

The migration of lute-type instruments to the Malay Muslim world

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This paper will explore the migration of the Hadhrami Arab culture, religious practice and music to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). More specifically the paper discusses the transmission of the folk-lute (*gambus*) from Hadhramaut (Yemen) to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) where the instrument has been adapted to local needs and culture. This paper will briefly discuss the existence of two types of lute instruments. The transmission of these instruments and their role and identity as “icons” of Islam in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) is reviewed and debated. The status of music and the emblematic representation of cultural icons are constantly challenged by Islamic purists generating debates regarding Islamic attitudes to music in today’s Malay Muslim society. I will examine the role and functions of music, which constantly lies between acceptance and rejection within some Islamic societies. Finally, this paper will briefly explore the question of “cultural space” for traditional performers which is threatened by the influences of modernization, the influx of popular culture and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

Introduction : Trading-Links from the Arabian Peninsula to the Malay world (Alam Melayu)

The arrival of Arab traders and Islam is the most critical factor in this study. The historical periods are divided into three stages of Muslim trading links with the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). First, in the Early Period (7th century) of early trading exploration in the historical sense by Muslim traders Second, is the Middle Period (15th century) which is most significant influences of Islamic contributions by Arabs, Persians and Indian Muslim traders. Third, is the Later Period (19th century) where the principal actors (Arabs) as entrepreneurs and religious men taking a more influential role in Malay culture and politics. This led to the establishment of land ownership, education and political philosophies of the Arabs in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). Events in the 19th century played a vital role by the arrival of Arab Hadhrami traders. This period can be referred to as the Hadhrami emigration “diaspora” (Alatas: 1997). With the high status and respect accorded to the Arabs, many Hadhrami traders came to trade, marry and settle down with the local Malay community. Subsequently, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 expedited the arrival of the Islamic *mullahs* and religious scholars from Yemen to this region.

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Generic term for Malay lutes

The word “*gambus*” refers to two main kinds of lute found in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). The word “*gambus*” refers to two main kinds of lute found in *Alam Melayu*.¹ Both of these types are known simply as “*gambus*” to the *Melayu* people.² However, both instruments are also known at times by other names to traditional players, makers and the wider community.³ The *gambus* that looks like the classical Arabian ‘*ud* can be referred to as *gambus Hadhramaut*, sometimes as *gambus Arab* or ‘*ud*. The other form of the instrument that appears similar to the Yemeni *qanbus* (sometimes called *qabus*, *turbi*, or *tarab* in Yemen) is referred to as the *gambus Melayu*.⁴ In Malaysia, the *gambus Melayu* is also currently known by six other names, (1) *seludang*, (2) *perahu*, (3) *biawak*, (4) *Hijaz* (5) *gambus kayu* (wood) and (6) *gambus Palembang*. These six alternative names for *gambus Melayu* have interesting metaphorical meanings.⁵ Figs.1 (a) and (b) are scale drawings of the two types of *gambus* (Hadhramaut and Melayu) superimposed to show the structural differences.

¹ Capwell (1995:80) describes the multiform nature of the *gambus* as two distinctive types of plucked lutes bearing the same name, which are also found in Indonesia.

² The *gambus* usually performed with the use of three or more *marwas* or *kompang* instruments. *Marwas* are small double-headed frame-drums, which come in three sizes. Two skins on each side of the *marwas* cover the instrument, which have a diameter of between 14 and 20 cm. It is laced with leather and has metal studs nailed around its frame. Goatskin is used for the membrane and jackfruit-wood is used for the frame of the instrument (Kartomi:1984). *Kompang* are single-headed frame-drums and they also come in three different sizes. Their sizes could range from 15 to 40 cm. The frame is also made from jackfruit-wood and the membrane is from goatskin and cowhide. In Malaysia, the *marwas* is used mainly in the *zapin* ensemble whereas the *kompang* is used extensively in many Malay music genres, most importantly in Malay wedding processions and in the welcoming ceremonies.

³ The Hornbostel and Sachs category for these lutes would be: 321. 321 “Necked bowl lute”, a classification the *gambus Hadhramaut* shares with the European lute, Greek *bozouki*, Chinese *pipa*, Arabic ‘*ud* and many other instruments. As for the *gambus Melayu* it can be classified under: 321.32 “Necked lutes - the handle is attached to or curved from the resonator, like a neck”, translated by Baines and Wachmann (1961).

⁴ Christian Poche told me that the *gambus Melayu* is probably from the Yemeni *qanbus* (personal communication: 4th July 1999) in Abbaye de Royaumont, France. The widely disseminated *qanbus* has various names: *gabbus* [*gambusi*] in Zanzibar, *gabbus* in Oman, *gabusi* or *gambusi* in the Comoros, *gabus* in Saudi Arabia and *kabosa* in Madagascar. Poche concluded that the term “*qanbus*” derives from the root “q-n”, often found in musical vocabulary of Semitic languages. The dropping of the “n” from “*qanbus*” to “*qabus*” has led to erroneous speculation that the word originated as a mutation of the Turkish *kopuz*, (*qopuz*, *qupuz*) a long-necked lute (*baglama*, *saz*) described by Farmer (1967:209) and Sachs (1940:252). See *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (Poche:1984:168). Also see Poche, *Musiques du Monde Arabe* (1994).

⁵ These names were used by practitioners of the *gambus* in different *kampong* (Malay villages) during my fieldwork from 1994-2003 in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).

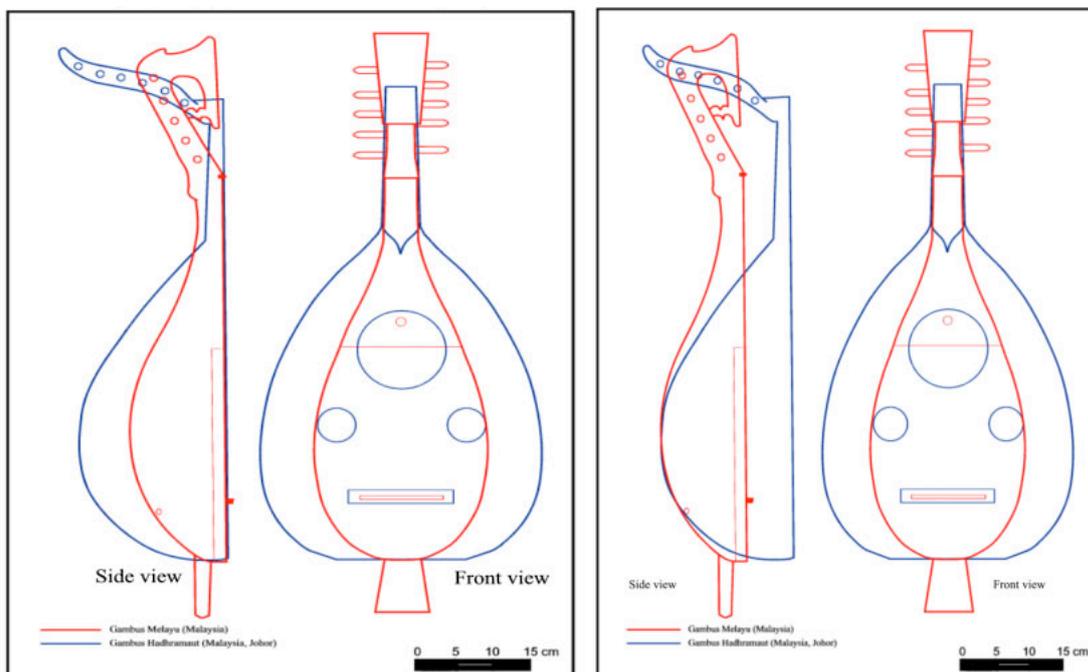


Fig. 1 (a)

Fig. 1 (b)

Figure 1. Two Superimposed Versions of Scale Drawings of the *Gambus Melayu* (red) and the *Gambus Hadhramaut* (blue)

The earliest western documented source that I have come across in English, which records the word “*gambus*” is Sachs’ *The History of Musical Instruments*. Sachs was probably the first European scholar to have used the word “*gambus*” in his 1913 German publication of “*Reallexikon der Musikinstrumente*” (p.152) Georg Olm Verlagsbuchandlung Hildesheim 1964 Nachdruck der Ausgabe, Berlin, 1913 mit Genehmigung des Verlag Max Hesse.⁶ Kunst used the word *gambus* in an article in 1934, describing the *gambus* as a plucked pear-shaped lute. He concluded that the *gambus* is fairly common throughout the entire archipelago in strict Islamic areas. Kunst described it as having seven strings: three double-strung pairs and one low single string (1934). In another article Kunst also mentioned that its (*gambus*) country of origin was the Hadhramaut region of Yemen where it is known as *quopuz*. This article appeared in “Two Thousand Years of South Sumatra Reflected in its Music” (1952). Both reprints also appeared in *Indonesian Music & Dance* published by The Royal Tropical Institute/Tropenmuseum University of Amsterdam/Ethnomusicology Centre “Jaap Kunst”, (1994:170; 237). Sachs claims that the word “*gambus*” derived from the Arabic name *qobus*, lute-type instruments that are still used in Turkey, Hungary, Russia, Romania and some other places in Europe. He mentions that in Borneo this instrument is called *gambus* and in Zanzibar it is *gabbus*. He attributes that the instrument arrived in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) as early as the seventh century. Sachs based his theories on the sickle-shaped peg-box, tracing these types of instruments to a kind of *rebab* still used in Borneo and Zanzibar (Panum:1971). *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, concluded that: the “*barbat*” was probably of Indian origin and

⁶ I am grateful to my student Ms. Yeong Laning for the translation of the German text.

was exported to Arabia via Al-Hira and became a predecessor of the 'ud (Klaus-Peter Koch:1980:550-552:No.14). According to Sir Richard Winstedt (1960) in *Kamus Bahasa Melayu*, R.J. Wilkinson (1955) in *A Malay-English Dictionary*, and in *Kamus Dewan* (1998) the word *gambus* may be an Arabic loan word in the Malay language.⁷

Migration and transmission : the Early Period (7th Century)

The arrival of the *gambus* in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) is controversial. There are various "theories" as to how *gambus Melayu* and *gambus Hadhramaut* arrived in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). It is difficult to state categorically when and how the *gambus* arrived in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). Because of the lack of tangible evidence only conjectures could be made about the early transmission. With little or no information regarding the arrival of *gambus*-type instruments, the present research relied heavily on historical accounts and on theories regarding the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) during the 15th century (Francis L.H:2004). The hypothesis about the arrival of the *gambus*-type instruments through the Arabs and Persians to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) is a strong possibility since economic growth and political stability could have influenced cultural adaptation and behaviour from a more dominant and influential cultural group (the Arabs).⁸ Fig. 2 shows the difference between the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) and the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).



Figure 2. Map of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) and the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*)

⁷ These Malay dictionaries describe the word *gambus* as a lute of Arabian origin, specifically with 6 strings. The word *gambus* has no roots in Bahasa Melayu. This has been confirmed by the members of the Malay Language Unit at Nanyang Technological University/National Institute of Education, Singapore: Dr. Kamsiah Abdullah, Dr. Paitoon M. Chaiyanara, Dr. Hadijah Rahmat, Ms Roksana Abdullah, Dr. Haji Abbas bin Mohd. and Mr. Tajul Arif bin Mohamed Yusof (personal communication: 1997-2000).

⁸ Personal communication: Dr. Farid Alatas: 26th July 1999.

Picken (1975:269) mentioned *gambus* in his book, *Folk Musical Instruments from Turkey*, in which he states: “The name *gambus* (from Indonesia [*Alam Melayu*] and *gabbus* (Zanzibar), applied to structurally related lutes resembling the *rebab* of North-west Africa, are forms of *kopuz*” – as Sachs recognized. ...“and the disappearance of the name *kopuz* from central regions of the Islamic world, indicate that transmission to Zanzibar and Madagascar, as well as to Indonesia (Borneo), probably occurred at an early date”. A Persian colony on the Malay Peninsula during the 5th and 6th centuries was also reported by Chinese sources. Heuken (2002:13-29) mentions that 500 hundred Persian families lived during the 4th century in *Tun-sun* on the Malayan Peninsula. Gujarati and Persian merchants created a wide network of trading posts entirely controlled by Muslim Melaka in 1414, Java and as far as Ternate in the late 1460 A.D. Malay sources have attributed the arrival of *gambus* to the Arabs during the Islamization of Melaka in the 15th century. The hypothesis that I am suggesting for the transmission of *gambus* to the Malay Archipelago could be even much earlier than the 15th century. I am propounding that the Persians and the Arabs were trading in the Malay Archipelago as early as the 9th century and these instruments could have been carried on board their ships for personal entertainment on long voyages. The *barbat*, *qanbus* and *‘ud* could have been introduced by these traders when trading along the Malay Archipelago. The arrival of the *gambus*-type instruments into the Malay Archipelago may not imply that the acceptance and indigenization of the instruments was immediate but rather happened through a gradual process of adaptation. These instruments may have been used only by Persian and Arab traders based in the Malay trading ports. It was probably after the Islamization of Melaka that the *gambus* was more fully integrated into the region, especially after the rest of the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) became Islamized.

It is interesting to note that Sachs mentioned that the Persian lute could have arrived in the Malay Archipelago through “Islamic migration and conquest”. Sachs’s view clearly requires an examination of the probable dominant Persian influence on Southeast Asia before the arrival of Muslim Arab traders in the 15th century. Sachs also claims that the Persian lute (*barbat*) reappeared in the Islamic Near-East many centuries later. Its peg-box was bent backwards in a sickle shape and contained lateral pegs. The string holder was not frontal but at the lower end of the body and skin-covered soundboard. This description is closely aligned to the *gambus Melayu*-type instruments found in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). The migration could have carried this lute eastwards from Persia to Celebes [Sulawesi] in Indonesia (*gambusu*), and also to Zanzibar (*gambusi*) and Madagascar (*kabosa*). He concludes that it was also introduced to Egypt around 1200 A.D. Today this lute is extinct in the Near-East (1940: 251-252). *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, also briefly mentions that contact with the early spice trade brought many influences from Arabic-Persian sources. The 7-stringed *gambus* was mentioned as one of them (Mantle Hood: 1980: No.9: 215).

The *barbat*, could have been brought by *Sufi* missionaries from Persia who plied the trade route of the Muslim merchants to Southeast Asia. Kunst describes Sumatra and the surrounding islands as being strongly influenced by Islam and the Persian-Arabic culture. He mentions *gambus* of the 7-stringed type lute as having come from Persia and Arabian Peninsula (1994:175). This fact further supports one of my hypotheses that the *gambus Melayu* may probably be of Persian origin. This vital fact was mentioned earlier in a quotation by Sachs. It supports the hypothesis that the *barbat* may have been

introduced into the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) even before the arrival of Muslim Arab traders to Melaka in the 15th century.

Generally, Persians and Arabs were scholarly people who recorded and documented much of their work and travels. It seems however, that the early exploration of Southeast Asia by Persians and Arabs were mainly by traders and the merchant classes who came to the region for economic reasons, thus not recording their exploits. There is also historical evidence to prove that Persians and Arabs were in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) as early as the 9th century. Chinese traveller, I-Ching in 671 A.D. embarked on a Persian (*Po-sse* in Chinese) ship to Palembang. Other Chinese accounts also mentioned Persian ships in 717 A.D. (to Palembang) and in 727 to Malaya (Hourani: 1995: 46-62 and Heuken: 2002: 11). Mohd. Taib Osman mentions that Arabs and other Muslim merchants had been known to be trading in the Malay Archipelago as early as the ninth century A.D. (1988: 262). Also see (McAmis: 2002: 9).

Alatas supports the hypothesis that the presence of large Persian and Arab trading Muslim settlements in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*).⁹ He states that a thriving port also existed on the west coast of the Malay Peninsular in the 9th century (named Kalah or Klang) inhabited by Muslims from Persia and India. Kalah is in the State of Selangor where the capital Kuala Lumpur is situated.¹⁰ It is not unreasonable to suggest that the Persians brought the *barbat* to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). The question that comes to mind is whether the *gambus*-type instruments come from Persia or the Arabian Peninsula? The *gambus Melayu* that came to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) could be either a direct descendant of the Persian *barbat* or from the Yemeni “*qanbus*”, which itself may have evolved from the “*barbat*”.¹¹ The *gambus Melayu* has striking resemblances to both *barbat* and *qanbus*-type instruments in its physical structures. There is historical evidence to suggest that either of these routes from Persia and Arabia were possible. The similarities between the *gambus* and the *barbat* are those that also link the *gambus* with the *qanbus*. Even the strings of both types of *gambus* instruments are tuned in perfect 4ths, as is the case with most Persian and Arabian lutes.

Information gathered about the construction of the *gambus Melayu* is similar in manner to the construction of the *barbat*. Ella Zonis (1973:179-180) in her book *Classical Persian Music* concludes that the *barbat* was constructed from one piece of wood. To quote Zonis: “As early as the Sassanian period, [224-651 A.D.] the Persians had an ‘*ud*’ called the *barbat*. The construction was different from that of the Arab lute, since in the *barbat*, the body and the neck were constructed of one graduated piece of wood, in contrast to the Arab ‘*ud*’, where the two were separate”. The above quotation confirms the close similarities apparent in the construction of the *barbat* and *gambus Melayu*. One cannot doubt the possibility of Persian influence in the construction

⁹ Summary of papers on “Hadhrami Diaspora” were discussions in the conference at Alwehdah (Singapore Arabs Association) on the 20th August 1995. Speakers were: Dr. Farid Alatas, Alwiyah Abdul Aziz, Harasha bte. Khalid Banafa and Heikel bin Khalid Banafa. Also see *Muslim World* 75 nos.3-4, (Alatas: 1985:163).

¹⁰ Most scholars identified “Kalah” with the present State of Kedah in the north-east of Peninsular Malaysia. However, Fatimi (1963) refers Kalah as in Klang which is now located in the State of Selangor where the capital is situated.

¹¹ Shiloah mentions in his writing that the ‘*ud*’ was invented by a Persian philosopher Ibn Hidjdja (b.1366-d.1434) who called it a *barbat* (1979:180).

method of the *gambus Melayu*. The descriptions by Sachs and Zonis about the *gambus* implies the instrument may be of Persian origin.

Also, according to Farmer (1967), the *barbat* was exported to the Arabian Peninsula from Persia. This may explain the close similarities between the 'ud and the *qanbus* from Yemen. Shiloah mentioned to me that most, if not all, references in Arabic sources seem to identify the *barbat* with the 'ud either as one out of the five names of the 'ud, or as a close variant of it (Date:26th March: 2000). This makes the issue of these two types of lute instrument more problematic as the word *barbat* or 'ud can be used to describe either instrument. Poche pointed out that the shape of the Yemeni *qanbus* is closely related to the early Islamic 'ud. There has been continuous interaction between the 'ud and the *qanbus*. However the *qanbus* is covered with lambskin painted in green as the colour of Islam and it has seven strings, three double-strung and a single low string. Poche mentioned that at Sa'na in Yemen the *qanbus* is called the 'ud of Sa'na or the 'ud with four strings to distinguish it from the classical Arabian 'ud in *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (1984: No. 3:168).

Farmer (1967:108) concludes that Persian lutes were taken to Arabia in the late 7th century by Persian slaves who were to work in Mecca and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula.¹² In the 8th century Zalzal introduced a new type of 'ud which superseded the *barbat*. It was this new invention ('ud) that was brought to Europe by the Arab invasion of Spain and became known to the West as the lute. There is another hypothesis that claims that the Persians may have brought the *barbat* or even the 'ud type instruments separately to the northern Sumatran states of Samudra, Pasai and Aceh during the 13th century as Islamic settlements were established by the early Persians.¹³ Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveler mentions in his report of his visit to north Sumatra port of Pase (Pasir) in 1345. He described the inhabitants as Muslims (McAmis:2002:13). Picken (1975: 269) states that, "the establishment of Islam in Sumatra in the 13th century has been correlated with the first transmission to the Indian Archipelago of *kopuz*-like instruments". It is believed that the Aceh royal court in the 13th century also maintained musicians from Persia. The Northern states of Sumatra have been influenced by Islam and the earliest gravestone of a Moslem prince was recorded in 1297 in Perlak and Samudra as mentioned by Tome Pires. The presence of some Muslim communities in Northern Sumatra was also reported by Marco Polo through his travels to this region in 1292. Persian musicians were invited to stay in Aceh and even today strong Persian *Sufi* influence is still apparent in Achinese culture.¹⁴ Tome Pires, a 16th century Portuguese explorer also emphasized that contacts with Muslim merchants was a sufficient explanation of Islamization of the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) (Reid: 2000: 16). During that time many literary works were translated from Persian into the Malay language. The schematic chart in fig.3 provides a diagrammatic illustration of the hypothetical historical transmission of the *gambus* to the Malaya Archipelago (*Nusantara*).

¹² By the 5th century, the *barbat* was used by Byzantine and Persian singing girls. The Arabic 'ud appeared in Mecca in the 6th century (Marcuse: 1975: 413).

¹³ We know from Marco Polo that the port of Perlak in North Sumatra was converted to Islam in 1291-1292 A.D. Another scholar, Van Leur points out that by the end of the 13th century, rulers of some newly-arisen coastal states in Northern Sumatra adopted Islam through their dealings with Indonesian trade (Van Leur: 1955:112); (Reid:2000:16).

¹⁴ Alatas mentions that many *Sufi* teachers and scholars introduced Greek philosophical thought besides *Sufi* theology to the Malay Archipelago (*Muslim World* 75 no3-4 (1985:173)).

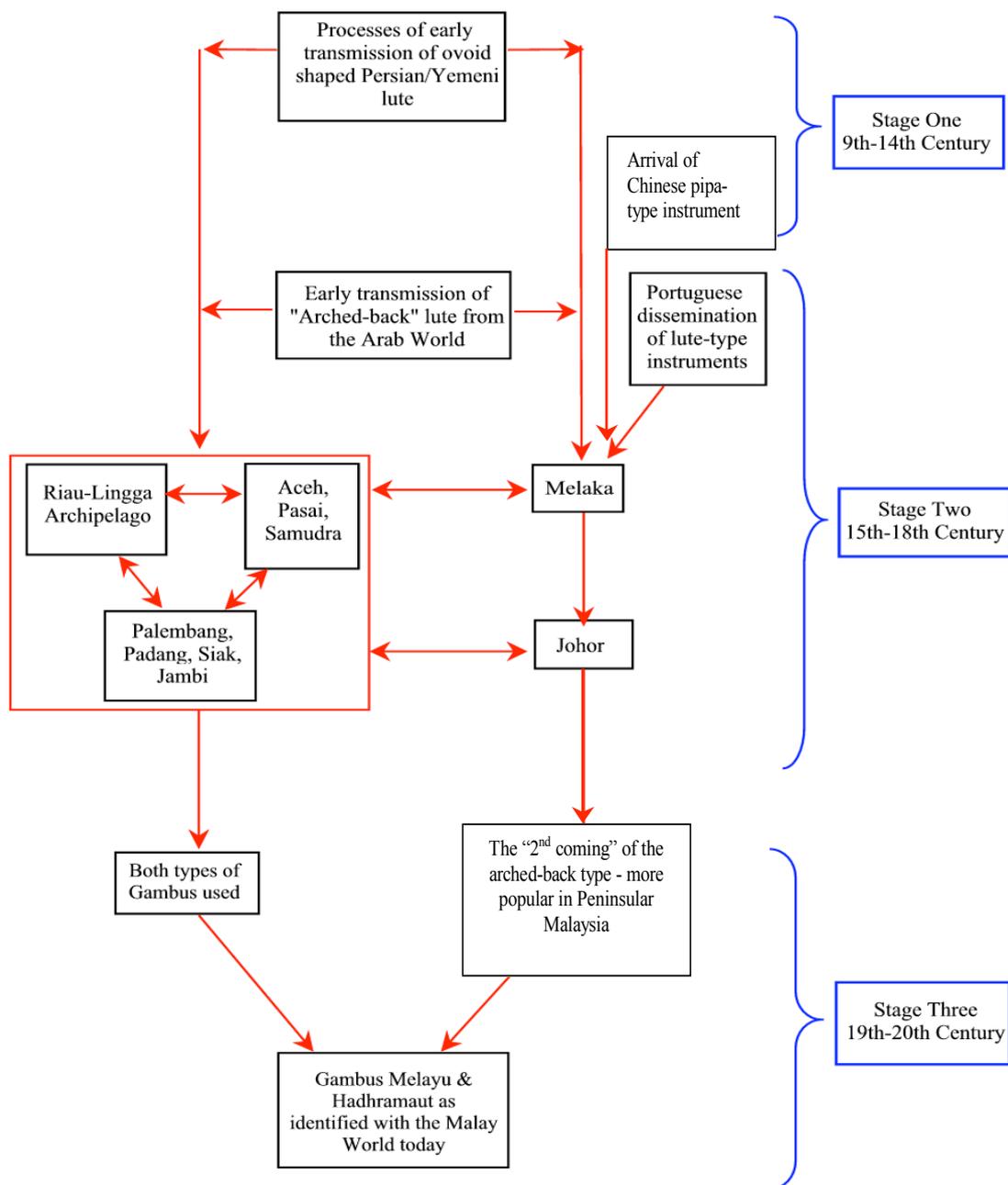


Figure 3. A Historical Hypothesis of the Dissemination of *Gambus*-type Lute Instruments in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*)

The Islamization of the Malay world (*alam melayu*): the Middle Period (15th Century)

S.Q. Fatimi has suggested that Islam arrived in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) in 4 stages. First, early contacts from 674 A.D., second, Islam obtained a foothold in coastal towns around 878 A.D., third, Islam began achieving political power in 1204 A.D. and finally decline set in from 1511 A.D. (69-70). Mohd. Taib Osman (1988) states that at about the beginning of the 13th or the 14th century, Islam came to exert its

influence on the Malays, brought to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) via Persia and India. Islam not only introduced a new religious faith, but also brought in its wake the Islamic cultural influences from Persia and India to the Malay area. Early historical accounts of Islamization are vital clues for understanding the dissemination of Arabian and Persian lute-type instruments in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). Kunst mentions that the contribution of the Muslim (i.e. Persian and Arabic) realm in the field of music consists of several instruments commonly used in Islamic societies in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). He notes for example the *gambus*, *marwas* and *rebana* as well as that the structure of a number of melodies found in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) have come from Persia and the Arab world (1994: 237).

The Golden Age of Malay history and of the concept of Melayu culture began with the Melaka Empire and the arrival of Islam in the 15th century.¹⁵ An important event in Malay history occurred in 1409 when the founder of Melaka, a Hindu prince (Parameswara), married the daughter of the Sultan of Pasai in Sumatra and, as a result, professed Islam in the 15th century. One result of the marriage of Parameswara and his conversion to Islam may have been the bringing of Persian court musicians from Pasai to entertain the Melakan court. Though Islam had been promoted earlier by Samudra-Pasai, the new religion became closely identified with Malay society (Andaya and Andaya:1982). One generally accepted hypothesis amongst Malay scholars and musicians is that the *gambus Hadhramaut* was brought in large numbers by the early Arabs or Indian traders following the vigorous conversion to Islam from the 15th century. Mohd. Anis Md. Nor clearly held this view.¹⁶

Alatas supports the theory that political and economic stability, controlled by the Muslim traders, was extremely important for the spread of Islam to counteract Portuguese influence and the spread of Christianity in the Malay Archipelago. He argues that Arab and Muslim communities with strong political and economic control of the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) may have been responsible for the promotion of Arab cultural activities that were immersed into, and emulated by, the Malay population. Van Leur (1955) and Schrieke (1955) argue that Islam did not offer any "higher civilization" to countries of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) but insisted that the struggle was more a political factor between Portuguese (Christians) and the Muslims (from Indian Ocean) rather than for commercial reasons. Hence, Islam became a symbol of political alliance for the countries of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) against the arrival of Europeans and Christian missionaries. On the other hand A.H. Johns (1961) and Fatimi (1963) developed a rival explanation of the Islamization process of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) centred on mystical *Sufi* preachers who were proficient in magic and possessed powers of healing in an Islamic spirit (Reid: 2000:17). The gradual progress made by Islam at a popular folk level and its later acceptance in the royal courts played a key factor in the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). There is evidence to show that the early Arabs, who came to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) to trade and settle down, were from Southern Yemen (Alatas:1985;1997). Today the Arab community in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore is solely made up of Hadhrami Arabs and the *gambus* and *zapin* are closely associated with them. The

¹⁵ Melaka has recently been declared a World Heritage site by the United Nations.

¹⁶ Personal communication: 4th March 1998. Also see Anis (1993).

presence of Hadhramis could account for the arrival of the Arabian *'ud* (*gambus Hadhramaut*) and the Yemeni *qanbus*.¹⁷

Even today music plays a significant part in the *Hadhrami* community in *zapin* performances.¹⁸ Performances of the *gambus* and *zapin* music and dance are significant at weddings, circumcisions and other cultural and religious festivals in the Hadhrami community.¹⁹ Farmer also mentions that the *Hadhramis* were not only traders, but great patrons of music. He concludes: "...real Arabian music comes from Al-Yaman, [Yemen], whilst the Hadrami minstrels are always considered to be superior artistes" (1967:3).²⁰ This supports the point that the *Hadhrami* traders brought along their musical instruments when they came to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) to trade and settle. Another fact that supports this view comes from fieldwork observations that *gambus* players in *samra* or *sara* performances were usually of Hadhrami descent, now settled in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).²¹ My observation during my research was that many of the *Hadhrami* Arabs were more highly accomplished musicians than Malay performers. The arrival of Hadhramaut Arabs is a vital link as it could explain the transmission of *gambus* instruments to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*), probably brought by these traders and religious men from Yemen.

The Hadhrami "Diaspora": the Later Period (19th Century)

In the 19th century there was a greater interest shown by the Arabs in trading with the Malay world, and some Arabs settled down in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). The Arab immigrants in Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia originated predominantly from the valley of Hadhramaut (Yemen). In the 19th century Hadhrami Arabs played a significant role in the spread of Islam as well as commercial trade in Southeast Asia. The Hadhrami not only arrived in Malaysia, as traders and merchants, but many were

¹⁷ Farmer mentions that the people from Al-Yaman (Yemen) had an instrument called *qanbus* which is also referred to as *qabus* could be traced back to the pre-Islam time (1931:73)

¹⁸ Lambert in a letter to me mentioned that *zafin* (*zapin*) is a kind of dance known to the Hadhramis and Gulf Arabs. *Zafin* may have a *qanbus* in the musical performance. It is more an aristocratic musical art form (letter dated: 27th December 1999).

¹⁹ On a number of occasions I have witnessed the performance of *zapin* music and dance held within the Arab (Hadhrami) community in Singapore. These evening musical performances are called "*samra*". The *gambus* plays the main role in the *zapin* performance in *samra* evenings. An interesting observation made at these performances was that the musicians who were engaged to perform in the *samra* were from Sumatra in Indonesia. Most of the musicians were of Arab (Hadhrami) descent. They were very accomplished musicians who not only played Arabic tunes but also *lagu-lagu Melayu* (songs) and Hindustani music. Loopuyt mentions that "*morisco*" (Moors), referring to the Spanish Moslems who were forced to convert to Christianity, continued the tradition of the night musical sessions called "*zambras*". There seems to be some connection with the Hadhrami musical evenings called "*samra*" and the Andalusian's "*zambras*" (personal communication: July 1999: France).

²⁰ *Aghani*, iv, 37 as quoted in the *History of Arabian Music* (Farmer). "*Kitab al-Aghani*" (Book of Songs) was written by Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani who lived from 897-967 A.D. (Shiloah: 1997).

²¹ The Malays use the word "*samra*" or "*sara*" to refer to *zapin Arab* (*zapin* of the Arabs). The term "*samra*" may be misunderstood by the Malays that refer to another Hadhrami Arab musical genre called "*sharah*". Shiloah pointed out to me the word "*samra*" or "*zambras*" derives from the Arabic *samar* or *musamara*, which means nocturnal conversation and depicts a "literary" genre. He also mentioned the word "*samra*" used in Yemen, designating a nocturnal entertainment session which includes singing, dances and music-making (personal communication: July 1999: France).

cultured and scholarly men imbued in Arabic literature, religious law and philosophy. They traded extensively in the archipelago where they were granted special commercial privileges because they were of the same “race” as the Prophet. By the 19th century, it had become the spread of Islam that was the primary goal of the Arabs in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). The Arabs brought along not only trade but rich cultural traditions. Another important factor is the establishment of closer contact with the Middle East, which began in the 19th century with increase steamship traffic and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. With increasing colonial exploitation by Britain and Holland, and an economic boom, more exchanges and close developments of religious orthodoxy took place between the Arab and Malay worlds. The economic success of the Hadhramis in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) led to the arrival of more family members.²²

Hadhrami Arabs brought not only their music and culture but they also inter-married with local women. Later, Islamic clergymen and religious scholars from the Hadhrami community started to arrive in this region. Musical instruments such as the arched-back ‘*ud* arrived in this region in the 19th century and became the predominant form of *gambus* in Peninsular Malaysia. Interestingly, the Hadhrami communities in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) provide a fascinating case of transnational communities. They assimilated well into their host countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore but retained their cultural identity at the same time. This is referred to as the Hadhami practice of *asabiyya*.²³

The evidence of Hadhrami cultural links is still strong today in Gresik, Surabaya and Jakarta in Java and Hadhramis still live in eastern Sumatra in places such as Melayu, Siak, Padang, Medan, Jambi, Bukit Si Gunung, Siak, Palembang, and Aceh.²⁴ In Singapore and Malaysia the Hadhrami community, although having adopted some Malay cultural practices, has not integrated fully with the Malay grouping and still prefers to be identified as Arab. The differences between the Hadhrami and Malay communities in music and dance are apparent from the interpretation of performances of *zapin* (as in *zapin Arab* or *zapin Melayu*).

One of the most important Hadhrami Arab cultural contributions is definitely in *zapin* music and dance and the use of *gambus* and *marwas* in Malay music. Evidently,

²² I am grateful to Professor Michael Gilson from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, New York University, for his helpful comments on the Hadhrami community from *Alam Melayu* (personal communication: 2000-2002).

²³ Dr. Farid Alatas describes this as Hadhrami consciousness and identity. He pointed out that for centuries, “Hadhramis married into Malay-Indonesian communities and retained their cultural identities without losing their sense of Hadhami identity because such identity is not national or ethnic but kinship-based” (personal communication: 12th July 1999). Also see Alatas (1996:10).

²⁴ It is interesting to note that there are no known Arab families living in Brunei today. This information was given to me by Mr. Omar Khatid (Secretary) of the Singapore Arab Association (*Alwehda*). No 11, Lorong 37, Geylang Road. (21st July 1997). Dr Majul’s research on the Muslims of the Philippines concludes that the first Sultan of Brunei Sharif ul-Hashim (also known as Abu Bakr in Sulu Genealogy) was of Arab descent and the Brunei royal family was related to the Mindanao royal family (Cesar Adib Majul: Muslims in the Philippines: 1999). However, there are also Hadhrami Arabs living in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) who do not display any distinctive Arab cultural attributes, while others identify themselves as Arabs first, then Malays. It seems that the more recent migrants identify themselves more as Hadhramis and less as Malays. On the contrary, some Hadhrami Arabs also prefer to identify themselves as Malays because of the privileges they get as *Bumiputeras* in Malaysia.

the Malays have adopted many other Hadhrami influences into their culture. The word *Rabu* (Wednesday), the Hadhrami reciting style of the *Koran*, the *thuluth* script, the language and knowledge of Islam (*ilmu*) and many aspects of custom can be traced to that of Hadhrami influences. The word *adat* (customary rites) was also adopted from the Hadhrami *Shafii* sect of *Sunni* Islam. The practice of death ritual (*tahlil*), the male dress (*gamis* or *tob*) and Moslem names such as Ali, Hussein, Omar, Ahmad, Mohamad, Abdullah and Ismail are all Hadhrami practises.²⁵

Second arrival

Having considered the various “theories” on the arrival and establishment of the *gambus*, there is one more hypothesis on the arrival of the ‘*ud* in particular. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 would have shortened and sped up the sea journey from the Middle East to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). With the impetus of steam navigation and the opening of the Suez Canal the economic prospects for the Malay peninsular was good (Shennan: 2000: 6). The Arabian ‘*ud*, but this time coming from other parts of the Middle East, could have been re-introduced as a “second coming” of the *gambus* in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). It can be argued that the popularity of the ‘*ud* (*gambus Hadhramaut*) superseded that of the *gambus Melayu* in the late 19th or early 20th century in Peninsular Malaysia.²⁶ The *ghazal* groups of Johor in the early 20th century were replacing Indian *sarangi* with the *gambus Melayu* and later by the *gambus Hadhramaut*. In Peninsular Malaysia today, the *gambus Melayu* has been almost completely replaced by the *gambus Hadhramaut*.

As both the *gambus Melayu* and *gambus Hadhramaut* may have come from the same genealogical development, it seems that no distinction was necessary between the two types of instrument but the generic term “*gambus*” was used to refer to both types of instruments by the Malays. Another important fact explaining the lack of any kind of differentiation is that both types of *gambus* are used interchangeably in the performance of Malay musical genres such as *zapin*, *hamdolok*, *asli*, *inang*, *masri*, and *ghazal*. Both types of *gambus* are found in Sarawak and Sabah in East Malaysia and also in Brunei and west Kalimantan (Borneo) in Indonesia. Many Malays strongly believe that the *gambus Melayu* is of Malay origin, as opposed to the *gambus Hadhramaut*, which they acknowledge to be of Middle Eastern origin. The arguments about the *gambus Melayu* they have put forward as Melayu origin are unconvincing and inconclusive, as there was no proto-type or primitive forms of Malay lute found in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). It is also unlikely from the evidence presented in this research shows that these instruments were brought by Persian and Arab traders. The only examples of the *gambus Melayu* considered as modeled on the Arabian ‘*ud* are those found in Brunei.

²⁴ Interview on Hadhrami culture and music was conducted with an influential Hadhrami community elder, Syed Ali Alattas from Johor Bahru on the 27th June 2000. However, it has also been pointed out to me that all the Arab names mentioned above are not necessarily Moslem names as they are also used by Christian Arabs in the Middle East.

²⁵ This view about the popularity of ‘*ud* replacing the *gambus Melayu* in the late 19th century is also shared by most Malay music scholars. Pak Fadzil Ahmad, a distinguished performer attached to the Ministry of Culture, claims that the ‘*ud*, became more popular in around 1897 in Johor, replacing the importance of *gambus Melayu*. Although some Melayu musicians disagree and mention that the ‘*ud* was only introduced in the 1950’s.

An instrument of this kind has also been found in Sulawesi but it has 6 double-strung strings.

Evidence pointing towards the contribution of the Muslims from Persia and Arabia in the transmission of the *gambus* to the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) is substantial and conclusive. The use of terms such as: Hadhramaut, Yemen, *gambus*, *zapin*, *samra*, *marwas*, Arab, and Hijaz, could be plausible admission of Hadhrami influences and transmission of lute instruments from Yemen rather than Persia.²⁷ With the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*) in the 15th century, many Muslim Arab traders established strong trade links with these areas. However, I have not come across the word “*qanbus*” in any primary text, although the word “*barbat*” has been used frequently to describe the Persian lute. There is also concrete historical evidence that supports the presence of “Parsi” (Persian) influence in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). However, whether it was direct or indirect, Persian influence on Malay culture has been particularly strong, especially on the Malay royal courts. Thus, the argument that the Persian lute come to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) cannot be dismissed altogether.²⁸

My argument points to the fact that both types of *gambus* were already highly developed when introduced into the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). There is no evidence of “similar” or “primitive” types of lute found that could point to the *gambus* being indigenous to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).²⁹ The *gambus* may have developed over the centuries in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). However, the striking resemblance to *qanbus* or *barbat* supports the theory that it was an “imported” instrument rather than being indigenous to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*), albeit now modified and adapted. The Persians could have also brought the *barbat* to Aceh, together with their *Sufi* practice as music plays an important role in *Sufi* mysticism. Shiloah in his book, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writing c.900-1900* mentions Al-Kari (Ali b. Sultan Muhammad al-Harawi b.in Herat d. 1605 in Mecca), the *Sufi* leader who had a general tendency in favour of singing and dancing. The important fact is that the author mentions the accompaniment by string instruments, specifically ‘*ud*, *rabab* and *barbat* as forbidden because of their association with the consumption of alcoholic drink (1979:244-245). The argument I am making here is that the *barbat* was still used as late as the 17th century as can be seen from Al-Kari’s writing. The *barbat* could have also been introduced to Aceh in the 13th century, as we know of its strong *Sufi* connection. However, Lambert cautioned me about religious scholars such as Al-Kari who may not be competent musicologists. Therefore, care must be taken when using such writings as evidence. There are also other Arab scholars who have mentioned the *barbat* after the 10th century and one in particular, Al-Sarkhadi b.1201- d.1275 A.D.,

²⁷ See Poche (1984) and Kunst (1952/1994).

²⁸ Mohd. Taib Osman mentions the Persian influence on the culture of the Malays has been particularly strong especially on the Malay royal courts. Malay court ceremonies, the title “Shah” for the sultans or rulers, literature and ideas on statescraft and kingship, the literary style of court literature, and religious literature of *Shi’ite* tradition, all bear indelible marks of Persian influence (1988: 267). Also refer to G.E. Marrison, “Persian Influences on Malay Life”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XXVIII (1955:80). G.W.J. Drewes comments that the Persian influence seems to exist alongside the Arabian influences in the Malay Archipelago in an article “New Light on the Coming of Islam to Indonesia” (1985:7-9).

²⁹ The musicians and scholars I spoke to in Indonesia, (S.Berrain), Malaysia, (Professor. Mohd. Anis Md. Nor) and Brunei, (Haji Nayan bin Apong) seem to agree that the *gambus Melayu* originated from the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).

mentioned the *'ud = barbat* in his writing devoted to musical instruments (1979: 320). The *gambus* may have departed from its place of origin and migrated through trade, missionary exploits and conquest in the Malay Archipelago (*Nusantara*). It will be argued that, through these activities, members of different musical cultures may have come into contact with one another. Over a period of time, through intensive cultural interaction, adaptation, mutation and borrowing, the *gambus* may have slowly changed in its formal structure to suit the local needs and the adoption by the society. I am convinced from the arguments that the *gambus Hadhramaut* was a later arrival to the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) as the *'ud* only arrived in Yemen in the 19th century.³⁰ My research suggests that *gambus Melayu* type instruments probably arrived first. It could even be possible that these pear-shaped lutes were transmitted by others and not only the Arabs from Hadhramaut.

Folk and religious traditions

Although Malaysia's state religion is Islam, it is not an Islamic country. Music still plays a major role in Melayu society, especially with its devotional Islamic songs. It can be argued that the dissemination of *gambus* is couched in terms of the spread of Islam. In Malaysia today, *gambus* performances are closely intertwined with the folk term of Melayuness and Islam. This is an important concept that must be first understood before any study of Melayu folk culture could be undertaken.

What constitutes Melayuness is a changing concept and the term "Melayu" has been in use from the early history of Melaka (c.1400-1511 A.D.). However, the concept of Melayuness has different meanings in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand and Indonesia.³¹ Before the arrival of the British the term "Malay" was used to designate the polity of the sultan regarding his subjects and communities living around the palace. The term was not used as ethnic category but rather referred to the place of origin from where they came from. The individual cultural experience of each "Malay area" has meant local adaptations of customs, dress, music, dance and dialect but in co-operation with and moulded in, the concept of Melayuness.

The playing of *gambus* and its musical genres is one musical practice that links the Melayu people of Malaysia to the rest of the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) in the sharing of a common musical culture and identity. Hence, it can be argued, that Melayuness and the *gambus* in particular, are strong emblematic representations of "being Melayu" and professing Islam.³² Islam means "peaceful submission to the will of God" and Muslim means "one who has submitted to the will of God". The question of the lawfulness of music has been debated since the first century (9th century) of Islam and continues to this day (Shiloah: 1997:168). Arguments that music is sinful (*haram*) are based not on the *Qur'an* but on the Traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*). Some of the rulings in Islamic law come from the *hadith* and are held to be binding if they are transmitted from reliable sources. *Hadith* also provides the most categories of rules that differ in opinion, separating the schools of Islamic jurisprudence from the *Qur'an* (Vincent J. Cornell:

³⁰ This astonishing fact was confirmed to me in a letter by Dr. Jean Lambert on the 27th December 1999. Dr. Lambert is an authority on the music of Yemen. His work on the *qanbus* and *'ud* from Yemen is discussed in *La médecine de l'âme. Le chant de Sana dans la société Yemenite*. Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 1997.

³¹ The concept of Melayuness is defined only within Malaysia in this paper.

³² Another instrument that is associated with Melayuness and Islam is the *kompang* (frame-drum).

1999: 92). The *Qur'an* says nothing about music explicitly, but two *suras* are sometimes invoked as supporting music. The *Qur'an* says nothing about music explicitly, but two *suras* are sometimes invoked as supporting music. In Chapter 35: Part 22: Verse 2 it says, "He adds to His creation whatever He pleases; for Allah has power over all things" (*Qur'an, Al-Fātir* [35]: 2).¹ Some believe this refers to a beautiful voice, a theme discussed at length in the literature about sacred and secular music. Another *sura* which is said to imply approval of music is, Chapter 39: Part 23: Verse 18-19), which says, "So give glad tidings to My servants, who listen to the Word and follow the best there of. It is they who Allah has guided and it is they who are men of understanding" (*Qur'an, Al-Zumar* [39]:17-19).¹ Some argue this concerns the singing of folk songs. Views and attitudes toward music vary from one Islamic country and historical period to another.³³ For example, music gained acceptance during the time of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Zayla, Safi al-Din and many other mediaeval Islamic writers, who regarded music as an indispensable part of human expression. In general, the Malay/Muslim population of Malaysia considers music as vital and necessary in both secular and religious aspects. Music is perceived by many Malays as having a positive spiritual value, especially if it is used in a devotional way, with moral meaning in its song-texts. Most Malay Muslims in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) do not consider music to be sinful (*haram*); on the contrary, it is praiseworthy if used in the correct Islamic context.³⁴ However, in some Malay/Muslim communities, music is regarded as profane, even though there is no clear explanation of *Qur'anic* prohibition with regard to music in the Malay context. Some Muslim clerics regard music as an unacceptable art form for the Islamic way of life and in two states (Kelantan and Trengganu) music is today considered as sinful (*haram*).³⁵ The status of stringed instruments is of special interest. They have also been the subject of debate in Islamic society. Some Islamic purists and theologians banned the use of stringed instruments and the *barbat*, and the *'ud* are listed among the forbidden instruments of Islam.³⁶ Paradoxically, the *gambus* is identified closely with the Islamic culture of the Malays. Heins described the *gambus* as widely used in Islamic religious music to accompany praise songs in Arabic or *Bahasa Melayu*. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1984: No.7: 142). The latest edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes the *gambus* as generally perceived in Indonesia as intrinsically Muslim "an icon of Arabic culture", and it is thus acceptable to many Muslims who would ordinarily frown upon secular entertainment (Philip Yampolsky: 2001: No.12: 281).

³³ See Baily (1988) and Shiloah (1995).

³⁴ Encik Yusnor Ef, a well-known composer, producer, music writer and Malay music critic with *Berita Harian* (Daily National Malay language Newspaper), explained that music is not proscribed in Malay-Muslim society. In a seminar he gave "*Ceramah: Apa yang Dikatakan Muzik Melayu*" 17th July 1999, at the Malay Village-Singgahsana Hall. Yusnof Ef acknowledged that the *gambus* is closely associated with Malay/Muslim society. He reiterated that if music is associated with erotic dancing and used in the company of wanton women or listened to with lyrics not compatible to Islamic teaching and used with the influence of drugs and alcohol then it is *haram* (sinful) in Islamic eyes (personal communication: 12th March 1997).

³⁵ In this paper I am not going to go into the discussion on Islamic censorship on music in Malaysia but I will only briefly touch on the situation regarding the recent rise in fundamental Islamic states in Peninsular Malaysia.

³⁶ See Shiloah (1989).

In the religious context, the *gambus* is used with Islamic singing (*nasyid*) and in solo performances (*taksim*) during *Awal Puasa* (the Muslim holy month of *Ramadan*), on the occasion of the *Maulid Nabi* (Prophet's Birthday), *Hari Raya Aidil Fitri Puasa*, *Hari Raya Aidiladha (Haji)* and also during the beginning of *Awal Tahun* (during the commencement of the Islamic calendar).³⁷ The *gambus Hadhramaut* is used as an accompanying instrument to verses from the *Qur'an* and also in performances of religious songs (*nasyid*).³⁸ Islam was also introduced through the *zapin* dance and various forms of group singing praising the Islamic God and Prophet Mohammad and Islamic warriors. Today these forms of entertainment are known as *hadrah*, *rodah*, *dabus*, *dikir* and *rebana* (Mohd. Ghouse: 1992). The *gambus* music (*taksim*) is used as interludes on radio and television just before prayer time, as is evident in the broadcasting of prayers on the mass media.³⁹ How can the *gambus* be representative of Islam if it is incompatible with Islamic philosophy? It is a very interesting and important question. Contrary to Islamic principles, the *gambus* is regarded as a "holy" instrument, comparable to King David playing the *harp* or *rebec* as described in the *Bible*.⁴⁰ There is a further symbolic meaning associated with the *gambus Hadhramaut*, its decorative sound-holes being representative of Islamic artistic expression.⁴¹ Some traditional *gambus* players hold the view that the sound produced on the *gambus* is identified with "holiness" and Islam because it reflects the "sound" of the "holy" land of the Prophet. There is evidence to support the fact that chordophones (*gambus/ud/rebec/lyre*) have an association with "holiness" and celestial powers (Shiloah:1995). Some Muslim

³⁷ *Hari Raya Aidil Fitri Puasa* is referred to, as *Eid* in some countries and *Hari Raya Aidiladha Haji* is the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca.

³⁸ Islam was also introduced through the *zapin* dance and various forms of group singing praising the Islamic God and Prophet Mohammad and Islamic warriors. Today these forms of entertainment are known as *hadrah*, *rodah*, *dabus*, *dikir* and *rebana* (Ghouse: 1992).

³⁹ The *taksim* is a tonal-spatial component of fixed scalar (melodic) structure played in free rhythm, a type of performance rooted in Arabic music. The *taksim* is highly motivic in nature, with characteristic short melodic passages being combined to form extended musical structures. Although microtones are used at times, the intervals do not have a completely fixed size when they are used according to the modal structure of the *taksim*.³⁹ The term *taksim* means "division" or "sections". The improvised melodic phrases are divided into sections, depending largely on the musician's ability, state of mind and circumstances and they give him the freedom to express his creative skills during the performance.

⁴⁰ The *Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Indonesian* translation of the *Bible (Alkitab)* describes *psaltery* and *rebec* as *gambus*. Refer to 1 Samuel 10, Daniel 3 in http://www.bit.net.id/SABDA-Web/1Sa/3_1Sa10.htm. This would imply that the word "gambus" may be a generic term to mean *lyre*, *psaltery*, both bowed and plucked lutes as described in the Malay and *Bahasa Indonesian* versions of the *Holy Bible (Lembaga Alkitab: 2001)*. The Jewish *Midash/Tora* associates Jubal with the invention of all musical instruments [Yuval] (The Jerusalem [Tora] Bible, Koren Publication, Israel, 1998, *Beresht*: 4:21). The Christian Bible mentions Jubal, as the father of such instruments as the *lyre (Holy Bible, New International Version, USA, 1983, Genesis: 4:21)*. The Arab Christian philosopher Hunayin ibn Ishaq (d.873) mentioned the cosmological association of the 4 strings on the 'ud to celestial imagery. Greek philosophers alleged the 'ud and its imagery as being in perfect harmony ruling the universe (Shiloah 1995). Also see Bachmann (1969); Brown (1979); Winternitz (1967); Woodfield (1984); Shiloah (1995) and Page (1997).

⁴¹ Green and Black are colours associated with Islam in Malaysia. These colours became representative of pan-Islamic distinctiveness and greatness closely aligned with the Islamic Empire of the Ottoman period. In Islam, green is the colour of plants and was thought to bring equilibrium, good luck, fertility and youth. Another significance of green is the colour of the Prophet's flag and the cloak of his son-in-law and successor Ali. In later times, green turbans were worn by the descendants of the Prophets and they believe the heavenly throne of Allah is said to be carved from a green jewel.

sources attribute the invention of the 'ud to Jubal's father Lamech (Lamak), son of Cain, [al-Mufaddal ibn Salama (d.830)] in his "*Kitab al-malahi*" (The Book of Musical Instruments) also by al-Djahiz (b.776 d.868-9) and Ibn Abd Rabhid (b.860 d.940). These arguments about the sanctity of certain stringed instruments contradict what Islamic jurists have said about them (Shiloah: 244:1979). One reason why the *gambus Hadhramaut* is referred to as a "holy" instrument is because it comes from the land of the Prophet, a place of central importance in Malay Muslim culture. However, this is not the case with the *gambus Melayu*, as this instrument is considered as being pre-Islamic and of Malay origin. To quote William Roff:

...the Malays had for centuries tended to look upon all Arabs, whatever their origin, as the direct inheritors of the wisdom of Islam, and on Sayyids in particular...as possessed of unexampled piety and religious merit.⁴²

Strictly speaking, historically and geographically the Hadhramaut, a region of Yemen where most Arabs living in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*) originally came from, is not part of the land of the Prophet. However, geographical accuracy is not the issue with the Malays, for they consider the Hadhramaut region as part of this area. Although, I have argued the importance of the role of the *gambus* in Malay society, the complicated question of whether music is considered sinful (*haram*) in the Malay/Muslim context is unclear. However, without any doubt, it can be argued that the *gambus* is certainly a symbol of Malay identity today and that to Malays it is symbolic of Islam. This is true not only for Malaysia but throughout the Malay/Muslim population of the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).⁴³ After independence in the late 1950s Malaysia had a rather secular character. Most Malays were not living a very strict religious life. Since then the attitude towards music has changed considerably, especially with the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. Malay/Muslim fundamentalists promote the conservative orthodox interpretation of Islam. They want an Islamic state based on the *Qur'an* and *hadith*. They wish to suppress and reject technology and "western" influence (McAmis:2002:80). The religious affairs department was established in every state in the Federation of Malaya in 1948. Today Muslims in Malaysia are subject to Islamic law under the jurisdiction of Islamic court or *syariah*. At the same time Islamic religious education has also been established in universities at departmental and faculty level. It was in the 1980's that an Islamic renaissance swept Malaysia, affecting Malays from all backgrounds and both sexes. The progression towards "more Islam" in Malaysia has been obvious since 1984. Decrees punishable by law of people caught preaching other faiths to Muslim were introduced in Selangor, Penang, Johor, Perak and Melaka. Muslims caught apostatising or preaching other religions to fellow Muslim faced whipping in Pahang state. In 1988 Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) announced that only Islam will be given air time over radio and television.

⁴² William R. Roff (1964:80), "The *Malayo-Muslim* World of Singapore at the close of the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIV.

⁴³ In West Kalimantan (Indonesia) the *gambus* is played with gongs and drums for dancing in some Muslim areas (Virginia Gorlinski: 2001: No.12: 353).

The recent emergence of a pan-Islamic identity has in many ways affected Malay cultural life, particularly in relation to women whose role in Malay social life has changed fundamentally in this new era. In 1990, Islamic Party (PAS-*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*) in Kelantan introduced the Islamic penal code (*hudud* laws). Dress code for Muslims and non-Muslims and Muslim women must cover everything except their faces and hands. Traditional games, music and cultural performances deemed indecent from Islamic standpoint were banned (Mutalib:1993). The rise of the Islamic political party in recent years has resulted in its establishing a political stronghold in the eastern states of Kelantan and Trengganu (Peninsular Malaysia).⁴⁴ In these two states music is generally looked upon as profane and against the teaching of Islamic principles. Music, including traditional Malay genres such as *mak'yong*, *dikir barat* and *wayang kulit*, is considered *haram* and these musical forms are now banned in these states. These genres are considered by the Muslim clerics of these Kelantan and Trengganu states as being pre-Islamic and incorporating Hindu elements in their art form. Hence, these traditional genres are now illegal in both states. The effect of increasing Islamic fundamentalism in Malaysia is evident in the role of women as *gambus* players. Today, *gambus* is played almost exclusively by men in Malaysia, although women used to play the instrument. With the revival of strong Islamic values, women are seldom involved in playing any kind of musical instrument; their role as performers is confined to singing in traditional music ensembles such as in *ghazal* groups and choir (*nasyid*). But there were a number of female *gambus* players in Johor during the 1950's, and their contribution to *gambus* playing was significant.⁴⁵

In Brunei, the *gambus* maker and performer Haji Ampon said that he first learnt to play the *gambus* from his grandmother, although he had not seen any other women *gambus* players. He said that over the last 25 years or so, women have not been encouraged to play the instrument because of a stricter form of Islam that has been introduced into the country.⁴⁶ Now the practice of Islam does not allow women to perform with men and does not encourage any kind of music-making amongst women in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). Today, Malaysia is fast moving towards establishing a stronger Islamic ideology and it remains unclear where the status of music and the *gambus* lie on the continuum between acceptance and rejection. The position of music in Malaysia needs to be made clear by the Malays if music is to be permitted to fulfill Islamic values in their modern country.

Conclusion

It can be argued that the emblematic representation of musical instruments such as *gambus kompang* and *rebab* and the musical genres such as *zapin*, *ghazal*, traditional *nasyid*, *naysid* pop, *marbahan*, *berzanji*, *selawat*, *zikir*, *qasida*, *rodat* and *hadrah* identifies with Malay/Muslim culture. To a large degree music provides an entertainment that is legitimized by its associations with the Arabic language and the land of the *Qur'an*. It seems that few young people today show interest in traditional

⁴⁴ On the contrary, Johor in 1914 became the first Malay state to organise Islam on a bureaucratic basis, followed by Kelantan in 1915. In Kelantan independent *sekolah pondok* (hut-schools) flourished in the early 1950's providing the anchorage for the growth of the Islamic Party (PAS).

⁴⁵ Personal communication with Pak Hassan bin Othman: 14th November: 2001.

⁴⁶ Personal communication with Haji Ampon: May: 1998.

music such as *ghazal*, *wayang kulit*, *asli* and other traditional art forms and in recent years Islamic fundamentalism designated some of these arts as essentially pre-Islamic and hence *haram* (Lockard: 1991: 43). Therefore, the place of music within Malay/Muslim society is ambiguous. Islam proscribes the use of instruments and music, but to most Malay/Muslims in Peninsular Malaysia, music is not seen as taboo. It can be argued that Islam has, since the 14th century, transformed the culture of the Malays, and that Islamic beliefs and ethos have become the foundation of their culture. Thus, in certain periods, Islamic religious leaders have condemned traditional music as being *haram* and inconsistent with an Islamic way of life. It can be argued that the Melayuness in *gambus* musical genres such as *zapin* and *ghazal* are distinctly different from these forms in India, Persia or Arabia and have become a manifestation of Malay culture.

In the search for a national music, the emblematic representation of musical instruments such as *gambus*, *kompang*, *rebab* and its musical genres like *zapin*, *ghazal*, *nasyid*, *rodat* and *hadrah* can be seen as portraying both Melayuness and also a Malaysian identity that would represent the people of all ethnic groups living in Malaysia. This study has shown that certain traditional musical genres and musical instruments are considered as an expression of both local as well as national music, together with the *gambus* as some of the emblematic representations of national identity. Today in Malaysia, “cultural space” may be impinged by the rise of Muslim fundamentalism especially in the eastern states of the Malay Peninsula. Not only has it got to confront with the growth of Islamic fundamentalism but tradition music also have to compromise with modernization and the encroachment of popular culture on its cultural space. Certainly the speed of modernization reflects social changes. Industrialisation, commercialisation and massification of popular and process cultures reflect economic growth, progress and development of nation building. But this in turn and with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism blurs the very existence of traditional music, hence violating the cultural space coming from two extreme polarities.

Certainly, with regards to the *gambus*, the emblematic representation is closely intertwined with Islam. In short, both types of *gambus* were later modified and adapted to have regional characteristics and an identity that is today representative of Malay cultural heritage. This research has shown that *gambus* instruments of both types are used in Muslim communities of the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).⁴⁷ It can be argued the *gambus* is now the manifestation of the Malay/Muslim tradition through adaptation, modification and interaction with Arabic custom, culture and religion. To quote Mohd. Anis Md. Nor, “Arab material culture is a source of authority and legitimacy in defining the realm of Malay Islamic culture in Malaysia” (1993:4). Capwell concludes: “Because of its evident “Arabic” derivation, the *gambus* has also come to represent the cultural orbit of Islam for many Malay Indonesians and in so doing has taken on a somewhat stronger religious aura in its new surroundings” (1995:85). This certainly explains the importance and prestige of the Arabian ‘*ud* (*gambus Hadhramaut*). The name *gambus*

⁴⁷ The *gambus*-type instruments must not be confused with the two-stringed lute instrument (*hasapi*) played by the *Batak* people of Sumatra. The *Bataks* are mostly Christians with some pagans. This research did not investigate the *hasapi* because it is a boat-lute and it is not played by the Muslim *Orang Melayu* grouping.

has been generally given to both kinds of lute, without any distinction, as they have existed side by side in the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*).⁴⁸

The language, customs, music and culture of the Malays in Peninsular Malaysia are held up as a model of Melayuness and have now developed and incorporated the whole range and styles of regional variations from the Malay world (*Alam Melayu*). Hence the absorption of each other's cultures, the music of *gambus* and, most importantly, the binding force of Islam has brought the *Orang Melayu* people together through a sense of shared cultural experience. The music of the *gambus* has been acknowledged as belonging to the wider pan-Malay culture without the blandishment of any nationalistic feelings or political definition but uniting the Melayu groupings in, amongst other things, their performance of *gambus* music. Today, both types of *gambus* and its musical genres act as powerful emblematic representation of Malay glory and pride tied to their culture and religion.

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⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that Farmer mentions that the words *barbat* and 'ud were synonymous in the 11th century as well. This is apparent from the writing of Shifa of Ibn Sina d.1037 (*History of Arabian Music*, 1967). It is also interesting that the philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who was born in Persia in 980 A.D. was the only writer who used the Persian term *barbat* to describe the lute with a frontal string holder in *The History of Musical Instruments* (Sachs: 1940: 253). It could be argued that these lutes (*barbat*, *qanbus* and 'ud) were all referred to in Malay by the generic term "gambus", as they became part of the Malay musical culture.

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