

The second day of the research camp started with a sharing session by Mohammed Azam on preparing a newspaper Op-ed. He discussed the characteristics of an Op-ed and shared some writing tips and tricks. Apnizan Abdullah discussed several important aspects of doing legal research. In the preceding session, Mohd Fariz highlighted some of the common mistakes in referring to Islamic sources. The last session by Shahino Mah provided participants with structured and simple techniques in managing references and databases using Endnote software.

This year's research camp attracted more than 30 participants from Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, representing a variety of backgrounds and professions, ranging from researchers to lecturers, students, representatives from the mufti offices, CEO, policymakers, and Islamic finance practitioners.

### **Webinar: Melaka Kingdom: Myth and Fact (24 June 2021)**

*Muhd Nur Iman Ramli*

The webinar was delivered by Dr Alexander Wain, Associate Research Fellow of IAIS Malaysia, and Dr Mohamad Firdaus Bin Mansor Majdin, Assistant Professor from the Department of History and Civilisation (IIUM) as a commentator. This webinar explored the history of Malay civilisation and investigated the historicity of *Sejarah Melayu*, and the myth and fact in the history of Melaka, including how this has generally impacted the study of Malay history.

In reference to the history of the Melaka kingdom, both Wain and Mohamad Firdaus highlighted the Malay literary work known as *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), the principal Malay source that gives a romanticised history of the origins, evolution, and demise of the Melaka Sultanate. It centred around the character of Sang Nila Utama, who was famously known as Parameswara. The work was composed sometime between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and is considered as one of the finest literary and historical works in the Malay language. It was traditionally written in classical Malay on a traditional paper in Jawi script. The text has undergone numerous changes and the oldest known text was dated 1612. This was later known as the Raffles MS No. 18.

The phantasmagorical stories in the *Sejarah Melayu* were constructed as a body of literature to be marvelled at by future generations. According to both Wain and Mohamad Firdaus, this, however, leads to a problem. Rather than seeing *Sejarah Melayu* as a great work of history detailing the past, some see it

as a confluence of fact and fiction. Colonial historians, such as Wilkinson and Winstedt, instinctively dismissed Malay historical texts, interpreting them as *ahistorical*.

However, as European colonialism ended, Asia and other regions witnessed a revival in indigenous culture. Simultaneously, in 1960s France, post-structuralism emerged (Derrida, Foucault), re-styling historical enquiry as a ‘discourse’—as a linguistic narrative shaped by the historical and cultural context of its authors, not objective reality. All forms of history became equally valid.

Emphasising their genealogical nature and association with the royal courts, it was concluded that Malay histories functioned not to record (as in the West) but to legitimate; their magical elements were not intended to reflect reality but to reorder it in an attempt to confer divine power upon the ruler. Early Malay writers did not compose fictitious historical narratives; they merged genuine historical events with myth, co-opting the latter’s supernatural aspect to elevate the former’s status.. For early Malay writers, a myth did not signify an account without objective reality, but something that reinforced the importance of reality.

Malay texts were written to legitimate and glorify their subjects using mythological elements. The presence of mythic imagery within those texts should therefore be seen as part of a unique worldview, not a reason to discredit the existence of the individuals mentioned in the text. These considerations must prompt a new approach to the historical sources on Melaka.

Firdaus concluded that historians find it extremely difficult to ascertain facts from distant pasts especially when relevant documentations are not available. Historians have developed a strict standard of accepting true events that do not simply follow any rumours or hearsay, let alone myths or legends.

**Webinar: Forum: Wanita dan Cabaran Era Pandemik menurut  
Perspektif Islam  
(Women & Challenges during the Pandemic according to  
Islamic Perspective)  
(12 July 2021)**

*Nurul Ain Norman*

Women are at the epicentre of the global pandemic that threatens their physical, social, and economic well-being. As public awareness grew, IAIS