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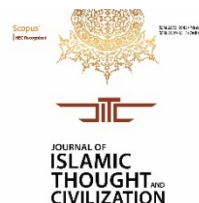
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## Revisiting Omani Legacy in Malaya through the Royal Kedah Dress: Reassessment

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the legacy of the Omani presence in the states of Malaysia, which arguably has made itself apparent in the royal dress of the Kedah Sultanate. This discovery indeed calls for further investigation, especially on how the Omani dress later became a model for Kedah royal dress which is famously known as *Baju Muskat*. Further analysis is essential to determine to what extent did the Kedah Sultanate adopted the Omani dress of the *Muscatti* style and what aspects of the Kedah royal dress resemble the Omani dress substantially. Preliminary research indicates that there are few similarities that one can find between the Omani dress with that of the Kedah royal dress, which is said to be worn by the latter since the 17th century. Reading through the existing literature in the field also reveals one interesting picture that points to the underrepresentation of Omani individuals, merchants, and scholars in the Malay texts as the former tends to describe them, often as Arab traders, or Persian traders. In short, this paper has attempted to explore and examine the above-mentioned circumstances for a better understanding of the subject matter under study through a method of content analysis.

**Keywords:** Oman, Sultanate of Kedah, *Muscatti*, *Baju Muskat*, Straits of Hormuz

### Introduction

Many people, at a first glance, would never imagine that the current Kedah royal dress demonstrates similarity with the Omani dress that is widely known as *Baju Muskat*. Many would think that this royal dress is purely of Kedah in origin, which of course some would naturally tend to support this idea. Nevertheless, in the strictest sense, it seems to the researchers that this dress has been produced after a series of changes and refinements until what it appears today. Before one being directed towards an in-depth discussion on the reasons that prompted the Kedah Sultanate to use the Omani dress of the *Muscatti* style as their royal dress and what are similarities between them, a brief historical analysis of the general relations between the Arab-Persian World and the Malay World is needed to set the context.

Historically, the Arab and the Persian traders found their way into the Malay World owing to the expected lucrative wealth resulting from the existing trading network with the Arab World, where a substantial number of them passed through the Straits of Hormuz before they reached the Malay World via the Straits of Malacca. This inevitably exposed them to a few important Malay port cities. Falling within the orbit of Indian Ocean trading networks explains the motivation for the Arab,

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Persian, and Western traders coming to the Far East, including the Malay World and China. The presence of the Arab and Persian traders in the Malay-Indonesian Islands was exemplified by numerous documented historical records, mainly in the form of Arabic and Malay literary works.

In this respect, among the earliest Omani Muslim seafarers were Abu Ubaidah Abdullah bin al-Qasim, an Ibadhi Syekh who went to China for bringing goods such as rope and *sobir* (a type of herb) with him shortly before the 758CE rebellion.<sup>1</sup> The second example would be an-Nahdhor bin Maimun of Basrah. He was of Omani descent and went to China at the end of the 8th century and early 9th century CE. He was also active in Chinese trading activities and at one time was appointed as the chief superintendent for the Middle Eastern communities at the port of Canton (modern Guangzhou). The figure was known as Xinya Tuoluo (Abdullah) according to Song Dynasty records and his son Mawu (Mahmud) also was appointed as a local officer after he had returned to Oman.<sup>2</sup>

According to Mahallah, the remains of a mosque known as al-Dzikra built by an Omani pioneer trader, Abu Ubaidah Abdullah ibn al-Qasim, could still be seen in China. This era coincided with the steady development of the Arab chronicles and lores depicting their encounters and contacts with the Malay World since it became their port of transit before they proceeded to China. Oman's early and active engagement in maritime trade was due to its strategic position between Southeast Asia and Africa, its long coastline, and its safe natural harbours. The Omanis were known for building and exporting very good ships, and they traded with precious goods such as frankincense.<sup>3</sup>

It is often argued that their transit in the Malay World, to a certain extent, was unavoidable given the nature of seasonal winds in the area on one hand and the availability of certain most sought-after items on the other. Thus, the interplay of these factors 'tempted' the Arab and Persian traders to come to the Malay World. Furthermore, though of later development, the Malay texts also narrated a range of stories about the coming of the Arabs and the Persians to different places in the Malay World. Based on these circumstances, it begs further investigation into these notable the Arab and Malay classical works to 'locate' the presence of the Arab-Persian traders (including the Omanis), as well as to identify the reasons behind their coming. Ultimately, this analysis will explain the 'impact' of their coming to the Malay Archipelago which has attributed such an impact on the subtle visibility of the *Muscatti* style of the Omani dress onto the Kedah royal dress.

In short, although the Omani traders, merchants, individuals or and scholars were often classified the same as the other Arab and Persian traders in both the Arab-Persian and Malay texts they had imprinted on the Kedahans with something that has remained intact for many years to come. To further discover and expose this, this investigation shall devote an in-depth observation on the subject of interest in the subsequent sections.

## 2. Methodology

The research will involve mainly qualitative methods to expound the analysis of data from various works of literature, such as manuscripts, cartographies, classical publications, colonial records, and graphics (maps, designs of old boats). In doing so, the researchers will use conceptual

<sup>1</sup>Sulayman at-Tajir and Abu Zaid As-Sirafi, *Rihlatus sirafi: Catatan pengembaraan di Alam Melayu, China, India dan Afrika* [Sirafi's Voyage: Notes on adventures in the Malay World, China, India and Africa], trans. Arsyad Mokhtar (Pulau Pinang: Baytul Hikma, 2017), 190-193.

<sup>2</sup>John Chaffee, "Diasporic Identities in the Historical Development of the Maritime Muslim Communities of Song-Yuan China," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 49, no. 4 (2006): 402-406.

<sup>3</sup>Malallah bin Ali bin Habib Al-Lawati, "Oman an Entrépot on the Maritime Trade Routes," paper presented at the *International Seminar of The Contributions of the Islamic Culture for the Maritime Silk Route*, Quanzhou, China (February, 1994), 4.

analysis that may involve a brief interpretative analysis of historical texts and views of the scholars in Malaysia and Oman. Thus, sources of information for this analysis will be taken from studies on a wide range of primary sources and scholarly works which have been written by Muslim and Western scholars alike. This research uses a method of content analysis which can be defined as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful sources) to the contexts of their use. That being said, the researchers use analytical constructs or inferences, making sense of texts found in contexts where the current study is conducted. Moreover, two domains, the texts, and the contexts are logically independent, and the researchers arrive at conclusions by looking at these two domains.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Historical Analysis

Concerning the relations between Oman and the Malay World, as have been mentioned above, there are varieties of Malay and Arab-Persian sources that provide the much-needed accounts and information. Looking back in time, it is important to note that the historical-cultural relations between Oman and Malaysia in the past were made possible initially through the existing maritime trade established between the two countries, where frequent exchanges of goods or products took place. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the role of Srivijaya that was before the rise of the Malacca Sultanate, in cementing the relations between the Arab and Malay Worlds. As a supreme power in the Southeast Asia, Srivijaya acted as a middleman in the trade between China and India, leading to the distribution of Chinese merchandise across the Indian Ocean and the Middle Eastern regions and vice versa.<sup>5</sup> The coming of Islam and the later rise of the Malacca Sultanate by the early 15th century marked new heights in the relations between Oman and the Malay Worlds. This resulted in not only the increasing volume of trade but witnessed the adaptation of cultures between them.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding trade relations, several factors facilitated this enterprise among which was the strategic location of the Malay World, the quest for Chinese commodities as a means to expand trade, and the unfortunate incident that had befallen to Muslim traders who engaged in China. The fact that the Malay World was situated between the East (China) and the West that rendered the region crucial in providing necessary and basic supplies for the Arab and Persian traders since the period before Islam. In other words, the Malay Peninsula provided natural ports for these traders who, in their course of trade visits documented the lives of the local people as they mingled and interacted with them.

As their interest to do trade with China increased due to the high demand for Chinese goods, this led to the coming of a greater number of the Arab and Persian traders to the Malay ports which served as transit points on their journey to the further east. It was not until the massacre incident at Canton in 878-879 CE which took the lives of many foreign traders including those from the Arabia and Persia that direct trade missions to China came to a halt. The incident forced many Arab traders

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<sup>4</sup>Marilyn Domas White and Emily E. Marsh, *Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology* (Illinois: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006), 27.

<sup>5</sup>George Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Singapore (Malaysia: University of Malaya Press. 1968), 110-130; Paul Michel Munoz, *Early Kingdoms of the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet. 2006), 113-138.

<sup>6</sup>Buzurg al-Rahmhurmuzi, *Aja'ibul Hind: Kisah-Kisah Ajaib di Daratan dan Lautan Hindi* [Miracle of India: Miracle Stories on the Mainland and the Indian Ocean, trans. Arsyad Mokhtar (Pulau Pinang: Baytul Hikma, 2016), 190-193; Tome Pires, *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; and, The Book of Francisco Rodrigues; Rutter of A Voyage in The Red Sea Nautical Rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in The East Before 1515* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1944), 14-21, 46.

to divert to the Southeast Asian region instead of as their final destination, hence contributing to a closer relationship between the Arab and Malay Worlds. To understand the impact of the massacre incident on the decision by Arab traders to stop short at the Malay ports or Southeast Asia, the sheer number of casualties is worth looking at. As mentioned by Abu Zayd, more than 120,000 foreign traders, many of whom Arabs and Persians, were killed by Chinese insurgents, and they were forced to resettle at Champa, the Malay Peninsula, and Sumatra where from thereon no Arab ships passed further.<sup>7</sup>

As the trade increased between the Arab traders and their counterparts from the Malay World, the maritime contacts mainly took place on two fronts i.e., via the Red Sea corridor and the Arabian Gulf corridor. On the Red Sea corridor, the emergence of Islam in the highland of Hejaz and the importance of Red Sea ports in Tihamah and Yemen, are the contributory reasons for the commercial activities concentrated in the area. Historical literature, depicting this relation was absent since the prevailing literary style at that time among Arab narrators, was mainly in the form of antique poetic *rajaz*, *syi'ir*, or *saj'* rather than detailed descriptions of matters related to the East including that of trade relations. This is also due to the tribal nature of the Arabs during the early decades of Islam which lay emphasize primarily on the events and figures at home without much consideration for those that were foreign. As the Muslim community began to migrate to other regions namely the Levant, Egypt, and Mesopotamia following the expansion of Islam and the Muslim rule, Islamic historical writing began to slowly take shape blending information derived from Arabic transmission of *hadith* or *khabar* and Graeco-Persian traditions found in abundance within the old cities of Alexandria and Damascus.

The move from Medina and Damascus to Baghdad (also known as the Round City of *Madinatussalam*) by the time of the Abbasid era marked the shift from the Red Sea corridor to the Arabian Gulf corridor leading to the rise of the coastal port of Basra which in turn stimulated the growth of a chain of port cities, some ancient and some newly established, such as Bushahr, Siraf, Suhar, Julfar, Sur, and Muscat where early Oman and its colonies were present. Of an interesting observation, Muscat's prominence as one of Oman's major port cities was illustrated as early as the 1st century C.E. by one certain Greek geographer, Ptolemy who noted its notability within the commercial activities of the region and beyond. Moreover, its significance within the orbit of Indian Ocean maritime network activities, connecting the West to the East had also prompted the Portuguese to subdue it in the early 1500s.<sup>8</sup>

The flourishing of these cities further intensified the maritime activities with the East resulting in the Gulf region, due to large investment made on capital and trading commodities, surpassing the Sassanids in terms of international contact with the East including India, Southeast Asia, and China. Apart from Basra, and the above-mentioned port cities, other cities that are worthy of mention for undergoing rapid improvement and urbanization due to the benefits of trade were Kufa and Baghdad which, as time passed by, emerged as melting pots of various intellectual traditions. Baghdad in particular, rose to dominance, establishing itself as not the only Abbasid political centre, but also a commercial and cultural centre.

<sup>7</sup>Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-modern Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 69-70; Derek Heng, *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Century* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012), 29, 35.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Forster, *The Historical Geography of Arabia: Or, The Patriarchal Evidences of Revealed Religion: A Memoir* (London: Duncan and Malcolm, 1884), 36; Daniel Filipe Ferreira da Gosta, "The Wavering Power: The Portuguese Hold on the Arabian Coast of Oman 1622-1650," Master's diss., (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2020), 3-6.

The prosperity, emanating from trade, enjoyed by the Abbasid Caliphate can be found mentioned in various Arabic literature and historical records. Not only do the records contain information about hundreds of localities visited by the Arabian Gulf merchants and sailors but detail the types of commodities traded at these places and information about the East or the 'new world'.<sup>9</sup> This interest shown towards the so-called 'new world' was similar to the reaction shown by the Europeans towards the East in the 18th and 19th centuries and it resulted in the production and collection of abundant travelogues comprising various pieces of information ranging from the environment, geography, botany, marinology, meteorology, astronomy, geology, zoology, anthropology and sociology of the lands and people whom they met along their long journey to the East. Of the foreign lands in the East, China appeared to attract a deep interest among the Arab and Persian travelers and traders.

Furthermore, given this, there are several Arab-Persian sources that implicitly or explicitly have mentioned not only lucrative trading products obtained from the Far East (China) brought through the Malayan ports such as camphor (*kafur*), different kinds of alloys, different kinds of spices (cloves, cinnamon, pepper), *lubban jawi* (benzoin), tin, iron, scented timbers, tea, porcelain, and jade but also geographical and socio-cultural commentaries on the Malayan port cities and kingdoms. Interestingly enough, these Arab-Persian accounts also contain important information regarding the socio-cultural and political environment of the Malay polities that they encountered.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the curiosity shown by the Arab-Persian traders and travelers towards the socio-cultural aspects of the Malay people in comparison to, for instance, the Chinese sources is astounding since the same interest tends to be absent in the records of the latter.

In the meantime, the recording of historical travelogues on the matters and affairs of the Malay World practiced by the Arab-Persian traders also prevailed among the Omani trading community. In fact, the historical travelogue genre marked the earliest form of recording activity among the Omani community, directly or indirectly, through non-Omani communities travelling East via its many ports. The documentation took place during the so-called 'the golden age of Arabic literature, a time when the quest for information and knowledge complemented the busy trading enterprise to the East. During this period, the Arabs, the Persians including Oman merchants or travelers sailed along the Straits of Malacca.<sup>11</sup>

The Arab-Persian records of polities and territories in the Malay Peninsula include such quasi-historical works like Sulaiman al-Tajir, the Merchant (c. 851 CE) who wrote *Akhbar as-Sin wa al-Hind*; Ibn Khurdadzbih (c. 844-848 CE) who wrote *Kitab al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik*; Al-Ya'qubi (c.875-880 CE) who wrote *Kitab al-Budan*; Ibn al-Faqih (c.902 CE) who wrote *Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan*; Abu Zaid (c. 916 CE) who modified and completed his version of *Akhbar as-Sin wa al-Hind*; Abu Dulaf (c. 940 CE) who wrote *Risalah*; Al-Mas'udi (c. 943) who wrote *Muruj adz-Dzahab* and several genres of universal and Islamic history); Buzurg bin Shahriyar al-Ramhurmuzi (c. 1009 CE) who wrote *'Ajaib al-Hind Barrihi wa Bahrihi*; Al-Biruni (c. 1030 CE) who wrote a *Tārīkh al-Hind*; Al-Idrisi (c. 1154 CE, who wrote *Kitab Nuzhat*); and Yaqut al-Hamawi (c. 1224, who wrote *Mu'jam al-Buldan*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Paul Wheatly, *The Golden Khersonese* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 210-251

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>11</sup>Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 69-70; Derek Heng, *Sino-Malay Trade and Diplomacy from the Tenth through the Fourteenth Century* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012), 29, 35; Wheatly, *The Golden Khersonese* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 210-251.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

Generally, the accounts provide rather incomplete and obscure descriptions of various matters that they came into contact with, with some precious details being often overlooked by the Arab-Persian traders and travellers including those from Oman who were present or transited along the Malayan coast. Nevertheless, one must handle these descriptive works with care as not to dismiss them in total and take into consideration several limitations which were experienced by the early Arab-Persian navigators.<sup>13</sup>

Among the earliest accounts on the contact established between the Arab and Gulf travellers with the Malay Peninsula would be that of Sulaiman at-Tajir dated back to the early second half of the 9th century CE. He was a Sirafian trader and seafarer who travelled to China, using a route which according to G. Ferrand was very similar to that used by other Arabian Gulf merchants or travellers. The ships passed by Muscat before crossing the vast ocean heading towards *Kolam* (Quilon, كُولَام) and *Sailan* (Sri Lanka, سَيْلان) via the monsoon which blew the sails from April to the coast of India, and the September wind which helped them to reach the Malay ports. After one month of departure, Sulaiman arrived at *Kalah Bar* ('Land of Kalah', بَار كَلَاه) which the later scholars estimate being an area located somewhere in between the northern Malay kingdom of *Kedah* (قَدَح) on the west coast and while Tioman (تِيومان) along the south-east coast of Malay Peninsula. Going further east, as recorded by Sulaiman, one would reach Cambodia in Indochina and Canton in South China.<sup>14</sup>

Sulaiman also narrated the process of transportation of goods that is how the commodities bound for the East will be assembled first at Siraf from feeders in Basra. He also mentioned about Chinese trading vessels heading to Muscat and Suhar. Meanwhile, regarding the word Chinese (صِيْنِيَّة), some scholars are of the view that it originally refers to Indian Ocean ships associated with Chinese trade rather than ships manned by Chinese themselves as the Chinese vessels were known to be less capable of crossing deep oceans. At least until the advent of Song and Ming dynasties when the Chinese shipbuilding industry became more sophisticated following the adoption of maritime technology of foreign origins such as the early Malay vessels known as *Kunlun Type* and *Champa Type*.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the descriptions of relations and contacts which took place between Oman and the Malay World are also present in the Malay literary works mainly in the form of Malay *hikayats*. From the 17th century onwards, one may find various accounts in the Malay *hikayats* (lores) relating to the coming of the Muslim traders, scholars, and *sufis* (saints) to the Malay World besides their trading activities in various localities. For example, the first account on the coming of Islam can be found in the *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* and in the Malay magnum opus *Sulalatus Salatin* (or *Hikayat Melayu*) when a convoy (was said to be headed by Sheikh Ismail) was despatched by the Syarifate of Mecca to Samudera.<sup>16</sup> Sheikh Ismail then met the local king, Merah Silu, and converted the local king and his whole subjects into Islam. The Arabic epigraphy on his tomb carved with his name *Malikussaleh* and dated 1297 CE attest to the truth regarding his existence and conversion to Islam. Considering the preceding time before his death and the time when his conversion took place, i.e. around the 1260s, the convoy must have arrived not long after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and the rise of Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo in Egypt. With the shift of the centre of the Muslim power

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>George Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Singapore (Malaysia: University of Malaya Press, 1968), 130-132; Allama Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, *The Arab Navigation* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors. 2007), 43-47; Wheatly, *The Golden Khersones*, 210-251.

<sup>15</sup>Hee Jung Kang, "Kunlun and Kunlun Slaves as Buddhists in the Eyes of the tang Dynasty," *Kemanusiaan* Vol. 22, no 1 (2015): 32-34.

<sup>16</sup>A. Samad Ahmad, *Edisi Pelajar: Sulalatus Salatin* [Student Edition: Malay Annals] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2003), 54-60; Russel Jones, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* [Chronicle of King of Pasai] (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1999), 11-16.



from Baghdad to Cairo, the centre of maritime activities of the Muslim World consequently changed that is from the Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea.<sup>17</sup>

About the Omani Muslims and their coming to the Malay waters between the 13th and 16th centuries, it appears that famous travelers' accounts like that of Marco Polo, Albuquerque, and Ibn Battutah mentioned only about the Arabs and Persians in general although Omani ports were noted as among the trading posts frequently visited by traders. The underrepresentation of Omani traders and sailors around this period is possibly due to several factors, one being the lack of involvement of the Omanis in a direct and major trade with the Malay World as compared to the more active Arab and Persian counterparts. Nevertheless, there was one account recalled about the Omani presence in the northern Malay Peninsula.

The story was found in *At-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* which is the official chronicle of the Kedah Sultanate written in the early 1900s by *To' Kerani* (Secretary) Muhammad Arshad, the special secretary to Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Syah (r. 1881-1943) (Ibrahim Bakar Langkawi, 2018). The chronicle has narrated that in 1122 AH/1710, the Sultanate of Kedah descended to darkness and confusion as the late Sultan passed away without any heir except for his only son, Tengku (Tunku later Sultan) Muhammad Jiwa who had been in absentia for years. The *Tunku* (royal prince) several years previously had embarked on a soul-seeking journey which led him to meet a saintly scholar known as Syeikh Abdul Jalil al Mahdani (*Mahdali?*). For years he studied under the Syeikh from Palembang, then to Java, and later settled at *Malabar* in southern India where eventually his heart was moved to return home. It is from Malabar that he along with a few companions took an Omani *baghalah* (a type of vessel, also known as dhow in East Africa) which was on its way to *Margi* (*Mergui*) in southern Myanmar.<sup>18</sup>

The rare direct reference to the Omani maritime activities in various Malay literature especially in the period before the 18th century calls for explanations. First, while there existed Malay *hikayats*, most of them dated back to the 18th and 19th centuries, and it was not until the 20th century that the Malay literature reached its maturity. Consequently, except for a few *hikayats* such as *At-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* and *Hikayat Aceh*, not much can be found written about Oman or Omani traders and sailors who visited the Malay World. This contrasts with the Arab-Persian literature as demonstrated in the variety of information contained in the travelogues written by the Arab-Persian travelers and visitors. That said, it appeared that Omani writers too did not produce many writings on the Malay-related affairs during the post-Abbasid period and even more so after the disruption of Muslim trade in the subsequent centuries following the domination of Portuguese in the Gulf Sea and Indian Ocean regions.

Secondly, in mentioning Middle Easterners who visited the Malay World, it was common that the Malay *hikayats* generalize them as either Arab or Persian travelers or traders without differentiating their countries of origin. Arguably, there had been Omani traders, travelers, and individuals who came to the Malay World based on the long-established commercial networking between the Arab and Malay Worlds since ancient times, coupled with the scattered accounts in the *hikayats* on the so-called Omani individuals and groups. And this Omani presence, interestingly, manifested in the form of a cultural legacy in Malaysia that will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>17</sup>A. K. Pasha, "Arabs and Euro-Asian Maritime Contacts," *Journal of Historical Archaeology and Anthropological Sciences* Vol. 3, no. 3 (2018.): 421-422.

<sup>18</sup>Ibrahim Bakar Langkawi, *At-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* [History of the Genealogy of the State of Kedah] (Kedah: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 2018), 115-130.



#### 4. The Omani Legacy in Kedah: The *Baju Muskat*

Before a further discussion is made on the *Baju Muskat*, it seems useful to address this through the linguistic aspect of the words. According to Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat (2015), *baju* in Malay means garment worn to cover the body, while *Muskat* appears also as an outer garment worn as top wear. It seems clear that the origin of the second vocabulary was derived from the textile of *Muscati* origin, Omani's biggest emporium for centuries. Thus, *Baju Muskat* of the Kedahan royal dress discussed in this paper points to a cultural link to the Omani nation of its *Muscati* dress style. Putting this into perspective, inspired by the *Muscati* dress of the Omanis, *Baju Muskat* later evolved, throughout the colonial period until the post-independence era, to become the symbol of Malayan nobility preference, their cultural taste manifestation, and the international cultural adaptation experienced by them.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, without doubt, *Baju Muskat* is very important evidence showing that Omani culture had a long-lasting effect over a foreign society centered around the Sultanate of Kedah Darul Aman in northern modern Malaysia. This, however, without proper discourse and pragmatic action will put its existence in enigma and even endangered of being banished from society though it has a big role and potential to bridge the two nations so far apart from each other across the Indian Ocean maritime region. The enigma of the *Baju Muskat* here is that, no matter how many people are returning back to their cultural origin in Muscat, the details of how it came, who brought it, and why the local Malays particularly of Kedah Sultanate in Malaysia came to adopt it as a part of their traditional attire will remain without an exact answer due to the inexistence of precise historical record of events. But through some examination on material references we might generally assume that first, it came together with a group of people most certainly traders who had contact directly or indirectly with Oman.<sup>20</sup>

This means that a wide array of maritime communities was involved who were either living in Oman, or frequented Oman but originally came from the seaboard of Yemen and Hadhramaut; the Indians of Gujarat, Malabar, and Bengal; and the Sumatrans who were known to have frequented the many ports of Kedah since the early century of the Common Era, and thus such continuous presence brought along with it Omani commodities to the ports of Old Kedah (Bujang and Kuala Muda) and those of New Kedah (Kuala Perlis, and Kuala Kedah) in Malaysia. The advent of early modern Kedah between the 18th and 20th centuries saw the rise of Kuala Muda and later Penang Island as the center of trade items flowing in and out of the region laden to India and Arabia. Following the English domination of Oman in the 19th century, direct Omani communication with the Far East and Southeast Asia had dropped to almost nonexistence and this was replaced by other communities taking advantage of the colonial entrepreneur network particularly those of Hadhramis and Indians.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Siti Zainon Ismail, "Konsep Adat Pakaian Cara Melayu Sentuhan Tenunan dalam Busana Melayu [The Customary Concept of Malay Attire through Woven Style in Malay Fashion]," (Paper presented at Seminar Tekstil Antarabangsa Tenunan Nusantara: Identiti dan Kesenambungan Budaya, Kuantan Pahang, May 12, 2009), 8.

<sup>20</sup>Rahmah A. Haji Osman, et al., *Oman in the Malaysian Memory: The Historical Reference and Cultural Heritage of Omani Nation in Malaysia* (Muscat: Dhakirat Uman, 2018).

<sup>21</sup>Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, *The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 109-133, 135-158; E. C. Ross, *Annals of Oman by Sirh n-bin Said-bin Sirhan of the Bem  Ali tribe of Oman* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press. 1874), 9-57.

They were the most likely candidates who brought many Arabian Gulf and Omani merchandise to the Orient especially the *saudagiris* of Gujarat based in Ahmedabad and the port of Surat.<sup>22</sup>

The British Empire for a time had developed the industry of Indian textile and fabric, distributed and profited across their territory, and for quite a time in the 19th century, the Omanis tried to challenge this by promoting their own production of cotton textiles at the international level which however failed after being in operation for one century, except in its traditional dominions of Swahili Coast where continuous mobility and kinship with Oman mainland ensured the traditional trade to prosper.<sup>23</sup> The English were determined to make their Indian cotton cloths successful and to go without any possible competitors. However, we must notice that Omani textile elements survived in the form of repositioning the former to Gujarati premises where descendants of Omanis or Indians were affiliated with Omani trade for generations had continued the former textile crafting popularly known as *Muscati* style of dress. During this development, a certain *Muscati* merchant family in Ahmedabad moved eastward together with *Muscati* cotton cloths to be traded as far as Siam (modern Thailand) and Cochin-China (modern Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) and through this network, they passed first the ports of Aceh, Kedah, Penang, and Singapore.<sup>24</sup>

At the advent of the 19th century, the throne of Kedah was greatly affected by the Siamese (Bangkok Thonburi Dynasty) invasion from 1821 to 1842 which later made its sultans subjected to the Siamese King until its territorial handover to the English in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Kedah thus for almost one century was controlled by Siam though granted with considerable autonomy. Penang Island and Province Wellesley (modern Seberang Perai, annexed by British in 1800) later became the trading 'Mecca' of Kedahan coastal polity and its traditional industry, and profiting depended mostly on its relationship with Penang government and Siamese consul.<sup>26</sup> The particular *saudagiri* family (*saudagar* or merchants in Malay, originated from Indian vocabulary) of Ahmedabad went to Siam under its first ancestor known as Abdultayeb Esmailji and became the textile agent of the royal family of Siam for around two hundred years.<sup>27</sup>

Gujarati trade in Southeast Asia was indeed not a new activity. It has existed since the old days of the Malaccan Sultanate and the Kingdom of Ayutthaya. For years, Esmailji and his family helped in regulating the movement of textiles and fulfilling the palace's demand for required types of fabrics

<sup>22</sup>Sarah Rooney, *House of Maskati: One Indian Family's Siamese Textile Legacy* (Singapore: Prestel, 2017), 10-180.

<sup>23</sup>William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Locally Produced Textiles on the Indian Ocean Periphery 1500-1850: East Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia* (London: SOAS, University of London, 2018), 20; Pedro Machado, et al., *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures and the Material World of the Indian Ocean: An Ocean of Cloth* (USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 61-71.

<sup>24</sup>Prapassorn Posrithong, Anne Håbu and Dawn F. Rooney (eds.). "Artistic Relations between Indian Textiles for Thai Market and Bencharong Ware," *Royal Porcelain from Siam: Unpacking the Ring Collection* (Oslo: Prestel, 2013), 7; Sarah Rooney, *House of Maskati* (Singapore: Prestel, 2017), 10-180.

<sup>25</sup>Mohd Herman Roslan, and Fareq Rizal, *Gajah Putih di Bumi Geroda: Perang Melayu-Siam 1767-1842* [White Elephant in Geroda (Old Kedah Kingdom): A War Between Malays-Siamese 1767-1842] (Kuantan: Penerbit Geroda Merah Resources, 2016), 91, 175; J. F. Augustine, *Kedah Zaman Silam* [Kedah in the Past] (Alor Setar: Lembaga Muzium Negeri Kedah Darul Aman, 1996), 61-74, 96-99, 110-112.

<sup>26</sup>J. F. Augustine, *Kedah Zaman Silam* [Kedah in the Past], 41-49.

<sup>27</sup>Prapassorn Posrithong, Anne Håbu and Dawn F. Rooney (eds.). "Artistic Relations between Indian Textiles for Thai Market and Bencharong Ware," *Royal Porcelain from Siam: Unpacking the Ring Collection* (Oslo: Prestel, 2013), 7; Sarah Rooney, *House of Maskati* (Singapore: Prestel, 2017), 10-180.

and pattern designs as they were in constant contact with suppliers back in Gujarat. This Indo-Siamese product, known as Pha Maskat or *Muscati* cloth, was of the highest quality, expensive and naturally it could only be owned by people from royal upbringing or those who were granted to possess it.<sup>28</sup> Pha Maskat in this sense is quite parallel with the designation of *Baju Muskat* in northern Malaysia then under the Siamese vassalage.

Colonial Malaya's *Baju Muskat* may have originated from tailors based in London and Bangkok which were associated with the mentioned Indo-Siamese industry affiliated with British Administration across the region, either around its colonial ports in the Indies or based in London itself. However, a closer look at Pha Maskat cotton-printed fabric reveals that it is similar to an earlier type of Kedahan *Muskat* which was a loose, short and thin jacket with additional embroidery, while the much later version in the 20th century came in the form of the thicker, black and embroidered jacket worn as a top.<sup>29</sup> This might suggest a variation of Maskat cloth in demand, which was made exclusive for Siam and Kedah whereas the latter might have had especially demanded Gujarati suppliers to produce another variation which is more complex and intricate in feature. The older version of *Baju Muskat* is related to fashion top jackets known as *Baju Sikap*, *Baju Takwa* and *Baju Layang* suited with *seluar Aceh* (Acehnese pants), a *dastar* or *tengkolok* (two kinds of Malay headgears), a *samping* (waistcloth resembling the Scottish kilt), and a *kris* (traditional dagger), which however had its origin long before the early modern time and at least had been known since the Malacca and Johore Sultanates.<sup>30</sup>

The evolution of Omani dress of *Muscati* style into what is known as *Baju Muskat* that is now officially worn by the Kedah Sultans and the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong's* (Heads of State of Malaysia) suggests the idea that the *Muscati* cloths from Oman and the other major port cities must have been continuously brought to Malaysia at least since the proliferation of the Arabs and Western voyages to the Malay World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward. Interestingly, the later form of *Baju Muskat* too also is seen as a latter trend or political-cultural phenomenon rooted in the arrival of the European official ceremonial jacket following the advent of Great Britain onto the Malay Peninsula since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which, therefore, westernized to a certain extent. The classical Turco-Arabians started to transform themselves from wearing turban, caftan, and robes by adopting European styled jackets, pants, the crown of fez (which the Malays transformed into their black headgear known as *songkok*). This form of later *Muskat* resembling the European jacket spread to the Malay World, especially to Aceh, Siak, Banjar, and Kedah and it is hard to determine its exact point of origin as contacts may have happened from various official visitation to Osmanli capital in Istanbul or from indirect cultural experience which occurred in Egypt, Hejaz, Yemen, or Oman itself where Kedahans and other Malays were frequenting since the early days, particularly for *hajj*.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Michelle Archambault, "Blockprinted Fabrics of Gujarat for Export to Siam: An Encounter with Mr. Maneklal T. Gajjar," *The Journal of Siam Society* Prapassorn Posrithong, Anne Häbu and Dawn F. Rooney(eds.). "Artistic Relations between Indian Textiles for Thai Market and Bencharong Ware," *Royal Porcelain from Siam: Unpacking the Ring Collection* (Oslo: Prestel, 2013), 7; Sarah Rooney, *House of Maskati* (Singapore: Prestel, 2017) Vol. 77, no. 2 (1989): 1-5; Posrithong, "Artistic Relations between Indian Textiles for Thai Market and Bencharong Ware," (Oslo: Prestel, 2013), 7-9.

<sup>29</sup>Michelle Archambault, "Block-printed Fabrics of Gujarat for Export to Siam: An Encounter with Mr. Maneklal T. Gajjar," *The Journal of Siam Society* Vol. 77, no. 2 (1989):71-74.

<sup>30</sup>Zubaidah Shawal, *Busana Melayu* [Malay Fashion] (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Muzium dan Antikuiti Malaysia, 1994), 1-130.

<sup>31</sup>Siti Amirah Abdullah, and Mohd Kasturi Nor, "Perniagaan Haji di Pulau Pinang dan Dokumentasi Sultan Kedah [Pilgrimage's Business in the Island of Penang and Documentation of

The Kedahan rulers in this sense might have adopted the royal official attire of *Baju Muskat* from this contact which transformed their early kind of royal dress to the later and contemporary one. Subsequently, they were seen as the legitimate successors or loyal vassals of the Ottoman Caliphate. In the early 1900s, for instance, the Malay sultans and Muslim society in Kedah were greatly inspired by the Pan-Islamism movement rooted in the Middle East and by claiming their brotherhood and affiliation with the Ottoman.<sup>32</sup> The idea of the Middle Eastern influence which, in this case, refers to the adoption of Omani dress of Muscati style in the Kedah royal dress was made possible as the Malay port cities in the early days formed part and parcel of the greater Indian ocean maritime networks.

In fact, the Omani traditional ships were still visiting Jeddah via Aden in the early 20th century, bringing along their textiles, a part of other Indians and Malays coming on board the European steamers. In addition, one may also further observe this interesting cultural link that existed between the Kingdom of Oman and the Sultanate of Kedah through the comparison of *Baju Muskat* of the Kedahan style with the traditional attires worn by many Omani Sultans of Bu Sa'idi lineage since the early 19th century CE. For instance, *Baju Muskat* of Kedah is comparable with Bu Sa'idi *bisht* or long, loose, black robe, worn on top of another inner white called in Arabic as *dishdasha*. This *bisht* in its early 19th-century form could be seen as carrying a certain special insignia of Bu Sa'idian pattern made of golden embroidery which happened to be almost similar with embroidered lining found on Kedahan *Baju Muskat* of the later form.

This is interesting, as to what extent the initial origin of Kedahan *Baju Muskat* is directly related with Oman as this *bisht* was worn long before the arrival of colonial powers around the Omani coast and thus eliminating its association with any European tailors except after the British colonization had taken place up till the post-independence where His Majesty Sultan Qaboos is seen wearing a type of *bisht* which resembles the Osmanli-European style. *Baju Muskat* of Kedah was somehow modelled on this and known to be made with *pesak jubah* (robe posture) which was shortened to suit the Malaysian warm and humid climate and preference for a good, ventilated attire. It looks obviously like a shortened Omani *bisht* reaching down to the thigh worn with a pair of embroidered black trousers. Interestingly, one official government publication reinforced the fact that the *Baju Muskat* design was directly taken from the Omani capital, Muscat (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 2017).

Furthermore, as briefly mentioned in the previous discussion, *Baju Muskat* has already now become the official attire of the Head of State of Malaysia (Yang di-Pertuan Agong). In brief, During the early years of Malaysian independence in 1957, and with the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak states into the federation in 1963, *Baju Muskat* as the traditional garment of high nobility then was introduced to the office of the King of Malaysia or stylized as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (literally means The Grand Overlord). This was done by the late First Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj (1903-1990) who, interestingly, was a royal prince of Kedah and the son of its late ruler, His Majesty Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (1864-1947). The late king's father was a great figure who helped to modernize Kedah under the inspection of Siamese and British powers respectively and was among the first Sultan in the region to have worn *Baju Muskat* as an official garment. This depiction is visible from many colonial photographs shot in Kedah or Bangkok.

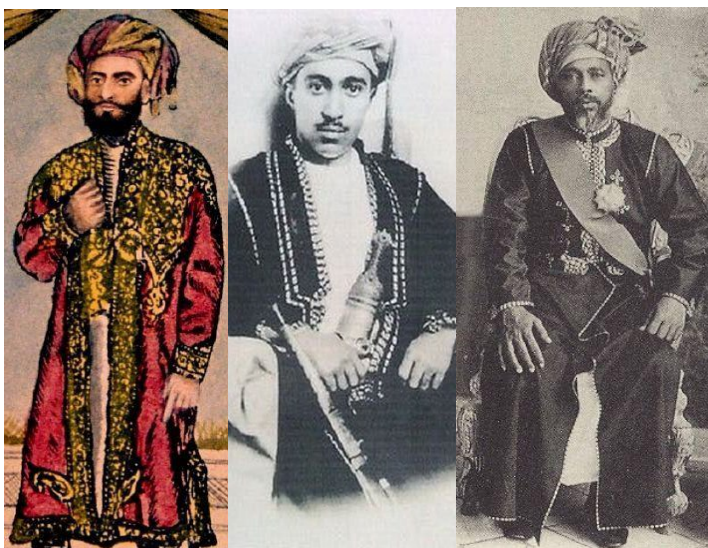
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the Sultan of Kedah], Monograph," *Monograph 48 Mubin Sheppard Memorial Essays* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 2015), 30-200.

<sup>32</sup>Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof, *Kedah Dalam Warisan Sejarah dan Budaya Nusantara* [Kedah in the Historical and The Cultural Heritage of The Malay Archipelago] (Alor Setar: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia Cawangan Negeri Kedah, 2014), 143-166; A. C. S. Peacock and Annabel Teh Gallop, *From Anatolia to Aceh: Ottomans, Turks, and Southeast Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152.

The position of the Tunku (literally denotes my lord, which in this case denotes royal prince) as a prominent political leader of the federation also led to the flow of ancient Kedahan culture into the central administration. During the tenure ship of His Majesty, the third Yang Dipertuan Agong, His Majesty Tuanku Syed Harun Putra ibn Syed Hassan Jamalullail (1920-2000) of the kingdom of Perlis, which was a part of Kedah sultanate before 1842, the Kedahan *Baju Muskat* was made as official attire of the Malaysian paramount up to this day as mentioned by the Tunku.<sup>33</sup> The *baju* thus went out of its traditional circle and was adopted by the new national sovereign, uplifting its status and further developing its design, usability, and functionality. Over the years, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's *Muskat* design became more intricate, expressed in the form of floral ornamentation such as *bunga raya* or hibiscus (national flower of Malaysia); and *awan larat* (lit. horizon of cloud) representing might and majesty of the paramount ruler of Malaysia. The attire is very expensive as it is made from a special kind of silk fabric embroidered patterns with golden threads.<sup>34</sup>

The older form of *Muskat* usually was thinner in fabric material and embroidered with silver, gold, or bronze wires known as *kelengkam* or *keringkam*, also elements that originated from Gujarati textile craftsmanship. The old form of *Baju Muskat* usually came with two options: either buttoned or unbuttoned while the modern one worn by the kings are without button whereas another form of official attire known as mess-kit is buttoned only at the collar joints. Official *Muskat* came in a set with *tengkolok* (a type of Malay headgear) named *Dendam Tak Sudah*, a golden pending belt, a *kris* (traditional dagger) named *Pendik Diraja*, a golden *samping* (a kind of traditional male skirt) wrapped around the waist, and a pair of woolen trousers embroidered with a pattern known as *tekat tuji*.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 1.** Example of the royal robes worn by the early sultans of Oman-Muscat.

<sup>33</sup>Rusmadiyah Anwar et al., "The Development of Formal Ceremonial Coronation Attire of Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Di-Pertuan Agong and Seri Paduka Baginda Raja Permaisuri Agong from I-XIV starting from 1957 until 2016," *Proceedings of the Art and Design International Conference*. Singapore, 2018, 37.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*





**Figure 2.** *Baju Muskat* in the form of long robe worn by Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah of Kedah in 1890s.



**Figure 3.** Short *Baju Muskat* worn by Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah of Kedah in 1890s.



**Figure 4.** *Baju Sikap* or *Baju Muskat* of Kedah style worn by Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah during his visit to London, 1909.



**Figure 5.** Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj ibni Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah, The First Prime Minister of Malaysia wearing *Baju Muskat*, photographs from early to mid-1900s.



**Figure 6.** Syed Hassan Bin Syed Zain Shahabuddin, the 7<sup>th</sup> State Secretary of Kedah wearing *Baju Muskat* during his wedding ceremony.



**Figure 7.** The late His Royal Highness Sultan Qaboos al-Said in a royal robe embroidered with special floral motifs.





**Figure 8.** Reigning Malaysia's Yang Dipertuan Agong, His Royal Highness Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin al-Mustafa Billah Shah in his ceremonial *Baju Muskat*.

## 5. Conclusion

Although there is little mention of *Baju Muskat* in the Kedah annals, it is believed that this type of cloth originated directly or indirectly from the Kingdom of Oman. The many resemblances of the Omani dress of Muscati style found in the *Baju Muskat* of the Kedah Sultan and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, however, suggest a unique cultural relationship between Oman and Malaysia even though both countries lay far from one another.

There seems little doubt that this unique cultural connection is made possible through the activities of Arab-Persian (including the Omanis), as well as the Indian traders and merchants who frequently visited the Malay port cities on their journey to China at least since the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. They must have exchanged several products and commodities including cotton and textiles with the natives and other Malay traders in the areas. In the end, directly or indirectly, such intercourse must have fascinated the Malay royalties and nobles and inspired them to adopt them in their socio-cultural lives as it was an old established policy that the foreign ships must have to seek permission to enter the Malay port cities from the Malay Sultans or territorial chiefs which normally come with lavish presentation of gifts and rare items.

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