SYAIR RAJA TEDUNG DENGAN RAJA KATAK
THE POEM OF THE COBRA-KING
AND THE FROG-KING

A FACSIMILE EDITION WITH TRANSCRIPTION,
TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF
MANUSCRIPT KL 161
IN THE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIDEN

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Leiden 2002
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Facsimile of manuscript Leiden, KL 161
INTRODUCTION

This volume of *Manuscripta Indonesica* not only contains a facsimile-cum-description of the manuscript but also a transcription, translation and an interpretation of the *Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak* as contained in manuscript Kl. 161 in the Library of Leiden University, where it is part of the permanent loan of the Dutch Bible Society. As the basis for this edition we used the MA thesis on this manuscript by A.W.H. Massier (1988). We thank Dr. Massier for his kind permission to make use of and rework the materials of his thesis.

Each transcription of a Malay text from *jawi* to roman script is an interpretation. In most cases we have to take for granted the editor’s choice. In an edition such as the present one, in which also the original text of the manuscript is presented, it is very easy (and very much encouraged) to check the interpretation by the editors against the original. That is also the reason why such an edition allows for more freedom of spelling towards standardized forms. The immediate advantage is greater accessibility of the text to the reader, who is not always convenient with the sometimes erratic ways of spelling traditional Malay.

So, although duplicated forms in the original are always indicated by the use of *angka dua*, there is now no need to write *sehari2*; instead we use *sehari-hari*. Because of the Riau-Johor providence of the text, we have used the *Kamus Dewan* (3rd edition) as our reference for Malay spelling. In the few cases where this Malaysian dictionary does not indicate a standard form and gives both words as separate entries without cross references (e.g. *lata* vs. *leta*), we used the spelling of the manuscript (*lata* in this case). Yet, full consistency is not possible, maybe even not desirable. For instance, we retained the consistent spelling of *menangarkan* (for *mendengarkan*) and *telampak* (*telapak*).

Leiden, 1st January 2002

Gijs Koster & Roger Tol
THE MANUSCRIPT

As far as we know there is only one manuscript extant of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, viz. Kl. 161 in the Library of the University of Leiden. This anonymous and undated codex unicus is part of the collection of manuscripts obtained by the Dutch missionary, Bible translator and lexicographer H.C. Klinkert (1829-1913). Almost all of these manuscripts he acquired during his stay in Tanjung Pinang on the island of Bintan in the Riau archipelago from 1864 to mid-1866, and in Singapore until mid-1867. He reported regularly on his acquisitions in his correspondence to his superiors at the Dutch Bible Society (Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap). More details on Klinkert’s stay in Riau and his correspondence are mentioned in Massier (1988:40-49).

A brief codicological inspection of Kl. 161 reveals the year ‘1863’ in a watermark and thus leaves little doubt that this manuscript was produced between 1863 and 1867. On the basis of Klinkert’s correspondence with his superiors we may narrow down this period and surmise that he obtained the manuscript between August 1866 and the summer of 1867. On 23 July 1866 Klinkert sent a list of the manuscripts he had acquired to the Society of Arts and Sciences in Batavia (Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen), on which this manuscript is not mentioned (Notulen 1867). In the following year Klinkert obtained another 73 manuscripts, both in Riau and in Singapore, among which the manuscript containing the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak.

It is not possible to determine whether Klinkert had commissioned to copy this manuscript from another one or that he just bought the manuscript as is. Another point is if the manuscript constitutes a copy or an autograph. There are a few indications that the manuscript is a copy and not an autograph. Possibly the strongest indication is a textual error on f. 7v 2b, where the text reads berteleku (which makes no sense) instead of bertelekan siku ‘to lean on one’s elbow’, as in f. 3v 2b, a common mistake in the act of copying known as saut du même-av-même. Another error that might be attributed to a scribal mistake is found on f. 9r 3c, where the text reads akan, ‘to be (in the future)’, instead of makan, ‘to eat’.

Actually, the most intriguing error is on f. 14r 6b where we read katak, ‘frog’, when clearly tedung, ‘cobra’ is meant. Of these three errors, only the first one seems to be hard evidence of a scribal error. The other two could easily have occurred in an autograph as well: we should always bear in mind that an autograph is not by definition a perfect, faultless, text.

When we compare the watermark on f. 4 and f. 17 (*K & S* 1863 with Beetle) with similar watermarks found the Klinkert collection, they point to Penyengat as the place of production. In that period, the papermakers Kerestin & Sohn produced paper with at least two types of related watermarks. The one found in our manuscript also occurs in fifteen other manuscripts from the Klinkert collection, whereas the watermark with 1863 and Beetle plus the full names ‘Kerestin & Sohn’ is found in another five manuscripts (Iskandar 1999: 1081,1089). In three instances the location and year of copying is mentioned, all three being Penyengat and the year 1865 (or 1282=1865-1866).

Manuscript Kl.161 contains 40 pages (numbered as folios), with the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak written from f. 2r to f. 19r. The size of the manuscript is 20.7 x 16.7 cm. The text is written within a single line frame in two columns, which are separated by two vertical lines in the middle. The frame measures 13(b) x 15(b) cm; the top margin is on average 2.7 cm, the bottom margin on average 2.2 cm. The frame lines are in black ink, partly drawn over the original blue lines. On the empty f. 1r and f. 1v the (original) frame is executed in blue ink without the two vertical middle lines. On the last three empty pages (f. 19v, f. 20r, f. 20v) the same frame in blue ink is drawn, to which are added the two vertical lines in the middle, drawn in pencil. Each page has fourteen double text lines, i.e. seven
quatruits, except for the first and the last page, consisting of eight and ten double lines respectively. Both the first and the last page have coloured decorations. The one on f. 2r depicts red and yellow snakes in an arch with green leaves. The left and right hand sides of the arch show stalks with flowers in red, yellow and green. Under the arch, the title of the poem is written: Bahwa ini Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, “This is the Poem of The Cobra-King and the Frog-King”. The space left under the last lines of the poem on f. 19r is filled up with a decoration of flowers, leaves and stalks in red, yellow and green colours. The handwriting of our unknown scribe is very neat and elegant with all dots of the letters carefully written and in a number of cases partly or fully vocalised (e.g. ulahan on f. 4v 7d and lintas on f. 7v 6c). He writes catchwords under the last line of the left column on each right hand page (folio verso side). All this tidiness adds to the pleasure of reading this text, not only regarding its contents but also as regards its form.

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL LAMPOON

If we may call an animal story a tale which has as its main protagonist an animal possessing the intelligence and power of speech of a human being, there can be little doubt that Malay traditional literature possesses a rich treasure of such stories, comprising a variety of genres. In oral literature perhaps the most familiar genre of the animal story is the Kancil story, which tells of the wily Mouse-Deer, who by its sheer wit always manages to get the better of its far stronger animal opponents (McCom, 1971: 71-84).

The oral genre of the Kancil story is so familiar to us that it may perhaps lead us to forget that manuscript literature, too, has a rich store of animal stories with their own genres. Of these genres the two most conspicuous ones are the parodic animal romance and the didactic animal fable. Different from the animal stories in the oral tradition, most of the animal stories in manuscript are not only found in prose but also in verse, namely in the form called syair. The first to draw scholarly attention to the animal stories (sometimes also flower stories) in the verse form syair, that can be found in the Malay manuscripts, was the German Malayist Hans Overbeck in an article discussing a number of animal and flower syairs (s). In that article he suggested viewing them as ‘little romances’ (Overbeck 1934: 108). Subsequent research by me has confirmed that it is indeed feasible to discern a genre which may be called the parodic animal (or flower) romance because it thrives on playfully parodying the Panji romance.

Here my concern is not with the parodic animal romance but with the other major genre of animal story found in the manuscripts, namely the didactic animal fable. The Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, which is also mentioned by Overbeck in his article about animal and flower syairs, is a sample of this genre.

The Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak tells of a Cobra-King who, with devious purpose, persuades a Frog-King to accept him as his retainer and make use of his services. The only reward he asks for in return is that each day he be given a few frogs as food. Although by God’s Will it has already been ordained that the Cobra and the Frog shall for ever be enemies, the foolish Frog-King refuses to listen to the warnings of his ministers and accepts the offer of the Cobra-King, because in this way he hopes to be able to strengthen his authority as ruler.

Each day the Frog-King makes the round of his kingdom, the pond, enthroned on the head of the Cobra-King, a sight that strikes fear and terror into the hearts of his subjects. As time goes by His Majesty becomes ever fonder of his new retainer and entrusts him with ever greater authority over his subjects. Each time the Cobra-King requests that the number of frogs given to him be increased, the Frog-King without giving it another thought immediately grants his wish, to the great dismay of his ministers. As a result many frogs flee the pond to save their lives. Finally there are no more frogs left in the pond, but the Frog-King and a loyal old minister. Now the Cobra-King reveals his true purpose in becoming the Frog-King’s retainer and in one gulp swallows them both.

Without claiming that this is all that can be said about the meaning of this poem, I will propose two readings for the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak. In order to be able to

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1 This chapter is a reworked version of a paper presented by Gijs L. Koster at the Second International Malaysian Studies Conference at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1989.

2 I found that poems such as the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak (Poem of the Shad and the Climbing Perch), the Syair Buah-Buahan (Poem of the Fruits) and the Syair Nuri (Poem of Princess Lory) all follow the same pattern of plot. Key themes and motifs familiar to us from the Panji romances are extensively parodied in them to comical effect (Koster 1977: 202-8; 227-35; Koster 1996: 25-6). For a characterisation of the genre of the Panji romance I refer to Koster (1997: 161-98).
produce these two readings I will try to retrace - however incomplete and provisional the result must inevitably remain - something of that intricate network of intertextual relations that must once have been perceived to surround this syair and must have helped the Malay listener or reader to understand what the poem was all about.

As I hope to demonstrate, this poem may on its simplest level be read as a didactic animal fable and as a work primarily belonging to the sphere of what may be called the Indian - and Persian - derived 'wisdom literature' as found in the Hikayat Panca Tanderan (Abdullah 1965) and the Hikayat Kailih dan Daminah (Gonggrijp 1892; Brandes 1931). On this level the Syair Raja Temung dengan Raja Katak may be interpreted as an allegorical story teaching a general lesson to Everyman about his foibles. Here the moral of its story is that for one's own good one must at all times be able to tell semblance from true meaning. As we will see, the lesson that one has to be able to discern semblance from reality also is central to the second reading I will propose for the Syair Raja Temung dengan Raja Katak. My second reading will among other things be based on certain intertextual relations in the poem which shows some works of traditional Malay historiography, such as the Tohfishal-Nafis and the Sejarah Melanau. On this level I will interpret the poem as a political lampoon, which, disguising certain historical persons and events known from the history of the Malay world in the garb of allegory, makes them the butt of its satire. Here I proceed another suggestion made by Overbeck, which has meanwhile also been confirmed by my own research in the case of some parodic animal romances, namely, that 'the stories contained in the Malay animal and flower shairs are based on real incidents' (Overbeck 1934: 108-9).

The Syair Raja Temung dengan Raja Katak as a didactic animal fable about Everyman's foibles

A good point from which to start interpreting the Syair Raja Temung dengan Raja Katak is the close intertextual relations it has especially with the Hikayat Panca Tanderan. This hikayat, a collection of animal fables in prose, is a translation into Malay of a version of the Sanskrit Tanmul of the Panca Tantra. The translation was made by Abdullah al-Munsyi and was first published by him in 1835 (Abdullah 1965). In Abdullah's hikayat we find a story about an old snake and a Frog-King which, albeit not without meaningful changes and adaptations, must have been a major source of inspiration for the author of the Syair Raja Temung dengan Raja Katak.

In Abdullah's Hikayat Panca Tanderan (Abdullah 1965: 80-81) we are told of an old snake, who is no longer capable of catching frogs but wants to eat all the frogs in a pond. It therefore sits down on its rim pretending to be a recluse, seated on the back of one of his men, has to pass by, accompanied by all his retainers and his gamelan orchestra. On seeing the meditating snake, his ministers propose that His Majesty makes the reptile his personal mount. They make this proposition arguing that, since all the world knows that the snake is the natural enemy of the frog, this will make their ruler renowned throughout the world. Foolishly the King allows himself to be persuaded by his ill-considered advice and offers the snake one frog a day in return for the right to use him as his mount. This offer is gladly accepted by the snake. Finally there are no more frogs left in the pond and the hungry snake now swallows the Frog-King.

The above story comes from the (originally Sanskrit) Pancatajana tradition. As the Sanskritist Van Daalen has pointed out, this collection of fables was originally written to teach certain useful lessons to the sons of kings. The lessons it teaches are about friendship or, more specifically, about being able to discern who is a true friend and who is a false one. In general, its fables teach what is called in Sanskrit niti and in English 'worldly wisdom'. All the stories of the Pancatajana emphasise the vital importance for a ruler to be able to discern the true meaning which lies behind the ostensible meaning of the actions of his ministers. In each of them the protagonist is put to the test by the action of an antagonist, and succeeds or fails in understanding its true meaning, namely either eminence or friendship.

As lessons for future kings the Pancatajana fables give them the advice about keeping their eyes wide open and maintaining a close watch over their ministers, because they may prove to be unworthy of their trust. Conversely, they enjoin them to take care not to be hasty in condemning a minister, because what may have seemed treacherous or inimical behaviour, may in the end turn out to have really been an act of friendship or loyalty. These stories also show what evil consequences attend upon the behaviour of someone who has foolishly lost his grasp on reality, such as the megalomania of the frog-king who rides on the back of the snake but forgets that in the meantime that reptile is eating his kingdom empty. (Van Daalen in Idena and others 1993: 171-4). It is not difficult to see that the above features are not found only in the fables in the original Pancatajana and in Abdullah's version of it, but that the Frog-King and the Snake-Mountain in the Malay Hikayat Panca Tanderan, but also in the story told in the Syair Raja Temung dengan Raja Katak. In the opening scene of this poem, the antagonist - the Cobra-King - is introduced to us as a dangerous and treacherous creature, whose wish it is to deceive the Frog-King and in this way to teach him a humiliating lesson: Beseeking God for His help, please listen, sirs, to this tale about the Cobra-King, that noble animal. / Day and night he kept fretting and moping, about how he could bring about the ruin of the Frog-King. / That Cobra was an accomplished snake, clever at concealing himself and deceiving, and he was poisonous beyond description. / Once he had been bitten, it was difficult to find an antidote. / Then the Cobra, that perfect animal, had an idea: / "Let's teach that Frog a lesson in true meaning! / If I can deceive him, I will by doing so, / humiliate all frogs!" (f. 2r 1-3).

With these words the stage is set for the enactment of a comedy. This comedy, which is about a foolish character being tricked by a clever character, is centred on the importance, not only for young future rulers but for each one of us, of being able to tell semblance from reality or, in other words, to discriminate ostensible surface meaning from true meaning.

When the Cobra-King introduces himself to the Frog-King for the first time, he holds out to him several signifiers in which a quite different true meaning larks beneath the surface of their ostensible one:

1 I beg for your forgiveness, O accomplished king. / As for the reason your slave has come to you, my lord, it is that he wishes to put his fate into your hands / and faithfully carry out your commands every day. [...] For long it has already been Our desire / to teach you the magic of the
The first ostensible meaning deliberately held out to the Frog-King by the Cobra-King is of himself as a loyal retainer (hamba) whose only wish is to carry out His Majesty’s every command. Another is that he also identifies himself as a pundit (pendeta) who has come to court because he desires to teach His Majesty a magic formula (ilmu) to help him strengthen his power over his subjects. Yet another surface meaning offered to the Frog is that of the lessons the snake promises to give: a knowledge, which will be beneficial to His Majesty and can be learned without entailing many requirements or great expense.

Had our dear Frog-King not been so foolish, so puffed up with self-importance and so self-righteous, he would perhaps have understood that something was wrong. He would then have wondered whether the snake’s flattering declarations of humility and loyalty could really be sincere. And he would then have noticed that there was a certain false ring to the eloquent claims and fine-sounding promises of this pretend pundit and obedient retainer. But alas, the king is totally deaf to the messages whispered by the little inconsistencies and ambiguities in the behaviour and the words of the snake, that betray the hidden presence of rather different true meanings.

One sign that should have alerted the Frog-King to something might be amiss and that the claimed identity of the snake as a humble and loyal retainer might just be a fake, is that the snake refers to himself as beta, the term which is commonly used by Malay royalty where its British counterpart speaks of ‘we’. What should also have awakened the Frog’s mistrust in the pretended humility of the Cobra is the implication of his proposition to become his teacher (guru) and make him his pupil (muflah). That such a mistrust would indeed have been well founded is betrayed by the snake when he initially calls the reward he expects to be given in return for his loyal services not a fee (upah) — that is, a payment by a superior to an inferior in return for the performance of labour — but a gift as it is exchanged between equals (kadiah) (Wilkinson 1943: I. 386).

What should also have set our dear Frog-King doubting is the ambiguity of the words with which the Cobra talks about the magic he wants to teach him. According to the snake his magic can be studied without much pain, but does this not also imply that it will make the Frog suffer some pain after all? There is also a marked ambiguity in the claim of the snake that the study of his magic does not entail many requirements (paksa-memaksah). His words could equally well be understood as meaning ‘it takes only a little bit of forcing’. Are the Cobra’s lessons really beneficial to the Frog-King’s power, as the snake claims them to be? That that creeping reptile really has something else in mind other than to teach him a magic to increase his might, should have been noticed by the Frog when he heard the snake say that he brought precious magic ‘so that We can teach it to Your Highness’ (savya tuanku beta ajarn), words which could equally well mean ‘so that We can teach Your Highness a lesson’.

Hearing only what he wants to hear, the Frog-King swallows the bait of the Cobra hook, line and sinker. He is blissfully unaware that what the snake really means by the magic (ilmu) he wants to teach him is not a formula for ensuring himself of the obedience of his subjects.

What he really offers to teach is a terrible curse (mala petakaka) which will strike him self, so that its study, though seemingly a clever idea, is really folly:

When the Frog heard what the Cobra-King said, ‘he felt greatly pleased with his words and said with a gracious mien: ‘We surrender to you all that We have. ’ [...] When the Frog heard his words he was all smiles. ‘Clear were his thoughts now and he felt delighted. ‘If such is the power of the magic formula teach Us its words this very moment. ’ [...] When the Frog heard his words he said with a kindly smile on his face: ‘If that is all you wish, my dear friend, not to mention two frogs per day, ‘We would even grant you ten’. (f. 2v 3; f. 3r 1; f. 3r 6.)

Even if His Majesty believes everything which he thinks he hears, and accepts the offer of the snake, this is not the case with his ministers. Horrified to see how easily their ruler lets himself be taken in by the flatteries and protestations of loyalty of the Cobra they think to themselves:

‘Our king, that noble animal, has already been deceived, ‘having fallen under the spell of the Cobra, that war-like paladin. Soon we will all be his prisoners. ‘Each of them felt melancholy; ‘they were at their wit’s end about what to do, ‘when they considered that their king, that venerable animal, was no whit different from the Cobra. ‘Impossible that His Majesty does not know ‘that to befriend a cobra is not an easy thing to do! ‘It has been God’s Will since the beginning of time ‘that the frog will be his food.’ (f. 3v 4b-6.)

As his ministers see it, the ‘teachings’ of the Cobra can only bring disaster. They therefore persistently try to drag the king back to reality, by reminding him that the Supreme Creator has of old decreed that the snake shall be the natural enemy of the frog (f. 5r 1a-b). Funnily, one of the ministers, while reasoning with the Frog-King, even points to the story of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Kutak itself as an argument why he should be distrustful of the snake: ‘My lord, don’t you perchance know ‘the story of the Cobra, that war-like paladin?’ (f. 10v 7c-d.)

Alas, all efforts by his loyal ministers to bring him back to sanity remain to no avail. Although they may succeed in temporarily ruffling the Frog-King’s belief in his new friend, the honey-tongued Cobra ultimately each time wins back his trust by his flattering words. All that the ministers accomplish is to provoke the anger of their lord thereby strengthening him in his foolish conviction that it is really they, and not the Cobra, who want to deceive him, as we see in the following passage: Furry with his Majesty his scolded ministers: ‘Hey, you vizier, you, old minister, ‘don’t you dare to put up all this pretence ‘and find fault with the young Cobra, that war-like paladin.’ (f. 5v 2b-d.)

A clear sign that there is no longer any hope that the Frog-King may still wake up to reality is given to us in the episode which tells how the old vizier in a despondent mood goes home, after he has been scolded and dismissed by his lord. On his way he meets a frog with a bristling moustache and spikes on his skin. He proves to be a mighty warrior, who has come all the way from the Kingdom of Pasai to seek an audience with his Frog-King. When the warrior-frog hears from the vizier how badly the Frog-King treats his ministers, even refusing to listen to their advice, he makes the decision to abort his mission and makes an about turn on the spot.

At first sight this episode may perhaps seem a rather superficial and non-functional addition. In order to understand that it indeed has a direct bearing on the fable of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Kutak and to grasp what it really means, it is useful to read it against the interest of the Sejarah Melaka (Genealogy of the Malay Rulers). An indication that it is indeed a foil against which the episode should be read, is given by the poem’s reference to the Kingdom of Pasai. The mention of this toponym, which does not otherwise have a
The function in the story of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, obviously serves as a clue, which has been dropped on purpose by the writer of the poem to help his listeners or readers make sense of this episode and to understand its implications.

In the Sejarah Melayu Pasai is depicted as a great kingdom, that is so proud of its success, it has grown haughty:

At that time there was no city below the wind that was the equal of Melaka, save only Pasai and Hara. The three kingdoms were of equal greatness, so that their rajas, no matter where they stood to each other in point of age, still sent ‘greetings’ only to each other, but the people of Pasai were wont to read as ‘obedience’ the word ‘greetings’ in any letter, no matter whence it came.7

In the Sejarah Melayu Pasai is not only recognized as one of the most powerful kingdoms of the Malay world but also as a major centre of knowledge and religion. This appears, for instance, from its famous story about how the Sultan of Melaka had one of his grandees, a certain Tun Muhammad, memorize the contents of a letter of his to the Sultan of Pasai and then sent him there as a ‘living letter’, to make sure that its wording could not be tampered with. That letter was concerned with a question of Islamic theology and was written to obtain advice from the most learned pundits of that kingdom. Obviously, then, Pasai was considered a fountainhead of learning and wisdom, where sound advice was to be had (A. Samad Ahmad 1979: 233-5).

If we read the episode of the warrior-frog from Pasai in this light it seems likely that the reason why he wants to have an audience with the Frog-King, is that he wants to give his Majesty some good advice, but that, on learning of the ill treatment accorded by the Frog-King to his loyal ministers he immediately abandons this plan. But if that is so, what exactly could the advice have been that he intended to give to the king? To give a plausible answer to that question we can turn to another anecdote in the Sejarah Melayu, which tells that the King of Syahru'n-Nuwi, jealous of the greatness and fame of the kingdom of Pasai, sends the warrior, Awi Dicu, there with four thousand men and a hundred ships.

On arriving in Pasai with his army, Awi Dicu claims they have come to trade and that they bring a message from the King of Syahru'n-Nuwi and a number of big chests full of presents for the ruler of Pasai. Trusting their professed friendly intentions, the Raja of Pasai welcomes the emissaries at his court. When the letter from the Raja of Syahru'n-Nuwi is being read out, at a sign from Awi Dicu four strong war-chiefs, who have been hidden in the chests, jump out and take the Raja of Pasai captive. He is escorted to Syahru'n-Nuwi where he is given the humiliating task of tending the palace fowls (A. Samad Ahmad 1979: 56-7). The moral of this story is obvious: a ruler should not be too trusting or he will end up being deceived and humiliated. Indeed a very useful advice to give to the obdurate Frog-King.

After the Frog-King has dismissed his vizier, the Cobra, that clever flatterer, increasingly gains the royal trust, so much so that the king even orders his subjects on penalty of death to obey whatever orders the snake may give them. And each time the snake requests for an increase in the number of frogs to be given to him daily as food, the king immediately grants his wish, until one fine day the only frogs left in the pond are the king himself and an old minister. At last the Cobra casts off his disguise of humility and obedience and, without mincing his words, announces that the moment has come for ‘the times to change’ (bergilir masanya, f. 18v 2c). The prediction, which has been initially made by the ministers of the

Frog-King on seeing their King fall completely under the spell of the Cobra: ‘...A sign that the end of time is nigh / It is truly astonishing to learn / That a snake and a frog have become friends’ (f. 6v 4b-d), is finally proven correct.

The way the story ends is hardly surprising. At last all semblance is cast off by the snake and he teaches the frog a lesson in true meaning. The Frog-King now becomes aware that what he has learnt from the Cobra is a lesson in stupidity and not a lesson in wisdom or magic power. The Cobra finally shows his true face, namely that of an enemy of the frog who preys on him. When he swallows the Frog-King and his old minister the true meaning of those strange words in which he has earlier protested his loyalty to His Majesty becomes apparent: ‘I am merely your slave at the foot of your coffin.’ (f. 12v 4d.) In his eagerness to hear only what pleases him, the foolish Frog-King must here undoubtedly have heard: ‘Your servant is just a slave under your foot’ (patik nia pacal di bawah telapalku) (f. 5r 6d.)

The way the story of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak is brought to a close is by the rendering of poetic justice: by narrative means the writer condemns whoever has transgressed some law in the moral order of things and rewards whoever has struggled to uphold that law. The Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak may be termed a comedy of forgetfulness about a stupid frog who is tricked by a clever snake. The one who forgets the law and is swallowed by the snake is the unwise Frog-King. The law he forgets is that by the Will of God the snake will never be the friend of the frog. The one who is ever mindful of that law is the clever snake, who is indeed duly rewarded with a last royal snack.

The reason why the Frog-King fails to remember that crucial law is because he allows himself to be overpowered by a desire to acquire power and a great name as king. As a result he fails to tell semblance - that is, friend - from true meaning - that is, enemy, and turns the world upside down, with baleful consequences. And the reader laughs and says: Serves him right, the idiot! We may conclude that, if the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak is read as a didactic animal fable in the Pancatantra tradition, its narrative provides an amusing lesson, which is taught not just for the benefit of kings, but can be profitable to all of us who have to choose our course through life judiciously.

The Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak as a political lampoon on historical events

As we have seen above, by befriending a snake - his natural enemy - the Frog-King turns the world upside down. This concept - that of a topsy-turvy world - is an important literary commonplace (topos, cliché). The use of this cliché is not limited to works of playful fiction, such as the Syair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak. It is also found in serious works of historiography, for instance in the Hikayat Siak. Thus, in order to prepare the reader for its story about how the throne of Siak is usurped by an Arab adventurer, the hikayat comments:

And because luck had deserted these kings of Siak who took to the sea, the times were about to change. The state of the world was in a constant flux; what was above descended to below; and what was below rose up to above.8

This commonplace of the world upside down is found not only in traditional Malay literature, but also in other traditional literatures, such as those of Europe and China. In the medieval literatures of Europe we meet this cliché in proverbs as well as in other genres. There it

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5 Adapun pada zaman itu sebahu negeri pun di bawah angin ini tiada menyamai Melaka, melaluian Pasai dan Hara, tiga buah negeri itu sama besar; tua mda pun rajanya berkirom salam juga; tetapi orang Pasai, barang dari mana surat datang, jika salam pun dibacakannya sembah juga. (A. Samad Ahmad 1979: 144).

6 Dan kerana tuah tiada lagi kepada segala raja-raja Siak yang ke lahat ini, hendak berubah tempoh. Adat duha berganti-ganti, yang di atas turun ke bermah; dan yang di bawah naik ke atas (Muhammad Yusoff Hashim 1992: 552-3.).
appears in the form of such normally impossible events or situations (adyana) as the dog who flees from the hare, the fish who hunts the beaver, the lamb who preys on the wolf, the ass who sings while plucking the lute, or the swan who keeps silent while the crows make a great din. In the medieval literatures of Europe these motifs are often used as a complaint about the times that are deemed to be out of joint, as an indictment of the degeneration of the world (Curtius 1996: 95-8).

The use of the cliché of the world upside down in the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak is one of the signs that draw our attention to another possible reading of the poem, namely as a satirical lampoon. Other signs suggesting such a reading will come to our notice if we compare the story told in the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak with the story about the Cobra and the Frog-King as told in Abdullah’s Hikayat Panca Tanderan. We will then notice that, if the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak has used Abdullah’s story as his point of departure, in doing so it has introduced some significant changes.

Both in the Hikayat Panca Tanderan as well as in the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak the Frog-King engages the serpent as his personal mount and sits on its head riding around the kingdom, but with two conspicuous differences, namely, on whose initiative he takes this foolish step and with what purpose. In the Hikayat Panca Tanderan he does so following the advice of his ministers, who think that this will make him famous throughout the world. In the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak, however, he does so on his own initiative, and in order to strike fear into the hearts of his subjects, so that they will have more respect for him and will recognize his apparently not very great authority.

What is also not found in the hikayat is the snake’s offer to teach him a magic formula to control his subjects’ loyalty. This offer is accepted by the Frog-King with apparent relief as appears from the description ‘clear were his thoughts now and he felt relieved’ (f. 3r b). Why, so we wonder, does he feel so relieved? What is also puzzling are the words with which the Frog-King accepts the snake’s offer:

“If such is the power of the magic formula / teach Us its words this very moment. // If that’s what it is, Our subjects, too, will love Us / for We are descended from an ancient lineage. // Even if treachery has been committed, so what? / May the curse from Macassar strike them all!” (f. 3r 1c-2).

Why, so we immediately wonder, is he so concerned with being considered by his subjects as a descendant of an ancient lineage? Why does he make a totally unmotivated reference to treachery? And why does he refer to the magic he hopes to learn from the snake as a mantra – literally, a whisper (kecut) – from Macassar?

In the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak the Frog-King not only willfully ignores all the warnings of his ministers that the snake is deceiving him, but even goes so far as to conclude a pact with the Cobra and swear an oath of mutual loyalty with him (f. 4v 2c: 10v 1a). This pact and the oath, too, are not mentioned in the Hikayat Panca Tanderan. Nor is there any mention in the hikayat of his forcing his ministers, with threats and curses, to obey whatever orders the Cobra may give them (f. 10r 2-3), a conduct which surely is most unbecoming of a Malay ruler, who should take care never to humiliate his subjects. Yet another event not mentioned in the hikayat is that, owing to the tyrannical behaviour of the Frog-King, many of his subjects flee the pond, seeking their safety elsewhere.

It is only if we read the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak against the foil of what we know of eighteenth century Malay history that it becomes clear why and with what intention the writer of this poem may have made all these changes to the story of the snake and the Frog-King as told in Abdullah’s Hikayat Panca Tanderan. On this level of reading the Siyair Raja Tedung with Raja Katak turns into a satirical lampoon on important political events of the time. Among the events it refers to – taking care to disguise them in the garb of allegory – the most important is the oath of loyalty sworn in 1721 between Sultan Sulaiman of Johor, and the five Bugis princes brothers. These five Bugis princes were adventurers from South Celebes, who at that time had already established themselves at Linggi in Selangor on the Malay Peninsula (Andaya 1975: 304-15).

By swearing this oath of loyalty with the Bugis princes and making one of them the first Bugis Yang Dipertuan Muda (Vice-Roy) of Johor, Sultan Sulaiman formally gave these newcomers a position of power within the body politic of his kingdom (Andaya 1975: 95-7). Sulaiman’s pact with the Bugis was a reward for the help they had given him in ousting a usurper from the throne of Johor, namely the ruler of Siak, Raja Keik. In 1718 Raja Keik had attacked Johor and had easily conquered it, ousting its sultan, Sulaiman’s father, Sultan Abdul Jalil Riayat Syah. The reason why Raja Keik had been able to defeat Johor so easily was that its then reigning sultan could not command sufficient loyalty from his subjects (Andaya 1975: 333-363).

Abdul Jalil had become sultan of Johor in 1699, as successor to Sultan Mahmud of Johor, whose Prime Minister he had previously been. In that year Sultan Mahmud had been killed by one of his nobles because of his tyrannical behaviour – an act which, however, understandable it might have been, was in Malay political thought condemned as treason (derhalha) and believed to be punished by the wrongdoer being struck by the supernatural power of the kingship (ditimpau dahai) against which he had revolted. Because Sultan Mahmud had no heir, the nobles of Johor had subsequently elected the Prime Minister as his successor (Andaya 1975: 255-6).

Because he was not a scion of the ancient line, which by way of the rulers of Melaka and Sriwijaya derived its origin from Alexander the Great (Iskandar Zulkarnain), the new ruler, Abdul Jalil, was unable to command the same loyalty as the legitimate rulers of the ancient line had enjoyed. Being considered a traitor who had revolted against his lord, when he was attacked by Raja Keik he had not received the support of the sea nomads (orang laut), who for centuries as loyal subjects had delivered the sailors manning the warships of the kingdom, and had always been deservd of a number of high dignitaries. He had been ousted from Johor and had fled to Pahang where he had subsequently been captured and killed on the orders of Raja Keik (Andaya 1975: 249-256).

All these events had already caused his son, Sulaiman, deep humiliation. What had added to this humiliation was that his own Malay relatives had been unwilling to help him regain his throne and avenge the death of his father. He had therefore been very grateful for the help given by the Bugis princes in his struggle for the restoration of his royal power and had rewarded them by concluding a pact with them and swearing an oath of loyalty with them.

The above events, including the swearing of the oath of loyalty (sumpah setia) between Sultan Sulaiman and the Bugis are told about in a large number of works of historiography from the Riau, Johor and Lingga areas. These works, that in fact form a complex of closely interrelated texts, are known under a great variety of titles. Among these are the Silišah Melaja and Bugis dan Sekulai Raja-rajaunya (The Genealogy of the Malays, the Bugis and Their Kings), the Tuhibat al-Nafs (The Precious Gift), and the Awan Setia Bugis dengan Melaja (The Pact of Mutual Loyalty between the Bugis and the Malays) (Tel and Witkam 1993: v). For practical purposes this intertextual analysis will limit itself to using only the Tuhibat al-Nafs (The Precious Gift). This work contains a history of the Johor-Riau-Lingga area and the role played by the Bugis in the developments there from the beginning of the eighteenth century until 1864. In its short version (Matheson 1982), which was written by Raja Ahmad a descendant of the Bugis Vice-Roys, it was completed in 1866 (Matheson Hooker 1991: 26-27, 33-45). In its extended form, produced by his son, Raja Ali Haji (Matheson Hooker 1991), it was probably completed shortly afterwards, because in April
1868 Tumenggung Abu Bakar of Johor, when visiting Riau, was presented with something that probably was a copy of this long version (Putten, J. van der, and Al Azhar 1995: 20). This is how the Tuhfat al-Nafis describes the swearing of the oath of allegiance:

When the time was right Sultan Sulaiman installed Opu Kelana Jaya Putera as Yang Dipertuan Muda to govern the kingdom of Johor and Pahang and Riau and all the subject territories with absolute authority. (...) There he performed the Bugis ceremony of loyalty, swearing an oath before the Yang Dipertuan Besar. Translated into Malay from Bugis, it went, ‘Be assured, Sultan Sulaiman Badr-al-Alam Syah, that I the Yang Dipertuan Muda shall govern your kingdom. If what is lengthways before you is not to your liking, I shall lay it acrossways, and if what lies acrossways before you is not to your liking, I shall lay it lengthwise. Whatever is overgrown and thorny in your path, I will clear.’ This was his pledge. (Matheson and Watson Andaya 1982: 78 I-II)

According to the vision presented in the Tuhfat al-Nafis the swearing of the oath of loyalty with the Bugis princes had been an act of wise statemanship, performed for the good of the kingdom of Johor and in gratitude for the good services rendered by them. The decision to make this pact with them had been taken after careful consultations had taken place with all the important dignitaries of the kingdom:

With their arrival, all his aims had been realized. His father’s death had been avenged, the kingdom of Johor was his and his enemies and relatives had been confined in their various attempts to do him evil. They had tried wars of attrition and by patronising Johor’s outer dependencies and subject islands had interfered with Riau’s trade. Then his kingdom had become stable, returning to the status it enjoyed under His Majesty his father. The only repayment had already been effected, and had been made in consultation with the Bendahara, the Temenggung and all the dignitaries (Matheson and Watson Andaya 1982: 123 I-II).

Unfortunately, owing to jealousy of the Bugis in certain circles among the Malay, division had arisen in the kingdom and had put an end to the atmosphere of harmony that had prevailed for a while:

Initially everyone had been pleased at the appointment of a Bugis Yang Dipertuan Muda but suddenly this had happened, when the Bugis were already like his own flesh and blood and had been considered as nobles in the kingdom of Johor.


3 Pada permulaan hendak mengangkat(kan) Yang Dipertuan Muda pihak Bugis itu dengan suka ria juga, tiba-tiba sudah (jadi) begitu, dan sudah menjadi darah daging dan berhapur-baur menjadi ipar dusai dan menjadi sanak saudara Bugis itu, serta negeri (sudah) ranai pulang sedihatah baik pekerjan dan lainnya. Maka baharabah sanak-sanak yang (lain-lain) sebelah Melayu hendak menghilangkan jasa budi orang khusus pula sudah bersumpah (dan bersyeta sebelah-menyelah) (Matheson Hooker 1991: 123: II).

4 In the nineteenth century the Bugis immigrants, and especially the family of the Bugis Vice-Roy, were known as defenders of the authentic customs, language and culture of the Malays and as the champions of the purity of Islam, resisting what they saw as the pernicious influences exerted in Johor-Riau by the proximity of the British and the Dutch. For details, see Hasan Yunus (1988) and Watson Andaya and Matheson (1979).

5 For the relationship between the Malays and the Bugis in the nineteenth century I refer to Watson Andaya and Andaya (1983: 97-103; 121-2) and Matheson (1986: 5-39).


7 (...). Maka yang mana Yang Dipertuan (Daging Kamboja) ini, banyak kegeruhan di dalam (negeri) Riau, antara raja-raja Melayu serta raja-raja Bugis (...). Syahadan adalah amilanambil pada hati mereka itu yang zahirnya, (pada keluakannya), adalah segala Bugis-Bugis orang baharu mendatangkan dengan hal yang demikian itu, (maka Baginda) Sultan Sulaiman menyerahkan (memerintahkan) kerajaannya dengan mudah, menjadi Yang Dipertuan Muda dan segala menteri halalbihalang yang besar-besarnya dibawah perintahnya. Pada hal orang besar seperti halalbihalang dan temenggung itu menteri yang sedai memang, maka dikurangkan kuasanya daripada orang yang baharu datang. Maka itai lah menjadi mengambil tima-tima kebenaran (dari) sebelah Melayu (Matheson Hooker 1991: 122: I-II).
In this atmosphere, poisoned by slander, so the Tuahfat al-Nafis continues, only Sultan Sulaiman himself had continued to appreciate as positive the contribution the Bugis princes had made, considering that they had at least helped him against his enemies, whereas his Malay relatives had not only never been willing to do anything for him, but had even slandered him, by spreading stories casting doubts on his noble origins:

On the contrary, they had completely humiliated him. Some of them had even said Sultan Sulaiman was not fit to become king because his mother was of lesser birth, that is, she was an Acehnese from Pedir, called Nusamah, who had been bartered for a gold rice-pot cover. Other relatives said he was not fit to become ruler because his mother was the daughter of the masseuse, and much else was said, so that he despairs of recovering his kingdom or obtaining help from his relatives, and had thus ceased his efforts in that direction. This was the reason he had asked the five Bugis princely brothers for help. (Matheson and Watson Andaya 1982: 123, 1)  

As we have already seen above, if the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak is read as a didactic animal fable, it can be seen to teach the Frog-King, and us readers with him, the important lesson that in life one should under all circumstances be able to tell semblance from reality – that is, seeming friend from actual foe – in order not to be victimized. Here too, in its satirical references to the oath of loyalty and the yielding of certain political powers to the Bugis, the poem seems to be concerned with telling semblance from true meaning. Interestingly, in the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak a true meaning is suggested of these events, which flatly contradicts the pious meaning attributed to them in the Tuahfat al-Nafis.

The Tuahfat al-Nafis offers us the dignified picture of the five Bugis princely brothers as the loyal retainers of Sultan Sulaiman, whose only wish is to be his obedient servants and to help him regain the glory and prosperity formerly enjoyed by his kingdom. This pious picture – greatly pleasing, no doubt, to its erstwhile Bugis readers - contrasts sharply with the unfailing one drawn by the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak. There the Bugis are depicted as a hungry snake, that is, as adventurers looking for a livelihood, who finally find it by deceiving an unwise king.

Clashing head-on with the dignified image in the Tuahfat al-Nafis of Sultan Sulaiman as a wise and moderate ruler, the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak pictures this king as a puffed-up, self-aggrandizing frog-king, who sacrifices his subjects to follow his own desires. Moreover he is shown – not as a legitimate and sovereign ruler, as the Tuahfat sees him - but as a mere upstart and traitor, and as a person of dubious ancestry who therefore fails to command due respect from his subjects. This frog-king unwisely fails to discern semblance from true meaning. He forgets the natural law that the Bugis is the enemy of the Malay. He also fails to see that the Cobra cannot be a subject, but is a king, just like himself. And what happens if a kingdom has two rulers? Disaster surely lies ahead for it.  

And what has the co-operation with the Bugis – the ‘magic formula’ Sulaiman has learned from the Cobra-King – brought, according to the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak? Has it returned his kingdom to the status it had formerly enjoyed under his father, Sultan Abdul Jalil Riayat Syah, as he had hoped? Has it led to renewed economic prosperity? In short, has the pact concluded with the Bugis been a sign of some newly gained political wisdom or simply a proof of folly? As the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak suggests, the latter is the case: it has brought only strife and political division and has even forced many of Johor’s subjects to flee the kingdom for the safety of other lands. Now the true meaning becomes clear which the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak gives to that ‘curse from Macassar’ (kesu Mengkasar) which the Frog-King has studied with his Cobra-guru: instead of an instrument by which Sultan Sulaiman can regain the respect and obedience of his subjects, it has proved to be a curse which has stricken his kingdom and emptied its lands. Contrary to what the Tuahfat al-Nafis tells, the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak suggests that the decision to make a pact and swear an oath of loyalty with the Bugis was not taken after careful consultations with the dignitaries of the kingdom, but was forced on his ministers by Sultan Sulaiman, without him paying the least attention to their warnings and remonstrations. Some of them were even sacrificed to the Cobra for reasons of political expediency. Ultimately the bad consequence of His Majesty’s total reliance on the Bugis and his yielding of political powers to them is that he becomes a puppet in their hands and has to do whatever they tell him to. As the words of the Cobra really say: ‘(it that is: the study of this magic) takes only a little bit of forcing’ (f. 2v 7d).  

Above we have seen that the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, if read as an allegorical animal fable, may be read as a comedy of forgetfulness, in which the protagonist – the Frog – to our great detriment becomes the victim of his inability to tell what seems a friend from what is really a foe. Read as a lampoon on early eighteenth century political events in Johor, too, the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak may be taken as a comedy of forgetfulness. The first of the laws Sultan Sulaiman fails to remember is that the Bugis are the arch-enemy of the Malays. The second one is that a king must at all costs avoid giving in to his own desires and passions, because such self-aggrandizement may destroy his kingdom, however great and prosperous it may be (Watson Andaya & Matheson in Reid & Castles, 1979: 118). Finally, the third law he forgets, and not the least important one, is that a king must never treat his dignitaries or his common subjects in a tyrannical manner.

As is well known, this third law is promulgated in the Sejarah Melayu (Genealogy of the Malays), in that famous episode where it tells of the concluding of the pact between king Sri Tri Buana and Demang Lebar Daun:  

His Majesty spoke: ‘Whosoever of my Malay subjects commits treason, departing from the terms of the pact, his house will be overturned by God so that its roof is laid on the ground and its pillars are inverted.’ Thereupon said Demang Lebar Daun, ‘If the Malay ruler departs from  

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16 Melainkan yang ada daripada segala sanak-sanak saudaranya (itu, semata-mata) menghinakan dia, hingga mengata (sesetengah daripada) setengahnya Sultan Sulaiman itu tiada patut menjadi raja sebab maknanya itu orang kecil, iaitu namanya Nusamah, ditukarkan) dengan tubuh pertu emas satu. Dan (ada pula setengah daripada sanak saudaranya mengata Sultan Sulaiman itu tiada patut menjadi raja sebab maknanya anak anit penticid dan, lurus lagi perkataan yang lain (yang macam-macam), sekitar-kira punca asal bahaya daripada mendapat kerajaan, dan punca asal bapa daripada pertolongan sanak saudara, maka punca jilid yang demikian itu. Maka itulah sebabnya ia minta pempolongan daripada raja Bugis opu-opu yang (ber)lima beradik itu. (Matheson Hooker 1991: 123, 1).

15 See also the comparison made in the Tuahfat al-Nafis between the situation in Riau at the time and a ship on which there are two captains (Watson Andaya and Matheson in Reid and Castles, 1979: 119).

14 This view suggested by the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak is also supported by historical sources. Thus an eighteenth century Bugis chronicle from Johor remarks: ‘The Yang Dipertuan Besar (that is, Sultan Sulaiman) is to be like a woman. When food is given to him, he may eat; and the Yang Dipertuan Muda is like her man. Should any question arise, it is he who is to decide it.’ And a Dutch Governor, writing in the mid-eighteenth century described Sultan Sulaiman as ‘a puppet, who must dance to the piping of the Yantuan Muda and his Bugis following.’ (Watson Andaya and Andaya 1982: 83).
the terms of his pact with his Malay subjects, his kingdom and his throne will be destroyed by God. ‘That was the gift God Whose Name be Praised bestowed on all Malay rulers, that they would never put to shame their Malay subjects, however gravedly they had offended, would not tie or hang them and would not shame them with abusive words, so long as they had not been condemned and executed. If any Malay ruler puts a single one of his subjects to shame, that shall be a sign that his kingdom will be destroyed.’

By unwisely following his desires and tyrannizing his subjects, so the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak suggests, Sultan Sulaiman has turned the world upside down. Appropriately, as the punishment for such a crime the Sejarah Melayu predicts that God will overturn the tyrant’s house, so that its roof is laid on the ground and its pillars are inverted. The Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak ends with the Frog-King having run out of subjects to feed to the snake and being swallowed by it. At last the Cobra-King can drop all pretense and say directly what he really thinks of him:

‘I know all about your ancestry; / From the spawn of frogs, that’s how you were born. / In a stagnant pool, that’s where you belong. / That’s why you are so puffed-up with pride. / Whose descendant you are it is hard to say. / Scattered eggs, that’s where you came from. / In moats and ditches, that’s where you dwell. / That’s why you look as ugly as you do. / When the eggs break and are ripe / the frogs are scattered about hither and thither / and some run for the safety of a well. / Damned frog, I don’t like you one bit! (f. 18r 5-7.)

Obviously the frog’s propensity to puff itself up to scare off other animals has been what made the writer of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak choose this animal for his satirical portrayal of Sultan Sulaiman. And it is not hard to see that he chose the Cobra to stand for the Bugis because in his view to conclude a pact with these newcomers was like presssing a snake to one’s bosom, a treacherous animal with a deadly poisonous bite. Yet another reason why he chose the snake to represent the Bugis may perhaps have been that this reptile is also used as a symbol of Bugis power. In the Tuhfat al-Nafis we see this in the study about the prophetic dream one of the five princely brothers, Opu Daeng Menambon, had on the eve of their departure from Macassar:

When preparations were complete, he (i.e. the eldest son, Opu Daeng Parani) discussed his intention of going to Johor and Malacca and travelling in those areas, because he had received an oracle from a witch toward the Bugis lands. Opu Daeng Menambon had dreamt that the penis of his brother, Opu Daeng Celik, had stretched out and become a serpent, whose head reared up towards the west and Johor. It was interpreted as meaning that his descendants would acquire lasting sovereignty in Johor and Riau. (Matheson & Watson Andaya 1982: 51: 1).13


Apabila sudah siap maka muafakatlah ia hendak masuk ke negeri Johor dan Melaka mengembara pada sebelah tanah itu, kerana ia sudah mendapat (satu) alat tatkala masa hendak keluar dari pada tanah Bugis itu: itut Opu Daeng Menambon ada berminipini akan zahar sandarannya Opu Daeng Celik itu menjulur laju/ menjadi sasang. Adalah kepalaannya mengudang ke sebelah pihak barat

In conclusion

We have seen that the narrative of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak in a humorous way centres on the serious problem of telling mere semblance from true meaning. This issue can be traced in the two readings which I have proposed above. If we read the poem as a didactic animal fable in the Panca Tantra tradition, it appears as a general lesson given to Everyday man not to follow the bad example of the Frog-King but to take care to discern what seems to be a friend from what is really an enemy.

If in reading the syair we intertextually relate it to certain episodes in the Tuhfat al-Nafis, we will see it as a satirical lampoon on a historical event, namely the incorporation of the Bugis into the early eighteenth century Johor body politic. It then turns into a lesson, specifically intended for the Malays of the Johor-Riau area, never to forget - as Sultan Sulaiman once did with evil consequences - that the seemingly friendly Bugis are really their foes. Thus the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, albeit in an entertaining way, pursues its serious aim of teaching the discernment of true meaning, as the Cobra had among others also intended to do, when he said: ‘Let’s teach that Frog a lesson in true meaning’ (f. 2r 3b).

As we have seen the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak shows close intertextual relations with the Tuhfat al-Nafis, which make the poem read like a lampoon directly aimed at ridiculing the dignified view presented by Raja Ali Haji of the role of the Bugis as the saviours of the Kingdom of Johor. If the syair was indeed written to serve as an antidote to the Tuhfat, this must have happened sometime between 1864 - the date of the last event told in Raja Ali Haji’s history - and at the latest 1867, when Klinkert returned to the Netherlands. As we have indicated in the description of the manuscript, philological evidence points in the direction of Pulau Penyengat as the place of origin of the manuscript. It is, however, not inconceivable that the author of the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak was someone with close ties with the Malays on the island of Lingga, which well into the nineteenth century continued to have conflicts with the Bugis. If this poem of considerable literary quality has actually been written on the island of Lingga, this confirms that in the nineteenth century the island of Lingga could indeed rival the island of Penyengat as a major centre of Malay culture (Matheson 1986: 5: 36).

In traditional Malay literature, but also in other literary traditions, allegorical animal fables, such as the Syair Raja Tedung dengan Raja Katak, have always been a useful instrument for discreetly giving vent to criticism of certain conditions, situations and events, without unduly attracting the attention of the responsible authorities. In modern Nusantara literature, too, - at least in Malaysia - this genre still seems to be very much alive. In 1979 Arena Wati published a short story entitled ‘Assembly of the Cats’ (Sidang Kucing). It tells of a gathering held by the cats, because they want to decide what course of action to take against their unjust and tyrannical owner. And that in same year Wahba published a short story called ‘Sharks’ (Jerang), which tells of a wounded shark that is not given help by the other fish, because they still remember how cruelly it formerly treated them (Zaini-Lajoubert in Ahmad Kamal Abdulrahil et al. 1995: 307). It seems likely that allegorical animal fables of some sort will always be written, because they meet a basic human need, but what stories they will tell only time can say.

Johor. Maka diabsarakan orang, anak cucunya akan mendapat kerajaan (di sebelah Johor) dan Riau yang berpanjangan (nua) masanya (adanya). (Matheson Hooker 1991: 51: 1)
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Bahwa ini syair raja tedung dengan raja katak

Wa billahi nasta’in dengan tuan cerita raja bangsawan sentiasa hari menanggung rawan betapakah hendak katak dibinasakan
tedung itu ular bestari pandai menyamar menipu diri bisanya pula tidak terperi jika terpatuk sukar ditawari
berpikirlah tedung amat sempurna biarlah katak kuajarkan makna dapatlah kutipu dia di sana katak sekalian kuberi hina
habislah pikir tedung berjalan mendapatkan raja katak bangsawan katak yang banyak pun berlompatan disangkanya tedung hendak memakan

This is the Poem of The Cobra-King and the Frog-King.

Beseeching God for His help, please listen, sirs,
To this tale about the Cobra-King, that noble animal.
Day and night he kept fretting and moping
How he could bring about the ruin of the Frog.

That Cobra was an accomplished snake,
Clever at disguising himself and deceiving,
And his bite was poisonous beyond description.
Once one had been bitten, it was difficult to find an antidote.

Then the Cobra, that perfect animal, had an idea:
‘Let’s teach that Frog a lesson in true meaning!
If I can deceive him, I will, by doing so,
Humiliate all frogs!’

Once he had made up his mind the Cobra went on his way,
When he found the King of the Frogs, that noble animal.
The many frogs who were there jumped away hither and thither,
Fearing that the Cobra had come to eat them.

Speaking in a soft voice the Cobra said:
‘Gentlemen, please, do not be afraid.’
The Cobra sat down at the feet of His Majesty the King,
While doing obeisance and pressing his fingers together.

‘I beg your forgiveness, O accomplished King.
As for the reason why your slave has come to you, my lord,
It is that he wishes to put his fate into your hands
And faithfully carry out your commands every day.’

When the Frog heard what the Cobra-King said,
He felt greatly pleased with his words
And said with a gracious mien:
‘We surrender to you all that We have.’

The Cobra felt pleased and his face lit up with a kind smile,
As he heard the words of the Frog-King,
While he thought to himself:
‘I have already succeeded in deceiving that frog.’

Thereupon the Cobra-King said to the frog,
Gesticulating as he told him why he had come:
‘It has already long been Our desire
To teach you the magic of the holy pundits.’
'The intention with which your servant has come to you
Is to bring you a precious magic formula,
So that We can teach it to Your Highness
And all your subjects in the kingdom will be stricken with fear.'

'But your servant does expect a little present in return,
As a token that you are his student and he is your teacher.
This magic can be studied without much pain
And its study does not entail many requirements.'

[f.3r]
When the Frog heard his words he was all smiles.
Clear were his thoughts now and he felt relieved:
'If such is the power of the magic formula
Teach Us its words this very instant.'

'If that's what it is, Our subjects, too, will love Us
For We are descended from an ancient lineage.
Even if treason has been committed, so what!
May the curse from Macassar strike them all!'

'Please, teach Us the formula
And tell Us right away what you want in return,
No matter how much it may be,
So that We can grant you it.'

Feeling pleased the Cobra replied:
'The fee to be paid is not high, my lord;
Just two frogs a day, that is all that is required.
If you, my lord, will permit it, your slave will eat them as food.'

'If these conditions have been fulfilled,
You are welcome to reside on Our head, my lord.
Wherever you may go, your servant will also be with you
And you will be seated on your throne for ever.'

When the Frog heard his words he said with a kindly smile on his face:
'If that is all you wish, my dear friend,
Two frogs per day are nothing,
We would even grant you ten.'

The frog immediately drew near
And stood on the head of the Cobra.
Glaring to the left and glaring to the right,
Shouting loudly he summoned his war-chiefs and ministers.
berkata hai sekalian menteri hulubalang
lihatlah oleh kamu aku sekarang
di kepala tedung duduk terjulang
lebihlah kebesaranku daripada orang
adakah orang sepertinya aku
di kepala tedung bertelekan siku
hendaklah kamu mengikut saba
supaya tidak kamu kusapu
menteri penggawa menengar saba
terbanglah arwah di dalam dada
apalah akal si raja berida
tak dapat tiada diikut barangnya saba
berpikirlah hulubalang menteri sekalian
tertipulah sudah baginda bangsawan
terkena pesona tedung pahlawan
akan kita sekalian pun tertawan
masing-masing pun berhati gundah
lenyaplah akal dari dalamnya dada
memikirkan halnya raja berida
daripada tedung tidak berbeza
bukannya tidak diketahui baginda
bersahabatkan tedung bukananya mudah
takdir azali yang telah sudah
katak menjadi makanannya yang ada
betapakah gerangan demikian laku
baginda ini tidak menaruh malu
tidak dipikirkan pekerjaan tipu
akhir porak-pariklah sekaliannya tentu

menyembahlah sekalian sambil berperi
patutlah tuanku raja bestari
di kepala tedung tuanku berseri
takutlah orang seisi negeri
baginda menengar suka tertawa
ingatlah kamu yang satu dua
jika lau siapa yang banyak kecewa
kuperbuat seperti sentana sarwa

He said: ‘Hey, you, my ministers and officers,
You there, just look at me now!
Here I sit, carried aloft on the head of a cobra!
Now my greatness exceeds that of all other rulers!’

‘Is there anyone else who like me
Can sit resting his elbows on the head of a cobra?
From now on you had better do as you are told,
To avoid taking a beating from me.’

When his ministers and war-chiefs heard his words,
‘They felt faint at heart:
Whatever may be the motive of our King, that venerable animal,
We can only obey whatever he commands.’

The officers and ministers thought to themselves:
‘Our King, that noble animal, has already been deceived,
Having fallen under the spell of the Cobra, that war-like paladin.
Soon we will all be his prisoners.’

Each one of them felt melancholy;
They were at their wit’s end about what to do,
When they considered that their king, that venerable animal,
was no whit different from the Cobra.

‘Impossible that His Majesty does not know
That to befriend a cobra is not an easy thing to do!
It has been God’s Will since the beginning of time
that the frog will be his food.

How can His Majesty behave like this?
Does he then have no sense of shame?
He does not for a moment consider it is a ploy.
In the end we are sure all will be in utter confusion.’

All did obeisance and said to him:
‘It is fitting indeed that you, our lord, accomplished king,
Should let your beauty shine forth from the head of a cobra.
How people will fear you everywhere in the kingdom.’

When His Majesty heard this, he laughed with delight:
‘Hey, you there, take heed of a thing or two!
If anyone of you disappoint me frequently,
I will treat him like I did all my Royal relatives.’
menteri yang tua pun berdatanglah sembah
ke bawah hadirat duli khalifah
apakah sebabnya tuanku berubah
dengan tedung jadi bersumpah

ampun tuanku patik berperci
jangalan digusaari mahkota negeri
bukankah musuh tedung yang bahari
makanya tuanku menurutkan peri

berapu tahun bulan dan hari
tuanku telah memerintahkan negeri
dengan kesenangan jua tuanku berperci
sekarang ini terseumalah diri

patik bersembah memohonkan tawakal
perkataan patik jangan disangkal
patik nin hamba di bawah capal
tedung nin banyak sangatnya akal

ke mari kedung menyerahkan diri
serta lemah lembut mengeluarkan peri
pura-pura tuanku hendak diajari
supaya makanannya tuanku memberi

[f 4v]
patik ini yang hina papa
perkataan patik jangan diserapa
bukannya patik mengadai rupa
akhirnya negeri tuanku hampa

karena apakah akal dengan daya
kepada tuanku patik mengeluarkan rahasia
kepada tedung janganlah bersetia
akhirnya tuanku jua tepercaya

aduhai tuanku tajuk junjungan
sekedarkan patik mengingatkan
jika bencana sudah kedatangan
sesal pun tidak berguna kemudian

karena tuanku raja mahkota
patik nin hamba di bawah takhta
tidaklah mau melalui kata
sebarang sabda dengan perintah

si raja katak demi menengar
sembuhnya menteri seorang wazir
arwah melayang semangat berkibar
berpikir benar menteri berkibar

His senior minister spoke while doing obeisance
To His Highness, God’s Vicegerent on Earth:
‘What is the reason, my Lord, that you have had a change of mind
And have actually sworn an oath of loyalty with a cobra?’

‘Your servant begs for your forgiveness for speaking thus.
Please, Royal Highness, do not get angry with him.
Is the Cobra, that fine animal, not an enemy?
Then why, my Lord, do you do his bidding?’

‘For several years, months and days already
Have you been ruler over this kingdom, my Lord,
Yet you have never lost your temper when speaking to us,
But now you have been taken in by the snake.’

‘Humbly pressing my fingers together and resigning myself to God’s Will
I pray that these words of your servant may not be rejected.
Your servant is a mere slave under your sandals;
This Cobra is an animal full of wiles.’

‘The Cobra has come to subject itself to you
Speaking words that are soft and gentle
And is pretending that he will be your teacher
In order that you, my Lord, will provide it with its food.’

[f 4v]
‘Thought your servant is a man of no consequence
May you not curse him for the words he speaks.
Your servant is not conjuring up some illusion;
Ultimately your kingdom will be empty, my Lord.’

‘For of the tricks and wiles of the snake
Your servant reveals the secret to you, my Lord.
Do not keep faith with the Cobra;
In the end you will be deceived.’

‘O, my lord, ruler whose every command is obeyed.
Your servant only wishes to remind you to take care.
Once disaster has already struck
To repent too late will be in vain.’

‘Because you, my Lord, are a ruler wearing a crown
Whereas your servant is a slave beneath the throne
He does not want to disobey your words;
Whatever wish you may utter is his command.’

When the Frog-King heard the words
That were spoken by his minister, the vizier,
He felt faint and his heart fluttered,
As he thought: ‘My minister is right to speak as he does.’
karena aku ini seorang raja
wajiblah berpaka sebarang kerja
tedung tak patut kuberi manja
akhiriya aku kecewaalah sahaja

setelah tetap sudahlah pikiran
bersabda dalam baginda dengan pelan
ayuah tedung muda pahlawan
takutlah aku ini terkena olahan

[f.5r]
karena takdir Khaliq al-Jabbar
katak menjadi makanannya ular
beta nini ngeri hati berdebar
takutlah beto kalau tersamar

demi tedung menengarkan kata
menundukkan kepala menyembah serta
dengan pelan mengeluarkan kata
ampun tuanku junjungan mahkota

khabarnya wazir jangan didengari
bukannya niat demikian peri
sebab pun patik datang ke mari
sahaja nini hendak berserah diri

jauhlah rasa dengan timbangan
makanya tuanku patik semukan
patik nini takut kena sumpahan
daripada Tuhan Malik al-Mannan

harapnya patik setinggi gunung
kepada tuanku mahkota anjung
di rahim tuanku hendak berlindung
sabda dan perintah pula dijunjung

patik nini tidak berdua kata
hendak menyemukan duli mahkota
karena tuanku raja di atas takhta
patik nini pacal di bawah telampah

niatnya patik di dalam diri
dari hidup sampai mati
kepada tuanku berserah diri
akan menjunjung sabda dan peri

[36]

Because I am a king
I am in duty bound to establish consensus over all matters of state.
It is not proper that I grant special favours to the Cobra;
Ultimately I will only 'be harmed.'

After he had regained his composure
His Highness spoke in a soft voice:
'Erh, young Cobra, mighty war-like paladin,
I fear I may become the victim of some trick.'

[f.5r]
'Because the Almighty Creator has willed it so,
The frog is the food of the snake.
I feel terrified and my heart is pounding.
We are so afraid we may be deceived.'

When the Cobra heard what he said
He bowed the head and made obeisance.
In a soft voice he uttered the words:
'I beg for your forgiveness, my sovereign king.'

'Please do not listen to the words of your vizier;
I have no such a kind of intention.
The reason that I have come here is
That I wish to submit myself to you.'

'Cast off from all feelings and considerations
That your slave may want to deceive you, my Lord.
Your slave fears being stricken by the curse
Of God, our King, the Well-Wisher.'

'Your slave has set his hopes, that are as high as a mountain,
On you, O Lord, most august of rulers.
On your lap, my Lord, I want to take refuge.
Your every wish will be my command.'

'Your slave does not speak with two tongues
Or wish to deceive Your Highness,
Because you, O Lord, are a king enthroned in majesty
Whereas he is just a slave under the soles of your feet.'

'Your slave's deepest wish is that he may
All his life until his dying day
Submit himself to you, O Lord,
And faithfully carry out your commands.'
berbaliklah pikir katanya bangsawan
benarlah sembahnya terdung pahlawan
wazir nira sangat berbuat olahan
kepada terdung hendak disalahkan
mukalah baginda seraya bersabda
aduhai wazir menteri berida
engkau nira jangan sangat mengada
menceilai terdung pahlawan yang muda
sebaikmu tidak lagi terpakai
engkau sekalian ncyat dan sakai
jangalah engkau berbanyak bagi
kupecatkan engkau daripada balai
menteri tua pun hatinya ngeri
menengarkan titah raja bestari
masyghullah sangat di dalam diri
lalu keluar dari lawang puri
hendak pulang ke rumah sendiri
hatinya susah tiada terperli
tambahan dilepaskau daripada menteri
makin dikenang bertambah ngeri
waktu sampai ke halaman balai
bertemu seekor katak yang bisai
tambahan berdua laksana misai
ia berjalan mengalun lambai

menteri yang tua lagi pun pandai
badannya penuh puru puru sampai
gagah berani bukan sebagai
hulubalang berani keturunan Pasai

berkatalah menteri sambil bersabda
hendak ke mana datuk berida
rupa nira gonoh tidak bersabda
apakah susah di dalam dada
ke mana jua datuk hendak pergi
berjalan pula dari pagi
jalan tidak berketaluan lagi
apakah yang hendak didapati

He changed his mind, that noble frog:
True were the words spoken by the Cobra, that war-like paladin.
This vizier of his was really doing all he could to trick him,
Wanting to find fault with the snake.

His Majesty was furious and spoke:
‘Hey, you, vizier, you, old minister!
Don’t you dare to put up all this pretence
And find fault with the young Cobra, that war-like paladin.’

‘I will no longer listen to your advice;
You all are subjects and subordinates.
Don’t you make too many objections,
Or I will dismiss you from the hall.’

The old minister was terrified
When he heard the words of that accomplished king.
His heart was filled with deep melancholy.
Thereupon he left the kings private quarters by the gate.

He wanted to go back to his own house,
Feeling upset, indescribably.
Moreover he had been dismissed from office;
The more he thought of it the more terrified he was.

When he reached the open space surrounding the hall
He met a toad who was a gallant man to behold,
Moreover he had spikes on his back like a moustache,
And walked with a swaggering gait.

He was a minister who was old as well as clever,
His body was covered all over with ulcers.
In strength and daring none was his equal,
He was a courageous war-chief of Pasai descent.

Addressing him the war-chief said:
‘Whither are you going, venerable sir?
You look as if you are a hurry and speak not a word.
What is it that upsets you so?’

‘Whither, sir, do you want to go,
Having been on your way since early morning.
You seem unable to make out any longer where to go;
What is it that you wish to obtain.'