

The Manuscript of Hukum Kanun Pahang: Insights on Trade Laws and Economic Regulations in 17th-Century Malaya

BITARA

Volume 8, Issue 3, 2025: 106-116
© The Author(s) 2025
e-ISSN: 2600-9080
<http://www.bitarajournal.com>
Received: 2 July 2025
Accepted: 26 July 2025
Published: 26 August 2025

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Abstract

The *Hukum Kanun Pahang* is a 17th-century legal manuscript from the Malay world that combines Islamic legal principles with Malay customary law. As a written legal text, it offers more than just jurisprudential content—it reflects the political authority of the sultanate and the effort to preserve legal knowledge through textual transmission. While often described by the colonials broadly as a digest of laws, its specific provisions suggest a more intricate role in regulating daily life, particularly in the economic sphere. This study focuses on the sections of the manuscript that detail commercial practices, taxation mechanisms, and regulations surrounding port activities. By examining these aspects, the research highlights how structured economic thought was embedded within the legal language of the time. Employing textual analysis alongside comparative historical sources, the study draws attention to how references to commodity categories, metrological units, and differentiated customs duties mirror a functioning economic logic tailored to the realities of regional trade. The findings suggest that while Pahang may not have functioned as a major entrepôt, it likely served as a supportive collecting centre within Melaka's broader trade network. More significantly, this research argues that Malay legal manuscripts like the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* hold valuable and underexplored data on economic governance. Rather than dismissing them as outdated or merely ceremonial, these texts should be mined for their rich details—offering historians a clearer view of early Malay approaches to trade regulation, taxation, and commercial administration.

Kata kunci: Hukum Kanun Pahang, Malay manuscript, Islamic trade law, economic regulation, economic history



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Cite This Article:

Amru Sazali. (2025). The Manuscript of Hukum Kanun Pahang: Insights on Trade Laws and Economic Regulations in 17th-Century Malaya. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 8(3): 106-116.

Introduction

The *Hukum Kanun Pahang* (HKP) mentions in the introduction of the manuscript to be written for Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah (r. 1592-1614) of Pahang. It is widely recognised by scholars as having been adapted, updated, and expanded from the earlier *Hukum Kanun Melaka*

(HKM). The *HKM* itself underwent revisions over time. It is believed to have been first introduced during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah (r. 1424–1444), further refined under Sultan Muzaffar Shah (r. 1445–1458), and later systematised during the rule of Sultan Mahmud Shah (r. 1488–1511), the last ruler of Melaka before the Portuguese invaded the city in 1511 (Yock Fang, 2016). Although HKP was considered an adaptation of HKM, it has unique characteristics and improvements, especially in terms of being more “*shari‘a*-inclined” than earlier editions of HKM (Kathirithamby-Wells, 1993: 139; Halim El-Muhammady, 2019).

Following the fall of Melaka, the *Hukum Kanun Melaka* was copied, adapted in different names, and implemented in various Malay and Islamic polities, including Kedah, Patani, Johor, Aceh, Riau, Pontianak, Makassar, Brunei, Pahang and others (Jelani Harun, 2008). These written legal texts reflect a key aspect of Malay consciousness, aiming to foster a society that adheres to the rule of law, promoting a prosperous and well-mannered civilisation. While some European scholars’ observations see that these laws were not always fully implemented, the tradition of copying and adapting these legal codes stands as evidence that there was a determined effort to push for their enforcement. This suggests that this manuscript tradition became evidence of efforts by both the ruler and the subjects, who together strived to implement the laws according to the guidelines, with the goal of ensuring justice and the well-being of the people.

According to Jelani Harun (2008), throughout the early 20th century, European scholars and colonial officers were the early ones to conduct academic studies and publication of Malay legal manuscripts. Among the key works published were *Undang-Undang Sembilan Puluh Sembilan Perak* by Riaby (1908), *Hukum Kanun Melaka* by Ronkel (1919), *Undang-Undang Kedah* by Winstedt (1928), *Hukum Kanun Pahang* by Kempe and Winstedt (1948), *Undang-Undang Minangkabau Dari Perak* by Winstedt (1953), *Undang-Undang Sungai Ujong* by Winstedt and Josselin de Jong (1954), *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* by Winstedt and Josselin de Jong (1956), and others. These publications were part of a broader effort to document Malay legal traditions. However, their primary intent seemed not to appreciate these texts as part of a rich indigenous legal heritage, but rather to assist British colonial administrators in governing Malay society more effectively (Jelani Harun, 2008). Winstedt (1940: 118), a central figure in this field, often interpreted Malay laws through a Eurocentric lens, using Western legal frameworks, which limited a deeper cultural understanding of their original context (Jelani Harun, 2008).

Winstedt, like other colonial scholars, showed a contradictory stance towards Malay legal texts like *Hukum Kanun Pahang* (HKP). On one hand, he actively collected these texts due to their international academic demand, yet on the other, he belittled their significance, particularly by simply equating them with Hindu law that was overlaid with Muslim Law, also implying it had little historical value. He seemed to suggest that although written laws existed, Malay rulers could still exercise absolute authority as they pleased, regardless of the legal codes—thereby rendering these written laws practically irrelevant (Ahmad Farid et. al, 2022).

These tendencies overlook the intentionality and sophistication of the manuscript’s compilers. If these laws were never meant to be enforced, one must question the rationale behind the efforts to adapt them so precisely to local contexts. The individuals who compiled and authored these texts were, arguably, highly capable and trained within the Islamic fiqh law, painstakingly and skilfully merging the core principles of legal codes with the socio-cultural

needs of their respective regions. Variations between versions of the laws are likely due to differences in local environments and socio-political conditions—such as those in Pahang—which necessitated certain adjustments, a phenomenon also seen in other Malay polities. Although as Hooker (1968: 41) observed, Malayan legal digests still include punishments that seem to come from pre-Islamic traditions, that might suggest that Islamic law was adopted unevenly across different regions in Malaya.

The utility of these digests in facilitating economy and trade is evident in the observations of Meilink-Roelofs (1962: 40), who argues that the codification of such laws contributed to the flourishing of maritime trade by offering guarantees and predictability for merchants navigating the Southeast Asian waters. Tatiana Denisova (2011), in her work *Refleksi Historiografi Alam Melayu*, reinforces this view by arguing that Islam's integration into Malay polity significantly enhanced trade, in contrast to other civilisations that often-viewed commerce as ignoble. In Islam, trade is sanctified, viewed as a noble act of worship, hence its legal protection became essential, as evidenced in the comprehensive regulations within *Hukum Kanun Pahang*.

The importance of manuscript studies is particularly evident in understanding the people's consciousness in which history unfolded. These documents often contain fascinating details that capture the everyday events and realities of the time, reflecting the contemporary society in which they were written. This leads to a re-examination of the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* manuscript held in the Pahang Museum today, which remains relatively understudied. From a codicological perspective, its watermark—bearing the *Pro Patria* symbol—indicates that it was copied on European paper in the 18th century. This raises an important question: why would the manuscript be carefully copied and updated if it served no practical function? Such efforts imply continued relevance and use, challenging the notion that the text was merely a static legal digest.

The Study of Hukum Kanun Pahang Manuscript

Manuscript studies provide vital insight into the legal, economic, cultural, and political frameworks of early modern societies. In the context of the Malay world, one of the most significant legal texts is the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, a 17th-century legal code attributed to Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah of Pahang (r. 1592–1614). The study of *Hukum Kanun Pahang* offers insight into the way different systems of law coexisted and influenced each other at the time, especially how Islamic legal principles were combined with local Malay customs and traditions. One key version of this manuscript, known as MS D, is currently preserved in the Pahang Museum and holds particular importance compared to earlier versions labelled A, B, C, and E (Halim El-Muhammady, 2019: 12). The uniqueness of MS D lies in its beautiful illuminations, the watermark “*Pro Patria*” on its European paper, and its preservation as one of the earliest and most complete versions of the code.

The other versions kept in the Maxwell Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, MS A and MS B, then later discovered by Jakeman (1961: 150) in the Swettenham collection, labelled as MS C. This MS D was brought to the attention of the Pahang State Museum in 1997. Jakeman noted that every officer in the administration may have had a copy, highlighting the administrative utility of the HKP (Jakeman, 1961: 150). According to Yakub Isa (2003: xii),

MS D was produced in Patani. This discovery is not without significance, as it is believed that Sultan Abdul Ghaffar's marriage to Puteri Ungu of Patani may have facilitated the transfer of the manuscript. Additionally, his matrimonial ties with the royal family of Brunei, particularly the daughter of Sultan Saiful Rizal (r. 1533-81), underscore the manuscript's geographic and political reach.

From a codicological perspective, this manuscript is significant for several reasons. First, its physical characteristics, such as the unique layout, decorative motifs, and the use of *Naskh* script, provide valuable insights into the artistic and cultural influences of the time. The damage and variations in handwriting point to its age and the transmission process, reflecting its journey through various hands and environments. These features highlight the manuscript's role as both a legal and cultural document, preserving the historical and intellectual heritage of Pahang. Furthermore, the preservation issues in this manuscript underscore the challenges faced by codices of this era, where material degradation and time have left their marks on the textual integrity, yet the manuscript remains a vital testament to the governance and legal systems in the Malay world.

The watermark "Pro Patria" found on the paper of the MS D version of *Hukum Kanun Pahang* provides valuable insight into the manuscript's material provenance and approximate dating. This watermark—Latin for "For the Fatherland"—was commonly used by Dutch paper mills, particularly in the 18th and early 19th centuries (Russell Jones, 1974:). Watermarks served as identifiers of the papermaker and often included patriotic or symbolic motifs, with "Pro Patria" being one of the more prominent marks associated with high-quality laid paper produced in the Netherlands. The presence of this watermark in MS D strongly suggests that the manuscript was copied during this period, likely in the late 18th century to early 19th century.

This manuscript consists of 104 pages, including three blank pages. The two opening pages are adorned with golden, green, blue, and red floral motifs in an "*awan larat*" design. There are 29 pages with visible damage, making them difficult to read due to the ink's acidity or because the paper has torn. The text dimensions are 17 cm x 22 cm. The script is neat, using the same calligraphy style from the beginning to the end. However, differences in writing style suggest that the manuscript may have been written by more than one scribe. The calligraphy used is the *Naskh* script, a prominent style in Malay Islamic calligraphy (Yakub Isa, 2003).

Beyond its artistic merit, as evident in the illuminated motifs and the quality of paper used, the MS D version of *Hukum Kanun Pahang* features the *naskh* script that is characteristic of the Malay-Jawi tradition. This script style is widely seen in other scholarly *kitab* manuscripts such as *Sirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, *Siyar al-Sālikīn*, and *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, as well as in royal correspondences, such as the golden letter from Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh to King James I of England in 1615 (Ab. Razak, 2017). Notable calligraphic features include the distinctively elongated, plain and horizontal "unteethed" *sīn*, and the rounded *nga* or 'ayn when written at the end of sentences. These mark a regional adaptation of *naskh* script that distinguishes it from its Middle Eastern counterparts. Such stylistic features not only reflect local aesthetic preferences but also demonstrate the degree of localisation and standardisation that had taken place within the Malay manuscript tradition.

The Role of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah and the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*

Linehan (1936: 29) in *The History of Pahang* provides an extensive account of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah, the ruler under whom the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* was believed to have been codified. Linehan notes that Sultan Abdul Ghaffar was a ruler with strong ties to neighbouring regions, notably through strategic marriages, and that he maintained a functioning bureaucracy with a keen interest in law and order. His reign marked a period of administrative consolidation, which included the codification of legal digests, the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*. Sultan Abdul Ghaffar played a crucial role in shaping the legal and administrative framework of his sultanate. His reign can be seen as a period of significant political and economic consolidation, as he sought to strengthen Pahang's diplomatic ties with Johor and external trade partners, including Pattani, Kedah, and Brunei through marriages. As regional commerce flourished along the maritime trade routes, the need for a formalised legal system became apparent. Recognising this, Sultan Abdul Ghaffar took the initiative to compile the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, a legal code that reflected both Islamic jurisprudence and local governance needs.

Jacques De Coutre, a Belgian trader, as cited in Peter Borschberg (2014: 80), had the opportunity to meet with Sultan Abdul Ghaffar during his voyage that landed in Pahang in 1594. He witnessed firsthand the ruler's grandeur and the formalities of his court. In his account, De Coutre describes the Sultan's formal reception, highlighting the organization and wealth of the court. Upon hearing of the traders' arrival, the Sultan ordered that the ambassador and his retinue be received with full honour, accompanied by knights and guards carrying spears. De Coutre and his party were led to the Sultan's palace, where the ruler was seated on a raised stage, surrounded by his knights. These knights were arranged in two rows: one wielding *keris* adorned with gold and the other with silver, a clear sign of their rank and the court's affluence. The details provided by De Coutre in his observation reveal the formal and structured nature of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar's court, emphasizing the elaborate ceremonies of hospitality and the royal environment of Pahang at the time. Although later he mentioned that Pahang was a small kingdom, yet they had their own gold mines and sufficed with food and provisions. Following the presentation of gifts from the Belgian traders, the Sultan reciprocated with a *keris* featuring a golden hilt, a traditional symbol of authority and honour. Additionally, the traders were gifted with betel leaves, five cows, a large amount of rice, chickens, fruits, sweets, and large earthenware jars filled with nipa palm wine, along with houses near their ship (Borschberg, 2014: 81). These extravagant gifts not only reflect the Sultan's generosity but also the flourishing economy and resources of Pahang during this period.

The Sultan's ability to extend such lavish hospitality signifies not only his political and economic power but also his understanding of diplomacy and trade. Sultan Abdul Ghaffar's administration was keen on engaging with foreign traders, establishing Pahang as an important node in the regional and global trade network. This explains the attribution of *Hukum Kanun Pahang* to his reign, as it aligns with his broader vision of strengthening Pahang's political authority and commercial prominence during a period marked by Portuguese dominance in Melaka.

Rather than aligning with the Portuguese, Sultan Abdul Ghaffar adopted a more assertive stance (Linehan, 1936: 30). He severed the friendly ties previously maintained under his father's rule and instead sought alliances with the Dutch to challenge Portuguese control in the Straits of Malacca. In 1607, Dutch envoys and naval forces, including Admiral Cornelis Matelief de Jonge, were welcomed in Kuala Pahang. The Sultan expressed willingness to support their campaign against the Portuguese, offering manpower and resources, including local artillery support. Pahang even cast its own cannons and collaborated with the Dutch to disrupt Portuguese supply lines. Although an alliance with Johor was also considered, a subsequent falling-out led to conflict, culminating in the temporary sacking of Pekan by Johor in 1612. Nevertheless, Sultan Abdul Ghaffar reclaimed the state with Bruneian support in 1613 (Linehan, 1936: 32).

This period of heightened international diplomacy and military assertiveness also corresponds with the emergence of locally minted gold coins in Pahang, suggesting that Sultan Abdul Ghaffar not only envisioned legal consolidation through the codification of laws but also sought economic sovereignty through currency production to support and regulate trade more effectively. There are at least 3 varieties of gold coins attributed to Sultan Abdul Ghaffar, identified through the readings of the inscription on the coins (Amru, 2025).

Although Winstedt (1947: 101) dismissed him as a “poor creature,” and Linehan portrayed him as being troubled by the meddling relatives of his consorts, Sultan Abdul Ghaffar was nevertheless praised in high esteem in the *Hukum Kanun Pahang*. In the introduction, he is honoured with an elaborate series of noble epithets:

*al-Sultān al-A‘zam wa’l-Himām al-Mukarram wa’l-Imām al-Jalīl al-Muhtaram
al-Fāḍil bi Faḍli’Llāh al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Sultān ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Muhyiddīn
Shāh Khallada’Llāh Mulkahu wa Sultānahu*

“The Greatest Sultan, the Noble Champion, the Honourable and Respected Leader, the One Exalted by the Grace of God, the Supreme King — Sultan Abdul Ghaffar Muhyiddin Shah, may God perpetuate his kingdom and sovereignty.”

Aspects of Trade and Economy in *Hukum Kanun Pahang*

The *Hukum Kanun Pahang* provides rich insights into the administrative and economic infrastructure of the Pahang Sultanate during the 17th century. In his introduction to the *Hukum Kanun Melaka*, Abu Hassan Sham (1991: 39) identifies a detailed hierarchical structure under the Sultan, comprising the *Bendahara*, *Temenggung*, *Penghulu Bendahari*, and *Shahbandar*. While the *Bendahara* and *Temenggung* played pivotal roles in governance and law enforcement, the *Penghulu Bendahari* and *Shahbandar* were central to the economic administration. The *Shahbandar* functioned as the port master, overseeing maritime trade and collecting taxes from foreign merchants. This office was instrumental in regulating commercial activities at port settlements, ensuring the smooth operation of trade flows. Meanwhile, the *Penghulu Bendahari* was responsible for managing palace finances and monetary transactions, reflecting a bureaucratic sophistication within the Sultanate’s financial system. Both need to

work hand in hand, as a paragraph in *Hukum Kanun Pahang* (Kampe and Winstedt, 1948: 28) says:

“... Pertama, hendaklah ia [syahbandar] muafakat dengan Penghulu Bendahari kepada mengira-ngirakan segala hasil raja; kedua, hendaklah banyak syafakat dengan segala dagang, dagang itu ma’amorkan negeri dan meramaikan bandar; jikalau tiada dagang, nescaya tiada hasil akan raja, dan manfa’at akan dirinya pun berkurangan; ketiga, jikalau dagang itu teraniaya, maka hendaklah segera disampaikan kepada segala orang besar-besar dan kepada raja; keempat, menyidek-nyidek khabar yang datang dari negeri yang lain; kelima, disegerakan segala dagang; itulah perangai yang mulia pada segala raja-raja.”

“... First, the Harbourmaster must work together with the Chief Treasurer in reckoning all the king’s revenues. Second, he should maintain good relations with all merchants, as they bring prosperity to the land and help grow the towns; without merchants, there would be no income for the king, and even his own benefits would decrease. Third, should any merchant suffer injustice, let it promptly be reported to the high officials and the king. Fourth, he should stay informed about news from other lands. Fifth, he must ensure that all trade matters are handled efficiently—such conduct is noble in the eyes of the kings.”

Embedded throughout the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* are metrological terms such as *tahil*, *kati*, *paha*, and *bahara*, which provide evidence of a standardized system of weights and measures used in trade (Yaakub Isa, 2003). These units, commonly employed in other Malay sultanates and throughout the South China Sea, and to a certain extent, the Indian Ocean trade networks, were crucial in facilitating fair commercial practices. Their codification in the legal text reveals a conscious effort by the authorities to align their trade regulations with established regional norms. Tahlil was known as *liang* in China, and *suvarna* in India, but commonly known to Europeans as “tael”, which carries the weight of approximately 37.8 grams (Wicks, 1983: 230). Accurate weight measurements not only prevented fraud but also enhanced trust among trading partners, both local and foreign.

Among other metrological data are measurements of weight, length, volume, and area, which are typically preserved without modification. The text also makes references to currency terms such as *pitis* (tin coins), *kupang* (0.6g of gold), and *mas* (2.4g of gold), indicating a complex monetary system that accommodated both local and international currencies. Archaeological finding corroborates what is mentioned in the text, such as the numerous gold and tin coins found along the Pahang River. The possible circulation of possibly Arab or Aceh *dinars* and *dirhams*, Chinese cash coins, and Indian coinage, apart from local *pitis*, *kupang* and *emas*, further underscores Pahang’s participation in the broader maritime economy, linking it with trade routes stretching from the Middle East to East Asia.

Another remarkable feature of these legal texts is their incorporation of the *Undang-Undang Laut* (Maritime Laws) (Abdul Monir, 2023:59), which demonstrates a comprehensive legal approach to regulating maritime trade. These sections detail procedures for the imposition

of maritime taxes, the rights and responsibilities of traders, and the leasing of cargo space (*petak*) aboard ships. The role of the *kiwi*, for example, a cargo rentier who negotiated shipping arrangements, is explicitly mentioned—revealing the presence of specialized roles within the logistics and trade sectors (Jelani Halimi, 2006: 181). These legal stipulations reflect a maritime commercial culture attuned to both Islamic legal principles and indigenous trading practices. The integration of *Shafi'i* jurisprudence within the maritime laws highlights a consistent application of Islamic legal norms across domains, reinforcing the adaptability of Islamic law to regional socio-economic realities (Halim El-Muhammady, 2019: 32).

The development of Islamic law in the Malay world traces back to the Islamisation of Melaka, which emerged as a leading centre of Islamic scholarship and governance in the 15th century. Influenced by scholars and traders from the Hadhramaut and Yemen—regions deeply embedded in the *Shafi'i* legal tradition—Melaka established a precedent for Islamic legal integration in Southeast Asia (al-Attas, 2011). As these legal principles spread through networks of ulama, trade, and political alliances, they reached other sultanates, including Pahang. The *Hukum Kanun Pahang* stands as a continuation and refinement of this legacy, evidencing how Islamic law became institutionalized in Malay governance and embedded in the fabric of society.

In terms of economic history, the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* sheds light on the mechanisms of trade regulation and the role of law in maintaining a stable commercial environment. References to standardized units like *gantang* (for grain), *kati* (for weighing goods), and *bahara* (for bulk commodities like tin and spices) reflect an advanced understanding of commodity trade (Shaharir, 2013). These units allowed for predictability and fairness in trade transactions, crucial in a bustling port economy such as Pahang's. The severe penalties prescribed for fraudulent measurements reveal a conscious attempt to protect market integrity and ensure confidence among merchants.

In addition, the detailed listing of various commodities—each with its own specific tax rate—reflects the complexity of the trading system. It also indicates the port's international reach, as it mentions that Portuguese and Chinese merchants were subject to additional taxes until their departure. To cite a few from the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* text, in (Halim El-Muhammady, 2019: 87):

“Fasal pada menyatakan hukum istiadat negeri seperti hasil mahsul, cukai dan segala yang naik timbangan. Adapun hasil mahsul itu jika kepada Peringgi dan Cina sepaha; sepertiga segala dagangan yang lain itu hasil seperti selama sehingga dia pulang. Adapun segala barang yang ditimbang seperti sutera, kibal – dan usyurnya lima belas emas sebahara. Adapun sik, gaharu, gadung, garam, artal, sudu. Lengkam, rasmak, pijar, mialu, sarang burung, cermin – sembilan emas sebahara. Adapun belaking – tujuh emas sebahara, yang lain jenis tembaga – tiang belah sebahara.”

“Clause concerning the customs and regulations of the state, such as revenues, taxes, and all that is measured by weight. As for revenue, Portuguese and Chinese traders shall pay a third of all other merchandise as tax until their departure. Items sold by weight such as *sutera*, *kibal* – are taxed at fifteen gold

per *bahara*. As for *sik*, *gaharu*, *gadung*, *garam*, *artal*, *sudu*. *Lengkam*, *rasmak*, *pijar*, *mialu*, *sarang burung*, *cermin* – the tax is nine gold per *bahara*. As for *belaking* – it is seven gold per *bahara*, and other types of copper—half a pillar per *bahara*.”

These can be evidence of Pahang’s inclusion within the broader maritime trade networks, as it is known as part of the Melaka trading network, corroborated by European travellers such as Valentyn (Hervey, 1884), who described Pahang as a functional and strategic port within the broader Melakan sphere, acting as a node within an interconnected network of trade routes. Geographically, Pahang’s location along the trans-peninsular *Jalan Penarikan*—a route connecting the Muar River on the west coast to the Pahang River on the east—underscores its strategic importance. This passage allowed for the transfer of goods across the peninsula, positioning Pahang as a crucial point of exchange (Ramu et al., 2020). However, archaeological evidence is still limited. Although artifacts such as Acehnese tombstones, Chinese and local coins, and ceramics from various regions have been discovered along the river, yet more systematic excavation is needed to substantiate these historical narratives.

The very existence of the *Hukum Kanun Pahang* as a region-specific legal text issued during Sultan Abdul Ghaffar’s reign further validates the region’s significance. It implies that a legal framework was necessary to govern trade activities and adjudicate disputes, indicative of a bustling port environment. Leong’s (1990) typology of Southeast Asian ports—ranging from entrepôts to feeder ports—provides a useful lens through which Pahang’s role can be reassessed. Further study is required to determine its exact classification.

Conclusion and Future Studies

While Jelani Harun’s (2008) work on Malay legal traditions is extensive, further research is needed to delve deeper into specific legal aspects of *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, especially by utilising MS D. The tendency of colonial scholars to view Malay legal texts as mere ‘digests’ has also been critically addressed by scholars such as Abdul Monir (2023: 56), Halim El-Muhammady (2019: 53), among others.

The Malay *Hukum Kanun* genre of manuscripts deserves deeper study, not just to look at the laws they contain, but to understand the bigger picture they offer. While some have said these laws are no longer useful today, there’s still much that can be studied further in extracting details in different aspects or subjects. For example, *Hukum Kanun Pahang* mentions places that suggest its legal influence may have reached beyond Pahang—into areas like Terengganu, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, and even Pontianak and Sambas in present-day Indonesia. This shows that the laws might have had a wider role than we often assume, and it is something worth exploring further. Besides that, the specific mention of commodities, along with references to metrology, could be examined to better understand the context and environment of the period. These legal texts ranged from the 15th to 19th century, including *Hukum Kanun Pahang* reflects the sophisticated legal, political and economic governance of the Malay Sultanates. Far from being a static digest, it functioned as a dynamic legal framework—regulating trade, enforcing justice, and maintaining social order. The consistency of incorporating Shafi’i jurisprudence while adapting to local realities, among all the related texts, represents a distinctly shared Malay

interpretation of Islamic law throughout the Archipelago. Viewed through legal, economic, and historical lenses, it underscores the value of manuscript studies in reconstructing the intellectual and commercial legacy of the region.

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