

Arab-Persian Merchants in the Malay Peninsula Based on Foreign Sources and Archaeological Data

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Abstract: Foreign sources, particularly records from China and archaeological data indicate that merchants from the Middle East, initially pioneered by the Persians had arrived in the Malay Peninsula and the archipelago since the 3rd century AD. Some scholars believe that merchants from the Middle East arrived in the archipelago in the 8th or 9th century AD based on the discovery of artefacts in archaeological sites around what was previously ports in the Archipelago. In fact during this time the trade activity from the Middle East was pioneered by the Arabs after they had learnt and became skilled in maritime knowledge that was acquired previously from the Persians, as it was well known that the Persian people were skilled in the technology of shipbuilding and in seamanship. Based on archaeological data, the artefacts often associated with merchants from the Middle East are items such as Persian ceramics, glass products such as oil lamps and perfume bottles, as well as beads made of glass or semi-precious stones. These artefacts are often found in archaeological sites, such as in Bujang Valley, Kedah and Kuala Selinsing, Perak. These discoveries show that trade activities had existed between merchants from the Middle East; namely, the Arab-Persian merchants and its connection with the function of Lembah Bujang, as an entrepot and Kuala Selinsing as a supplier port. Other ports visited by Arab-Persian merchants were ports in Palembang, Kota Cina, Jambi, Lamuri (Aceh), Takuapa, Pattani, Chaiya, Ec-eo and etc. Among the goods imported from the archipelago were spices, camphor, sandalwood, aloes wood, forest products, cinnamon bark and resin while exported goods were such as ceramics, glass products, iron tools, weapons, silver, beads, nails, fan, jewellery, silk and perfume.

Key words: Bujang Valley, Kuala Selinsing, Takuapa, Arab-Persian traders, Malay Peninsular

INTRODUCTION

The development of trade in Southeast Asia led to the presence of merchants from Arab-Persia, China and India to the archipelago. Development of trade that begun since the end of the prehistoric age in Southeast Asia had attracted the presence of merchants from Middle Eastern to the archipelago, as well as merchants from India and China. The arrival of merchants from the Middle East to Southeast Asia was heavily influenced by merchants from Persia that is before the religion of Islam spread to Persia. This is because the Persian merchants from the time of the Parthian Empire had reached the Malay world in the 3rd century AD. These Persian merchants had been trading in most ports in Southeast Asia, including in the Malay Peninsula where a total of 500 Persian merchants had settled down at the Tun-sun port (Wheatley, 1964). Their activities had spread beyond the port in Indo China, such as the Tongkin port where these trade activities were recorded by K'ang Tai from the Wu Dynasty.

During this time, the trade by sea was expanding further with the existence of innovation in shipbuilding technology where the invention of ships that allowed them to sail closer to the wind was successfully created. This knowledge subsequently spread along the towns near to the Indian Ocean and to the areas in the East. The Sassanian Empire, then came to power and crushed the Parthian Empire in Iran. This empire that was newly in power subsequently enhanced further their trade links that had existed in Southeast Asia and China in the 4th century AD. Persian merchants dominated the trade routes from the East and many Persian ships sailed to Vietnam, Southern China through the Malay Peninsula. Merchants from Persia also had close trade ties with South China Dynasty (Wheatley, 1964).

The spread of Islam in Arabia led to the strengthening and development of politics there and as a result city centres and trading ports came to being, developing concomitantly with the spread of Islam itself. There were 2 main routes for Arab merchants to exploit

trade in Asia that is through the sea route, namely the Red Sea while the second route was through Iraq and Syria which was the route that passed through land, rivers and seas in which this route will lead straight out to the Persian Gulf. In 762 AD, the Abbasid Caliphate moved the centre of their administration to Baghdad near the Tigris River. The main purpose was to facilitate the trade route and trade activities because the Tigris River flowed directly into the Persian Gulf that was the path of entrance for the international merchants. With these 2 major routes under the authority of the Abbasid, hence this situation then made it very easy for the Arab merchants to conduct their trade activities with foreign countries, especially China.

The developments in China, also became one of the factors for the increasing trade activities between China and the Middle East. Good system of governance and economic development achieved by the reign of the Tang Dynasty (618-906AD) was the result of Tang Dynasty's government policy that accepted trade relations with foreign countries in addition to their colony expansion policy in the Western part of China.

In the Middle East, the desire for luxury goods resulted in trade activities between the Middle East with India and China becoming very active and attracting the interests of many merchants. China sources stated that trade between China and the Middle East was very active in the Middle of the 8th century but then halted for a while at the end of the rule of the Tang Dynasty because of the political instability faced by the Tang Dynasty. This trade relationship continued to prosper in the 10th century AD during the reign of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 AD) and continued until the reign of the Ming Dynasty (1364-1644AD).

THE ARAB-PERSIAN DOCUMENTS ON ANCIENT PORT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The ports of call for Arab-Persian merchants can be referred from the written records, as well as archaeological data. Based on written sources, the most famous port was Zabaj. The location of Zabaj port was in Palembang, South Sumatra where this port was under the rule of the Sriwijaya Kingdom. Another port that was often mentioned is Kalah, a port located in the North of the Malay Peninsula. Although, it has become more of a debate until today of whether the location of Kalah was in Takuapa or Kedah, most scholars state that Kedah is the same, as Kalah as recorded in the Arab sources around the 8th-9th century AD (Wheatley, 1964), however there are also views which stated that Kalah was in Takuapa (Coedes, 1968). H.G.Q. Wales was of those who believe that there were 2 Kalah mentioned by the Arabs in which

the port called Kalah before the 11th century AD was Takuapa located in the Tambralingga Province on the North of Kataha (Kedah). However in the 11th century AD, the port called Kalah by the Arabs was Kedah (Quaritch-Wales, 1976).

Among the well-known trade products produced in the Kalah trade centre was tin. The as-Sin wa'l-Hind mentioned that bar in Arabic means government or the coast. According to the newspaper, Kalah-bar was a kingdom whose location was near the coast (Wheatley, 1964). It was also mentioned that Kalah-bar was a kingdom that was under the control of al-Zabaj (Srivijaya) (Coedes, 1968; Wheatley, 1964). Sulayman on the other hand, described the Kalah kingdom, as the colony of the Srivijaya kingdom and also the entrepot trade centre where it was here that sailors and merchants called to obtain supply of clean water (Braddell, 1950).

Abu Dulaf Misa'r stated that Kalah was a huge kingdom surrounded by walls, gardens and water resource facility, markets and houses with a large population (Braddell, 1950). Based on the notes of Arab merchants, the Kalah people wore loose clothing known as futah. Futah means a piece of cloth at the waist that is loosened while Wheatley considered the futah to be sarongs (Wheatley, 1964). Abu Dalaf added that the Kalah people were said to live in the city and carry out work as sword smiths. Kalah people were also described, as eating animals without slaughtering them while for the purpose of self-cleaning, they took baths in rivers. Their staple food at that time was wheat, vegetables that were sold by weight and bread sold by quantity. In terms of clothing, they were described as wearing fine Firand (silk imported from China). Kalah had its own social system that was really organised in terms of justice, treatment of offenders and also matters related to fines (Wheatley, 1964).

The presence of Arab-Persian merchants was to obtain valuable commodities found in Southeast Asia. They had brought products of technology that had long developed particularly in the Middle East that began since the Mesopotamian era. Among the ports that were often visited by the Arab-Persian merchants during the Abbasid Period was in Kataha (Kedah), Lamuri (Acheh), Palembang and Takuapa. Among the goods imported from the Southeast Asian region were spices, camphor, aloes wood, sandalwood, forest products, cinnamon barks and resin while the goods exported were ceramics, glass products, iron tools, weapons, silver, beads, nails, fans, ornaments, silk and perfumes.

The role of Kataha (Kedah), as the main port for the Arab-Persian merchants is evidenced by the discovery of 2 pieces of coins of the Abbasid Period (758-1258 AD) at

the confluence of the Merbok River (Wheatley, 1964) and one of them is dated 234 (848 AD). Another port which was very popular for the Arab merchants was Tiyumah; it is believed that its location was the Tioman Island. Tiyumah acted more, as a place where merchants called for shelter and obtained clean water before continuing their journey to China. Arab records has also mentioned about a place called Panhang or known as Pahang.

By the 10th century AD, there were many Arab merchant ships which sailed to China and these ships used the ports in the archipelago as a port of call before continuing their journey to China. However, Arab merchants considered the journey they went through in reality, as costly and this is one of the factors why the names of the areas or ports in the archipelago was not recorded, so much in the Arab merchants records in the 12th and 13th century AD.

Arab merchants began to focus their trade in the Western area of the Bay of Bengal because it was more profitable. Another factor that led to the lack of Arab merchants in the Archipelago was because of the instability that occurred in the Gulf of Persia, as the reign of the Abbasid Empire had already been compensated by the Fatimid Dynasty which was based in Egypt. There existed competition between the 2 empires in the Persian Gulf area coupled with the convenience of Arab merchants who were using the Red Sea to conduct their trade activities with the focus given to India and Ceylon. Maritime trade relationship between India and the Archipelago was continued and maintained between Indian merchants and merchants of the Archipelago.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ON MIDDLE EASTERN ARTIFACTS

Archaeological data have proven that Arab-Persian merchants had been to the Archipelago to conduct their trade activities. The presence of these merchants can be seen through discoveries, such as coins of the Sassanian period which found Yarang, Pattani which are dated in the 5th century AD and the discovery of 2 coins of the Abbasid period (758-1258M) at the confluence of Merbok River (Wheatley, 1964). In addition, the discovery of glass fragments, pottery and beads became indicators to archaeologists and also evidence of the presence of Arab-Persian merchants in Southeast Asia. Alastair Lamb, also reported of the discovery of artefacts from the Middle East in many sites in the Malay Peninsula such as in Takuapa, Pengkalan Bujang in Kedah, Kuala Selinsing in Perak, Malacca, Kota Tinggi, Johor Lama in Johor.

In Malaysia, among the areas where many Middle East artefacts were found is in Kataha (Kedah) which is recognised as an entrepot. Kataha entrepot developed rapidly, since the 5th century AD and it is believed that

this port was open since the early century AD. Kataha's reigning centre at that time is located in Sungai Mas because it is here that various types of temple architecture and thousands of foreign ceramic fragments were found. Relative dating that was employed showed that Sungai Mas has prospered, since the 5th century AD based on relative dating that was made on the writing on the Sungai Mas inscription and also the votive tablet found during the conduct of archaeological excavations. Bujang Valley has unearthed artefact collection from the Middle East such as glass, pottery and beads that are in abundance and has proven the role of Kataha as an entrepot and the trade activities carried out by the Arab merchants. About 2 sites that unearthed a lot of these Middle East artefacts are in Kampung Pengkalan Bujang and Kampung Sungai Mas (Abdul Rahman and Yatim, 1990). Studies have shown that the early entrepot in Kedah is based in Sungai Mas and later spread until Kampung Pengkalan Bujang.

Another port in Malaysia where artefacts from the Middle East were found is in Kuala Selinsing, Perak, even though there are those who are of the opinion that the Middle Eastern artefacts here was obtained from Lembah Bujang. Among the artefacts found here are Persian ceramics and also glass. This port was a feeder port for Lembah Bujang and based on absolute dating it was used since 200 BC (Zuliskandar and Abdul Rahman, 2010; Ramli *et al.*, 2009). This port was most likely used by the merchants to obtain sources of water and food supply based on its location midway between the port in Kataha, the port in Jambi and Palembang.

Takuapa port which is located approximately 500 km North of Kataha port was a port that has similar features to Kataha port. It is at this site that artefacts indicating the presence of Arab merchants were found with discoveries of Persian ceramics and also items made of glass. This port is also regarded as Kalah port as noted in the Arab records. Other ancient ports where artefacts from the Middle East were found are in Pattani and also Chaiya. All 3 ports grew in tandem with the Kataha port since the 5th century AD and some even earlier.

Ports in Sumatra that became the choice for Arab merchants were Kota China Jambi and Palembang which were all entrepots. At the archaeological sites around Jambi, Palembang and Kota China many artefacts from the Middle East were found; among them are Persian ceramics, glass and beads. These cities had grown rapidly in the 7th century AD. Jambi for instance was the site of the Molayu kingdom that is recorded in the Chinese records. This kingdom has been mentioned, as one of the kingdoms in Southeast Asia that had sent a mission to China in the year 644 AD (Wolters, 1970). In the year 671 AD, I Ching recorded Molayu, as one of the places that he called in on his journey from Guangzhou (Canton) to India (Yijing, 1896; Abdul Rahman

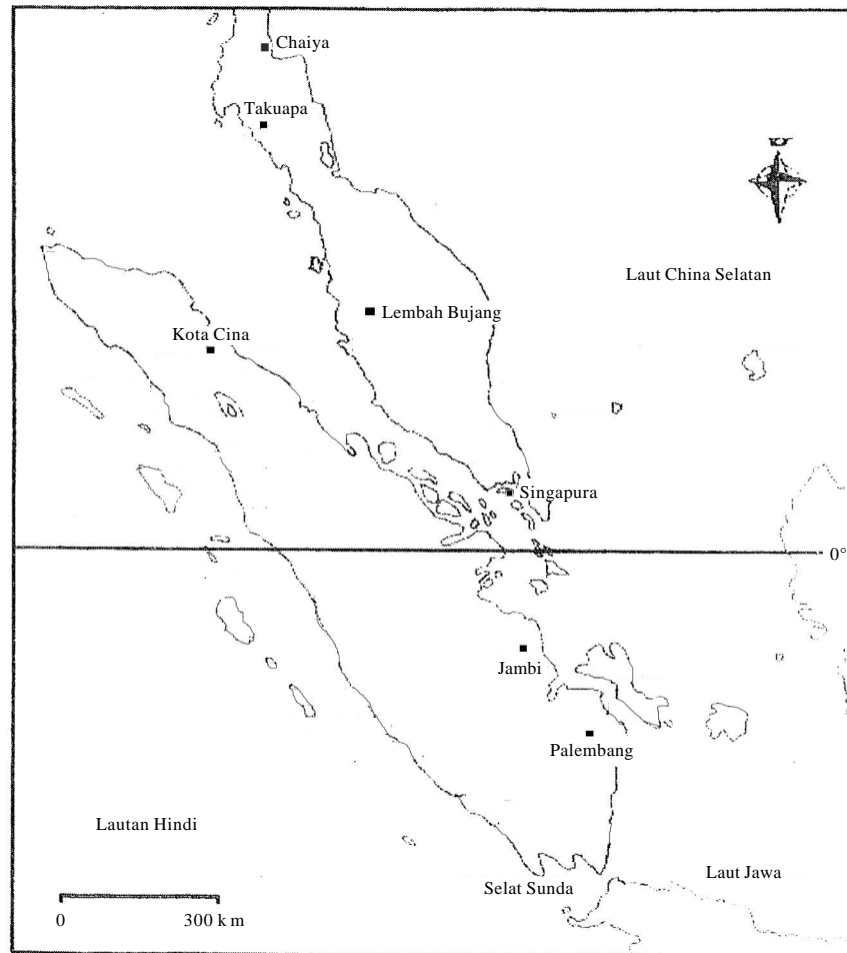


Fig. 1: Map of the ports in the Archipelago

and Yatim, 1990). In the year 685 after I Ching returned from India, he found that this Molayu kingdom had become one of the colonies of Shih-li-fo-shih (Sriwijaya). The same also happened to the Chieh Cha Kingdom (Kedah). Palembang on the other hand was a centre for the Sriwijaya Kingdom established in the 7th century AD by Dapunta Hyang who led the 20,000 troops from Minanga Tamwan to Palembang, Jambi and Bengkulu. This event is recorded in the Kedukan Hill Inscriptions dated 16th June, 683 AD. The development of Sriwijaya is believed to have started since the 5th century and was based in Palembang. This kingdom was composed of 3 main zones the district of the estuary capital that was based in Palembang, Musi River basin which served, as the regional support and the competing estuary districts capable of becoming the centre of competitive ascendancy. The upstream region of Musi River was rich in various commodities valuable to the Tiongkok merchants (Munoz, 2006).

The presence of Arab-Persian merchants was to obtain valuable commodities available in Southeast Asia.

They brought goods produced by technology that had long been developed, especially in the Middle East beginning since the early Mesopotamian era. Among the goods imported from the Southeast Asia Region were spices, camphor, aloes wood, sandalwood, forest products, cinnamon barks and resin while the goods exported were ceramics, glass products, iron tools, weapons, silver, beads, nails, fans, ornaments, silk and perfumes. In the context of archaeology, the artefacts that could clearly indicate the presence of these Arab-Persian merchants is the discovery of glass based artefacts and also pottery. Glassware that can be identified are such as oil lamps, perfume containers and also polychrome beads while the pottery can be categorised as dark green and dark blue glazed Middle East pottery and splashed-sgraffiate ware (Fig. 1).

GLASS DISCOVERIES IN BUJANG VALLEY

The remains of the artefacts from the Middle East are abundantly found in the proto-historic age archaeological

sites in Southeast Asia. Among them are in Bujang Valley, Kedah, Palembang, Jambi and Kota Cina in Sumatera, Singapore, Chaiya, Pattani and Takuapa in Thailand and in other areas. Among the artefacts that came from the Middle East are glass, pottery and polychrome glass beads. These artefacts are the evidence of the arrival of the Arab-Persian merchants who highlighted the achievements of the Islamic world and manufacturing technology similar to China that is famous for its manufacturing of ceramics.

Glass is divided into 2 which are natural glass or glass produced by the process of melting silica with soda and lime. Natural glass in particular obsidian had long been used by prehistoric people around the world to produce sharp cutting tool or the tip of the arrow. The limited source of obsidian had turned it into a commodity or trade goods. Based on archaeological evidence, glass was first created in Syria that is during the development of Mesopotamian civilization or in the ancient kingdom of Egypt. Most of the earliest glass found is in the form of beads dated at about 5000 years ago.

The alkaline material of glass used by glassmakers in Syria and Egypt was soda ash, sodium carbonate that could be extracted from ashes of trees, often halophile. Lime was always taken from the limestone which was added into the glass mixture to stabilize the glass melting process, even though most producers had no knowledge of this.

In the golden age of Islam during the Abbasid period, Islamic chemists, architects and engineers managed to create a clear colourless glass and glass that had high purity. For example, silica and high purity colourless glass were invented by Abbas Ibn Firnas (810-887). He was the first to successfully create glass from sand and gravel (White, 1961). The Arabic poetry of al-Buhturi (820-897) described glass created by Abbas Ibn Firnas as: Its colour hides the glass as if it is standing in it without a container.

Patterned glass (stained glass) was introduced by Muslim architects in the South Western area of Asia by using materials from coloured glass in comparison to the previously used material made from stone. In the 8th century, the Islamic chemist Jabir ibn Hayyan had scientifically explained the 49 original recipes on the ways to produce coloured glass in his book entitled *Kitab al-Durra al-Makmuna* (The Book of Hidden Pearl) and subsequently another 12 recipes was inserted by al-Marrakishi in writing his book (Hassan, 2008).

Parabolic mirrors was described for the first time by Ibn Sabl in his book that was translated, titled on *The Burning Instrument* in the 10th century AD and later described again by Ibn al-Haytham's in the year 1021 AD in the translated books titled *On Burning Mirrors* and

Book of Optics (Rashid, 1990). In the 11th century AD, clear glass mirrors were created in Islamic Spain. During this time, many glass manufacturing companies were built by glass artisans of Islam in the Muslim world. Glassware producers had also built glass factories in Europe in the 11th century AD, namely in Corinth, Greece (Hassan, 2008).

The discovery of the Middle East glass through archaeological excavations in Peninsular Malaysia was first reported by Evans with the findings of glass fragments in the archaeological site of Kuala Selinsing, Perak (Evans, 1928a, b, 1932). Evans believes that some of the glass was produced by the local community but Lamb doubts his opinion. Lamb is of the view that the glass was originally from the Middle East, namely in the period of the Roman Empire until the early period of the Islamic kingdom (Lamb, 1961a). Based on the chemical content of the glass in Kuala Selinsing, it was found that its lead element content is low and there is no barium element content. Silica content of the glass is between 65 and 75%. The chemical content of the glass found in Kuala Selinsing indicates that it is certainly not glass from China because of the low lead content (Beck and Seligman, 1938). Most of China's glass is lead type glass. The glass findings in Kuala Selinsing by Evans were all in the form of fragments.

In Lembah Bujang, artefacts from the Middle East have been found in places like Sungai Mas (Site 32) and in Pengkalan Bujang. Both of these areas formerly served as prosperous entrepots. The discovery of artefacts from glass and beads has been reported by Quaritch-Wales in his research at Lembah Bujang. Among them was the discovery of glass fragments at Site 18, Pengkalan Bujang as reported by Quaritch-Wales (1940). The discovery of this glass is associated with the discovery of laterite stone blocks and bricks which Quaritch-Wales expected to be a palace hall or building structure in a palace. Other discoveries were small glass lamps which have been identified based on their shape which is similar to the ones in Egypt and also in mosques in Syria (Fig. 2).

Quaritch-Wales was not concerned of the importance of the discovery of glass in Lembah Bujang and hence, very little research and writing was made about the glass. Lamb then conducted a study on Quaritch-Wales discoveries at the museum and supported the views expressed by Quaritch-Wales that these glass fragments originated from the Middle East. Its chemical content is similar to the chemical content of the glass in Kuala Selinsing. Based on site dating in Pengkalan Bujang, it is believed that the glass was brought by Muslim merchants during the Abbasid period (Fig. 3-5).



Fig. 2: Oil lamp from glass after being reconstructed by Quaritch-Wales. This lamp was discovered at Site 18 Pengkalan Bujang Village



Fig. 3: Fragments of glass lamp found by Quaritch-Wales at Site 18 of Pengkalan Bujang Village which is the bottom of the lamp's wick (Essay Offered to G.H Luce)

A review by Lamb (1961a, 1965) at the site that was once excavated by Quaritch-Wales which was at Site 18 (Pengkalan Bujang Village) resulted in him finding many discoveries, such as the discovery of ceramic sherds, glass fragments, beads, metal and various other types of artefact findings. Lamb assumed that Pengkalan Bujang was once a very important entrepot. Lamb conducted re-excavations at this site and as a result of the excavations conducted by him many discoveries were uncovered. Lamb reported findings consisting of 5000 glass beads, tens of thousands of glass fragments, Chinese ceramics from the Sung and Yuan period, Indo-China ceramics and



Fig. 4: The 2 glass waste material (punty-caps) that were found by Lamb. On the left side is glass which is opaque brown in colour while the other one is transparent yellow-green in colour (Essay Offered to G.H Luce)



Fig. 5: The one more waste material from glass production in Pengkalan Bujang (Essay Offered to G.H Luce)

Middle East ceramics. The discovery of a huge number of Middle East glass and ceramics at this site showed the role played by the Arab-Persian merchants in Pengkalan Bujang.

Among the tens of thousands of glass fragments found by Lamb, he has identified with the help of Dr. Donald Harden a few pieces of waste material from a glass factory (punty-cap), as a result of the process of production of goods from glass. The interpretation presented by Lamb, as a result of the discovery of this glass waste material (punty-cap) is that it was most likely a glassware factory that existed in Pengkalan Bujang or that this glass waste material was brought from another place to Pengkalan Bujang. There is no evidence that there were factories producing glassware in the Malay Peninsula before this technology developed in Europe. It is most likely that the glass waste material was re-used to produce Indo-Pacific glass beads.

The scientific analysis of the glass beads found in Takuapa (Alastair, 1961), Pengkalan Bujang (Lamb, 1961b) and Kuala Selinsing showed that the glass beads from all 3 regions contained the same chemical composition as the chemical composition of glass from the Middle East. The chemical composition referred by Lamb is the use of sodium as a flux. Glass from Pengkalan Bujang and Takuapa used sodium as flux but the glass from Kuala Selinsing is slightly different because of the content of sodium and potassium which are very similar in terms of its percentage.

Glassware that existed in Lembah Bujang is usually in the form of bottles, containers for filling in perfume and also in the form of glass lamps as found by Quaritch-Wales in Pengkalan Bujang at Site 18. Aside from bringing in the perfume supplies for the Southeast Asian market, the perfume was also an important commodity for market in China.

Apart from glass, beads from glass and stone have also been found in Lembah Bujang and other archaeological sites, such as those found in Kota Tinggi, and Johor Lama in Johor (Gardner, 1973). It is believed that the glass beads, particularly the polychrome glass beads and stone beads were brought in by the Indian merchants or Arab-Persian merchants. Some of the polychrome glass beads found in Lembah Bujang can be classified as beads of the Islamic era. The beads found in Kota Tinggi are classified, as Roman beads which were probably brought by Indian merchants or merchants from Persia.

The glass and stone bead making industry in the Muslim world began to grow from the 8th century until the 15th century AD. The technique used to make these beads is similar to the techniques used by the earlier bead makers during the era of the Egyptian and the Roman kingdom but used the traditional Islamic design. Most of these bead producers settled in big cities in the Muslim world where many Islamic scholars, also lived in these cities which had stable political system. The cities include Damascus, Baghdad, Isfahan, Constantinople, Cordoba, Timbuktu and Cairo. The style and technique of bead production relied on traditional styles and techniques applied by the existing local community. This glass bead production was active during the Pre Islamic, the Abbasid and Fatimid period.

The raw material to produce beads was very actively traded in the Islamic world in the 10th century until the 14th century AD. Between the 10th century AD to the 11th century AD, Cairo became the predominant area for bead producers in the Islamic world, particularly during the Fatimid Period. Cairo carried out importing, processing and trading activities of beads that were also made from



Fig. 6: Fragments of glass found in Lembah Bujang believed to be from the Middle East

corals, pearls, cowrie shells and ivory from Africa. Skilled artisans in Cairo, also produced items of silver, bronze and ornaments from glass including beads. By the 12th century AD, beads of glass and semi-precious stones, such as lapis lazuli from Bardakstan, turquoise from Kirman and Nishapur, carnelian, crystal quartz and amethyst became common items in Cairo causing their market price to fall. Only beads from onyx stone obtained from India and Yemen managed to maintain its high value (Dubin, 2006). Beads and goods made from glass were later traded to the rest of the world including in Southeast Asia (Fig. 6).

DISCOVERIES OF MIDDLE EASTERN POTTERY IN LEMBAH BUJANG

Apart from the discovery of items from glass and beads in Lembah Bujang, Arab-Persian merchants, also brought their own pottery to Southeast Asia. Archaeological excavation that was carried out unearthed potsherds alleged to be Middle Eastern pottery (Abdul Rahman and Yatim, 1990). Much of this type of pottery was discovered in Pengkalan Bujang (Leong, 1973) and also in Kampung Sungai Mas (Abdul Rahman and Zakaria, 1993). Pottery of this type can be divided into 2 types, namely blue or dark green glazed pottery while the other type is pottery embellished with incisions or splashed-sgraffiate ware. Middle Eastern pottery began to be traded during the pre and early Islamic, the Abbasid and Fatimid period (Fig. 7).

The pottery was glazed dark green and its body blended white. The pottery's glaze is darker than the Chu-lu-hsian glaze which is green in colour, as stated by Nils Palmgren (Abdul Rahman and Yatim, 1990). These pieces have been found at Sites 21 and 22, as well as in



Fig. 7: Discoveries of beads from stone, gold, monochrome glass and polychrome glass from Rome, Middle East, India, Southeast Asia and local ones in Lembah Bujang



Fig. 8: Dark green and dark blue glazed Middle Eastern pottery found in Lembah Bujang

Kampung Sungai Mas, consisting of the base of a container in which the base was flat without foot ring. Pottery of this type can be classified as Middle Eastern pottery. The date may be earlier than the splashed-sgraffiate ware that also originated from the Middle East, either Persia or Iraq. These pieces were identified after a reference was made to Abu Ridho, an expert on Chinese ceramics, Mrs. Margeret Madley and Dr. Geza Fehervari. Dr. Geza has helped in terms of identification and the date. The date for the splashed-sgraffiate ware is based on the assumption that the type of glaze was copied from the post Sassanian Islamic type that is after the 9th century (Lane, 1937). The fragments can be identified as Sassano Islamic type.

The dark blue potsherds have very fine blend and have patterns of embossed stripes. A thick blue luminous or shiny glaze covers the outer part of the body of the ware while the inside of the ware is covered by a thin glaze of which the blue was less in its colour. Alastair Lamb mentioned of the blue glazed type of ware that are available in Takuapa which was classified by him, as Middle Eastern pottery dated in the period between the



Fig. 9: Middle Eastern splashed-sgraffiate ware that was found in Kampung Sungai Mas, Kota Kuala Muda, Kedah

17th and 18th century. This type of ware was found in all layers of the earth in the excavation trench of Site 32 in Kampung Sungai Mas (Abdul Rahman and Yatim, 1990; Abdul Rahman and Zakaria, 1993).

Several pieces of potsherds of 3 colours from the splashed-sgraffiate ware were found during the excavations in 1976 at Site 21/22 of Pengkalan Bujang Village. The potsherds were found at a depth of 75 cm from the ground surface, similar to green glazed potsherds. Its colour is dark green, bright green and bright yellow. Most are not as bright as the 3 coloured pottery of the Tang Dynasty. It is believed to have originated from the Middle East and its place of origin is either Persia or Iraq. The date of this type of ware is about the 10th or 11th century AD (Fig. 8 and 9).

CONCLUSION

Archaeological data, particularly in the Malay Peninsula indicated the role played by the Arab-Persian merchants in the trade activities in the Archipelago. These Arab-Persian merchants indirectly have succeeded in demonstrating the achievements of the Islamic world in the production of glass, beads and earthenware in addition to the achievements of the Muslims in seafaring and international trade activities. Technology in shipbuilding has enabled the Muslims to bring their products to the rest of the world since the 8th century AD. The products from the pre and early Islamic, the Abbasid and also the Fatimid period, such as items from glass for example oil lamps, bottles, perfume containers, various types of glass and stone beads and pottery were traded in Southeast Asia and the evidence can be seen, as a result of the research and archaeological excavations that have been carried out. Among the archaeological sites in Malaysia that have unearthed products from the Middle East are such as Kampung Pengkalan Bujang and Kampung Sungai Mas, Kedah and Kuala Selinsing,

Matang, Perak while the Southern area of Thailand that became the focus of the Arab-Persian merchants are in Takuapa, Pattani and Chaiya and Kota Cina, Palembang and Jambi in Indonesia. Indirectly, research and archaeological excavations can be utilised as useful and relevant data apart from the written data.

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