

Silver Eye of Singapore: The early photography accounts in the *Hikayat Abdullah*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present further investigation on the evidence of early photographic process described in the *Hikayat Abdullah* in which was narrated in the early Malay literary text published in the lithographic stone edition in 1849. The author of the said literature had observed a direct early photographic practise of the Daguerreotype. Few had mentioned of this said events through annotations, translations of the *Hikayat*, academic papers, and in newsprints. However, the details of this literature were instead summarised and details of exact identity of the daguerreotypist remained unnamed. In recent evidence from Maria Balestier's letter, the wife of one of the first American Consulate of Singapore, it had indicated of a physician whom practise the image-making craft. This had raised a coincidental suggestion of the same unnamed doctor whom might be described in the *Hikayat*.

Keywords: Daguerreotype, Singapore, Munsyi Abdullah Kadir, Photography, *Hikayat Abdullah*, Malay literature.

Introduction

The photographers in the past have always been on the proceeding cases in the pioneering efforts by the early explorers, arming themselves with the steadfast early productions of 'camera-kits' and establishing the supplies, employing their services in bringing this new mode of fast illustrative qualities that ideally that would replace employed artist sketches; which was the usual manner in conducting land surveys, portraits, and cultural practices and occupations.

This monumental effort supplements the colonising efforts in part of collecting and classification in the knowledge during the early 19th Century period. It was one of the crucial tools in the race for securing and development of the obtained lands across the globe by the colonisers.

When photography was announced to the world by the French Government in 1839, which they claimed that the knowledge of the photographic process (the daguerreotype) is to be made 'free' to the world, it was then quickly strategised to be introduced by various agents in promoting this image-making crafts. The manner in making the daguerreotypes were rather straight-forward, however the making would not be possible without the appropriate apparatuses and chemicals needed. The learned craft then idealise in the form of 'entrepreneurial' activities by these venturous photographers, which then extended further with the development of transport routes through networks of the land and sea.

How attractive as one would imagine; when presented shiny well-polished plate of silver, placed into several apparatuses; the camera, and then treated with chemicals, and it would then produce accurate representation and the likeness of the subject. Of course, this would be very much like a magical experience, as it would be a theatrical event into its making, as well as it takes less than an hour to make such images appear on a good bright day.

Newhall (1976) had coined the early photographic process as 'The Pencil of Nature', 'The Child of Light', 'Nature's Amanuensis', and 'Sun-drawn Miniatures'. Such description revealed the effectiveness of the tool for rendering the required likeness in the subject of interest in a small amount of time and much higher represented accuracy rather than aesthetic representations. The daguerreotype would then become a recognised tool for the colonial offices to employ skilled operators of this newfound invention to expedite their colonial campaigns.

The Strait Settlements; composed the state of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca, were no exceptions from being subjected in the past by photographers' lenses. The images made, in the form of prints and plates, became a part of 'illustrated' pride for the British Empire in order to accommodate towards these adventurous conquering administrators. This form of visual acquisition had further the effort as collective visual imageries in recognising the political and economic grasp of colonial powers have onto the affected region. However, of many dozen know image-makers in the past, only a few would have had survived through time. What more as the early images made during the *Munysi's* observation was before the arrival of the gold chloride gilding, in which, would render much more durable daguerreotype finishing.

This early daguerreotype practices began to occur coincidentally as the expansion of the British Strait Settlements, where Singapore became a prosperous port in 1819 built by the English East India Company. Photographers of the Early Strait Settlement Colonial such as John Thomson, Jules Itier, Kleingrothe, G.R. Lambert & Co., H. Husband, and C. Düben, and other early image-makers, had seek opportunities to explore the world with their newly-learned photographic craft in serving the colonial government.

It was through John Falconer's (1987), '*A Vision of the Past: A History of Early Photography in Singapore and Malaya, The Photographs of G.R. Lambert & Co., 1880-1910*', which had mentioned within the texts within the *Hikayat* of Abdullah's exceptional experience in observing the entire image-making process.

Falconer's (1987) reference perhaps arrived from the A.H. Hill's annotations of the *Hikayat Abdullah*, though unknown whether if it was from the *Oxford's University's Press publication* (1969), or the *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society's publication* (1955). Though, both carried similar annotations in the description of *Munysi's* account in observing the process, which would not be the burden of the matter. Falconer (1987, 9)

had noted several minute errors in the *Hikayat*, which had piqued my curiosity about how it may have affected the manner of the intended event (the observation of the process).

The *Hikayat Abdullah*

Photography was part of variance as the tools for ‘Imperial Gaze’, a prescribed way of seeing the illustrative lands and its people for the colonisers of the past to, which came across the observant eyes of a Malay teacher by the name of Abdullah Kadir (a *Munysi*; a teacher of languages), who penned his own autobiography, the ‘*Hikayat Abdullah*’ (‘The Story of Abdullah’, also referred to as the *Hikayat* throughout this paper).

It was also in the manner of Abdullah Kadir’s writing, which became exception compared to other Malay authors of the time. The *Munysi* composed the narratives the observations of cultural practise, travels, conversation with significant individuals, rather than tales and stories of wonders and ideal. The *Hikayat* is an accumulation of small narratives divided into chapters of events, travelled location, and meetings with significant individuals.

Though some portions in his writings within the *Hikayat*, was arguable as it was more of memorising ideal narratives, but brilliantly placed nonetheless compared to other authors of the time as they commonly publish more than just ‘sacral’ references or oral tales. It was in Osman’s (1961, 1) published description best described the overview on the *Munysi’s ‘Hikayat Abdullah’* to be:

“... writing with his free and almost colloquial style and with his very personal approach to the themes and subjects of his writings which were his own experiences and observations on contemporary events.”

Through several published works by Abdul Kadir, the mannerism in his writings had deduced the author to be known as the ‘Father of Modern Literature’ in the Malay world.

Though the compendium of *Hikayat* in effect does have remnants of the Malay romantic mannerism in the *Munsiy*'s notations, as semantics are usually of heightened emotional situation usually comes about the cliché-ridden phrases, or the usage of abstract nouns. This, fortunately, had not affected the portion that depicted the process of the 'daguerreotype' chapter in the *Hikayat*.

The *Munsiy*; Abdullah Kadir was a Malaccan born mixed of Malay, Arab, and Tamil descendant; who was a scholar, translator, transcriber for the languages of Arabic, Malay, Tamil, Hindu, and Malay; and mentor several colonial officers and missionaries. He had accommodated various tasks and the resources in publishing for his student-cum-employers, Reverend Alfred North and Reverend Benjamin Kaesberry.

It was the American Missionary, Reverend Alfred North, who had encouraged the Abdullah Kadir to begin transcribing his own autobiography somewhen in October 1840, as noted in the *Hikayat*, which completed in 1843. The *Hikayat Abdullah* was written in the form of memoir or autobiography of the author himself, which was argued to be a form of creation, and self-aggrandising. Amin Sweeney is primarily known as the author of three volumes of *The Complete Works of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsiy*, which he had mentioned in his article to thread carefully in reading into the *Hikayat* from looking at it too closely as a representation of facts, or journalistic per se. Abdullah worked on the *Hikayat* under the constraints of two employers; Mr Alfred North and Mr Kaesberry. This would be particularly the case when the written accounts of religious views and theological observations.

There were three noted *Jawi* versions of the *Hikayat Abdullah*; one was of the written manuscript by Abdullah himself, which was completed in 1843. The second version; the *Hikayat* was transcribed of Ismail Hussein, which was observed by Reverend Alfred North. The third; would be the 'edited' lithographic edition that was printed in 1849, which Reverend Benjamin P. Kaesberry, who is also one of the *Munsiy*'s students,

whom oversaw the printing of it. The difference the last two would be slight, however, the meaning and intended narratives were mostly agreeably kept in place. Sweeney (2006, 240) mentioned the mannerism in *Munysi's* writings of the *Hikayat*, contains two considered points:

‘Firstly, Abdullah’s narratives regularly features him as one of *dramatis personae*, usually centre stage. Secondly, whether he was present or not at an event, his account of it usually has the flavour of eyewitness narrative’

This statement echoed the remarks as John Turnbull Thomson’s (1874) ‘*Translations from the Hakayit Abdullah*’, which he had mentioned the said author’s manner of writing in the *Hikayat* had approached in creative, poetic form of writings, which were “...as they ought to be, but not as they were”.

However, this isn’t to give a perspective onto the writings of the *Hikayat* to be unreliable, but to carefully consider the factors involved in the variable of the narratives given, particularly in the case of an early photographic process such as the daguerreotype, to be described in its presented observation.

Traill (1982), observed the manuscript from the Library of Congress of the *Hikayat's* original lithographic print in 1849, which he noted there were small differences in the writings between the two. Though small, it seems to be able to shift the meaning and intended idea, which would have been an editorial effort that could be the doings of Reverend Kaesberry, whom overseeing the production of the printing of the lithographic edition. This was verified to be the case as well by Roger Tol (2001) describing a master transcriber, Hussin Bin Ismail, to be a known colleague of Abdullah in producing copies from the original manuscript of Abdullah after May 1843 before one of the copies were sent to America.

There would be a possibility of the *Hikayat* had three versions; the original manuscript by the *Munysi*, the second

version would be the edited transcribed version by Ismail Hussein, supervised by Reverend Alfred North, and third would be the printed lithographic version, edited again by Reverend Benjamin Kaesberry which was published in 1849.

I had a chance to gather a copy of John Turnbull Thompson's (1874) annotations, the '*Hakayit Abdulla*'. In this copy, Thompson (1874) mentioned in the '*Preface*' that he had received one of few copies of the '*Hikayat Abdullah*' manuscript directly from the *Munysi* himself in 1846, whereby *Munysi* hoped it to be translated under his care. Unfortunately, Thomson had mentioned that he had misplaced the original manuscript due to his delay in attending to the said matter. Observing the received year, this was before the 1849's lithographic prints, which could either be of Ismail Hussein's transcribed copies, or even of the original few of the *Munysi*'s manuscript.

It is still under consideration, if current copies of the early *Hikayat* prior to the lithographic edition in 1849, could directly be mostly similar to the transcriptions by Ismail Hussein, which was observed by Reverend North himself for five months, which is in the works towards the lithographic edition. Given that the discovered (possibly original) 1843's *Munysi*'s manuscripts still needed to be ascertained.

My scope here specifically to the episode of the hundreds within the *Hikayat*. Towards the end of the *Hikayat*, the segment of '*Darihal Gereja Singapura*' (*tr.* Stories from the English Church of Singapore); which are at the length of less than four pages (specifically forty-seven lines), which narrated the daguerreotype observation by the *Munysi*.

Between the annotations and direct translations of the *Hikayat*'s 1849's lithographic edition, it was noted several translations are exact to the *Jawi* text. The written annotations of the *Hikayat* by Hill (1955) and Turnbull (1874) were done as annotations, rather than a direct translation, in which it eases the meaning and described the event as straightforward narrative. Annotations, however, would have an influential way in explaining the situation, which would leave out the directed

details that could be the proponent to evaluate the situation.

One primary example, within the *Munsi*'s notation of the event, he mentioned of the arranged meet an unnamed 'doctor' to observe how this image-making process were done. After the entire process were observed, the *Munsi* queried to the doctor how long ago was this invention was found, which Hill (1955: 258) stated:

It was copied by the English and by other European nations. It was only recently that the art of making pictures in this way was discovered, not more than four or five years ago."

Where else, the Malaya Publishing House (1947: 328), noted the direct quotation from the *Jawi*:

" Shahadanada pun asal-asal-nya yang mêngeluarkan hikmat yang ajaib ini orang Prancis, maka kêmudian di-turut oleh Inggêris dan bangsa-bangsa Eropah akan dia; maka bëlum-lah lama lagi di-dapati orang akan kepandaian ini, baharu juga êmpat lima tahun lalu ada-nya."

Hikayat's Malaya Publishing House (1947: 328)

John Falconer (1987) mentioned on the *Hikayat*'s problematic nature in obtaining the correct chronological order. Though he mentioned that the process was invented four or five years ago, which invented by the 'Frenchman', which would suggest being Jacques-Louis Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the process, which were named after himself. The event was foreseen to occur somewhen in the 1841 as suggested by Massot (2015), Falconer (1987), and Sweeney (2006). Considering the manner of the conversation, there seemed to be a sequence of transference of knowledge in geographical manner, which could suggest the doctor might, as *Munsi* would recall it, be furnished with such information. The doctor would have gathered the

knowledge foundation of the daguerreotype's making read literature, which would be explained later in this paper.

Considering the Malaya Publishing House's to be closely to what was penned by Munsyi, he had noted the phenomenon was '*hikmat yang ajaib*' which meant closely to 'magical wonder', rather than as an expressed paraphrase as 'the art of making pictures...'. The latter differ as which suggest the of image-making more of an artistic practise. It was then followed the note of the practise which originated from a Frenchman, then the English, and throughout Europe.

Who is Dr Wright?

Falconer's (1987) assumption of the observation of the *Munsyi* of the unnamed doctor was made somewhen in 1841-42. This coincides with a recent publication by Richard E. Hale's (2016) claims in his published book, 'The Balestiers: The First Residents of Singapore'. Hale (2016) had noted a letter by Mrs. Mary Balestier written to her sister, Harriett, of a junior Doctor by the name of Dr. Wright, had arrived from the USS Constellation on the 4th of November 1841. In the letter, the mentioned doctor had been making 'daguer a type drawing' of Mrs Balestier home next to their plantation. Hale's (2016) discovery as it is a found information which gives a glimpse as a claim for early image-making within the Strait Settlements, and a good coincident of the Munsyi's chapter in the Hikayat. This was noted in an article as well by Loo (2019) of the named Dr. Wright, which refers to Hale's (2016) notes.

However, I wish to extend slightly further to see to this evidence by looking at the received copy of the letter from the collection from the Massachusetts Historical Society;

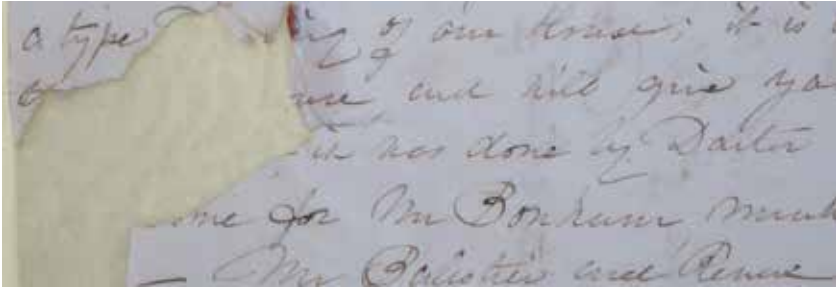


Plate 1: Maria Revere Balestier papers, 1834-1847 | P-367 1-reel microfilm
 | From the Walter Muir Whitehill Collection. Letter from Maria Revere
 Balestier to Harriet Revere, 4 January 1842, 6 p.

– I send you by Captain Nott a Daguer
 a type Drawing of our House; it is the end next to
 the, and will give you a little

 us has done by Doctor Wright who had
 some for Mr Bonham, much to his
 satisfaction

As observed, the portions of the letter were unfortunately damaged in some areas of interest, in which what would probably have had written the type of image-making method which she coined it as ‘*Daguer a type Drawing*’, which of course, firmly suggested to be the daguerreotype. The named operator of this said ‘Daguer a type drawing’, was done up by a physician by the name of Doctor Wright. It could be a rather close consideration of the description of the image-maker as noted in the *Hikayat* where Reverend Kaesberry mentioned of a doctor arrived in an American warship, both are of the same circa period as well.

It would appear that it is to be considered coincidence towards the identity of the unnamed doctor in the *Hikayat* based on the reading gathered so far. The good doctor goes by the name of John H. Wright from Northampton, was appointed as an assistant surgeon by the Counsellors of Massachusetts

Medical Society, which he was then enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Dr. John H. Wright was one of the two Assistant Surgeons officers on board of the USS Constellation, which heads the East India Squadron, commandeered by Captain George W. Storer, which had taken the journey from Boston on 27th October 1840 to Rio Janeiro, Brazil. It was there, Captain Storer was relieved once arrived at the Cape of Good Hope; which the ship had then to be taken over by Captain Lawrence Kearney, who commanded the Potomac before then.

Captain Kearny commandeered the USS Constellation and the East India squadron; had made its way to Macao as assigned to oversee and oppose the opium smuggling towards the end of the first Opium War. This action, which in its own way created the opportunity for the Americans to expand their interest accessing China. The USS Constellation (with Dr Wright on-board) had reached the Island of Johanna, South East coast of Africa, and made their way to the 'Quallah Battoo' (*Kuala Batu*), Acheh on September 1841, in which soon after, arrived in Singapore on the 4th November 1841. I had considered the case where Dr Wright would have learnt the making of daguerreotype. It would be possible that he would have had attended one of François Gouraud's daguerreotype demonstrations tour in Boston prior to his assignment as the Assistant Surgeon of the USS Constellation to China. Gouraud had held a series of four lectures and daguerreotype demonstrations somewhen on the 24th March 1840 at the Masonic Temple, where he had hosted for at least five hundred interested viewers and learners. Gouraud was assigned by Daguerre himself as an agent to sell the equipment based on the knowledge made available to the public. Boston was also placed in of well-known practitioners such as Josiah Johnson Hawes and Albert Sands Southworth (of Southworth & Hawes), alongside with Dr. Samuel Bemis; whom all had made their name though this practise. Though it won't discount the case if Dr Wright might had learnt this in Washington, however, it was noted of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York to be the heart of the daguerreotype industry and learning grounds.

Within the *Hikayat*, there were two daguerreotypes described; one, which was shown by Mr. Kaesberry to the *Munysi*, which presumably a gift by Dr. Wright to Reverend Kaesberry; and the other which was made on the Monday after, during the demonstration over at the Bonham Hill.

Hale's (2016) notes arriving in the letters by Mrs. Maria Balestier to her sister, which mentioned the daguerreotype by Dr Wright that were made of the plantation area, and possibly, images of the Mr. Bonham during his stay. Assuming now at this point, at least four earliest daguerreotypes were made in Singapore based on these two documents.

The Balestier's letter, which noted of a sent daguerreotype of the Balestier's home next to the plantation were delivered to Boston over by Captain Nott, whom commanded the ship, *India*, which had arrived for a brief stay for three days in Singapore fast-stead speed from Macao in 1842. He had then immediately sailed towards Boston soon after. Though it is still unknown at this point in time whether those daguerreotypes are still in existence.

The Daguerreotype

The daguerreotype is silvered plated images; in which prepared to polished state to mirror-finished, and sensitised with halogen fumes, which excites then silver-iodide surface in sensitised state. The sensitised silver plate then placed into a wooden plate holder and fitted onto a camera, which would then be exposed to an appropriate time of illuminated lit subjects. It would then be prepared to be developed in heated mercury, which forms the amalgamated image; a positive image in a reflective angle towards dark background, and a negative image if turned away onto white reflected areas.

The invention of the Daguerreotypes were presented to the Academy of Science in France on the 7th January 1839 by Jacque Louis-Mande Daguerre (the named inventor) through his associate, François Arago, the Secretary of the said establishment, and announced to the public in August in

the same year (Buerger, 1989, p. 4). Through the mentioned announcement, the French Government see this invention of as scientific achievement and revolutionary in fixing image onto an object through the means of *photography*, an appropriated term and concept, which Sir John Herschel aptly chose to popularise to the public (Wilder & Kemp, 2002).

The apparatus for the daguerreotypes in the past carries few needed chemicals, compared to the much more elaborated methods and chemicals involved of its later, yet cheaper to produce images, photographic progressions such as the wet plate collodion process (Maurice, 1993) or the dry plate process.

The written account of this photographic practice within the *Hikayat Munsyi* mentioned one of the lesson days of the *Munsyi* with his student, Mr. Benjamin Peach Keasberry, a missionary, had shown to him of what was believed to be a daguerreotype plate, which depicted a landscape scene of then Singapore.

The *Munsyi* then queried Mr. Kaesberry of how such wonder and precise nature of imagery were made. Mr. Kaesberry mentioned he had received the plate from a doctor or physician on board of an American ship, which he had carried with him of apparatus of interest which he was not familiar of the methods. That had piqued *Munsyi's* curiosity, and he agreed to observe this curiosity on the following Monday, in which Mr. Kaesberry would request the doctor to demonstrate the process.

The following Monday, the anticipated doctor had walked in the middle of the *Munsyi's* tutoring lesson. Pleasantries exchanged, and they had then agreed to meet up later in the afternoon over at the Bonham Hill, where the equipment stored over at the governor's residence.

As they arrived, *Munsyi* observed the physician had brought out a wooden box, attached with it that he had observed to be a lens, which Hill (1955) described it as a 'telescopic' object. The rest of the equipment and steps were described in detail; from the preparations of the plates, the application of the sensitiser that affected the polished silver plate turns colour, and

the doctor's actions in developing the plate.

Then, the doctor proceeded to carry the exposed plate into the shaded area, and proceeded to develop the plate over fumed mercury, and revealed to the already impressed Abdullah of the impressing the landscape of the town of Singapore from the developed plate.

The produced plate was given an excellent excitement to its production as the view of Singapore's township were imprinted 'without deviation even by so much as the breath of hair', which directly translated as a perfect copy of the sighted scene.

The *Munysi* queried the doctor whether if the image to be larger, which carries the tone of hopeful expectation of such wonders, to be presented larger than the present size. The doctor replied it could only be larger based on the size of the equipment and the received plate. This would be an interesting point to take, as such knowledge would arrive with the

The doctor had then explained that it was an invention of a Frenchman, discovered not long ago, which was 4-5 years ago as stated in the *Hikayat*. Dr Wright had mentioned '*orang fransais*' (Frenchman), but never specifically named the inventor. With given historical account within most photography history; it is to be of Louis-Jacques-Mandé *Daguerre*, a French artist and photographer, recognized for his invention of the eponymous daguerreotype process of photography.

It was noted earlier Falconer (1987) mentioned the years to be nearly twice more than the estimated timeframe from the day of the invention made announcement in August 1839, as the proposed meeting of the *Munysi* with Dr Wright would be somewhen in late 1841 to early 1842 based on the notations by Hale (2016).

The information would have been learned by Dr. Wright before he shipped off from Boston during one of the daguerreotype demonstrations exercises. After the said demonstration, Dr Wright would have had had purchased kit alongside with its manual, the *Historique et description des procedes*

daguerreotype et du Diorama (published by Daguerre and Giroux in September 1839), which carries detailed accounts towards the creation of the daguerreotype. Within the said manual, it had noted of Daguerre's decision to call the silver plate image-object to be known as the of 'Daguerreotype' in 1838 noted to his partner, Isidore Niépce (Siegel, 2017), could have been considered to be known by Dr Wright.

Another consideration would be the of the *View of the Boulevard du Temple*, taken by Daguerre in 1838 in Paris, was given as a gift (as a triptych panel) to King Ludwig I of Bavaria then in 1839. This was one of few strong attempts of Daguerre alongside with Isidore Niépce then to push this invention to be the public interest, which was unsuccessful until the arrangements with François Arago at the Paris Academy of Sciences, which trajected the invention to global scale. Samuel Morse, the known inventor of the telegraph, had seen this image in 1838, and wrote a description of the image after visiting Daguerre's studio, which was published in the New York Observer in April 1839.

If these were the case, it could be considered the years mentioned by Dr Wright to Munsyi could not be chronologically error as claimed, as *Munsyi's* would certainly recall the key points of the conversation and the process observed as narrated in the *Hikayat* in regard to the daguerreotype. It would be a hypothetical assumption of Dr Wright's informed manner to the *Munsyi* of the estimated years of invention was not a timeline error, but rather, an informed knowledge by Dr Wright.

Calling it for what he thought it was...

What would one call it when one sees a wonder like the daguerreotype? According to Hill's (1955) annotations, the *Munsyi* was familiar to the idea of printing methodologies and the usage of optics. He wrote the exacting nature in the usage of copper sheets and the chemicals utilised, in rendering the image which gives the characteristic of '*timbul tenggelam*' (raised and receeded) of the shadow areas.

The only reference that had referred by *Munsyi* as the *daguerreotype* would be by Hill's (1955) annotation, and J. T. Thompson's (1874) translation/annotation which the latter noted on the header in the *Munsyi's* episode. Thompson's (1874) had given assertion in his annotations, as it was done nearly thirty years after receiving the said manuscript, in which the process would have been certain as to what was observed by the *Munsyi*.

What would the *Munsyi* have recognised it? The mannerism of the daguerreotype is exacting as how the *Munsyi* had noted, in which '*tiada berselisih sebesar rambut jua pun seperti yang ada itu dengan eloknya*', which had been closely translated as '... without deviation even by so much as the breath of hair'. Such perfect likeness must have its place within the nomenclature of in the Malay language. Which I believe the choice of the *Munsyi* to cite these image-objects to be '*gambar*' as it was not just exclusively seen as illustrated value or picture, but with the foundation that it was a part of printing process in which he was all too familiar with.

Referring to the lithographic 1849 version of the Hikayat, there were several mentions on the use the word '*gambar*' (گمبر), which also being supported with the description of '*peta*' (which means drawn map). Initially, this particular word puzzles slightly, as commonly the term '*gambar*' in modern Malay definition refers to the manner of image-making, particularly towards the action of photography. However, looking through the early sources how the word was utilised in a manner of finished crafted work, James Howison's (1801) noted:

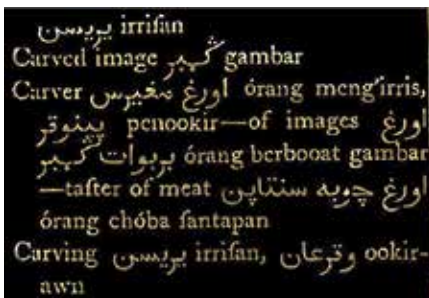


Plate 2: From the pages of Howison (1801) *Dictionary of the Malay Tongue*

Within the said dictionary as well, the word *gambar* also refers to; the action in coin making (p 77), or figure/cypher (p 116), to immitate (p 140), to illuminate (p 140), picture (in manner of drawing), p 167, and statue (p 198). This strongly suggest the word *gambar* to be a result from specific craft of emulating reality.

I was intrigued whether the word *gambar* had existed before Howison's (1801) dictionary. Within the preface, Howison (1801) tribute the first successful note on the use of the Malay/*Malayo* language, utilised in manner for trade purposes, which had been noted by Thomas Bowery in 1701. The word '*gambar*', were used in describing the manner of the same intended depictive of illustrated, written, drawn, shaped, or carved works, which were manifested by employing human actions in crafting identifiable patterns of imageries onto inanimated objects, based on living or observed nature.

Though the etymology for the word *gambar* still remains to be of interest at some point, it has been utilised in the '*Elkitab 'Ija 'itu, segala perdjandjian 'an lâma dâh bahâruw* (by R. & Dj. Wet'intejn, 1733), numerous times in describing crafted or carved works. In other areas rough search as it seems highly probable the word exists long before the Bowery's (1701) dictionary. Though, several variations of the *Hikayat's* text (including the recent annotations by Kassim Ahmad (2008) '*Hikayat Abdullah*', which clearly utilised another term, '*peta gambar*'.

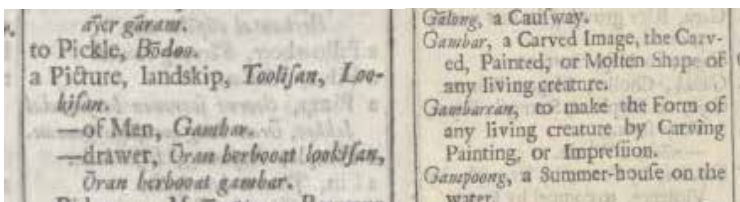


Plate 3: From the pages of Bowrey's (1701) Dictionary on the meaning of '*Gambar*'

The Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka (the Malaysia's Institute of Language and Literature); had prescribed the word '*gambar*' to be a word that would be closer to the phrase of '*gambar bumi*' (closely translated to the manner of landscape image), in which brings about the meaning of '*peta bumi*', closer towards as an observed drawn map of the earth/landscape. This is similar to the meaning of '*gambar*' as utilised by the Haji Sulaiman's (1936) '*Buku Katan Kamus Melayu*':

Munysi had utilised the phrase of '*bayangnya*', which could be seen in a poetic manner. This had been applied as in descriptive account towards the exactness of this form of image-objects, which renders a query towards the direct translation of '*bayang*' directly translated as 'shadow'. According to Hill (1955, pp 256-7):

“...he showed me an ingenious device, a copper sheet about a foot long by a little over six inches wide, on which was a picture or imprint of the whole settlement of Singapore in detail, the shadows appearing in relief”

The *Hikayat* had noted the image ascending/descending nature of the imagery on the surface of the plate arrived in a form of *bayangnya timbul tenggelam*, a phrase which *Munysi* could assume that goes in both technical description as a trained printer, described in his notes of the shadows standing out in high relief (dark areas) and the highlights were a form of recess.

On another note, the applied word of '*bayang*', the common oversight at this assumption of the Malay word '*bayangnya*' as a directly to be translated as shadow. The use of '*bayang*', within this context brings about several more towards the appearance in manner of silhouette, in which indirectly a loosely narrated as the impressed reflection that appears on another surface. Lowry & Lowry (1998) had noted the daguerreotype to be a synonym of truth. However, Skinner (1978) had noted the *Munysi*'s writing of the *Hikayat* could be

highly romanticised in many areas. Though it was observed in the *Hikayat's* text in the making of the daguerreotype plate by the said physician as observed by *Munysi*, were closely aligned to the methodology in the making of the plate. This would counter Skinner's (1978) notes, in which this particular chapter could not have been made up from in any sense of imagination, nor to be borrowed description from other text, as the said chapter were written and formulated in an observed participatory manner.

Conclusion

It is with this displayed evidence of the named doctor or physician who would be the unnamed daguerreotypist as depicted within the *Hikayat Abdullah* strongly suggested to be Dr. John H. Wright from Northampton, Massachusetts. As a trained physician, it would come as no surprise of his ability to learn the process rather quickly through observation, and he understood the principle of Daguerreotypy with the given apparatus and manual that had been sold by Daguerre's agent, Mr. Francois Giroux. Within a year after, the military ship which he had embarked travelled towards China had brought him to the Balestier's residence in Singapore.

During his stay, he had utilised daguerreotype to amaze his host with this new-found invention, and he generously gave away the plates to his host and associates. One of the image-objects had come across the attention of the *Munysi* which Reverend Kaesberry had brought it in. With strong curiosity, the reverend had arranged for a demonstration by Dr. Wright for the *Munysi* to observe.

Maria Balestier had noted in her letter plates were made of their house next to their plantation and also of, what we could assume if the portrait of very patient Mr Bonham were made? At this point, there would not be much noted earlier evidence any known existing plates made in Singapore would still be of another daguerreotypist from France, Alphonse-Eugène-Jules Itier, who arrived there soon after. Assuming at this point, at least four earliest daguerreotypes were made in Singapore based on

the *Hikayat* and the Balestier's letter. All are, unfortunately, still remained unknown of its whereabouts.

This particular chapter in the *Hikayat*, 'Darihal Gereja Singapura', became a significant note which demonstrate the *Munsyi's* ability with the use of the appropriate vocabulary that arrived from his experience as a writer and printer. The experiential depiction, by which the *Munsyi* had observed, became the epigraph for this form of image-objects that viewed of the world as it had never seen before.

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