, Sultan Mahmud was supported by the Gujaratis in his attempt to assert Melaka as the region's pre-eminent Muslim centre by aggressive expansion into Sumatra. This religious zealotry, Thomaz believes, alienated the non-Islamic communities of Melaka, who were therefore inclined to welcome and even ally with the Portuguese. Yet though the Portuguese attack on Melaka was decisive, it was in many ways a Pyrrhic victory. While Pires had predicted that possession of Melaka would mean place the Portuguese hand 'on the throat of Venice', these hopes remained unfulfilled. The entrenched Portuguese hostility to Islam resulted in the exclusion of Muslim merchants and retaliation by neighbouring Islamic rulers. Although captains of Melaka subsequently attempted to reverse this policy, they were unsuccessful in recapturing the town's former prosperity. One is led to the inescapable conclusion that Melaka's steady decline after the Portuguese conquest was due in great part to the abandonment of the cross-cultural toleration that characterized what was in many ways a unique 'Islamic' city.

Notes


(12) C.C. Brown, “Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals,” Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 25 2 and 3 (1953), known as Raffles 18. There are other versions of the Sejarah Melayu, notably that edited by W.G. Shellabear (Shah Alam: Fajar Bakti, 1995), a hybrid text that seems to have combined different recensions and the provenance of which is unknown. For that reason the Raffles 18 version is often preferred.


(14) This ongoing archaeological work is being undertaken by Dr. John Miksic, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.


Hirth and Rockhill, *Chau Ju Kua*, p. 61.


Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires* 2: 241. In Minangkabau society matrilineal ownership of land and houses encourages male migration (*merantau*) and the rivers of east coast Sumatra, which originated in the Minangkabau uplands, provided a ready access out to the Straits and from thence to the Peninsula.


49 See further Andaya and Andaya, A History of Malaysia, pp. 44 - 5
53 It was here that the last ruler of Melaka fled following the Portuguese attack. Cortešao, The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires 2: 280.
60 Hashim, The Malay Sultanate of Malacca, p. 141.
64 S.O. Robson, “Java at the Crossroads: Aspects of Javanese Cultural History in the 14th and


67 See, for example, E. Edwards McKinnon, "Mediaeval Tamil Involvement in Northern Sumatra, C11-C14 (the Gold and Resin Trade)," *JMBRAS* 69, 1 (1996): 85 - 99.


74 Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arabic Texts*.


87 Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City," p. 163.


89 Liaw, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, pp. 84 - 5.

Haneda and Miura, Islamic Urban Studies, pp. 6 - 7.
Haneda and Miura, Islamic Urban Studies, pp. 333 - 43.
Brown, Sejarah Melayu, p. 59.
Brown, Sejarah Melayu, p. 60; Wake, “Melaka in the Fifteenth Century,” p. 149.
Liaw, Undang-Undang Melaka, pp. 62 - 5.
Brown, Sejarah Melayu, p. 59.
Brown, Sejarah Melayu, p. 95 - 6.
This episode was probably included in the course of the sixteenth century, since that was the period Ache emerged as an important Muslim port.
Ahmad, Hikayat Hang Tuah, pp. 437 - 2.
Ahmad, Hikayat Hang Tuah, pp. 449 - 50.
Ahmad, Hikayat Hang Tuah, pp. 468.
Ahmad, Hikayat Hang Tuah, pp. 468 - 74
Mills, Eredia’s Description of Malaca, pp. 40 - 1.
Ahmad, Hikayat Hang Tuah, pp. 474.

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