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Pertala Indera Boat : Historical and Cultural Aspects of Bird-Themed Boats in Kelantan, Malaysia <Special Theme : Material Cultural Studies on Boats and Fishing Tools Based on the Museum Collections and Fieldwork>

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## ***Pertala Indera* Boat: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Bird-Themed Boats in Kelantan, Malaysia**

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博物館資料としてのプルタラ・インデラ舟  
—マレーシア・クランタン州における鳥舟の  
歴史的・文化的背景をめぐる一考察—

モハメド・ナスラミアザム・モハメド・ナシール

*Pertala Indera* boats are known as traditional watercraft with an important relation to Malay historical circumcision ceremonies conducted along the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, especially in the state of Kelantan. The examination described in this paper correlates the historical culture of bird-themed boats that are prominent in the Kelantan palace while touching on aspects of the decorative properties of the boat, particularly the bow, which extends to a bird-like head. This explanation presents a new discovery that the *Pertala Indera* boat collections at both the Malaysian Museums and National Museum of Ethnology in Japan (Minpaku) include model boats adapted from the original boat used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They come with a few minute differences such as their size, decoration, carving motifs, and usage. Most were built in the 1980s. The paper also presents discussion of the interesting collection of *Pertala Indera* boats at the Minpaku and the possible new origin of this boat as Kelantan based on the author's interview surveys. Based on findings from fieldwork and contact with people across the Kelantan River, especially during the 'bah' (flood) season, some evidence suggests *Pertala Indera* boats as important objects in the cultural history of Kelantan, but they were never used for circumcision ceremonies for the royal family of Kelantan unless a royal boat was used only once in the history of the Malay Sultanate of Kelantan. However, to date, the existence of *Pertala Indera*

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**Key Words** : material culture, museum collections, Peninsular Malaysia, *Pertala Indera* boat  
キーワード : 物質文化, 博物館資料, マレー半島, プルタラ・インデラ舟

boats is still regarded as important material evidence symbolizing the cultural glory of the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent rulers.

プルタラ・インデラ舟は、マレー半島東岸の中でも特にクランタン州におけるマレー文化と密接にかかわる重要かつ伝統的な船舶の1つである。本稿はこの鳥型の舟に関する歴史文化的側面を紹介しつつ、その特徴的な形態の中でも鳥の頭頂部を模した船首や尾を象徴した船尾における装飾についても論じる。さらに本稿では、マレーシアにおける博物館や国立民族学博物館（みんぱく）に所蔵されているプルタラ・インデラ舟が、20世紀前半に実際に利用された舟を忠実に模した模型として1980年代に制作された可能性を明らかにした。また民博に所蔵されているプルタラ・インデラ舟の製作地がクランタン州であったこと、さらにクランタンではプルタラ・インデラ舟が割礼儀式には一度も使用された記録がないことを指摘した。むしろプルタラ・インデラ舟はクランタンにおいて、王族たちが洪水の際にクランタン河を行き来するさいに利用した船舶であった可能性が高い。しかしプルタラ・インデラ舟は、20世紀初頭のクランタンにおけるスルタン・ムハンマド4世および彼以降の王族たちにおける栄光の歴史や文化を象徴する物質文化として今なお貴重な資料であり、かつマレー文化の影響を強く受けた船舶である点について総合的に論じた。

1 Introduction	4 Comparison of the Minpaku <i>Pertala Indera</i> Boat with the Malaysian Museum Collections
2 History of the <i>Pertala Indera</i> Bird in Kelantan	5 New Information about the Minpaku <i>Pertala Indera</i> Boat
3 <i>Pertala Indera</i> Boat in the Kelantan Palace	6 Discussion and Conclusion

## 1 Introduction

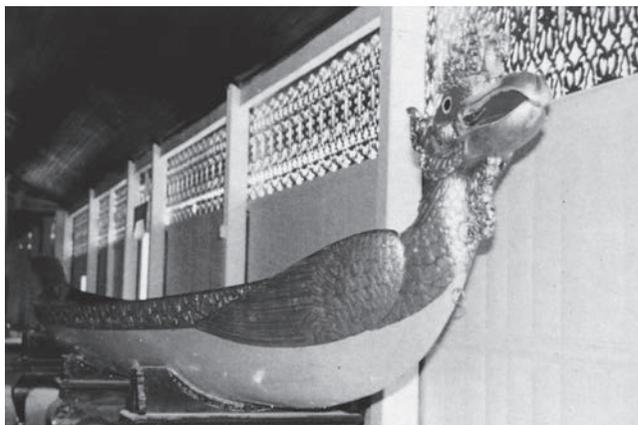
The Malay people residing along the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia have generally been described as a maritime society sharing a close cultural relation with boats. It is readily apparent that some cultural items of the region are related to boats and the sea. Boats, or *Perahu* in the local tongue, are regarded as a symbol of closeness between the people and the sea. It is an important part of their livelihood to an extent where boat-related influences blend in with the people. Therefore, the importance of boats to the maritime society can be illustrated through the implementation of symbols that correlate to architecture and carvings which include handicrafts, residential architecture, and weaponry.

Along the East Coast of the peninsula, the people have maintained an intimate

relation with boats and the sea. They share an abundance of similarities especially involving fishing techniques, boat designs, decorations and rituals, and as one might expect, almost anything involving boats and the sea. Apart from their usage in economic practices for the fishermen, boats are also revered as a status symbol by the rulers. In Kelantan, boats are often regarded as official means of transportation for royalty in certain rituals, especially for the *sultan* (king) and the *Raja Perempuan* (queen) of Kelantan. Coatalen (1982) elucidated that Kelantanese society has boats of four types: the *Perahu Raja* (royal boat), *Perahu Lumba* (Race boat), *Perahu Nelayan* (fishing boat), and boat models used for shamanic rituals. This finding indicates that boat culture is shared not only among commoners; it also involves royalty and governing bodies.

Based on that understanding, this paper presents specific examination of *Pertala Indera* boats, which are known as bird-themed watercraft with an important relation to Malay historical culture related with circumcision ceremonies conducted along the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula, especially in the state of Kelantan. The birds are animals that have beautiful plumage and magnificent beaks. At the same time, the birds are often associated with myths and beliefs as *Garuda* belief in traditional Malay literature. The bird symbol in the art of wood carving might have started in the pre-Islamic era. It has a concurrent history with early Malay kingdoms such as *Funan*, *Srivijaya* and *Langkasuka* (Noor and Khoo 2003).

Generally, the *Garuda* or bird boat in Kelantan is known as '*Pertala Indera*' which refers to a boat owned by the sultan of Kelantan, Sultan Muhammad IV (Photo 1). The first *Pertala Indera* boat was built during the reign of Sultan Mansor and was completed during the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV in 1900. The motif of the *Garuda* figure in the Malay world constitutes one theme for motifs of pre-Is-



**Photo 1** Kelantanese royal boat called *Pertala Indera Sri Kelantan* or *Sri Mahkota* (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports Malaysia 1986)

lamic times. Among local residents, the name *Garuda* was in line with *Geroda* or the *Gagak Sura*. When associated with royalty and nobility, the *Garuda* is known as *Pertala Indera*. Conceptually, *Indera* refers to *Dewa Indera* (Vedic deity in Hinduism), which is at the top of the Vedic hierarchy. This reference is associated ultimately with Hindu mythology that describes the role of *Garuda* as a vehicle for *Dewa Wishnu* (Vishnu).

After the use of the first *Pertala Indera* boat by Sultan Muhammad IV in 1900, the *Garuda Pertala Indera* bird procession was held three times in conjunction with the circumcision ceremony of the King of Kelantan and his brothers (Mohammed 1991) in 1919, 1923, and the last time in 1933, but according to Sheppard (1971) the procession of *Burung Pertala Indera* was performed twice in conjunction with the royal circumcision ceremony in 1923 and 1933 (Photo 2). After these ceremonies by the King of Kelantan, the *Garuda Pertala Indera* boats apparently became an important ceremonial boat and a royal boat in Kelantan.

Based on historical records, the existence of this *Pertala Indera* boat began much earlier than the circumcision event using a cart or stretcher of the *Garuda* bird (*Pertala Indera*), which took place in the history of the Kelantan Sultanate. The boat was built at the end of the reign of Sultan Mansur, probably in 1899, and was completed in 1900 during the reign of his successor Sultan Muhammad IV. Although not recorded in the history of the evidence circumcision ceremony by boat *Pertala* sense, this boat is likely to be important material evidence related to the belief system and the high art of Kelantan Malay society, especially in connection with royalty. Furthermore, the existence of this royal boat is linked to the background of the time where the main communication system is through the river or sea. Therefore, it is suitable with the status of the royal family: the *Pertala*



**Photo 2** *Pertala Indera* bird during the circumcision ceremony of the Princes of Kelantan in 1923 (Noor and Khoo 2003)

*Indera* boat became the most powerful and beautiful water vehicle of its time, surpassing all water vehicles available in Kelantan at that time.

A small *Pertala Indera* boat model (Photo 3) is also stored at National Museum of Ethnology, Japan (Minpaku). This boat collection was purchased at Kuala Terengganu in 1990. The inventory collection data by Minpaku noted that this boat was produced in Besut district in Terengganu during the 1950s. The boat had been used for a long time for the circumcision ceremony of the royal family of Terengganu. The Besut district is located in the north part of Terengganu. It faces the border of Kelantan (Map 1).

As described above, the use of a *Pertala Indera* boat for circumcision ceremonies of the royal family is well known in Kelantan state. Therefore, if the inventory collection data of the Minpaku are correct, the boat in Minpaku can be an important material to indicate that such a circumcision ceremony tradition using the *Pertala Indera* boat was also practiced in Terengganu. Seeking more details of the *Pertala Indera* boat of the Minpaku, the author conducted two fieldwork investigations and interviews with the founder of *Seni Ukir Bakawali*, who is a wood carving teacher and a living heritage figure in the field of wood carving in Malaysia. To obtain more detailed data for the history and decoration of the *Pertala Indera* boats including the Minpaku collection, the author conducted field studies in Kampung Raja, Besut (Map 1), Terengganu in June and in December of 2020. The



**Photo 3** *Pertala Indera* boat at the Minpaku repository during a visit and observation by the author (Photo by Rintaro Ono in February 2020)



**Map 1** Peninsular Malaysia and States of Terengganu and Kelantan  
 (Adapted from [www.worldatlas.com/maps/malaysia](http://www.worldatlas.com/maps/malaysia); accessed on July 21, 2022)

main purpose of the field studies was to confirm the origin of the Minpaku *Pertala Indera* boat building that occurred in Kampung Raja, Besut, Terengganu (Map 1). In addition, the author examined the decorative patterns and carving motifs found on the Minpaku *Pertala Indera* boat, which is said to have the same characteristics as some *Pertala Indera* boat models as those in several museums in Peninsular Malaysia. To obtain data effectively, the author also uses ethnographic research methodologies.

As described herein, the author first presents the history of *Pertala Indera* boat in Kelantan and its traditional use for circumcision ceremonies of the royal family, and then compares the *Pertala Indera* boat collection at the Minpaku with five similar collections at museums in Malaysia. The author also reports new informa-

tion that might be related to the Minpaku boat based on interview surveys for additional discussion. This study specifically examines the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV (1899–1920) and subsequent eras.

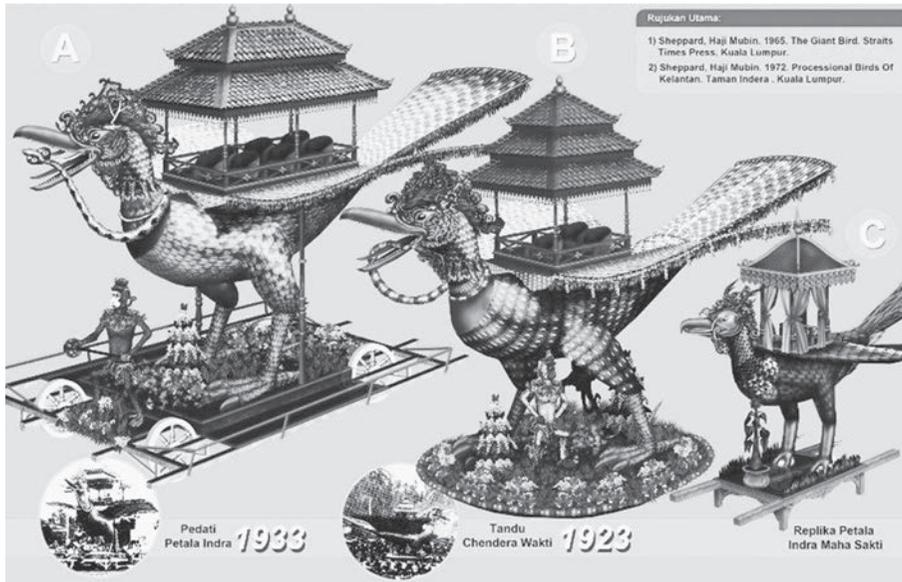
## 2 History of the *Pertala Indera* Bird in Kelantan

The giant *Pertala Indera* bird is produced specifically for the procession of the prince for the circumcision ceremony. These *Pertala Indera* were used as vehicles and were pulled in a royal procession watched by all common people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 1, Photos 2 and 4). The use of birds as vehicles is regarded as having symbolic meaning of a ruler's position and power. Oral history sources relate that the *Pertala Indera* bird guards the state of Kelantan. The story of this bird appears in the dream of the Sultan of Kelantan. Based on the dream of Sultan Muhammad IV, he ordered dignitaries to build a vehicle in the shape of a *Burung Pertala Indera* for the circumcision ceremony procession for his sons.

The design of this bird took three months to complete. The carriage height in 1933 was 20 feet (Photo 4). *Cengal*-like wood was used to make the frame. It was



**Photo 4** *Pertala Indera* bird during the circumcision ceremony of the princes of Kelantan in 1933 (Noor and Khoo 2003)



**Figure 1** Illustrations of *Pertala Indera* and *Chendera Wakti* bird carriages in 1923 and 1933 (Photo courtesy of Persatuan Pencinta Sejarah Kelantan 2017)

then covered with velvet cloth and colorful paper. Thousands of thick paper sheaves were cut into a shape resembling feathers and were glued to the entire body of the bird. In the mouth of the bird is a snake carved as if it were being chewed by an eagle; a white monkey is placed near the bird's feet. The bird is placed on a special platform made of wood and is placed on a round bamboo so that it is easy to hit. This bird is described as a mythical bird and as a symbol of a vehicle used by Vishnu: a Hindu deity. This bird is picked up by no fewer than 100 people in rotation from the site of the bird sanctuary to the Great Hall Palace: a trip which takes 3 hours. The children of the king who rode this bird were dressed in clothes made of silk, pendants, *dokoh*, *pontoh* bracelets, and a *keris*. All the utensils were made of gold; the crown prince also wore a ceremonial crown on his head.

On the back of the *Pertala Indera* bird replica is a painted wooden pavilion or *wakaf* and a two-layer *singgora* roof, with two buttons with carved scales of dragon suckers along the roof rafters and sweeteners. The pavilion accommodates six people as passengers.

The chair on *Pertala Indera* in year 1923, however, had a three-layer pavilion roof in the shape of a Mount Meru pyramid with one *buton* (stupa). The bird's beak is painted as gold color, with ivory-colored fangs. Its still open beak is biting a venomous snake, which known as *Bora* (giant) Dragon snake, which is wrapped around the neck of the *Pertala* bird. Eyes are made of gemstones. The balloon is

made of bright sparkling tinsel paper. The hair on his head and throat is from a collection of various colors of velvet and silk. His head was carved and built beautifully. Each frond of the bird shape is cut carefully from brightly colored paper. The paper shines brightly when exposed to refracted glare of sunlight. Its wings and tail are arranged in rainbow colors. In addition to the statue of the *Pertala* bird with it, there is also a statue of a monkey wearing a small crown on its head. It resembles dancing or guarding the prince who is in the Pavilion and the *Petala* bird. This giant bird parade event first took place in 1923, where two eagles were formed and named *Pertala Indera* and *Cendera Waktu*. In 1933 only one bird was used: the *Pertala Indera Kuda Terbang* (flying horse) (Sheppard 1971).

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the parade of *Pertala Indera* birds also took place in Pattani (Thailand) with the use of a giant bird of equal size to that of the *Pertala Indera* bird which was built for the circumcision ceremony for the royal family of the Kingdom of Pattani at that time (Photo 5). Because the heir to the throne of the Kelantan Sultanate is from Pattani, it is not impossible for this culture and tradition to have been brought to Kelantan after the fall the Pattani Kingdom to Siam (Thailand) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This sculpture of the head and tail of the *Gagak Sura* (raven) has been immortalized by the famous Malay woodcarving master Nik Rashiddin as material cultural evidence and a reference to the parade events that took place in Pattani (Photo 6). It is particularly interesting that the giant bird produced in the history of Pattani is better known as the *Gagak Sura*,



**Photo 5** The *Gagak Sura* from the nearby Pattani Kingdom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Pertala Indera* bird's predecessor (Noor and Khoo 2003)



**Photo 6** Sculpture of the head and tail of *Gagak Sura* at the Nik Rashiddin Academy in Kandis, Kelantan, Malaysia (Photo by the author in 2015)

which is more similar to the head of the *Pertala Indera* bird found on the *Pertala Indera* boat models found in many museums in Malaysia, including Minpaku.

### 3 *Pertala Indera* Boat in the Kelantan Palace

As noted in the introduction, the first *Pertala Indera* boat was built during the reign of Sultan Mansor. It was completed during the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV in 1900. It is 25 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 14 inches high. The boat is carved almost entirely with an image depicting a bird known as *Jentayu* or *Garuda* that is hovering in the water. The name for this boat is '*Pertala Indera Seri Kelantan.*' The head and tail are coated in gold. Its beak and tusks are made of an alloy of gold and copper (Photo 7), called *suasa* in the Malay language and *tuasa* in Kelantanese (pronounced *tosa* in the local tongue). Along the edge of the boat is a rope ornament engraved with the *dala* leaves (*Crataeva macrocarpa*).

In view of material culture, this boat shows quality and high expression of the Malay carvers at the time and the subject of a mythology and a high status (king). Each engraving and motif found on the head and the entire body of the boat clearly reflects the philosophy and beliefs of the community, especially the nobility of the spiritual and mystical. This boat is loaded with complex and unique decorations making it the only iconic royal boat during the reign of the Kelantan Sultanate.



**Photo 7** The bow of the *Pertala Indera* boat, which was inspired by the mythical *Jentayu* bird in the *Ramayana* epic (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports Malaysia 1986)

Although it is said to have been used only once in the royal history of Kelantan, this object has formed a strong tradition that influences the style and form of boat decoration in Kelantan. Molded motif craftsmanship from the boat artisans in Kelantan and Pattani indirectly gives the impression that traditions and beliefs of the elite of the pre-Islam concepts were still strongly influential in Kelantanese Malay society during that period. These beliefs are also related to the great kingdom of Langkasuka.

Other writings about the history of Kelantan include earlier information about the *Pertala Indera* boat, although it is never stated that the boat was used for circumcision ceremonies. According to Graham (1995), the *Pertala Indera* boat was used only once during the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV. It was used by His Majesty as a boat for sightseeing on the Kelantan River. It is kept even today in the *Istana Balai Besar Kelantan* palace, although it is no longer used for any ceremony. One unique point of the boat is that the boat hull is decorated with a plate enameled with *Jawi* inscriptions that read “*Ini perahu Raja Kelantan yang dinamakan dia Petala Sri Kelantan fi Rabia awal sanat 1319 [This is the boat of the King of Kelantan dubbed Petala Sri Kelantan completed on 1319AH (1900)]*” (Photo 8). This script describes the ownership of the boat and the year the boat was completed: 1900.

This boat is used once a year by the king and queen along with princes and princesses who also participated during the rainy season, especially when there was a flood situation (Coatalen 1982). Usually, the Malays in Kelantan held a ‘ceremony’ called ‘*main bah*’ or ‘playing with the flood.’ In the old days, when there was a flood, the commoners consisting of girls and boys came out in beautiful clothes to get together in the rain. This practice also provides an opportunity for the



**Photo 8** *Jawi* inscription plate on the *Pertala Indera Sri Kelantan* boat (Coatalen 1982)

general public, especially the youngsters, for matchmaking and getting to know each other. This statement strengthens the argument that the *Pertala Indera* boat was never used for circumcision ceremonies and that it is intended for the exclusive use by the king and his family to sightsee during the monsoon season across the Kelantan River. In the Kelantan cultural history, it has been proven clearly that the circumcision vehicle for the prince and his younger brother is the *Pertala Indera* bird procession, which is in the form of a wheeled land vehicle pulled by almost 100 strong and brave guards.

Another decorated boat, called *Pertala Wakti*, was bequeathed officially by a representative of the king of Siam named *Phya Sukhum* to Sultan Muhammad II in 1846 (Photos 9 and 10). The *Pertala Wakti* was produced in *Pattani* and was then brought to Kelantan via Kuala Besar. Taking its name in conjunction with the representative of the king of Siam, the boat was named *Phya Sukhum* before Sultan Muhammad II changed it to *Pertala Wakti*. The 45-foot-long bow of the boat has been carved to resemble a duck head (Peking duck). Both boats were used to greet Siamese government officials from Bangkok who came to visit Kelantan. These two boats are used to take the sultan and the royal family to go on holiday along the Kelantan River once a year (Coatalen 1982). The interesting aspect of these two ornate boats is a symbolic characteristic of the name and carvings on them. Symbolically, the name *Pertala Indera* reflects a masculine nature, whereas *Pertala Wakti* represents femininity. The selection of names for the boats is based on the names of mythological birds of the celestial realm: the highest level in the universe. The boat is actually a symbol of the position and power of the king's rule.



**Photo 9** *Pertala Wakti* boat (*Sri Kekayangan*) (Photo by the author in 2015)



**Photo 10** Royal barge journey down Kelantan River (Photo by Brus in 1980)

#### **4 Comparison of the Minpaku *Pertala Indera* Boat with the Malaysian Museum Collections**

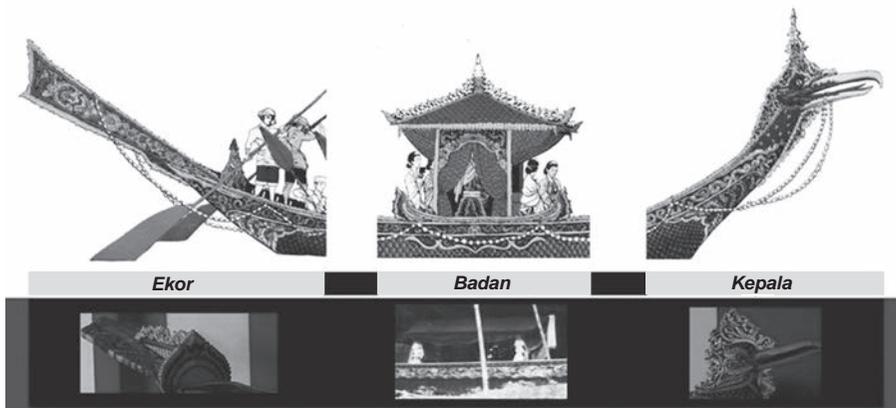
Generally, the shape and style of this boat are taken from the original model of the Royal Kelantan boat called *Pertala Indera*. In the pre-Islamic history of the Malays, the ship is engraved with the figure of a bird's head, known as *Garuda* or *Gagak Sura*. The selection of the name of this boat is based on the mythological

bird: the vehicle of the gods which has always been in the highest celestial realm. This bird also symbolizes the belief that the position and power of the king are at the apex of every society. This belief is based on the legacy of the ancient Malay kingdoms, particularly the Langkasuka-Pattani governance during the pre-Islamic era.

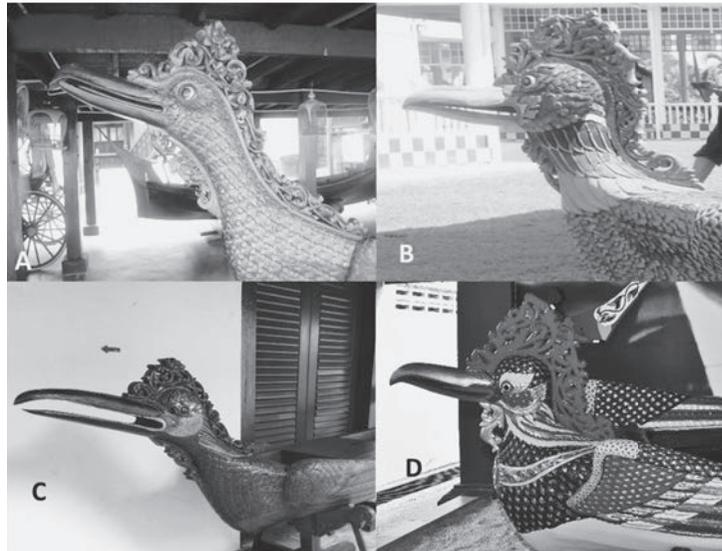
Physically, the boat is divided into three main parts: the head (bow), body (hull), and tail (stern). Referring to the illustration below (Figure 2), the original *Pertala Indera* boat can accommodate up to 10 passengers including the king and queen, as well as his princes and princesses. However, based on the author's direct observation of the *Pertala Indera* boat model stored at National Museum of Ethnology or Minpaku in 2020, it closely resembles the prototypes of *Pertala Indera* boats at the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur, the Kelantan Museum, the Pahang Museum, and the Melaka Museum of Ethnology (Photos 11 and 12). Now there are only seven such models of bird boats in the six Malaysian museums, as shown below.

1. Kelantan State Museum (2 boats – original and model) (Photo 11-A)
2. Pahang State Museum (1 model – *Pertala Wakti*) (Photo 11-B)
3. Melaka Ethnography Museum (1 model – *Pertala Indera*) (Photo 11-C)
4. National Museum, Kuala Lumpur (1 model – *Pertala Wakti*) (Photo 11-D)
5. Shah Alam Museum, Selangor (1 model – *Pertala Indera*) (Photo 12-A)
6. Fisherman Museum, Johor (2 model – *Pertala Indera* and *Pertala Wakti*) (Photo 12-B)

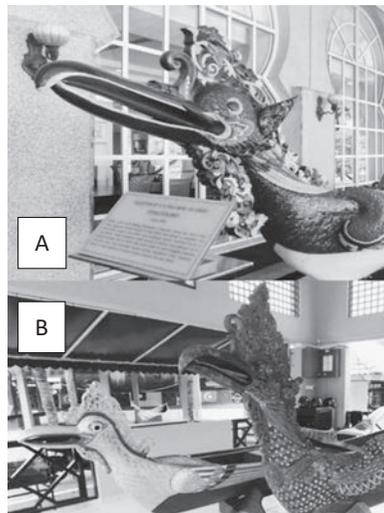
Among these models are two basic types as *Pertala Indera* and *Pertala Wakti* boats (Figure 3), although they are fundamentally similar in shape, size, and



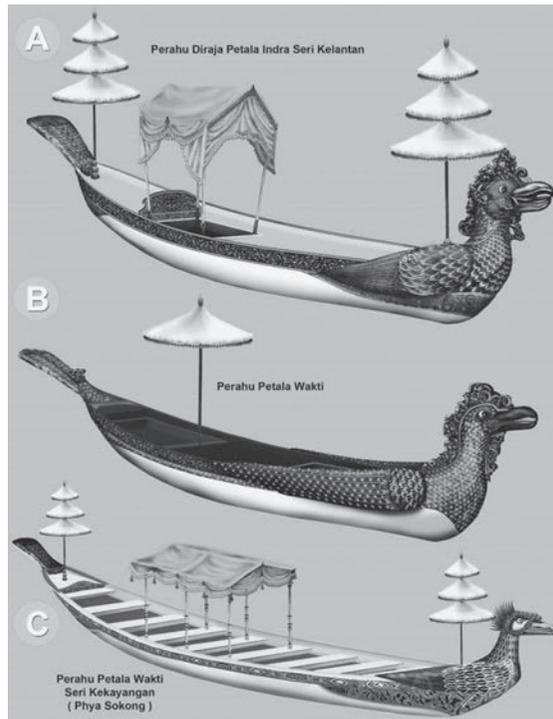
**Figure 2** Depiction of a real *Pertala Indera* boat (Photo courtesy of Kelantan State Museum 2015)



**Photo 11** Selective *Pertala Indera* boats in the Malaysian museums (All photographs were provided by the respective museums except the photograph of the *Pertala Indera* dan *Pertala Waktu* boat at the Kelantan and Pahang State Museums by Dr. Rohaizat and the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur by the author)



**Photo 12** The *Pertala Indera* boats at Shah Alam Museum (A), Selangor and Fisherman Museum, Johor (B) (All photographs were provided by the respective museums except the photograph of the *Pertala Indera* dan *Pertala Waktu* boat at the Kelantan and Pahang State Museums by Dr. Rohaizat and the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur by the author)



**Figure 3** Three Kelantan royal boat types are (A) *Perahu Diraja Petala Indra Seri Kelantan*, (B) *Perahu Petala Waktu*, and (C) *Perahu Petala Waktu Seri Kekayangan (Phya Sokong)* (Photo courtesy of Persatuan Pencinta Sejarah Kelantan 2017)

appearance. The only difference between the two is the shape of neck part, where the *Pertala Indera* neck looks longer and taller, whereas the *Pertala Waktu* neck is slightly shorter. In terms of motifs and decorative patterns, no great difference between these boats of two types is apparent (Figure 3). These boat modes are no longer produced now. The production of these boat models ended in the late 1980s. This cessation of production is attributable to several factors such as the lack of boat builders and sculptors who are skilled in making this type of boat. Secondly, the raw materials, especially wood, are an expensive type of *cengal* (*Neobalanocarpus heimii*). Thirdly, erosion of the elements of belief and love for the spiritual art eventually cause this object to be increasingly forgotten by society. They were no longer produced in 1990. Judged with the neck part of the Minpaku collection, we can identify it as a *Pertala Indera* boat.

This boat has been developed using a large piece of *cengal* wood. The maker will drill and shape the wooden plank so that it is formed into a boat. Parts of the boat hull will be carved by a sculptor to form the motif and shape or face of the

boat (Figure 4). Some accessories, such as the head carving, use the *pasak* (pegs) technique, which is to do installation without using nails from the same type of wood, which is *cengal* (*Neobalanocarpus heimii*). Carving techniques of at least two types were used by boat makers and carvers to produce the *Pertala Indera* boat at the Minpaku: embossed perforations (*tebuk timbul*) and perforated perforations (*tebuk tembus*). These techniques are very popular among Malay carvers in the East Coast, especially for creating sculptures that are flowers and plants.

Studies of the shape and variety of ornamentation on the *Pertala Indera* boat at Minpaku clearly reveal that the boat is a model boat with a real nature that is loaded with decorations and carved motifs deriving from the Kelantan–Pattani area. Apart from that point, the author also identified the two main techniques used by boat builders in producing ornaments and motifs on the boat. The first technique is perforation. The second is embossing. These techniques are very popular among Malay carvers, especially along the East Coast, for producing sculptures of the same type of small or large type objects. Moreover, the boat looks faded by time and weather factors, probably because the collector who previously owned this boat lived in a coastal area where the weather and temperature on the coast differ greatly compared to the rural areas or towns. Most materials made from wood are more sensitive. Therefore, after 10 years, the boat appears to have been used. The paint on the hull seems to have started to fade.

In the 1980s, several bird-themed boat models were produced by a boat sculptor in Pengkalan Kubur, Kelantan, Malaysia. These replicas were later purchased



**Figure 4** Names of curved parts of the Minpaku *Pertala Indera* boat (Photo by Rintaro Ono in February, 2020)

by collectors in Malaysia and Pattani, Thailand. The decorative themes and motifs found on these *Pertala Indera* boat replicas are influenced by the variety of decorations from the Pattani area, especially Teluban or Saiburi. In the view of Noordin, this is normal because the location of Tumpat (Kelantan) is indeed next to the southern border of Thailand. Moreover, the culture and tradition of the Kelantan people are similar to those of the Pattani Malay society. They do indeed share the same historical and cultural background because they are from the same ethnic cluster and lineage. Therefore, it is not a strange thing that the decoration, theme, motif and design of this boat have the same characteristics, known as the Kelantan–Pattani style.

## 5 New Information about the Minpaku *Pertala Indera* Boat

Next, the author reports field study results about new information of *Pertala Indera* boat collection at the Minpaku. Regarding general information of the inventory collection data of the Minpaku *Pertala Indera* boat (Table 1), it was purchased at Kuala Terengganu in 1990. The boat was made in the 1950s as a vehicle for circumcision ceremonies at Besut in Terengganu state. The author’s comparative investigations of the Minpaku collection with the seven Malaysian museum collections revealed similarities in size, shape, and carving techniques. Because the seven bird boat models in the Malaysian museums are just models and have never been used for a circumcision ceremony, it is highly probable that the Minpaku collection might never be used for a circumcision ceremony either.

**Table 1** Description of the *Pertala Indera* boat of the Minpaku

Name	Ceremonial boat for circumcision
Synonym	<i>Pertala Indera</i> boat
Local Name	Perahu Petala Indera
Place of location	Terengganu (East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia)
Place of production	Besut, Terengganu
Place of use	Kuala Terengganu
Description	Made in the 1950s. No longer produced at the time of collection (1990). Owned by the descendants of the family in Terengganu.
Condition	Used
Size	N. A.

Source: National Museum of Ethnology, Japan (Minpaku) inventory collection data

Furthermore, the author’s interviews with Mr. Norhaiza Noordin, a wood carving expert, newly confirmed that the boat was not produced in Besut, Terengganu, but was instead produced in Kelantan by the same manufacturer of the

models collected at the seven Malaysian museums. He also described that the *Pertala Indera* boat has never been used either in Kelantan or Terengganu for a circumcision ceremony. Many historical and ethnological sources indicate that the cultural ceremonies of boats were performed only by fishermen to worship the spirit of the sea and not for circumcision ceremonies. However, the activity was later banned by the Islamic Religious Department because it was against Islamic teachings. Consequently, the circumcision ceremony using the *Pertala Indera* boat in Terengganu was impossible. In addition, the Terengganu governor (sultan) has always very strongly adhered to the teachings of Islam and has opposed any form of behavior or activity that is against the religion.

The inventory collection date of the Minpaku noted that this *Pertala Indera* boat had been used by the royal family in Terengganu, but new information collected through interview research indicates that this boat had never been used in Terengganu. The inventory record provided by Minpaku clarifies that the *Pertala Indera* boat might be not owned by a descendant of the family in Terengganu, but it might be originally from Kelantan. The information by my interview also indicates that the boat was never used for any circumcision ceremony unless it was just a model boat produced by the maker, as inspired by the real *Pertala Indera Sri Kelantan* boat owned by the Sultan of Kelantan since 1900. Regarding the name of the family lineage, my survey in Terengganu confirms that no Sultan or king of Terengganu exists, although the descendants are actually from the Kelantan sultanate which derives from the Pattani royal family. Even the owner of the *Pertala Indera Sri Kelantan* boat, Sultan Muhammad IV, has an actual name that is descended from the family. Therefore, it is clear that the family used on the original inventory data of the *Pertala Indera* boat at the Minpaku actually has a factual error about the family history.

The use of the *Pertala Indera* boat in the circumcision ceremony, as noted in the Minpaku inventory data, is also a factual error. The author's field research confirms that *Pertala Indera* boat had been used only as a vehicle for the royal family to travel along the Kelantan River during the flood season and was used during the



**Photo 13** *Pertala Waktu Congkak* (Photo courtesy of Department of Museums Malaysia 2020)

'*Puja Umur*' ceremony or to celebrate the birthday of the Sultan of Kelantan in the past. Therefore, the inference of the *Pertala Indera* boat as a boat for the circumcision ceremony is not true. The author also found that there might be some confusion because the circumcision vehicle for the prince of the king of Kelantan is also called the *Pertala Indera* bird, even the name *Pertala Indera* is used interchangeably with other cultural objects including a congkak-shaped bird *Pertala Indera* or *Pertala Waktu* (Photo 13).

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

After observing the *Pertala Indera* boat, it was found to be an absolutely real model, but it was produced through the inspiration of the history of its usage in the Kelantan Malay community in the past. The boat, which has been used only once by the Sultan of Kelantan in 1900, was produced from the creativity of the sculptor and the builder. In fact, the *Pertala Indera* boat has never even used for the circumcision ceremony of the sultan's princes unless it was used by the sultan for sightseeing in the Kelantan River. In Kelantan, there is a wheeled vehicle in the shape of a giant bird, which is also known as the *Pertala Indera* used for the circumcision ceremony of the princes. Based on the testimony of Sheppard (1971), the circumcision ceremony for the princes of the king was held with a procession of giant birds designated as *Pertala Indera*, the flying horse and *Chendera Waktu*. The giant bird is inspired by the *Garuda*, which was turned into a wheeled vehicle pulled by almost 100 people.

In addition to that, the boat was designed imaginatively to depict a bird that is both magical and mythical based on the cosmological way of thinking of the community at the time. The bird was known to the community at that time as *Garuda* or *Jentayu*. It was given a particular name by the sculptors specifically for the king or a ruler. The given name was *Pertala Indera Seri Kelantan*, which is very close to the cultural background of the Malays of Kelantan. The theme or style of the *Garuda* is also often found in decorations on other material cultural objects in Kelantan such as on the *Kris* hilt of *Tajong* or *Pekaka*, *Kacip Pinang*, *Bangau* on boats, *Congkak* and shadow puppets. It is absolutely clear that the theme of *Garuda* is a main theme in art, especially in the Kelantanese Malay community in the past.

The *Garuda* design is one decoration that dates from the pre-Islamic era of the Malay Kingdom of Langkasuka (Noor and Khoo 2003). If traced from the context of material culture, there are some cultural objects, especially from Pattani or Kelantan, that use various *Garuda* ornaments. When studying ornate boats such as the *Pertala Indera* boat, one unavoidable point is the connection between boat making and the art of wood carving. It includes carving techniques, themes, and motifs used on carvings either on the body or head of the boat. Usually, the most important and meaningful part of the boat is divided into three: the head, body, and

tail. The decorations and carvings on each part will give a certain meaning or emblem to the owner and the community. Predominantly, the meaning or symbol of a motif or decoration on a sculpture is associated with the worldview or belief system of society at the time. The choice of the *Garuda* theme for the head of the boat by the sculptor or boat builder is based on expressing the beauty and aesthetic value inherent in each theme and motif produced.

Researching the *Pertala Indera* boat in Minpaku indirectly unveils elements of the belief of the boatman and the original owner of the boat to the *semangat* (spirit) or *roh* (soul) possessed by the boat. The concept of *semangat*, a major concentration in the belief system of the Malay community (Yusof 1992), is based on old beliefs that remain intact and which have a role in the daily life of Malays. In fact, the *semangat* concept is closely related to several other concepts such as soul and life. At the same time, *semangat* is a reflection of the ‘Malay soul’ combined with several faiths and religions that were adopted by the Malays in a long course of history, from the time of animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Referring to the *Pertala Indera* boat, the *semangat* concept can be found for the design of the boat, which is described as a *Garuda* accompanied by a specific name that is *Petala Indera*. It indirectly symbolizes the strong, powerful, and loyal spirit of *Garuda*, which in Hindu belief is the vehicle of the gods. Even during the time when the boat was manufactured, Islam already had a strong foothold in the community, but the elements of syncretism between ancient beliefs are ongoing in society at the time.

Based on analysis in the context of the cultural history of ornaments, one can recognize that almost all motifs and ornaments on the *Pertala Indera* boat paint a picture of the beliefs of the Malays in Kelantan at the time, especially the status and power of government. The head of the *Garuda*, which is used as the bow of the boat, clearly illustrates the impression that the boat is owned by someone in power and is in the highest position in society. In addition to that, only one *Pertala Indera* boat exists, in terms of its history, which was produced and kept in the palace. Therefore, the prototype of this boat indirectly gives a comparison that the *Pertala Indera* boat produced as a model or prototype cannot closely match the real *Pertala Indera* boat that belongs to the king or sultan of Kelantan. This boat derives from customs and taboos in the Malay culture. Any object or good owned by the king or sultan should absolutely not be similar to those owned by commoners. This orally formed taboo serves as a guide to the common people that they must abide by the customary rules which have been in place since time immemorial.

Kelantan’s cultural history also recorded that the depiction of the *Garuda* subject does not only persist on the head of the royal boat: it also appeared three times in 1919, 1923, and 1933 as a large vehicle in the shape of a *Garuda* that was used by the Kelantan Palace for circumcision ceremonies of the king’s children. The



**Photo 14** *Jentayu* (left) and *Garuda* (right) in Kelantan shadow puppet (Sweeney 1980)

vehicle, known as the *Pertala Indera Maha Sakti*, was also designated as ‘the giant bird’ by the community at that time. In addition, the *Garuda* character is close to the community, especially in Kelantan, because the image of *Garuda* often appears in *kelir* (shadow puppet screen) of the *Ramayana*-themed shadow puppets shows in Kelantan, better known as *Seri Rama* or *Wayang Kulit Kelantan* (Photo 14). In the *Seri Rama* text, the character *Jentayu* is known as the younger brother of *Garuda* who seeks to save *Sita* who was kidnapped by *Rawana*. Despite being killed at the hands of *Rawana*, *Jentayu* became the messenger to *Rama* and *Laksamana* to find the mastermind behind the disappearance of *Sita* (Sheppard 1972).

When examining the motifs on the *Pertala Indera* boat carvings, almost all motifs used to beautify the head, body, and tail of the boat are motifs that are often found on the carvings of other objects on the east coast. In revealing the motifs in Malay carvings, at least four major themes are often used. These motifs are closely synonymous with carvings on houses, boats, as well as agricultural and household equipment. By observation of the motifs on the *Pertala Indera* boat, the author found a combination of several elements of Malay motifs such as leaves, flowers, *Awan Larat*, and geometry. Each motif has a local name such as *Bayam Peraksi*, *Daun Meliding*, *Bunga Siantan*, and *Sulur*. This study also confirmed that these motifs are plants that grow around the residential areas or settlements of sculptors and boat builders. Therefore, the motifs on the boat reflect the special features of local art, especially in the coastal areas on the eastern coast of the Malay peninsula.

The traditional Malay art, or in a broader context of expressive Malay cultural traditions, transcends aspects of cosmology (Bujang et al. 1997). The cosmology in this context is channeled through the traditional Malay art, including the thoughts, worldview, and the Malay psyche. One manifestation of Malay art is apparent through carvings. In appreciating sculpture (in fine arts), the tools and functions of art are inseparable. The two merge and blend beautifully: they must be appreciated

as a pair. The artistic function found or built into a tool cannot be seen or appreciated separately from the function or the use of the tool (Jamal 1979). The elements or motifs that reflect the mind are the result of observation and sensitivity of Malay artists toward their surroundings (Yatim 2001).

In the historical development of Malay culture, aesthetic requirements in the production of art tools (material culture) exist when people first settled and raised a form of confidence that affects society. A belief exists that some powers control the course of human life. These forces must be worshiped and respected at all times to prevent disaster from occurring with society. The worship of this extraordinary power is done in various ways such as holding singing ceremonies, dancing, and giving performances placed in beautiful containers. The basis of this belief is that it produces all forms of handicraft art filled with decorative patterns reflecting the image that has long been established, adored, and recognized as belonging to the community. The creation of the artifact such as *Pertala Indera* boat is indeed closely related to the belief in power and spirit. Its creation clearly not only serves as a great and beautiful water vehicle. Its function also extends beyond the magical and spiritual aspects. The creation of a royal boat (*Pertala Indera*) is sort of a symbolization of the culture and cosmology of the Malay community.

Although the collection at the Minpaku is a model of *Pertala Indera* boat, it is also a 'recorder' of a history and culture of the Malay community in coastal areas of the East Coast. The main vision of the museum has assigned value to an object as a form of cultural material that gives meaning to the cultural needs of the people, especially the Malays. The king of Kelantan and the princes and dignitaries used to board the *Pertala Indera* boat as a vehicle to travel along the Kelantan River, especially during the monsoon season or '*bah*' (flood). The nature and shape of boats that resemble a *Garuda* or *Jentayu* are related to the concept of the vehicle of the gods, Vishnu or Indra, as influenced by Hindu beliefs in the past.

Through the history of the early kingdoms in Southeast Asia, almost all kings were associated with the concept of *dewa-raja* (god-kings), in which the rulers were regarded as being representatives of the gods. Therefore, evidence shows that *Garuda* sculptures are often placed together with *Vishnu* sculptures to emphasize the role of *Garuda* as *Vishnu*'s vehicle. At the same time, the use of the *Pertala Indera* boat is associated with the influence of the *Mahabharata* epic, which was adapted into a local version called the *Hikayat Ismu Dewa Pakerma Raja*, which was later made into one episode in the shadow puppet tales in Kelantan. However, the arrival of Islam to the Malay world isolated concepts associated with deities and Indian influences. For today's society, the *Pertala Indera* boat is regarded as a material cultural object in the context of sculpture alone without truly understanding the spiritual and historical meaning underlying its creation.

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