

NOTES ON VARIOUS THEORIES REGARDING THE ISLAMIZATION OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

Introduction

In the study of the history of the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago (present-day Malaysia and Indonesia) various theories and points of view have been presented and the issue of objectivity arises in this context as clearly as in any writing of history. Mannheim's thesis that "the greatest comprehensiveness and the greatest fruitfulness in dealing with empirical materials" are the criteria to be applied in the choice between various interpretations¹ would seem to be relevant also in this case.

The history of the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago is still a much neglected field, particularly the period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, a period of large-scale and vigorous conversion to Islam. At the heart of this neglect are two related issues: the impact of Islam in the Malay Archipelago and the periodization of Malay history (see below at note 49).

The idea of a distinctive period of Islamization between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century has not been seriously entertained by either Western or Malay historians. While the periodization of history is not entirely divorced from the *Weltanschauung* of the historian, there are instances in which it is possible to determine more or less objectively events that mark the end of one epoch and the beginning of another. With reference to the question of the end of the period of antiquity in Western history, Pirenne observed:

The Germanic invasions destroyed neither the Mediterranean unity of the ancient world, nor what may be regarded as the truly essential features of the Roman culture as it still existed in the 5th century, at a time when there was no longer an Emperor in the West.

Despite the resulting turmoil and destruction, no new principles made their appearance; neither in the economic or social order, nor in the linguistic situation, nor in the existing institutions. . . .

The cause of the break with the tradition of antiquity was the rapid and unexpected advance of Islam. The result of this advance was the final separation of East from West, and the end of the Mediterranean unity.²

Pirenne's point is that the Middle Ages in Europe did not begin with the Germanic invasions but with the expansion of Islam, the period from 650 to 750 being the transitional phase:

¹ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1936), p. 271.

² Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, translated from the French by Bernard Miall (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939, and reprints), p. 284; cf. also pp. 47-85 passim, esp. pp. 163, 164, and 185.

The Western Mediterranean, having become a Musulman [*sic*] lake, was no longer the thoroughfare of commerce and thought which it had always been.

The West was blockaded and forced to live upon its own resources. For the first time in history the axis of life was shifted northwards from the Mediterranean. . . . Europe, dominated by the Church and the feudality, assumed a new physiognomy.³

It seems worth suggesting, then, that in a somewhat similar way the changes brought about by the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago in the period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century were so radical that we are warranted to describe this as a distinctive period in Malay history.⁴ The following observations on the history are presented consciously from a Malay point of view, a perspective significantly different from that arrived at from "the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading house,"⁵ a perspective ultimately more comprehensive and more meaningful for the interpretation of the events of this time.

Trade and the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago

In reviewing the various theories on the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago I draw heavily on Fatimi's *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, published in 1963,⁶ both to corroborate and substantiate his findings on the one hand and, on the other, to raise a few critical questions on some of the points of detail.

Many authors dealing with the history of the Islamization of this area have stressed the fact that Islam was brought to the region by traders from Arabia, Persia and India. Ḥasan b. Aḥmad Muḥallabī, writing towards the end of the tenth century, reported that a thriving port existed on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula (named Kalah or Klang), inhabited by Muslims from Persia and India.⁷ Following a reference to Ibn Baṭṭūta's fourteenth-century account, Arnold wrote (with an indirect quote from Snouck Hurgronje's exposition of 1883⁸):

But long before this time merchants from the Deccan, through whose hands passed the trade between the Musalman states of India and the

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-85.

⁴ For a discussion of this issue, see S.H. Alatas, "Reconstruction of Malaysian history," *Revue de sud-est asiatique*, III (1962), 219-45; S.M.N. al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969). To the best of my knowledge, these are the only two works that deal with this issue.

⁵ J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1955), p. 261.

⁶ S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, ed. Shirle Gordon (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69, tracing the establishment of this settlement back to events in China in 878, with a reference to M. Reinand, ed., *Geographie d'Aoul Feda*, Arabic text, p. 375.

⁸ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *De Beteekenis van de Islam voor zijne Belijders in Oost Indie* (1883), reprinted in his *Verspreide Geschriften* (Bonn-Leipzig-The Hague: Schroeder-Hijhoff, 1924), pp. 8-9.

Malay Archipelago, had established themselves in large numbers in the trading ports of these islands, where they sowed the seed of the new religion.⁹

In the *History of the Sung Dynasty*, the author Chau-Ju-Kua refers to a Muslim diplomat from Borneo who travelled to China as early as A.D. 977.¹⁰ The oldest evidence of the presence of Islam in Java is found in the gravestone of a Muslim lady, Fatima, at Leran, dated A.D. 1082.¹¹

The writings of Arab historians and geographers of the ninth century and later show clearly that the Arabs knew of the kingdom of Crivijaya which included a large part of the Malay Archipelago. Ya'qūbī, for example, writes of the trading connections between Kalah on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and Aden. Ibn al-Faḳīh (902) not only mentions the products of the kingdom of Zabij (Crivijaya), but also illustrates the cosmopolitanism of the area by referring to parrots that talked in Arabic, Farsi and Chinese.¹² Speaking about Kalah, Abū Zayd of Sirāf (d. 916) says that "this city, which lies half-way between China and Arabia, is the center of all trading in spices and aromatic essences; it is there that the Omani ships come nowadays to traffic and it is from here that they return to Oman."¹³ Above (at note 7) mention was made of al-Muhallabī's reference to Kalah as a prosperous town inhabited by Muslims from India and Persia.¹⁴ Also worth mentioning is the tenth-century (A.D. 956-957) nautical treatise condensed into a single manuscript by Ismā'īl b. Ḥasan from the compilations of Muḥammad b. Shāzān, Sahl b. Abān and Layth b. Kahlān, the grandfather of Ibn Ḥasan, a work based in part on travels in the Malay Archipelago.¹⁵

There is ample evidence, therefore, that Arabs, Indians and Persians travelled to the Malay Archipelago and even inhabited some of the more important ports there as early as the ninth century. But it seems that only a relatively small proportion of the Malays and the Javanese who came into contact with these Muslim traders became Muslims themselves, and that it was not until the period of the thirteenth to the sixteenth century that intense proselytization occurred and that large-scale conversion to Islam took place. The issue to be addressed is, obviously, why at least four centuries passed between the time that traders "sowed the seed of the new religion" and the beginning of the period of a widespread Islamization.

⁹ T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam. A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (London: Constable & Company, 1913; reprint Lahore: Shirkat-i-Qualam, 1956), pp. 364-65.

¹⁰ F. Hirth and W.W. Rockhill, *Chau Ju-Kua, His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the twelfth and thirteenth Centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chi* (New York: Paragon, 1966), p. 157.

¹¹ See Fatimi, *Islam*, pp. 38-41, and Plate VII; G. Coedès, *Les états hindouïses d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1964), pp. 433-34, as quoted by R.R. di Meglio, "Arab Trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula from the 8th to the 16th Century," in D.S. Richards, ed., *Islam and the Trade of Asia* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1970), p. 116.

¹² Di Meglio, "Arab Trade," in *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, pp. 110-11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁴ See also *ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

The beginning date of this latter period seems relatively well established. Fatimi gives it as 601/1204, basing this on the *Annals of Acheen*:

This book, which to my knowledge is the only Malay classical history that is definite and exact in its dates, records as follows: "On Friday the 1st of Ramaḍān in the year 601 of the flight of the Holy Prophet of God, (1204 A.D.) Sulṭān Johan Shāh came from the windward and converted the people of Acheen to the Muḥammadan faith. He married the daughter of Baludri at Acheen and by her had a son, and died on Thursday, 1st of Rajab, 631 (1233 A.D.) after a reign of 30 years 11 months and 26 days and was succeeded by his son Sulṭān Aḥmad."¹⁶

From Marco Polo it is known that the port of Perlak in North Sumatra was converted to Islam by 1291 or 1292.¹⁷ In a few years the kingdom of Samudra-Pasé was also Islamized, as is known from the tombstone of the first Muslim ruler of Samudra-Pasé, Malik al-Šāliḥ, who died in 697/1297.¹⁸ The evidence for the conversion to Islam of at least parts of the Malay Peninsula comes from an inscription found in Trengganu, dating from 1303, which bears an edict regarding Islamic law in Trengganu.¹⁹ Later on, with the rise of the Melaka Sultanate, Islam continued to be spread with much vigor.

While it was clearly through trade that Islam was initially introduced in the Malay Archipelago, it seems highly questionable that the large-scale conversions that took place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries can be explained adequately as resulting directly from these early trading contacts. Various other theories of the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago need, therefore, to be considered as well, especially the interpretations that these large-scale conversions took place for economic and political gains, were due to the rivalry between the Muslims and the Portuguese, resulted from inter-marriages, and, finally, were brought about through sufism.²⁰

The factors here alluded to are not mutually exclusive. For example, placing the emphasis on the impact of sufism does not mean that one would necessarily deny the fact that Islam was also spread through trade or through inter-

¹⁶ *Islam*, p. 38.

¹⁷ See M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 21; Fatimi, *Islam*, pp. 8-10, with a reference to Sir Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (London: J. Murray, 1929), II, 284.

¹⁸ Discussed in some detail by several authors, among them Fatimi, *Islam*, pp. 29-36; cf. Plates I-IV. Fatimi's suggestion that the date is "more probably 1307" (based on the inscription's wording "in the year 696 after the passing of the Prophet") is far from convincing: most likely the year 696 of the hijra is intended, as Ph. S. van Ronkel, R.A. Kern and many others have maintained. Tome Pires recorded in the early sixteenth century that "the people of Pase are for the most part Bengalees, and the natives descend from this stock"; quoted in Fatimi, *Islam*, p. 16 (see also *ibid.*, pp. 12ff.).

¹⁹ S.M.N. al-Attas, *The Correct Date of the Trengganu Inscription* (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara, 1970), p. 24.

²⁰ Cf. Fatimi's survey of the various answers given to the question *how* Islam came to Malaysia, *Islam*, pp. 71ff.

marriages. But it seems helpful to consider separately each of the factors mentioned.

Trade and Islamization during the Period from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century

As already hinted at above, the notion that trade was a significant factor in the large-scale conversions of this period seems open to challenge. Arnold claimed that the different Muslim "settlements [of traders] in the Malay Archipelago laid a firm political and social basis," describing these traders in the following terms:

They did not come as conquerors, like the Spanish in the sixteenth century, or use the sword as an instrument of conversion; nor did they arrogate to themselves the privileges of a superior and dominant race so as to degrade and oppress the original inhabitants, but coming simply in the guise of traders they employed all their superior intelligence and civilisation in the service of their religion, rather than as a means towards their personal aggrandisement and the amassing of wealth.²¹

Among the more recent authors, Meilink-Roelofs stated as her aim to "simply demonstrate the close connection between trade and the expansion of Islam," being "not competent to judge the religious and philosophical backgrounds against which this conversion must be viewed."²² Decisive factors in the dissemination of Islam in the Malay Archipelago are left out of the consideration by this exclusive focus on the economic realm. Moreover, there seems hardly any need to demonstrate once again the close connection between trade and the expansion of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. The issue at stake is which (*additional*) factors explain why proselytization was intensified in the period from the thirteenth century onward. Was trade simply a factor that facilitated the dissemination of Islam by other means or was it itself a directly contributing factor? This is, it seems to me, the issue raised by the Dutch sociologist J.C. van Leur, who is interpreted by Fatimi as a proponent of the view that Islam spread primarily by trade, and of whom Fatimi therefore writes that he was "practically repudiating the general thesis propounded by himself on the earlier pages of his dissertation"²³ when he (van Leur) observed:

There had, then, been Moslem trade involved in the traffic of the Indonesian ports for centuries without there having been question of missions and conversions to Islam to any appreciable degree. Toward the end of the thirteenth century a change began to take place, however, a

²¹ *Preaching of Islam*, pp. 365-66.

²² M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, "Trade and Islam in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago prior to the Arrivals of the Europeans," in *Islam and Trade of Asia* (see note 11 above), p. 143; cf. also p. 148, on trade and shipping as important factors in the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago.

²³ Fatimi, *Islam*, p. 91.

change which developed rapidly in the fourteenth century and became the dominating phenomenon in Indonesia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Trade itself did not play an independent role in the change. The trade of Moslems was no more directly related to the conquests of Islam in southeast Asia than Indian trade had been related to the expansion of Brahmanic culture there. In this case, too, trade and faith need to be kept separated.²⁴

Far from contradicting himself, as Fatimi claims, van Leur simply makes the point, as countless others have done, that long before mass conversions to Islam commenced in the thirteenth century Muslim traders had settled in various parts of the Malay Archipelago, and then clarifies the issue of the relationship between trade and the spread of Islam by stating explicitly that "trade itself did not play an independent role in the change" which occurred in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This seems, basically, the same point Fatimi himself makes. And so we are still faced with the question which Alatas articulated in 1962 in the words:

The co-existence between Islam and trade in South-East Asia does not explain why only between the 14th and 16th century the process of Islamization was released with great vigour.²⁵

To the issue of which factors can explain this thirteenth to sixteenth century development in a more plausible way than trade in and by itself we now need to turn.

Conversions for economic and political motives

In his 1955 publication van Leur stressed the significance of political factors in the process of the Islamization of Indonesia:

The Islamization of Indonesia was a development determined step for step by political situations and political motives.

At the end of the thirteenth century rulers of some newly-arisen coastal states in northern Sumatra adopted Islam. With the political decline of the ports across the straits, on southern Sumatra, the new trading settlement, Malacca developed quickly and was nourished in its growing strength by the powerful trade movement of the fifteenth century. Its dynasty then adopted Islam and used it as a political instrument against Indian trade—in which the Moslem trade from the ports of northwest India was at that time taking a chief position,—against Siam and China, and against the Hindu regime on Java.²⁶

²⁴ Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade*, p. 112.

²⁵ Alatas, "Reconstruction," *Revue du sud-est asiatique*, III (1962), 236.

²⁶ Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade*, p. 112. Fatimi, *Islam*, pp. 91-92, branded van Leur's theories as

Several critical observations seem to be in order at this point.

1. Even if the fact could be established that rulers in general converted to Islam for political and economic reasons, one is still not justified in assuming that the whole archipelago did so for the same reasons.

2. As far as the ruler of thirteenth-century Melaka is concerned, it would have been at least as advantageous for him, politically and economically, to adopt Chinese culture and embrace Chinese religion as to accept Islam. For the period 1200–1500 China was the foreign power most feared by the Malay rulers. China was also the only power capable of sending punitive expeditions and of putting a deposed ruler back on his throne.²⁷

3. With regard to those (Hindu) princes on Java and Sumatra who accepted Islam in the thirteenth century (definitely not all of them did), one can not assume that they could foresee at that time the economic and political benefits that much later, in the fifteenth century, might result from a conversion to Islam.

4. In Malay history no case is known of a ruler who had to change his religion as long as his subjects did not change theirs his authority remained unquestioned as long as he professed the same religion as his subjects. Some rulers may have converted because traditional faiths had ceased to meet the needs of large segments of the population which had, therefore, turned to Islam.²⁸

Conversions as a result of Muslim-Portuguese Antagonism

Schrieke, who saw the Portuguese expansion as a sequel to the Crusades, contended that it is

impossible to understand the spread of Islam in the archipelago unless one takes into account the antagonism between the Moslem traders and the Portuguese.²⁹

The author was fully aware of the generally-held view that large-scale conversions to Islam began in the thirteenth century:

At the end of the thirteenth century Pĕrlak and Pasai in northern Sumatra had turned Moslem; Malacca followed early in the fifteenth century. By the beginning of the sixteenth century Islam was the dominant faith in the Moluccas. . . . It was not until the beginning of the seventeenth century that the ruler of Macassar (batara Goa) went over to Islam. It is clear, then,

being "subject to rapid change," pointing to a remark made by van Leur only six years after the presentation of his doctoral dissertation, in which he commented on the causes of "the great proselytization . . . [beginning] in the thirteenth century" in the following terms: "Perhaps it was a repercussion of the Mongol wars and the threat to the Moslem caliphates, perhaps too more forceful counter-propaganda arose as a result of the coming of Christian missionaries during the rule of the Mongol khans"; van Leur, *Indonesian Trade*, p. 169.

²⁷ Alatas, "Reconstruction," *Revue du sud-est asiatique*, III (1962), 237.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 238–39.

²⁹ B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1957), 233.

that the Islamization of the archipelago actually occurred only in the course of the sixteenth century and later.³⁰

When the Portuguese attempted to expand their power by seeking to convert the people to Christianity, local rulers began to propagandize Islam to counter Portuguese activity.³¹

In explaining wide-spread Islamization as a result of Portuguese-Muslim rivalry, Schrieke arbitrarily dates this process as a sixteenth-century development, coinciding with the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in A.D. 1511. He is able to do so because he defines Islamization primarily in terms of the conversions of rulers to Islam, as his reference to the ruler of Macassar seems to suggest.³² To reduce the process of Islamization to the conversion of rulers is misleading in as far as it focuses on only one aspect of social change within a society. Even more important as an objection to Schrieke's thesis is the undeniable fact that the process of vigorous Islamization was unleashed three centuries before the Portuguese arrived in the area, which renders it impossible to explain this process as resulting from the Portuguese-Muslim rivalry.

Conversions resulting from Inter-Marriages

In discussing the spread of Islam along the Straits of Melaka, Brian Harrison paid special attention to the importance of inter-marriages between members of royal or merchants families.³³ It was through such marriages, the author maintains, that

both Muzaffar Shah, who assumed the title of Sultan, and his successor Mansur Shah made good use of the marriage value of Malacca princesses to carry Islam northwards to the rulers of Pahang and Kedah, and southwards to those of the Sumatran river-ports of Siak, Kampar, Indragiri and Jambi.³⁴

The view that since "the Malay identifies race with religion and religion and custom with his ruler" he would, "in the course of time" become a Muslim when his ruler was converted,³⁵ was criticized by Fatimi with a reference to subsequent events: if Malays were resistant to Portuguese authority as far as the propagation of Christianity was concerned, then it is likely that they were equally resistant to

³⁰ Ibid., 231.

³¹ Ibid., 235-36.

³² Cf. Alatas, "Reconstruction," *Revue de sud-est asiatique*, III (1962), 236-37.

³³ Brian Harrison, *South-East Asia: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 50-51.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

³⁵ The quotation is from G.E. Marrison, "Islam and the Church in Malaya," *MW*, (1957), 292. Fatimi, *Islam*, p. 88, gives Harrison as the author's name, particularly confusing because it occurs in a paragraph dealing with the last mentioned author. Elsewhere, however, *ibid.*, pp. 2, 6, 33, Fatimi rightly mentions Marrison as the author of the 1957 *MW* article. Harrison links the marriage and the economic profit interpretations by stressing the effect of the "marriages between members of royal or merchant families" and by then suggesting that "the acceptance of Islam by the local rulers of those coastal areas must have been largely inspired by the wealth, commercial success and good business which those merchants represented"; *South-East Asia*, pp. 50-52.

Malay rulers as far as their example of conversion to Islam was concerned. This criticism of Fatimi seems unconvincing to me: it is not only conceivable but plausible that Malays were more open to direction from their indigenous rulers than to directives from the Portuguese. There are much stronger arguments for rejecting the thesis of large-scale Islamization as a result of inter-marriages. There are only a relatively small number of foreign Muslim merchants who had come to the Malay Archipelago. They were sporadically settled along the coasts and mostly transient,³⁶ all of which makes it highly unlikely that, in Fatimi's language, "this romantic method of conversion . . . [ever] assumed mass proportions."³⁷

Harrison's almost exclusive emphasis on the marriage factor obscures the significance of other factors; but this is not to deny that inter-marriage did play a role in the gradual Islamization of the Malay Archipelago.

Sufism and the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago

While a few others had pointed in this direction,³⁸ it was A.H. Johns who focused attention on the role of sufis and of the *ṭarīqas* in the Islamization of this area. In a paper read in London in 1956 and published a few years later, he opened up new perspectives in the ongoing discussion on the relation between trade and Islamization:

It is not usual to think of sailors or merchants as bearers of religion. If, however, we think of traders belonging to Sufi trade guilds, accompanied by their Shaikhs, there seems a more plausible basis for the spread of Islam. This puts the importance of the *ṭarīqas* in a new light. The fact that there were *ṭarīqas* in Indonesia has often been noted. As far as I know their paramount importance has not. At all events, their interpretation of Islam was certainly suited to the background of the Indonesians, and it should not be going too far to say that the conversion of Indonesia to Islam was very largely the work of the *ṭarīqas*—even though they are ungratefully spurned at the present day.³⁹

The time lapse between the beginning of regular visits of Muslim merchants to the Malay Archipelago in the eighth century and the appearance of Islamic communities of note in the thirteenth century needs to be understood, Johns suggests, in the light of the fact that sufi orders did not become significantly influential in the Muslim world until the defeat of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols in 1258. It was at this time that the *ṭarīqas* began to play an important

³⁶ Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, II, 231.

³⁷ Fatimi, *Islam*, p. 87.

³⁸ See, e.g., Fatimi's references, *Islam*, p. 93, to B. Schrieke (*Ruler and Realm in Early Java*, 1957) and W.F. Wertheim (*Indonesian Society in Transition*, 1956), and his remark about D.A. Rinkes's study on "the saints of Java" (1910–1913), *Islam*, p. 80; cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 22–23 for the role of Sufism in the spread of Islam in Malaysia.

³⁹ A.H. Johns, "Muslim Mystics and Historical Writing," in D.G.E. Hall, ed., *Historians of South East Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 40–41.

role in the preservation of the unity of the disintegrating Muslim world and also developed close relations with craft guilds (*tawā'if*).⁴⁰

Malay and Javanese chronicles confirm the importance of sufi teachers who "face the Shiva-Buddha mystics on equal terms as mystics to mystics, to teach the supremacy of the new religion."⁴¹ Johns gives one such account, taken from two important chronicles, the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* and the *Sejarah Melayu*, both dealing with the spread of Islam to Pasai in North Sumatra. The ruler of a place in the Middle East, Ma'abri, abdicates his throne, becomes a *faqir*, sets sail for Samudra, a North Sumatran port, and on the way stops in various Sumatran locations such as Fansuri, Lamiri and Haru, where he converts the inhabitants to Islam. The point of interest for Johns is, obviously, the role of the *faqir* in these successful proselytizing efforts.⁴²

Johns also discusses the fact that it is characteristic of sufism to accept non-Islamic elements as long as they do not contradict Qur'anic revelation, and furnishes as examples the use of the Sanskrit *Dewata Mulia Raja* instead of the Arabic *Allāh Tā'āla* in the Trengganu inscription and the use of various sufi interpretations in the wayang (Indonesian shadow-play theaters).⁴³

Comparing the social organization of Indonesian towns with that of Islamic towns in the Levant, and noting that sufi orders such as Qādiriyya, Nakshabandiyya, Shaṭṭāriyya and Suhrāwardiyya were well established in the archipelago, Johns suggests that, as in the Levant, sufi affiliation with trade gave Muslim artisans a reputation of honesty and made them an important element in the economic structure of the Indonesian towns.⁴⁴ Far from being other-worldly, these sufi orders played a "specific part . . . in the international centers of Muslim trade," Johns emphasizes,⁴⁵ and a more detailed study of the role of these orders in the Malay Archipelago may well confirm the suggestion of a very similar function in this part of the world. There seems at least ample evidence that the image of sufi religiosity as a "retreatist world view"⁴⁶ is not applicable to

⁴⁰ A.H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, II (1961), 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴² *Ibid.* Fatimi speaks about the authors of *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, as "these glib historians"; *Islam*, p. 72; see *ibid.*, pp. 9, 12, 24-29 for information on the original chronicles and printed editions.

⁴³ Johns, "Sufism," *JSEAH*, II (1961), 19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21. In this connection Johns quotes the following observation on the Islamic city of the Levant from H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, I, 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 277: "The social function of the corporations was enhanced (not in all, but in most, especially of the craft corporations) by their religious affiliation, usually to one of the great religious orders. The moral effect of this religious personality, as it were, was incalculable; it encouraged the qualities of honesty and sobriety which all observers agree in attributing to the Moslem artisan. . . ."

⁴⁵ Johns, "Sufism," *JSEAH*, II (1961), 21.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., the characterization given by S. Zubaida, "Economic and Political Activism in Islam," *Economy and Society*, III (1972), 335-36: With the onset of the fragmentation of the Muslim empire, the declining bourgeoisie, and increasing corruption of the military bureaucracy . . . "Sufi religiosity

the Malay situation in which sufism rather, as Johns described it, contributed significantly to a this-worldly, ascetic ethic.⁴⁷

Admittedly, much more work needs to be done to assess adequately the role of sufism in the Islamization process of the Malay Archipelago. But even at the present stage of our knowledge it seems justifiable to state that of all interpretations considered thus far the reference to the sufi impact seems to be the most satisfactory explanation of the developments in the thirteenth to the sixteenth century: the rise of sufi activity in the Muslim world after the defeat of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258⁴⁸ coincides with the beginning of large-scale Islamization in the Malay Archipelago, and the sufi-factor more than any of the others mentioned provides a plausible answer to the question why it was only in the thirteenth century, four centuries after the first Muslim contacts had been established, that widespread conversion to Islam began.

The Impact of Islam in the Malay Archipelago and the Issue of Periodization of Malay History

At the outset of this article two interrelated problems in Malay historiography were referred to, first noted by Alatas in 1962 with specific reference to Indonesia:

the neglect towards Islam in the writing of Indonesian history has very much been influenced by the idea that it has not brought about any profound changes. This in turn affects the periodization in Indonesian history.⁴⁹

A clear instance of such a denial of any profound changes brought about by Islam can be found in the work of van Leur, who saw Islam as only a "thin, easily flaking glaze on the massive body of indigenous civilization," and who wrote:

The expansion of the new religion did not result in any revolutions or any newly arrived foreign colonists coming to power—the Indonesian regime did not undergo a single change due to it. . . .

provided a retreatist world view which was an expression of political impotence and acquiescence appropriate to the experiences of the urban populations in this period. . . . [it] fulfilled important functions for the urban group in providing units of association and solidarity which survived the great upheavals and transformations caused by the periodic imperial fragmentation noted earlier."

⁴⁷ For Johns see notes 43–45 above. Fazlur Rahman once made a sharp distinction between "asceticism in this world," which is Islamic, and Max Weber's "this-worldly asceticism" in the sense of "asceticism for this (i.e., material) world," which is supposed to be 'the Protestant ethic.'" Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: Challenges and Opportunities," in Alford T. Welch and Pierre Cachia, eds., *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), p. 328.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of Malay-Ottoman relations see A. Seljuq, "Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay Kingdoms in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago," *DI*, LVII (1980), 301–10.

⁴⁹ Alatas, "Reconstruction," *Revue du sud-est asiatique*, III (1962), 227.

Nor is there any influence of a cultural sort. Islam did not bring a single innovation of a "higher level of development" to Indonesia, socially or economically, either in state polity or in trade.⁵⁰

Admitting that some changes took place in Javanese society as a result of the coming of Islam, Schrieke maintained that these changes did not effect what he calls the primary factors of Javanese society.⁵¹ As a final illustration of this line of thought we mention Hall's thesis that Java never really converted to Islam but merely absorbed elements of Islamic culture.⁵²

There would, obviously, be no justification for seeing the period of Islamization (thirteenth to sixteenth century) as a turning point in Malay history if no basic and essential changes occurred, and in that case any comparison with the one-hundred-year period 650-750 in European history (at least as viewed by Pirenne) would be totally inappropriate. But this image of Islam as not more than a "thin veneer" on indigenous Malay civilization is open to challenge. A significant impact of the Islamization process of those four centuries is noticeable in many realms of Malay civilization and society. As far as Malay literature is concerned, al-Attas drew attention to the "unrivalled prolificness" of Muslim Malay writing at the end of this period and in the century immediately following it:

The 9th/16th and 10th/17th centuries witnessed the unrivalled prolificness of Malay writing on philosophical mysticism and rational theology. The first Malay translation of the Qurān with commentary based on al-Bayḍāwī's famous Commentary, and translations, commentaries and originals on philosophical mystics and rational theology also appeared during this period which marked the rise of rationalism and intellectualism not manifested anywhere before in the Archipelago.⁵³

Such sufis included Ḥamzah Faṅṣūrī (d. 1600), Shams al-Dīn (d. 1630), 'Abd al-Ra'ūf (d. 1693) and Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1666). As the teachings of these sufis and of the theologians contained elements of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, it was Islam that first brought Greek philosophical thought to the Malay Archipelago.⁵⁴

If it was indeed, as suggested above, sufism that played a major part in the Islamization process, then the Malay Archipelago was already in this period effected by developments in the worldwide community of Islam and became itself, to a higher degree than ever before, an integral part of the Muslim world at large. And there is no doubt that the subsequent contact that the Malay

⁵⁰ Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade*, pp. 168-69.

⁵¹ Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, I (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1955), 99. See Alatas's critical comments on this observation, *Revue du sud-est asiatique*, III (1962), 228.

⁵² D.G.E. Hall, "Looking at Southeast Asian History," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XIX (1960), 250.

⁵³ S.M.N. al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ S.M.N. al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1972), p. 32.

Archipelago, particularly Aceh, had with Turkey and Egypt laid an important foundation for the development of Malay Islamic thought which it greatly stimulated.⁵⁵

But also in the economic realm the thirteenth to sixteenth-century period saw a major shift. At the end of the fourteenth century, after the downfall of the Buddhist kingdom of Crivijaya, trade in the archipelago was characterized by the absence of a central commercial town.⁵⁶ This void was to be made up by the rise of Melaka which had been founded around 1400.⁵⁷ After its conversion to Islam, Melaka was able to divert Muslim trade from Pasé⁵⁸; it became a center of Islamic culture, where Islamic literature, mysticism and law were studied, and large parts of the Malay Archipelago were Islamized as a result of the influence of this new center. In the fifteenth century, Muslim Melaka began to play a role whose significance for the history of the Malay Archipelago can hardly be overestimated.

Contemporaneous with the rise of Melaka is the development of Malay as the lingua franca of the Malay Archipelago. The dominance of the Malay language lingered on even after the decline of the city as the commercial center of the region. The crucial importance of the Malay language is no doubt partly due to Malay dominance in shipping and to Malay influence in the coastal trading ports, to some extent to the political and economic strength of the Malays,⁵⁹ but certainly not least to the role this language played after the Islamization of the region. The use of Malay as the literary and philosophical language of Islam in the Malay Archipelago gave it the status of a literary language and so it was able to displace the hegemony of Javanese as the language of Malay-Indonesian literature.⁶⁰ In all of those realms the Islamization centuries mark the beginning of a new phase in Malay history.

Epilogue

Considering the detailed work that has been done on the history of many other parts of the (Muslim) world, the field of Malay Islamic history is still in a very early stage. There is a wealth of unexplored or insufficiently explored source material, and many of the conclusions and interpretations long accepted as firmly established need to be subjected to a critical reconsideration. But thanks

⁵⁵ A.H. Johns, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Reflections and New Directions," *Indonesia*, XIX (1975), 45.

⁵⁶ Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ According to tradition by a Javanese nobleman (Paramisora), whose son and successor was converted to Islam. See, for example, H.M. Vlekke, *Nusantara* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), pp. 68-71.

⁵⁸ As mentioned earlier, the fact that a ruler—in this case of Malacca—may have converted to Islam for economic reasons does not mean that one can assume that the population in general did so for the same reason.

⁵⁹ S.H. Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 190.

⁶⁰ Al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah Melayu*, p. 21.

to those authors to whose work frequent and grateful reference was made in the foregoing notes—among them in particular, Fatimi, Johns, Alatas and al-Attas—we begin to see a pattern that waits to be uncovered in even greater clarity.

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