

THE AMBASSADORIAL MISSION OF LAKSAMANA HANG TUAH FROM
THE KINGDOM OF MALACCA TO THE KINGDOM OF VIJAYANAGARAM
IN SOUTH INDIA

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SINOPSIS

Rencana ini membicarakan tentang pelayaran Hang Tuah ke Benua Keling seperti yang diriwayatkan oleh Hikayat Hang Tuah. Penulis cuba menghubungkan peristiwa yang dikisahkan oleh Hikayat Hang Tuah dengan keadaan yang wujud dalam sejarah Negeri Vijayanagaram pada zaman itu. Walaupun terdapat beberapa anakronisme dalam Hikayat Hang Tuah, namun dalam banyak hal peristiwa yang dilaporkan oleh Hikayat Hang Tuah itu mengandungi kebenaran sejarah.

The name Hang Tuah and those of his intimate friends, namely, Hang Jebat, Hang Kasturi, Hang Lekir, and Hang Lekiu, are indeed very famous and well-known among the Malay people. The stories of their heroic adventures have been told and retold repeatedly since the ancient times until now in the form of folk tales, dramatic performances and film.

The *Hikayat Hang Tuah*¹ (of approximately 146,000 words), which narrates the story of the heroic deeds of Hang Tuah, is one of the greatest and most original of the classical Malay literary works, which contains some historical elements as well. Its author, who remains anonymous, begins the story from the earliest known era of Malay history going back to the origin of the Srivijaya kingdom in Bukit Seguntang, Palembang, Sumatra. He then narrates the account of the heroic adventures of Hang Tuah and his friends in the kingdom of Majapahit in Java, as well as in Inderapura (Pahang) and Malacca in the Malay peninsula, and this is followed by an account of Hang Tuah's travels to the kingdom of Vijayanagaram in South India, which is known as Benua Keling, or the land of Kalinga,² then to China,

¹*Hikayat Hang Tuah* (menurut naskah Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), diselenggarakan dengan diberi pengenalan dan catatan oleh Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cetakan Ketiga, 1968), xix, 523pp.; see also, *Peristiwa-Peristiwa dari Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh A. Bakar Hamid (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979); *Diskusi Peristiwa-Peristiwa dari Hikayat Hang Tuah*, oleh Abu Hassan Sham (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu, 1975); *The Adventures of Hang Tuah*, by M.C. ff Sheppard, illustrated by Kathleen Walker (Singapore: Donald Moore for Eastern University Press Ltd., fourth edition, 1959); *The Story of Hang Tuah*, by Buyong (Yusof) bin Adil (Singapore: Geliga, 1957).

²The term *Keling* is used in the Malay peninsula and the archipelago to designate the people of South India, especially those from the Coromandel coast of South India, and the word is derived apparently from the term *Kalinga* meaning the Southeastern coastal territory of peninsular India. See also R. Braddell, "An introduction to the study of ancient times in the Malay peninsula and the Straits of Malacca," *JMBRAS.*, Vol. 13, pt. 2 (1935), p. 105; G. Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968), p. 30.

Thailand and Turkey. The *HHT* concludes with a brief account of the circumstances leading to the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese (1511 A.D.). Several of the incidents mentioned in the *HHT* world seem to have been historical events, and some of them are in fact mentioned also in the classical Malay historical work intitled *Sejarah Melayu* in somewhat modified form.¹ However, the author of the *HHT* does not seem to be concerned about the historical sequence of events and this has given rise to certain anachronisms to be found in his work. For example, the great era of Majapahit kingdom (1331–1364 A.D.) is juxtaposed together with the period of Malacca's greatness (1456–1511 A.D.). Moreover, Hang Tuah himself is portrayed as an immortal hero in the service of almost all the rulers of Malacca since the kingdom was founded circa 1403 A.D., until its fall to the Portuguese in 1511 A.D. However, this does not mean that the author of *HHT* was not aware of human mortality. On the contrary, he was, indeed, fully aware of it. But, as Hang Tuah, whose adventures he narrates, was an extraordinary person or a 'superman', the story of his greatness knows no fixed period of time in the *HHT*.

The *HHT* is believed to have been composed in the period between 1641 A.D. and 1736 A.D., probably in the kingdom of Malacca.² There are no less than ten manuscript versions of the work, written in Perso-Arabic (Jawi) script, the earliest known manuscript (Leiden Code 1762) dating back to 1758 A.D.³

Laksamana Hang Tuah

Though Hang Tuah is depicted in the *HHT* more like an epic hero, there is no doubt about the historicity of the person named Hang Tuah in Malay history. Indeed, according to the classical Malay historical work *Sejarah Melayu*, Hang Tuah was conferred with the title of *Laksamana* (Laksmana) during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah (1459–1477 A.D.),⁴ and by virtue of the conferment of the title *Laksamana*, Hang Tuah's status in the royal audience-hall was equal to that of the Bendahara or the Prime Minister, and Dato' Naradiraja, and whenever Dato' Naradiraja was absent, it was the *Laksamana* who acted for him as the bearer of the sword of the state.⁵ The conferment of the title *Laksamana* on Hang Tuah, who was a high-placed

¹ *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cetakan Ketiga, 1968), p. xi; see also Ahmad Sarji, *Hang Tuah dalam Hikayat Hang Tuah dan Sejarah Melayu*, Latihan Ilmiah untuk ijazah B.A. Hons., Jabatan Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1961 (Unpublished).

² *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cetakan Ketiga, 1968), p. xii.

³ The editions of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* include those of Shellabear (in Jawi script, 4 volumes, Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1908), Balai Postaka (Djakarta, 1929), Djambatan and Gunung Agung (in Jawi script, edited by Abas Dato' Pamunchak Nan Sati, Djakarta, 1960), and Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cetakan Pertama, 1964).

⁴ "Sejarah Melayu, Raffles ms., edited by R.O. Winstedt," *JMBRAS.*, Vol. 16, pt. 3 (1938), p. 113; *Sejarah Melayu*, diusahakan oleh W.G. Shellabear (Kuala Lumpur, 1967), pp. 113 and 132; *Sejarah Melayu, or Malay Annals*, translated by C.C. Brown (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 77.

⁵ "Sejarah Melayu, Raffles ms., edited by R.O. Winstedt," *JMBRAS.*, Vol. 16, pt. 3 (1938), p. 114.

dignitary in the ruler's immediate vicinity, is apparently based not only on the pre-Islamic royal Malay tradition which characterised the Malay ruler as the manifestation of the ideal king Rama, but also on a popular Indian tradition which refers to Rama as having appointed his younger brother Laksmana as the commander-in-chief of his realm at the time of his enthronement as king of Ayodhya.¹ It is also significant to note that Laksamana Hang Tuah indeed identified himself as the commander-in-chief of the king of Malacca.² As regards the title *Laksamana* being used in Malay to designate the Guardian of the sea-coast or the Admiral of the Naval fleet in the Malay kingdoms, this usage came into being apparently because the admiral played the role of the commander-in-chief in the Malay maritime kingdoms.

Hang Tuah's Mission

According to the *HHT*, Laksamana Hang Tuah is chosen by the Sultan of Malacca as his envoy to the kingdom of Vijayanagaram, not only because he knows the language of Benua Keling,³ but also because he is well-versed in the art of diplomacy.⁴

Laksamana Hang Tuah is accompanied on his mission by his friend Tun Kasturi, who as the deputy envoy is conferred with the title of Maharaja Setia by the Sultan of Malacca.

Laksamana Hang Tuah is entrusted with an epistle from the Sultan of Malacca to the ruler of Vijayanagaram, and in this document the king of Vijayanagaram is addressed as Seri Sultan Benua Keling and he is also described as the younger brother (*adinda*) of the Malacca ruler.⁵ The family relationship of the Sultan of Malacca to the king of Vijayanagaram is also mentioned in other contexts, of the *HHT*.⁶

¹ A. Ziesenis, "Funktion und Stellung des Laksamana am Hofe der Malaiischen Sultane," *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. XV (1937), pp. 72-75; C. Hooykaas, "Laks (a)mana at Malay courts," *JOIB*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (September 1956), pp. 1-2.

² *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Pustaka, Cetakan Ketiga, 1968), p. 135; *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Weltevreden: Balai Poestaka, 1930), Jilid I, p. 140.

³ When Laksamana Hang Tuah presents his credentials to the ruler of Vijayanagaram, he explains to the ruler that he learned the language of Benua Keling from a *lebai* (an Islamic religious officiant/teacher) in the kingdom of Majapahit in Java, Indonesia. *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Cetakan Ketiga, 1968), p. 350. It is, of course, open to speculation whether the language which he is said to have spoken melodiously was Tamil or Telugu.

⁴ *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad, p. 339.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁶ For example, the great reception extended to Laksamana Hang Tuah on his arrival in Vijayanagaram is attributed to the fact that the rulers of Vijayanagaram and Malacca were brothers. *Ibid.*, p. 349. It may be also noted in this connexion that according to the author of the *HHT*, when the Benua Keling did not have a proper king or government, a prince of the Malacca kingdom, named Sang Jaya Nantaka, accompanied a wealthy merchant named Paramadevan (who used to be a frequent visitor to Malacca) to Benua Keling and it was the prince from Malacca who became the ruler of Vijayanagaram. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-89.

Hang Tuah's Voyage

Hang Tuah and his entourage sail in twelve sea-going vessels for eleven days and nights before they reach the sea-port town of Nagapattinam, and their arrival is announced by a burst of royal gun-salute.¹

The sea-port official known as Shahbandar, meets Laksamana Hang Tuah, who informs the official of his ambassadorial mission from the Sultan of Malacca to king *Kisna Rayan*² of *Bijaya Nagaram* (or Vijayanagaram).

Hang Tuah in Vijayanagaram

The news is then conveyed to a prominent merchant named Nala Sang Guna, who proceeds to the capital of Vijayanagaram, which is said to have been located at a distance of seven days' journey from Nagapattinam, to inform king *Kisna Rayan* of Laksamana Hang Tuah's arrival. In the meantime, the visitors from Malacca are accommodated in the residential premises of a large godown.³

After Nala Sang Guna has obtained king *Kisna Rayan*'s consent to receive the mission from Malacca, Laksamana Hang Tuah and his entourage proceed on horseback to Vijayanagaram. The epistle and gifts from the Sultan of Malacca are carried by elephants.

On arrival in the city of Vijayanagaram, Hang Tuah observes that the gateway-towers of the city are adorned with beautiful stone sculptures depicting the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He also notices several temples, mosques and trading emporia where merchants from various lands are to be found.⁴

After their arrival in the audience-hall, Laksamana Hang Tuah addresses the king in the language of Vijayanagaram, and the king and the courtiers are amazed and pleased to hear Laksamana Hang Tuah speaking in their language so fluently and melodiously.⁵

¹ During the journey by sea, Hang Tuah and his entourage encounter an island named Biram Dewa, where no one has so far dared to alight. Before Hang Tuah decides to visit the island, he prays to Allah Ta'ala for help in reducing the force of typhoon. After he lands on the island by himself, Hang Tuah meets a sage named Nabi Khidhir, who predicts that Hang Tuah will not only be successful in his mission but he will also proceed to China as the envoy of the king of Vijayanagaram. The sage also gives Hang Tuah a fruit with the instruction that on his arrival in Benua Keling he should plant a seed of the fruit there, so that it will produce leaves, flowers and fruits. Hang Tuah accepts the gift and returns to his vessel and continues his voyage towards Benua Keling. Subsequently, in accordance with the instruction of Nabi Khidhir, Hang Tuah plants the seed in the garden of the city of Vijayanagaram and king *Kisna Rayan* is amazed to see the seed growing into a fruit-bearing tree and he also tastes a fruit of the mysterious tree. *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kasim Ahmad, pp. 341-343 and 358-359.

² The name *Kisna Rayan* is apparently derived from the name of Krishnadeva Raya of Tuluva dynasty, who reigned over the kingdom of Vijayanagaram from 1509 to 1529 A.D., with great distinction. See K.A. Nilakanta Sastra *A History of South India from prehistoric times to the fall of Vijayanagar* (Madras: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1958), pp. 267-275.

³ *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad, p. 345.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁵ *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad, p. 349.

King Kisna Rayan enquires about the wellbeing of his ancestral relation in Bukit Seguntang in Sumatra and his brother in the kingdom of Malacca. Then the king ceremonially invests the envoy Laksamana Hang Tuah with the royal golden shawl. The visitors from Malacca are then lavishly entertained at a royal banquet, accompanied by music and melodious songs in the language of Kalinga.¹

Hang Tuah's Wisdom and Skill

One day Nala Sang Guna enquires of Hang Tuah whether he knows of any cure for childlessness. Hang Tuah replies that he knows of the remedy and subsequently prepares the drug (*madat*) and sends it to Nala Sang Guna.²

During Laksamana Hang Tuah's sojourn in the capital of Vijayanagaram, he demonstrates his riding skill to king Kisna Rayan by mounting a powerful horse which has not been mounted by anyone else. He also proves his prowess as the commander-in-chief by easily vanquishing the best swordsman of Vijayanagaram.³ Then at the king's suggestion, Laksamana Hang Tuah comes forward to serve as the king's envoy to China.⁴

One day, king Kisna Rayan decides to visit Nala Sang Guna's residence. In order to test Nala Sang Guna's ability to cope with any difficulty, the king orders his subjects not to supply fire-wood to Nala Sang Guna for the preparation of the feast for the king. When Nala Sang Guna is unable to obtain fire-wood from any source, he seeks Hang Tuah's advice. Hang Tuah suggests that cloth, dipped in oil, be used as fuel for cooking. In accordance with this advice, the cloth from Nala Sang Guna's godown is dipped in oil and used as fuel to cook the various dishes for the king, who is greatly impressed with the wisdom of Hang Tuah.⁵

Hang Tuah's Visit to Cidambaram

After a stay of seven days in the capital, arrangements are made by Nala Sang Guna at the king's command for Laksamana Hang Tuah and his entourage to visit the various important places of interest in the kingdom. Accompanied by Nala Sang Guna, Laksamana Hang Tuah visits the temple at Cidambaram, and he is said to be

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

² *Ibid.*, p. 351.

³ *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad, pp. 360–361. It is known that in Vijayanagaram, nobles settled their disputes by duelling and kings like Vira Narasimha (1505–1509 A.D) rewarded skill in swordsmanship by presenting winners with beautiful girls. See K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, p. 267.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 354 – 356.

greatly impressed by the beauty of sculptures in the temple.¹

Laksamana Hang Tuah then returns briefly to the capital of Vijayanagaram to bid farewell to king Kisna Rayan. The visitors from Malacca set sail from Nagapattinam towards home and to China, where Laksamana Hang Tuah is to play the role of king Kisna Rayan's envoy.²

Conclusion

It would seem evident from the above summary of the salient points of information to be found in the *HHT* about Laksamana Hang Tuah's ambassadorial mission to the kingdom of Vijayanagaram that friendly relations between the kingdom of Malacca and the kingdom of Vijayanagaram were maintained by the exchange of royal epistle and gifts sent through special envoys and that the relations between the two kingdoms were so cordial as to induce the author of the *HHT* to depict the rulers of the two kingdoms as brothers, tracing their origin back to the founder of the famous Malay kingdom of Srivijaya in Palembang. Though the historical veracity of the latter point may not be proved easily, it does seem that such a detail is somewhat akin to certain known cases of Indian warrior princes or Brahmana such as Kaundinya assuming the rulership of the ancient kingdom of Funan in the Indo-Chinese peninsula,³ with the difference that, according to the author of *HHT*, it was a prince from the kingdom of Malacca who became the ruler of Vijayanagaram in Benua Keling. Though there are several chronological anachronisms to be found in the narration of *HHT*, nevertheless it would seem that the surviving text of the *HHT* has retained that memories of certain events which may well have been historical in character, and perhaps further research relating to the sources of the history of Vijayanagaram in South India may throw some light on this question.

Abbreviations

HHT.	=	<i>Hikayat Hang Tuah</i>
JMBRAS	=	<i>Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,</i> Kuala Lumpur.
JOIB	=	<i>Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda.</i>

¹ *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, diselenggarakan oleh Kassim Ahmad, p. 351. The temple of Cidambaram, visited by Laksamana Hang Tuah, is apparently that of Lord Nataraja, which dates back to the seventh century A.D. According to the *HHT*, the term *Cidambaram* itself means 'temple'. It is noteworthy that according to Tamil tradition the term *koyil*, meaning 'temple', generally refers to the temple of Nataraja at Cidambaram. Again, according to *HHT*, gold is presented by merchants to the temple and in this way the temple has accumulated a large amount of gold. It may be noted in this connexion that the roofs of the *vimana*, or the main tower, over the *sanctum sanctorum* (*Cit-Sabha*) and the sacred dance-hall (*Kanaka-Sabha*) in the temple of Lord Nataraja are plaited with goldleaf. See *TamilkkalaikkalanCIyam* (Tamil encyclopedia), Vol. IV (Madras: Tamil Valarccikkalam, 1956), pp. 658-661.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 363-364.

³ Cf. G. Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968), p. 37.