Kingship and Enthronement in Malaya

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(PLATES XII AND XIII)

There are two rulers in Malaya who claim descent from a Bichitram (=? Vićitram), reputed kinsman of the Sri Mahārājas of Sri Vijaya, the Buddhist empire (fl. A.D. 750–1350) that extended over Sumatra and Northern Malaya and for a while Java. The name Bichitram is whispered into the ear of every Perak Sultan at his enthronement as that of the ancestor of the Perak (and old Malacca) dynasty. And Bichitram, according to the Sejarah Melayu, was brother of the first king of Palembang (= Sri Vijaya) and Singapore, and was himself ancestor of the Minangkabau line, from which the Yang di-pertuan of Negri Sembilan claims descent.

The folk-lore of the Sejarah Melayu, however, confuses the history of Sri Vijaya (which had relations with the Palas of Bengal) with that of its Chōla conquerors and derives the spear side of these Malay dynasties from chieftains in North Arcot, Trichinopoli, Tanjore, and possibly Chingleput, who were related by descent or marriage. Shulan must be the dynastic name of the Chōlas of Negapatanam. The Amdan, with which one recension connects them, may be Anḍam, i.e. Anḍa-nādu in North Arcot. Chulin of Lenggku may be a Chōla of Ilangoi-tīvū, Tamil for Lankā-dvīpa or Ceylon. Raja Suran could be Rājesurān, the Tamil form of Rājēśvara or else the legendary Raja Sura of Tirūkkalikkunram in Chingleput. His three “sons”, Jiran of Chandragiri, Chulan of Vijaya-nāgara, and Pandyan of Negapatanam, must be corruptions of the names of the Chēra, Chōla, and Pāṇḍya dynasties, though the Chēras never ruled Chandragiri, the Chōlas were nearly extinct before Vijaya-nāgara arose and the Pāṇḍya kingdom never included Tanjore, in which Negapatanam lies. Paladutani, son of Chulan, may be Pāṇḍavāyana “descendant of Pandu”. Jambuga (= Jambuka), son of Adhirāja-rāma (alias Adhivīra), is apparently connected with Jambukēśvaram or Tiruvanaikaval, a place in Trichinopoli with an important temple.¹

Whatever their genealogy, it is the enthronement of the two

¹ I am indebted to Dr. L. D. Barnett for the identifications in this paragraph.
Malay rulers claiming this descent from Palembang or Srí Vijaya that happens to have been described by observers.

To understand the awe Malays still have for their rulers one has to explore the origin of their divine right. In his latest avatar, a Yang di-pertuan, He-who-is-made-master, is the Shadow of Allah on earth, whose blood is held to be white as in the veins of Muslim saints. But formerly it was as an incarnation or receptacle of a Hindu divinity or a Boddhisatva that he was credited with white blood, and the rulers of Perak and Negri Sembilan are still installed with Brahminical and Buddhist ceremony. Moreover, under the Muslim Caliph and the Hindu-Buddhist ruler, there remain traces of the shaman from Yunnan and affinities with the emperors of China and Japan. The custom in Japan and formerly in Malaya of vacating the palace of a dead predecessor and starting a new capital, the custom of giving dead kings posthumous titles, the couch-throne found in Japan’s oldest enthronement ritual and in parts of Indonesia, the reverence for regalia without which no Japanese or Malay can become a ruler, all these would appear to belong to a very early layer of civilization.

**The Malay King as Shaman**

Dayaks believe that at first the Creator stretched out the heavens no bigger than a mango, and a medicine-woman in a Dayak legend satisfies an army with rice steamed in a pot the size of a chestnut and with meat cooked in a pan the size of a bird’s nest. The heads of the Perak royal drums are fabled to be the skins of lice and the clarionet to be made of a nettle stalk. The pillars of the palace of the Sultan of Minangkabau also were fashioned of nettle stalks, and the Sultan possessed a dagger formed of the soul of steel, coeval with the creation. Both Malay ruler and Malay shaman therefore were masters of the mannikin soul of things. And if as seems certain ideas derive from great centres of civilization, then this conception of the power of Malay kings and magicians will have come in prehistoric times to the Malays, as to China of the Chou period, from Babylonia or some other centre in the Middle East, to be carried from Yunnan down to the archipelago; a conception to be developed centuries later into the idea of a Malay king being a Hindu god, and to conclude in the Malay’s ready acceptance of Islamic pantheism with the famous cry of Abu Sa’id that “there is nothing inside this coat but Allah”
As a Hindu god the Malay king was lord of the realm by virtue of possessing a miniature Mount Meru. But as Confucius reminds us, even five centuries before Christ there was "an earth-mound at the borders of a Chinese town or village, interpreted as symbolizing the whole soil of the territory in which it stood. It was often associated with a sacred tree or grove and with a block or pillar of wood which served as a resting place for spirits". Under the old wooden palace of Negri Sembilan hangs by a rope a carved truncated pillar (or oblong block) of wood, not reaching the ground and tabu for all but royalty. As we shall see, a palace or a temple came in time to symbolize the mound mentioned by Confucius.

The office of shaman, like that of ruler, is often hereditary among Malays, and both possess as insignia drums and tambourines baleful to those that touch them, even though the ruler's vengeful instruments have become part of a Muslim's naubat band. It is tempting to surmise that it is with the grass aspergillum of the shaman a Sultan of Perak sprinkles rice-paste on newly installed chiefs, but the brush of medicinal leaves used by the King of Siam before his coronation is prepared by Brahmins. However, as late as 1874, Perak folk saw nothing strange in their Sultan, 'Abdu'llah, sitting at a séance on the shaman's mat and becoming possessed by the genies of the State, who prophesied the death of the British Resident. Just as Japan had a spiritual head in the Mikado and a secular in the Shogun, so however it came by him, during the last two centuries at least Perak had in addition to its secular ruler a Sultan Muda holding the office of State Shaman, whose duty it was annually to revive the regalia by proffering them food and drink and on occasion to sacrifice to the guardian spirits of the country, brought within the fold of Muslim orthodoxy by inclusion under djins who are all subservient to Allah.

While the Sultans of Malay port kingdoms waxed rich on tolls and dues, it is perhaps significant that like the shaman (and the Khassi chief) a Sultan of Minangkabau had no source of income beyond the produce of the royal demesne and voluntary contributions for ceremonial functions. But, though the Malay shaman frequently uses a tabu vocabulary, there appear to be no words reserved for himself and his actions, as there now are for rulers. It is notable, however, that in the old Indonesian tongue, Sundanese, the words siram "bathe", gering "dry = sick", ulu "head ", bérangkat "be carried = travel", titah "order", mangkat "borne
away, dead ” are not, as in Malaya, reserved for royalty and tabu for others. Moreover the words “be carried” for the royal mode of progression, “borne away ” as a euphemism for death, and “dry” for “sick” embody Hindu ideas that a king must never set foot on earth and that his subjects must never allude to him as liable to mortal ills.

**THE MALAY KING INCARNATE AS A HINDU GOD**

Along with those Indonesian words tabu in Malaya for all but royalty have been joined the Sanskrit words: *murka* “angry ”, *kurnia* “gift”, *anugrah* “give”. For to graft the Hindu conception of a divine king on to the Indonesian master of magic was in many respects easy. A man might be born a shaman or he might be made one by magic rites, just as a Hindu king, though hereditary, acquired divinity by the performance of the magic ritual of enthronement, which under a Muslim veneer is still for Malays a Hindu and Buddhist ceremony.

(1) As in Vedic times, as formerly in Burma and still in Siam and Cambodia, the first rite is lustration. In Perak the Sultan sits on a banana-stem, while water is poured down a banana-leaf over his shoulders by a hereditary herald of Sivaite origin entitled Sri Nara-diraja who alone outside the royal family may handle the regalia. In Negri Sembilan, at the last installation the ruler and his consort were seated on a nine-tiered bathing pavilion (Pl. XIII). Seven times the four Palace Officers circumambulated it, carrying rice-paste in a silver bowl, which each in turn presented to the royal couple, who four times dipped their right hands in it. So far from being an innovation on the Perak custom, “in Jataka reliefs in the Ananda temple, Pagân, there are coronation anointment scenes in which Brahmans are represented as offering consecrated water in conches, in small quantities suitable for anointment.” Both in Siam and in Burma Buddhism substituted water for oil, and lustration and anointing are now apt to be merged. But in Siam after lustration the King dons royal dress and sits on a throne, where he is handed conches of anointment water, one at each quarter of the compass as he turns about. In Negri Sembilan this part of the symbolism has been forgotten or found inconvenient to carry out and the ruler sits facing east for all four anointings, not as in Vedic ritual only for the first.
Just as in Siam Brahmins chant stanzas of benediction, so pious Malay Muslims here chant prayers for the prosperity of their ruler.

(2) After the lustration, the Perak Sultan dons royal dress Like a Hindu god he wears a golden necklet and golden armlets, shaped like the dragon Antaboga. In his headdress is thrust a medieval seal, whose handle, it is stressed, is made of "thunder" (gempita) wood that "causes matter to fly": it is called the "lightning seal" (chap halilintar) and must have taken the place of Indra's vajra, or thunderbolt symbol so often represented in Javanese sculpture. In Vedic time an Indian king was given at his coronation a wooden sword termed a thunderbolt as a weapon against demons. And in Japan, where it may be only a coincidence, the Emperor after being anointed is given a wooden baton as a badge of priestly office. From the Perak Sultan's shoulder hangs a State weapon (churika Mandakini "blade from the heaven-born Ganges") that still bears this name of the heavy sacrificial knife (Pl. XII) used by Aditiavarman, fourteenth century ruler of Minangkabau, as member of a demoniacal Bhairava sect professing a Tantric doctrine that connected the worship of Siva with the worship of Buddha. This type of knife figures in the sculpture of Borobudur and Prambanan and in images of Bhairavas at Singosari (Java) and Padang Rocho (Sumatra). Aditiavarman's knife formed part of the Minangkabau regalia and was discovered as recently as 1930 in the house of an old lady descendant of the former royal family: on the obverse and reverse of the blade inlaid in gold wire are the figures of a Bhairava and his sakti, one of the terrible manifestations of Siva and Mahadevi. In spite of its name the Perak weapon (unlike heavy Malay choppers called parang churika ¹) is a sword of Indian or Arab make, and in no wise archaic, though reputed to have belonged to Alexander the Great. In the Sultan's waist-belt is tucked his personal weapon, a creese. It is not on this creese but on the sword that the guardian spirits of the State may alight during the enthronement.

The ruler of Negri Sembilan whose ancestor came over from Minangkabau and carved out a throne in Malaya as late as the eighteenth century possesses no Hindu armlets and no historical weapons. He and his consort wear handsome Malay costume and in his belt is a fine creese, a family heirloom. Thus arrayed the Malay ruler is escorted in procession round his palace grounds.

¹ Note: ksuriṇā Skt., churīṇā Prakrit
Two Faces of the Minangkabau Churikà and a Panel of the Perak State Trumpet.
PAÑCA-PRAŚĀDA AT THE ENTHRONEMENT OF A SULTAN OF SELANGOR, 1939.
The ruler of Negri Sembilan with his consort is seated under a yellow-curtained canopy on a heavy processional car, termed Maharaja 'diraja. It is not said if the car circles the royal precincts more than once but apparently not. It is drawn by a body of retainers called The Ninety-Nine. In front are carried regalia and royal umbrellas, behind the royal flags.

In Perak the Sultan circumambulates the royal demesne seven times to the thud and blare of the naubat drums, trumpet (Pl. XII, and see Junas, 1944, p. 193, n.), and clarionet, escorted by courtiers carrying flags and pennons, creeses, lances, and swords.

In modern Siam it is after the coronation that the King has circumambulated his capital the way of the sun.

This circumambulation of palaces recalls how the royal house of Sri Vijaya was connected with Mount Meru, which in Hindu and Buddhist mythology is the pivot of the universe, the heaven of Indra, wielder of the thunderbolt and controller of weather. There is no difficulty about the siting of a Mount Meru in Sumatra at Palembang—which (it has not so far been noted) is corroboration that the spot was a capital of Sri Vijaya. For Hinduism gave the name to many mountains just as the Olympian gods, wherever their worshippers moved, dwelt on the highest mountain there, making it an Olympus. In the museum at Batavia there is or was a sculptured Meru being transported by the gods from India to Java! So in Burma, Siam, Indochina, and Indonesia, the capitals of old kingdoms in sequence from a more ancient symbol, had like Angkor a hillock or like Angkor Thom a Buddhist shrine or like Bali a Hindu temple or like Mandalay a palace-tower, all of them identified with Mount Meru.

Convenne rege aver, che discernesse
della vera cittade almen la torre.

The owner of such a hill, temple, or palace was a receptacle or incarnation of Siva or Vishnu or Indra; always of Indra where Hinayana Buddhism admitted no immortal god, the long-lived lord of Meru being the next best thing, and it was as lord of the state's symbolic Meru that the King guarded the fortunes of his people. The Tamil poem Manimekalai mentions two Malayan kings who claimed descent from Indra. Bhisma states that when a king is crowned, it is Indra who is crowned, and a person who desires prosperity should worship him as Indra.
is worshipped. In Malay literature, the word Indra, which in Sanskrit can mean a prince as well as the god, was used to denote "royal", as, for example, Permaisuri Indra "royal princess" and Mahkota Indra "royal crown". And the synonym Isle of Indra for Penyengat where the Muslim Under-Kings of Riau lived in the eighteenth century may have had no other significance. In the same century Perak had three capitals, Brāhmaṇa Indra, Indra Śakti, and Indra Mulia. The capitals of Pahang (as well as one Sumatran State) was called Indrapura, "the town of Indra." The hill close behind the Negri Sembilan palace is The Hill of Sri Indra, which is unequivocal.¹ Sri Vijaya had its Sailendra dynasty, the house of the Indras or lords of the mountain.

If as in modern Siam the State religion was Hinayana Buddhism, then the lord of the Meru might occasionally claim to be a Boddhisatva or his worldly counterpart, a Chakravartin.

To circumambulate his Meru, whether hill or palace, was for the new sovereign, Hindu or Buddhist, to take possession of his kingdom in little.

In Hindu mythology the four faces of Mt. Meru are coloured, white towards the east, yellow towards the south, black towards the west, and red towards the north. It is probably not mere coincidence that these are the colours appropriate in Perak for the Sultan, the Heir Apparent, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of War respectively.

(3) In Perak, when the Sultan has entered the palace and taken his seat on the throne, his chief herald, Sri Nara-diraja proclaims the royal title and, as a Brahmin whispers into the ear of his pupil the name of the god who is to be the child’s special protector through life, so the herald whispers to his new lord the State secret, Vičitram, the name of the lord of that Meru in old Palembang, ancestor and guardian of Perak royalty. Then he reads the chiri, a formula in corrupt Sanskrit, extolling the new ruler as a great king "who ravishes the three worlds by the jewels of his crown" and lauding his victory, his luck, his justice, his power of healing.

In Negri Sembilan, when the new Ruler and his consort are seated on their throne, the premier commoner chief tells the Court

¹ A Minangkabau tribal headman of Negri Sembilan, when suspected of offering a bribe to an official, protested that, if he were guilty, then might he be stricken by the magic of magnetic iron, by the thirty chapters of the Kuran, by the divine power of his Ruler and might his tree of life be killed by the borer-beetle of Indra Śakti!
Herald on the Right, of the electors’ choice, whereupon the herald proclaims it in Brahminical attitude, that is, standing on one leg with the sole of the right foot resting against his left knee, his right hand shading his eyes and the tip of the fingers of his left hand pressed against his left cheek. Incense is burnt and a formula in Malay and Arabic is read, not by one of the ‘ulama but by one of the Four Court Officers, an invocation to the angel of the rising sun, the angels on the right and left of the sky, the angel of the setting sun, the angel Kaṭb of the zenith to beseech Allah to enthrone the prince; and an invocation to Kārnain the horned angel of the moon ¹ and to the four archangels of Islam to assist in his salvation. It was the guardians of five regions who were invoked in Vedic ritual.

It looks as if the choice of the reader was the survival of a Brahmin privilege and as if the Herald and the Four Court Officers must once have been Brahmins just as there are still Brahmins at the courts of Siam and Cambodia. The Sri Nara-diraja in Perak was obviously of Brahmin origin, and beef is tabu for his family.

But more interesting still is the fact that the combination of Perak’s chiri with Negri Sembilan’s fourfold “anointment” and subsequent invocation to the five regions of the heavens make up the Siamese rite when after lustration the King facing east first takes his seat on a throne. A court functionary (1) hails His Majesty as a victor and protector, and (2) offering water in a conch calls on him to guard and rule the eastern tracts of his realm. The Siamese King promises so to do and turns to the points of the compass one after the other—a similar address being made and answered at each.

Both in Negri Sembilan and in Perak the rulers have to sit as immobile as possible on their thrones, rigidity being evidence in

¹ The horned angel (or, in one version, princess) of the moon is an intruder. Alexander the Great was known to Muslims as Dhu’l-Karnain or “two-horned” from a phrase in the Kuran. And Muslim missionaries, needing a pedigree for royal converts to compensate for their loss of Hindu godhead, fabricated for them descent from Alexander the champion of Islam (as their reading showed), with the genealogy of the Sassanian kings and Kaid the Indian as a link. Alexander’s connection with Meru was patent! Dionysus was born from the thigh (mēros) of Zeus and raiding India Alexander found near Meru the people of Nysa, named after Dionysus’ nurse, who joined him in his raid on the Punjab. Once upon a time Alexander crossed to Andalus (Andalusia) and clearly this was Andalas (Sumatra); so Minangkabau folk-lore has put his tomb on the slopes of Palembang’s Meru! It was therefore a brilliant thought to invoke the horned angel (or princess) of the moon to protect the descendant of Alexander the two-horned!
Hindu ritual of incipient godhead. In Perak the Sultan has to remain utterly still while the naubat band plays a certain number of tunes, not more than nine or less than four. The Sri Nara-diraja lights the royal candles (or ? candle) and asks the Sultan to fix the number of tunes. Negri Sembilan lacks the Muslim accretion of the naubat.

(4) The Sultan of Perak sits to hear the naubat enthroned, while pages bearing the regalia squat to right and left. But no account speaks of swords and daggers being displayed. In Negri Sembilan, as soon as one of the Four Palace Officers has read the invocations to the angel guardians of the five regions of the sky, the regalia are displayed, weapons being taken from their wrappings and unsheathed for a moment and then covered again. Although no mention is made of further details at the last enthronement of a ruler of Negri Sembilan, a previous record set forth how "the Panglima Raja stands on the ruler's right and holds the Great Spear and the Panglima Sultan stands on the left and holds the Royal Sword. Beyond them are the two Laksamana similarly equipped. Beyond them are retainers with eight tufted spears, eight long creeses, eight tapers, eight water-vessels, and other symbols of power. When all is ready, the insignia are shown solemnly to the spectators. The weapons are taken out of their yellow wrappings, the royal umbrellas are opened, the royal candles are lit, the water-vessels and betel boxes are lifted on high for all to see. A copy of the Koran is set down before these mighty regalia and ewers filled with every kind of holy water are arranged before them. One ewer contains water mingled with blood; another contains water with a bullet in it; another rice-paste."

It will be a pity if these old-world details are abandoned. For in Siam and Cambodia princes, courtiers, and officials drink twice a year water of allegiance in which the Court Brahmans have dipped the State Sword and other royal weapons. Newly appointed chiefs in Perak used to be sworn to allegiance on water in which the State sword had been dipped.

(5) Next, in Negri Sembilan the Herald on the Right once more assumes his uneasy Brahminical posture and calls on the four territorial chiefs to pay homage. Each chief in turn on every one of the seven steps of the dais lifts folded palms to forehead, kisses the ruler's hand three times, and still seated (cross-legged) retires backward down the steps, lifting hands in homage five times.
Lesser chiefs lift hands nine times advancing and seven times retiring.

In Perak, it is said, a chief touches the Sultan’s knees with forehead and lips or puts his head under his Sultan’s feet.

The Malay King as Caliph

(6) In Negri Sembilan the ceremony closes with a Muslim accretion, just as in Siam it closes with the modern assumption of a crown. The local Kathi recites a prayer in Malay asking Allah’s guidance for the new Khalifah He has raised to the throne, the guidance He gave to the Prophet Solomon.

Here the Perak account is vague. But it is suggested that the prayer with the Kuranic verse on Allah having appointed a new Caliph as His vicegerent precedes the homage.

So finishes the ceremony, but several kindred points deserve notice. To-day in Perak, as in Siam, the ruler’s consort is separately installed, and in Perak in deference to Muslim prejudice the spectators are women. But an eighteenth century history of Perak, the Misa Melayu, records how in 1756 a Sultan and his consort were enthroned together. In matriarchal Negri Sembilan in 1936 the Ruler (perhaps wrongly in theory) installed his consort first, before he was an anointed king endowed with royal authority: in Siam the King instals his consort afterwards.

There are several other parallels between Malay and Siamese kingship. As in ancient China new posthumous names are given to dead rulers. The King of Siam keeps an albino elephant, albino monkey, and albino crow: till modern times, albino children were a perquisite of the ruler of Negri Sembilan. Umbrellas must be closed near Malay as well as near Siamese palaces, as they are the homes of incarnate gods. For the same reason no one might have a higher seat than a Malay or Siamese ruler even in a carriage or car. It was taboo to spill royal blood. Head and hair of rulers were sacred. Only, however, in Trengganu has there survived a form of top-spinning conducted (several centuries ago) by Brahmins in Siam to foretell the fortunes of the realm.

In old Malacca, Perak, and Negri Sembilan there has been the same preoccupation with 4, 8, 16, and 32 that Dr. Heine-Geldern has detected in other kingdoms of Farther India and the same division into officers of the right and left hand. Malacca and Perak
have had 4 great, 8 major, 16 minor, and 32 petty chiefs. Even the ground-plan of an old Perak palace shows pillars in sets of 8 making 32 for each main section of the building. In Negri Sembilan, and probably in other States, salutes numbered 8, 16, and 32. Negri Sembilan too has 4 princes of the blood, 4 territorial chiefs, 4 major court officers, and only the ruler may have 4 wives. The regalia of the ruler of Negri Sembilan comprise 8 tufted spears, 8 swords, 8 creeses, 8 large candles, 8 small tapers, 8 betel-boxes, 8 handfuls of ashes, 8 water-vessels, 16 pennons, and 16 umbrellas. In Burma the King was required to have 4 queens, 4 lesser consorts, 4 chief ministers, 4 heralds, 4 messengers, 8 assistant secretaries. For the first part of his coronation a Siamese King sits on an octagonal throne. Fifty years ago when a shaman's séance was being conducted to cure his illness, the sick Sultan was seated on a sixteen-sided stand to await with shrouded head and grass brush in hand the advent of the spirits of the realm. There was the same kind of preoccupation with these astrological numbers in Siam and Cambodia. Generally at his enthronement a king in those countries is surrounded by eight Brahmins representing the Lokapālas who guard the eight points in the Brahmin cosmogony. Pegu in the fourteenth century had thirty-two provinces, whose governors with the King made up the number of the gods in Indra's mountain paradise. "A passage in the New History of the T'ang Dynasty," Dr. Heine-Geldern tells us, "indicates that the kingdom of Java in the ninth century was divided into twenty-eight provinces, their governors together with the four ministers again having numbered thirty-two high officials. This may have been a somewhat older form of the same system, in which the provinces corresponded to constellations, the twenty-eight Houses of the Moon, and the four ministers to the guardian gods of the cardinal points. It is clear that in all these cases the empire was conceived as an image of the heavenly world of stars and gods." On the fifth day of the Cambodian enthronement ceremonies princes and dignitaries forming a circle about the King pass round nineteen times from left to right seven disks set on tapers, whose smoke they fan towards him. This ritual symbolizes the revolution of the seven planets about Mt. Meru, here represented by the king.

Accounts of the enthronement ceremony are wanted from Pahang, Selangor, Trengganu, and especially Kedah and Kelantan.
KINGSHIP AND ENTHRONEMENT IN MALAYA