

Report on Malay Studies.

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I have been asked to contribute a report on the progress of Malay studies in recent years. This is a branch of research that is not often mentioned in meetings of Orientalist Societies; it plays but a very small part by the side of larger subjects as India, Islam, China, and the like. I am glad, therefore, to comply with the request. For practical reasons I must confine myself to Malay studies properly so called, excluding the numerous other languages and peoples of Indonesia. Even in regard to Malay studies proper, I can venture to deal only with the work done by British scholars: to take a wider range would occupy more time than I have at my disposal, and I must therefore omit from my survey the excellent work done by many eminent Dutch and other foreign scholars in this and the cognate lines of research. The Dutch, owing to their extensive possessions in Indonesia, naturally take the lead in this department, and their great names, among whom I cannot refrain from mentioning those of H. N. van der Tuuk and of my old friend Dr. H. Kern, will always be regarded with reverence. If I omit to deal with the work done by Dutch and other non-British scholars, it is not for want of appreciation but merely because I could not do justice to it in the time at my command.

Within the last few years British research in this branch of studies has received a new and remarkable impetus. This has been due to several causes, but chiefly to the fact that the growth of the British sphere of administration and influence in the Malay Peninsula has brought home to the local Governments the desirability of encouraging by all possible means the systematic study of the Malay language and people. It was felt that the haphazard way formerly pursued of allowing individual officers of Government to pick up at first hand, each one for himself alone and without assistance, such information as he could acquire, was inadequate to the growing needs of our time. The interests of good administration demanded that an attempt should be made to collect and co-ordinate all such information in a methodical manner. The senior officers of Government realized that the younger men were tending to lose touch with native life. In former days a junior Government officer was often stationed in a district where he was the sole European: he was thus almost inevitably forced to learn something about his Malay neighbours. Nowadays that seldom happens: he is surrounded by European neighbours, and has not the same compelling incentive for interesting himself in the native population. His official routine duties also have increased materially and leave him less time and energy for individual research.

Accordingly it was decided to set up a Committee for Malay Studies in the Federated Malay States which should encourage and assist the collection and publication in a systematic form of all manner of information on such subjects as Malay life, customs, history, language, literature, etc. This committee was set up a few years ago and the results have been very satisfactory, both from the practical and the scientific point of view.

The movement I have referred to arose out of the actual practical needs of the situation. But movements are generally inspired by individuals, and in this case the chief merit is due to one man, Mr. R. J. Wilkinson, now Governor of Sierra Leone. A Malay scholar of distinction, author of an excellent Malay-English dictionary, he had also planned a comprehensive work on the Malays of the Peninsula, but eventually decided to issue it provisionally in the more manageable form of separate monographs. In 1906 he published his "Malay Beliefs," a stimulating and interesting pamphlet on the subject of Malay religion and folklore, in which he describes and assesses the relative importance of the influence of Islam, the present official faith of the Malays, and of the surviving relics of their former faiths, such as Hinduism and Animism. This was to have been the first of his series of monographs, but it was also the last. The work of continuing the series was taken up by the Committee for Malay Studies, of which he became the leader and virtually the motive force. Interesting and valuable pamphlets were now brought out in quick succession under the Committee's auspices, on Malay History, Literature and Law, Malay Life, Customs and Industries, and on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Peninsula, and these were followed by another series of monographs dealing with the history and constitution of several of the Malay States of the Peninsula individually.

More than half of these *opuscula* are from the pen of Mr. Wilkinson himself, and they all mark a considerable advance both in the collection of material and in the critical treatment of it. That one should always find oneself in agreement with every word contained in such an extensive range of monographs, was not to be expected, nor were their authors all equally qualified to do full justice to their subjects. Mr. Wilkinson, in particular, sometimes disposes too hastily of the views of his predecessors and occasionally fails to give them the credit which was their due. But no one who studies his work will come away from it without having derived new information, and what is even more important, fresh stimulus from its perusal. On the whole Mr. Wilkinson was also fortunate in his collaborators, among whom one must specially mention Dr. R. O. Winstedt. That gifted scholar's contributions to this series of "Papers on Malay Subjects," as they are modestly styled, are of peculiar value owing to his exceptionally intimate acquaintance with native life and his complete mastery of the language, both colloquial and literary. He has also to his credit an excellent grammar of Malay, published in 1913 by the Clarendon Press, an English-

Malay dictionary based on Wilkinson's Malay-English dictionary but containing many additional words, and a number of minor works, some of which I shall have to refer to presently.

Pari passu with the issue of the "Papers on Malay Subjects," the Committee for Malay Studies undertook the publication of another important series, styled the "Malay Literature Series," containing a number of Malay texts mainly printed in the Roman character. The population of the Peninsula is very cosmopolitan. Nearly half of it, in these days, is non-Malay. Yet Malay is the *lingua franca* of the country; everybody speaks it, more or less correctly, whenever it becomes necessary to communicate with a person of another race who does not happen to know the speaker's own mother-tongue. Europeans, Chinese of different dialects, Indians of various provinces of India, Indonesians from the different islands of the Archipelago, and all other strangers, use colloquial Malay freely as a means of intercommunication. Now, for the last five centuries or so Malay literature has been written in the Arabic character, a script hallowed by religious prestige but ill adapted to the phonetic requirements of the language. There was of course no idea of suppressing the use of this script, but the Government felt that its exclusive use constituted a barrier to the exchange of knowledge which had to be surmounted. True, certain of the Government officials had always been required to master it, but the rest of the non-Muhammadian community declined to do so. Accordingly it was decided to issue a number of Malay texts in the Roman character, which is far better suited for the expression of Malay sounds than the very imperfect Arabic script.

Moreover, without dropping the teaching of the latter, the study of the Roman script was introduced beside it into the Malay vernacular schools, where it has been found to assist considerably in the acquisition of the power of fluent reading. In this matter we followed in the Peninsula the precedent set by the Dutch in their Indonesian dominions years ago. Although at first the ancient prejudices against the use of the Roman character found some expression, no serious opposition was encountered, and the two scripts now subsist side by side without friction or difficulty of any kind. While the study of Malay in the Arabic character is actively pursued in the schools, a number of text books in Roman script are also in use. Several of these, as well as others in the Arabic script, are from the hand of Dr. Winstedt, and one in particular, a history of the Malays in Malay, deserves special mention as an excellent introduction to the subject.

From the starting of the "Malay Literature Series" in 1906 up to the present time fifteen texts have been issued in it in the Roman character. These include both works that had been published before, such as the classical *Sĕjarah Mĕlayu* and *Hang Tuah* and the modern writings of Abdullah bin Abdulkadir, and also various hitherto unpublished texts, both traditional and modern, as well as collections of riddles, quatrains, etc. In the editing of

many of these texts Dr. Winstedt has again played a great part. His Introduction to the collection of quatrains in the *pantun* form is a very valuable critical account of the subject founded in part on the work of his predecessors but adding much that is both new and illuminating.

I have attempted to do justice to the new-born activities of the Committee for Malay Studies. But meanwhile the old established Straits Branch of our Royal Asiatic Society steadily continued its labours in the same field. That branch was founded in 1877, and its Journal with its 81 numbers now fills quite a respectably sized shelf. In the last ten years it has issued about 25 numbers of very varied contents. A great part of its activities has always been devoted to Natural History, a subject on which I will not enlarge, as it does not concern the studies with which we have to deal here. But it has also issued a number of valuable papers on matters that interest us more directly, and has published a good many Malay texts. I must particularly mention the *Sēri Rama*, printed (in the Arabic character) in 1916, from the early 17th century MS. in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. No existing Malay MS. is much older than this one, and the work, which is a Malay prose recension of the *Rāmāyana*, is interesting from several points of view. It illustrates the changes of style, language, and orthography that have taken place in Malay in the last three centuries, and it is a good example of the way in which the ancient Indian epic has been remodelled to suit Malay ideas. The recension was, of course, made after the Malays had already been converted to Islam, but in spite of consequent anachronisms it still retains much of the flavour of its old Indian original. An analytical comparison of the two made by its editor, Dr. W. G. Sheilabear, in No. 70 of the Journal will be found of interest to Indianists who care to follow up the fortunes of the old Sanskrit epic in foreign lands.

Two other texts of more local interest published in the Journal are the histories of Kēdah and Pasai, both of which had already been issued in the Arabic character but had long been out of print. Amongst a large number of miscellaneous articles that have appeared in the Journal there are several which owe their origin to the extension of British influence over the North-Eastern States of Trengganu and Kēlantan, where a very curious dialect of Malay is spoken that differs considerably from the Malay of the Southern States. I may perhaps be permitted to mention that a paper containing specimens of this dialect recorded phonographically and expressed in the symbols of the international phonetic alphabet will appear before long in the Bulletin of our London School of Oriental Studies. In the Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Dr. Winstedt has found another outlet for his superabundant intellectual activity, and the last few numbers contain many articles from his pen, all of them contributing something to our knowledge of Malay life, customs, history, or language.

What I have mentioned goes to show that there is no lack of good work in this particular field: there is plenty of enthusiasm locally, but unfortunately it inspires only a rather limited number of workers. That is a criticism that may legitimately be made, but one may hope that other recruits will be enlisted. A gratifying aspect of the matter is the growing tendency on the part of the workers to co-ordinate their work amongst themselves and also to link it up with that of Orientalists in other fields. It is quite impossible to do justice to Malay studies if one neglects either the element of Indian civilization that influenced the Malay race for at least a thousand years up to the close of the 14th century, or the more recent and now all-pervading factor of Islam, which supervened upon the decline of Indian influence and replaced it as the dominant ideal. I am glad to see that local students have begun to realize to the full the great importance to their studies of understanding these two factors.

Conversely, I would turn to the Indianists and the Islamic scholars here, and suggest that for them too Malay studies have interest and value. They will see therein, if they care to look, some curious specimens of the application and development of their own systems, working on an alien population, blending and intermingling with local customs and ideas in a very peculiar way. I venture to think that it is part of the functions of Societies like ours to co-ordinate studies, to take broad and comprehensive views of them, and to think (as it were) in continents. It will give a much needed stimulus to local students in a distant corner of the Asiatic field, if they know that the headquarters staff is interested in their work and has its eye upon them. On these grounds I feel I need make no apology for having taken up some of your time with this necessarily brief and inadequate notice of what has recently been achieved by British scholars in the part of the world with which, as Reader in Malay in the University of London, I am most directly concerned.





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