M. B. Hooker

ISLAM IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.B. Hooker, Introduction: The Translation of Islam into South-East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.C. Milner, Islam and the Muslim State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy F. Ellen, Social Theory, Ethnography and the Understanding of Practical Islam in South-East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Bousfield, Islamic Philosophy in South-East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Day, Islam and Literature in South-East Asia: some pre-modern, mainly Javanese perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.B. Hooker, Muhammadan Law and Islamic Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliar Noer, Contemporary Political Dimension of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Islam is the religion of about 140 million people in South-East Asia concentrated in a “Muslim archipelago” stretching from southern Thailand through Malaysia and Indonesia and north to the southern Philippines. As the verse cited emphasizes, the religion is a whole, encompassing a social, a legal and a moral order. It is only one of many verses stating the fundamental premises that Dominion belongs to God, that faith is required of man and that the individual Muslim is bound to obey the commands of God as expressed in the words of the Prophet Muhammad.

1 Say: “O men! I am sent
Unto you all, as the Apostle
Of God, to Whom belongeth
The dominion of the heavens
And the earth: there is no God
But He: it is He that giveth
Both life and death. So believe
In God and His Apostle,
The unlettered Prophet,
Who believeth in God
And His Words: follow him
That (so) ye may be guided.: S.VII.158
[from A. Yusuf Ali’s translation]
But the verse is written in the Arabic language, its premises are expressed in terms of the Arabic culture of the Middle East and its *raison d’être* originates in Revelation. The cultural realities of South-East Asia, on the other hand, include the Malay and other languages; and pre-Islamic explanations of the world order deriving either from indigenous philosophies or from Indian sources. The purpose of this Introduction is to describe the structure of the accommodation between the Middle-East derived form of Islam and the culture(s) of South-East Asia.

It is apposite to consider a little further the main structural features of Islam which have a particular relevance to this book. As suggested above, the main issue is the extent to which the formalism of Islam is culturally derived. A very obvious example is the divergence of doctrine within Sunni Islam as represented by the existence of four different schools of Sharī'a; these, moreover, were originally representative of different local traditions, the two oldest (Hanafī and Maliki) being derived respectively from Kufa and Medina. Indeed, a wide cultural variation in early Muslim jurisprudence was the rule rather than the exception and, as Schacht\(^2\) has demonstrated, cultural elements from the heartlands of Islam were more often in opposition than not. The law originated in the provinces rather than radiating from a centre at Medina and reference to the Sunna of the Prophet was often *post facto* rather than *res ipsa*. Individual *hadith* (the vehicle of the Sunna) were essentially local and represented the social, legal and religious ideas of their places of origin. From the ninth century onwards, the main concern of Muslim jurists became the formulation of commonality of doctrine. This was achieved through the doctrine of consensus (*ijma‘*) and the recognition of mutual orthodoxy within the four Sunni schools. However, even today each school tends to retain a geographical reference;\(^3\) more important, the *hadith* through which the Sunna was and is known remain in their own culturally defined forms.\(^4\) They are *literary* emanations from certain places and times and for the South-East Asian Muslim they are culturally foreign. The result is a tension between local culture or, more exactly, indigenous modes of conceptualizing the world and thinking about the eternal verities, and the literary information defining the belief in God and the practice of His commands. This internal conflict is of a severity such as to prompt one South-East Asian author to call for the development of culturally relevant traditions.\(^5\) However, even in the unlikely event of this call being heeded, it would not accommodate the Middle-Eastern derived modes of scholasticism, e.g. the *usul al-fikh*. The gulf between literary tradition and cultural reality remains a fact of Islamic life.

---

2 See Schacht (1950).
4 See Goldziher 1971: 193f. See also Burton 1977.
5 Hazairin 1964.
For the student of Islam in South-East Asia these comments reduce to two issues:

(i) the modes of transfer, *i.e.*, the temporal and intellectual dimensions by and through which the religion came to the "Muslim archipelago".

(ii) The "translation" of Islam, *i.e.*, the means through which the absorption of principle came to result in the formation of an original South-East Asian dimension for Islam. In its dictionary sense "translation" means to move from one condition to another, to turn from one language to another either by simply making a version or by use in a metaphorical sense, or by interpretation and explanation. It can also mean to enrapture or to entrance, as well as to change form and appearance. Examples of all these cognate meanings can be found in South-East Asian Islam and they are the subject of the essays in this book. Together they make up a sufficient description of cultural accommodation, a process which is both historical and contemporary.

THE MODES OF TRANSFER

(a) *The temporal dimension*

By this I mean the ways by which Islam "came" to South-East Asia, a subject of perennial fascination. There is one semantic trap to be avoided in this formulation. "Came" means either *routes* of introduction or the *methods* by which acceptance was achieved. Both are in question here but will be kept separate. Together, they comprise the "temporal dimensions" of Islamic history in South-East Asia. As we shall see the temporal dimension remains uncertain in shape and hazy in outline. To take first the question of routes; the consensus of modern scholarship⁶ is that the period in time is the very end of the thirteenth century and the following fourteenth century, *i.e.*, from about 1292 to the 1390s. The argument and the evidence for the existence of Muslims in South-East Asia runs as follows.

(i) Evidence: the hard evidence for a Muslim presence consists: *first* of three Muslim gravestones discovered in the Pase district of north Sumatra, dated in the first half of the 15c, another at Gresik in east Java of 1419. It has been determined that these originated at Cambay in Gujarat. In addition, a much earlier gravestone, but not known to be of Cambay origin and dated 1297, is also known from Page. This stone *may* have an Indian origin. Two further gravestones from Lérán in Java dated 1102 and 1391 are also known although there is considerable uncertainty about the first date. Also in East Java are the Tralaya inscriptions, dated in the *saka* era as being from 1298—

⁶ Drewes 1968 for a full account.
1397S (i.e. 1376–1475). Finally, there is the celebrated Trengganu inscription dated variously as 1303 or 1386-87, the latter being the preferred date.

The second body of evidence on origin and routes comes from early travellers’ accounts. The great Moroccan traveller, Ibn Battūta visited Pasai in 1345 and describes its people as Muslim. Marco Polo was in the area in 1292 and describes Perlak as Muslim but that “Samara” remained heathen. There is difficulty in identifying “Samara” with Samudra or Pasai. Consensus at the moment seems to be that Samara is Samudra thus giving us a date of 1292. The next source of information comes from Tomé Pires whose *Suma Oriental*, completed in 1515, described Pasai as a cosmopolitan city with an important Muslim population among whom Bengalis were especially prominent. The ruler was Muslim though the country outside the urban area was still heathen. Finally, there is evidence from Chinese sources (the History of the Sung Dynasty (960–1279) bk. 489) which may be read to indicate an Arab presence in Sumatra but given the then propensity to confuse the west coast of Sumatra with Arabia, this reference is most uncertain.

The third and final body of evidence are the indigenous histories which relate the beginnings of Islam. The oldest are the *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai* and the *Sejarah Melayu* (1612); while both repeated earlier material (now lost) they considerably post-date the evidence already cited. They will be considered more fully in a later section because they provide examples of the intellectual transmission of Islamic values rather than evidence of transfer. For present purposes it is enough to notice that the accounts of the beginning of Islam are posited on the position of the ruler or prince and assume a definite religious function for him. The significance of this will appear below.

(ii) Interpretation of the Evidence: the evidence just outlined is meagre and the various interpretations put on it have suffered from obvious deficiencies. With the exception of the Trengganu inscription, the surviving epigraphy merely gives (Muslim) names and dates, and the accounts of travellers to the region are not wholly reliable, either with respect to their geography or to information on the depth and spread of response to Islam. But the evidence must still be read for what it can tell us about the immediate origins of South-East Asian Islam so that we may determine the effect (if any) of the particular cultural form in which it arrived.

Three places of origin have been put forward. First, that Islam derived directly from the Arabs of the Hadramaut. This, the Arabian thesis, was held by Niemann and de Hollander (both 1861) and, given that the Shafi'ī are the dominant school in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula, this was not an improbable ascription. Evidence for an Arabic origin, though via the Persian and Indian coasts, was given by Pijnappel in 1872 based on a French translation of Arabic accounts of the voyages of Suleiman and of
Marco Polo and Battuta. The conclusion drawn from this last class of evidence was as to feasible sea routes which, when combined with much later evidence from indigenous Sumatran material (see below) in which Persian terms are common, indicated a Persian/West Coast of India origin. The argument is inconclusive because, as has been shown by Bausani the great majority of Persian terms are known as borrowings from India. As yet, the part of India from which they derive is not established. The earliest dated evidence does not, therefore, conclude anything on the origin of Islam except as inferential support for later literary evidence.

This brings us to the second interpretation, associated with Snouck, who took the Indian suggestion considerably further. In 1894 he moved, by way of Indian data, to an assumption of an Indian origin: when Islam had gained a hold in the port cities of south India.

"...The inhabitants of the Deccan, who resided in great numbers in the port-cities of this island would as middlemen in the trade between the Muslim states [i.e. West Asia] and the East Indies, were as if in the nature of things destined to scatter the first seeds of the new religion. Arabs, especially those who passed for descendants of the Prophet... Sayyid or Sharif, found a welcome opportunity to demonstrate their organizational ability. As priests, priest-princes and as sultans they often put the finishing touches to the formation of new realms".7

This hypothesis rests on the demonstration of three points. First, a significant Muslim presence in south India. This is known to have occurred at the correct time.8 Second, the existence of trading links between south India and South-East Asia. This has also been demonstrated.9 Third, the existence of a prominent Muslim element in this trade, and thus a Muslim element in the South-East Asian population. The latter is supportable from the epigraphy earlier described. Snouck himself, when he returned to the subject in 1907, cited Ibn Battuta’s report, mentioned the three Pase gravestones and drew attention to their similarity with the stone commemorating Malik Ibrahim in Gresik dated 1418. In 1912 it was established by Moquette that the Pase and Gresik tombs originated from Cambay in Gujarat thus demonstrating a relation with India in the fifteenth century. The origin of the oldest known stone, that of Malik al-Salih dated 1297 from Pase, is not known. However, the advance is considerable, an Indian link being shown. But it is a far cry from saying that Islam came to South-East Asia from Gujarat because gravestones came from that place. There are good reasons for not making this assumption: Gujarat only came under Muslim rule in

7 Snouck Hurgronje cited in Drewes 1968: 441.
8 See Marrison 1951: 34ff.
9 Reid and Castles 1975:45f.
1297 whereas the Muslims had been established much earlier in south India. More important, the later Malay literature of Sumatra has a strong south Indian background and the intellectual significance of Gujarat is not apparent until al-Raniri in the seventeenth century.

In other words, the argument is inconclusive on the evidence except that an Indian connection in trade, and thus the presence of individual Muslims, is demonstrated (see below also at pp. 44–45).

The third interpretation of the evidence brings us to Bengal. Tomé Pires describes Pase as a rich trading city in which the most prominent men were Bengali or of Bengali origin. This comment forms the basis of a recent argument by S.Q. Fatimi\(^{10}\) to the effect that Bengal was the origin of South-East Asian Islam. It is of course undeniable that trading relations long existed between Bengal and the archipelago and indeed the Sailendra monarchs derived Mahayana Buddhism from that area. But Fatimi’s arguments from the evidence to show a derivation of Islam are not acceptable. They rest on strained and unnecessary interpretations of the epigraphy and contain “wild conjecture”\(^{11}\). Data from Bengal itself which Fatimi brings forward to make a case, rest on a further assumption that Islam in South-East Asia derives from the Şuфи form. This again is misleading. Sufism is not a cultural form but an attempt to state the outer limits of doctrine (see further below). A yet further difficulty is that the predominant school of law in Bengal is Hanafi and not the archipelago-wide Şafi’i. There is no evidence, internal or external, to support a change in school. This does not, of course, exclude a Bengali element in the Muslim population of the archipelago.

To sum up, the interpretation of the evidence is not conclusive as to origins. On the other hand, there are two important implications. First, we know from the later history of Islam in South-East Asia that, while cultural formalism played an important role in the understanding of Islam, it was not the only factor. The indigenous modes of adaptation were equally and perhaps more important. The evidence brought forward so far has value in a negative sense; it tells us that Middle Eastern formalism was not necessarily a constituent part of the initial Islamic experience in the formative period (see below).

Second, we are now in a position to summarize the main factors in the initial accommodation of Islam in the area for the period from the end of the thirteenth century to the early fifteenth century. It is the mode of acceptance rather than the route with which we are now concerned. The evidence for the period is unhelpful, and the difficulty is compounded by the multiple referents of the term “Islam”. It refers simultaneously to a simple faith, to a social identity, to a cultural heritage and to an explanation

---

\(^{10}\) Fatimi 1963.

for and a theory of power and authority. Apart from the fact that the faith of Islam was physically present in some degree in the city-ports of Sumatra and north Java, our evidence tells us two things. First, Islam was characteristically a court phenomena; it was here that trade took place and it was at this point that the local rulers became involved with the religion. Trade has always been a princely or royal interest in South-East Asia for it was on wealth and the control of wealth-producing activities that rulers depended. The foreign trade was in Muslim hands and thus the culture and ethos of the city-ports were Muslim. The idea or concept of Islam as an aspect of authority or wealth or rule must, therefore, have been of early significance in South-East Asia.

Further, and following from this, it is not too much to say that this was the primary referent of Islam so far as the indigenous urban population were concerned. While the accounts of foreign travellers emphasize this point, the most informative of the early inscriptions — the Trengganu inscription — provides unmistakable evidence confirming this interpretation. The inscription is written in Malay (in Arabic script) and contains a short list of ten rules, breach of which was punished. The actual provisions are fragmentary, and indeed the first three rules are entirely missing. A full description has been provided elsewhere and we need notice only three points here; first, the content of the rules is not Islamic but local Malay/Javanese. Substantially the same provisions can be found in the Malacca and Malacca-derived law texts of the seventeenth century and later. Second, the language used contains a large proportion of Javanese and Sanskrit terms; there are no less than twenty-nine words of Sanskrit origin in the inscription. The nearest parallel is to the fifteenth century tax and land charters of Java where a similar “Javanization” of Sanskrit technical terms of (legal) classification occurs. Finally the “Islamic” element in the inscription is confined to the preamble which defines the officers of government, or bearers of authority as “expounders on earth of the doctrines of God’s Apostle [Muhammad]”... “such exposition being incumbent on all Muslim Raja Mandalikas...”. In other words, the inscription is not Islamic-derived in either substance or technical terminology. The Islamic connection is solely confined to validating the provisions by reference to God’s will. It is worth noting that the date of the inscription makes it contemporary with Majapahit and that the

---

12 The “urban centred” factor in understanding South-East Asian Islam has been most fully described in Johns (1975) (1976).
13 In all the debate on this period it is remarkable that this inscription has only been cited as evidence of dating. In fact its provisions tell us more about Islam at this time than any other single source;
14 Hooker (1976).
15 See Hoadley 1975: App. V for examples of the ways in which Sanskrit terms were defined in technical classes of relevance to Javanese legal thought.