

**The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,
Union Theological Seminary, New York**

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 4

Finding Aid for

Munshi Abdullah Papers, 1918

Finding Aid prepared by: Debbie Liu, March 2012
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Summary Information

Creator: Munshi Abdullah, 1797 – 1854
Title: Munshi Abdullah Papers
Dates: 1918
Abstract: Munshi Abdullah, also known as Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir was a writer, interpreter, and translator of Malay. Abdullah spent a significant amount of time in Singapore as interpreter and tutor of Malay to Indian soldiers, British and American Missionaries. Collection includes a 335 page typescript titled, *The Autobiography of Munshi Abdullah*. It is translated from the Malay by W.G. Shellabear and published in 1918.
Size: 1 box, 0.25 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

- Provenance: Originally part of the independent Missionary Research Library, these records were moved with the MRL to the Brown Memorial Tower of Union Theological Seminary in 1929. In 1976 the records were accessioned to the Burke Library archives with the closure of the MRL.
- Access: Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions: The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation: Item description, MRL 4: Munshi Abdullah Papers, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Munshi Abdullah (1796-1854), born Abdullah bin Abdul Karir, was a writer, teacher, and translator of Malay, the national language of Malaysia. Abdullah was born in the Malaysian state of Malacca and spent a significant amount of time in Singapore as an interpreter and tutor of Malay to Indian soldiers, British and American Missionaries. His writings are considered to be highly influential and mark an early stage in the departure from classic to modern Malay literature. Munshi Abdullah is best known for his journalistic approach and colloquial style about the life and times of the Malay people. His most famous publication, *Hikayat Abdullah* (*Abdullah's Story*), was written between 1840 and 1843 and was published in 1849. *Hikayat Abdullah* was one of the first Malay texts published commercially.

At age 13, Munshi Abdullah began teaching and writing Koranic texts to Indian soldiers of the Malacca garrison stationed at the Malaccan Fort. From these soldiers he was given the Malay nickname "Munshi", or teacher of language. In December 1810, Abdullah was hired as a copyist and scribe for British East Indian Administrator and founder of the port City of Singapore, Sir Stamford Raffles.

From 1815, Abdullah worked as a translator for the London Missionary Society, translating the Gospels into Malay as well as teaching the language to British missionaries. In 1819, he arrived in Singapore to begin work as an interpreter and taught Malay to British and American missionaries and Indian soldiers. Additionally, Abdullah also occasionally served as a secretary to Sir Stamford Raffles and was a printer to the press for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Singapore.

Sources:

Abdullah, Munshi. *The Hikayat Abdullah. An annotated translation by A. H. Hill*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1970.

Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir,”
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/959/Abdullah-bin-Abdul-Kadir> (accessed March 20, 2012).

Singapore Infopedia, s.v. “Munshi Abdullah,”
http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_503_2004-12-27.html (accessed March 20, 2012).

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection includes two copies of a two volume typescript of the autobiography of Munshi Abdullah as translated from the Malay by W.G. Shellabear. Shellabear’s translated version of Abdullah’s autobiography was published in 1918 and consists of fourteen chapters.

Processing

Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes.

Further Sources

The main records of the ABCFM are held by the Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts and the following link is to the Finding Aid of that collection: <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hou01467> Microfilms of various sections of the Houghton Library collection, most commonly of the earliest pre-1919 correspondence, can be found in many academic libraries.

See Series: ABC 16.2: Southeastern Asia for information regarding the ABCFM’s mission to Singapore and mission records.

The Missionary Research Library at the Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary also offers a collection of ABCFM records. Please contact the archives if you would like to see these records at burkearchives@library.columbia.edu.

Contents list

Box	Folder	Contents
1	1-2	Volume 1, 1918
1	3-6	Volume 2, 1918