Malay house is for all intents and purposes highly practical, as opposed to the Toraja or Batak counterpart.

The difference between a villager's hut and that of the more well-to-do headman or penghulu, onang kaya or aristocrat is simply in the splendour of the carvings and the size of the scrambi or anjung. A penghulu would obviously have a bigger anjung and scrambi space to suit his needs of meeting people, whilst the religious teacher would often dictate his teachings in his own house. This is completely in accordance with the sunnah, where the Prophet used his house as a mosque. Of the roof, there are various styles, such as the limas bungkus or hipped and the limas potong Belanda or hipped-gable. The Indonesian varieties would include not only stilt-raised forms but also houses on an earthen slab. The earthen floor is not uncommon in Malay traditional houses, as cooking is thought safer to be on the earth.

The palace is simply a bigger house, and usually longer than any of the houses in the village. The spaces would include a treasure chamber, an audience room, weapon room and private quarters. During the colonial period, palaces were built with masonry instead of timber and boast many Western-type room, with plaster ornaments of floral motifs and khat writings. Indonesian kraton or palaces are much larger than their Malay counterparts, complete with generous garden spaces within the masonry or wooden fences.

The cemetery

In Islam, the Barzakh represents the third of four worlds meant for human beings. The first is the womb, the second is the world of the senses and the fourth is life hereafter. The cemetery is the City of the Dead, a reminder to the living that they will soon join those who have passed on. The Prophet Muhammad had forbidden the building of tombs and mausoleums to prevent the rejuvenation of the rituals of worshipping the dead, as recorded in Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 2, p.237.

The burial place of Muslims should be a simple affair of raising the ground a few centimetres to distinguish from the level earth. The tombstones are usually two in number and about half a metre high. The place of the cemetery is usually close to the village as the act of carrying the body by the community is considered a most sacred affair since this would allow as many people as possible to view the procession and remind them of their impermanence in life. The modern zoning procedures that have placed cemeteries away from the city have missed this point about the Islamic way of life. The Prophet used to stand up to honour the procession carrying the jenazah as a sign of respect:

*It is narrated on the authority of 'Amir ibn Rabi'a (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (may peace be upon him) said: Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up for that until it moves away or is lowered on the ground.*

*(Sahih Muslim Vol. II, p.454)*
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THE MESSAGE IN THE MALAY WORLD

THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Badrane Benlahcene

Mystery still surrounds the origins of Islam in Southeast Asia. The date of the religion’s arrival in the Malayan world, and the identity of those responsible for its introduction, will probably never be known with certainty. Some clues are provided by Arab and Chinese documentary sources, archaeological investigations and inscribed stones. However, debate continues as to whether the propagators were from the Middle East, India or China. Despite this, the development of Islam in the region is widely and richly recorded.

Before the arrival of Islam to the region, there were regular contacts with the Indian subcontinent. In addition, a number of Indian states existed in the Malayan world. Geographical factors within the archipelago and Southeast Asia, and the inherent relationship with the Indian Ocean, provided the infrastructure for human interaction, precipitating the Indianisation of the region. The Indians introduced the Hindu and Buddhist religions to the region; an early prominent Buddhist kingdom in the peninsula was that of Lankatana in the Bujang Valley, Kedah, in the north of modern Malaysia. From the 7th to the 13th century, the Hindu-Buddhist empire of Srivijaya, founded in Palembang, controlled all of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, the greater part of Java, and numerous other islands in the region. In the 13th century, the Srivijaya empire was succeeded by the kingdom of Majapahit. Based in Java, Majapahit held sway over vast territory, including parts of Borneo. These Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms blended their religious practices with ancient Southeast Asian customs and traditions.

By the later 13th century, the most powerful state in Southeast Asia was the Sultanate of Melaka, and this is where the story of the Muslim Malayan world really begins. The political presence of Islam in the Malayan world came some time after the first Islamic presence in the region; the connection between Southeast Asia and the Arab world predates Islam itself by many centuries. Scholars have observed that the relationship between the Malayan world and Arabia could date back as early as the 1st century AD. Studies have found that Malayan navigators learned to use the monsoons, and Malayan shipbuilders probably pioneered the balance-lug sail, allowing vessels to sail into the wind by 'tacking'. The technology is related to and may be the ancestor of the triangular-shaped sail of the Arab dhout, which was in turn borrowed by the Portuguese and Spanish in the design of the caravel.
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earliest known examples of the caravel.

By the 8th century, Muslim traders and merchants had established themselves in Sind (present-day Pakistan), and merchants from Persia, Oman and Hadramawt had settled on the west coast of
India. Gujarat came under Muslim rule in 1287, and significant Muslim trading communities
developed in Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal. Extensive trade connections between India, China,
West Asia and the Malay Archipelago enabled Muslim sailors, merchants and travellers to visit and
settle in the region. Certain locations in the Malay world were well known to Arab and non-
Arab Muslim traders, being mentioned in works of early Muslim geographers and travellers. Along
the Melaka Straits, Arab merchant colonies were established in Kedah (Kedah) and Zabaj, which has
been identified with Srivijaya, in south Sumatra. The harbour of Melaka also became a familiar
destination for traders from Arabia. Arab sources mention the existence of tin and jungle products.
This reference to tin supports arguments identifying Kedah as Kedah, as well as the discovery in the
state of Kedah of two coins from the Abbasid Caliphate, one of which is dated 234 AH (848 AD).
Another popular stopover for Arab sailors was Tiyumah, believed to be Pulau Tioman, in the South
China Sea. Like Kedah, Tiyumah acted as a staple port and source of fresh water for ships sailing to
China. In the 10th century, an Arab text also mentions ‘Panhang’ (Pahang). The major maritime
route followed by early Arab and Persian traders went from Sri Lanka via the Nicobar Islands to Kedah, and then round the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula to the island of Tioman and then north to China.

Among the first confirmed pieces of evidence about the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia comes from Phan Rang, in Champa (to the south of modern-day Vietnam), where an Arabic-inscribed pillar recording laws, dated to the year 1035, and a Muslim gravestone, dated to 1039, have been found. In addition, a Muslim woman's gravestone from 1048 was found in Brunei, and another from 1082 is known from Leron, East Java. The existence of these graves suggests that a Muslim presence in these places was well established. As Muslim merchants did not travel with their families, the women commemorated by the gravestones were probably local inhabitants who had married the traders during their long periods of stay while awaiting the change of winds. On the Chinese side, from the 12th century, the closing of the overland routes across Central Asia spurred the Hui communities to expand their ocean-going trade activities in Southeast Asia, and Chinese Muslim settlements developed in Southeast Asia. When the Ming emperor sent an imperial fleet through the region, he chose the Chinese Muslim Zhenghe (Cheng Ho) (1371–1435) as his emissary.

The settlements established by Arab merchants along the Straits of Melaka facilitated the expansion of Islam. During the 13th century Muslim missionaries, mainly Sufis from West Asia, travelled to these ports to reintroduce Islam among the traders. From the 13th century onwards the first local Islamic kingdoms appeared, the earliest of which was Pasai in northern Sumatra. From that time onwards the commercial presence of Muslim traders in the Malay regions was essential to introducing local societies to Islam, and Islamic influence became very pronounced.
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The pioneers of Islam in Southeast Asia
Unlike the date of the arrival of Islam to the region, most scholars agree on how Islam made its way
to Southeast Asia and who its pioneers were. The leading mentors included traders, the Ulama and
Sufi ‘saints’, and the local sultans. Islam took root in Southeast Asia through a combination of the
patience of religious scholars and the adaptation of members of royal courts. Although extensive
Arab contact with Southeast Asia predated Islam itself, and despite the Chams of Vietnam adopting
Islam in the 10th century, it was not until the end of the 13th century that the faith came to be a
major influence in Southeast Asia’s coastal regions. From there, it made inroads into the hinterland
of Southeast Asia.11

Although Islam travelled by many different routes, sometimes converting rulers and entire
populations in a single initiative, it was not solely traders and religious figures who provided spiritual
guidance. The sultans played a vital role in the spread of Islam among the different tribes and
kingdoms of the region. They were the protectors of Islam on the one hand, while on the other hand
they found in Islam a sense of a unity to live by and a message to accomplish. These elements formed
the basis of the establishment and spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. Once established, the spread of
Islam was accelerated through marriages between the daughters of wealthy local merchants and
Muslim traders, combined with commercial policies.12 From the 13th century onwards, as is evident
in the use of Arabic terminology in the Sejarah Melayu, Islam made progress in the region through
trade with Arab merchants and as a result of the movements of Islamic scholars and pilgrims across
the seas to Mecca.13

By the 14th century, Muslim traders in Java were among the elite at the capital of Majapahit.
In addition, Java’s port cities converted and, as sultanates, competed with Majapahit for trade. New
men, especially merchants, formed the elites of these sultanates.14 While the names of the prominent
traders who contributed to the arrival of Islam remain unknown, historical records state that they
came mainly from southern Arabia and other parts of the Arab world, as well as Persia, India and
Turkey. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Islamisation of the region was advanced, especially
by traders and Sufi saints from the Hadramaut in southern Arabia, as well as by merchants from
southern India.15 These were areas in which Shafi’ite Sunnism was prevalent, propagated in the garb
of a mysticism imbued with the ideals of sainthood and attached to the leading mystical orders then
active in the Middle East and India.16

The emergence of various Malay-Muslim kingdoms in the wake of the disintegration of the
Srivijaya empire, based in south Sumatra, and the Majapahit in Java took place at different times and
under different circumstances. Following the example of powerful kingdoms in the region,
beginning with Samudra-Pasai in north Sumatra in 13th century, the succeeding centuries saw the
rise of Melaka, Aceh, Brunei, Patani, Banten and Cirebon, culminating in the 19th century with
sultanates in southern Thailand and along the coasts of Borneo. These kingdoms were not only the
centres for the propagation of Islam, but they also nurtured its intellectual development through the presence of the Ulama and advanced Islamic education, especially Sufi philosophies.\textsuperscript{17}

The Sultanate of Melaka was one of the most significant bases of Islamisation in the region, before it was taken by the Portuguese in 1511. This empire controlled much of the trade passing through the Straits of Melaka and was also a centre of Malay culture and a model for subsequent Malay-Muslim sultanates.\textsuperscript{18} Aceh, also known as the ‘Verandah of Mecca’, reached the height of its power during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-36), controlling the lucrative trade in pepper and providing patronage for many Islamic works.\textsuperscript{19} History mentions the names of many other sultans who were patrons of learning; among the most notable were al-Malik al-Zahir of Samudra-Pasai, Mansur Shah of Melaka, and Iskandar Muda Mahkota Alum of Aceh. Some were the protectors of Sufi orders and followed the mystical paths or were associated with the teachers of Sufism. These include Muhammad Yusuf al-Khalidi al-Naqshabandi of Riau and Agung Tirtayasa of Banten.\textsuperscript{20}

The institutions which have played a more continuous role in the Islamisation of Southeast Asia are the Ulama and Sufi orders. These formed a special and greatly respected group which influenced all aspects of society. Among the leading figures who played a part in developing regional Islamic culture were the prolific writer and scholar Hamza al-Fansuri (d. 1629) of Barus in Sumatra, Nur al-din al-Raniri (d. 1666), Shams al-Din al-Sumatrai (d. 1630), Abd al-Ra’uf Singkl (d. 1693), Daud Ibn Abdullah al-Fatani (1718-1847) and the Nine Saints in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sulawesi (15th century AD).

The development of Islamic culture

The advent of Islam and the subsequent spread of Islamic learning in Southeast Asia brought about a major cultural change. The process of Islamisation and the formation of the Malay world’s Islamic culture and identity underwent a gradual evolution in three phases. The first of these (circa 1200-1400) was the phase of nominal conversion, or ‘conversion of the body’. The second phase (circa 1400-1700) is described as the period of the ‘conversion of the spirit’, and saw the rising influence and spread of philosophical mysticism, tasawuf and kalimah. The third phase (from 1700 onwards) saw the continuation and consummation of the second phase coinciding with the coming of the West.\textsuperscript{21}

The Islamic theological, mystical and metaphysical literature set in motion the process of revolutionising the Malay world view, turning it away from a preoccupation with mythology to the world of intelligence, reason and order. Islamic monotheism also transformed the Malay language. By the 16th century, Malay had become the literary and religious language of Islam in the region. The 16th and 17th centuries, a period which marked the rise of rationalism and intellectualism not manifested anywhere before in the Malay Archipelago, saw the emergence of philosophical mysticism and rational theology. The works of this new stream of Malay literature reveal a language of logical reasoning and scientific analysis. This period was also significant for setting in motion the process of
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The new conception of being in the world view of Tawheed (monotheism) was the
fundamental factor in the cultural transformation of the 15th to 17th centuries, which reflected
the beginning of the modern age in the archipelago. This affected all aspects of Malay culture by
introducing the concept of the Umma (universal community of Islam). In addition, there are the
essential concepts of a sultan who takes responsibility as a guardian of religion and society; for society,
there is the importance equality in the sight of God; for culture and knowledge, Islam introduced the
fundamental call of the Qur’an for believers to base their life and their religion on reading and
the pursuit of learning.

This process helped remove many mythical and tyrannical traditions, and caused the
integration of the magical world view of the region. This latter was further assisted by the coming
of the West and the imposition of Western culture, beginning in the 16th century. The advent
of Islam changed the culture of maritime Southeast Asia in many ways. It brought a new system of
writing; the Malay language was now written in Arabic script called Jawi. Malay itself became the
language of religious works, and, next to Arabic and Persian, a major vehicle of Islamic discourse.

Islam is a civilisation, as well as a religion, which in the span of about eight centuries has
shaped most of the Malay Archipelago into a distinctive Islamic entity. The areas that make up the
Malay world are inhabited by over 200 million Muslims of Malay ethnic stock, speaking a form of
the Malay language as their lingua franca, along with other local dialects which are cognate to
Malay. Not only has Islam developed into a civilisation recognisable for having its own cultural
configuration, based on the religious fundamentals of Islam, but it also makes Islam a regional force
to be reckoned with.
From Trengganu, the foundation stone of Malay manuscripts
For almost two thousand years, the Malay world was renowned for its scholarship. From the 4th century AD onwards, Southeast Asia was a centre of trade and Hindu-Buddhist learning, attracting numerous visitors from outside the region. By the 14th century, it was Islam that had become the focus of religious study and the dissemination of knowledge. The media used for spreading knowledge were oral and written. Most of the Malay world’s traditional cultural life, literature and religious beliefs have been transmitted verbally, from one generation to the next, up to the present day. In addition, written material has been used by rulers and scholars to inform the populace about law and religion. Before the arrival of Islam, a stone inscription found at Borobudur, written in Sanskrit and dated to the Hindu equivalent of 732 AD, describes the installation of the stone emblem of the Hindu god Shiva by King Sanjaya. In Terengganu, on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, there is another stone inscription. Dated to 702 AH/1303 AD, the contents were written in the Jawi script and provide details about the law in that sultanate. Taking a more international approach to the written word, Sultan Mansur Shah of Melaka (1456-1477) sent a letter to the Chinese emperor seeking protection against Siamese incursions.1

The oldest surviving Malay manuscript is thought to be one found in the village Tanjung Tanah in South Sumatra.2 This is a legal code written in old Malay script during the second half of the 14th century, in the pre-Islamic era. The manuscript remains with the owner as it is considered to be a sacred heirloom of the village. Other Malay manuscripts date back to the 17th century, including the Suluk al Salatin, Hikayat Hang Tuah and Bustan al-Salatin. Some of these are preserved in the National Library of Malaysia, while others are housed in overseas institutions, such as the
thousand years, the Malay world was renowned for its scholarship. From the 4th to the 14th century, Southeast Asia was a centre of trade and Hindu-Buddhist learning, attracting foreign scholars from outside the region. By the 14th century, it was Islam that had become the main study of the Malay world and the dissemination of knowledge. The media used for spreading knowledge were oral and written. Most of the Malay world’s traditional cultural life, literature and religious beliefs, have been transmitted verbally from one generation to the next, up to the present day.

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The arrival of Islam to Southeast Asia was the start of a new era. Most of the Malay Islamic empires came to flourish as centres of learning as well as trade. Among the most significant of these were: Pasai in the 13th century; Aceh from the 13th-17th century; Melaka from 1400-1511; Patani in the 16th century; Johor from 1511-1789; Palembang from 1650-1824; and Riau from 1798-1900. The Malay language was the lingua franca of these different education systems, all of which followed Islam’s insistence on the pursuit of knowledge. Starting small group discussions among sultans and religious scholars in mosques and palaces, this developed into a system of personal tutors for the ruler’s family. From there, it spread to talks given by scholars to villagers. Ibn Battuta mentioned that during his travels in Sumatra during the 14th century he saw the faqaha (scholars) and their books at a special session with Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir.

The function of manuscripts among the Malay people became more important after the arrival of Islam. Those who converted to Islam sought to have a copy of the Qur’an to refer to in their daily life. As stated in the Prophet Muhammad’s last sermon:

“I leave behind me two things, the Qur’an and my example, the sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray.”

Malay religious scholars and calligraphers took to copying the Qur’an for their communities. Most of these manuscripts are undated and do not reveal the name of the calligrapher or illuminator. Supplementing these Qur’ans, a number of books were produced to serve the need of Muslims seeking knowledge about their religion. Most of the manuscripts were copied and translated into the Malay language from original works written in Arabic or Persian. These covered fields such as religion – the Qur’an, hadith, tawheed, fiqh, akhlak, prayer and sinah – along with cultural expressions such as traditional medicine, beliefs, weapons and architecture.

From the 14th to the 16th century, Malay rulers were essential to the development of writing and copying the Qur’an and other manuscripts. Most of the writing workshops in the early stages were located in the palace, under the authorisation of the sultan. Traditionally in Malay society, learning activities and education started in the palace precincts. Teachers and scholars would come to the court to teach the royal and noble families, and they then worked as writers and translators. Books were often written by order of the sultan. Sheikh Abdul Rafa (1593-1695) was an important adviser to Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-39) of Aceh. As an adviser, he was also responsible for writing religious manuscripts and official documents at the sultan’s request. “The Forty Hadith”, a famous compilation by al-Nawawi, was copied on the instructions of Sultanah Inayat Shah Zakyatuddin Shah, who ruled Aceh after Sultan Iskandar Muda. He was also the first Malay scholar to translate the entire Qur’an into the Malay language.