

**THE DISCOURSE OF ISLAM AND OTHER
RELIGIONS BY EARLY 'ULAMĀ' IN THE
MALAY WORLD**

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Abstract

The article analyses the discourse of early 'ulamā' in the Malay world such as Nuruddin al-Raniri and Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili on Islam and other religions. Early 'ulamā' in the Malay world wrote numerous intellectual works for the need of local as well as international audiences. The history of religions in the Malay world revealed interesting facts on the diversity of religions that existed and were practiced by the local people. The question now is on how early 'ulamā' in the Malay world addressed the presence and influence of religions other than Islam during the early period of Islam in the Malay world. In order to find an answer to this question, this article analyses the topic of interest written by these early 'ulamā'. The analysis is also expanded to the discourse between local 'ulamā' and their counterparts all over the world. Special focus is given to the discourse on religions other than Islam written by early 'ulamā' in the Malay world in order to understand their priority at that time. This article concludes that the discourse in the writings of early 'ulamā' in the Malay world corresponds with their counterparts worldwide. The main discourse is still on the fundamental teachings of Islam. Nevertheless, discourse on religions other than Islam was not totally neglected. The limited discourse on religions

other than Islam in the works of early '*ulamā*' in the Malay world implicitly tells us about the priority of early '*ulamā*' in the Malay world at that time in propagating the messages of Islam to the local people.

Keywords: '*ulamā*'; Malay world; Islam; Nuruddin al-Raniri; Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili; discourse on religions.

Khulasah

Artikel ini mengkaji perbincangan para ilmuwan awal Islam di Alam Melayu seperti Nuruddin al-Raniri dan Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili mengenai isu-isu berkaitan Islam dan agama-agama lain. Para ilmuwan ini menghasilkan pelbagai karya intelektual bagi tatapan pembaca tempatan dan antarabangsa. Sejarah Alam Melayu menunjukkan fakta-fakta yang menarik mengenai kepelbagaian agama yang wujud sejak sekian lama. Persoalan yang timbul adalah mengenai cara para ilmuwan ini berinteraksi dengan kepelbagaian agama pada masa tersebut. Bagi mencari jawapan, artikel ini bermula dengan mengkaji tema-tema perbincangan yang menarik minat para ilmuwan ini dan juga perbincangan mereka bersama para ilmuwan lain di seluruh dunia. Setelah itu, artikel ini akan memfokuskan kepada perbincangan mengenai agama selain Islam bagi memahami keutamaan para ilmuwan Islam pada masa tersebut. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahawa para ilmuwan awal Islam di Alam Melayu sentiasa melibatkan diri di dalam perbincangan ilmiah bersama dengan ilmuwan antarabangsa yang lain. Keutamaan mereka pada ketika itu adalah perbincangan berkenaan isu-isu utama di dalam agama Islam. Walau bagaimanapun, perbincangan mengenai agama selain Islam tidak dikesampingkan. Ini menunjukkan keutamaan yang diberikan oleh para ilmuwan ini pada ketika itu iaitu menyampaikan ajaran Islam kepada penduduk tempatan.

Kata kunci: Ulama; Alam Melayu; Islam; Nuruddin al-Raniri; Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili; perbahasan mengenai agama.

Introduction

When Islam arrived in the Malay world, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as local traditional beliefs, were the main religious beliefs adhered to by the people. These are the belief systems that 'ulamā'¹ met when they arrived in the Malay world. In order to understand how 'ulamā' taught Islam to the local people during these early periods of Islam in the Malay world, there is no better hard evidence available than the Malay texts themselves. Among all available texts, the religious texts seem to be able to provide us with the clearest picture of this matter. Thus, this article analyses evidence from Malay religious texts in order to understand how Islam was taught to the local people. This analysis is based on the priorities given by 'ulamā' when writing these texts in the Malay world at that time. By highlighting the trends of Malay Islamic writings in the Malay world, this article identifies the concern of the 'ulamā' in their response to the needs and interests of local people at that time. In relation to this, this article discusses topics of interest to 'ulamā' globally, and also analyses whether or not these discussions attract local 'ulamā' to respond to them.

The main highlight of this article would be on the contributions of 'ulamā' in the Malay world to the discourse of religions other than Islam. Despite the scarcity of such discourses, this article managed to bring evidence from several 17th century Malay texts namely *Tibyān fī Ma'rīfat al-Adyān* (The Explanation of Faiths), *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* (The Garden of the Kings) and *Asrār al-Insān fī Ma'rīfat al-Rūh wa al-Rahmān* (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the

¹ The learned of Islam who possesses the quality of knowledge in its widest sense.

Merciful One) of al-Raniri; Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili's *Lubb al-Kashf wa al-Bayān limā Yarāh al-Muḥtaḍar* (The Essence of the Exposition and Explanation of What the Dying sees in His Vision); as well as the anonymous *Hikayat Seribu Masalah* which include the discussion of other religions in passing or as part of the entire discussion on other branches of knowledge in Islam such as *fiqh*, *tawḥīd* and *taṣawwuf*.

Topics of Interest to Muslim Scholars Globally

'Ulamā' in the Malay world never live in isolation. They were an integral part of an international network of 'ulamā' spread all over the known world with the *Ḥaramayn* as its hub. Such relationships developed when Arabia, or specifically the *Ḥaramayn* of Mecca and Medina, played a significant role as a meeting point for these 'ulamā'.² The reputation of the *Ḥaramayn* as the birthplace of Islam attracted Muslims communities worldwide, not just to come for the pilgrimage but also to study there. It was the wish of every Muslim who wanted to become a respected 'ālim³ to study in the *Ḥaramayn*, since there was no other place available to teach and guide them to become 'ulamā' as good as the *Ḥaramayn*. Early 'ulamā' in the Malay world such as Ḥamzah Fansuri (c.1550 – c.1621), Nuruddin al-Raniri (c.1590-1658) and Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili (1620-1693) were known to have received part of their religious education in the *Ḥaramayn*.⁴ Although little is known about Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i's life, especially his educational background,

² Azyumardi Azra, "The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1992), 136.

³ A singular form of 'ulamā'. See footnote no.1 above.

⁴ Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (Singapore: Horizon Books Pte. Ltd. 2001), 105, 117, 125.

his significant contribution to writing texts in Arabic⁵ could possibly suggest that he also went and studied in Arabia during his lifetime.

Their shared experience in the *Haramayn* made them part of the international network of 'ulamā'. One of the salient characteristics of this network is the use of Arabic as a medium of communication. These 'ulamā' wrote in one common language, which is understood by all 'ulamā' in other parts of the Muslim world. Obviously, Arabic which is not just the mother-tongue of the Arabs but also the holy language of Islam, was the medium among these 'ulamā' to share their views and thoughts on religious matters. Therefore, it is not surprising to see 'ulamā' in the Malay world also writing some of their texts in Arabic. Religious texts such as *Jawhar al-Ḥaqā'iq* (The Essence of Verities)⁶ of Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i and *Nubdhah fī Da'wa al-Zill ma'a Ṣāhibih* (The Synopsis of the Invitation of the Shadow with His Friends) of Nuruddin al-Raniri⁷ to name but a few, were written entirely in Arabic. It would be strange to suggest that these texts were meant for the local 'lay' audience, since they did not understand Arabic. These texts cannot have been meant for the *ummah*⁸ at large, but for a smaller readership of 'ulamā' worldwide.

These *Haramayn*-educated 'ulamā' were also inclined to use Arabic for the titles of their work although

⁵ Anthony H. Johns, "Shams al-Din al-Samatrani," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* IX. ed. Eliade, M. (Leiden: Brill 1997), 296.

⁶ This is al-Sumatra'i's principal work in Arabic. It is a Sufi treatise that includes the thoughts of Ibn al-'Arabi, the poetry of Ibn Farid, and the structure of Burhanpuri's *Tuhfa*. For details, see Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 112-13; Johns, *Shams al-Din*, 296.

⁷ This text was written purposely to attack the teachings of Hamzah and Shamsuddin in a question-and-answer format. For details, see Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 123.

⁸ The Muslim community throughout the world.

the contents itself were in fact written in Malay. This can be seen by a closer study of the works written by these 'ulamā' throughout their stay and life in the Malay world during the early period of Islam in the Malay world.⁹ The use of Arabic would also tell their local community that they were part of a global community of 'ulamā'. Furthermore, by using Arabic, they also boasted their credentials as 'ulamā' because Arabic is the language of the Quran, the Holy Book in Islam, and that would suggest that they understood the contents of the Quran very well.

Moreover, the texts produced by these 'ulamā' in Arabic are important for their credentials as Muslim intellectual authorities. This would allow other 'ulamā' to quote their works and at the same time allow the authors to receive feedbacks from other 'ulamā' in other parts of the Muslim world. This can be clearly seen in Nuruddin al-Raniri's work written in Arabic which was mentioned before. He composed the *Nubdhah* in Arabic in order to inform his fellow 'ulamā' worldwide about the controversy between him and the followers of the *wujūdiyyah* at that time by providing details of his debates in the questions and answers format. This is important evidence, which shows that these 'ulamā' were not living in isolation among their colleagues locally, but also became part of a larger community of 'ulamā' all over the world.

The contact between these 'ulamā' from the Malay world and their colleagues in the *Haramayn* not only equipped them with the best knowledge of Islam at the time but also widened their religious knowledge. They became familiar with religious developments elsewhere in the Muslim world, and especially the ones in the Muslim heartland of Arabia itself and continued to stay in contact

⁹ Tueku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad* (Brunei: Jabatan Kesusasteraan Melayu, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 1995), 361, 410-418, 423-424.

with each other through their writings. It is no surprise, therefore, that any religious development in other parts of the Muslim world soon would have an impact locally.

Indeed, the *Haramayn*-educated Muslims were highly respected by their local communities.¹⁰ Clearly, these 'ulamā' played a crucial role in disseminating Islam. The role of these early 'ulamā' in the Malay world like that of 'ulamā' anywhere and at any time, was to maintain and uphold the correct teachings and transmission of Islam. Globally, they did so by constant reaffirmation in the form of publishing texts in Arabic. Locally, this could take different forms. Some of them such as Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i and Nuruddin al-Raniri involved themselves with the political power at that time as advisors to the Rulers of Aceh.¹¹ Other 'ulamā' who probably did not want to get involved too closely with worldly authority would simply become teachers of the local people on matters related to Islam.

The dual role of 'ulamā' as members of an international community of Muslim scholars and as local teachers and guardians is reflected in the contents of their writings. Some of the issues highlighted in the texts were not directly the concern of lay people, but of interest to Muslim theologians in other parts of the Muslim world such as the discussion of the complex seven grades of Sufi's thought by Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i in his *Jawhar al-Haqā'iq*. As international 'ulamā' themselves, they followed the theological discussion at the international level, and at the same time, contributed their thoughts, while refining the correct understanding of Islamic theology. However, the need of the local people was not neglected. These 'ulamā' also addressed the concerns of

¹⁰ Azra, *The Transmission*, 135.

¹¹ Vladimir Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings and Literary Views* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004), 642, 645.

the local people in their writings, based on the consensus agreed upon by the global community of 'ulamā' all over the world.

Participation in the On-going Debates throughout the Muslim World

As mentioned, 'ulamā' have responded to religious issues happening elsewhere in the Muslim world through their writings. The most pressing issue at that time which dominated the attention of 'ulamā' in the Malay world was Sufism. The confrontation between two schools of Sufism, namely the orthodox and philosophical Sufism, is not unique to the Malay world alone. In fact, this discussion was an extension of worldwide debates and disputes in the Muslim world.

Debates on Sufism started after the emergence of the so-called 'post-classical' Sufi proponents in 11th-12th centuries C.E., such as al-Suhrawardī (d.1191) from Persia and Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) from Spain, who spent the second half of his life in Syria and Asia Minor, and died in Damascus in 1240 C.E.¹² Their thoughts on Sufism were influenced by non-Islamic ways of thinking, and worldviews such as Neoplatonism, mixed with Aristotelian elements known as *waḥdah al-wujūd* (the oneness of being) focus on the idea of the unity of all beings.¹³ This notion has drawn criticism from orthodox Sufi such as Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328) and others. Such debates were later spread throughout the Muslim world, including the Malay world. In fact, Johns has highlighted that the controversy between these two schools of Sufism

¹² William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al- 'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 15; William Chittick, "Waḥdat al-Shuhūd", in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* XI. ed. M. Eliade (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 317.

¹³ Chittick, "Waḥdat al-Shuhūd", 317.

in the Malay world happened simultaneously with similar events in the Indian subcontinent.¹⁴

Briefly, the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd* which was claimed to be introduced by Ibn 'Arabī, but never found mentioned explicitly in his works to mean the absolute identity of God and creation.¹⁵ It considers that the creations of God on earth are basically the manifestations of the existence of the Divine. From such understanding, Ibn 'Arabī developed relations between God and His creations into philosophical expressions. These philosophical expressions if not properly understood may cause confusion and even deviation from the foundation of faith (*tawḥīd*) in Islam by associating God with His creations (*shirk*). This notion was not acceptable to conservative Muslims such as Ibn Taymiyyah and others who interpret such an idea as an attempt to make God identical with His creations.¹⁶ For them, this clearly works against the core principle of the Islamic creed (the *shahādah*) which says that there is only one God, Allah, and prohibits Muslims from associating God with His creations. Moreover, there are similarities between the teachings of *wujūdiyyah* and pantheism, which view every creation in this world as sacred and possessing divine elements.

The same reaction also came from the Indian subcontinent. A prominent 'ālim and the head of Naqshabandī order from this region Aḥmad Sirhindī (d.1624) came out with his notion of *waḥdah al-shuhūd* (The Oneness in Witnessing) in response to the notion of *waḥdah al-wujūd*.¹⁷ As he himself was Sufi, he introduced this notion in order to bridge the gap between the orthodox

¹⁴ Johns, *Malay Sufism*, 34-35.

¹⁵ Chittick, "Waḥdat al-Shuhūd", 37-39.

¹⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 266; Chittick, "Waḥdat al-Shuhūd", 39.

¹⁷ Chittick, "Waḥdat al-Shuhūd", 37.

and philosophical groups of Sufis by emphasizing the importance of observing the *sharī'ah* while practising *taṣawwuf*.¹⁸ This is because there was a tendency among followers of *waḥdat al-wujūd* at that time to avoid observing the *sharī'ah* while practicing *taṣawwuf*.

To return to the Malay world, proponents of both groups could also be found. Hamzah Fansuri and Shamsuddin al-Sumatra'i were known as proponents of what is known as *waḥdah al-wujūd*, while Nuruddin al-Raniri and other 'ulamā' after him were against such notion. Shamsuddin for example devoted his principal work in Arabic entitled *Jawhar al-Ḥaqā'iq* to discuss the thought of Ibn al-'Arabī, the poetry of Ibn Fāriḍ, and the structure of al-Burhanpuri's *Tuḥfah*.¹⁹ Furthermore, he wrote a text, *Nūr al-Daqā'iq* (The Light of the Meticulous), which expresses his Sufi thoughts of the seven grades also in Arabic.²⁰ Besides these two texts, Iskandar also listed two other texts by Shamsuddin entitled *Kitāb al-Ḥarakah* (The Book of the Movement) and *Risālah Tubayyin Mulāḥadhāt al-Muwahḥidīn wa al-Mulḥidīn fī Dhikr Allāh* (The Epistle Explaining the Observation of the Believers [Monotheists] and Disbelievers [Atheists] in the Remembrance of God) which were said to be written in Arabic as well.²¹

Conversely, al-Raniri has written a series of criticism against Hamzah and Shamsuddin's notion of *waḥdah al-wujūd* in Malay.²² Furthermore, he also wrote the *Nubdhah* which has been mentioned earlier in Arabic for the same reason.²³ Iskandar also listed four other works by al-Raniri

¹⁸ Sah Inayatullah, "Syeikh Ahmad Sirhindi," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* I, ed. M. Eliade (Leiden: Brill, 1960) 297; Chittick, "Wahdat al-Shuhūd", 39.

¹⁹ Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik*, 390.

²² Braginsky, *The Heritage.*, 645.

²³ See footnote no. 5

written in Arabic.²⁴ No proper studies have been done on these texts. However, based on brief descriptions given by other scholars, the contents of these texts also discussed issues on *tawhīd* and *taṣawwuf*.²⁵ There are also three works by Abdul Samad al-Falimbani in Arabic.²⁶ Although Drewes did not elaborate more on the content of these texts, it is also obvious that these works are also related to Sufism, while one of them is a treatise on the holy war (*jihād*).

Based on the above brief survey of related works by those 'ulamā', one may see that they are involved in ongoing debates on *taṣawwuf*. They have written extensively on this matter in Malay for the local audience. At the same time, they also wrote in Arabic, which can be seen from the above list. This is meant to inform and gain the involvement of other 'ulamā' worldwide in the ongoing debates. For example, al-Raniri also took this opportunity by writing in Arabic on this issue to tell other members of 'ulamā' about such debates which occurred in the Malay world between him and Shamsuddin in the *Nubdhah*.

Finally, the work of al-Falimbani on the holy war written in Arabic entitled *Naṣīhat al-Muslimīn wa Tadhkirat al-Mu'minīn fī Faḍā'il al-Jihād fī Sabīlillāh wa Karāmah al-Mujāhidīn fī Sabīlillah*²⁷ seems to be very interesting because this text does not fall under the popular ongoing debates on theology and Sufism at that time. Perhaps this subject of *jihād* is also popular at that

²⁴ Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik*, 418.

²⁵ Tudjimah, *Asrarul-Insan fī Ma'rifatir-Ruh wa'l-Rahman* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas, 1960), 22; Daudy, *Allah dan Manusia dalam Konsep Syekh Nuruddin ar-Raniri* (Jakarta: Rajawali, 1983), 55-57.

²⁶ Gerardus W. J. Drewes, *Directions for Travelers on the Mystic Path* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 223-224.

²⁷ Drewes, *Directions for Travellers*, 223.

time in Mecca where he resides, which prompted him to write on this matter as well.

In short, the presence of so many religious texts in the Malay world written by '*ulamā*' either in Malay or Arabic is a manifestation of how committed these '*ulamā*' were in discharging their duties as members of an international community of '*ulamā*' as well as local teachers and guardians. Obviously, the written texts served as an important tool in disseminating one's thoughts and ideas. Unlike verbal preaching, these written texts will last longer and can serve Muslims in this region and beyond for generations as points of reference. This is true if we look at the fact that these texts still exist today.

The issues discussed in these texts also portrayed the interests and needs of the Muslims in the Malay world at that time. While texts on *tawhīd* and *fiqh* represent the core teachings of Islam, these '*ulamā*' did not neglect the interests of the people at that time in Sufism. As a result, texts on Sufism were written the most either in Malay or Arabic. The fact that their main duties are to maintain and uphold the correct teachings and transmission of Islam locally, these '*ulamā*' did not detach themselves from the outside world. That is why they wrote some of these texts in Arabic, not for local consumption but for other members of '*ulamā*' worldwide. In doing so, it gave an opportunity for them to highlight local issues which most of the time also occurred somewhere else in the Muslim world as described above. At the same time, they were able to get a response from other '*ulamā*' outside the Malay world on that particular issue, such as the controversy between the philosophical and orthodox Sufis.

However, being a universal religion Islam must have its own worldview on the existence of other religions in this world. What we have discussed so far merely represents the intra-religious issues among Muslims all over the world with a special reference to the Muslims in

the Malay world. Therefore, it is equally important for us to analyse the views of 'ulamā' in the Malay world on other religions. This is because there were significant influences of Hinduism and Buddhism as well as traditional beliefs in the Malay world before the arrival and spread of Islam.

Writings on Other Religions

The writings based around other religions are not so frequent among early 'ulamā' in the Malay world. It was as if these 'ulamā' were not interested in writing about other religions at all. Even the earliest known text which talked explicitly about other religions was in fact written by a non-Malay 'ālim, Nuruddin al-Raniri. Based on early Malay texts we have until today, al-Raniri's *Tibyān fī Ma'rifah al-Adyān* could be considered the only early Malay text on comparative religion surviving which deliberately discusses other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism as well as other Islamic sects in the world.²⁸ Other texts only mentioned other religions in passing.

The copy of the *Tibyān* is currently available in numerous types of collections including old manuscripts and microfilms. The original copy is in the collection of the University of Leiden, Holland.²⁹ In Malaysia, there are at least three copies of *Tibyān* available. One of them is a manuscript kept in the National Library of Malaysia,³⁰ which was copied from the original by Lebai Abdul Rahman. At the University of Malaya, it is in the form of microfilm.³¹ Another copy is in Wan Mohd Shaghir

²⁸ Al-Rānirī, *Tibyān fī Ma'rifah al-Adyān*, The University of Leiden, Holland, Cod. Or. 11618

²⁹ Cod. Or. 11618.

³⁰ MSS 1533 (A) and also in microfilm (MKK 5408).

³¹ Cod. Or. 3291.

Abdullah's personal collection.³² The copy of *Tibyān* is also to be found in Dr. P. Voorhoeve's compilation of Al-Raniri's works, *Twee Maleische Geschriften van Nuruddin ar-Raniry*.³³

Al-Raniri wrote the *Tibyān*³⁴ in Aceh in his capacity as the Shaykh of Islām in response to the commands of the Queen of Aceh, Seri Sultan Tajul Alam Safiyuddin Shah. Al-Raniri classifies these religions into two categories, namely, (1) Religions with Scriptures, and (2) Religions without Scriptures. Quoting again what he says:

O Student, you have known all the sects that are without scriptures, and I shall now present to you the beliefs of the people with scriptures (*Ahl al-Kitāb*). So, sprung from the people with scriptures ten sects of which the first is called Barahimah. They said, "We are from the religion of Prophet Ibrahim and we are his offspring". Indeed, they are the idol

³² Wan Mohd Shaghir, *Khazanah Karya Pusaka Asia Tenggara 2*. (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1991), 30. It was printed in Bombay (now Mumbai) India and checked by Muhammad Saiyid Zaman Kaasyghari.

³³ Peter Voorhoeve, *Twee Maleise Geschriften van Nuruddin ar-Raniry*. (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 5-7 in a facsimile form.

³⁴ For the purpose of this analysis, we use Voorhoeve's facsimile compilation of the *Tibyān*. For details P. Voorhoeve, *Twee Maleise Geschriften van Nuruddin ar-Raniry*. Leiden: Brill, 1955. His edition of the *Tibyān* is the only complete copy published. In addition, two romanized versions of the *Tibyān* by Engku Mohd. Anuar and Mohd Rushdan Mohd Jailani will also be used to assist in our understanding if we encounter any difficult word(s) found in Voorhoeve's facsimile edition of the *Tibyān*. For details, Engku Mohd Anuar Wok, "Versi Rumi *Tibyān* fi Ma'rifati 'l-Adyān" (Academic writing for the Bachelor Degree in Malay Studies: University of Malaya, 1965), and Mohd Rushdan Mohd Jailani, *An Annotated Translation and Transliteration of *Tibyān* fi Ma'rifat al-Adyan*, (Master's Thesis, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 2003).

worshippers and some of them resided in the continent of Gujerat.³⁵

The second sect is the Jews, who were the people of Prophet Musa, and was also divided into two other sects. They are 'Uzayriyyah and Sāmiriyyah or Samamawiyyah.³⁶

The third sect from the people with scriptures (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) is the Christians. And they also developed into three sects: firstly, *Malkaniyyah*, secondly, *Masturiyyah* and thirdly, *Mari Ya 'qubiyyah*...³⁷

On the status of *Majūsi*, some say that they are not *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book), while some scholars say that they are *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book) and some others

³⁵ "Hai Talib, apabila kau ketahuilah I'tiqad segala taifah yang tiada berkitab, maka sekarang kunyatakan akan dikau I'tiqad segala taifah Ahli al-Kitab. Maka jadilah segala ahli al-Kitab itu pun sepuluh taifah. Pertama daripadanya bernama Barahimah. Kata mereka itu, "Adalah kami atas agama Nabi Allah Ibrahim lagi kami pun zuriatnya". Dan adalah mereka itu menyembah berhala dan tempat kediamannya itu, setengah daripada mereka itu di Benua Gujerat." Al-Rānīrī, *Tibyān*, 31.

³⁶ "Kedua taifah daripada Ahlal-Kitāb Yahudi, iaitu umat Nabi Allah Musa, itu pun jadi dua taifah. Pertama Uzayriyyah, kedua Samiriyyah, dan Samamawiyyah pun namanya." Al-Rānīrī, *Tibyān*, 31.

³⁷ "Ketiga taifah daripada Ahli al-Kitab itu Nasara. Maka mereka itu pun jadi tiga taifah. Pertama Malkaniyyah, kedua Masturiyyah, ketiga Mari Yaakubiah. Maka sebab jadi sesat mereka itu dan jadi ikhtilaf agamanya kerana adalah antara kaum Nasara dan kaum Yahudi ber'adawah keduanya. Maka amat banyak dibunuh kaum Nasara akan kaum Yahudi." Al-Rānīrī, *Tibyān*, 34-35.

(scholars) say that they are *Shibhu al-Kitāb* (similar to the People of the Book).³⁸

Al-Raniri's origin in the Indian subcontinent, as well as his experience of the Arabian Peninsula, could be the reason why he was so keen to include the discussions of other religions in his writings. Al-Raniri came from the Indian subcontinent, or more specifically from Gujarat, an international port situated on the north-western part of Indian subcontinent.³⁹ His living experience in Gujarat, and later in Hadramawt, in South Arabia brought him in contact with other religions he wrote about in *Tibyān*, such as Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism.

No wonder that he was able to elaborate on these religions comfortably, although this text was not meant to discuss these religions in great details. Other 'ulamā', on the other hand, were probably not interested in writing much on other religions. Even though early Malay 'ulamā' have also experienced living together with people from other religions in the Malay world, they did not feel any need for them to elaborate much on these religions, such as traditional local beliefs or Hinduism as well as Chinese religions in their writings. There is little evidence that religious tensions between the followers of Islam and other religions have ever occurred in the Malay world prior to the present time. The spread of Islam in the region was, indeed, a peaceful process altogether.⁴⁰ Thus, there is no pressing need for local 'ulamā' to write on other religions without there being any visible competitions from these religions. Without such needs, this may justify

³⁸ "Adapun hukum Majusi itu, kata setengah bukan ia Ahli al-Kitāb dan kata setengah ulama bahawa ia Ahli Kitab dan kata setengah ulama bahawa ia Shibhu al-Kitāb." Al-Rānirī, *Tibyān*, 18.

³⁹ Tudjimah, *Asrarul-Insan*, 1-2.

⁴⁰ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in the Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2006), 3-4.

the lack of interest among early 'ulamā' in the writing of other religions.

There are further texts which have also included the discussion of other religions in passing or as part of the entire discussion on other branches of knowledge in Islam such as *fiqh*, *tawhīd* and *taṣawwuf*. Such elaboration can be found among others in al-Raniri's *Bustān al-Salāṭīn* (The Garden of the Kings) and *Asrār al-Insān fī Ma'rīfah al-Rūḥ wa al-Raḥmān* (The Secrets of Man [Revealed Through] the Cognition of Spirit and the Merciful One); Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili's *Lubb al-Kashf wa al-Bayān limā Yarāh al-Muḥtadar* (The Essence of the Exposition and Explanation of what the Dying sees in His Vision); as well as the anonymous *Hikayat Seribu Masalah*.

In the *Bustān*,⁴¹ al-Raniri's expositions on Christianity begins with the story of Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) - peace be upon him. According to al-Raniri, Prophet Yaḥyā was for an uncle to marry his niece. The mother of the girl persuaded Herodias to kill Prophet Yaḥyā, which he did by beheading the Prophet in front of the mother and daughter.

⁴¹ This is another contribution of al-Raniri to the Malay world. He had written this text of seven volumes in Malay while he was in Aceh under the command of Sulṭān Iskandar Thānī. Although there are seven volumes, volume two, in particular, is relevant to this study because it discussed al-Raniri's views of other religions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. He did so while explaining the history of prophets from Adam to Muhammad. For this analysis, we will be using Jelani Harun's edition of the *Bustān* which consists of volumes one and two. In his book, Jelani also gave the background of the *Bustān*. According to him, the *Bustān* can be categorized into the world history genre based on Islamic historiography. Furthermore, the contents of this text were arranged in such a way similar to the works of other Muslim historians such as al-Bayhaqī, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Qashānī and many more. For details, see Jelani Harun ed., *Bustān al-Ṣalāṭīn (Bab Pertama dan Kedua) Karangan Nuruddin Ar-Raniri* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004).

During that time Prophet 'Īsā forbade marriage to nieces. There was one Herodias, the judge of Banī Isrā'īl from the Yunayan tribe and his niece. He wanted to marry his niece. Prophet Yaḥyā prevented him from beheaded by Herodias, the judge of Banī Isrā'īl. Herodias wanted to marry his niece but Prophet Yaḥyā prevented the marriage because Prophet 'Īsā had declared that it is unlawful carrying out (his intention). And so the girl's mother persuaded Herodias to kill Prophet Yaḥyā but the request was rejected. After that she came to Herodias persuading him even more. And so, he granted her wish and he ordered the capture of Prophet Yaḥyā. The people arrested the two women and presented them to him (Herodias) and he ordered the beheading to be carried out in front of the two women. Prophet Yaḥyā was killed just before Prophet 'Īsā was raised to heaven.⁴²

⁴² "Dan adalah pada masa itu Nabi Allah Isa mengharamkan nikah anak saudaranya perempuan. Kalakian, ada seorang Hirudas, iaitu hakim Bani Israel daripada kaum Yunayan dan seorang anak saudaranya perempuan, maka hendak dinikahi akan dia. Maka ditegah Nabi Allah Yahya akan dia daripada mengerjakan yang demikian itu. Maka dibawa ibu perempuan itu akan Hirudas (supaya) membunuh Nabi Allah Yahya, maka tiada dikabulnya. Kemudian dari itu, maka datang pula ia serta dengan sangat minta keduanya. Hatta maka dikabulkannyalah kata perempuan itu, lalu disuruh tangkap akan Nabi Allah Yahya. Maka ditangkap oranglah kedua perempuan akan dia lalu dibawa mereka itu kepadanya, maka disuruhnya sembelih di hadap(an) kedua perempuan itu. Maka adalah Nabi Allah Yahya alaihissalam terbunuh dahulu daripada diangkatkan Allah Taala Nabi Allah Isa alaihissalam ke langit hampir jua masanya." *Al-Rānīrī, Bustān*, 132-133.

In his *Asrār al-Insān*,⁴³ al-Raniri's discussion on the Christian's belief highlights what the Qur'ān says about Prophet 'Īsā, that those who claim that he is God have indeed committed a blasphemous act. He says:

And Prophet 'Īsā was bestowed with various miracles from God to the extent that the disbelievers claimed that he is God (Haq Almighty), as Allah says "*laqad kafara alladzīna qālū innaallāha al-masīhu ibna Maryam*" (Indeed those who say that God is Jesus son of Mary have become disbelievers (*kāfir*)) (al-Qur'ān 5:17).⁴⁴

Al-Sinkīlī in his text *Lūbb al-Kashf wa al-Bayān limā Yarāh al-Muḥtaḍar bi al-'Iyān*⁴⁵ which was published

⁴³ This text was written by al-Raniri under the royal command of Sultan Iskandar Thani, but was completed during the reign of the next ruler, Sultanah Safiyya al-Din. For this analysis, we will be using the text which was studied by Tudjimah for her doctorate thesis. For details, see Tudjimah, *Asrarul-Insan*. Steenbrink's romanized version of the text for folio 77a until 80a, which will be the focus of this analysis, is also part of our main reference here. For details see Karen A. Steenbrink, *Kitab Suci atau Kertas Toilet: Nuruddin Ar-Raniri dan Agama Kristen* (Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ "Dan demikian lagi dianugerahi Haq ta'ala akan Nabiullah 'Īsā berbagai-bagai daripada anugerahnya, hingga dikata segala kafir, bahawa ia Haq ta'ala, seperti firman Allah ta'ala '*laqad kafara alladzīna qalu inna'llaha al masihu ibna Maryam*' sesungguhnya telah kafirlah segala merekaitu yang mengata bahwasanya Haq ta'ala itulah Isa ibnu Maryam (al-Qur'ān 5:17)." Al-Rānīrī, *Asrār al-Insān*, 175.

⁴⁵ This book is one of many writings of Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili. He wrote this book in Arabic, and it was translated into Malay by Katib Seri Raja. See Braginsky, *The Heritage*, 651. It is based on *Kitāb al-Tadhkirah bi Umūr al-Ākhirah* (The Book of the Reminder of the Events in the Hereafter) by al-Qurṭūbī (d. 1272). It focuses on the experience of every human being while on his deathbed. This text also includes an elaboration of the essential preparations of a Muslim who is about to face death. These preparations are important in guiding Muslims from the devil, who will try to change the belief of the dying Muslims from Islam to other religions. For this analysis,

under the title *Bajan Tadjalli* by Voorhoeve explains that Satan will appear in three appearances to the dying Muslim to persuade him to change his religion. These three appearances will be in three different colours i.e., black, red, and yellow. Black represents Satan itself, while red and yellow represent Judaism and Christianity respectively.

When the moment of death approaches, the person will see many appearances, and when the one with the black appearance approaches him, that is the devil and he must say, "There is no God except Allah and Muhammad is His messenger". And when the one with the red appearance approaches him, that is the Christian and he must say, "There is no God except Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger". And when the one with the yellow appearance approaches him, that is the Jew, he must say, "There is no God except Allah and Muhammad is His messenger". And when the one with the fair skin approaches, indeed that is the Messenger, he must say "Māshā' Allāh, he was indeed one of the true believers."⁴⁶

we will be using Voorhoeve's edition of the text which was published under the title *Bajan Tadjalli*. For details, see Peter Voorhoeve, "Bayan Tadjalli", *TBG* 85 (1952), 91.

⁴⁶ "Telah datang kepada manusia pada ketika sakarat al-maut beberapa rupa jang amat banyak, maka apabila datang kepadanya rupa jang hitam maka jaitu iblis maka hendaklah ia mengutjap la ilaha illa'allah (Muhammad rasulu'llah) huwa huwa huwa. Dan apabila datang kepadanya rupa merah maka jaitu nasrani maka hendaklah mengutjap la ilaha illa'allah Muhammad rasulu'llah huwa huwa huwa. Dan apabila datang kepadanya rupa kuning maka jaitu jahudi maka hendaklah ia mengutjap la ilaha illa'allah (Muhammad rasulu'llah) huwa huwa huwa. Dan apabila datang kepadanya rupa jang putih maka jaitu rupa nabi kita Muhammad rasulullah maka hendaklah ia mengutjap masja'Allah kana min al-mu'minina'l-hakk." Al-Sinkīlī, *Lūbb al-Kashf wa al-Bayān limā Yarāh al-Muḥtaḍar bi al-'Iyān* 91.

*Hikayat Seribu Masalah*⁴⁷ discusses Islam's position on eschatological issues vis-à-vis the positions of the Jews, Christians, and others. For example, there is an account of a dialogue between a Jewish *rabbi* 'Abd Allāh bin Salām before he became a Muslim with Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH):

So, say to him, O Muḥammad, do those who entered Paradise are because of their good deeds?" Rasulullah then answered, "O 'Abd Allah, they did not enter the Paradise because of their good deeds. Only those who say that "There is no God but Allah and Prophet Muḥammad is His Messenger" will go to Paradise and not because of their good deeds. If the Jews and Christians say these two phrases, or even the idol worshippers, if they enter Islam, Paradise is for them." 'Abd Allah responded, "True, O Rasulullah". "Say O

⁴⁷ This text was originally composed in Arabic and Persian and the author is unknown. This is a popular story in the Muslim world, which was written in Arabic before 963 C.E. See Edwar Djamaris 1994, 5. The text probably originates from the Arabian Peninsula. The text exists not only in Arabic and Persian, but was also translated into several other languages such as Urdu, Turkish as well as Malay and Javanese. Not only that but, it has also been translated into several European languages such as Portuguese and Dutch. The Malay edition of this text was translated from Persian in 17th century C.E. (Edwar Djamaris *Hikayat Seribu Masalah*, 5). The contents of this text are also copied under different titles such as *Masā'il 'Abdullāh bin Sallām Li Nabiyinā*, *al-Kitāb al-Masā'il 'Abdullāh bin Sallām* and *Masā'il 'Abdullāh bin Sallām* are all referring to the same text. Ismail Hamid, *The Malay Islamic*, 57. Iskandar has listed this text as one of the contributions from Palembang to the development of literary activities in the Malay world which existed before 1712 C.E. Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik*, 444. For this analysis, we will be using Edwar Djamaris's edition. For details, see Edwar Djamaris, *Hikayat Seribu Masalah* (Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1994).

Muhammad, all Jews and Christians and worshippers of fire, idols and trees – they are all unbelievers". 'Abdullāh then said, "True, O Rasulullah".⁴⁸

An important point to note is that none of these 'ulamā' has ever mentioned Chinese religions and belief systems such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and other branches of its folk beliefs explicitly. The fact that the Chinese, together with people from the Indian subcontinent, was the earliest foreign communities who had been in contact with the peoples in the Malay world, cannot be disputed, as there is concrete evidence to indicate their presence in the Malay world, long before the arrival of people from the Middle East and further West.⁴⁹ Thus, the absence of any elaboration on these religions in the Malay texts requires further investigation.

There is a possibility the followers of these Chinese religions and beliefs systems that came and resided in the Malay world had no desire to preach their religion to the locals. This is true if we look at the teachings of Buddhism itself which adopted a non-preaching attitude and concerned more with self-purification, based on certain

⁴⁸ "Katakanlah, ya Muhammad segala Islam yang masuk syurga itu dengan kebaktiannyakah?" Maka sabda Rasulullah, "Hai 'Abdullah segala orang yang masuk syurga tiada dengan kebak(t)an. Barang siapa menyebut la ilaha illa 'l-Lah Muhammad Rasulullah itulah yang beroleh syurga tiada dengan kebak(t)an. Jikalau Yahūdi dan Naṣrānī sekali pun jika ia menyebut dua kalimat itu atau orang yang menyembah berhala sekali pun jika ia masuk Islam, syurga baginya." Maka kata 'Abdullah, "Sidiq ya Rasulullah. Katakanlah, ya Muhammad, segala Yahūdi dan Naṣrānī dan segala orang menyembah api dan orang menyembah berhala dan orang yang menyembah pohon kayu sekalianya itu kafir." Maka kata Abdullah, "Sidiq, ya Rasulullah." *Hikayat Seribu Masalah*, 24.

⁴⁹ Leonard Y. Andaya, "Malay Peninsula," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* VI, ed. M. Eliade (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 233.

values prescribed by its founder Gautama Buddha.⁵⁰ They would simply practice their religion and keep it to themselves. Al-Attas also suggested that besides being a non-missionary religion, another factor that might cause Buddhist philosophy not to flourish in the Malay world, such as the background of the Buddhist clergy themselves, who were mainly from South India and came to the Malay world only to find seclusion and peace for the purpose of contemplation.⁵¹ They were not interested in preaching and only kept themselves in the monasteries for their own spiritual quests.

However, one could argue this by taking into consideration two important pieces of evidence related to the development of high Buddhist culture in island Southeast Asia namely the construction of a Buddhist monastery in Nalanda, India by the Srivijayan Empire⁵² and the existence of Candi Borobudur in Central Java. The construction of a monastery in Nalanda by a local Malay Empire, Srivijaya tells us two important facts; firstly, the involvement and contribution of a local ruler to the development of Buddhism, not only locally, but also internationally in the birthplace of Buddhism itself; secondly, it proves that followers of Buddhism in Southeast Asia island did not live in seclusion but reaching out for the welfare of their members as far as we know here to the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, the Candi Borobudur is a manifestation of a great artistic

⁵⁰ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (Melbourne: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1989), 61-62; Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion 2* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 358, 498-499.

⁵¹ Syed M. N. Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969), 4.

⁵² Oliver W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 134.

achievement of Buddhist followers in the archipelago. Thus, to say that the followers of Buddhism idly secluded themselves in the monasteries might not be entirely true. They did indeed contribute to the local society, but in their own ways.

Furthermore, the teachings of Buddhism, which were mentioned above, also did not make the locals stay with this religion after the arrival of Islam in the Malay world. Although the Malay world had once been a centre for the study of Buddhism, especially among Chinese Buddhists before they continued their pilgrimage to Nalanda, the arrival and spread of Islam changed the religious interests of the Malays altogether. It appears that, at that time Buddhism could not offer a new set of beliefs which can compete with what Islam could offer to the Malays. For example, the concept of paradise was seen as a new and attractive belief offered by Islam to the local people. Buddhism does not have such notion of paradise. The cycle of life in Buddhism will end when they reach *nirvana* or enlightenment, the supreme state free of suffering and individual existence. In Islam, paradise is a happy ending for Muslims. It is a promise of a joyous and permanent second life after death on this earth if they follow the rules and regulations set by Islam obediently. Muslims will thus struggle to become the best followers in the eyes of God, in order to be granted with paradise in the Hereafter.

Above all, the Malays have never been influenced by Buddhism or any other Chinese religions and belief systems. The influence of two main South Asian religions namely Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism in island and mainland Southeast Asia, before the spread of Islam in this region was seen frequently at the courts and not with the people at large.⁵³ That is why, when two new religions,

⁵³ George Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press, 1968), 33.

Islam and Theravada Buddhism came to replace them, these new religions were easily accepted by the people. This is solely on the reason that these new religions were very much involved with the welfare of the individual. The mainland Southeast Asia is dominated by the Theravada Buddhism, while Islam gained its popularity on over most of the island of Southeast Asia. This factor might have caused the authors of early Malay texts have not discussed and included these beliefs in their writings. However, the reasons given above are still inconclusive in explaining the absence of any mention of Chinese religions in early Malay texts. This could be an interesting research topic for future studies.

Conclusion

In short, all of these texts discuss one or more religions other than Islam. The obvious similarity between these texts can be found in terms of the religions they discussed. All of them discussed certain religious teachings of either one or all three Semitic religions, namely Judaism, and Christianity, as well as Islam in the texts. The approaches taken by the authors of these texts to discuss the theological aspect of these Semitic religions are in fact continuing the trend of religious discussions at that time, particularly in the Middle East. The texts which included a discussion on other religions in brief passages tell us different interests shown by early 'ulamā' to those of their counterparts in Persia and the Middle East.

The writings of 'ulamā' from these regions at that time such as *Kitāb al-Hind* (Book on the Indians) and *Kitāb al-Āthar al-Bāqiyah 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyah* (Book on the Remaining Signs of Past Centuries) of al-Birūnī (d. 1051), *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Aḥwa' wa al-Niḥal* (The Decisive Word on Sects, Heterodoxies and Denominations) of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1066), *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (The Book of Sects and Denominations) of Shahrastānī (d. 1085), and *al-Jawāb al-Ṣahīh li man*

Baddal Dīn al-Masīh (The Correct Answer to Those who Changed the Religion of Christ) of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328). The obvious shared origins and similarities between these three religions in terms of their beliefs in one God, as well as their differences in the interpretation of theological issues, are still subject to ongoing disputes and discussions among the adherents of these religions up to now. Thus, this religious debate has, indeed, influenced the authors of the above texts to continue similar debates and be part of the discussions in their own writings.

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