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RULER AND REALM: POLITICAL MYTHS IN WESTERN INDONESIA

P. E. DE JOSSELIN DE JONG

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Our starting-point in Malaysia. This federation has the remarkable constitutional provision that the office of King of the federation as a whole is held by the rulers of each of the constituent states (who usually bear the title of Sultan) in turn. This arrangement has conferred a certain new dignity and importance to the office of Sultan, which in the post-war years was becoming not much more than a relic of a (sometimes more, sometimes less) glorious past. It has also revived the general public's interest in the Sultans of the various Malaysian states: in their personal qualities, and in their dynastic histories. For the inhabitants of Negri Sembilan, a state on the west coast, it is a source of pride that their ruler belongs to the most ancient of all Malayan dynasties, as it goes back to a 14th-century Hindu-Sumatran king, whose name we know through a number of inscriptions on stone monuments, found in the west coast region of Sumatra. Negri Sembilan is a remarkable Malaysian state, as its inhabitants are not Malays, as in the other Peninsular states[1], but settlers from Minangkabau, a mountainous region in western Sumatra. The account of the origin of their dynasty, as told in Negri Sembilan to the present day, can be summarized as follows.

Negri Sembilan was originally governed by a rather informal council of chieftains of the matrilineal clans, but when this Minangkabau colony on the west coast of Malaysia felt itself threatened by three powerful neighbours it decided it needed a more centralized and monarchical government to organize its self-defence. An embassy was sent to the Minangkabau homeland to beg the ruler of Minangkabau – and it was this Minangkabau dynasty which could trace back its ancestry to the 14th century – to send one of the princes to become ruler of Negri Sembilan.

This request was granted, and a Minangkabau prince, Raja Malewar, crossed over to the Malay Peninsula to assume the new royal office. On landing, however, he immediately ran into trouble because (due to the machinations of a rival), the Peninsular Minangkabau held him to be an impostor. It was only after a period of humiliation and many hardships that he managed to gain followers who were convinced of his legitimacy, and, with their support, could defeat his rival and set up his court and a central government in what has remained the royal residence to the present day. Thus he established Negri Sembilan's dynasty: a branch of the ancient Sumatran-Minangkabau dynasty, and thereby the oldest and most prestigious royal family of all Malaysia.

Thus goes the account told in Negri Sembilan today: a tale which

[1] I am now leaving out of consideration Chinese, Indian, and other immigrants or temporary residents.

obviously serves to affirm that this state's rulers are legitimate *par excellence*. It has been accepted as historically correct, not only by the inhabitants themselves, but also by foreign (i.e. mainly European) scholars of Malayan history, and has been considered by them as referring to events which took place in the second half of the 18th century. However, if we study the records and correspondence of the Dutch East India Company's "Factory" at Malacca, we can follow the political developments in neighbouring Negri Sembilan month by month during these critical years, and, as I attempted to demonstrate in a recent article (de Josselin de Jong 1975), these documents make it extremely unlikely that anything like the coming of Prince Malewar actually took place, historically speaking. This does not diminish the value of the Malewar saga for the people of Negri Sembilan: it is a story of such great national significance that we are justified in calling it the dynastic of political myth of this state.

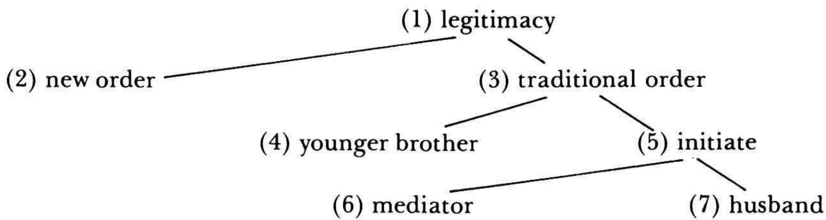
Now it is very remarkable that a first, preliminary examination of political myths of other western Indonesian societies leads us to the conclusion that whenever these myths, like the Malewar myth, deal with the establishment of a *new* dynasty, the founder of that dynasty, the first ruler of a new line, like Raja Malewar has to undergo a period of humiliation before he can accede to his new dignity. I think I may summarize the idea behind this type of political myth as follows. Every king is an exceptional person, but the first ruler, the founder of a new dynasty, is even outstanding and exceptional as a king. He can legitimately attain this very special position only by overcoming exceptional adversities; in other words, the period of humiliation is an initiation he has to endure in order to prove himself worthy of, and entitled to, his doubly eminent status.

Most Indonesian rulers[2], as is to be expected, do not derive their legitimacy from initiation into the status of founder of a new line, but from being members of a traditionally established, acknowledged dynasty; this is the type of royal legitimacy with which we are familiar in western Europe. At this point a diagram may be helpful.

A rapid and cursory reconnaissance of the field of western Indonesian political myths has given me the impression that certain notions concerning the position of legitimate ruler, and in particular concerning the relationship between ruler and realm, constantly recur. These notions can be brought together in a model which (I must emphasize) is not the

[2] Throughout this essay, I prefer to use the word "ruler" rather than "king", as the more neutral term avoids the typically European connotation of "king". Most present-day Malaysian rulers bear the title of Sultan, with two exceptions: the Raja of the state of Perlis, and the Yangdipertuan Besar, i.e. "He who is acknowledged as great lord" of Negri Sembilan. This was also the title borne by the now extinct line of rulers of Minangkabau. In older Malay texts, the word Raja is often used with the general meaning of ruler, king, prince.

outcome of research, but rather will serve as a guideline for research I am engaged in at present. It may, therefore, also serve as a guideline for this paper.



We have said a few words about the connection between the ideas (1) and (2); we shall now follow the line of the "traditional order", (3).

Societies (and periods) with an old-established dynasty often have origin myths which trace the ancestry of the ruler and his people to two brothers; the younger brother is the ancestor of the royal family, the elder brother, of his subjects. (A variant theme is that the commoners were living in the region from time immemorial, and the first ruler came from abroad). The elder brother – the ancestor of the commoners, and especially of the chief ministers – is endowed with wisdom, the younger brother attains a position of prestige and power. This establishes a relation between minister and ruler, by which the minister is the wise counsellor, who imparts his advice and wisdom to the king.

This brings us from item (4) to item (5): the ruler is initiated into secrets of statecraft by his minister. Parenthetically I may observe – and the reader will certainly agree – that my model is neither elegant nor logically consistent, for by following the line of the "old order" we arrive at the concept of "initiation" that we had already encountered as a feature of the "new order". For the defence I can only say that, at the present stage, I am trying to keep as closely as possible to the cultural participants' own cognitive scheme; in this scheme, cross-linkages keep on appearing.

To continue: the ruler, initiated by his minister, is able to act as a mediator (item 6). I use this convenient and fashionable term at present to designate in the first place the king who unites or re-unites the two halves of his kingdom (this theme is prominent in Javanese historiography). The ruler is also a mediator – literally and figuratively a "middleman" – as he is considered to be in the geographical centre of his kingdom, and, in that position, to combine and unite various groups. We shall return to this theme later in this essay.

Finally, there is also an association between themes number (5) and number (7). In many Indonesian societies only the married man is seen as a normal, entirely acceptable and socialized member of this community;

a wedding, we may say, is an initiation ceremony. We can leave aside this metaphorical association of marriage and initiation if we wish, but we cannot pass by the evident fact that, in the societies we are considering, the relation of a ruler to his realm is that of husband and wife. This finds its expression in myths and in practice. In the legendary histories of Aceh (the society at the northern tip of Sumatra), Aceh, in the words of Snouck Hurgronje (1893: 139) "is the perpetual bride", and (to cite an instance of recent practice) in Negri Sembilan the heir to the royal dignity can only assume his office if he is married to a woman of one of the "commoner" clans of that state[3].

In the present paper we shall consider legitimacy beliefs and ideas concerning the relationship between ruler and realm which are associated with the ruler as a central mediator and the ruler as the husband of his people (i.e. themes 6 and 7 in our diagram). Also, that we shall confine ourselves to the societies of the Malays and the Minangkabau, in the pre-colonial and early colonial period. The sources we shall use are indigenous historical texts – at least, such texts, or the parts of such texts, which in their own societies fulfill the role of myths; myths in the meaning of oral or written texts which are of prime, fundamental importance to members of the society concerned. We may call them origin myths, but, as will become apparent, they are concerned not with the origin of the world or mankind, but with cultural origins: the institutions of the society in which the text in question was, and still is, told or read. As David Moyer (n.d../1976: 22) phrases it: the New World myths studied by Lévi-Strauss "deal with universalistic problems such as man's relation to nature, cosmology, and the total social order. On the other hand, the Sumatran and Malay material often appears particularistic and focused on the location and definition of particular groups and individuals in the social order." For that reason, I prefer to call the latter political myths rather than origin myths.

For the Malay world we have an excellent text of prime importance in the *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals. It is an account of the founding, and then a detailed history, of the Malay Sultanate of Malacca, which flourished in the 15th century until its capture by the Portuguese in 1511. The two principal versions of the Annals probably date from 1536 and 1612.

The first part of the Annals[4] deals with the wondrous and supra-normal happenings in Sumatra and on the site of present-day Singapore that led up to the founding of Malacca. This part can fittingly be called legendary, while the much longer second part, that describes the rise to

[3] This is (still) the norm at present, but it has not been practised since the first half of the 19th century. See Hooker 1972: 118, 119.

[4] That is to say, approximately p. 12–60 in C.C. Brown's translation (1952).

power and prosperity of Malacca and its sudden fall, is historical. The distinction I am making here between legend and history is not one of untrue versus true, but between two kinds of materials for the narrative. The first part deals with persons and events to which the compiler of the Annals and his contemporaries had no direct access: neither by documentary evidence nor by a chain of orally transmitted traditions connecting the Annalist with his subject matter. For the second part, the Annalist did have access to his material through these two channels, so that it is also not surprising to find at least the main characters of this part appearing as recognizable human beings with distinctive traits.

Now the legendary first part contains a myth, in the sense of a tale which was and remains of prime importance for this society as a whole. It is as follows. Three princes, descendants of Alexander the Great, had lived beneath the sea. They rise up and come on land on the east coast of Sumatra. Two of them depart, but the third is proclaimed king by a supernatural herald. There were already people living in this region, under their own headman – this is one instance of the theme I have already mentioned of the populace being autochthonous and the king arriving later. The local headman and the newly proclaimed king then enter into a solemn compact. The chieftain says: "Your Highness, the descendants of your humble servant shall be subjects of your Majesty's throne, but they must be well treated by your descendants. If they offend, they shall not, however grave their offence, be *disgraced* or *reviled* with evil words; if their offence is grave, let them be put to death. . ." The king replies: I agree, but in return I require the undertaking "that your descendants shall never for the rest of time be *disloyal* to my descendants, even if my descendants oppress them and behave evilly" (Brown 1952: 26).

This is the mythical theme of the primeval covenant between the ruler and his subjects, stipulating unswerving loyalty on the one hand, and freedom from disgrace and shame on the other. However important this central part of the myth may be, if only for stressing the notion of disgrace or humiliation we already encountered in the Malewar legend, the episodes immediately preceding and following it are even more enlightening for our purpose.

When the third of the sub-marine brothers had been proclaimed king, but before he had entered into the solemn contract with the local chief, he wished to marry. A suitable bride was found, but after a night with the king she was found, the following day, to be stricken by a skin disease (*kedal*, "chloasma"). The king then sent her away, and this happened 39 times. The king then asked the local headman for his daughter's hand in marriage, whereupon the headman consented, on the condition that the king and he first make a covenant with each other. This was done, as we have seen, so that the chieftain's daughter could then be given to the king

as his bride; "and when day dawned he (the king) saw that she was not stricken with chloasma" (Brown: 27). The meaning of these events is obvious: it was the supernatural power of the king that caused the disease; by means of the covenant this power was neutralized, as henceforth there was not merely physical contact, but a regulated relationship between the king and his bride – i.e. also between the ruler and his subjects. However, I think there is more to it than this, as becomes apparent if we consider a transformation of this tale. For this transformation, we have to turn from the Malays to the Minangkabau of west Sumatra.

The long narrative poem is one of the western Indonesian literary forms. The Minangkabau word for this genre is *kaba*, and the outstanding *kaba* is the *Kaba Cindua Mato*. As an Indonesian anthropologist, himself a Minangkabau, has put it: the *Kaba Cindua Mato* "is a state myth *par excellence* and a standard reference work for Minangkabau *adat* (i.e. customary law) theoreticians and guardians" (Taufik Abdullah 1970: 3). I shall summarize what is narrated in roughly the first quarter of the poem.

We are at the dawn of Minangkabau's history. In the royal residence lives the queen "who was created together with this world". Her son and heir-apparent is, very properly, engaged to be married to his mother's-brother's-daughter, the Lady Bungsu. While the prince (the heir-apparent) is attending a ceremony, his friend Cindua Mato goes walking up and down the market-place. To his horror he thus comes to hear the slanderous rumour that the prince is suffering from four loathsome skin diseases (van der Toorn 1888: 119 line 353 and 195 fn. 353), and that for this reason his marriage to Bungsu will not now take place. She is to be given in marriage to an east coast king instead.

It soon becomes clear to Cindua Mato and his friend that this king was the source of the rumours: he had blackened the prince's reputation in order to gain Bungsu for himself, and had almost succeeded. Cindua Mato rushes off, in secret, to where the wedding between beautiful Bungsu and the dastardly king is to take place. He kidnaps the Lady Bungsu. She marries the prince to whom she had originally been betrothed. This part of the *kaba* ends with the outwitted king appealing to a court of the highest judges: he "charged that a member of the royal family had humiliated him – indeed an inexcusable offence. But (the judges) asked: who began the humiliations?" (Taufik Abdullah 1970: 7).

If we once more venture outside the Malay-Minangkabau area and turn again to Aceh, we come across a legend concerning Mökuta Alam, the late 16th-century sultan who initiated Aceh's golden age. He was suffering from venereal disease, and resorted to the cure which was at any rate still held to be effective in the early years of this century: he slept with a healthy woman (in this case, with a slave girl). The sultan was cured; the girl contracted the disease, but also became pregnant. Her son became

the ancestor of the lineage of territorial chiefs who bore the title: "Lord Elder Brother", viz. of the Sultan – again a familiar element (Snouck Hurgronje 1893: 139, 140).

So in that part of the Malay Annals which contains what we may call the national myth of the Malays, we have a king who gives a skin disease to every woman with whom he has sexual intercourse (until the relationship between him and his bride is given a quite new aspect); in the "state myth *par excellence*" of Minangkabau, the future king is said to be suffering from skin diseases by which any women would be infected after sexual union with him. And the great sultan of Aceh had venereal disease with which he actually did infect one of his subjects.

All three monarchs, that is to say, are directly connected with an unpleasant, humiliating disease. Apart from the theme of humiliation – by the king and of the king – there are several other features in this set of mythical transformations which, I am convinced, shed light on the ideas of the relation between the ruler and his subjects.

The Malay and the Aceh cases are in clear opposition; the Minangkabau legend is between the two, as it deals with rumours only. The Malay king is no longer a source of infection as soon as he consorts with a woman who is not merely physically a woman, but also culturally defined as a subject, with whom he is in a relationship of mutually agreed rights and duties. The Sultan of Aceh is in no such relation to his bed-fellow: she is described as a black slave, so she is neither a member of the Aceh people nor possessed of the status of a normal subject.

But, we may wonder, why should a disease (or even four diseases), considered disgusting and disreputable be attributed to royalty?[5] I think there are good reasons for explaining this as an aspect of the ruler's position as mediator (rôle nr. 6 in our diagram); this also brings us to the second half of this paper.

The ruler as mediator can be the person who, *qualitate qua*, unites the two halves of his realm; as I remarked earlier, this notion was prominent in Javanese historiography. He can also be the central figure surrounded by the four quarters of his territory; this is again Javanese, but has also been recorded for the eastern Indonesian island of Ambon (de Josselin de Jong 1977: 13, 14). This system of territorial classification based on the centre surrounded by four points can expand so that the 4–5 becomes an 8–9 arrangement: the ruler in the centre surrounded by an inner and an

[5] To be precise: in this case Aceh and Malaya are in extreme positions, with Minangkabau in the middle. The account in question attributes a disease to the Sultan of Aceh himself, but not to the ancestor of the rulers of Malacca. One of the characters in the *kaba* spreads the story that the Minangkabau prince is diseased. Although it is implied that this is merely slander, the story apparantly has so much verisimilitude that it is generally believed. Wilkinson (1932) s.v. *kedal* and *tulah* is very relevant for our present study.

outer circle of four. This is the way the people of Negri Sembilan conceptualize their state (the very name means "the nine territories").

But when a social person unites the two (or more) parts of his realm, he thereby combines and shares in the qualities attributed to these parts: as a mediator, he is a representative of the totality, and thereby ambivalent. To use a term often used in older anthropological literature, but which has gone out of fashion lately, he is a "trickster". And only a slight shift in emphasis is required to pass, in one direction or the other, from the concept of the ruler who combines the features of the various parts of his realm to that of the ruler who is required to balance the qualities of his subjects by setting off other qualities against them. As the Swedish anthropologist Elisabet Lind phrases it (1975: 133): "(Just as) the center, in the Javanese view, may be opposed to the periphery and at the same time absorb it and represent the totality, so may *slamet* (the ideal state of harmony and balance) both imply order as opposed to disorder/destruction and a state of equilibrium."

These words refer to Java, but they can also be applied to the two societies we are dealing with now. To rephrase Miss Lind's words more crudely but also perhaps more clearly: in the interests of equilibrium, of order, the ruler may unite in himself the qualities of his subjects or he may stand in conceptual opposition to his subjects: the ruler is what his subjects are not. I shall mention a few manifestations of this opposition principle.

In Minangkabau proper and in Negri Sembilan, the descent principle which applies to the royal family is in contrast to that of the society as a whole: both societies are matrilineal, but succession to the dignity of Yangdipertuan, i.e. Ruler, is patrilinear. A comparable situation prevails[6] in a number of other Indonesian monarchies.

A very well known feature of the courts of the central Javanese Principalities was, until quite recently, that "at court, the ruler and his consort are surrounded by dwarfs, hunchbacks, albinos, eunuchs, and cripples" (Ras 1978: 458, 464; cp. Groneman 1895: 18); the Minangkabau ruler's *entourage* also included criminals, outlaws, illegitimate children, and in general "the weird and the dangerous" (de Josselin de Jong 1951: 108; van der Linden 1855: 261). I shall return to this presently.

It is also remarkable how often the prince's rule, over Sumatran and Peninsular Minangkabau (and elsewhere) is described in local histories and legends as harsh, severe, arbitrary, etc. (de Josselin de Jong 1951: 108; 1975: 283). Here we have the interesting case of a value-laden statement being made of the ruler: the statements would be derogatory if applied to a commoner, but I have the strong impression that in these cases we are presented with characteristics which would be misplaced in a

[6] I am here using the "ethnographic present".

commoner but, for that very reason, are to be expected, are fitting, in a ruler: the non-commoner, and more than that: the opposite of the commoner. If this is so, may we not also see the diseased or disease-causing king in this light? This brings us back to our source for the doings of one of these kings, viz. the Malay Annals.

This is an account of the rise to power of the Malacca sultanate and of its golden age, written shortly after its conquest by the Portuguese. Its purpose may well have been to impress upon the Malays that, as long as they abide by the primeval compact between rulers and ruled, they may yet regain their recently-lost eminence. Let us now see how this book of history, with its air of tragic dignity interspersed with passages of sardonic realism, depicts the sultans. In earlier studies I had noticed – as one cannot fail to do – that they did not come off too well. "The Annalist does not go to extremes in eulogizing Malacca's sultans" was one of my earlier conclusions, and also: the sultans are "by no means ideal figures; on the contrary, they are 'human, all too human'" (de Josselin de Jong 1964: 237, 240). On the same subject, in a later article: ". . . one is struck time and again by the fact that this same work which builds up the *mystique* of the Malacca dynasty for all it is worth does not hesitate to depict at least one of the most prominent and competent rulers as a thoroughly nasty individual" (1965: 150).

I must admit that it is only now, turning again to the Annals years later, that I fully realize how remarkable this is. It may be due to his own cultural conditioning that a western reader expects to find the ruler playing the leading role in a work like the Annals, that describes Malacca's history from the standpoint of a small circle of high dignitaries; and it takes some time before he realizes with a shock that stock figures like Charles the Bold, Frederick the Great, the Father of the Fatherland etc. are – if I may say so – inconspicuous by their absence.

The sultans are of course presented as the central figures at court and in the state, but the distinctive characters who play the leading roles in Malacca's dramatic history are courtiers and ministers, with pride of place given to the Bendaharas, the (hereditary) chief ministers.[7]

It is by no means original to point out the prominent role of the Bendaharas in the events described in the Annals. This is generally recognized in the field of Malay studies, as is its explanation: the Annals were written (or at least compiled) by a member of the Bendahara family, and it is evident that the Annalist consistently places the Chief Ministers in a favourable light, especially *vis-à-vis* at least one other courtier and naval commander. I do not disagree with the accepted opinion that,

[7] The Annalist praises a few of the sultans for their personal ability in what looks like stock phrases: the "justice" of Sultans Tengah and Muhammad in almost the same few words; see Brown 1952: 52, 59.

through the cause just mentioned, the Annals contain much pro-Bendahara propaganda; but I am convinced there is more to it than that. It was possible and permissible for the Annalist to introduce this bias in his work because it was in accordance with fundamental representations. Sultans could be presented as unsatisfactory and even "nasty", as deviant from the *commoners'* norms, because that was the role they were due to fulfill. It was part of their position as mediators, and in addition it was in accordance with the accepted relations between Sultan and chief commoner or minister: the ruler is endowed with power, the minister with understanding of statecraft and wisdom, as we have seen when we discussed the ruler's positions numbers (4) and (5) in my diagram.

The Malay Annals are the principal work of Malay historiography, and as such they can lead us back from the Malay to the Minangkabau world. I have already said a few words about the Minangkabau *kaba*, the long, narrative poems, of which the *Kaba Cindua Mato* is the outstanding specimen. There is, however, another genre in traditional Minangkabau literature that is closer to the Malay Annals, namely the *tambo*: local prose histories, or rather digests of the customary law prevalent in particular areas of Minangkabau, preceded by historical accounts of how these rules had come to be established. It is worth noting that, as will soon become clear, the present-day Minangkabau's attitude to the *tambo* is not the same as that towards the *kaba*. The *kaba* are the highly respected "classics" of the past, but the *tambo* have much greater direct relevance for the present; they are consulted as compendia of customary law, and their long introductory passages on local history arouse great interest. They are living myths, believed in as they stand or requiring exegesis in order to be believed.

I called the historical introductions, these living myths, local histories. This is only partly correct, as the very beginning, that is common to all *tambo*, deals with the origin of Minangkabau society; this part fans out, as it were, to the various more specific sections dealing with local history. The tale which articulates the general with the particular histories is, briefly summarized, as follows. (See e.g. Netscher 1850: 38–48; Willinck 1909: 19–23).

Alexander the Great had three sons. One of them travelled northwards (or westwards, in other versions) and became king of Rum, i.e. Rome or Byzantium; the second eastwards, and became king of China. The third son is of special interest to us. In the first place because he is the youngest brother, as the truly legitimate king has to be (see the diagram, item 4); secondly, because he is singled out as the paramount king by his very title. The elder brothers are both styled Maharajo, but the youngest is Maharajodirajo, "King of Kings". It does not surprise us that this eminent person arrives on the island that will become known as Minangkabau. He settles there, and marries a human girl, a Siamese cat, a learned dog, and

a Cambodian tigress (in some versions also a goat of the forest). By each of these wives he has a daughter, who become the ancestresses of the inhabitants of the three central provinces of Minangkabau and of one (or two) of the outlying districts.

It is this crucial passage which present-day Minangkabau find to be in need of exegesis. A graduate student of University of Indonesia recently asked me whether I would agree that it refers to "a period of totemism". The two Minangkabau scholars who edited a *tambo* in 1956, adding their interpretative commentary to the text (Batuah and Madjoindo 1956: 13, 14) were of the opinion that Siamese cat, Cambodian tigress etc. are nicknames: the cat being an affectionate, the tigress an irascible lady, the goat a vegetarian, and so forth.

My own opinion is that, although I have no idea why the cat is called Siamese, the dog learned, etc., nor why the provinces are each associated with their particular human or animal ancestress, I do think some light can be shed on this fragment. To do so, we must go back one generation.

The three brothers (the kings of Byzantium and China, and the king of Minangkabau) were the sons of Alexander. Alexander was a son of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve had 39 (in other versions, 99) children, with (in both versions) the sons outnumbering the daughters by one. The boys and girls are paired off in marriage to each other, thus leaving one unmated young man. This is Alexander. He is then taken up to heaven where he is married to a nymph, before returning to earth with his heavenly bride.

So we see that the two direct progenitors of the Minangkabau royal dynasty are united in marriage with creatures of heaven and earth, and, of their earthly mates, with a human and with animals; and the animals are both the domesticated and the wild.[8]

It is surely not fanciful to paraphrase this by saying that the universe: heaven and earth, man and beast, culture and nature, have their focus in the ruler. He is the central point who brings all together by the most fundamental of all social regulators: by *marriage*. It is significant that this Minangkabau myth, as I said at the beginning of this article (p. 6), is an origin myth not in the sense that it deals with the origin of the world and of mankind, but with cultural origins: the establishment of an ordered society and its institutions. These myths have been committed to writing in their most appropriate context: as introductions to collections of customary laws, serving to explain how these regulations came to be established.

We encounter the ruler here in the positions numbered (4), (6), and (7) in the diagram: as younger brother (this relationship does not assume its pregnant form, and is therefore not of great importance in the myth we

[8] It is probably not fortuitous that one of the wild animals is herbivorous, the other carnivorous.

are now discussing), as husband, and, by his marriage, as mediator or, to put it more clearly, as the central point, the pivot of an ordered society – even of an ordered universe. The Maharajodirajo is the embodiment of order.

So we see that the *tambo* contain compendia of customary law, preceded by these remarkable little myths, which led us to the concept of order and of *l'univers des règles* (Lévi-Strauss 1949: 35 ff). As we find the legitimate ruler so closely associated with (customary) law and order, it is evidently desirable for us to enquire, however briefly, whether other, more official, law books have anything to offer that can help us understand the Malay or Minangkabau representations of the legitimate ruler. Thus brings me to the concluding section of this article. Although the relation between ruler and law is a topic worthy of a more extensive study, I shall, as I said, now be very brief.

For pre-colonial or early colonial law books due to a single compiler or emanating from a central authority, we can confine ourselves to the Malay world. We can form a fairly clear impression of the usual *contents* of such law-books from the manuscripts in the libraries of universities and other research institutes, and thanks to a number of published editions. The *function* in the place and time in which they were written still needs a thorough investigation, although Van Ronkel (1919: 1–7) has made a few very useful preliminary remarks on this subject.[9]

They were never, he says, actually used as legal codes; nor are they *aides-mémoire* on living customary law. (If they were, they would in this respect be very similar to the Minangkabau *tambo*.) Their principal purpose was to put on record what threatened to be lost; such are the "Malacca Codes", compiled after the fall of that sultanate to a foreign power (Van Ronkel 1919: 6; Winstedt and De Josselin de Jong 1956: 29, 51). A special case are the "maritime laws of Malacca", which were needed in practice as guidelines for the captains of ships at sea; that is to say, in situations where they have to act as substitutes for the regular judges.[10]

Bearing in mind the purpose and function of the indigenous Malay law-books, and the character of the ruler as the central pivot of an ordered realm (and even of an ordered universe), it would be a profitable undertaking to study the relation between the ruler and the law – but not one to be undertaken now. I shall confine myself to what is directly relevant for our present theme.

[9] The social function of a special kind of law-books, viz. reform laws, has been analyzed in an important study by Moyer (1978).

[10] In addition, we have legal digests compiled at the behest of a colonial administrator. Some of these date from the very early years of the colonial period. Moyer (1975: 1–38) gives a minute analysis of the factors involved in such a process.

I have already referred to cases, in Minangkabau and elsewhere, of the king being what the commoner is not, and the ruler being expected to do what the commoner should not. One manifestation of this representation of the ruler's position, as we have seen, is that his *entourage* includes people who are physically or socially out of the ordinary. The legal texts we are now discussing tend to confirm this for the Malay world. "Any one by the custom may escape the penalty for murder by becoming a royal slave" (Kempe & Winstedt 1948: 7). It is not only murderers who can find sanctuary by thus becoming immediately associated with the ruler, but there appears to be a special relationship between the ruler and slaves in general-people who, socially speaking, are non-persons: "Whoever kills a slave commits an offence against the Raja" (Kempe & Winstedt 1952: 5, § 15).

An even more striking example of the link between "the Raja" and a category of – there is really no better word – anomalous persons is the following, taken from the same "Malay legal miscellany". "Two free persons committing adultery should be put to death . . . The man is killed by a weapon; the woman is strangled. If she lives after being strangled thrice, she becomes the property of the Raja" (Kempe & Winstedt 1952: 5, § 18). In other words, the ruler is here associated with women who survive being put to death three times; that is to say, with the living dead.

The anthropologically standard explanation of such ideas – one which I have also put forward in an earlier publication (1951: 107, 108) – is that such representatives of the weird and the dangerous are compatible with, and serve to strengthen, the ruler's own dangerously supernatural power (his *daulat* or *tulah*, in Malay). Although I do not wish to reject this view, I think we can now be more specific, and consider this phenomenon as an aspect of the ruler's role as the focus of an ordered society, that belongs to his position as middleman and mediator (see above, p. 13).

Although I feel less certain about this, I think there is good reason to suppose that the notion of the ruler as the embodiment of order can explain a remarkable feature of the Malay legal texts, namely the great (and in our 20th-century western eyes, excessive) emphasis they place on sumptuary regulations, royal prerogatives, and court etiquette.

The Malacca Laws, as found in the manuscripts used by Van Ronkel (1919: *μυ*) and in the much larger collection edited by Liaw Yock Fang (1976: 65), not only make the well-known provision that only the ruler may wear yellow garments, but both collections impose the death penalty on the breach of this rule. The same legal digest reserves the use of five specifically mentioned words (for "command", "wrath", "grace", "bounty" and "I" or "me") for the ruler, and adds: "A subject of the ruler who utters them shall be put to death" (Liaw 1976: 67).

It would be easy to cite parallels in other cultures, and to add the comment, that is not much more than a tautology, that they are so im-

portant because they are the tokens or symbols of royal majesty. That is as may be; but is the importance of such a rule, in the society we are now studying, not better understood as a "*règle comme règle*", to use Lévi-Strauss's phrase? "The *fact of being a rule*, completely independent of its modalities, is indeed the very essence" of such prohibitions (Lévi-Strauss 1949: 39; 1969: 32). If the ruler stands for ordered society, the breach of rules regarding that ruler – however arbitrary they may appear to be – goes against the very concept of an ordered, civilized society.

We have been considering the position of the ruler, in particular in his relation to his subjects, in the societies of the Malays, the Minangkabau of Sumatra, and the Minangkabau of Negri Sembilan, Malaysia. Our sources were principally indigenous oral and written accounts dating from or referring to the pre-colonial period. Of these societies, Negri Sembilan has retained its ruling dynasty, as have most of the Malaysian Malay states, although the social and political functions of their Sultans and their Raja have undergone great changes in the twentieth century. In Sumatra, however, the royal dynasty was eliminated in the years around 1820. It may therefore be fitting to conclude this essay with just a few words on what we might call court etiquette in a society without a court. This will give us a glimpse of how the concept of order is made manifest in Minangkabau, when the ruler, the central embodiment of social order, has disappeared. I shall draw on an article by V.E. Korn, based on his experiences as a government magistrate in West Sumatra in the 1930's and on current digests of customary law, for his description of the installation of a *panghulu* or headman of a matrilineage (Korn 1941: 327–337).

Once the new headman has been selected, there follow two days of public ceremonies. On the second day, the *panghulu* is escorted, in a long procession, from the house in which he was born to the village council hall. The procession is arranged in three groups; the first consists of the new dignitary and his colleagues, the second of members of his own and his wife's lineages, the third of other guests, musicians, dancers, etc. The organization is in the hands of four masters of ceremonies with drawn swords. I now quote Korn: "Their special task is to guard against *sumbang*, i.e. walking in the procession in the wrong group. They have full powers, and no resistance to their decisions is allowed. If anyone disturbs the order and resists, they are permitted to kill him without paying compensation."

Here again we have the (now familiar) seemingly excessive punishment – the death penalty – for a breach of etiquette. In this case the misdemeanour is disturbance of the order in both senses of the English word: sequence and orderliness. This regulation applies to the installation of a chieftain who, in everyday speech and in proverbs, is often designated

as *rajo*, "king", and who in many cases has this word as part of his official title.

There is, however, a feature even more interesting than this transfer of the concept or order from the *rajo*, the ruler of all Minangkabau, to the *rajo* or lineage headman. Disturbing or breaking the order is called *sumbang*, as Korn notes – but in this case only. The usual meaning of *sumbang* is: *incest*, or marrying within one's own exogamous descent group.

If we ask ourselves what can possibly be the *tertium comparationis* of an infringement of the most fundamental marriage rules and an, in our eyes, trifling breach of etiquette, it is surely not fanciful to say that in both cases an individual places himself in the wrong culturally defined social group. He is disturbing an ordered society, and breaking a *"règle comme règle"*, a rule that is important "because it is there". On p. 16 I concluded a survey of texts which lay a severe punishment on the use of the royal colour or royal words with a quotation from Lévi-Strauss: "The *fact of being a rule*, completely independent of its modalities, is indeed the very essence" of such prohibitions. Actually, Lévi-Strauss's sentence ends with the words: ". . . of the incest prohibition". This sentence is taken from a book dealing with incest prohibition and marriage rules, but I am convinced that, in the more general form I ventured to produce, it is applicable to every prohibition a culture considers of prime importance. In the context of western Indonesian political myths, disrupting the social order is such a case.

We have been discussing Minangkabau and Malay ideas of the position of the legitimate ruler. I think a Malay should now be given the last word, namely the compiler of "a Malay legal digest": "*Ada pun segala raja-raja itu umpama saorang utasan yang berbuat tanaman; maka diaturnya segala tanamannya itu*". In translation: "A Ruler is like a gardener laying out a garden; he puts his garden in order" (Kempe & Winstedt 1948: 26).[11]

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[11] A few weeks after the completion of this paper I attended the inaugural address of Dr. J.G. de Casparis as Professor of Archaeology and Ancient History of South and South East Asia. Although it is not feasible to incorporate the results of De Casparis' research in the present essay, the great complementarity of these two studies, in different disciplines and using different materials, should be noted.

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