

## **Islamization in Southeast Asia :**

Reflections and Reconsiderations with Special  
Reference to the Role of Sufism \*

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In 1961 I published a paper on the islamization of peninsular and insular Southeast Asia [Johns 1961]. At that time it had seemed that there was a simple explanation to this vast, further expansion of the domain of Islam : it could be understood largely in religious terms reducible to a single factor, the appeal of Sufism to the peoples of those areas of Southeast Asia that now include the modern nation states of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Yet it could never have been as simple as that. Nothing ever is. There were political and economic factors involved. The facts of social life in the port cities of the island archipelago before Islam certainly included political structures of a certain sophistication. Urban activities inevitably had to be seen in reference to the position of the ruler and his entourage, a religious elite and religious institutions. The bureaucracy must certainly have included a harbour master and tax collectors. The security of the state would have required armed forces, however organised, on land and sea. Trades people would have included carpenters, ship-builders, weapon-makers, smiths and a range of service industries. There was a need for regular supplies of food—rice, vegetables, fish, and meat, which would have led to a merging of urban life with that of the rural hinterland. All these activities inevitably were among the challenges confronting the appeal and adaptiveness of the new religion.

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Islamization in this context should not necessarily be understood as synonymous with conversion, at least in the first instance. At this stage the word conversion is best avoided, for it has connotations of an individual choice of one religion rather than another on largely theological considerations such as one finds motivating religious change in the modern world, at least in the individualistic west. But were such unmixed considerations always the determinant factor? Is it not likely that religious change was gradual, and came about after a long process of association between local peoples and Muslims, beginning with curiosity, followed by a perception of self-interest leading eventually to attachment to and finally entry to that religious community, rather than a response on an individual basis to the preaching of a message? In the light of such considerations, my idea of the primacy of the mystical dimension of Islam in the Islamization of Southeast Asia needs re-consideration, and along with it a number of tacit assumptions as to the nature of Sufism and its relation to Islam more generally that lay behind it.

The end of the thirteenth century, which saw the earliest physical evidences of an Islamic port city in North Sumatra marked the beginning of a strong forward movement of Islam in the region. By this time *ṭarīqa* had become great international corporations, and were playing a major role in maintaining the unity of the Islamic world after the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258. In fact a process was in train which by the eighteenth century led Gibb to remark "membership of the religious orders was practically synonymous with the profession of Islam" [Gibb and Bowen 1957: 76]. When Ibn 'Arabi died in 1240, the monistic theosophy of the Sufi tradition was well articulated and widely diffused. This, together with the fact that the earliest extant MSS from North Sumatra, albeit some three centuries later, showed evidence of a strong concern with such a theosophy seemed to suggest a causal relationship between the development of theosophical Sufism and Islamization in our region.

This was after all a view to which my early research on Sufism in Sumatra during the Seventeenth century [Johns 1957] disposed me. I had at that time an enthusiasm for the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabi, doubtless imperfectly understood, for which such generalizations seemed to provide an acceptable social context, and was intoxicated by the writings of Nicholson and Massignon.

Ibn 'Arabi's visionary Sufism is indeed intoxicating. His philosophical monism expressed in the term *wahda al-wujūd* (the Unity of Being) transforms the emanational

ideas of Islamic Neo-Platonism into an extraordinary system of aspects and relationships, generated by the lines of force inherent in the Ninety Nine most Beautiful Names of God, vehicles of His power and being, names such as al-Rahmān (The Merciful), al-Hayy (The Living), al-Qayyūm (The Self-Subsistent) and al-Muhaymin (The Guardian). Even so such religious concepts were for a spiritual elite, not for every Muslim, and even with this qualification, they were not universally accepted.

Islamization is a word with a variety of meanings, depending on the mix of trends and tendencies within the world of Islam at any one time. Such trends and tendencies are responses to the internal and external challenges that Muslim communities have faced since the religion was first preached in Arabia, and which still continue. The division between Sunni and Shi'a, as a response to different views concerning the leadership of the community, is one example, but there are others which sometimes led to schism, at others resulted in no more than a shifting distribution of varying emphases in the formulation of doctrines on which all Muslims agreed. Examples of such issues can be seen in debates as to whether the interpretation of the Qur'an was to be literal or allegorical, whether rationalism or gnosticism should be the dominant characteristic of the religion, whether the Law or spiritual insight should have the primary role in determining its norms and ideals.

The spiritual dimension of Islam was from the beginning a central concern in my research. It lies at the heart of the development of what was later to be called Sufism. Central to this dimension is the longing for an experiential awareness of God, in Qur'anic language, a yearning to see His face. This yearning in the history of Sufism is expressed in different ways and associated with varying styles of spirituality and spiritual taste. They range from the severely ascetic and sober, based on techniques of self-scrutiny, to the ecstatic, induced by recitation of the Qur'an accompanied by music and dance leading to exuberances of theosophical expression. But these differences are not mutually exclusive, and there is a distribution of emphases within them and between them.

Such modes of spirituality are part of the general history of the Islamic peoples, Southeast Asia not excepted. This area of the world, however, presents special problems to Islamicists. One of the reasons is that Islamized Southeast Asia is a region without a stable urban tradition and in which the oral tradition is stronger than the literary. It is therefore difficult to bring to it the philological and historical

methodologies developed in the study of Islam in the Middle East or the Indian sub-continent. Thus scholars concerned with the traditional Islamic disciplines found little there of interest to them compared to the intellectual excitement to be derived from the literary traditions of South and West Asia. And many of the scholars who devoted themselves to the study of the history and society of Southeast Asia lacked a wider knowledge of the world of Islam, let alone an effective mastery of the Islamic disciplines, and tended to overlook the role Islam played in many areas of local life. The result was in many writings, a prominence given to issues such as “syncretism” and the “conflict” between adat and Islamic law, suggesting that these were distinctive of Islam in the region and not encountered elsewhere in the Muslim world.

In fact, the presence and role of Islam in Southeast Asia has been consistently underestimated. This is in part because in a number of critical regions, Central Java being a case in point, many cultural forms of the pre-Islamic past still have a vigorous life, notably the shadow theatre and the gamelan orchestra. Moreover, in the search for a classical tradition (every country has to have one!) the pre-Islamic archaeological and literary culture represented by monuments like the Borobudur and the retelling in old Javanese poetry or prose of episodes of the Hindu Buddhist epics from the pre-Muslim past have exercised a stronger appeal for philologists and scholars of religion than the living tradition of Islam, which for many lay unobserved. In addition, thanks to the tendency to regard Central Java as representing the core of insular Southeast Asian culture, Islam appeared to lack any legitimacy and cultural status, and was seen as a cultural blight that put an end to the splendour of Hindu Java. The presence of Islam was noted, and needed cursory reference, but often scholars were uncertain as to how to handle it, and so looked the other way.

This attitude was compounded by the currency of such terms as the heartland and the periphery of the Islamic world to refer to the Middle East and the Indonesian islands respectively—as though the further one got from Mecca the weaker Islamic faith and practice inevitably became. Such are the ways in which we are made captive to metaphors of our own creation!

A corollary of this has been that what passes for conventional wisdom concerning Islam there ranges from the bizarre to the patronizing. It is said, for example, that Javanese Muslims are tolerant, and do not exhibit the aggressive characteristics of

Middle Eastern Muslims because pre-Islamic beliefs are still strong, the implication being that the Javanese in revealing this dimension of tolerance are not behaving as Muslims at all, or that a tropical climate with its heavy rainfall, has dampened religious enthusiasm.

It is difficult to exaggerate how widespread such generalizations are, or how superficial. Tolerance and intolerance are not distributed geographically. There are in Egypt and Pakistan, for example, Muslims with a far broader range of religious sympathies than many Indonesians. There are Indonesians with a far more narrowly scripturalist understanding of the religion they profess than some Saudi Arabians. The reverse of course is also true.

If such were the views simply of European non-Muslims, it would be bad enough, but in fact one finds similar attitudes among Muslims in the Middle East who speak patronizingly of their co-religionists in Indonesia or Malaysia, as though to say, due to their distance from the Holy Land, they are not really Muslims, or at best, that their way of being so is so distinctive that there can be no strength of identification with them as fellow-members of the Muslim community.

A different perception, however, follows almost immediately from the adoption of a perspective other than that provided by the dichotomy between the heartland and periphery of the Muslim world, one that takes as its starting point a consideration of the active engagement of Southeast Asian Muslims in the commonwealth of Islam.

It is necessary, by way of example, to take account of their observance of the daily ritual prayer, the passage rites of circumcision, marriage and burial, and alongside these, those areas of life in which Islamic Law of the Shafi'ite school is applied, and the great annual events such as the Fast and the Pilgrimage. One should consider, likewise, their participation in revival movements such as that of the Wahhabis, or the reformist movement initiated by al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, or in the radicalization of Islam in modern times by Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb and Khomeini. One has to appreciate the part they played in the transmission, development and vernacularization of the Islamic disciplines in their part of the world: their knowledge of Arabic, the manuscript copies they made of authoritative Arabic texts before the advent of printing and acceptance of its use for religious works, and their competence in the Islamic disciplines. In addition, one can look to their association with outstanding teachers in other areas of the Muslim world, the part they played in the

Islamic commonwealth of religious scholars, and their preparation of text books for local conditions, making their own contribution to such disciplines as Qur'anic exegesis, dogmatics, jurisprudence and eschatology. Not least one should be aware of the implications of their adoption of the Arabic script to write their own languages. Finally one should take account of the establishment of Islamized forms of the state, and the role of sultanates in the region in the days before sultans were forced to give way—at least in some areas, to Colonels and Presidents.

It is only in such a wider context that the more specific question may be asked: how did they participate in the various Sufi traditions known in other parts of the Muslim world, share in and make their own contribution to the mystical dimension of Islam? It is in this context that one may ask whether there were any aspects of Sufism that facilitated the spread of the religion, or may have predisposed Muslims in the various areas of what is now Indonesia to being Muslim in one way rather than another. In this respect, the word "Indonesia" as the name of a modern nation state is an obstacle to a clear understanding of the processes of Islamization in the region. It is easily overlooked that the word had no political content before the early twenties of this century. The fact that it is an over-arching term does not imply any homogeneity in the regions it subsumes, and certainly does not wipe out a millenium and more of the histories of a variety of languages and cultures all important in their own right. People in different areas of what is now Indonesia naturally participate in the Islamic world in different ways.

It is from such a perspective that one should attempt to highlight the various aspects and emphases in the Islamization of the region from the time that it began. Self-evidently, it cannot be separated from the trading system of the Indian Ocean. As soon as Muslims took part in that system, and eventually they were to dominate it, a discreet, silent process of Islamization began, as Muslim trading communities became established at focal points along the northeast coast of Sumatra and on the Malay Peninsula, the north coast of Java, Borneo and the Celebes. Such points were convenient stopping places to exchange goods, to take on water and firewood and wait for a change of the monsoon, either to journey on to China for silks and porcelain, or to take on board spices and locally produced goods.

How long these communities had remained silent and discreet before appearing on the pages of history with a political profile there is little way of knowing, any more

than whether they formed settlements in areas largely uninhabited, to which they attracted other traders, or whether they formed autonomous quarters in already existing centres of population and trade. At any rate, as Muslims, they had their networks of international contacts within which business confidence was secure, due to the writing of contracts according to Muslim Law. Business confidence is infectious, and the association of non-Muslim peoples in the trading enterprises of Muslims with contracts written according to Islamic Law, followed by the growth, stability and prosperity of Muslim communities is a widely recognized mode of Islamization.

Now if Muslim communities are to function effectively as communities, they require the presence of '*ulamā*', those individuals trained in Islamic jurisprudence who understand the principles of contracts—whether for trade or marriages—, who can work out legal solutions to the conflicts that arise in any community, and who can perform the necessary astronomical calculations to determine the times for prayers, the approach of the fasting month, and the pilgrimage season. Such an elite, a class of scholars, have their own networks, both among themselves, the teachers from whom they had studied and acquired their legal expertise, or from whom they had been inducted into one or another of the great *tariqa*.

Once these things have occurred, there is already effective participation in the world of Islam, even if, in the thirteenth century, as far as Southeast Asia is concerned, documentation is sparse. But there is another development to take into account. By the thirteenth century, the new institution of the sultan had become well-established. The first ruler whose coins bear the title Sultan was apparently the Seljuq Tughril Beg 1055 [Hitti 1979:474]. From his time on, Sultanates sprang up like mushrooms in the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. Once the precedent had been established, any leader of a community who had established an adequate power base could, when he deemed the time ripe consolidate that power base by declaring himself sultan and claiming an area of territorial jurisdiction. A sultanate, barring coups and/or assassinations is a hereditary institution and given a measure of stability, and a succession of able rulers, is able to expand its area of authority. At some stage, this happened in Sumatra, and it is the culmination of a process of silent Islamization that is marked by the first evidence of a sultan in Sumatra, the grave stone of Sultan Malik al-Saleh at Pasai with an inscription giving as the date of his death a year corresponding to 1297 or 1307, depending on how the inscription is interpreted [Hall

1955:177].

Pasai was a harbour principality, and it is the establishment of such harbour principalities under a sultan with their religious and mercantile orientation across the Indian ocean that provide the political and economic mechanism for the further expansion of Islam. It is likewise this institution that provides the means of a closer relationship with other Muslims, and creates opportunities in the structure of the state for the establishment of religious schools, the participation in teaching of foreign with local '*ulamā*', and the creation of libraries.

If one asks whether during this period there is any direct evidence of Sufi involvement in the Islamization that had reached the level at which the leader of a Muslim community might declare himself Sultan, the answer is no. But if the question is put differently: what is the likelihood of individual traders and '*ulamā*' law brokers essential for business confidence being members of *tariqās*?, then by the thirteenth century, the answer must be that it is high, particularly if the trader, as so many of them were, was from Indian subcontinent. There is indirect evidence in the traditional stories that are elaborated in the court chronicles which attribute the coming of Islam to the preaching of itinerant holy men from abroad, one of them commissioned by Muhammad himself [Jones 1979]. But such stories are largely *ex post facto* fabrications.

There is evidence that the Pasai court was aware of personalities and events in other, older established centres of authority in the Muslim world. Fatimi [1963:11], using information provided by Hitti, has drawn attention to the possible significance of the name of the Pasai Sultan, Malik al-Saleh (as it is usually spelt in histories of Indonesia) mentioned above. This name, Fatimi points out, eponymous with that of the Ayyubid ruler al-Malik al-Salih (r. 1240-1249), who restored Jerusalem to Islamic rule in 1244. Might this not have been a reason for him on becoming or declaring himself Sultan, to adopt this name? It is possible to see a similar motivation in his naming of two of his sons Malik al-Zahir [sic] and Malik al-Mansur [sic], both eponymous with two near contemporary figures in the Middle East. al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars was the fourth Mamluk sultan (r. 1260-1277). He aspired to be a second Salah al-Din, and played a major role in blocking the Mongol's advance towards Cairo [Hitti 1979:656].

al-Malik al-Mansur (r. 1279-1290), was likewise a great anti-crusader, and the most

outstanding Mamluk figure after Baybars. He achieved such renown that even the ruler of Ceylon sent an embassy to his court with a letter no one could read!<sup>1)</sup> The correspondence of names may be coincidental, but it is not inherently unlikely that the Pasai Malik al-Saleh was sufficiently in touch with events across the Indian Ocean, mediated perhaps through trading contacts, perhaps through Pasai pilgrims or a Pasai community in Mecca, to be aware of these three famous names from the Middle East, and to be heartened by reports of Muslim victories against the crusaders. After all, events there would have had economic consequences for Pasai. At the very least, Fatimi's implied point that to be a sultan was to become a member of an exclusive club of Muslim rulers is important.

It is not until the late sixteenth century that local MSS sources from Sumatra become available. All are written in the Arabic script, adapted to indicate those sounds in Malay that have no counterpart in Arabic, and all show a significant stratum of Arabic loan words and a number of features of syntax that could reflect Arabic influence. Although relatively young, it is clear that they belong to a tradition that is much older and are evidence of a long and close participation of local peoples in Islamic life and culture. The earliest example is the poems, the Malay quatrains, of the Achehnese Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590). He is an author belonging to the theosophical tradition of Ibn 'Arabi mediated by the Iraqi al-Jili (d. circa 1408). His rendering of numbers of Qur'anic verses into Malay and interpretation of them as they are understood in this mystical tradition, no less than his vernacularisation of Arabic words and concepts, is extraordinary. His writings show an ecstatic passion for union with God, and include a brilliant tangential allusion to al-Hallaj's identification of himself with the burning bush in the vision of Moses, by an identification of himself with the tree that is burnt to yield camphor.<sup>2)</sup>

By the seventeenth century, it is possible to demonstrate a close relationship between religion and political authority in the Acheh sultanate (1496-1874). This relationship is evidenced in a number of ways: through the investiture of the ruler Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607 - 1636) in a Sufi *tariqa* by his Shaikh al-Islam, (perhaps a conscious use of an Ottoman title) Shams al-Din. It is also seen in this Shaikh al-

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1) See [*ibid.*: 678]. Fatimi's summary and interpretation of these events should be read against the information given in [*ibid.*: 655 - 656 and 677 - 678].

2) See [Drewes and Brakel 1986]. The specific, verse reference is p. 143 v. 13.

Islam acting in a political role as foreign minister and in addition Vicegerent when Iskandar was incapacitated by bouts of insanity. This combination in a single individual of the roles of Sufi adept, *murshid* to the ruler, and holder of two senior positions of state is striking [Nieuwenhuijze 1945: 6-21].

The position of Islam in the state is likewise illustrated by reference, in a nonchalant and unstudied manner, to two well-known mystical verses of Ibn 'Arabi in a Malay work published under the title *Hikajat Atjeh* a lengthy fragment of a panegyric to Iskandar Muda [Iskandar 1958: 67].

When a remote ancestor of Iskandar finds his future bride in a clump of bamboo, to quieten her alarm at this unexpected discovery, he says to her: God has made manifest today our former hidden union (in the knowledge of God, before individual existents were differentiated one from the other). In this allusion there is both reference to the predestined greatness of Iskandar, and a highly sophisticated sexual conceit, the product of close, even playful familiarity with the formulations of the central doctrine of Sufi theosophy, that of the Unity of Being.<sup>3)</sup>

Chance allusions of this kind are more revealing of the currency of religious ideas than the fact that Shams al-Din wrote a number of treatises in Arabic, still extant, and in fact was an early, if not the earliest Sumatran on record to have written in Arabic.

The writings of Shams al-Din moreover demonstrate that there has been a shift in the provenance of religious thought popular in court circles from the Iraq/Iran tradition of al-Jili represented by Hamzah Fansuri to one that derives from Muhammad b. Fadl Allah al-Burhanpuri, a north Indian teacher who wrote in 1590 a work outlining a system of seven grades or manifestations of Being—a theosophical system that, while based on the same concept of the unity of being as that espoused by Hamzah, expresses it in a different formal structure [Johns 1965: 9-10].

It should be remembered that acceptance of the Ibn 'Arabi tradition represents only one way of participation in the mystical life of Islam, and that other models are represented in fragments of works in Javanese from the late sixteenth century, dealing

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3) The lines in question are:

We were lofty sounds unuttered  
held in the highest peaks of the hills  
I am you in Him, and we are you and you are He  
All is He in Him—ask those who have attained.

For a Malay commentary on these lines by the Achehnese 'Abd al-Ra' uf see [Johns 1955].

with dogmatics and spirituality, from one or another of the north coastal towns of Java [Drewes 1954;1969]. These works have little to do with the monistic theosophy of the Ibn 'Arabi tradition but are based largely on the ethical mysticism of al-Ghazali. These examples are sufficient to demonstrate the independent net-working of groups of religious teachers with varying spiritual taste at the various centres of trade and authority in the archipelago, and the discrete character of local traditions all over the archipelago.

By the mid-seventeenth century, a fuller documentation of this participation becomes possible, with evidence in Arabic sources of the presence of Sumatrans in Mecca and Medina and their attachment to a particular teacher. This is sufficiently important to present in some detail. We are able to put together a Kurdish scholar, Ibrahim al-Kurani (1615-1690) who was affiliated to a number of *tarīqa*, and a *khalīfa* of the Shattariyya order, who settled in Medina; 'Abd al-Ra'uf, an Acehnese who studied with Ibrahim in Arabia 1640-1661, and Yūsuf<sup>4)</sup> a Makassarese who was in Medina with 'Abd al-Ra'uf for some years; and Ibrahim's pupil al-Hamawi, who wrote a biographical dictionary *Fawā'id al-Irtihāl wa Natā'ij al-Safar* (The profits of travel and the gains of journeying) a biographical dictionary of the '*ulamā*' of Mecca and Medina, in the eleventh Islamic century (seventeenth century CE) with an entry on his teacher Ibrahim and the Sumatrans who studied from him, reporting what they said to Ibrahim and what Ibrahim said to him about them.<sup>5)</sup>

In this entry Hamawi says:

Our Shaikh (Ibrahim) told me that one of our Jawi associates—and he was reading with him the [work entitled] *al-Tuḥfa al-mursala ilā rūḥ al-nabī* while we were present—told him that this treatise and the matters it treats of was popular and well-known in the lands of the Jawi, and that it is read in their religious schools.

Ibrahim had a special relationship with Jawi students, foremost among them 'Abd al-Ra'uf whom he designated as his *khalīfa* to spread this *tarīqa* in Sumatra when he

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4) Yūsuf al-Maqāsiri (1626-1699), a major religious-Political figure in Java in the middle years of the seventeenth century. See Heer [1979: 15].

5) Johns [1975: 33-55]. See in particular pp. 48-49.

returned. They asked him questions about the correct understanding of the work, referred to by Hamawi and the system of seven manifestations of Being that it set out. It was in response to their questions that Ibrahim wrote a major work on the topic, entitled *Ithāf al-Dhakī*. In his introduction to his work he refers to the Sumatrans and the questions that they put to him :

We have reliable information from a group of Jawi that there have become widespread among the inhabitants of the lands of "Java" : some books on Realities and esoteric teachings by men attributed with knowledge because of their study and the teaching of others, but who lack any understanding of the Law of (Muhammad) the Chosen, the Elect.

He continues :

They told me that among the best known of books among them was the compendium entitled *al-Tuhfa al-mursala ilā rūḥ al-nabī* (the work by Muhammad ibn Fadl Allah mentioned by Hamawi in the biographical entry referred to above), and more than one of them has asked my humble self to prepare a commentary upon it to make clear the conformity of the questions (it discusses) to the basis of the principles of religion, confirmed by the noble Book, and the *Sunna* of the Lord of the Messengers.

What kind of a man was Ibrahim? What did his teaching communicate to 'Abd al-Ra'uf, and how did it contribute to the participation of his countrymen in Islamic life and devotion? In other words, what was the range of learning and the kind of spirituality to which he attracted them? In the introduction to his work *Ithāf al-Dhakī*, he plays on the most beautiful names of God as though they were a musical instrument with the compass and resonances of a great organ, "God is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward : the First before whom nothing was, the Inward beneath whom nothing is more hidden." He justifies the seeking of inward meanings in the Qur'anic verses and *hadīth*, but condemns any abandonment of their literal meaning, quoting from al-Ghazali's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, al-Ghazali's use of the tradition "Angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog," to condemn the *Bāṭiniyya*. To

discover an inward sense to the *ḥadīth*, i. e. that the word “house” may signify heart and “dog” the spirit of anger, and thus that it means “angels do not enter a heart in which is the spirit of anger” does no violence to the words of the Messenger. It would only do so were one to claim that the only meaning of this *ḥadīth* is the inward one. Knowledge of such an inward meaning however, does not exempt the believer from the duty of obeying the literal sense of the words. But, Ibrahim says, the Sufis do not do this, rather they affirm the outward sense of the words, and in addition understand them in whatever inward way that Allah reveals to them, for there is nothing impossible in God giving to anyone of His servants He chooses an understanding of meanings in His Book and the sayings of his Prophet that are not explicitly expressed.<sup>6)</sup>

What was he like as a teacher? There is an anecdote told in a biographical dictionary :

Ibrahim used to say : the *Fātiḥa* should be recited at the end of every meeting. There was once an old *faqīh* who said : I married a young woman when I was advanced in years. Her family loved me and trusted me, but secretly, she disliked me because of my old age, and only pretended affection for me for the sake of her family.

Now one day a woman friend visited her, and I listened to them talking without their knowing it. Every word she spoke complaining about me I wrote down on a piece of paper I had by me. Then the woman visitor made to leave, but my wife said to her : “not until we have recited the *Fātiḥa* together, as do the *faqīh* and his friends when they part.” So the pair of them recited the *Fātiḥa*, and I wrote that down too, as they recited it.

Then I told her brothers all that she had said about me, and said to them : do not make her stay with me, for I wish to divorce her. They were displeased with her and reproached her, but she denied everything I had accused her of having said against me. So I said : here is the paper on which I wrote everything down as you were saying it. And lo! there was nothing on the page except the *Fātiḥa*, and so I realised that the *Fātiḥa* had blotted out every evil thing she had said [al-Afrani : 210 – 211].

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6) These passages are summarized from a draft translation of the *Ithāf al-Dhakī* based on the Leiden Ms. Cod. Or. 7050.

A number of maxims are attributed to him. They include: "It is better to reconcile two conflicting points of view rather than to choose one of them or the other"; "Truth lies at the mid-point between excess and inadequacy" and "The philosophers got close to ultimate truth, but did not quite succeed in attaining it."

And what of 'Abd al-Ra'uf? He lived for 30 years in Aceh on his return from 20 years in Arabia. He exchanged letters with Ibrahim across the Indian Ocean. He was supported by the court, by the Sultana Safiyatu'l-Din (r. 1641-1675). He wrote prolifically, and his contribution to the vernacularization of Islam in Malay is remarkable. He wrote a treatise, on the orders of the sultana, on that branch of *fiqh* known as *al-mu'āmalāt* called *Mir'āt al-tullāb*— a work of 600 pages in Ms; he prepared a Malay rendering of the *tafsīr* of al-Jalalayn that is still in use today and is regularly reprinted. (This work, entitled *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was regarded by Snouck Hurgronje as a translation of Baydawi's *Anwār al-Tanzīl*). He wrote a lengthy treatise on the spiritual exercise of *dhikr* called *'Umdat al-muhtajīn*, and a theoretical work on the concept of the unity of being, which may be summarised: the world is from God. Everything is The Reality, *al-Haqq*, but not as it is here and now. Being is one, but only at the level of non-manifestation in the knowledge of God [Voorhoeve 1952: 109-115].

'Abd al-Ra'uf's concerns were broad. He brings together the exterior and interior disciplines (as did his teacher Ibrahim). He writes on *tafsīr* without reference to the mystical dimension of exegesis, *hadīth* and *fiqh*. Yet he also writes on the spiritual exercise of *dhikr*, and on the unity of Being. As a teacher, he inducted many individuals into the Shattariyya order, and was responsible for its popularity in Java.

This is the first occasion in the history of Islam in the region in which it is possible to bring together such a constellation of facts and sources of information: concerning a Sumatra scholar, 'Abd al-Ra'uf; the ruler of Aceh, Safiyatu'l-Din, who was his patron; the Kurd, Ibrahim al-Kurani, who was 'Abd al-Ra'uf's teacher in Medina, and the biographer of Ibrahim, Hamawi who refers to the presence of Sumatrans in the circle of Ibrahim's students. In addition, we have works that they produced. We can put our hands on their writings and in some cases MSS of the letters they wrote to each other across the Indian Ocean.

Another, later instance of such a constellation of elements occurs in the mid-

eighteenth century under the aegis of the Sultanate of Palembang in south Sumatra. It is possible to document the relationship between 'Abd al-Samad (1703-1788) of Palembang, and Arab scholars in the Holy Land, including the Egyptian Azharite professor Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Damanhuri who visited Mecca in 1763, and Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Samman (1719-1775) who founded the Sammaniyya *ṭarīqa*. 'Abd al-Samad was inducted into this *ṭarīqa*, and through his students in Mecca returning home to Sumatra, it was established in Palembang where it flourished within the founder's life-time [Drewes 1977 : 219 - 220].

Palembang was a centre of Muslim learning that deserves detailed study. Within a period of 50 years or less, Malay versions of such works on dogmatics as Ibrahim al-Laqani's (d. 1631) commentary on the rhymed credal statement *Jawaharāt al-Tawhīd*, works of ethical mysticism as the *Hikam* of Ibn 'Ata Allah, and the *Risālat fi'l-Tawhīd* by Raslan al-Dimishqi enlarged by the Cairo author Zakariyya al-Ansari (d. 1520) and later 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731) a Sufi text that lays greater emphasis on inner worship, purity of motivation, and the spiritual stages of *shukr*, *rida* and *sabr*, than on absorption into the Divinity. Then most important of all, 'Abd al-Samad's rendering into Malay around 1788 of *Lubāb ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn*, an abridgement of al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn*, by al-Ghazali's brother Ahmad. Here again is documentation of a Sumatran scholar who spends years in Mecca, his association with Arab and Egyptian scholars, his induction into a *ṭarīqa*, his spreading of this *ṭarīqa*, in Palembang both personally, and through the students who came from Sumatra to study with him in Mecca, the major contribution he makes to the vernacularization of Islam with a work that is still reprinted, and the role of the Palembang court in supporting religious learning [*ibid.* : 36 - 37].

A nineteenth century example is furnished by the career of al-Nawawi al-Bantani. He was born in 1814, went to Mecca in 1829 and lived there the remainder of his long life. He wrote on the various disciplines of *ḥadīth*, *fiqh tafsīr* mysticism grammar and rhetoric. He was teacher and guide to many generations of Jawi in Mecca over 40 years. Snouck Hurgronje met him in 1885 and in his book *Mekka in the latter part of the 19th century* [Snouck 1931 : 268 - 267] notes that he was acknowledged as head of the Jawi community ; and had just published, on the newly established Mecca Press, a two volume commentary on the Qur'an.

al-Nawawi was the author of over 100 works in Arabic, a number of them still in

current use in religious teaching institutions, regularly reprinted in Mecca, Cairo, and a number of major cities in Indonesia. His two volume *tafsīr, Marāḥ Labīd* [al-Nawawi 1965] deserves special mention. In an introduction he lists the authors and their works on whom he depends. They include Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209), Shirbini (d. 1570), and Abu'l-Su'ud (d. 1574). In fact about 70 percent of his *tafsīr* is selected from Razi's great work *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, giving his own compilation, following in Razi's footsteps, a markedly rationalist character. Moreover, following Razi, he omits many illustrative stories to the Qur'anic text that Razi rejects, which modern Muslims dismiss as Isra'iliyyat. Thus Razi's influence on him is highly significant, an influence that he passed on to thousands of his students from the Indies over a period of forty years, and in these respects anticipated and facilitated, the rapid spread of Muhammad 'Abduh's reformist ideas there. Indeed, by way of a digression, I owe Nawawi, a great personal debt, for it was through him that I discovered Razi, and found a new career in Raziana.

These examples are far from exhaustive. They are, however, sufficient to show that reference to Sumatra and Java as part of a remote periphery of the Muslim world is misleading. Rather the islands of Indonesia were linked to the Arabian Peninsula by the Indian Ocean, not separated from it. Modes of participation varied from place to place. During the silent years of Islamization preparing the ground for the appearance of Islam with a political face in the region, the Sufi dimension was present, both explicitly and implicitly at appropriate levels in Muslim communities.

In my giving a primacy to the Sufi movement in Islamization, the issue was wrongly put, but the putting of it was not wholly wrong. If the generalization that the Indies became Islamized due to the spiritual appeal of Sufism was too broad, it is not necessarily wrong to say that many, if not a majority of the '*ulamā*' who played a role in the establishment of Muslim communities in Southeast Asia had Sufi affiliations. By the same token, it is certainly overly simplistic to speak tout court of Islam being brought to the Indies by traders without reference to the '*ulamā*'.

During the early years of Islamization, local evidence is so scarce that it is necessary to proceed by inference. Nevertheless it must be recognized that we have to do not simply with local peoples encountering Muslims, and eventually adopting a new religion in a particular geographical area, but with their involvement in a wide-ranging international community through a variety of net-works comprising related

ethnicities, merchant groups, religious teachers and *tariqas*. All this was a continuing process that by zealous networking at an individual level *pari passu* with the expansion and contraction of political authority at the level of the ruler, extended the domain and depth of Islam in the region, particularly when the Muslim ruler allied himself with (or fought against) another local Muslim ruler.

During this period (eleventh–eighteenth centuries) Sufism should not be thought of as distinct or separate from the vast body of jurisprudence which it complemented and alongside which it grew out of the primary sources of the Qur'an and the *sunna*, notwithstanding that the house of Islam has long been divided in its attitude to the Ibn 'Arabi tradition of theosophical Sufism. The Sufi Shaikhs were not necessarily to be thought of as individuals or a class separate from the '*ulamā*'. It is in part the anti-*tariqa* stance of the reformists of Muhammad Abduh's generation that have exaggerated this tension which they have projected back anachronistically, and a number of Western scholars have followed in their wake.

The Sufi movement is a dimension of Islam, and in so far as it has a separate identity, represents only one aspect of Islamization. There are many others which complement and support each other. Among them is story-telling, especially as represented by local re-tellings, adaptations and enlargements of Qur'anic presentations of scenes from lives of the prophets, *qiṣāṣ al-anbiyā*. (Stories of the Prophets) which long before the Germans invented the term *heilsgeschicht*, established a widely socialized perception of a universalistic salvation history from Adam to Muhammad.

My examples have been limited to Aceh, Palembang and Banten, and they are far from exhaustive. One could refer to other centres and periods with similar kinds of documentation. But this brings us to a paradox: of how intensely local such communities and centres of trade and culture are, and how the religious elites were embodied in these communities, in a way that presented a fusion of universal forms of Islam with local beliefs and life-styles [Lapidus 1990:259]. This is indeed true of Indonesia today, with its distinctive styles of fusion of local elements with the universalistic doctrines of Islam in say Aceh, Minangkabau, Central Java and the Celebes, but it is certainly not peculiar to Indonesia and its neighbours. Lapidus' great work makes this abundantly clear.

What it amounts to is that the processes of Islamization in Southeast Asia and the results of those processes are more like than unlike what happened elsewhere in the

Islamic world; in the so-called polarization between what is called *shari'a* and adat law, we are only seeing the same processes that were to yield the so-called classic formulations of Islamic Law—a bringing together and infusing with an Islamic spirit and norms, a whole range of practices in familial, commercial and criminal law, administrative regulations, bringing in Persian, Byzantine and Hellenistic maxims, elements of the canon law of the orthodox church, Talmudic and old Babylonian law—bringing all into conformity with God's will [*ibid.*: 102–103]. Equally, “syncretism,” no matter how this troublesome word is understood, is a phenomenon well attested in all parts of the Muslim world.

Sufism then had and has its role in a variety of styles of Islamization in different regions and periods in combination with many other things besides in Southeast Asia. It is a dimension which offered a variety of modalities of participation in the universe of Islam according to the spiritual taste, cultural traditions and *Zeitgeist* of those parts of Southeast Asia that were to become part of the domain of Islam.

So let me conclude: the role of Sufism in our region is not all that different from that of Sufism in other parts of the Muslim world. There is little reason to regard the Muslims of Southeast Asia overall as being necessarily more legalistic, more mystical or more prone to “syncretism” than other peoples of the Muslim world. From Morocco to the Moros the Domain of Islam includes a mix of shared emphases, and a varying distribution of emphases within that mix. Indeed, a major challenge to Southeast Asianists is to learn to recognize that the presence of Islam as a living, functional component permeating the diverse traditions of the region is far greater than conventional wisdom up to the present has allowed. To echo the Qur'anic words: ... *Sibghata 'llāh! Wa man aḥsanu mina 'llāhi ṣibghatan* ... as the dye of Allah! And who, better than Allah can spread the tincture of a dye? (Sura 2, Baqara: 138) This 'dye of Allah' is more widely and deeply infused than many have realized.

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