

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF A GIFTED HISTORIAN, PROF. EMERITUS
DATUK DR. AHMAT ADAM, 1941-2025**

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Charting the Course

Born in Malacca on March 24, 1941, Professor Emeritus Dr. Ahmat Adam was one of the most well-known history professors in Malaysia. He attended a Malay school from 1948 to 1951, Tranquerah English Primary School from 1952 to 1954, and Malacca High School from 1955 to 1959 for his early schooling. He continued his language studies at the Language Institute (1961–1962) in Lembah Pantai before enrolling in a special teaching course with a major in art at the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (1965) in Cheras. Prof. Ahmat pursued higher studies at University of Malaya, majoring in History and Malay Studies from 1967 to 1970. He continued his education abroad at the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), University of London from 1970 to 1975. Professor Ahmat worked at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, where he was notably the former Head of History Department (1983-1985) and the Dean of the Fakulti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan from 1989 to 1991.

He joined Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in 1995, where his scholarly and administrative skills led him to serve in several key roles within the university. From 1995 to 2005, Professor Ahmat served UMS in a dual capacity, acting as both a history professor and the dean of the Pusat Penataran Ilmu dan Bahasa. Furthermore, he was a key figure in the development of the early framework for the university's liberal studies program. Ahmat Adam, alongside distinguished academics like Prof. Mohd Noh Dalimin, Prof. Siti Maimon, Prof. Shariff Abd. Kadir Shariff Omang, and others, is considered among the foundational pillars responsible for the early development of UMS. In recognition of his foundational leadership role within the PPIB and his standing as an esteemed scholar, the main meeting hall has been formally named the "Bilik Mesyuarat Ahmat Adam." During its 12th Convocation in 2010, UMS officially bestowed upon him the distinguished title of Profesor Emeritus, recognising his significant contributions to the university's growth. He was a senior fellow at the

History Department, University of Malaya from 8 October 2009 to 7 October 2011 and later appointed as Karyawan Tamu at the same Department from 2015 to 2018.

In addition to his local roles, his international collaborations included participation in the UNESCO Maritime Silk Roads Project and serving as a research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS). His last position before his passing was the member of Malaysian Council of Historians established in September 2025.

Publications

Over fifteen of his works have been published both domestically and internationally. His primary areas of study throughout his doctoral studies were the development of Indonesian nationalism and the history of the Indonesian press. Among his principal books are *Sejarah dan Bibliografi Akhbar dan Majalah Bahasa Melayu Abad ke-19 di Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapura dan Sri Lanka* (UKM, 1994), *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness 1856–1913* (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1995), *Letters of Sincerity: the Raffles Collection of Malay Letters (1780-1824)* (MBRAS, 2009), *Melayu, Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa* (UM, 2013), and *Sulalatu's-Salatin (a critical edition with introduction and annotations)* (Yayasan Karyawan, 2016). He also authored *Antara Sejarah dan Mitos: Sejarah Melayu dan Hang Tuah dalam Historiografi Malaysia* (2016), *The Terengganu Inscription* (2017), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (atau Hikayat Hang Tua) (2018), *Hikayat Raja Pasai* (2019), *The Sejarah Melayu Revisited: A Collection of Six Essays* (2020), *Tawarikh Melayu dan Melaka* (2021), and *Tawarikh Hikayat Melayu atau Sulalat-us-Salatin Yakni Pitututuran Segala Raja-Raja* (2024). The last seven books were published by Gerak Budaya/SIRD.

His Prominent Work

Professor Emeritus Dr. Ahmat Adam's primary areas of study throughout his doctoral studies were the development of Indonesian nationalism and the history of the Indonesian press. However, throughout the past ten or so years, he became interested in the study of Malay manuscripts and how they affected Malay history.

Prof. Ahmat gained notoriety for his critical thinking, often deviated from accepted academic norms. He demonstrated his courage by advancing a new interpretation of the classic, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. He used the philological method to correct – among other things – the mispronunciation of Malacca Laksamana's (admiral's) title and name and to critically address the contents of the hikayat, which Orientalists and local scholars had misread and erroneously transliterated into Roman script for more than two centuries. His claim that the legendary figure in Malay history's true name was probably "Tuha" (or "Tua") is a noteworthy illustration of his unusual viewpoint. This claim both provoked criticism and annoyed many academics who accepted the customary title "Tuah" in "Hang Tuah." His extensive research and his efforts in translating and improving a number of important ancient Malay texts served as the foundation for this contentious claim.

In *Tawarikh Hikayat Melayu atau Sulalat u's-Salatin Yakni Pitututuran Segala Raja-Raja (Versi Raffles MS. No. 18)*, Prof. Ahmat sets out to trace the history of the writing

of the *Malay Annals (Sejarah Melayu)*. He argued that the master manuscript of all Malay hikayats that were produced after the 16th century was the Hikayat Melayu of Aceh that was composed in the 1530s.

In the *The New and Correct Date of Terengganu Inscription*, he used the method once more to argue that the correct date of the inscription is not 702 H. or 1303 A.D but 708 H. or 1308 A.D. He also revealed the usage of a unique calendrical system in the early 14th century Malay society.

Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr. Ahmat Adam's legacy is characterised by his courageous pursuit of historical truth based on rigorous evidence and philological scrutiny. His contributions demonstrate a strong commitment to academic integrity and the principle that history must be grounded in reliable facts. His body of work continues to stimulate critical thought in Malaysian academia.

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