EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

First Printed Malay Work by a Local
Abdullah bin Abdul Karim (c.1767-1854), better known as Munsyi Abdullah, was a scholar and translator. Regarded as the ‘father of Malay printing’, his autobiography, the Hikayat Abdullah, was published in 1849 in collaboration with Reverend Benjamin Keasberry (1817-75), a Protestant missionary. Munsyi Abdullah was the first non-European to have his work published in Malay. The Hikayat Abdullah is a record of the sociopolitical landscape of Singapore, Melaka and the kingdoms of Johor and Riau-Lingga at the beginning of the 19th century.

Story of Romance and Adventure
The Hikayat Isma Yatim tells the story of Isma Yatim, who has written hikayat (narratives) since childhood. His good work led him to be accepted into the king’s service as an adviser. This hikayat also features the love story of the king and a princess hidden in a magical sapphire. Isma Yatim later rescues the pregnant princess from the wrongful accusations of the king’s elder wife. The work is replete with descriptions of beautiful objects, people and places.

Love Poem about a European Clerk and a Married Woman
The Syair Simor Kosta is a romantic poem that narrates how Dutch clerk Simor Kosta has fallen in love with Lela Mayang, the wife of a Chinese merchant. He tries to win her heart, and the couple eventually have a happy ending.

There are several variants of this story. In other versions, the protagonist is a Portuguese merchant, and the Chinese merchant wins back his concubine. This particular syair (poem) was composed by Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin (1767-1852), the ruler of Palembang in Sumatra. It was probably written before the Dutch banished him to Ternate in 1821. This manuscript was copied in 1863.

Letter from Sultan of Pontianak to Stamford Raffles
Sultan Syarif Kasim (1766-1819) of Pontianak, Kalimantan, sent this letter to Stamford Raffles (1781-1826). Much of the letter pertains to the sultan’s request for British help against their common enemy, the sultan of Sambas. The end of the letter mentions that Sultan Syarif Kasim would send two manuscripts requested by Raffles: a legal text and the Hikayat Roja Ikanodor. Raffles was an avid collector of Malay manuscripts.

Get into the world of Malay stories – fantastical adventure tales of kings and heroes, founding myths of sultanates, and romantic poetry.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

For centuries, Malay was the language of trade, diplomacy, religious discourse, and literature for maritime Southeast Asia. This exhibition explores traditional Malay literature captured in ink on paper – from handwritten manuscripts to early lithographed books. These rarely seen items provide glimpses into the society that produced and read these literary works. Discover lesser-known stories of women authors and 19th-century lending libraries in the Malay world. Learn about the dramatic impact of printing on the manuscript tradition, and Singapore’s role as the early Malay/Muslim printing hub for the region.

The exhibition features precious manuscripts on loan from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, shown in Singapore for the first time. It is a unique opportunity to view these collections together.

Highlights include a manuscript (copied in 1710) of one of the oldest existing syair (narrative poem), which tells of the war (1666-69) between the Dutch and Makassar; the earliest manuscript on the exploits of the legendary Malay hero, Hang Tuah; one of the most ornate Malay manuscripts; and an 1811 letter from the sultan of Pontianak in Kalimantan to Stamford Raffles.

Come, discover these and other fascinating stories.
**PROGRAMMES**

**AUGUST 2017**

**TALK** | Art and Artists in Malay Manuscript Books
---|---
18 August, 7.00pm – 8.00pm | Level 16, The Pod
Speaker: Datuk Dr Annabel Teh Gallop

This talk will be conducted in English.

The art of the Malay book is a primarily a religious art. The finest examples of manuscript illumination in Southeast Asia are found not in literary or historical works, but in copies of the Qur’an. Almost without exception, these exquisite works of art are anonymous, for Malay artists did not traditionally sign their artworks.

However, the artist has inscribed his own name in one of the most illuminated Malay literary manuscripts from the British Library - the Hikayat Nabi Yusuf! (The Story of the Prophet Joseph), copied in Perlis in 1802, displayed in this exhibition. The artist’s comments and annotations in the text also shed invaluable light on the mechanics of the manuscript trade in the Malay Peninsula in the early 19th century.

Join Dr Annabel Gallop in this talk as she shares about the illumination of Qur’ans and other Islamic manuscripts.

**NOVEMBER 2017**

**TALK** | Malay Manuscript Collection and Early Malay Printing in America and Europe
---|---
25 November, 2.00pm – 3.00pm | Level 5, Possibility Room
Speaker: Associate Professor Hadjah bte Rahmat

This talk will be conducted in Malay.

Professor Hadjah Rahmat will discuss the manuscripts and early Malay books found in the United States (US) and Europe, where there are precious collections on Malay literary culture. These were garnered by Christian missionaries, scholars as well as European and American colonial officers. Learn about Professor Hadjah’s experiences in examining manuscripts and early Malay printings held at institutions such as the Library of Congress (US), Leiden University (Netherlands) and the University of Cambridge (United Kingdom).

**FEBRUARY 2018**

**WORKSHOP** | Can Compose and Recite Syair!
---|---
3 February, 9.30am – 11.00am | Level 5, Imaginarium Room
Facilitators: Dr Saida Buang and Dr Kartini Awan
Participants must understand and be able to speak simple Malay.

This workshop will be conducted in English and Malay.

Syair is a form of traditional Malay poetry that is made up of quatrains. Unlike another poetic form, pantun, each line of every stanza in a syair contributes to the formation of a unified idea or story.

Participants will be introduced to the functions and basic features of syair. They will also encounter various melodious forms of syair recitations based on the content and intent of the syair. Look forward to composing at least two verses of syair and reciting them!

**DECEMBER 2017**

**TALK** | Malay Magic and Divination Manuscripts
---|---
2 December, 2.00pm – 3.30pm | Level 5, Possibility Room
Speaker: Dr Farouk Yahya

This talk will be conducted in English.

Malay manuscripts on magic and divination contain fascinating and diverse images. These include illustrations of spirits, human beings and animals, as well as diagrams and talismanic designs for protection, healing and sorcery.

Join Dr Farouk Yahya as he explores the intriguing images found in these books.

**SEPTEMBER 2017**

**TALK** | The Script State (Negeri Naskah) – Malay Manuscripts in Documenting Memories
---|---
30 September, 3.00pm – 4.00pm | Level 5, Possibility Room
Speaker: Dr Azhar Ibrahim

This talk will be conducted in English.

Manuscripts are testimonies of their time, as they reflect the conditions and people surrounding the text. Today, the reception of manuscripts and texts – the way we read and interpret them – is also subject to the prevailing ideas of our time.

This programme provides an overview of the written tradition of the Malay world, which we have inherited in the form of manuscripts. Discover the stories of these texts, their various forms throughout history and how the written text has become a symbol of power, intellect and mastery.

**OCTOBER 2017**

**WORKSHOP** | Basic Jawi in Minutes!
---|---
7 October | Level 10, Learning Space
Facilitator: Undergraduates who are also experts in Jawi

Learn basic Jawi (modified Arabic script) and familiarise yourself with simple Jawi symbols and their corresponding Roman alphabets. Discover also the various script types used in many Malay manuscripts.

Participants are welcome to choose either one of the workshops based on their preferred language of instruction.

*Parent and child pairs are welcome. Suitable for children 9 years old and above.

**PUBLIC TOURS**

Every Saturday* and Sunday^ until 25 Feb 2018

* Except 23, 30 Dec 2017, 17 Feb 2018
^ Except 24, 31 Dec 2017, 18 Feb 2018

Time: 1.00pm – 2.00pm
Meeting Point: Level 10, Gallery entrance
Led by docents
Free admission: first-come first-served basis

**SCHOOL TOURS**

The National Library provides guided tours for students and teachers. Interested schools can email visitnls@nlb.gov.sg for more details.

Book early to secure a tour slot!

**TALES OF THE WILY MOUSEDEER**

In Malay folklore, the wily mouse deer is the king of the forest. Stories of how the mouse deer outsmarts animals bigger than itself have entertained adults and children alike for centuries. The earliest manuscript containing the mouse deer story was written over 350 years ago! Learn more about the mouse deer in this travelling mini-exhibition.

The National Library would like to thank Inch Chua for allowing us to use her illustrations.

**SHARE THE STORY:**

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