Islam in South-East Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral, 1500–1800:
expansion, polarisation, synthesis

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Over the past half-century historians have endeavoured to moderate the exaggerated importance long attached to 1498 and the arrival in the Indian Ocean of a small band of Portuguese. The Portuguese introduced consistent contact in a language still relatively accessible, and in this sense 1498 may be seen as a turning point in the literature. Asia was henceforth linked to Europe directly, and the exchange of ideas and technologies was possible without the need for Central Asian mediation. Apart from an aggressive naval strategy and more effective technologies of navigation, time-keeping and warfare, however, the Portuguese had little more to offer by way of modernisation of commerce, science and technology. They made the great effort to join the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean precisely because it was already highly developed, delivering spices to Europe through Alexandria and Venice, and using more sophisticated financial techniques unknown to the Portuguese.

In this Muslim-dominated trade the Iberians initially brought only plunder and deception, and were naturally seen as a scourge. In the longer term the establishment of a direct maritime route of trade around the Cape of Good Hope was profoundly important in depriving the Islamic commercial networks of their monopoly of east–west trade and intellectual mediation. It also introduced to the world of the Indian Ocean a sharp polarisation between Islam and non-Muslims from which the maritime world had previously been spared.

The 'Muslim lake' of the late fifteenth century

The carriage of goods between the various key centres of production in South-East Asia—coastal China, the islands of South-East Asia, India and the Middle East—grew in sophistication as southern Chinese, Javanese, Tamils and Arabs became more active in it. The movement of population southward in
China, together with the great prosperity of the Song dynasty there (see Chapter 3), helped China replace India as the largest single market for South-East Asian tropical produce. But the prosperity of the countries at the opposite end of Eurasia, in Europe, following their recovery from the fourteenth century Black Death, made this the other great magnet of long-distance trade in the fifteenth century.

Exotic items of food, aromatics and medicine, along with the undervalued but prized gold, silver and jewels, were still the most important items of the long-distance trade in the fifteenth century. Within the Indian Ocean world, bulky items — cloth, rice, ceramics, cowry shells — already dominated in volume if not in value. If Muslim traders had been crucial all along along the silk route to China since the eighth century CE, it was only the fifteenth-century European infatuation with eastern spices that took them to the extremity of the commercial Eurasian world, the Maluku archipelago of eastern Indonesia. Cloves were then harvested for export only in the tiny volcanic islands of Ternate and Tidore (north Maluku) and nutmeg in the cluster of five volcanic islands of Banda (south-east Maluku). (See Map 8.)

The key feature of these commercial carriers of Islamic beliefs and customs was that they were trading communities, not representatives of states. They were often effective warriors, with some of the same superiorities of weapon and motivation as the Europeans who followed them. But unlike other expanding khanates of central Asia or the Portuguese, Dutch and English, they did not fight in the name of a distant state or receive reinforcements over the long term from a power centre. Only in the sixteenth century did they become the major factor in Islamic expansion also in maritime Asia.

Communities of traders of diverse ethnolinguistic background had either found in Islam a powerful rallying point as small minorities in the vast countries they linked through trade. Like Hindu, Jewish and Nestorian merchants, they received from Indian, South-East Asian and Chinese rulers the rights to build their places of worship and to apply their own rules on matters of marriage, inheritance and business contracts. Traders could operate alone and could not expect the local state to intervene on their behalf to recover debts and so forth. In this world the commercial communities which flourished were those which had an internal mechanism for solving disputes, somewhat like the medieval courts of Europe or the milles of Turkey. For Arabs, Persians, south Indian Muslims and 'Malays' of various communities and nationalities, the Muslim identity was more useful in this regard than other ethnic-linguistic ones. Where the Muslims were small minorities, even Sunni-Shi'a distinctions were generally subordinated to the advantages of solidarity with those who shared an Islamic sense of propitiety and acceptable food. Ibn Battuta, for example, made no mention of Sunni or Shi'a, Malay or Persian, in a lengthy description of Quanzhou and other maritime Chinese cities, where there was a quarter for Muslims, in which they live by themselves, and in which they have mosques both for the Friday services and for other religious purposes. The Muslims are honoured and respected.15 Of some ports governed by Muslims offered more attractive opportunities, and there are numerous examples of the Muslim commercial minority playing a major role in putting a Muslim ruler on the throne. By around 1500, the major Indian Ocean ports for the long-distance trade were Muslim-rulled (see Map 7) — Muscat, Aden, Bana and Muscat in the Arab world, Cambay in Gujarat, Melaka on the peninsula and Pasti, Pidie (Pedir) and Aceh competing in northern Sumatra (see Map 9). Even in Hindu-rulled Java the Muslim ports of the north coast — Gresik and Japara (see Map 10) — had asserted their independence of the Majapahit. But the Muslim commercial minority was almost as much a force in ports such as Calicut in Malabar (Keralad), where Muslim writers like the famous in the sixteenth century and Abdul Razzaq in the sixteenth approved the strict justice and security offered by its Hindu rulers — 'Security and justice are so firmly established in this city' — that every vessel was treated with the same strict honesty no matter what the religion or provenance of its owner.16 In the Cham ports of what is today the Vietnamese coast, in Siam, Pegu (Burma), Cambodia and Brunet, as in China, the Muslim traders were rich and powerful enough in their respective quarters to be treated with respect and care.

The Muslim spice trade was particularly flourishing around 1500, when over 100 tons of Malukan spices (cloves, nutmeg, mace) were arriving each year on the docks of Venice. Though small items of trade in comparison with pepper, sandalwood and cinnamon, these were valuable and well documented, and travelled the whole route from easternmost Asia to the Mediterranean. The system worked in sectors, hinged around the great emporia just mentioned where the items would be sold and redistributed to inland markets. Javanese and Bandanese Muslims would carry the spices from Maluku to Java, particularly its Muslim ports, Javanese and Malayan

would carry them onward to Melaka, whence a variety of Chinese, Ryukyuans, 'Luzon' (hybrid Muslim Filipinos) and Malays would take them to northern Asia, while Gujaratis, predominantly Muslim south Indians (known locally as Klings), Malays and assorted others would take them to Calicut and Cambay, Gujaratis, Persians and Arabs (notably the Katmi merchant guild from Hadramawt) dominated the onward trade to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, while Venetian galleys piloted the last stage of this maritime route, from Alexandria and Beirut to the chief European market for eastern spices in Venice. Virtually the whole route from Maluku to the Mediterranean was in Muslim hands. Each stage of the route was travelled alternating monsoon winds were in the correct direction, so that the entrepôts that formed the hinges of the system saw huge crowds of traders from diverse communities mingling for the monsoon change.

The key to these ports was cosmopolitanism. Their lifeblood was in welcoming different kinds of merchants, each group playing its necessary role in the trade. Even though Muslim shipping was dominant, every port needed also its Hindu financial castes, the south Indian Chettuvars and Gujarati Sarafs, to provide finance and letters of credit on other ports. With them came the Hindu temples essential to their operations. In South-East Asia all welcomed the Chinese merchants with their religious traditions. Of Melaka at this time it was said that eighty-four languages could be heard in its streets; frequently voyages were equipped using crews who were Muslim and Buddhist, and finance capital that might be Hindu or Jewish. The Arab pilot Shihâb al-Din Al-Mädhī ibn Majd complained of Melaka as its Muslim dignitary that "The infidel marries Muslim women while the Muslim takes pagan to wife. You do not know whether they are Muslim or not... They drink wine in the markets and do not treat divorce as a religious act."

Portuguese disruption, Muslim regrouping and the rise of Aceh

The Portuguese brought to the Indian Ocean a different kind of naval warfare, motivated by ethnic and religious solidarities of a new kind. A tight fit between national self-interest and religious zeal had propelled the Portuguese southward in a long series of battles with Islam, first to complete the reconquest of Portugal and then to carry the fight to the coast of Africa. Once into the Indian Ocean in 1498 their objective was to locate the sources of pepper and spices and seize control of them from the Muslim traders by whatever means it took. It was less a missionary imperative than a crusading one, which justified plunder in terms of a military-political struggle with Islam.

The first two Portuguese fleets, of Vasco da Gama (1498-9) and Cabral (1500-1), seized or sank enough Muslim shipping to make their intentions plain. The Muslim traders of Calicut and Gujarat appealed through them to the Mamluk rulers of Egypt to send a military force to combat this new threat. A forty-galley Mamluk fleet reached Calicut in time to do battle against the third Portuguese expedition, in 1502, but was defeated by da Gama's canons. A second Mamluk fleet sent out in 1504 to stiffen Muslim resistance in Gujarat and the south was more successful in a battle off Sri Lanka, but was eventually routed off Diu by Almeida in 1509. They could not prevent the Portuguese entrenching themselves in fortified strategic points, initially at Calicut (where the Muslim population became their bitter enemies, making nearby Cochin a more satisfactory base), then at Goa (1510), Melaka (1511) and Hormuz (1515). In the first fifteen years of the new century the flow of Indian Ocean spices along the Muslim route to the Mediterranean faltered and almost died.

This onslaught forced the trade of the Indian Ocean to adjust in a variety of ways. Hindu and Buddhist actors quickly worked out modes of operating with the Portuguese. But the dominant Muslim trade was obliged to arm itself more effectively, and to regroup around stronger rulers able and willing to confront the Portuguese threat. The Portuguese capture of Melaka, at that time the largest entrepôt of South-East Asia, was particularly disruptive. Although the Javanese tried for a time to continue their strong relation with the city, the other major sectors of the Islamic trade had to attach themselves to different entrepôts. The long-term beneficiary was Aceh, but many also shifted their operations to Johor, Patani or Palembang. In Kerala the Mappillas eventually made Calicut impossible as a Portuguese base, but from nearby Cochin the Portuguese remained able to form local alliances and to take a share of the pepper crop.

The key political institution of Indian Ocean trade in the fifteenth century had been the city state, a cosmopolitan autonomous polity dedicated to trade and dependent on it. Polities such as Calicut, Pulicat (Coromandel coast), Melaka, Pasai, Japara and Gresik tried to stay aloof from the warfare of continental powers, buying their autonomy when necessary by sending tribute to those in a position to threaten. Dependents for even their rice staple

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on imports by sea, they were potentially vulnerable to the kind of naval attack
launched by the Portuguese.

It was precisely such port-states that the Portuguese sought to overpower,
and in the first years of the century they achieved amazing success in doing so.
Virtually all of the port-states on which the Muslim trade depended in southern
India and the archipelago were threatened. It was as Muslims that the traders had been attacked, and it needed to be as Muslims that they responded.
Their complex links with Hindu rulers or financiers were called into question by the Portuguese challenge, and they transferred their support to rulers
strong enough to defend them against Portuguese attack. As Barros acknowledges, India and the archipelago were threatened in imports by sea, they were potentially vulnerable to the kind of naval
attack that the Portuguese had been attacking, and it needed to be as Muslims that they responded. As Barros acknowledges, India and the archipelago were threatened.

The origins of the Aceh sultanate at the mouth of the Aceh river in northwestern Sumatra appear no older than the late fifteenth century, although Muslims were well placed since the thirteenth century in the older port of
Lamri, 50 kilometres further east. The advent of a group of prominent merchants and aristocrats from the Champa capital, after that city fell to the Vietnamese in 1471, appears to have been the stimulus for a new Islamic
dynasty to form in Aceh and incorporate Lamri. Nevertheless it was not sufficiently established as a port-state to attract the initial attention of the Portuguese, who from 1509 sought a foothold in the two older and larger ports of northern Sumatra – Pidie (modern Sigli) and Pasai, which since its conversion around 1292 had been the beacon of South-East Asian Islam. The Portuguese establishment of fortified strongholds in both ports and interference in their succession disputes increased the instability to which they were already prey, and particularly alienated the Indian and Arab merchants. Only in 1518 did a Portuguese fleet rashly attempt a raid on Aceh, lured by stories of a "heavenly temple" (possibly Chettiyar) stocked with gold there. Aceh's defeat of this raiding party and seizure of many of its weapons set it on the road to driving the Portuguese from Pidie and Pasai in the early 1520s, no doubt with the support of Muslim merchants. By 1520 Aceh had unified the whole north Sumatran coast under a militantly anti-Portuguese dynasty. From that point Aceh provided a secure base for Muslim traders, who gradually developed new routes avoiding the centres of Portuguese power. Throughout the first part of the century, it was the most consistent and militant enemy of

the Portuguese, laying siege to the fortress of Melaka itself on multiple occasions.

The rise of Banten, eventually the strongest maritime sultanate in Java, has a similar origin. West Java was still Hindu at the Portuguese arrival, including its main port of Sunan Kelapa, modern Jakarta. The Portuguese saw it as a promising source of pepper and slaves and made an alliance with it in 1522. A backlash occurred against them at about the same time as Aceh conquered the Portuguese strongholds in northern Sumatra. The founder of Islamic power on the west Java coast, through the two west Java sultanates of Cirebon and Banten, is known in Javanese tradition as Sunan Gunung Jati. While it is possible that the military conquest of Banten and Sunan Kelapa was the work of his son-in-law Farahullah (for whom there is a Cirebon grave dated 1570, quite distinct from that of Gunung Jati dated 1568), most sources attribute everything to Sunan Gunung Jati himself.

The wa4li or apostle (from Ar. walil, saint) was by origin a Sumatran from Pasai. Angered by the intrusion of the Portuguese in Pasai, he travelled to Mecca and fought there, and spent about three years as a religious student there. When he returned the Portuguese were still entrenched, and he moved on to the principal Muslim stronghold in Java, the port-state of Deliak. There he reputedly married the sister of the ruler, Sultan Trenggono, and encouraged him to use his power to expand Islam on the island. Presumably learning of the Portuguese beachhead in the west, Sunan Gunung Jati obtained Demak assistance to go there and establish Muslim control at Banten, west of Jakarta. From there he conquered the main Sundanese (west Java) port of Sunan Kelapa in 1527, and renamed it Jakarta. His descendants became the sultans of Banten, developing in the coastal strip of west Java a substantial port and polity, distinct by its Javanese language and its literal Islam from the Sundanese of the interior, but also a formidable rival of the Javanese state coveted eventually in Mataram. Once again, Portuguese intervention had provoked a strong Islamic riposte.

In southern India it was the Mappilas who emerged as the implacable Muslim opponents of the Portuguese, even though they had initially been more localised trade rivals of the Arabs and Gujaratis. The Mappilas were indigenous or hybridised Malayalam-speaking Muslims, who dominated the regional trade around the coasts of southern India and Sri Lanka. Virtually throughout the 1520s and 1530s they were at war with the Portuguese, fighting particularly over the pearl fisheries and the trade in pepper and cinnamon.

Like the Acehnese they adopted the language of jilah, laying siege to Portuguese forts in Calicut (where they forced its abandonment), Kollam

and Colombo. Of major ports they were strongest in Calicut, and enabled its rulers to hold off the Portuguese, who made their major Kerala base for the pepper trade in Cochinn further south. But they never controlled a state, and had a difficult relationship even with their prime protector, Hindu-ruled Colnict.

The rise of a few powerful ‘gunpowder empires’ in the sixteenth century at the expense of less defensible commercial ports was a wider phenomenon than the Indian Ocean world, and Christian-Muslim rivalry was by no means the only factor at work. The military revolution making more effective use of cannon and other technologies spread unevenly, and assisted some military innovators in becoming unprecedentedly strong. Portugal’s invasion of the Indian Ocean coincided with the rise of two mighty Turkish empires. The Ottomans expanded towards the Indian Ocean by annexing Egypt in 1517, and extended their rule to the Hijaz and Hadramawt in the subsequent years. In India the victory of Babur’s armies at Panipat inaugurated Mughal rule, which quickly came to dominate all of northern India.

The Ottoman Turks were far more important of the two as a maritime factor. Their claims on the caliphate, their control of the land passages of the old Islamic spice route and their wars with the European powers made them the only conceivable leaders of any concerted Islamic response to the Portuguese threat. The first Asian maritime state to contact them and support their claim to the caliphate was the Bahmani sultanate of the Deccan, then master of the west coast around Goa. Its sultans exchanged letters with the Ottomans as early as the 1480s, despite the obstruction of the Mamluks in Egypt. After the fall of the Bahmanis in 1527 these contacts appear to have been revived by Bijapur, the Muslim successor state in that section of the coast.

Gujarat, independent at the time under Muzaffar Shih II (r. 1511-26), had much more intimate commercial relations with the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports as they fell under Ottoman control. In 1518 Muzaffar Shih congratulated the Ottoman sultan Selim I (r. 1512-26) on his victories and sought his assistance against the accused Portuguese. Turks were prominent in Gujarat’s armed forces, and Gujarat became the first strategic partner of the Ottomans in their attempts to become an Indian Ocean power.

6 Naimir Bahman Farroqi, ‘Mughal-Ottoman relations: A study of political and diplomatic relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman empire, 1556-1727’, PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, (1985), pp. 20-3. This was subsequently published under the same title in Delhi in 1989.

By 1577, when the strongest of Ottoman rulers, Suleyman ‘the Magnificent’ (r. 1520-66), was ready to initiate a new phase of concerted anti-Portuguese action, Aceh was established as another enthusiastic strategic partner. Aceh’s pepper, still grown chiefly in the formerly independent Pasai and Picic regions, had mostly been destined to China during the fifteenth century, but Portuguese disruption of Muslim export from the south-west coast of India led Gujarati and Arab shippersto seek new suppliers from Aceh, now firmly anti-Portuguese. By the mid-1560s, a new Islamic route was well established, probably shipping pepper directly from Aceh-ruled Pasai via the Islamic Maldives to the Red Sea. This quickly came to rival the Portuguese route in the volume of pepper shipped to Europe. It also established direct relations between Aceh and the Ottoman-ruled ports of Jiddah, Aden and Suez, and gave Aceh its claim to be ‘the verandah of Mecca’ (sarambi Melbah), the place of departure for South-East Asian pilgrims making the haji.

Sultan Suleyman received petitions from Indian Ocean littoral states pleading for protection of shipping, and appealing to the Ottoman role as ‘servitor of the Holy Cities’ (Khalive al-Haramayn). In 1557 he sent envoys to Gujarat and other Indian Ocean ports to gain their support for the attack on the Portuguese. We do not know if these envoys also went as far as Aceh, but it seems likely that the first Achehese attack on Portuguese Melaka, in 1537, was partly motivated by the Ottoman initiative. From this point onward, Portuguese sources are full of references to Turkish soldiers and weapons playing a key role in Aceh’s campaigns, against both the neighbouring Hindu/animist Batak and the Portuguese in Melaka. Mendes Pinto, more valuable for his evocative detail than for his accuracy with numbers, portrayed 300 Turkish troops, together with others from Gujarat and Malabar (Kerala), turning the tide in Aceh’s contest with the Batak king, who was for his part bolstered by presumably non-Muslim auxiliaries from other parts of Sumatra and Borneo, and from Portuguese Melaka.

However, the naval expedition under the Ottoman governor of Egypt, 20,000 men strong, proved a dismal failure. Its attempt to besiege the Portuguese fortress in Diu in September 1558 was defeated, and the Ottoman-Gujarat alliance broke up. Since many of this large army reportedly dispersed because the people of India had induced them away, they must
have played a role nevertheless in subsequent attacks on Portuguese around the littoral.

The anti-Portuguese activities of Aceh in the period 1532–9 were probably the work of the warlike local ruler of Pasai, Al-ud-din Rû‘ayat Shah al-Kahar, brother and successor of the Aceh sultan. His control of the then major pepper port probably made him also the recipient of the additional Turkish military assistance which came with these ships. This may have enabled him both to lead the first expedition against Melaka, and to topple his brother and seize the throne sometime in the period between 1537 and 1539. Al-Kahar then ruled until 1571, and became the major scourge of the Portuguese in the Malacca Straits. Alliances between the Portuguese and Aceh’s rivals in northern Sumatra, synthetically Muslim Aru and a non-Muslim Barak federation, increased the militant quality of al-Kahar’s rhetoric. Acehnese remembered him as the one who established the ‘Turkish alliance and first employed the ghâsîr ideal of ‘fighting all the unbelievers’, while Portuguese sources portrayed him as a bloodthirsty exponent of pure jihad. Pinto included the interesting detail that al-Kahar took special pride in a title of holy warrior against the infidels, bestowed by the sharif of Mecca in acknowledgement of the annual gifts of two golden lamps that he sent to the Holy City. \(^71\)

Suleyman the Magnificent must have been discouraged by the defeat in 1538, and subsequently directed his attention to Europe and the Mediterranean. Aceh also encountered some local setbacks in the 1540s. The only substantial Turkish fleet sent into the Indian Ocean in the remainder of Suleyman’s reign was that of Piri Rej in 1551, destroyed by the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf. Even that ineffective thrust may have stimulated another anti-Portuguese coalition in the Islamic Far East. The Portuguese reported that Johor, one of Aceh’s usual rivals, tried to rally Japara, the leading Java port and Portugal’s main rival in the Malacca spice trade, into a holy war against Portuguese Melaka in 1550–1. \(^72\) More fundamentally, the important Muslim states all along the Indian Ocean trading route, including the Mughals, Bijapur, and Golconda in India, the Mappilas in Kerala and the port-states of South-East Asia, became committed in this period to orthodox Sunnî Islam, with implicit or overt acceptance that the umma ought to be a political community united behind a caliph in Turkey.

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72 [H.J. de Groot], ‘De rechten van Panteunismus Scrupulis’ (Iragalige’), Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut, 13 (1904), pp. 37–44.
73 The travels of Mendes Pinto, p. 32.
74 [H.J. de Groot], ‘De rechten van Panteunismus Scrupulis’ (Iragalige’), Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut, 13 (1904), pp. 37–44.
Melaka and attacks at the same time by Calicut, Bijapur and Gujarat against Portuguese possessions in India. This was one of the most difficult moments for the Portuguese in Asia. Even as far east as Ternate in Maluku, the Portuguese were ejected from their fort when a militant Muslim for the first time assumed the Ternate throne.

It is rightly said that Islam came to these maritime realms by sea and by trade, interacting with and adapting to local beliefs as it made converts among the local commercial population. In this early stage force was seldom of much utility, and the community was essentially a commercial one living as an enclave minority in a very plural world. The sixteenth century, however, brought a quite different quality to political Islam. In a number of areas holy war was embraced as the appropriate response to the Portuguese onslaught, and then extended to local non-Muslims. New gunpowder empires arose on the back of trade wealth and firearms, and adopted a militant vision of Islam as the rationale for their expansion. In such areas the line between Muslim and unbeliever became explicitly political.

Crossing the line had clear political as well as behavioural consequences. Some groups who felt themselves the victims of this militant period, including al-Kahar’s Barat rivals, the Hindu Balinese and some Torajans of Sulawesi, developed their sense of modern identity in consequence as specifically non-Muslim. Other communities, like the pearl-fishers of southernmost India or one of the two traditional moieties of Ambon, consolidated their identity by allying with the Portuguese as Christians against this political Islam of mid-century.

Sixteenth-century consolidation of Muslim institutions

Much energy has been expended pushing back the first indications of Islamic presence in one place or another, usually in the form of a tombstone or a name in the Chinese record. Too little has been given to the crucial process by which Islam extended its reach from harbour communities to major states, essentially in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At the beginning of the ‘age of commerce’ in the fifteenth century Pasai was probably the only state which espoused and institutionalised Islam as a central part of state identity. By its end in the mid-seventeenth century Islam had occupied most of its modern extent in South-East Asia, mosques and religious schools were built at substantial settlements, most Muslim rulers had ensured that pork was not eaten and that funerals and key public ceremonies were Islamised, while a few had imposed what they believed to be Islamic law in their capitals.

Writing around 1520, Tomé Pires pointed out that although the king of the Minangkabau (Sumatra’s most numerous people) had accepted Islam when he married the Melaka sultan’s sister, many said he was not truly Muslim. ‘The truth is that he is a Moor [Muslim], with about a hundred of his men; all the other people are heathens’. In Borneo there were Muslims only at the Brunei capital, where the king had recently converted, in northern Maluku, the sultan of Islam in eastern Indonesia, the kings of Ternate and Tidore were Muslims ‘but not deeply involved’, while ‘three parts and more of four’ were still heathen.15

The chronicle of Patani, in the Thai–Malay borderlands on the east coast of the peninsula, tells the story of that kingdom’s Islamisation in two stages. Sometime in the early 1500s the king promised to become a Muslim if miraculously cured of an illness by a visiting shaykh from Pasai. After twice reneging on his promise, he finally submitted to the shaykh’s requirements. He recited the Shahiida, accepted an Islamic name and instructed all his court likewise to become Muslim. In his lifetime, ‘all the people within the town adopted Islam, but of the people outside the town area not one accepted Islam. And although the raja accepted Islam, the only habits he abandoned were worshipping idols and eating pork. Apart from that he changed not one of his heathen habits’. It was only considerably later in the reign of his son Mudhaffar (d. 1564) that another shaykh from Pasai visited and complained that ‘if there is no mosque [in a country] there is no sign of the Islamic religion’. So a mosque was built, and only then the country people too became Muslim and permanently accepted the laws of the Prophet. Although they in turn abandoned pork and the worship of idols (berabul), perhaps as a Hindu cult, they continued to worship stones, trees and spirits.16

In Patani there were certainly mosques at the time of Ibn Battuta’s visit in 1345, and in Melaka ‘the beautiful mosque ... the finest known in these parts’ was built by Sultan Munnar Shah (r. 1499–77).17 In his time there was also a shift of Melaka, as there had been earlier in Patani. But outside the quarters of the traders from ‘above the winds’ (Persia, Arabia and India), there was little

17 Souris oriental of Tomé Pires, p. 249.
evidence of Islamic scholarship in South-East Asia before the sixteenth century. Only then do we begin to read of ‘ilmānī’ spreading out from strongholds such as Pasai to teach in other ports. The political polarisation referred to above encouraged rulers who aligned with the Islamic side of the contest to seek out religious teachers and embrace their new ways of thinking as a bulwark against the Portuguese, and at the same time a justification for expanding their realms.

Muslims and Christians developed their institutional arrangements for proselytising South-East Asia in tandem with each other, and often provoking each other into further efforts. The initial crusading impulse of the Portuguese had left little room for preaching or proselytising. Only in mid-century with the Jesuit mission of Francis Xavier were there serious efforts at conversion for its own sake, rather than as a sign of political loyalty. Xavier went first (1542) to the impoverished Peranakans of the pearl fisheries opposite Sri Lanka, who sided with the Portuguese in the bitter Christian-Muslim fighting over the pearl trade in the 1530s. He laid the basis for a permanent Tamil-speaking Christian community there, and a Malay-speaking one in eastern Indonesia, notably Ambon. The Spanish, colonising the Philippines after the full effect of the Catholic Counter Reformation, put a higher priority than the Portuguese on sending missionaries to convert the islanders.

From mid-century, then, the competition between Muslim and Christian also took on a proselytising quality. Centres such as Aceh, Demak, Gresik, Brunei and Ternate sent learned ‘ilmānī’ on the trading ships to frontier areas, to set up schools and communities. In the first stage up to the fifteenth century the lingua franca of Islamic commercial communities around the Indian Ocean had been Arabic, but Malay now became established as the language of South-East Asian Islam. The Melaka chronicle noted that the people of fourteenth century Pasai all spoke Arabic, whereas in fifteenth-century Melaka the chief lingua franca was Malay, with Arabic script. The Melaka chronicle, in its story of the Portuguese conquest of 1511, mentions the Ḥanafī ʿAbdulrahman Hamzah and the Ḥikayat Amir Hamza, versions of two famous Arab stories of warrior heroes of the Prophet’s time rendered into Malay verse. On the eve of battle the young Melaka nobles asked the sultan to have the first of these read to stir their courage, while he initially offered instead the latter.  

Evidence for the development of a corpus of theological and mystical writing in Malay comes later. The earliest of the great Malay writers known by name, Hamzah Fansuri, was thought to have flourished around 1500 until a copy recently came to light of a gravestone in Mecca of one Hamza ibn Abdullah al-Fansuri, dated 1527. He felt the need to say that he was writing his mystical text in Malay so that the Muslims who did not know Arabic or Persian could understand it. If such writing was then still relatively rare, it reached its flowering within a century. Many of the key writers of the seventeenth century read and quoted Hamzah, and like him taught and wrote in Aceh, the principal domesticator of Arabic and Persian ideas into the Malay world.

The most prolific of these Malay writers, the Gujarati-born Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī, recorded some of the history of this process. Some noted scholars arrived in Aceh from the Arab world on the pepper-ships, and began to teach in the new frontier. The Egyptian Muhammad ‘Abd ar-Rahman Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn came from Mecca in the 1570s and taught inferential theology (taḥālīf). In the 1580s two more well-known ʿilmānī’ came from Mecca to teach ḥadīth and ʾaqīdah respectively. A little later al-Ranīrī’s uncle, Shaykh Muhammad Jullānī, arrived from Gujarat to teach ḥadīth, ʾ AQI dAH AND TaHAliff. While these learned men presumably taught and wrote in Arabic, their students and successors, including al-Ranīrī himself, were masters of Malay. One of the most prolific was the Ārāmī-born Shams al-Dīn al-Sururī al-Pasā’ī, who composed many texts in Malay and Arabic advocating a mystical monism influenced by the Naqshbandī Sufi order. His chief tool for proselytisation was a Malay catechism of 1609, in the form of 211 questions and answers, the Mi‘rāj al-Mu‘minīn. He is also widely thought to have been the ʿAQI dAH OR ShAYKH aL ISLĀM (`BISHOP’) of Aceh who was able to use his Arabic to discuss matters with James Lancaster’s first English fleet in 1602.

The direct political and economic connection between Aceh and the Ottoman-ruled Arabian peninsula, in other words, laid the basis for Aceh’s emergence as the intellectual centre of Islamic South-East Asia (Fig. 1). We shall return below to the main preoccupations and debates of the schools of Islamic writing that developed there.

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20 Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī, Ḥikayat-Sulānī, pp. 21-3.
The conversion of Java

As home of the only substantial Indianised kingdoms in South-East Asia that subsequently became Muslim, Java is especially interesting. Almost the whole of Javanese-speaking (central and east) Java became nominally Muslim in the long sixteenth century, with some of the Hindu elite taking refuge in Bali. This contrasts not only with Bali and the eventually Buddhist states of mainland South-East Asia, but with India itself, where major Hindu communities continued in those parts of India which were conquered by Muslims. Even in other parts of South-East Asia where Islam made an early and deep impression, there remained large interior communities that resisted Islam, as with the Batak case mentioned above. The key to Java’s distinctiveness appears paradoxically to lie in the very strength of the older Hindu-Buddhist tradition exemplified by Majapahit, on to which Islam was successfully grafted. Warfare played a major part in the Muslim conquest, but a creative process of selecting and filtering the new religious and cultural elements was equally important. Akbar’s synthetic project in Mughal India of developing a religious system which could carry all his subjects with him was a failure, but the analogous project in Java may be said to have prevailed under the Mataram kings.

The political conquest

The long sixteenth century was critical for this process in Java, even more decisively than elsewhere in the archipelago. Around 1500, according to Portuguese reports, Islam was still limited to the coastal trading cities of what had been the Majapahit kingdom – that is Javanese-speaking central and east Java. As the previous chapter has made clear, these were cosmopolitan trading centres, which owed their Islam partly to the (partly Hanafi) trade and tribute connection with Champa, Canton and Quanzhou, and partly to the (principally Shafi’i) Islamic spice trading route to the west, through first Pasai and Palembang, but after about 1460 primarily Melaka, to the Indian Ocean world beyond.

Demak was by 1510 the strongest of these Muslim port-states, while its pious patron, Hindu Majapahit, was in disarray. Dynastic upheavals after 1486 led to the move of its capital further inland, to Kediri, where it lost influence over all the coastal ports except Tuban. The wealth of Demak had been built in the last quarter of the fifteenth century by a very successful Sino-Malay trader from Palembang, in some chronicles called Ko Po. He built a fleet of ships trading around the Java Sea, dominating the spice trade from Maluku and the supply of Java rice to Melaka. He had reputedly spent time in Greece, an older Islamic centre and port for Majapahit, but as Majapahit declined he moved his base of operations to Demak, and central Java became the centre of Javanese rice exports. He was not himself a ruler as much as a politically astute merchant, who married his daughters to several of the key coastal kings. His descendants became rulers of Demak, and made him the clear leader of the Islamic alliance and the major power of the Java Sea. He or his son must have been one of the historical identities whose memory went into the construction of the legendary Javanese hero Raden Patih (the conqueror). In the eighteenth-century Mataram historical epic, Babad Tanah Jawi, this figure was used to legitimate the non-Javanese or mestizo Muslim coastal rulers as appropriate heirs of Majapahit. He was made the son of the last Majapahit Hindu ruler by a Chinese princess, banished to Palembang as a child and brought up by a client ruler there. His conquest of Majapahit, in the also legendary year 1478 (the Javanese year 1460, thought appropriate for a
change of dynasty), could therefore be seen as a restoration of the Majapahit lineage.

The first firmly historical ruler of Demak was known posthumously as Sultan Trenggana. Son or grandson of the Sino-Malay shipping magnate, he may have come to the throne around 1505. He patronised the rebuilding of the great mosque of Demak, in 1507, and presumably the casing of the great cannon Kijitamat, dated to 1527/8 and bearing the inscription `the supreme result is the triumph of the faith'. He may have patronised some of the semi-legendary holy men (wali) of Java, such as Sunan Kalijaga, whom popular tradition credits with the conversion of much of interior central Java. This king appears to have ruled until his death on the battlefield in 1546, though eclipsed during part of his youth by his forceful brother-in-law Pali Yunus of Japara, another successful shipowner who took over some of Demak's maritime networks and confronted the Portuguese in the second decade of the century.

Trenggana's long reign coincided with the transition of Javanese Islam from a cosmopolitan commercial enclave situation to an aggressive competitor for power in Java. The challenge of the Portuguese, vividly experienced by refugees from Melaka and Pasai, must have been connected with this transition, as we saw above in the expansion westward to Cirebon and Banten in the 1520s. Already a few years after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese, the ruler of Tuban, Majapahit's only remaining coastal dependency, told Tomé Pires that Majapahit was `always at war with the Moors on the sea-coast, especially with the lord of Demak'. Muslims who had experienced the Indian Ocean contest with the Portuguese identified Trenggana as the likeliest leader of the political expansion of the dār al-islām in Java. Sunan Gunung Jati, notably, is remembered as having bestowed on him the title sultan after his return from Mecca, perhaps seeing it as a legitimization for military expansion. Demak finally succeeded in taking the Hindu capital at Kudus around 1537, in a campaign portrayed in Javanese sources as a holy war supported by several Muslim port-states and such spiritual leaders as the master of the sacred place Kudus (al-Quds), a little to the east of Demak.

The defeat of Majapahit did not lead directly to a Muslim kingdom taking its place. In the power vacuum at the centre of Java Demak was now well placed, but it remained a coastal metropolis long separated from the politics of the interior, and still interested above all in its trade. The following decades saw Sultan Trenggana sending the vital military and spiritual aid to one faction of a succession dispute in Banjarmasin, in return for conversion. According to the Banjarmasin chronicle, this intervention secured the Islamisation of Banjarmasin and enabled it to become the principal Muslim state of southern Borneo, initially under Demak patronage. In the 1540s Trenggana led a military campaign eastwards, against the Hindu kingdom of Pasuruan. Mendes Pinto claims to have followed the campaign in 1546, and refers to Turkish and Acehnese assistance with artillery, and detachments of soldiers from Javanese, and from the `Luzon' (Muslim Filipinos) exiled from the Manila area. Pinto's account of this contest is free of the holy war rhetoric he used for Acehnese campaigns, however. Even though one side is Muslim, these contests were both part of the same Javanese moral universe. Sultan Trenggana was killed during this war against Pasuruan, and so it was presumably his successor who in 1548 alarmed a visiting Jesuit with his aggressive plans to spread Islam around the neighbouring peoples, and become another Sultan of 'Turkey'. On the contrary, however, Java after Trenggana's death became again a patchwork of local chieftains. The commercial centrality his grandfather had built up had long passed to other centres with better ports. References in the most reliable Javanese chronicle to wong ma'ti Selam (people who die for Islam, or martyrs), fighting furiously on the winning side in battles for interior centres in the 1570s, suggests that the multithetic Muslim shock troops who had fought for Islam under Demak's banner continued to be decisive in the following decades. But all sources agree that whatever unity there was on the Muslim side during Demak's heyday was lost to a variety of newly Muslim contenders by the 1640s. Pajang, near contemporary Surakarta, claimed authority over much of central Java including Demak itself in the third quarter of the century, and hence a primacy over the lords of Java.

According to the Javanese chronicles, it was a military commander of Pajang's forces who was given the fertile Mataram area round modern Yogyakarta as a fief. His son, Panembahan Senopati Ingalaga, emerges more fully into history as a conquering king of Mataram from about 1584. As portrayed by an acute Dutch visitor in the following century, he was remembered as having used Islam to make a clean break with the old Hindu dynasty, 21 22 23 24

22 Sūrat oriental of Tomé Pires, p. 176.
kill all potential rivals from that quarter and stake his claim to a new kind of legitimacy based on upholding the new religion. After establishing an independent base in Mataram he ‘made war until the end of his life’, which came in 1605. By then he had subdued the older centres of Pajang and Demak, and taken possession of items of regalia held to confer legitimacy since the time of Majapahit. He had also extended his power to Kediri and Madura.

Senopati was remembered as the founder of the last strong Javanese state, a great conqueror who returned power to the interior by mastering the new type of warfare introduced by Muslims, Portuguese and Chinese on the coast. The Mataram he effectively founded laid claim to legitimacy in Islamic as well as Javanese terms. Senopati sought to compensate for his landless origins by marrying various royal ladies, while subsequent historians saw him as successor to Majapahit through Demak and Pajang. We know almost nothing about the nature of his Islamic commitment, or the extent to which Islam was practised. Javanese legend has one of the coast-based wali, Sunan Kalijaga, from the Demak holy place of Ngadilanggu, as his adviser, but no mosque is attributed to him. Senopati’s Mataram appears in fact to have been a pioneering military camp in a fertile but underpopulated area, with most of its early population forced to shift there as soldiers or captives from other areas.

Unlike its Muslim predecessors Mataram was not dependent on the Muslim commercial communities of the Javanese pesisir (coast), though it needed their support if it was to grow and flourish. The centres of the old Majapahit culture were far away in east Java, and its leaders killed or fled to the remotest east at Balambangan. The models both for Islamic learning and for the partially Islamised Javanese court culture were now in the pesisir. With the decline of the central Java ports, the centre for both moved to Surabaya, including its nearby port area of Gresik, in which sat the Islamic ‘holy hill’ of Giri. If Mataram applied just as much Islam as its ruler saw fit, Surabaya inherited from Demak the leading role of seeking to build a new civilisation which could reconcile the needs of international Muslims of the pesisir with those of Javanese aristocratic tradition.

Senopati failed in his attempts to incorporate the Surabaya area. This task fell to his grandson, Sultan Agung (r. 1634–98), who defeated Surabaya in a series of campaigns in 1620–5. It was the reign of this Javanese sun-king that created the synthesis between the old Java of Majapahit and the new Java of the Muslim coastal cities. The eclipse of the Muslim coastal cities, under the

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military pressure of Mataram and the commercial inroads of the Dutch and English into the formerly lucrative spice trade of the pesisir, brought an end to a remarkable chapter in Javanese history. During the long sixteenth century Java had been as exposed to the cosmopolitan and commercial influences of the Muslim overseas as had other parts of the Indian Ocean littoral. By the end of Agung’s reign those influences were limited and controlled, and a Javanese synthesis was in place that could bring even the most Hinduised elements of Javanese society along with it.

The spiritual synthesis

The story just told is one of kings and battles, and the way in which the old order of Majapahit, centred 60 kilometres up the Brantas valley in east Java, was supplanted first by an avowedly commercial and cosmopolitan Islamic order, and then in turn by an interior kingdom in south-central Java. Another story must be told, closer to that of the Javanese traditions, about a spiritual transformation attributed to a number of miracle-working holy men, mystic saints as well as warriors.

The older religious order had comprised both a Hindu ritual in the courts, intended to safeguard the supernatural legitimacy of kings, and a popular spirituality of holy men and holy places – ascetics and hermits in their dharma or purupam (hermitages). The former was seemingly destroyed in the battles of the long sixteenth century, so that no Brahmins survived to minister to the needs of the court as they did in Buddhist Siam and Cambodia. The latter was much more resilient. Tomé Pires described how vigorously the older pattern of ascetics (tapu) survived the first stage of Islamisation even in the pesisir of Java:

‘There are about fifty thousand of these in Java. There are three or four orders of them. Some of them do not eat rice nor drink wine: they are all virgins, they do not know women. They wear a certain headdress which is full a yard long ... And these men are also worshipped by the Moors, and they believe in them greatly; they also give them alms; they rejoice when such men come to their houses.’

The popular success of the new doctrine in Java lay in its ability to penetrate this ascetic world and gradually give it a more Islamic flavour, rather than seeking to condemn and confront it directly. The well beloved of Javanese Islamic traditions are depicted as men who through meditation and self-denial
had penetrated to the inner unities of being, and could thereby demonstrate superior spiritual powers. There are stories of their visiting the ancient mountain hermitages such as Mantingan near Demak, or Pulangan near Banten, and being accepted by the adepts (santir) there. The earliest Javanese guide to Islamic behaviour, from the pesantren of the sixteenth century, itself adopted the same term tapa for its model Muslim. But the strengthening of the tapa is to stay in the mosque, to perform the five daily prayers and to recite the Quran. The line was drawn against the tapa of the unbelievers and their yogic practices. 27

This document certainly comes down to us from a Javanese urban milieu where Islam was still contested, even if supported by the local rulers. Muslims had to be warned against honroring idols, praising the more generous behaviour of non-Muslims and answering questions about religious identity by denying one’s Islam or suggesting it made no difference. Suggestive of the upper hand of Muslims in the city, however, was the warning against killing a non-believer in order to take possession of his property, rather than for religious motives. 28 The earliest Dutch expedition to Java, from 1599, also received the impression that it was still only the coast that was predominantly Muslim.

Legends about the spreading of the faith among the people of central Java are associated with one of the best-loved wali, Sunan Kalijaga, and his disciple, Ki Pandan Arang. The latter was supposed to have come from the former rulers of Java, and in one version was in reality the last king of Majapahit. Kalijaga converted him to the ascetic life through various miracles, however, after which Ki Pandan Arang travelled about central Java performing his own miracles and converting notable people as well as ruffians to the true faith. He ended his life by teaching and meditating at the small hill of Tembaya, in the Mataram area just south of modern Klagen. This appears to have been a pre-Muslim sacred place, judging from its architecture and inscriptions on the site. In Muslim times however its sacredness was attributed to the tomb of Ki Pandan Arang there, known after his death as Sunan Tembaya. Islamic prayers and interpretations provided an added source of sacred power for one of the holy places of the Mataram area. The former tapa became known as santir, and their dharma as pesantren, autonomous centres of study, meditation and often martial arts, both geographically and politically remote from the centres of royal power, and guaranteed immunity from taxes and levies like their Hindu-Buddhist predecessors. 29

Sunan Kalijaga is also attributed with the creation of the Javanese shadow puppets (wayang kulit), despite the Hindu subject matter of their stories from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Modern students of this most central and semi-sacred of Javanese arts tend to agree that it attained its modern form in the Islamised pesantren around the sixteenth century, and was not part of the older repertoire of theatrical forms. It may indeed have seemed a cultural compromise, depicting not human forms, exactly, but shadows. A Javanese legend has Sunan Kalijaga telling the king of Demak that ‘the wayang is indeed a reflected image of the One, so to speak, the image of the Law. The wayang represents all humanity, the dalang [puppeteer] corresponds to Allah, creator of the universe.’ 30 Some monist texts saw the dalang as absolute being, the puppet as relative being and the screen as the outer world of essences where formal religion had its place. The screen on which the shadows played thereby represented the hiddenness of the ultimate reality of unity. 31 Yet the shadow puppets were never used for the cycle of stories (mokal) inspired by the Islamic tradition, which were played on wooden puppets also perhaps developed in the coastal cities of the sixteenth century.

The aspect of the Islamic spiritual tradition which most appealed in Java, as to a lesser extent throughout maritime Asia, was the monism of authors such as al-Hallaj and especially the Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240). The strain of Sufism that stressed a progression through seven layers of meaning towards the ultimate hidden one-ness, appealed to the ascetic and meditative strand of Hindu-Buddhist Java. Many from the Javanese tapa tradition believed they saw in the Sufi ideas filtering to them through an Indian lens another avenue of approaching this ultimate one-ness. Of course more orthodox versions of mysticism propounded by the greatest of Arab theologians, al-Ghazali (1059–1111), also reached South-East Asia and gradually established the boundaries of orthodoxy there as elsewhere. The violent confrontation between the two strands was well documented in Aceh (see below), but in Java it is only through the well legends that we know how a similar battle may have been played out.

Many of these legends concern Sri Jenar, whose life and death suggest some influence from the Arabic stories about al-Hallaj. At a famous meeting of

28 Ibid., pp. 16–9.
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the wall in the mosque of Demak all gave their views about the true nature of unity. They were concerned that Siti Jenar was growing very popular by teaching the secret knowledge which should not be publicly revealed, and that in consequence his followers neglected the Friday prayer as unimportant. When they summoned Siti Jenar to join them he insisted that Siti Jenar did not exist, only God existed. When they criticized his followers for not attending Friday prayer he replied that 'there is no Friday, and there is no mosque'. Sunan Kalijaga, the warrior wali, then beheaded him with his sword, giving rise to various miraculous stories about his disappearance.32

We cannot know whether Siti Jenar had an existence in history as well as in the abundant stories about his life and death. But the fact that these stories end with his death, as do similar stories about four other popular radical innovators, two more placed in the sixteenth century, one in Agung’s reign and one in the eighteenth century, makes it very likely that the orthodox of the coastal cities did seek to condemn to death those they identified as pantheist heretics. The fact that they were all portrayed in the stories as miracle-workers who had attained ultimate knowledge, and erred if at all only in revealing it, shows the popularity of this manner of thinking in Java’s transition to Islam.

It appears that the battle over spiritual legitimacy in this critical period was especially fought over sacred sites, and the charismatic spiritual eminences associated with them. Each of the nine wali is associated with a sacred place where they were thought to have taught, and where their tomb (if, unlike Siti Jenar, they have one) is located (Fig. 4). The leader of the wali in some versions was Sunan Giri, and the port-complex of Gresik-Surabaya over which Giri presided was sufficiently wealthy and well connected to ensure that Giri remained throughout the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth centuries the most prestigious Muslim site in Java. It became even more the spiritual opposite pole to Mataram during the long resistance of the Surabaya complex of cities to Sultan Agung’s campaigns in the 1620s. Surabaya was eventually starved into submission in 1625, and the cultivated heir to its throne, Pangeran Pekik, was forced to become an ascetic at Surabaya’s oldest mosque of Ampel. But Giri continued to represent the greater centrality of Islamic norms and leadership in the peninsular than in Mataram, and was therefore seen as an alternative and challenge by the king.

Sultan Agung’s most explicit steps towards synthesis were coeval with his campaign to incorporate Giri and co-opt its legitimacy in the 1620s. Reliance on military resources alone was not convincing after his armies had met a spectacular defeat in attempting to expel the Dutch from Batavia in 1629. Soon after this disaster the nearby sacred hill of Tembaya appeared to pose a threat to the king, and he sent an army to conquer it. Whatever trampled with the satiri there persuaded him to make amends in the form of a personal pilgrimage to the site in 1633, and the reconstruction of its massive gateway in old-Javanese style. At the same time he brought Pangeran Pekik to court from his internal exile in Ampel, and co-opted his charisma by royal marriages — Pekik married Agung’s sister while Pekik’s daughter married the heir to the Mataram throne. Pangeran Pekik was renowned not only for his heritage from Surabaya and Ampel, but for his literary skills in incorporating the new Muslim knowledge into acceptable Javanese poetry. He is often credited with the ‘civilising’ of Mataram by bringing to it the best of court culture.

from the old Majapahit as filtered through the new penitan centres. Perhaps under his influence Sultan Agung established a uniquely complex Javanese calendar, which incorporated the Islamic calendar with its weekly cycle and lunar basis for establishing festivals, into the older Indian-derived Saka calendar.33

In 1601 Pangeran Pekik was placed in charge of the reconquest of Giri, which had presumably continued to see itself as an autonomous sacred place as well as a haven for internationally connected ulema. The expedition was successful and the Sunan Giri was brought to Mataram to make his obeisance to the king, even if the wanderings of santri refugees from Giri became the stuff of later legends. In the remainder of his reign Agung seemed determined to ensure that he was the sole source of spiritual as well as political power. He sent an embassy to Mecca that brought him back the title of sultan in 1641, a step his rival in Banten had taken earlier. He began building his mausoleum at Limosari that explicitly evoked the kind of hybrid Javano-Islamic shrine architecture hitherto devoted to the tombs of the wall. Later Javanese chronicles give him the title of king-priest (pandita) also bestowed on some of the walls, and claimed that he had such spiritual power that ‘each Friday the king went to Mecca to pray’.34 Dutch envoys are witness to his success in domesticating Islam effectively into a royal cult in which they ‘consider their king so proudly that they respect him as a god’ even while insisting that they were good Muslims ‘and curse all others’.35 Challenges from the more literal Islamic world would return from time to time, most effectively in the twentieth century, but Sultan Agung had established a synthesis that allowed almost all Javanese to become Muslims without sacrificing their rich heritage.

The boundaries of Islam in the eastern archipelagos

Prior to the sixteenth century Muslim influences had travelled to those trade centres of the eastern islands best connected with trade routes to southern China on the one hand and to the clove-producing centres of northern Maluku on the other. The undated genealogies of Sulu have been interpreted to mean that a Muslim trader and adventurer from Samatra began an Islamic lineage there around 1400. Brunei, Sulu and Manila were the three easternmost tributaries of Ming China in the early 1600s, perhaps because Muslim traders

33 See further in following chapter.

from Quanzhou had settled in each of them. In Maluku it appears that Javanese buyers of the precious clove crops of Ternate and Tidore, and the remnant of Banda, began to establish stable Muslim communities there in the late fifteenth century.

When the Portuguese reached Maluku in 1513, and the Spanish of Magellan reached Cebu and Brunei in 1521, Islam had already begun to make converts among those who dealt with the trade. Tomé Pires explained that the great majority even of key centres like Ternate were still animist, and the king of Ternate had been willing to switch from Muslim to Christian ‘if it seemed good to him’.36 The five small islands of the Banda group were a kind of merchant oligarchy where the Javanese and Malay Muslim merchants were held in great respect. In Brunei Pigafetta described a flourishing sultanate seeking to dominate trade along the whole route from Manila to Melaka. In Cebu (central Philippines) a Muslim trader was on hand to warn the local rajah against the aggressive ‘Franks’.

In none of these sites, however, did Islam present an obstacle to the favorable reception of the Europeans. They were at first welcomed everywhere as alternative buyers of the local spices, driving up the price and increasing the flow of Indian cloth into the region in exchange. Only as the Europeans sought local domination or monopoly, or like Magellan tried to impose Christianity at the first encounter, did the lines gradually become established between those who supported the Europeans and those who supported Islam.

As indicated above, the lines became more firmly drawn in mid-century throughout the Indian Ocean region, and the numerous local conflicts in Maluku were rapidly drawn into this Christian-Muslim dichotomy. The most useful chronicle of the events from the Muslim side, the Hikayat Tanah Hilir, portrayed the second half of the sixteenth century as one of continual holy war against the Portuguese, with those falling on the Muslim side described as martyrs (shahids). The tensuous Portuguese alliance with the nominally Muslim kings of Ternate, leaders of one side of age-old rivalries throughout Maluku, finally broke down completely in 1570. The Portuguese murdered their supposed ally Sultan Hajiun, and his son Baabullah led an effective Muslim alliance to throw the Portuguese out of Ternate and to impose Islam as the principal symbol of loyalty to Ternate rather than the Portuguese. He reigned until 1583, and the Europeans credited him with patronising numerous Arab and Persian preachers (muballigh), and with
spreading the faith as far as Buton, Selayar (both in southern Sulawesi) and southern Mindanao.

The permanent Spanish presence in the Philippines, beginning with Legazpi’s expedition of 1565, ultimately established the northern boundary of Muslim expansion. Legazpi’s seizure of Manila (1571) from the hands of an incipient Muslim port-state made of the city the opposite pole to Banda’s Ternate. Alarm at the sending of Islamic teachers to Mindanao by Ternate and the older Islamic trade centre of Brunei, Spanish Manila sent expeditions to Mindanao and Sulu, and in 1578 succeeded in sacking Brunei and curbing that city’s role as a hub of trade and Islamisation for the Philippines. Henceforth the sultanates based in the island of Sulu and the Pulangi river basin of Magindanao would be the primary political upholders of Islam and of resistance to the Spanish in the Philippines. For both states the greatest strength was an intense pluralism, which made it impossible for the Spanish to turn their military superiority and periodic victories into permanent influence. Only the long reign of Sultan Qudrat in Magindanao (c. 1609-36) produced a strong political centre for Islam in this period, partly thanks to Dutch commercial support.

In this eastern frontier of Muslim/Christian competition, the Muslim sulans was far more successful in enroling the support of local rulers. The port-kings who emerged as competition grew for spices and other products readily allied with the Muslim traders, patronised them and gave them daughters in marriage, while drawing on the charisma of a new faith as a justification for expanding their territories. Unlike the situation in Java, Bali, Siam or Cambodia, kingship had not in these regions embraced a specifically Hindu pattern of legitimation. Yet power remained profoundly spiritual, and no king could be strong who did not command supernatural support for his rule. Islam is rightly seen as having brought individualist (‘bourgeois’) and rational elements into the world of local and animist religion. But it could not have succeeded if it had directly subverted, as Iberian Catholicism did, the rulers’ need to be the pre-eminent mediators with the supernatural. In Counter Reformation Catholicism the celibate clergy had a monopoly of sacramental power, and hence there could be no successful Christian kings. Many rulers in Sulawesi and Maluku were attracted to Christianity and Iberian assistance, but misunderstandings put an end to every Christian kingdom after a few years.

By contrast, even the most orthodox of South-East Asian sultans, Iskandar Thani of Aceh (r. 1636-41, see below), claimed in his diplomatic letters to be a supernaturally powerful world ruler endowed with magical regalia. The Malay-language culture of kingship found an Islamic vocabulary to express this royal transcendence. Arabic dawa (dynasty or state) became the term for the profoundly mystical essence of Malay sovereignty, expressed in the self-presentation acknowledgment of royal charisma, ‘daulat Tsanakou’; Persian na-bat (name divinity) became not only the orchestra restricted to royal use, but the term (nabat) for enthronement itself, by virtue of the sacred powers of the music. Arabic wahy to express the divine inspiration of the Prophet, became the magical power unique to kings (especially in Java).

The Islamisation of south Sulawesi, the populous, rice-growing southwestern arm of the island, is a particularly interesting case. Although situated in the east, beyond any substantial Brahmanic influences, the Bugis and Makassar peoples before their Islamisation in the early seventeenth century had developed great reverence for their heaven-descended royal lineages, a written culture in an Indian script closest to those of Sumatra and the Philippines, and a priesthood of transsexual priests as special mediators between the kings and the upperworld of the gods, whose prehistory was elaborately described in the La Galigo epic. Although not an essential part of the spice-trading route, south Sulawesi’s ports could deliver a rice surplus helpful for traders travelling to rice-deficient Maluku, while the iron of the Lake Matano area appears to have been important for both Java and Maluku. The abundant Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai ceramics buried in grave sites of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries indicate that it was already integrated into a trading world. At least by the 1540s, both Muslim and Portuguese traders began calling in these ports, and encouraging converts. A few of the scores of local rulers experimented with Christianity, while the Malay traders of the Makassar area were permitted to build a mosque around 1580. But the major kings resisted conversion to either faith if it would diminish their supernatural status, not to mention interfering with their pattern of religious feasting with pork and palm-wine.

In the short period 1603-41, on the other hand, all the Makassar and Bugis kings accepted Islam. Local Muslim traditions associate these conversions with three Minangkabau missionaries, seemingly linked with the rulers of Aceh and Johor. The consummate politician of Makassar, Karaeng Matuwai, later told the Portuguese that he had adopted Islam out of largely political motives, and after failing to get any response from Melaka to his request for priests to be sent. The royal chronicles, however, suggest a pattern of consultation among the rulers with the greatest reputation for wisdom and high birth. The most ancient lineage of Luwu was the first to accept Islam formally, and Karaeng Matuwai led Makassar into the new faith very quickly thereafter (probably September 1605) to ensure that he would not be
outflanked. After carefully securing the support of the Makassar nobles for the new religion, Matoya proceeded to attack those Bugis states that resisted his request to follow him into Islam. The chronicles suggest that it was a mixture of this forceful pressure and the generous terms on which the autonomy of each state was guaranteed under Makassar's leadership that won them all over within a few years. Although Makassar, like Aceh, Banten, Demak and Banjarmasin, profited from the expansion of trade and the new firearms to rise to unprecedented prominence, it differed sharply from them in respecting most traditional autonomies, and almost all of the older aristocratic culture.

Bira remained to celebrate the enthronements, weddings and funerals of courses of the Bugis and Makassar kings. Their lineages continued to be regarded as descended from the upperworld and surrounded with supernatural mystique. While the elaborate death rituals still to be seen among the upland Toraja of south Sulawesi were wholly Islamised, and pork abhorred, other rituals of the life cycle, kingship and agriculture survived with an Islamic addition. In each state a qādi and an imām for the state mosque were appointed, though usually from among the aristocracy who could be relied upon not to overturn the adat (custom). Some old palm-leaf texts even developed a syncretic origin myth, in which the gods of the La Galigo cycle were descended from Adam and Eve, and the hero of that cycle, Sawerigading, became a prophet foretelling the Qurān. The story is probably apocryphal, but is nevertheless suggestive, that Shaykh Yusuf (see below) returned to Makassar in the 1660s, and appealed in vain to the rulers to impose Islamic principles, but they were unwilling or unable to prohibit gambling, cock-fighting, arrack drinking, opium smoking and the like. They in fact promoted superstitions practices such as giving offerings to the spirit of ancestors in the hope that the latter would bring them prosperity.37

The cosmopolitan port and capital of Makassar was, until it fell to the Dutch in 1660, a remarkable beacon of tolerance of all faiths, presenting itself in that period as the free antithesis of the monopolistic Dutch. While Catholic worship was forbidden in the Dutch settlements, there were three Catholic churches in mid-century Makassar, and a well-regarded Portuguese trading community of several thousand.

South Sulawesi's most learned and revered 'llim, Muhammad Yusuf al-Maqassari (known today as Shaykh Yusuf, c. 1627–90), left his homeland

37 Asyzzami Aina, The origins of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay, Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'llimma in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Sydney, 2003), p. 64. ————

Further frontiers: Siam and Cambodia

The Asian maritime frontier of Islam expanded markedly in the sixteenth century, and in some sense reached its peak in the seventeenth before the boundaries consolidated. The Muslim commercial commerce in the time of Ban Banti had stretched as far as China, but had little purchase on the littoral beyond the enclave ports. In the sixteenth-century contest with the Portuguese, important states became the champions of the Muslim side, but the Chinese arm of the original commerce withered. Non-Muslim Chinese were definitely in charge of their own commerce in the South China Sea from at least 1657. By the mid-seventeenth century Muslims had lost most of the high points of maritime commerce, and even pilgrims from South-East Asia to Mecca travelled most of the way in European ships. Yet as an alternative to the aggressive Europeans, Islam still had gains to make on distant frontiers.

One of these was the Theravada Buddhist world of mainland South-East Asia. In this world the Cham ports along the major routes to China provided the earliest converts to Islam, particularly in the Phan-rang area left to the Chams after their 1471 defeat. There was a Muslim commercial minority here since the eleventh century, but they made rapid converts from the late sixteenth century until by 1690 the King and most of the coastal population were declared to be Muslim. This community established commercial and religious links with the Malay states of the peninsula, and a new frontier for Muslim commerce in Cambodia.

38 See the following chapter for a fuller account of Shaykh Yusuf.
Cambodia in the half-century after 1594 was a battleground of foreign communities. Expanding Viet and Thai politics constantly threatened from east and west respectively, while well-armed Cham, Malay, Iberian, Chinese and Japanese minorities sought to protect their commerce by holding the king hostage in their mutual conflicts. By killing a group of Spanish and Portuguese adventurers in 1598 and opposing the subsequent Siamese intervention, the Malay and Cham commercial group positioned itself as one of the options for greater Cambodian independence. In 1642 they supported a coup against an unusually ruthless king, and the following year led a massacre of forty men of the Dutch mission which had been asking for monopoly trading rights. The new king, Cau Bana Chand, increasingly dependent on the Muslims to protect him against Dutch and other retaliation, embraced Islam, imposed it on his court, married a Malay woman and used the title Sultan Ibrahim when dealing with foreigners. Although Cambodian memory has marginalised this figure, his reign (1642-59) was one of the most stable of this turbulent century, and was only ended by a ruinous Vietnamese invasion that imposed a half-Viet king.

Islamic influence in Siam also peaked in the mid-seventeenth century, both in Sunni and Shi'a forms. The Sunnis were more numerous, at least in the southernmost Malay dependencies and among the Malay, Makassar and Cham refugees who appreciated Siam's tolerance. But it was Shi'a Muslims from Persia and India who were far more influential at the capital. Their annual Hassan-Husayan procession was one of the highlights of the Siamese calendar in the 1670s, with 2,000 Shi'ites reportedly participating. This festival had provided cover for the Persian-assisted coup that brought King Narai to power in 1657, and in gratitude the king had paid the annual festival thereafter. A cultivated Persian merchant, Aqâ Muhammam Astarbâdi, became Narai's chief adviser in commercial and foreign affairs, engineering a Siamese embassy to Persia in 1668, and placing (mainly Shi'a) Muslims in control of all the key ports – Tessaerim, Mergui, Phuket and Bangkok. Narai was an intellectually curious renaissance man, intrigued by Persian civilisation as he later was by that of the Europeans, but was never likely to adopt either of the foreign faiths that were urged upon him.

Muslim political influence declined with the death of Astarbâdi in 1676, and the prominence of Constance Phaulcon at court in the 1680s. It ended when a coup attempt by Makassar and Cham Muslim refugees was suppressed with French help in 1686. The example of these Theravada Buddhist countries reveals, however, both the strength of Islam in the maritime world at this time, and the factors ranged against its further expansion. The former included an association with commerce, military prowess and a kind of cosmopolitan modernity at a time when local certainties were under threat; the latter included even better-armed antagonists from Europe and north-east Asia, an ever-present anti-foreign sentiment and the capacity of the Buddhist monastic (sangha) to create strong popular loyalties beyond anything known to the Hindu-influenced animist worlds of the islands.

**Sahîha and Sufi in the seventeenth century**

In South-East Asia, as in India, the carriers of the Islamic literary and philosophical tradition were primarily Sufi masters, who accepted to some degree a fusion of esoteric and literary learning to their particular teacher and beyond that to a chain of other masters of the tradition. Azymardi Azra has at last provided the first comprehensive survey of these Sufi networks linking Indonesia to the broader Indian Ocean world, making use of their own habit of establishing the legitimacy of their writings by describing the chain of teachers before them.

In India these Sufi masters often showed an interest in the yogic mystical techniques long practised in the subcontinent, as in Java they could recognise the strengths of the older ascetic tradition. As we have seen in the Java case, the Sufi recognition of different stages of consciousness was in turn attractive to ascetics accustomed to self-denial and meditation to attain the inner essence of knowledge beyond the surface of law and requirements. Some of the earlier Sufis may indeed have seemed relatively indifferent to the legalistic tendency of shahâ'. In the eyes of their later seventeenth-century critics, the great Malay poet Hamzah Fansuri (Hanna al-Fansuri) and the possibly mythical Javanese Sin Jener crossed the line into heretical pantheism. Yet even Hamzah Fansuri warned the faithful, in one of his favourite maritime metaphors, 'Uphold the shahâ' ... if the rope of your anchor is attached to something other than the shahâ', it will be difficult to reach the harbour of gnosis.'

Azyumardi has pointed out that in the seventeenth century, the leading Sufi masters ardently believed that only by way of total commitment to the shahâ' could the extravagant features of earlier Sufism be controlled. He stresses the harmony between the two trends, while earlier writers have perhaps excessively focused on the conflicts. The persecutions of al-Bânîrî were indeed

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20 Azyumardi, *The origins of Islamic qīnām*, p. 5.
of critical importance, but they are the only well-documented case of using the Islamic *mutaṣab* (apostasy) laws to execute Sufis judged to have strayed too far from *shari‘a*. These occurred in the reign of South-East Asia’s greatest patron of the *shari‘a*, Sultan Iskandar Thani of Aceh (r. 1637–41). He excluded Chinese traders from Aceh because of their pork-eating habits, executed scores of Portuguese who refused to accept Islam (including their French priest, Pierre Berthelot, subsequently beatified as a martyr by the Catholic Church) and entrusted religious authority to the stern and prolific upholder of the orthodoxy of *shari‘a*, Nā‘īr al-Dīn al-Rānirī. Having failed to convince the previous ruler, Iskandar Muda, to support his views, al-Rānirī now prevailed, and had the books of Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrīnī (d. 1650) burned in front of the great mosque. Their disciples who refused to renounce the proscribed views were executed for apostasy, including the popular shaykh Jamal al-Dīn.

A consensus may be said to have developed in Aceh and elsewhere that, although al-Rānirī’s numerous writings were extremely valuable in clarifying for the Malay reading world the dangers of the wajibīyya mystic stream and the nature of *shari‘a* and fiqh, his extremism was as unacceptable as the excesses he condemned. After al-Rānirī’s royal protector died in 1641, Sayf al-Rijal, a Minangkabau disciple of the executed shaykh, returned to Aceh from his studies in Arabia, and bitterly attacked al-Rānirī’s views and actions. As al-Rānirī himself put it,

Sayf al-Rijal ... held debates with us over the matters which had been discussed before. We ask: ‘How could you approve of the people who assert that “man is Allah and Allah is man”? ‘ He answers: ‘This is my belief and that of the people of Mecca and Medina.’ Then his words prevail, and many people return to the wrong belief.’

In effect the crowd decided in favour of Sayf al-Rijal, the Aceh establishment accepted the popular view and in 1645 the learned Gujarati fled back to his birthplace in Gujarat.

The Aceh elite had earlier spurned his advice by putting a woman on the throne, and were so pleased with the results that they enthroned three subsequent women, covering in all the period 1641–99. In this they emulated the strategy of two other contemporary commercially inclined sultanates, Patani (from 1564) and the Maldives, who also showed a repeated preference for female rule not previously known in the region. This raises the question

whether the conventional disbarring of women from exercising religious authority was seen as an advantage for the queens by contrast with the pressures of office al-Rānirī had been able to impose on Iskandar Thani. It may have been seen as a means to avoid pushing disagreements to the ultimate limit, and effectively legitimating, by default of a sole religious authority, the pluralism that was essential to stable commerce. Azyunardi points out that the queen, Safiyyat al-Dīn, ‘wisely refused’ to resolve the debate on the grounds that she had no authority on religious matters.42
Under the queen the Chinese returned, a Franciscan mission served the small Christian community, commerce prospered and Aceh's most beloved Sufi master, Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singhili, established a new and healing consensus.

'Abd al-Ra'uf was probably born about 1617 in Singhili, a west-coast dependency of Aceh, and departed for study in Arabia in 1642, just after the Ranî purges. As set out in the following chapter, he was inducted into the Shâfi'iyya and Qâdiriya orders by Ahmad al-Qushâshi and studied philosophy, fiqh and sharî'a with Ibrâhîm al-Kûrânî, the two great masters of his day. He returned to Aceh in 1650 as the best-connected and most authoritative of any Indonesian 'ulama', and was quickly appointed chief religious authority as Kâdi Malabî Alî by the queen. In his own copious writings in Arabic and Malay he never condemned either Hanâfî Fâsâri or al-Rânî, but clearly sought a synthesis which would reconcile a commitment to sharî'a with the appreciation of the inner knowledge of Sufi masters. It seems clear that it was he who appealed to the prominent Meccan shaykh Ibrâhîm al-Kûrânî for a ruling whether it was legitimate for a sultan to have executed a wujûdîyya 'âdîf, accused of heresy by another 'ulama', when the 'âdîf in question responded that he could not repent as his argument had not been understood. He received the answer he no doubt anticipated, that such executions were very grave errors, and that a statement which could be interpreted in multiple ways could not be held as evidence of heresy.

The conflict of the 1620s and 1640s was the most spectacular indication of a peaking in the trend to a rigid scriptural interpretation of sharî'a, after which a more inclusive and indigenous synthesis was established. Regularly constituted sharî'a courts were set up at least in Aceh in the first half of the seventeenth century. In the 1630s there were two such courts functioning, one to enforce the observance of fasting, prayer and religious orthodoxy, and the other for issues of debt, marriage, divorce and inheritance. Although Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-36) frequently interfered arbitrarily in the working of these courts, his successor Iskandar Thanî supported the system devoutly, and even decreed that the ancient South-East Asian method of trial by ordeal be replaced by Islamic requirements for witnesses. Under the early period of female rule, at least, these courts continued to function. Foreign observers were quick to notice also that the 'âdîf penalties for theft were applied in seventeenth-century Aceh as rigorously as anywhere in the world, with numerous people being seen on the streets with their hands or feet amputated (Fig. 5). To a lesser extent, the same phenomenon was noted in Brunei in the 1580s, and Banten in the 1620s.

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South-East Asian localisations

One may take the year 1629 as a striking military turning-point, after which the further expansion of Muslim political power was qualified by the ominous factor of superior European power at least by sea. In that year, coincidentally, massive attempts were made by the strongest South-East Asian Muslim powers to finally eject the Portuguese from their stronghold of Melaka, and the Dutch from their in Batavia (Jakarta). Iskandar Muda of Aceh sent 256 ships and 30,000 men against Melaka, 'the finest fleet that had ever been seen in Asia', and the last Acehnese tour de force. It was largely destroyed by superior Portuguese naval tactics and timely assistance from Aceh's Malay rivals. The same year marked the last attempt by Java's most powerful ruler, Sultan Agung, to take Batavia in a siege by a vast army poorly equipped with modern siege techniques. After it too was destroyed, largely by hunger and disease, Javanese rulers found ways to legitimise the Dutch as part of Javanese history, working with them more often than against. Although it was much too early to speak of European military superiority on land, from this point Europeans held a naval advantage which was accepted as a fact of South-East Asian life.

The direct link between the archipelago and the Islamic heartland was also broken, as the greater capacity of the English and Dutch companies to ship spices and pepper around the Cape of Good Hope rendered the Muslim network uneconomic. By the 1640s the ships were no longer travelling directly between Aceh and the Red Sea. Gujarati shippers, with their own relatively direct links to the Holy Land, sailed to the archipelago in decreasing numbers, securing the route to Mecca and Medina via Gujarat taken by Shaykh Yûsuf in 1644. About eight Gujarati ships reached Aceh every year at the beginning of the century, three in the 1620s, one or two after 1660 and none at all after 1680. Thereafter it was Dutch and English ships that provided the most comfortable passage to Mecca and Medina even by way of the main Gujarati port of Surat. Muslim traffic remained dense across the Bay of Bengal, but the chief Muslim connections outside South-East Asia came again to be with south India, and especially the Tamil coast, a world of similar localisations to those in South-East Asia.

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Reid, Age of commerce II, p. 28.
The New Cambridge History of Islam

The result was a greater reliance on local resources and ideas, and a consensus that retreated from both extremes of the earlier debate.

Diffusions of Muslim power

The major centres of Islamic learning, translation and propagation in seventeenth-century South-East Asia – Aceh, Banten, Makassar, Ternate – were also newly strong ‘gunpowder empires’ and centres of the spice trade. The Dutch Company (VOC) at first allied with them in its attack on the Portuguese, but soon sought to dominate or defeat them in its quest for a monopoly of the supply of spices. The Muslim centres in Maluku (the Moluccas) were the first to fall under Dutch control. The sultan of Ternate was effectively a Dutch client from the 1620s, and the Muslim hold-out of Hiu in Ambon was defeated in the 1640s. Makassar then became a goal to the Dutch as the remaining free port of the eastern archipelago where the spices which eluded Dutch controls were sold to English, Portuguese and Muslim buyers. It was too strong for the Dutch alone, but they engineered an alliance with a Bugis coalition led by Arung Palakka, resentful of the unprecedented autonomy introduced by Makassar’s Sultan Hasanuddin. Makassar fell in 1665. Power in south Sulawesi was again dispersed under multiple small states, as in the pre-Islamic sixteenth century, but with the difference of a strong Dutch naval presence in the fort of Makassar, able often to act as referee between them.

Aceh under its queens was alone able to retain its complete independence. The Dutch succeeded only in removing its productive pepper-producing areas on the west coast of Sumatra, and limiting its naval reach in the Straits of Malacca. Internally the sultans were never again as powerful as those of the early seventeenth century had been. The military leaders rewarded with fiefs by Iskandar Muda became hereditary chiefs, small rajas, and united with the capital only under religious exhortation or the threat from outside. The substantial party opposing the queens, who lost the contest in the succession dispute of 1668, won the day in 1669 with the aid of a fatwa from Mecca condemning female rule. But the new Arab dynasty was even less successful than the queens had been in imposing its will on the country.

In the pepper sultanates of south Sumatra, the Dutch established a monopoly in Palembang after sacking the city in 1659, though they continued to have problems in neighbouring Jambi. Banten remained a strong competitor of Dutch Batavia until the 1680s, with English, French and Danish companies, and a major Chinese presence, all using it as a base to take a share of the pepper from the VOC. As explained in the following chapter, Islamic literature peaked in Banten under Sultan Abdullah Ageng (r. 1651–82), who patronised Shaykh Yusuf al-Maqasidi and sent the heir to the throne on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Batavia’s opportunity to crush this rival came in 1680, when the more pro-Dutch son, known as Sultan Haji, sought to take power from the old sultan. The VOC intervened in the civil war in 1682, and the old king capitulated a year later. The Banten sultanate became a kind of puppet thereafter, though often disturbed by bitter individual attacks on Dutchmen.

The conflict between Islamic-oriented port and agricultural hinterland, which played its part in these defeats for international Islam, had already been decided by Sultan Ageng’s Java in the 1620s in favour of a self-sufficient policy founded on rice-growing. But the battle was rejoined under Agung’s less capable successors. The arbitrary cruelties of Amangkurats I (r. 1646–77) and II (r. 1677–1703) managed to unite all his enemies under an Islamic banner. He had massacred 2,000 prominent ‘Javan’ soon after his accession, and killed the king of Madura after bringing him to court. A son of this royal victim, Prince Trunajaya, obtained the blessing of Java’s major Muslim holy places, Tembaya and Giri, for his rebellion in the 1670s against Amangkurat. It was joined by a formidable group of Makassar refugees from the loss of their capital, for whom Amangkurat appeared another compromiser with the hated Dutch. By February 1677 Amangkurat I had so few supporters left that he signed a humiliating treaty with the VOC which legitimated their seizure of Surabaya.

When the king died soon after, his son saw no better option than to become a client of the Dutch, as Amangkurat II (r. 1677–1703). The better-organised Dutch forces managed to eliminate his chief rivals by 1689 – not only Trunajaya himself but the Islamic leadership of both Giri and Tembaya. The VOC could in this way keep the king on his throne but not enforce his will. The Javanese heartland knew little peace in the century between the death of Sultan Agung and the Dutch-sponsored Giyanti Treaty of 1755 which finally divided it into two kingdoms. The religious synthesis established under Sultan Agung nevertheless withstood various challenges and largely defined the way Javanes would face the new waves of Islamic reform with which they had to deal in the nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries.

The specifically Malay type of polity, the Malay-speaking kerajaan, had not experienced the ‘gunpowder empire’ phase of power concentration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Arguably its genius was necessarily based on a diffusion of power, with each raja occupying the lower reaches of a particular river, and mediating trade up the river to largely non-Islamic food
producers and foragers whose forest products they exported. Relations between the different river systems were always unstable, with the primacy of any one port, such as Sriwijaya, Melaka or Riau, always dependent on attracting a diversity of traders. The shifting capitals of Riau-Johor in the Singapore area, and Patani in the Thai-Malay borderland, were the most substantial Malay centres in the seventeenth century, and Riau continued in the eighteenth.

Malay-language Islamic scholarship was sustained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries primarily in strong polities in which Malay was not the vernacular— Aceh, Banten and Makassar. The defeats suffered by these states in the latter part of the seventeenth century opened the door to a different type of millenarian Islamic resistance, especially with the approach of a new hijra century (AH 1100 began in 1688 CE). In this climate, states could be imagined rather than defended. One self-styled Sultan Ahmad Shah bin Iskandar, a miracle-working Minangkabau based on the island of Belitung, claimed in 1689 that he was the rightful king of Minangkabau and descendant of Alexander, commisioned by God to expel the Dutch from Muslim lands. He gained the support of thousands of dispossessed warriors— Malakansese, Bantenese, Malays and Minangkabaus—to threaten Dutch interests in south Sumatra and the Malacca Straits. The kings of Jambi and Palembang appeared to support him, and even Dutch ally Amanangkurat II invited him to Java for the holy war. The Dutch sent numerous expeditions against him which regained control of the major commercial centres by 1690, though they never found him in the Sumatran interior. The most frightening moment for the Dutch came in August 1689, when they discovered evidence that the Muslim Amboinese Captain Jonker, their most trusted Indonesian lieutenant in numerous past military campaigns, had joined the cult and made preparations to massacre the Europeans of Batavia. The Dutch were merciless in pursuing him and his men to Karasura, where Amanangkurat II at first gave them refuge, and made Jonker's gruesome death an example to other potential rebels.

New networks of the eighteenth century

If the gunpowder empires had been the main proponents of Islam in the period 1500–1800, the eighteenth century was a time when Muslim devotional and scholarly life depended more on networks. The Dutch had demonstrated that they were the single strong power remaining in the archipelago, though not in a position to rule directly as the Spanish did in their comparatively underpopulated islands. Military technologies also shifted, with the key weapons no longer the royal cannons that had terrified the elephants and pikemen of an older generation of opponents. Muskets and soon the flintlock rifle became generalised everywhere in the islands (the Malay term for rifle, senpang, being derived from Dutch for flintlock), not only widely sold by English and Portuguese but also manufactured at centres in Sumatra, Borneo and Java. With this the military balance shifted to smaller networks of armed individuals, who could evade the pressures the Dutch could mobilise against maritime states.

While the multietnic followers of Trunajaya and Ahmad Shah had demonstrated these new possibilities, it was the Bugis who proved most adept in the long term at utilising the new conditions. In particularly the commercially minded Bugis of Wajo, having seen their senior partner and trade centre Makassar humbled by a Dutch-Bugis alliance, and the subsequent Bugis world dominated by neighbouring rival Bone, perceived little virtue in strong states. They developed an individualistic ethos approaching a doctrine of personal freedom (to travel, to gather, to speak, to own property) in their homeland, yet cooperated effectively outside their borders to establish new post-states. They particularly sought commercial bases in the sparsely populated but strategic Peninsula, settling in the Selangor area in the late seventeenth century.

Johor-Riau entered a period of crisis when the last scion of the old Melaka royal line was murdered in 1699. Both Minangkabau and Bugis adventurers moved in to support conflicting sides, but by 1721 the Bugis were clearly on top. They installed one of the Malay contenders as senior ruler (Yangdiperuaat Besar), but one of their own, Daeng Marewa, became the first ‘junior king’ (Yangdiperuaat Muda) and effective ruler of the most successful polity of the Straits area. Its headquarters were now on the island of Bintan, just south of Singapore, conveniently situated to become a hub for Chinese, Malay and Bugis trade. The most formidable of the Bugis junior kings, Raja Haji, took the fight to the Dutch in 1783–4 in a spirit of Islamic revival sparked by another imminent hijra century (AH 1100 began in 1785 CE). He laid siege to Dutch Melaka before being killed by a strong fleet sent out for the purpose from Holland. Riau thereafter was better known as a centre of Malay scholarship than as a serious challenger to Dutch power.

Among the other networks which became effective in the eighteenth century were those originating in China and India. Following the massacre...
of Chinese in Batavia in 1720, and the exclusion of further Chinese migration to Manila soon thereafter, Chinese trade showed more inclination to support smaller ports not controlled by Europeans. Among the Muslim ports which benefited from this shift were Riau itself, Trengganu on the east coast of the peninsula, Brunei (before its own attacks on the Chinese) and especially Sulu. Sulu, situated on an island chain at the margins of Spanish, Dutch, British and Chinese spheres of influence, became the archetype of the anti-state or pirate lair. The Spanish occasionally punished the Sulu capital, but its sultan was but one of the chiefs in a very plural polity, never susceptible to indirect rule. Sulu was able to become in the period 1760-1820 not only the gathering-place for sea produce for the Chinese market, but the largest slave market in South-East Asia, financing slave raids by its Ilanun allies throughout the central Philippines and as far as Sumatra to the west. In this period the 'Moro scourge' became embedded in the Filipino psyche, with the heritage of Spanish plays about the reconquista of the peninsula being transplanted and indigenised into the Philippine locale.

Indian traders from Gujarat, the Tamil area and Bengal had all been bringing their cotton cloth to supply the South-East Asian markets since at least the fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century the English, Dutch and Danish companies realised they too could only do well in the South-East Asian spice trade if they brought Indian cloth for sale. Hence they established their collecting centres in each of the three areas and gradually came to dominate the supply. Gujarati and Bengali ships had virtually ceased to come to South-East Asia by 1700, as we noted above, though individual cloth traders and financiers from these communities were still active. It was the Tamil Muslims, known locally as Cholias, who became the chief Indian Muslim presence in South-East Asia in the eighteenth century, sailing out of Sao Tome, Porto Novo and Cuddalore. Many became influential advisers and ministers for the rulers of Aceh and the Peninsula.

The following chapter explains the new prominence of Hadrami networks in the eighteenth century, and their links with a number of states outside Java. The Hadrami came in European or Indian ships, not their own, but made their way as financiers, investors, small traders and religious teachers. The sayyids among them were especially honoured as descendants of the Prophet. Many were able to intermarry with the ruling families of Sumatra, Borneo and the Peninsula, and their descendants even to become rulers in Aceh (from 1799) and Siak in Sumatra. Pontianak and Mempawa in west Borneo. Although the earliest census of them was only in 1859, this suggested that the biggest concentrations of Arabs were in Aceh and Palembang (1,264 in 1859).

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