

by Guru Scott McQuaid

The cultural town of Melaka (Malacca) is famous in Malaysia for being the trading hub of Asia during the 16th century, opening Melayu's spice trade to the West and bringing much wealth and foreign culture to the island. For many visitors today the town is a historical center, filled with market stools, old China town's art shops, ancient mosques, chinese temples and a reconstruction of Melaka's palace. But there is another domineering presence in this town, a figure that is celebrated on every road, building, sign post, art canvas and many tourist products. This figure is Malaysia's most famous warrior known for his ferocious silat, his keris skills and his loyalty to the Sultan. This warrior is Hang Tuah.

The Hang Tuah tales are chronicled in the semi historical Malay annals of the Sejarah Melayu as well as the more romantic scriptures from the Hikayat collections. I shall retell the stories as documented in the Malay scriptures before analyzing factors that will open a debate which will hopefully broaden this topic and further the results in this ancient myth or legend.

The story begins in the 15th century during the reign of the Sultan Mansur Shah, the sixth sultan of Malacca that some scholars believe was a descendent from Sumatra ruling the state from 1459 to 1477. Mansur Shah implemented a policy of expansion during his reign, with many territories in the Malaysian Peninsular and eastern Sumatra under his rule. Relations between Melaka and Sumatra strengthened when the provinces of Bintan Siantan and Inderagiri were given to Melaka as dowry for the Sultan's marriage to the princess of Majapahit.

The Sultan's admiral (laksamana) Hang Tuah was instrumental in Melaka's victories. He became the Sultan's constant aide, accompanying the king on official visits to foreign countries.

During a visit to Majapahit, a famous Indonesian warrior named Taming Sari challenged Hang

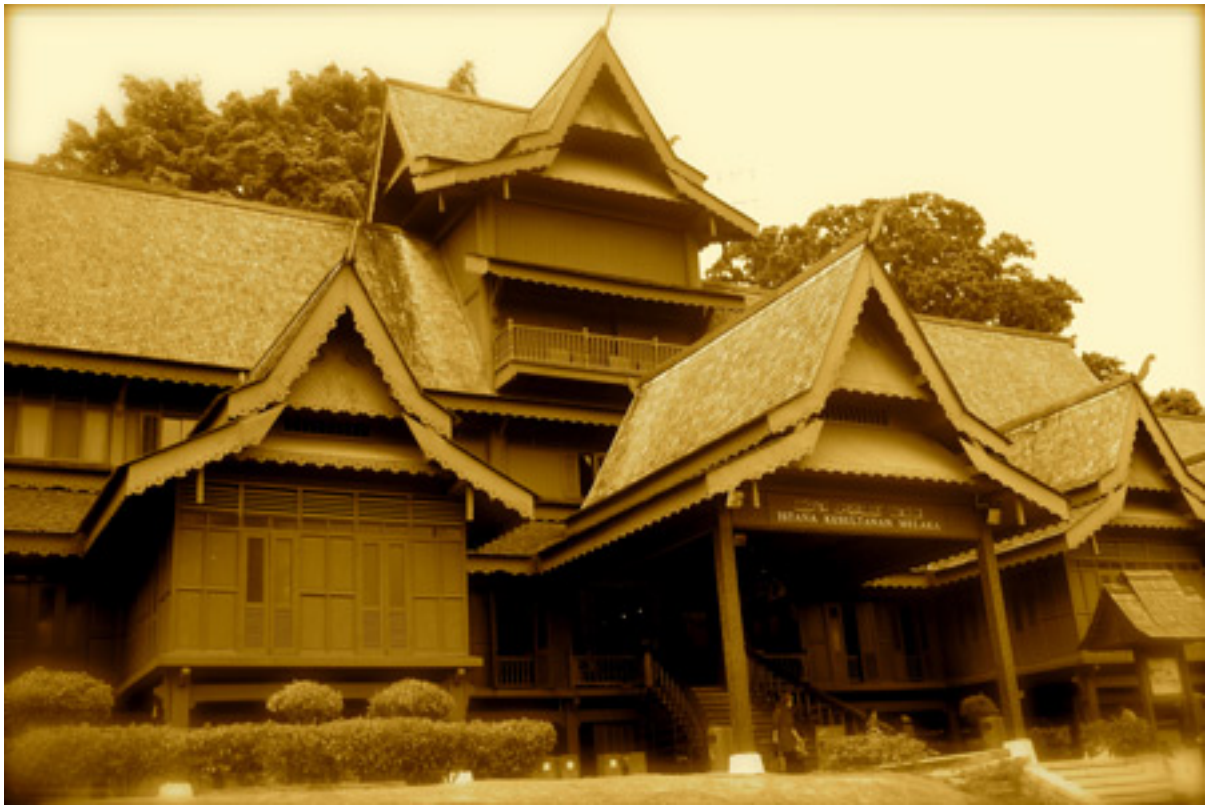
Tuah to a keris duel. One source notes that the Indonesian warrior forged a keris which he named after himself while another tale documents that it was literally hand moulded by the famous Guru Sang Adi Putra. The warrior Taming Sari was once a disciple of guru Adi Putra who also trained Hang Tuah. Back then it was common practice that any great warrior seek the skills from many mentors. Long before Taming Sari went to study under guru Adi Putra, the guru was said to have been meditating in seclusion in a cave. Suddenly a source of molten iron appeared in front of him, so he took it in his hand and by his *shakti* (human energy power), he pressed and shaped the iron forming a keris that he named Taming Sari. Years later, once the student Taming Sari finished his training under guru Adi Putra, the guru told him about the keris and the coincidental naming and then lent the keris to his student. Taming Sari was told to carry the Taming Sari keris but mysteriously the knife was not meant to be given to him permanently and he did not return the keris to his master as promised. This keris had served him well in previous battles and the blade had become an entity of power and folk magic, with word saying that whoever possessed this keris would become invincible.



The Jawa warrior Taming Sari was the senior of Hang Tuah but they had never met before. Hang Tuah learnt about Taming Sari and his famed keris from their mutual guru. He knew that the keris was a key factor to winning the fight, for the bearer of this keris would be invincible. The grand event attracted many spectators to witness this match between two mighty warriors. As the fight commenced Hang Tuah seemed to be no match against the Majapahit warrior Taming Sari. The fight depicts that Hang Tuah was always under attack; he was only able to act defensively. But Hang Tuah was said to be waiting for the right opportunity to capture the famed keris. He continued to defend and eventually found an opening disarming Taming Sari. The empowered keris fell from his hand. Hang Tuah gave his own keris to the Java warrior deceiving him and those watching as a gentleman's gesture. He then retrieved the keris named Taming Sari from the ground. The keris knives had been switched with new handlers, Hang Tuah became more aggressive, attacking more frequently, and with only a short amount of time since the keris exchange, Hang Tuah stabbed the Majapahit warrior Taming Sari killing him almost instantly. Hang Tuah followed the *adat* (tradition) protocol by presenting the keris to his Sultan that in turn presented it back to the Majapahit king who politely refused. The Melaka Sultan then honored Hang Tuah with the knife. Once Hang Tuah returned to Melaka, he climbed Mount Ledang to return the keris back to his teacher and rightful owner. It is then that Guru Adi Putra officially made the keris belong to Hang Tuah.

Hang Tuah would be given further responsibilities as ambassador, acting on behalf of the Sultan when traveling to allied countries.

A story from the Hikayat Hang Tauh scriptures tells the tale of the warrior being sent to Pahang with the task of persuading the already engaged princess Tun Teja to forget her previous commitment and become the Sultan's companion instead. The document continues to note that princess Tun Teja fell under the impression that Hang Tuah himself had come to persuade her to marry him and not the Sultan. She agreed to elope with him to Melaka and it was only during the voyage home that Hang Tuah revealed his deception to Tun Teja. The Sejarah Melayu annals carry a different account of this tale, claiming that it was another warrior named Hang Nadim who deceived the princess.



The most famous story of Hang Tuah is the tale of his fight with his closest childhood companion, Hang Jebat. Hang Tuah's deep loyalty and popularity with the Sultan was known throughout the kingdom, but rumors started to circulate about the warrior having an illicit affair with one of the Sultan's stewardess (dayang). The Sultan felt betrayed and insulted, so he

sentenced Hang Tuah to death without trial for the alleged offense. The death sentence was never carried out, however, because Hang Tuah's executioner, the Bendahara, went against the Sultan’s orders feeling that Hang Tuah was sentenced unjustly and so he hid Hang Tuah in a remote region of Melaka, protecting the town’s hero.

Hang Jebat heard of the unjustly murder of his childhood friend, so he seeked to avenge his friend's death. Hang Jebat's revenge allegedly became a palace killing spree or furious rebellion against the Sultan depending on which source you read. However, it remains consistent that Hang Jebat wreaked havoc onto the royal court, and the Sultan was unable to stop him, as none of the Sultan's warriors dared to challenge the more experienced battle veteran Hang Jebat.

The Bendahara then informed the Sultan that the only man able to stop Hang Jebat was Hang Tuah and that he was still alive. The Sultan immediately told the Bendahara to recall Hang Tuah from his hiding place and the warrior was given full amnesty by the king and instructed to kill Hang Jebat. The keris duel between the two warriors Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat is legendary illustrated in many paintings around Melaka’s art community. The fight is said to have lasted seven grueling days and eventually Hang Tuah was able to kill Hang Jebat.



The two main sources of this Hang Tuah story differ on the details of his life. According to the Hikayat Hang Tuah pages, it was Hang Jebat who avenged his friend's death, only to be killed by the same friend, but according to Sejarah Melayu records, it was another warrior named Hang Kastur who invaded the palace who eventually fell in battle to Hang Tuah’s keris. These documents are unique in that they constitute the only available account of the history of the Malay Sultanate in the 15th and early 16th century, but the dramatic Hang Jebat story remains the more popular.

Hang Tuah continued to serve Melaka after the death of his friend Hang Jebat. As Hang Tuah progressed in his years, the warrior was ordered by the successive Melaka Sultan to court a legendary princess on the Sultan's behalf.

The Puteri Gunung Ledang (Princess of Mount Ledang) was so named because she resided on Mount Ledang at the Melaka-Johor border. Some scholars documented this Princess as being Sumatran from the Minangkabau region. According to the legend, the Princess met with Hang Tuah, and only agreed to marry the Sultan if he satisfied a list of requirements, or pre-wedding gifts. The list included a golden bridge linking Melaka with the top of Mount Ledang, seven trays of mosquito livers, seven jars of virgins' tears and a bowl of the Sultan's first born son's blood.

Hang Tuah knew the tasks would not be fulfilled, and was said to be so overwhelmed that he failed his Sultan that he flung his Taming Sari keris into a river and vowed only to return to Melaka if it resurfaced, which it never did. He then simply vanished into thin air.

Another version of this story is that he himself fell in love with the princess and that they fled to Sumatra and were never seen again. Recently an article was published online on a Malaysian website about traces of Hang Tuah’s blood DNA being found in Ridu, Sumatra.





Indonesian scholars also question Hang Tuah's ethnicity; some believe he was not Malay but actually







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