

KERATAN AKHBAR

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Did Hang Tuah meet Leonardo da Vinci?

KUALA LUMPUR: Could famed Renaissance painter and polymath Leonardo da Vinci have met legendary Malay warrior Hang Tuah between 1503 and 1506? This was the tantalising possibility unearthed by researchers from The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, a compilation the Italian master's writings and sketches.

Local researchers are now poring over manuscripts, and may soon seek the help of their European counterparts to ascertain the identity of a Malaccan noble who da Vinci wrote about. In the notes, da Vinci wrote, "I sketched a vehicle after meeting a Malaccan noble". However, the word after that was unclear. There is a possibility that they met, as both men lived during the same era — da Vinci and Hang Tuah were born in 1452 and 1431 respectively.

The exact time and place of the encounter between da Vinci and Hang Tuah is still uncertain, but both men were at the height of their reputations. Da Vinci was a noted painter and highly regarded as a military engineer, while Hang Tuah was sent by the Sultan of Malacca on several overseas missions, including Turkey.

This finding was revealed by Dr Rohaidah Kamaruddin, a senior lecturer at the Malay Language Department, Modern Language and Communications Faculty, University Putra Malaysia. She presented her research at the "Wacana Manuskrip Melayu, Hang Tuah: Daripada Mitos Kepada Fakta Sejarah" event at Wisma Sejarah here recently. UPM's professor of Malay Linguistics, Prof Emeritus Dr Hashim Musa also presented a paper at the event.

Dr Rohaidah said da Vinci's notes indicated that Hang Tuah may have existed. She said this was because Hang Tuah was mentioned by a foreign writer, and not in accounts in local books Hikayat Hang Tuah and Sulalatus Salatin (Malay Annals). Dr Rohaidah said she had tried to verify the contents of the two historical books through material available overseas. She said such material often contained dates of important events, unlike olden Malay books that placed no importance on dates, but only on what had transpired.

However, she said the facts contained in the latest discovery could not yet be ascertained, and that she needed to conduct further research, as well as meeting historians to pore over old manuscripts in Spain or Portugal. Dr Rohaidah said she was told by a reliable source that Hang Tuah was mentioned by da Vinci, indicating

that Hang Tuah was a Malacca Sultanate diplomat sent to various countries. Meanwhile, Hashim said there were 22 books by scholars that described Hang Tuah as intelligent, masculine and brave, besides being able to converse in several languages.

“A personal note by the Portuguese conqueror Afonso de Albuquerque mentioned that during the conquest of Malacca in 1511, an elderly 80-year-old man with great reputation and knowledge emigrated to Temasik (now Singapore) after the fall of Malacca,” he said. Both UPM lecturers co-authored a book, Hang Tuah: Catatan Okinawa that posits the existence of Hang Tuah through research done in Okinawa, Japan, with the help of the Japanese Education Ministry.

The discovery of a curved kris without its hilt and sheath at the Enkakuji Shuriji temple, located near the Shuriji castle, is solid evidence of the good relations between Malacca and Japan in the past. The kris, which has nine “waves” or curves, is usually presented by the Malacca Sultanate to other governments, while blades with fewer curves are gifted to individuals.

The discovery of a letter sent by Hang Tuah to the emperor of the Ryukyu Kingdom between 1480 and 1481 is also evidence of good relations between the Malacca Sultanate and Japan. Diplomatic relations between the Malacca Sultanate and the Ryukyu Kingdom (in modern-day Okinawa) was clearly stated in the “Rekidai Hoan”, a historical document verified by scholars. The document also described Hang Tuah as a person who commanded great influence internationally, as well as a Malaccan diplomat who travelled to India, Turkey and Pattani.