

Historical References On The Presence Of Omani Travellers In Malaysia

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Abstract:

This study demonstrates that both the nations of Malaysia and Oman were historically interconnected via the Indo-Pacific maritime route since the olden days. Classical Arab literatures as written by various famous historians or sea travellers from as early as the Abbasid Period from the 9th century CE up until around its demise in the 13th century CE presented various accounts pertaining the presence of Omanis from the Persian Gulf visiting what is today part of Malaysia. Likewise, they also appeared in a few classic Malaysian literatures, especially during the advent of the early modern period in between the 18th to 19th century CE when historical writing became a more established and well-preserved activity in Malay Archipelago. All references shared rather similar settings, although some of them appeared to be divided apart for centuries long. The activities of Omani travellers back then seemed to have concentrated in the northern Malaysian state, which then was known as the powerful kingdom (later sultanate) of Kedah. Since its days, were incorporated within the thalassocracy of the famous Srivijayan Empire (Ar. *Zabaj* or *Mulku Jawah*) around 8th century CE until the arrival of the European colonialism in 18th century CE, Kedah was a natural international maritime hub which had attracted travellers from both East and West including the Omanis.

1. Introduction

The area of Malay Peninsula and The Strait of Malacca, which will become part of modern Malaysia today, were well known as anchoring harbor for travellers bound to the east and west for various purposes. In most of the cases, the earliest evidence for the formation of an early political states (kingdoms) and classical trading entrepot had emerged with the kingdom (later sultanate) of Kedah. This particular kingdom has the evident of the earliest and precious iron industry in Southeast Asia, which originated from around 8th century BCE and to continue until 12th century CE [1]. Beginning from around 3rd to 6th century CE, it was heavily Indianised and incorporated into the massive thalassocratic Srivijayan Empire (Ar. *Zabaj* or *Mulku Jawah*) and had attracted lucrative trade with Indian kingdoms such as Chola and Pala, as well as Chinese Dynasties such as Liang, Song, and Yuan [2]. Kedah, according to some historians, was the central dominating power across the area and was the twin capital of Srivijaya if not

the capital itself [3]. The kingdom converted to Islam in 1136CE and later Srivijaya itself evaporated in 13th to 14th century CE, however, together with other neighbouring kingdoms such as Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, and later Melaka and Johor, Kedah continued to enjoy being the hotspot for Arab-Indian Muslim travellers mostly merchants and courtiers until colonial power such as Great Britain dominated the Strait of Malacca through the establishments of their colonies in Pulau Pinang (Penang), Melaka (Malacca) and Singapura (Singapore) in between 1786 to 1824.

Historically, both the nations of Malaysia and Oman were interconnected via the prosperous Indo-Pacific maritime route throughout the periods mentioned. The arrival of the Middle Eastern missions to classical Malaysia appeared to have been aided by the skill and bravery of Arab ship masters mainly dominated by the Omani nation. By referring to the classical Omanis, we do not confine them just within a specific modern nation-state border of The Kingdom of Oman. The people did indeed originate from the heartland of the al-Azad Arabian tribe in what is now known as Muscat, Suhar, Julfar, Qalahat, Sur, and the surrounding coastal areas of the modern nation, however we should take note that since the 6th to 7th century CE the people had freely established their other colonies elsewhere across the water, in various ports and coasts of the Persian Gulf such as at Basra, Siraf and Hormuz. The people continued to spread their influence outside the gulf where they also went as far as to settle in the East African Swahili coast and at some western Indian ports such as at Gwadar Their cultural foundation which had encouraged their diaspora was to maintain their international mercantile and seafaring lifestyle intact given that those are their only sources of wealth and maintaining in power. This was however, just like Malaysians was ended by the Indian Ocean monopoly forcefully inflicted by The British Empire in between 18th to 20th century CE.

The evident pertaining the historical presence of Omani travellers in Malaysia could be found from classical writings by Arab writers, some did pioneer traveling themselves such as Abu Dulaf al-Muhalhil (c. 10th century CE), while many others did by compiling lores or accounts they gathered from various sources into short treatises (Ar. *risalat*) [4]. This period span The Golden Age of the Abbasid Caliphate from 8th century CE to 12th century CE. Likewise, the presence also appeared in a few classical Malay literatures such as At-Tarikh Silsilah Negeri, Kedah [5]. Although their appearance as surviving historical materials was quite late in between 18th to 19th century CE, however, they are the only precious accounts in accessing the related accounts from the olden days. It is noticeable that sources from both sides were separated by means of centuries, thus also visible from the style. The former had directed their interests towards recording the lucrative commodities and immediate settings they found in Malaysia which matched their contemporary activities. While the latter was done in the time when the late classical Islamic intellectualism and academia from the Middle East began to take root in their area. The proper 'history' (Ar. *tarikh*) genre of writing began to spread, however still resonates the Persians Shahnameh style used to write the royal genealogical history from 15th to 16th century CE. All sources help in contextualising Malaysian distant past useful for its current and future development culturally and economically.

2. Data Availability: Omani Travellers in the Classical Arab Literatures

There are many classical Arabic literatures from as early as 9th century CE which provide information pertaining pioneering Arab travels to the east, however only some do notably contain references to Omani visitations to places located geographically within what is known today as Malaysia. Some of the writers might not have written their books or *risalah* in Oman, however they were Omani-Azadi Arabs by blood who had settled in their people's various colonies and culturally related. The Arab writers were:

1. Sulaiman at Tajir (c. 851 CE, wrote *Akhbar as Sin wa al-Hind*)
2. Ibn Khordadzbeh (c. 844-848CE, wrote *Kitab al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik*)
3. Al-Ya'qubi (c.875-880CE, an Abbasid historian)
4. Ibn al-Faqih (c.902CE)
5. Abu Zaid (c. 916CE, modified and completed *Akhbar asSin wa al-Hind*)
6. Abu Dulaf (c. 940CE)
7. Al-Mas'udi (c. 943, wrote *Muruj, adz-Dzahab* and several historical genesis histories)
8. Buzurg bin Shahriyar al-Ramhurmuzi (c. 9th century CE, wrote '*Ajaib al-Hind*)
9. Al-Biruni (c. 1030CE, wrote an extensive and detailed account on India)
10. Al-Idrisi (c. 1154CE, wrote *Kitab Nuzhat*)
11. Al-Baladhuri (c. wrote, *Kitab al-Ansab*)
11. Yaqut al-Hamawi (c. 1224)

Majority of these classical writers wrote rather in the traditional way of transmitting Islamic hadiths or Arabian lore, their compilations usually were simple, incomplete, and obscure, however informative and unique. The technique during that time was to record or transmit *per se* without much interpretation or analysis in the way later Muslim historians will do in separate exegesis. The advantage to this is that it leaves open for later observers to freely access the raw settings of the accounts without any concern of biases, thoughts, interpretation, and analysis of writers or observers from different period. The job of the writers would only to transmit whatever ready for them to record and leave the rest for the others, no matter how anachronistic the accounts were according to the proper historical methodology. Some of those might be perceived as mere myths or illogical fables by society during a particular period but not by the others. Historians who went through these works thus should handle with care and to have a neutral attitude to be able to contextualise correctly any relevant discussions related to the accounts.

One of the earliest accounts of the corresponding travel of Omani to Malaysia would be that which was written by Sulaiman, Merchant (Ar. *At-Tajir*) around the early second half of 9th century CE. He was a Sirafian trader (modern Bushehr, Iran) and its seafarers who had gone as far as to China according to Ferrand via the very similar sea route used by other Persian Gulf ships. The route passed by the Omani port of Muscat before crossing the vast ocean heading towards Quilon (Ar. *Kolam*) and Sri Lanka (Ar. *Sailan* or

Sarandib) aided by monsoon winds which blew their sails in April on the coast of India and in September to reach the Malay ports. Indeed, after one month from departure Sulaiman arrived at Kedah (Ar. *Kalah*, also *Kalah-Bar*, an Arabo-Persian reference for 'The Land of Kalah') located in the modern northern part of Malaysia [6]. To the east of this he mentioned the island of Tioman (Ar. *Tiyumah*). Both were bustling emporiums which controlled international trade on both sides of the Malaysian peninsula. Some traders from China, India, and the Middle East did not travel to the extreme distance from their home ports, however, had chosen to trade their commodities such as tea, metal, silk, glassware, beads, etc. midway at the entrepots mentioned. The locals other than helping providing premises for such activity would also offer their own commodities in the form of aromatics, iron, gold, tin, semiprecious stones, forest produces, sea produces, etc. Which was why their land was called as magical (Ar. *'ajaib*) or prosperous as gold (Ar. *dzahab*).

According to Sulaiman, he reported that all Middle Eastern commodities laden to be deported eastward at his time will be delivered from Basrah to gather first at Siraf [7]. From there the 'Chinese' ships will head to Muscat and Suhar passing several locations. According to some scholars, the reference to Chinese (Ar. *Siniyyah*) might refer to any kind of Indian Ocean ship associated with Chinese trade instead of literally manned by Chinese, considering that Chinese maritime technology and skill proper at that time was known to be incapable to cross the deep sea until the advent of the Song and Yuan Dynasties [8]. Instead, the Chinese used to employ Malays, maritime vessels and crews for their expeditions referred as 'of Kunlun'. During Sulaiman's time, he stated that the whole coast of the Malaysian Peninsula was coined of Kalah and situated to the right (Ar. *yamin*, eastward) of India (Ar. *al-Hind*) [9]. Kalah was stated to be ruled by a king, and the people of all statuses wore a similar kind of draped waistcloth known in Arabic as *al-futh* which is equivalent to modern Yemeni *al-futhah* and Malay *sarong*, and water were extracted from a well rather than a river or springs [10]. From Kalah, Sulaiman recalled the route towards Tioman.

According to Sulaiman and in the extended version by Abu Zaid (c. 9th to 10th century CE), Kalah was a country where riches sought by Arabian traders may be found in abundance:

"...also subject to the Maharaja (of Zabaj) is the country of Kalah, which is midway between China and Arabia. The country of Kalah covers an area of 80 square *parasang* (distance unit of measurement). The city of Kalah is a market where are concentrated the trades of aloes, camphor, sandalwood, ivory, tin, ebony, brazilwood and all kinds of spices and herbs which would be too long to describe. It is in this port that sail the vessels from Oman [11].

Abu Zaid was indeed the most detail classic Arab chronicler in describing the relationship enjoyed between the Omanis and Kedah. In his 916CE work, he had stated the presence of Kalah as part of the extensive maritime empire of Zabaj (historians believed to represent Srivijaya). According to him, the whole stretch of the land was regarded as the novel of world seafaring activities, spanning in Middle East to China and beyond:

"It is to this port that the ships of Oman come, and it is from this port that the ships leave for Oman [12].

Ibn Khordadzbeh (c. 9th century CE) added in his *Kitab al-Masalik was al-Mamalik* that Kalah was a part of a large polity known as Jabah al-Hindi which was somehow the same entity with Zabaj [13]. Upon arriving, Omani, sailors never fail to stop midway there either going to or from Oman and gathering local lucrative materials such as aloeswood, camphor, sandalwood, ivory, tin, ebony, and spices of different kinds [14].

In around the 10th century CE, al-Mas'udi resonated similar accounts about Kalah, located sixth in sequence of seaborne travel from Siraf, Muscat, Suhar, Quilon, and Anniqbalus (Nicobar) [15]. He stated:

"The fourth sea is that of Kalah Bar as we have said. It has also the name of the Sea of Kolah. The water in this sea is shallow; the shallower the sea is, the more frequent are accidents, and the greater is the danger. In this sea there are many islands and *saddad* (reefs). This word is the plural of *sadd*; so the sailors call it the land between two seas, which they have to pass it. Several islands and mountains of this sea are worth of notice...[16]

"Between the country of Kalah are mines of white lead (Ar. *rassas*, tin), and mountains rich in silver, which contain also gold and lead; but it cannot be separated [17].

"Monkeys are also found on the coasts of the straits of Zanij (also Zabij or Zabaj), in the Chinese sea, and in the dominions of Maharaj, who, as we have already said, is the king of the islands opposite the kingdom of China, being situated between the kingdom of al-Ballahara (in India) and China. The monkeys of those countries are very numerous and famous for the perfection of their figures. From thence, monkeys and serpents were brought to al-Muqtadir (Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad). They were in long chains, and some of the monkeys had beards and long whiskers; some were young and others old. The present was accompanied by many other curiosities of the sea; they were brought by Ahmad bin Hilal who was then the governor of Oman. These monkeys are very well known to the sailors of Siraf and Oman, who trade with the country of Kolah (which is Kalah) and az-Zanij; they are also acquainted with the way of hunting the crocodiles, which live at the bottom of the water [18].

The journey of Sindbad, a gallant master navigator and adventurer hero of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean (thus nicknamed Sindbad 'The Great of Sindh') was also mentioned about Kalah in his Fourth Voyage taken from The Tale of One Thousand and One Nights written in between 8th to 9th century CE. Although the tale was just like any other identical romances genre, the settings usually fit those contemporary to the writers. In it was said that:

"From the island of al-Naqus we went in six days to that of Kalah. Then we entered the kingdom of Kalah. It is a great empire bordering with India, in which there are mines of tin, plantations of bamboo, and excellent camphor. The king is a powerful ruler and governs the island

of al-Naqus, in which there is a town also called al-Naqus, which is two days in extent [19].

Yaqut al-Hamawi (c. 1224 CE), an Abbasid historian in his *Mu'jam al-Buldan* mentioned that:

"The equator passes through the island of Kalah... a land at the extremity of India, whence is exported aloeswood. Abul Abbas, the poet to Saifuddaulah, said: "She gives out a perfume as pungent, as musk rolled in the fingers, or as Kalahi alo [20].

He also added:

"It is also a port in the Indian Ocean midway between Oman and China, and situated on the equator [21]

According to him, in this particular country one could get the pure iron known as al-Qal'iy from where the al-Qal'iy swords were produced and prized throughout the Arabian society in Yemen, and in India due to its fine quality and metal purity as stated by al-Baladhuri, Abu Dulaf and again by Yaqut in his *Marasid al-Ittila'* [22]. Al-Qal'iy is another designated name for Kalah when written as Qalah in Arabic.

Abul Fida' had written that:

"After the *Qanun* (of al-Mas'udi) and *Kitab al-Atwal wal 'Urud*, the island of Kalah is 130° longitude and 8° latitude. It is to the south of the first climate, in the sea of India. It is the port of all regions between Oman and China. Tin is exported from there, which bears its name... There is a prosperous town inhabited by Muslims, Indians and Persians... plantation of bamboo and camphor trees. Twenty *majra* (units of measurement for distance) separate it from the Isles of the Maharaja (Srivijaya) [23].

Buzurg al-Ramhurmuzi (9th century CE) in his *Aja'ibul Hind Barrihi wa Bahrihi* had related numerous stories about Arab-Persian sailors from Basrah, Siraf and Oman who frequented the ports of the Malay Archipelago such as Lamuri (modern Aceh, Indonesia), Fansur (modern Barus, Indonesia), Qaqulah (modern Takuapa, Thailand), Kalah, and Zabaj. The most striking among his account would be that of Nakhoda Ismailuyeh (*nakhoda* Persian title for ship master). Ismailuyeh was a Persian ship master who had narrated to al-Ramhurmuzi about Kalah many times and had visited the country personally [24]. In 317H (939 CE), he directly sailed from Oman to Kalah, however he was attacked by a fleet of local pirates on the way back which he was almost perished. After a battle ensued for three days, he managed to escape to Syihr Luban within 41 days he managed to bring together the wealth he gathered from his trade at Kalah which was counted to be around six million dinars which one tenth of those were taken by the Sultan of Oman and the rest were distributed to the general community of Omani citizens or lost in action during the pursuit and trouble with the pirates. In this case, the ruler of Oman mentioned might be referred to an Ibadhite Omani *imam* who autonomously implemented the Islamic Ibadhi law of collecting the tithes (Ar. *zakat*) from ships moorings at their administered harbors, or he might be an Abbasid assigned governor in Oman.

In another occasion, Buzurg narrated the story of how the king of Kalah, named Sri Nata kindly treated an Omani *nakhoda* known as Juhud Kotah. The old *nakhoda* in a development had experienced a problem to remain seated folded legs when attending the royal court which is noted as *al-barsila*. The word was an interestingly a direct Arabic rendering of the Malay term of *bersila*, social meeting custom practiced even to this day. The king of Kedah was stated to also be the similar king of Zabaj and and The Golden Land (Ar. *Ardh al-Dzahab*). Historically, in between 10th and 12th century CE, the maharajas of Zabaj or Srivijaya Empire possessed Kedah as its twin capital if not the capital itself [25]. The king subsequently showed mercy and pardoned *nakhoda* for being unable to observe the court etiquette and humorously was said to have played a trick by telling the king the story of Kan'ad fish which enabled him to stretch his numb leg when he described its features. The king at that time ordered that the customary etiquette not to be implemented over any foreigners, especially to the Muslims. This account might suggest that Juhud Kotah had indeed conversed in simple Malay with the locals and thus transmitted it *per se* to al-Ramhurmuzi [26].

The frequent mentioning of Kalah is supported also by Abu Dulaf al-Muhalhil (c. 10th century CE). His CE *Risalat* complemented many previous accounts resonating Kalah as a fortified city, spacious, impenetrable by enemies, full with lofty buildings, gardens, and water sources [27]. It was also where the prized al-Qal'iy sword mentioned in the *Kitab al-Ansab* of Baladhuri (c. 9th century CE) were forged and raw tin material was mined from [28]. Al-Muhalhil added that the swords were forged within the city walls surrounded by numerous cities, towns, and villages, the people had a considerable democratic stance in facing their rulers, had their own law system and eat wheat and palm date as well as traded vegetables and breads. Trade also transacted with the use of *fihrī* dirham almost similar to the Abbasid standard and the use of *fulus* of much inferior metal while the king wore a type of Chinese *fir and* (Per. silk) and much depending on Chinese vassalage [29]. All these descriptions fit with other historical sources, for example, with the 11th century CE Tanjore Inscription of Chola Kingdom which mentioned similar characteristics of Kedah [30]. In brief, there was no country named Kalah by the Middle Easterners to advanced and prosperous for over than millennia, situated on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula other than Kedah. The concentration of Omani travellers, mostly merchants, over parts of Peninsular Malaysia at that time was also caused by the instability in India and southern China, which forced them to relocate to safer places [31]. This also mutually helped finance the rise of major and rich Malay port kingdoms such as Kedah and later the Malacca and Johor sultanates.

Other than numerous accounts about Kedah as demonstrated above, we might also see the role of other ports in Peninsular Malaysia visited by Omani sea travellers. Al-Mas'udi recalled a country named as Fanjab, but it was suggested by Wheatley (2010) as a misreading of Fanhan, a Peninsular Malaysia polity also known in the Chinese records as Pengheng or Pengkeng, which in all was Pahang in the east coast. Pahang was historically another old Malay polity which controlled traditionally the peninsula from as far north the coast of Terengganu down to the border of Johor in the south. Mas'udi stated:

"In the Sea of Kundrang (Gulf of Kunlun, which was Siam, mainland, Southeast Asia)" there are many people, including those called Fanjab, who have wavy hair and strange figures. In their small boats they wander round any ships which visit them and they throw (shoot) a

strange type of poisoned arrow. Between these people and the land of Kalah are mines of tin (*al-rassas*) and mountains of silver. There are also mines of gold and lead which are seldom exploited [32].

As for the island of Tioman, this island entrepot which was famous until the 16th and 17th century supported by countless archaeological remains of international commodities traded there [33]. Tioman of Pahang was mentioned by Sulaiman at Tajir, Ibn Khurdhadbih, and al-Idrisi as stated previously and *Akhbar asSin wal-Hind* of Abu Zaid stated that:

"Then the ships travel to a place called Betumah (Tiyumah), which has fresh water for anyone who desires it, and the distance to it is ten days (from Kalah, thus strengthening the point that Kalah is a territory nearer to the southern extreme of the Malaysian Peninsula.) Then the ships set out for a place called Kundranj (also Kundrang above) which takes ten days. This is also quoted by Ibn al-Faqih [34].

3. Omani Travellers in the Classical Malaysian Literatures

The classical Malays who lived in the polities shown above, on the other hand, were also found to be aware of the arrival of the Omani sea travellers only that the references were not as much as those retrieved from the classical Arab mainstream literature. This happened because many Malay literatures did not survive the climatic complex of the tropical region, and due to cultural factors such as war and relocation which often destroyed many materials in the process including libraries or archives owned by the Malay royals. Many accounts in the form of *hikayat* (chronicles) and *tarikh* (histories) from before 18th century CE survived only in copied works, but not the contemporary original manuscripts, thus some might be dismissed by certain historians as unreliable as they were not first hand and direct eyewitness to the settings. However, it is significant that the later works are regarded with respect, complimented somehow by many archaeological findings and foreign literatures which help giving context and value to the former given that some of them even talk about settings and events from as far back as the 4th to 8th century CE. The accumulation of accounts on the related topic also was comparatively small due to the period when classical Malaysians began to write more about their history, and the Omanis began to lose their maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean and replaced by Yemenis and British alike [35].

The Omanis did not have much influences after Malaysian polities began to convert to Islam and adopted Islamic style of literature in between 13th century CE to 15th century CE. This was so as Islam and all its religious and cultural aspects as adopted by the locals originated from other Arab Muslim communities especially the Hejazians and Yemenites (mostly Hadhramis), so they appeared as celebrated figures in the literatures like *Sulalatus Salatin* (*Sejarah Melayu*), *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, and *Tarikh Fathani* here and there. We should not simply conclude that Omanis did not present around Malaysian classical ports at Malacca, Kedah, and Johor, etc. as they were not recorded in local references. The underrepresentation of Omani travellers after the Abbasid Period might happen due to their humble role, and did not involve them as the main sponsor or owner of maritime enterprises nor they have political ambitions with the local kingdoms or sultanates which might have had spotlighted them. Nevertheless, the rare appearance is not totally in absentia.

In accordance to the trend, we found in classical Arabic literature, again Kedah becomes the main setting where references over the presence of Omani travellers occurred in classical Malaysia. The account may be referred to would be the 18th to 19th century CE century copy of Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa (HMM) and its descendant, the early 20th century CE At-Tarikh Silsilah Negeri Kedah (ATSK). The author of the former is unknown, however, the latter was produced by Muhammad Hassan bin Datuk Kerani Muhammad Arshad, the private secretary of the Sultan of Kedah at that time Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (r. 1882-1943) [36]. HMM tells the story of a legend that the first raja of Kedah, Raja Merong Mahawangsa originated from the Middle East known as The Land of Rum, and he settled out to travel to Kedah by sea after being assigned by the king of Rum looking out for his lost son where he eventually discovered near Langkawi Island in Kedah. Legend may it be as the hikayat was heavily influenced by Persians Hikayategh Sulaiman, however the tale is rationalised by ATSK historical account stating that the first raja was indeed Maharaja Darbaraja who fled the kingdom of Gumerun [37].

This particular Gumerun was in fact a kingdom situated at Ormuz (also Hormoz), a Persian kingdom situated at the entrance of the Persian Gulf which had controlled its surroundings in around the early centuries CE [38]. It is however difficult to set the date of the arrival of the king who fled the Persian invasion as both sources did not include any dates, however, based on Tarikh Fathani of Sheikh Safiuddin al-Abbasi of 15th century Patani the establishment of the dynasty which ruled Kedah and Patani happened around 3rd century CE, and interestingly the defeat of the king of Hormoz at the hand of the Sassanid king also historically happened in the same period [39]. We may assume that Maharaja Darbar Raja and thus the legendary Merong could be the very same person with the king of Gumerun. One evident to the historical and legend of these stories is that one cape in Langkawi Island was named Tanjung Gumerun which according to locals was to commemorate the anchoring of Maharaja Darbar Raja's fleet when he first arrived to Kedah after sailing passed the Andaman coast [40]. The kingdom of Ormuz was throughout most of its history was ruled by Persian-Arab rulers, especially of Omani descent up until the 16th to 17th century CE when a Ya'rubite Omani dynasty from the Omani heartland took over the domination of the area [41].

Turning to ATSK, it may contain perhaps the most vivid recollection of the presence of Omani sea travellers at hand. The account tells a particular story of how Tengku Muhammad Jiwa, the future sultan of Kedah (r.1710-1778), met with Omani vessels and crew in 1122H (1710 CE). The story began when the prince went to study Islamic sciences in Java, Palembang, and Malabar following his Yemenite teacher by the name of Sheikh Abdul Jalil al-Mahdani (or supposedly al-Mahdali, a Hadhrami *sayyid* clan name?). He was away for years until one day he missed his father and country so dearly that he decided to influence his teacher to come to Kedah. Without knowing that at the same time his father Sultan Abdullah al-Mu'adzam Shah (r.1698-1706CE) had passed away, he sailed from Malabar (modern Kerala, South India) with his teacher and peers until they reached the coast of Mergui (modern Myeik, Myanmar) where they met with Kedah mission looking out for him. The journey importantly occurred via a *baghalah* type ship of Arabian Sea owned by a Muscati *jeragan* (shipwright).

The story relates:

"Thus, on the first day of Jamadilakhir year of Hijrah, one thousand one hundred and twenty two, Tengku Muhammad Jiwa asked Tuan Syekh

Abdul Jalil and Hapis Sab to go to Kedah and mentioned that the kingdom is big and the king is a Muslim named Sultan Abdullah... [42].

It continues:

"... and so Tengku Muhammad Jiwa, altogether three of them made preparations and went on a baghalah of a Muskati man who happened to halt at India on his way to the Southeast... [43].

Together with Kedahan ships, the Omani baghalah passed the coast of the Andaman Sea until they reached Langkawi where Kedahan Laksamana (admiral) patrols halted them at the entrance of Selat (the Strait of) Tanjung Timun and Selat Tiloï near the modern town of Kuah. In commemorating the return of Kedahans until today, name the entrance to the strait, which is in between Tanjung (the Cape of) Chawat) and Pulau (the Island of) Bumbon as Selat Baghalah Tengku Muhammad Jiwa Balik (The Strait of The Returning Baghalah of Tengku Muhammad Jiwa) or shortened as Selat Berala [44]. In Langkawi, all of them got the opportunity to tour around and while they were at Pulau Dayang Bunting a part of Langkawi, the Omani jeragan was recorded to say that his intuition says that there are treasures being hidden at the bottom of the Tasik (The Lake of) Dayang Bunting which made the tengku smiles.

"Thus, in the following day the Arab people, jeragan of the baghalah conveyed to Tengku Muhammad Jiwa in Arabic, "Within my humble falak (astrology) calculation, there is a lot of precious treasure within this lake. Thus Tengku Muhammad Jiwa smiled... [45].

It is fascinating how in 18th century Malay accounts there are still Omani vessels and shipmasters still continuing the maritime tradition of visiting Malaysian coast and beyond as left by their forefathers from 9th century CE. The main activity was clear that other than moving mercantile cargoes for seasonal trade in the Malay Archipelago, they also moved passengers along their way, especially when they were passing southern India. The navigational and astronomical knowledge of the Omani shipwright must be a common skill which helped them survive in the Indo-Pacific network until British and Dutch colonial powers finally ended non-European maritime activities in the region in between the 19th and 20th century CE.

Outside Kedah, references to Omani might be found in Persian adaptation Malay *hikayat* called Syair Madhi which depicts a hero named Badrul Jabil (supposedly Jamil) and Rauza Khan who fought a cruel tyrant in Persia. The Malay literature has a colophon stating that it was copied in 1330H (1911CE) at Kampung Tembaga, in Singapura [46]. Just like any other *hikayat* which ended in Singaporean colonial collections, the *hikayat* might also originate from Kedah or any nearby state

4. Conclusion

This study gives insights on the historical relationship shared by both Malaysian and Omani nations since classical times. Various references in the form of Arab as well as Malay literatures in between the 9th century CE up to early 20th century CE show that Omani sea travellers had visited Malaysia particularly in what was then the Kingdom of Kedah. The references are essential as they provide information of different settings of the society during that time and their international activities. This is quite useful as a kind of benchmark in developing current and future society, especially for the international strategic cooperation between Malaysia and Oman pertaining cultural and

economic aspects. The revelations from the literatures provides awareness that the nations were once great, interrelated, and interdependent along the Indo-Pacific maritime network until colonial powers partitioned them apart. In Oman, the political disintegration involved the Bu Sa'idi Dynasty which once ruled down until the Tanzanian coast, while in Malaysia it involved the Sultanate of Kedah which ruled up until southern Myanmar, and the Sultanate of Johor who ruled southern Peninsular Malaysia together with Riau Archipelago. Kedah was sliced accordingly by the Siamese (modern Thailand) and British in between 1786 to 1909, while Johor-Riau was divided by British and Dutch through a treaty in 1824 and all these had handicapped the nations from their advancement until independence. By highlighting the relationship, thus the nations may start to leave their colonial disability and reach their full potential together.

Data Availability

The data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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