

## THE MALAY SHA'IR

### PROBLEMS OF ORIGIN AND TRADITION \*

Having been requested to publish a small piece for the benefit of the needy of Breda in this severe winter, I have been pleased to set aside the following article for that purpose.' With these words P. P. Roorda van Eysinga, 'Knight of the Order of the Netherlands Lion, Ph. Th. M. and L. H. Doct., Professor in the Philology, Geography and Ethnology of the East Indian Possessions at the Royal Military Academy, Member of Home and Foreign learned societies', introduced a small book entitled *Radin Mantri, eene Romance naar een Indisch Handschrift van Ali Musthathier*, published in 1838 in Breda by Broese and Co. — 'Entirely for the benefit of the poor of Breda' as was also pointed out on the title-page.

I do not know how far the distress of the Breda poor was alleviated by this product of Dutch Oriental scholarship. What is certain is that this little book first drew the attention of the Dutch public to a Malay poem which was subsequently published by a number of Dutch Malay scholars during the nineteenth century, but seems rather to have been forgotten since then. In connection with my preparation of a new edition of the text I have recently been engaged in fresh research into the poem. In this article I want to report on my research and on certain problems of a more general nature concerning Malay poetry which it has raised.

Roorda van Eysinga's publication of the text is not so much a translation as an adaptation in the luxuriantly romantic language which characterized Dutch writing at that time. He says, 'This sample contributes to knowledge of the nature of the poetry of the Malay archipelago; perhaps it would be of some use to point out that it is

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\* English translation of a paper, read at a meeting of the Oosters Genootschap at Leiden, on November 3, 1965.

<sup>1</sup> P. P. Roorda van Eysinga, *Radin Mantri, eene Romance naar een Indisch handschrift van Ali Musthathier*, Breda 1838, 28 pp.

encountered among peoples who, being neither literate nor civilized, express themselves naturally, following quite artlessly the promptings of their feeling and imagination', but from this statement as well as from the Dutch adaptation of the poem we learn more about the Romanticism of the editor and his time than about the Malay original and its background.

Fortunately the Malay original was soon available to orientalists in print. In the first impression of De Hollander's *Handleiding bij de beoefening van de Maleische taal- en letterkunde*, published in 1845, the full text appeared under the title *Sjair Ken Tamboehan*.<sup>2</sup> This was based on a copy of the same manuscript which had inspired Roorda van Eysinga's literary efforts. In 1856 De Hollander published the text as a separate book,<sup>3</sup> this time apparently using the actual manuscript which Van Eysinga had mentioned on his title-page. Klinkert's *Drie Maleische Gedichten*,<sup>4</sup> published 30 years later, included a quite different version of the Shair Ken Tambuhan. It was much longer, with considerable differences in the narrative sequence, personal names and other details.

Shortly afterwards this version was published once more in a Singapore lithograph edition.<sup>5</sup> Connection with Klinkert's publication cannot be proved, but the chronology makes it probable. Apparently the shair was to the taste of the Malay public, for a first impression in A.H. 1305 (i.e. A.D. 1889) was followed by an almost identical reprint in 1891,<sup>6</sup> and Winstedt reports another one in 1904.<sup>7</sup> No more of such editions appeared and there is no evidence of subsequent European interest in this text, apart from Winstedt's remarks on it in 1940 in his great history of Malay literature to which I hope to return. In Malaya, too, the shair appears to have been almost forgotten; repeated enquiries in various regions of the country in the summer

<sup>2</sup> J. J. de Hollander, *Handleiding bij de beoefening der Maleische taal en letterkunde*, Breda 1845, p. 256-280 of the Anthology.

<sup>3</sup> *Sjair Ken Tamboehan*. Een oorspronkelijk Maleisch gedicht, met aanteekeeningen uitgegeven door J. J. de Hollander, Leiden 1856, 18 + 26 pp.

<sup>4</sup> *Drie Maleische Gedichten*, by H. C. Klinkert (Shair Ken Tambuhan, Shair Yatim Nestapa dan Shair Bidasari), Leiden 1886, pp. 1-151.

<sup>5</sup> *Sha'ir Ken Tabuhan*, Chetera Jawa, terchap dimatba' Haji Muhammad Sirāj kampung Gelam... 1305, Singapore 141 pp.

<sup>6</sup> The Leiden copy has no title page proper; at the end of the shair a colophon says: Telah khatamlah sha'ir Ken Tabuhan kepada 20 hari bulan Sha'ban adalah yang punya chap ini alhaji Muhammad Sa'id, yang menyurat ini alfakir alhakir Ibrahim .. sanat 1307.

<sup>7</sup> R. O. Winstedt, *A History of Malay Literature*, JMBRAS XVII, Part III (1940). Bibliography, p. 243 (Sec. ed. id. XXI, Part 3 (1958), p. 259).

of 1964 led me to the conclusion that it was no longer known and nowhere to be found, either in manuscript or as a lithograph edition. An abridged version of the same story was put out by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the large and very active state publishing concern, as a reading book for schools.<sup>8</sup> This edition is based on a Leiden manuscript which obviously contains a later prose adaptation of the shair.

The text in question belongs to the poetic genre which is called *sha'ir* in Malay. Malay poetry does not possess a great variety of genres. It is true that through the years Malay poets have experimented incidentally with different foreign verse forms: mathnawi, rubā'i and others are encountered in the *Tājus-Ṣalātin*, for example, and the gurindam was used in the nineteenth century, particularly by Raja Ali Haji, but none of these genres has ever become popular. Discussions of Malay poetry are really concerned exclusively with the pantun and the sha'ir, with the possible addition of what Winstedt in his *History of Malay Literature* terms 'rhythmical verse': literary fragments, sometimes poetically impressive, which are still current in the Malay world to judge from the tales taken down from (usually old) storytellers and published recently by Dewan Bahasa at Kuala Lumpur. The clear formal characteristics displayed by the pantun and the shair are absent from this rhythmical work.<sup>9</sup>

Much has been written about the pantun.<sup>10</sup> Essentially it is a four-line stanza, each line of which generally has four words, and it is distinguished by an a-b-a-b rhyme-scheme. Internal rhyme also occurs quite often. The most striking characteristic of the pantun, however, is the relationship between the first and second couplets. By its sound and/or its significance — symbolic or otherwise — the first couplet alludes to the second pair of lines in which the poet's meaning is clearly revealed. It is largely this relationship between the two halves of the stanza which has stimulated the interest of researchers and translators.<sup>11</sup>

The shair differs in various ways from the pantun. Whereas in the

<sup>8</sup> *Hikayat Panji Semirang dan Hikayat Ken Tambohan*. Diusahakan oleh Nik Maimunah binti Yahya, Zaharah Mhd. Khalid. Bunga Rampai Sastra Lama V, Kuala Lumpur 1964.

<sup>9</sup> Winstedt, op cit. p. 121 sqq.

<sup>10</sup> The most important literature is mentioned in A. Teeuw, *A Critical Survey of Studies on Malay and Bahasa Indonesia*, The Hague 1961, p. 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> For a good collection of pantuns with an interesting introduction, see *Pantun Melayu* by R. J. Wilkinson and R. O. Winstedt, Singapore 1914. Pantuns with an adequate English translation can be found in A. W. Hamilton, *Malay Pantuns*, Singapore 1959.

latter the four-line stanza forms a complete and rounded whole, in the shair the stanza is just a part of an often very lengthy poem. The shair stanza also lacks the allusive element entirely. The rhyme-scheme is also different: the shair rhymes a-a-a-a and internal rhyme hardly ever occurs. The correspondence of pantun and shair lies in two aspects of their formal structure: both have usually four-line stanzas, and both show a marked preference for the four-word line.

As has already been pointed out, the shair attracted the attention of European scholars early in the nineteenth century. In 1812 Marsden included a fragment of the Ken Tambuhan with a translation in the extracts added to his *Malay Grammar*.<sup>12</sup> In 1811 Leyden mentioned the 'sáyer' in his famous treatise *On the Languages and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations*,<sup>13</sup> observing that it was 'analogous to the Persian Musnevi', and he also published a fragment of the Shair Selimbari. Dulaurier, in his well-known *Mémoire*<sup>14</sup> of 1843, summarized the contents of a Ken Tambuhan manuscript from the Raffles collection in London, translating a short passage into French. His comments reveal obvious aesthetic appreciation as well as scholarly interest: 'Ces compositions sont remarquables par la simplicité de l'action, par le pathétique des situations, par l'expression des sentiments tendres et gracieux qui y dominant'. Dutch editors of the text were equally positive in their evaluation of these Malay poems in general and the Ken Tambuhan in particular.<sup>15</sup> However, the dissenting view of one researcher should also be quoted — that of Pijnappel, who saw nothing in Malay letters beyond simple tales and doggerel, and in fact denied that Malay had a literature in the proper sense of the word.<sup>16</sup>

Even scholars who found the shair interesting and bestowed a great deal of care on the publication of texts did not devote much attention to general questions of the origin, form and structure of this literary genre. Unlike the pantun, the origin and structure of which have

<sup>12</sup> W. Marsden, *A Grammar of the Malayan Language*, London 1812, p. 193-208.

<sup>13</sup> John Leyden, *On the Languages and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations*, Asiatic Researches... X (1811), p. 176, 182-184.

<sup>14</sup> Ed. Dulaurier, *Mémoire*, lettres et rapport relatifs au cours de langues Malaye et Javanaise, Paris 1843, p. 49 et seq.

<sup>15</sup> See also H. C. Klinkert, *Korte Inhoud van het Maleische Gedicht Sjair Ken Tamboehan*, De Indische Gids III. 1 (1881), p. 1165-1187.

<sup>16</sup> See the quotations in A. Teeuw, *De Bahasa Indonesia, de Wereld en Nederland*, Amsterdam 1955, p. 19.

frequently been subject of research and the cause of profound differences of opinion, the shair as such has hardly ever been studied. The genre seems to have been accepted as it stood and its provenance and age have only been commented on incidentally — and such comments are sometimes contradictory. In an article in the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* it is said that the shair appears from its foreign name to be of alien origin,<sup>17</sup> but in 1952 Hooykaas asserted equally positively that in spite of its name, the shair is an indigenous Malay verse form.<sup>18</sup> Winstedt in his authoritative history of Malay literature does not discuss the question of the origin of the shair as such at all.

Perhaps it is therefore worth while going into these questions further, always bearing in mind that the origins of the name and the genre do not necessarily coincide and that the derivation of the name does not necessarily explain the provenance of the genre. On the other hand an investigation of the genre should obviously include the name.

Many writers have observed — and none has ever disputed — that the word shair goes back to the Arabic *shī'r*, a term that means poetry in general, and also a poetical work, a poem; *shā'ir* (with long ā) is the Arabic word for poet. When and for what reason the Arabic word became *shair* in Malay rather than, for example, *shīir* is not altogether clear — the unvocalized Arabic orthography of the manuscripts conceals the pronunciation.

The two earliest instances that I know of the use of the word shair in Indonesia both date from the sixteenth century. One is Malay, the other Javanese.

The Malay example occurs in the sixteenth-century manuscript which Drewes published of the Malay translation of the Arabic kasidah *Burda*.<sup>19</sup> In it there is reference to a life 'yang telah lalu dalam berbuat sha'ir' — a life that was spent in the writing of poetry. The word is used here as a general term with no hint of any more specific sense. It is employed as a translation of *shī'r* in the Arabic text.

In the sixteenth-century Javanese primbon which was also published by Drewes<sup>20</sup> there is a similar use of the term *sair* in this general sense. In introducing a quotation from an Arabic poem, the text says:

<sup>17</sup> *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indie* III; see 'Sjair'.

<sup>18</sup> C. Hooykaas, *Literatuur in Maleis en Indonesisch*, Groningen and Djakarta 1952, p. 70-71.

<sup>19</sup> G. W. J. Drewes, *Een 16de eeuwse Maleise vertaling van de Burda van al-Buṣīrī*... Verh. Kon. Inst. 18 (1955) p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> G. W. J. Drewes, *Een Javaanse primbon uit de zestiende eeuw, opnieuw uitgegeven en vertaald*, Leiden 1954, p. 30.

'kadi ucap ing sair' — which means 'as the poem says', unless the Arabic word meant is *shā'ir* and to be translated as 'poet'.

In later Javanese the word occurs in the form *singir*. Pigeaud repeatedly mentions it in his *Javaanse Volksvertoningen*<sup>21</sup> where he describes *singir* or *geguritan* as 'poems in a simple 8-syllable or 10-syllable measure, the lines rhyming in couplets or in fours. . . . the themes of this type of Javanese poetry are usually the sacred history of Islam, the life of the Messenger of God. . . . and so on'. Pigeaud points out that these poems are found especially in eastern Java and along the Pasisir, the coastal region. He also reports descriptions, from the *Tjenti* and elsewhere, from which it appears that this type of poem was sung to a musical accompaniment by choral singers who were themselves called *singir*. He also indicated the connection with the Malay shair.

With regard to the relationship between the older Javanese *sair* and the modern *singir*, it is possible that first a Malay version of the word was borrowed and that later this was either re-borrowed or Arabicized once more into *singir* (with the characteristic Javanese rendering of 'ain by ng); however, it is also possible that in the primbon we have the word for poet and that *singir* is the natural form in which Ar. *shī'r* would be rendered in Javanese. In the Javanese *Tuhfa* translation which Johns has recently published<sup>22</sup> the expression *wong sangir*, 'a poet', occurs twice when quotations are introduced, suggesting that the Arabic *shā'ir* rather than *shī'r* is the source for this.

It is clear that these instances afford little new information about the origin of this well-known Malay literary genre and the specific use of the word shair to designate it.

The *Tājus-Ṣalāṭin* is interesting and instructive in this respect. This text was written in 1602 and has been published as early as 1827 by Roorda van Eysinga,<sup>23</sup> but even before this it was familiar to such students of Malay as Werndly and Valentijn. It is a Malay princely chronicle which in its essentials derives from Persian examples, although the exact origin of the text as it stands has not yet been explained.

<sup>21</sup> Th. Pigeaud, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen*, Batavia 1938, p. 304, see also the other references in the Index.

<sup>22</sup> A. H. Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*, Canberra 1965, p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> *Tāj-ūṣ-Ṣalāṭin . . . De Kroon aller Koningen van Bocharie van Djôhor naar een oud Maleisch Handschrift vertaald door P. P. Roorda van Eysinga*, Batavia 1827. See also Ph. S. van Ronkel, *De Kroon der Koningen*, TBG 41 (1899) p. 55-69.

The date given — 1602/3 — has never to my knowledge been disputed, and it has also been established that the text originated in Atjeh, then the centre of Malay literary activity.

Quite a few samples of poetry occur in this text, inserted by the writer as illustrations, embellishments — and doubtless as a demonstration of his skill and knowledge in this field. Most of these poetic fragments are given a heading indicating the genre to which they belong: *rubā'ī* and *mathnawī* are most frequent, followed by *qit'ah*, which occurs several times, and finally the term *shī'r* (perhaps it should already be read as *sha'ir* — the unvocalized text gives no indication). *Rubā'ī* and *mathnawī* are literary genres that are familiar from Persian poetry, and the terms are here applied to similar Malay poems. *Qit'ah* means 'fragment' or 'scrap' and is also familiar from Arabic poetics, where it is used for poems on a special theme; the poems in the Tājuṣ-Ṣalāṭīn to which this term is applied are palpably fragmentary verses of this kind. The term *shī'r* that most concerns us here is used for poems of varying length and verse structure (i.e. the rhyme is of various types), so that it would appear that *shī'r* is not a specific technical term but a general word for poem. The type of poem which today is called a *sha'ir* does not occur in this text, no more than does the *pantun*.

We conclude therefore that in Atjeh in about 1600 the word *shī'r* or *sha'ir* still meant poem in general, and that at least the author of the Tājuṣ-Ṣalāṭīn included no poems in his book which exhibit the structure of the present-day Malay *sha'ir*. Obviously the roughly contemporary works of Hamzah Panzuri, which are generally referred to as *sha'ir*, must be compared with this text. The term *sha'ir* occurs on a number of occasions in Hamzah's poetic works, as published by Doorenbos,<sup>24</sup> particularly at the beginning or end either of fragments or complete poems. Unfortunately the form in which these poems have been transmitted is not always as perfect as might be desired, and Doorenbos did little to clarify the history of the texts; the authenticity of the opening and closing lines in which the author and time and place of composition are given can sometimes be disputed. But even if all such lines were authentic, all that could be deduced from any occurrence in the text is that *sha'ir* was a term for a poem of the sort that Hamzah wrote, that is to say a series of four-line stanzas with a-a-a-a rhyme.

<sup>24</sup> J. Doorenbos, *De Geschriften van Hamzah Pansoeri uitgegeven en toegelicht*, Diss. Leiden. 1933, e.g. pp. 16, 19, 27, 28, 29 etc.

There are in fact clear indications that Hamzah and his contemporaries did not use the word *sha'ir* as a technical term for the poems that we now call by this name. Drewes and Voorhoeve<sup>25</sup> were long engaged in the identification of a text which contains a commentary on Hamzah Pansuri's poems, and in Malay sources this text is not called *sharḥ sha'ir H.P.*, but *sharḥ rubā'i Hamzah Panzuri* — 'commentary on the quatrains of Hamzah Panzuri'. Hamzah's poems were therefore known technically as *rubā'i* or, in the Arabic plural form, *rubā'īyyāt*. In one respect this use of the term does not agree with Arabic and Persian poetic practice: the special characteristic of the *rubā'i* is that it forms a complete entity in itself and is not a stanza of a longer poem. In their structure, however, Hamzah's poems can best be defined as *rubā'i*: four-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme that may be a-a-a-a, a-a-b-a, or a-a-b-b. These different schemes also occur in the poems designated as *rubā'i* in the Tājuṣ-Ṣalātīn. The connection between *rubā'i* and *sha'ir* was noted long ago by a Western researcher. In an article about the pantun in 1883, Pijnappel implied, although he did not actually state explicitly, that the *sha'ir* is borrowed from the *rubā'i*<sup>26</sup>:

'*sjir* and not *sjaïr*, as it is pronounced by the Malay themselves, means poetry and also, by extension, poem. The usual form of Malay poems is that of the modern Arabic, or rather Arabic-Persian *rubai*, an originally Persian poetic genre, although this name does not occur in Malay. They are four-line stanzas, hence the name *rubai*, 'four-line', and all lines — with the occasional exception of the third — have the same rhyme'.

There are other points in Hamzah Pansuri's work which give the impression that in those days Malay terminology was not yet fixed and differed from that which we encounter later. At a certain place in the poems there is mention of the *Asrār al-'ārifīn*, a text which has also been preserved, and consists of a number of stanzas of the *shair* type, followed by a detailed prose commentary. Speaking of Hamzah's work this poem says:<sup>27</sup>

Asrār al 'ārifīn pun perbuatannya  
Ruba' al muḥakkīkīn nama baitnya

<sup>25</sup> See G. W. J. Drewes, *Sjamsuddins onwindbare Sjarḥ Ruba'i Hamza al-Fansuri*, BKI 107 (1951), p. 31-41; P. Voorhoeve, *Is Sjamsuddīn's commentaar gevonden?* *ibid.* p. 361-364; cp. also R. Roolvink, *Two new 'old' Malay Manuscripts*, Malayan and Indonesian Studies, Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt... Oxford 1964, p. 243 sqq.

<sup>26</sup> J. Pijnappel Gzn., *Over de Maleische Pantoens*, BKI published... on the occasion of the Sixth International Congress of Orientalists at Leiden, The Hague 1883, p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> Doorenbos, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

which means: 'he (Hamzah) made the *Asrār al-'ārifīn*, the *rubā'ī al muḥakkikīn* is the name of its *bait*'. Once again *rubā'ī* is used to indicate a poem of the type which we would now call *shair*.

This term *bait* also merits attention. It is familiar in Arabic-Persian poetics and means distichon, two lines which together form an entity. But in this context the term is obviously used in a wider, or even quite different sense, meaning a stanza of four lines, and is therefore almost synonymous with *rubā'ī*. This is clear from the *Asrār al-'ārifīn* itself: in the introduction of the text, in which there is an exhortation to seek the true knowledge of God, the author — or the copyist who is responsible for the introduction — writes: <sup>28</sup> *Adapun semetara belum bertemu dengan yang sempurna berma'rifat, pandang pada lima belas bait. 'As long as you have not yet found a teacher who possesses the full knowledge, turn your attention to the fifteen baits' and, the text continues, 'if you do not understand these fifteen baits, study the commentary on them' (i.e. as given in this book). It is clear from the poem which immediately follows that by *bait* is meant a four-line stanza rhyming a-a-a-a. It is even possible that this is stated explicitly. There is a sentence which reads: *adapun ini empat s-j-alif-w-ng* <sup>29</sup> *pada sabuah bait. My conjecture is that this s-j-alif-w-ng is a corrupt rendering of *sajak*, and that what is being said is that a *bait* consists of four rhyming lines.**

Be that as it may, it is remarkable that once again a poem which we should unhesitatingly call a *shair* is not referred to as such by the author or copyist. It is not until two centuries later that we find a clear definition of a *shair* by a Malay writer. Raja Ali Haji, the celebrated author from Riau who has many works of many different types to his credit, wrote a collection of *gurindams* in A.H. 1263 (A.D. 1846) which were published by Netscher in 1855.<sup>30</sup> In the introduction to

<sup>28</sup> Doorenbos, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> In the manuscript a *j* is written, not a *ch*. However, in this as well as in many other manuscripts the distinction between *j* and *ch* is often neglected. — In the discussion after the lecture, Prof. Drewes suggested that *empat sechawang* could well be the correct reading, meaning "four in one branch", parallel e.g. to the well-known Malay expression *empat serangkai*.

<sup>30</sup> *De twaalf spreukgedichten*. (A Malay poem by Raja Ali Haji of Riau, published and furnished with a translation and notes by E. Netscher) TBG 2 (1854), pp. 11-32. The Malay text runs as follows: *Adalah beda antara gurindam dengan sha'ir itu aku nyatakan pula. Bermula arti sha'ir Melayu itu perkataan yang bersajak yang serupa dua berpasang pada akhirnya dan tiada berkehendak pada sempurna perkataan pada satu-satu pasangannya, bersalahan dengan gurindam. Adapun arti gurindam itu yaitu perkataan*

this volume the Malay writer compared and defined the gurindam and shair as follows: 'I will make clear the difference between gurindam and shair: the meaning of shair in Malay is a text with uniform final rhymes in double pairs; the shair, unlike the gurindam, requires no completeness of text in each of the two pairs separately. The meaning of gurindam is a text which does have final rhymes, in pairs, but the text is complete within a single couplet, so that the first rhyming line forms as it were the protasis (condition, *sharat*), the second the apodosis (answer, *jawāb*)'. Then follow examples of the two genres.

Here we have the shair as we know it defined within Malay literature itself.

Information relevant to this problem of the origin of the name and genre of the shair can also be extracted from early Dutch sources, although it is mostly negative; and while it is necessary to be careful with arguments *ex silentio*, the following facts nevertheless give food for thought. First of all there is an old list of Malay manuscripts which were in the possession of Isaac de Saint Martin, and about which De Haan and Van Ronkel have informed us.<sup>31</sup> Among the manuscripts listed there is no text which is referred to as shair or in which a known shair can be recognized.

Valentijn knew of 'sjaïers', as he spelt the word. In his great book *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën* is a list of titles of Malay texts, all of which he says he had in his keeping 'except for one or two'.<sup>32</sup> In this list he mentions not a single shair by name, but in the middle of the list he puts 'Various Malay Sjaïers, or Verses' — after that he continues his inventory with 'Hhakajats', prose stories which by definition are not shairs in Malay.

Elsewhere in his book, actually in two parallel passages, Valentijn is clearer on the subject of the shairs with which he was familiar; twice he speaks of the old port of Pansur, on the coast of Sumatra,

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yang bersajak juga pada akhir pasangannya tetapi sempurna perkataannya  
dengan satu pasangannya sahaja, jadilah seperti sajak yang pertama itu  
sharat dan sajak yang kedua itu jadi seperti jawab.

Bermula inilah rupanya sha'ir:

dengarkan tuan suatu renchana / mengarang didalam gundah gulana /  
barangkali gurindam kurang kena / tuan betulkan dengan sempurna //  
Inilah arti gurindam yang dibawah satar ini:  
persimpanan yang indah-indah / yaitulah 'ilmu yang memberi fa'idah //  
aku hendak bertutur / akan gurindam yang teratur //

<sup>31</sup> F. de Haan, *Uit oude Notaris-papieren* I, TBG 42 (1900), p. 297-308; Ph. S. van Ronkel, *Over eene oude lijst van Maleische handschriften*, ibid. p. 309-322.

<sup>32</sup> F. Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* III, part I, p. 26-27.

once a flourishing commercial centre, but almost forgotten by Valentijn's time. Not entirely forgotten, however — and I quote from the more ornate of the two passages, which makes the piece cited by Doorenbos seem almost dowdy by comparison: <sup>33</sup>

'A certain Malay poet, Hamzah Pantsoer . . . , that is to say Hamzah named after Pansur, a man renowned among the Malays for his wonderful Sjaiers and Poems, makes us familiar with his native town when in his grandiloquent verses he raises as from the ashes its ancient lustre and past splendour and re-creates the bright days of its glory'.

This is not the only place where Valentijn says more than he can justify, but at least he had heard of the 'sjaiers' of Hamzah Pansuri. Even if he cannot convince us that he had read them, let alone understood them, what he does show is that about a hundred years after their composition, these poems were known in the Malay world as shairs.

If after reading Valentijn's work we turn to Werndly's Malay grammar, which appeared in 1736, then it must be admitted that it is doubtful whether Valentijn actually saw these poems or had any concrete conception of the term shair. It is obvious that the scholarly Werndly had no example of what we would call shairs at his disposal for his study of the Malay language. He does describe a few Malay texts mentioned in his *Boekzaal* as being either 'written in verse' or 'rhymed'.<sup>34</sup> But he refers to these texts as hikayat, which makes it unlikely that they were poems. They appear — and probably not by accident — to be the texts which follow the entry 'Various Malay Sjaiers, or Verses' in Valentijn's list. It seems quite probable to me that Werndly read Valentijn wrongly, taking these texts to be examples of his 'Various Malay sjaiers' and classifying them as such without having seen them himself.

That Werndly was unfamiliar with the shair genre is shown incontrovertibly by Book IV of his work, *Van de Dichtkunst*.<sup>35</sup> Here he discusses in detail metre and rhyme in the classical languages, Dutch, Persian and Arabic, and finally Malay. However, everything he says about Malay poetry and all the examples he gives are derived from the *Tājuṣ-Ṣalāṭin*, which for him was a *non plus ultra* for Malay literature. He seems to have had no knowledge of either shair or pantun.

<sup>33</sup> id. IV, part I, p. 66; the quotation in Doorenbos (p. 1) is from Vol. V, first part, *Beschrijvinge van het eiland Sumatra*, 7th book, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> G. Werndly, *Maleische Spraakkunst*, Amsterdam 1736; the texts mentioned by him as being written in rhyme are the *Hhikâjat Bûrong pingit* (no. 18: "This is a poem"), the *Hhikâjat rādja Tambikbâja* (no. 25) and the *Hhikâjat Segala Susuhûnan* (no. 32).

<sup>35</sup> Werndly, op. cit. p. 196-226.

This does not mean, however, that before 1700 the shair as a literary genre was confined to Hamzah Pansuri's work. The genre was already being practised with intelligence and skill in Macassar in about 1670, as is shown by the *Shair Perang Mengkasar*, recently published and translated by Skinner.<sup>36</sup> This text shows too that in this period, and at least by this particular author, the genre was also used for poems which were not strictly religious: the shair on the war in Macassar, written by a local poet, is historical rather than religious. But at the same time Skinner has convincingly shown that this historical shair clearly displays not only the influence of the spiritual climate of Atjeh around 1600, but also the direct influence of Hamzah Pansuri himself. It is this particular historical shair, which is so typical of its genre and at the same time so directly based on Hamzah's oeuvre, that raises the question of whether his work is in fact the origin of the Malay shair, a type of poem which in its stanza structure goes back to the *rubā'i*, by which name it was at first known, but from which it is distinguished by being made up of series of such stanzas. These poems by Hamzah would have spread rapidly through Indonesia in copies designated at first as the *shī'rs* or *shā'irs* of Hamzah, meaning simply his 'poems' — but since the genre was new and the name strange, this general term could quite easily, and almost automatically would become the name of this specific genre, especially as the genre soon began to inspire imitation, not only in the original religious themes but also in a wider range of subjects.

I fully realize that it will be difficult to state anything with certainty in this matter. It would, for example, be difficult to prove that there were no earlier poems of the shair type in Malay: it could be argued that parallel to an Indo-Javanese, early Javanese literature, there must have been an Indo-Sumutran, early Malay one, of which in fact there are obvious relics preserved in Malay writings. Nūruddīn ar-Rānīrī's denunciation of this sort of literary product in about 1640 is a clear indication of its existence.<sup>37</sup> But because of the absence of manuscripts earlier than the sixteenth century and the fact that in Malay literature copyists were always potential rewriters, we shall never obtain any more precise knowledge of this earlier Malay literature. Whether poetry was an important part of this literature and in what form must also

<sup>36</sup> *Sja'ir Perang Mengkasar* (The Rhymed Chronicle of the Macassar War), by Entji' Amin. Edited and translated by C. Skinner, Verh. Kon. Inst. 40 (1963), see esp. pp. 22-25.

<sup>37</sup> Winstedt, op. cit. p. 98.

remain a mystery. The fact that the term *seloka* occurs with diverse meanings in Malay is no more enlightening than the fact that an epitaph in verse was carved on a tombstone in Atjeh in 1380 which was initially classified by Stutterheim as a shair,<sup>38</sup> but was later identified more correctly by Marrison as a verse composed in the Indian metre known as *upajāti*.<sup>39</sup> What can be said is that it is not very likely that a verse form primarily characterized by rhyme is of Indian or, to be more cautious, of Sanskrit origin. To the best of my knowledge end-rhyme plays either a subordinate role or no role at all there.

The shair could of course be thought of in terms of an old Indonesian form of poetry, possibly adapted to later alien forms. Such a possibility cannot be immediately rejected. It is a fact that in Indonesian popular poetry the four-line stanza and the four-word line occur frequently, while rhyme too plays an important part in the various verse forms of this poetry. Against this stands the fact that as far as I know the shair is not a popular element of folk poetry in traditional Malaya. Nor to my knowledge has an exact equivalent of the shair been encountered in all the detailed material on folk poetry that has gradually become available. To this must be added not only the fact that the early lists of Malay texts contain no shairs, but also the fact that no shairs have been preserved in the oldest manuscript collections. Finally there are, as far as I know, no quotations or examples or any other indications of the existence of old shairs to be found in the old Malay prose texts which do contain other important points of reference for the history of Malay literature (e.g. the *Sejarah Melayu*, which mentions such texts as the Muhammad Hanafiah, the Alexander romance and the Amir Hamzah<sup>39a</sup>).

<sup>38</sup> W. F. Stutterheim, *A Malay Sha'ir in Old-Sumatran Characters of 1380 A.D.* Acta Orientalia 14 (1936), pp. 268-279.

<sup>39</sup> G. E. Marrison, *A Malay Poem in Old Sumatran characters*, JMBRAS 24 (1951), pp. 162-165.

<sup>39a</sup> Is it merely accidental that in the story of the wooing of Puteri Gunung Lédang the detailed description of the wondrous garden, which is found in the later version of the SM (Sh. 27.13), does not occur in the Raffles manuscript, which according to Winstedt represents an older version of the text (p. 130)? In the later version, a survey of existing Malay literary genres is given in the description of the singing of the birds: "segala burung didalam taman itupun berbunyi, pelbagai bunyinya, ada yang seperti orang bersiul, ada yang seperti orang berbangsi, ada yang seperti orang *bersha'ir*, ada yang seperti orang *berbait*, ada yang seperti orang *berseloka*, ada yang seperti orang *bergurindam*, limau mengkaripun bersorak, anggerékpun mengilai, delima tersenyum, dan bunga air mawar *berpantun*....."

We must conclude that there is no external evidence for the existence of shair as a literary genre before 1600. Is there any internal evidence in this direction, in other words have any shairs been preserved of which it might be plausibly suggested or even proved that they are older? This brings me back to my point of departure, the Shair Ken Tambuhan. For in Winstedt's discussion of this shair, which he treats as an example of a genuine old Malay shair, he argues that it must have originated in fifteenth-century Malacca, as is clear from the following quotation: <sup>40</sup>

'None of the MSS. of the *Sha'ir Ken Tambuhan* may be very old, but in spite of Arabic loan-words the poem has all the marks of the spacious days of the fifteenth century, Kawi words like *lalangun* "garden", Javanese forms like *ngambara* and *ngulurkan*, a copious vocabulary, and a knowledge of Hindu mythology with a classic style at times as polished and vigorous as the heroic couplet of Pope but oftener monotonous from trite rhymes'.

On closer inspection the literary and stylistic arguments do not seem very convincing. Certainly there are all manner of Javanese loan-words in the Ken Tambuhan and other sha'irs, some of them apparently being words from older forms of Javanese rather than from the modern language. There is, however, no compelling reason for assuming that these Javanese loan-words were borrowed directly from the original language by the writer of the shair — all these Javanese elements are without exception to be found in the Malay Panji and wayang stories which have long been widely distributed in large numbers through the Malay world (Wernndly makes mention of them), and which can probably be traced directly to Javanese sources, dating perhaps from the time of Malacca. The shair poet had an ample store of Javanisms at his disposal, enough to give his poem consciously or unconsciously its local colour (the story takes place in Java), and it is quite unnecessary to assume direct Javanese sources or contacts for these elements in the shair. Moreover, even after the Malaccan period the possibility of direct Javanese influence on the Malay world can by no means be excluded. There were centres of Malay literary activity which maintained the closest contacts with Java up to recent times — Palembang comes first to mind, but Batavia itself can be quoted in this connection and Banjarmasin too is an interesting example; quite late in the nineteenth century a Panji story was adapted there in the form of a Malay shair. This poem, which is known only in manuscript, is so full of Javanese words and forms that all the versions of the Ken Tambuhan seem the

<sup>40</sup> Winstedt, op. cit. p. 127.

purest Malay in comparison.<sup>41</sup> In fact even in a typically Malay text such as the Hikayat Hang Tuah, known to have been written somewhere on the Malay peninsula in comparatively recent times (the second half of the seventeenth century?), these Javanese elements occur in quite large numbers and obviously belonged to the repertoire of Malay writers throughout the Malay world, thanks to — and by way of — all those Javanese wayang stories which have been so widely current up to the present day. The Javanese influence on the Kelantan wayang is also known, an influence which is also regarded as fairly recent.<sup>42</sup> There is no apparent evidence of independent, direct knowledge of Hindu mythology on the part of the sha'ir poet. The only names of gods, celestial nymphs etc. which he employs are obviously based on second- or third-hand knowledge, via Javanese-Malay prose texts.

Similarly the argument of varied vocabulary which Winstedt advances in support of a Malaccan and fifteenth-century origin of the Ken Tambuhan has little value — on closer inspection this variety does not quite come up to expectations, and it should also be pointed out that there has been no lack of later writers in the Malay world who have wielded a sometimes very rich vocabulary; Raja Ali Haji, Abdullah and the author of the Hikayat Hang Tuah are examples.

Winstedt himself has also pointed out the large number of Arabic or Arabic-Persian loan-words in the Ken Tambuhan. It is difficult to find in this an argument *against* an early origin of this shair; after all there are indications enough that many Arabic loan-words had already penetrated into Malay in the sixteenth century, and probably as early as the fifteenth.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless it is remarkable how many of these terms are treated as perfectly ordinary Malay words, and also how less usual loan-words are used, which indicated a certain active interest in the language from which such borrowings were made.

The textual history of the Shair Ken Tambuhan, in so far as it is known at present, does not point to an old tradition. I cannot go into this at great length in this article as I have discussed it in detail in my introduction to a critical edition of the text. I must restrict myself here to a few of the main points. I have had to leave the two Djakarta

<sup>41</sup> The *Charita Wayang Kinudang*, described by H. H. Juynboll in his *Catalogus van de Maleische en Sundaneesche handschriften der Leidsche Universiteitsbibliotheek*, Leiden 1890, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Anker Rentse, *The Kelantan Shadow-Play*, JMBRAS 14.3 (1936); Jeanne Cuisinier, *Le théâtre d'ombres à Kelantan*, Paris 1957.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. the Burda translation (note 19) by Drewes who has paid special attention to borrowings from Arabic.

manuscripts out of this discussion, but as far as can be made out from the information given in Van Ronkel's Catalogue they would not greatly alter the picture given here.<sup>44</sup>

The Shair Ken Tambuhan has come down in three versions. There is the version which was published by De Hollander and had previously been translated by Roorda van Eysinga. It is obviously based on a manuscript which was in the possession of the Reverend Lenting. That manuscript is no longer known; perhaps it has suffered the same sad fate as many of the manuscripts of the Algemene Secretarie, as recently outlined by Voorhoeve.<sup>45</sup> This text is quite close to the prose Hikayat Undakan Penurat, to which Mr S. O. Robson first drew my attention.<sup>46</sup> There can be little doubt that the hikayat, a typical though short Pañji story, is anterior to this shair version. The shair as published by De Hollander is a clumsy specimen of this Malay genre and in itself it certainly does not give the impression of being very old.

The second version is the text published by Klinkert. There is only one recent manuscript of this, probably copied on Klinkert's behalf.<sup>47</sup> This version differs considerably from De Hollander's in its wording as well as in narrative sequence.

A third version has not yet been published and it is remarkable that all the manuscripts I have consulted save Klinkert's in the main contain this third version, even though they diverge at the end of the story, falling into several groups. The oldest manuscripts of this version date from about 1800 — they are of rather diverse provenance but many of them suggest an origin in southern Sumatra, notably Palembang. This third version is close on the whole to Klinkert's, but differs somewhat in wording and versification: in the first part at least half of the stanzas are completely different and the number of actually identical stanzas is quite small, while in the second part there is even less correspondence. On the other hand the wording of the seven manuscripts of Version III is very similar, so much so that it has proved possible by using these seven manuscripts to achieve a critical edition of the text in which the commentary takes up less room than the text itself. Anyone who has experience of Malay literary tradition will appreciate the significance

<sup>44</sup> Ph. S. van Ronkel, *Catalogus der Maleische Handschriften in het Museum van het Bat. Gen. van K. en W.*, Verh. Bat. Gen. 57 (1909), pp. 312-313.

<sup>45</sup> P. Voorhoeve, *A Malay Scriptorium*, Malayan and Indonesian Studies, Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt... Oxford, 1964, pp. 256-266.

<sup>46</sup> Juynboll, *op. cit.* p. 100.

<sup>47</sup> Ph. S. van Ronkel, *Supplement-catalogus der Maleische en Minangkabausche handschriften in de Leidsche Universiteitsbibliotheek*, Leiden 1921, p. 61.

of this. It seems therefore unlikely that Version III, from which these seven mss. derive, should go back to the Malaccan period and that three centuries after the creation of this version its tradition should still be preserved in such remarkably similar and reliable manuscripts. It is more likely that this version was written in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, possibly in Palembang. The Klinkert version, although written in good, sound Malay, is in no respect older or more archaic in its features compared with Version III. It is possibly a Riau re-composition of the text, the model for which was known only by oral tradition. De Hollander's version seems a clumsy versification based on the Hikayat Undakan Penurat, which is difficult to date — this text apparently goes back to a Palembang manuscript too. In any case, whatever its relationship to the two other versions may be, there is no internal evidence for a pre-1600 origin for this text.

Everything considered, the textual history of the Shair Ken Tambuhan supports no argument for a fifteenth-century origin of this shair, and there is in fact strong evidence in the manuscripts as they have been handed down to us against an early genesis. It seems quite probable that the Shair Ken Tambuhan originated in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

What should be concluded from all this? First of all that the application of the term shair to a particular literary genre in Malay is probably not earlier than 1600, and that the name only acquired this technical meaning after, and possibly because of the poems of Hamzah Pansuri. It is quite conceivable that this poet did more than consciously or unconsciously establish a new name for an existing genre. In the light of present knowledge it is possible to support the hypothesis that in making use of the Arabic-Persian verse form with which he was familiar, the *rubā'i*, he deviated from the Arabic-Persian tradition and wrote *rubā'i* which were no longer complete poems in themselves but stanzas of a larger whole. At first these poems built up out of numerous stanzas were still called *rubā'i*, were sometimes referred to as *bait*, but also as *shi'r* or *sha'ir*, meaning simply 'poem'. The model found favour, however, and this extended *sha'ir* was looked upon as a new genre. At this point *sha'ir* became the technical term for the type. Other poets began to follow Hamzah's example, not confining themselves to religious poems. All kinds of subjects were dealt with in shair form. A swift distribution and popularization of the new genre is by no means unlikely if it is remembered how quickly and widely this spiritual influence from North Sumatra generally spread through the archipelago. It is possible,

although not essential to the argument, that the Javanese *singir* mentioned by Pigeaud also derives as a genre from the Malay *shair*, and the point is worth making that in Java too both name and genre were used for religious poetry — and according to our hypothesis so was the original *shair*. It is in no way surprising that as early as 1670 a Malay in Macassar used the genre for what we would term a historical poem, although it did contain a religious element. Similarly it may be presumed that Malays in various places began to employ this new form for romantic poems of the *Ken Tambuhan* type, perhaps in seventeenth-century Johore, in Palembang, in Riau, in Banjarmasin, in Batavia and Ambon, in short throughout the whole extent of the Malay world. So quickly and generally did the genre spread that it must have given early nineteenth-century European scholars the impression of being something typically and universally old and genuinely Malay. Yet it has obviously remained a literary genre, never becoming popular in the sense of leading to oral improvization in the manner of the *penglipur lara* stories.

The above is not intended to be anything more than a theory, a hypothesis. Definitive proof of its correctness will be difficult to furnish, if only because the older Malay literature must always remain a mystery to us. It is quite possible, however, that clear proof of its incorrectness may be advanced, based on external or internal evidence that has escaped me, or on evidence which can only be brought to light after more extensive examination of the available material. If this paper occasions such comment or further research then it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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