

# ISLAM AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FROM TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MALAY WORLD

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## Introduction

Through trading activities the Malays had been, from time immemorial, as familiar with the region now known as the "Middle East" as they had been with India and China. To the Malays, however, until recently they did not have any specific word for the Islamic heartland, that is, the lands predominantly inhabited by Persian, Arab, and Turk. The earliest and probably the nearest equivalent for the name "Middle East" known by the Malays would perhaps be the phrase used in *Sejarah Melayu* which refers to the region as part of the "*Negeri di Atas Angin*" (The Land Above the Wind or The Lands to The Windward of the Southwest Monsoon), while Melaka was described as among the "*Negeri di bawah Angin*" (The Lands Below the Wind or The Lands to the Windward of the Northeast Monsoon).<sup>1</sup>

Apart from *Sejarah Melayu*, the term is also found used in other traditional Malay literary works. In *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the legendary Malay hero, Hang Tuah, on his mission to Rum (Turkey) to acquire cannons for the Sultan of Melaka is said to have stopped in Egypt and was granted audience by the Egyptian Grand Vizier who wanted to know more about the Malay Kingdom of the "Land Below the Wind".<sup>2</sup> In *Hikayat*

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1 See W.G. Shellabear, *Sejarah Melayu*, Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1984, pp. 40, 50, 61, 65 & 114. See also J.A.E. Morley, "The Arabs and the Eastern Trade", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 22, Part 1, 1949, pg. 143.

2 Kassim Ahmad (annotated and with new introduction), *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993, pg. 542.

Raja-raja Pasai and Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, it is also narrated that from "The Land Above the Wind" came the people who converted the Malay rulers and their subjects to Islam, constructed mosques and taught them how to read the Qur'an.<sup>3</sup> The straightforward explanation as to why the term Middle East was unknown to the Malays is the fact that the term was introduced by the West and was not even local to the area itself.<sup>4</sup>

Originally the term Middle East was coined by the American Naval Officer, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1902 to address the strategic location of the area. The term was then made familiar to a wider public due to the role played by Valentine Chirol, a prominent historian and journalist of the "Middle East".<sup>5</sup> The widespread use of the term "Middle East" as a region was then taken up by military strategists during and after World War I, but its exact area was never specifically defined, which resulted in the admission or omission of certain countries to the region from one time to another.<sup>6</sup> The term, with the slightly earlier term "Near East", however, soon passed in to general use, though both are relics of a world with Western Europe in the centre, and other regions grouped around it.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact its obsolete and parochial outlook, the term "Middle East" has won universal acceptance and has been even adopted (somewhat illogically) by the Russians, the Chinese and the people of

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- 3 Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan, "The Changing Pattern of Religious Leadership in Malaysia", *Solidarity*, No. 14, September/October 1987, p. 69.
  - 4 For other discussions of the use of the term "Middle East" for the region, see for example C.G. Smith, "The Emergence of the Middle East", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, July 1968, pp. 3-17; Nikki R. Keddie, "Is There A Middle East?", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 4, 1973, pp. 255-271; Mat Daud Ag. Hamat, "Penjajahan Eropah dan Kemunculan Negara-Negara Bangsa di Timur Tengah", *Islamiyyat*, Vol. 4, 1982, pp. 81-100.
  - 5 Roderic H. Davison, "Where Is the Middle East", in Richard H. Nolte (ed), *The Modern Middle East*, New York: Atherton Press, 1963, pp. 16-17.
  - 6 G.M. Wickens, "Introduction to the Middle East", in R.M. Savory (ed), *Introduction to Islamic Civilization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 1.
  - 7 Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963, p. 9.

the Middle East themselves.<sup>8</sup> As for the Malays, even when the term was already popularly used in the West in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was still unknown to them. Instead the widely used term was "The Muslim World" which normally referred to this region; otherwise the name of the specific Muslim country was used.<sup>9</sup>

### **Early Arabs Trading Activities with the Malay World**

For many centuries Arabs from the Middle East have exercised a great deal of influence in the Malay World and for a considerable time many may have come here to spend the greater part of their lives. The Arabs' intercourse with the Malay World had its origin from their trading activities in the Indian Ocean which are reported in several accounts, some of which predate the beginning of the Christian era, handed down by Greek and Roman writers.<sup>10</sup> From here Arab traders extended their trading ventures to China, where according to G. R. Tibbetts, who cites a Muslim historian, their presence may well have dated from as early as the fifth century AD.<sup>11</sup> Since the Malay World and other parts of South East Asia are situated approximately in the middle of the route between India and China, it is most probable that this region was first successfully reached by Arab traders a little earlier than the latter.<sup>12</sup>

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8 G.M. Wickens, "Introduction to the Middle East", pg. 1.

9 See for example *Malaya*, a monthly Malay journal with illustrations published in 1926 which also included a special section "The Muslim World" in which news from the Middle East was the main feature. Similar sections are also found featured by other newspapers and journals such as *Idaran Zaman*, *Taman Bahagia* and *Dunia Melayu*.

10 G.R. Tibbetts, "Pre-Islamic Arabia and South-East Asia", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XXIX, Part 3, 1956, pg. 182; see also Alauddin Ismail Samarrai, "The Muslims in the South Seas and the Beginning of the Portuguese Challenge", *The Islamic Review*, Vol. XLV, No. 12, December 1957, pg. 27.

11 See G.R. Tibbetts, "Pre-Islamic Arabia", pg. 207.

12 *Ibid.*, pg. 207.

Constant contacts with the Malay World in the past inspired some of these Arabs to write accounts of their trading expeditions which have provided this region with a rich historical literature.<sup>13</sup> This information, which includes accounts of the Malay Peninsular in ancient times, has been one of the main sources to which Malays have been indebted when writing their early history.<sup>14</sup> Among these Arab writers who wrote about the Malay World between the second half of the ninth and the first half of the tenth century were Ya'qubi (875-80), Ibn al-Faqih (902), Ibn Rustah (903), Ishaq ibn 'Imran (circa 907) and Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi (d. 923 or 932).<sup>15</sup>

In all probability, however, it was the Arabs of the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula who were the first navigators of the Indian Ocean and who discovered the Far East.<sup>16</sup> Evidence of their being great mariners may be found in their old lexicons, pre-Islamic poetry and the

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- 13 Paul Wheatley, "Arabo-Persian Sources For the History of the Malay Peninsula in Ancient Times", in K.G. Tregonning (ed), *Malaysian Historical Sources*, Singapore: Department of History, University of Singapore, 1965, p. 10.
  - 14 For works by these Arab writers and others, and their contributions as a source of the early history of the Malay Peninsula, see G.R. Tibbets, "The Malay Peninsula as Known To the Arab Geographers", *Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 8, 1956, pp. 21-60; G.R. Tibbets, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean Before the Coming of the Portuguese*, London: The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1971; Paul Wheatley, "Arabo-Persian Sources", pp. 10-19; Abdul Azim Hashemi Nik, "The Background of Acquaintance With Malay Societies: Evidence Found in Existing Islamic Geographical Texts", Paper Presented at the Second Conference on Malay Civilisation, 15-20 August 1989, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, pp. 1-42. For a brief account of several leading Arab travellers and writers on oceanography and allied subjects, see Abdul Ali, "The Arabs As Seafarers", *Islamic Culture*, Vol. LIV, No. 4, October 1980, pp. 218-219; and Affan Seljuq, "Some Muslim Geographers on South-East Asia", *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, Vol XXXVII, Part II, April 1989, pp. 125-132, an extract from accounts by two Arab geographers Ibn Khurdadhbih, al-Masalik Wa al-Mamalik and Ibn Rustah, *Kitab Al-Aclaq al-Nafsah*.
  - 15 Rita Rose Di Meglio, "Arab Trade With Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula From the 8th to the 16th Century", in D.S. Richards (ed), *Islam and the Trade of Asia. A Colloquium*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970, pg. 110.
  - 16 Caesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction and Expansion of Islam in Malaysia", *Siliman Journal*, Vol. II, Part 4, 1964, pg. 236.

religious writings of the pagan Arabs.<sup>17</sup> The strategic location of the Malay Peninsular which was situated on the ancient international maritime route enabled it to emerge as a vital stopping place for foreign merchants and since pre-Islamic times it was also a regular shipping route for Arab traders.<sup>18</sup> By the middle of the ninth century, the Malay Peninsular became increasingly visited by the enterprises from southern Arabian Arabs, since it was an obligatory passage between East and West for any ship bound for China.<sup>19</sup>

The Southern Arabian Arabs' active involvement in inland trade as well as maritime trade in the adjacent seas and beyond to the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean as a source of livelihood was encouraged by a number of factors. The contributing internal factor was the arid and barren homeland (with the exception of few coastal areas) which was not suitable for agricultural activities.<sup>20</sup> Another important contributing factor which also led these Arabs to turn to trade for a living was the stagnation or the decline of the economy of the area and the increase in the population, which could not be accommodated any more by the cities of Hadhramaut.<sup>21</sup>

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17 S.M. Imamuddin, "Islam in Malaysia. Impact of Bengal, the Deccan, Gujerat and Persia in the Early Middle Ages", *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, Vol. XXIX, Part IV, October 1981, pg. 260.

18 See Kenneth R. Hall, "Trade in the Malay World. An Historical Perspective", in Mohd. Amin Hassan & Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman (eds.) *The Eighth Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia. Selected Papers*, Bangi: History Department UKM, 1988, pp. 207-210.

19 The existence of Arab trading activity in China during this period is provided by two independent accounts of the route at that time, Ibn Khurdadhbih's *Kitab al-Masalik Wa al-Mamalik* and Sulayman's *Akhbar al-Sin Wa al-Hind*. See George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951, pg. 66.

20 Peter Boxhall, "Arabian Seafarers in the Indian Ocean", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. XX (Old Series Vol. 76), Part III, October 1989, pg. 287.

21 Caesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction", pp. 338-339.

The prominence of the Southern Arabian Arabs in trading ventures was also tremendously assisted by the advantage of their location which enabled them to function, centuries before the advent of Islam, as intermediaries between Europe and the East. Furthermore, their trading activities in the Indian ocean were also greatly encouraged by favourable geographical conditions related to the monsoons which assisted the establishment of trade. The monsoon winds which blow steadily across the Indian Ocean, and then blow in the reverse direction for several months at a time, allowed the passage of sea transport from South-West Asia and from ports further East.<sup>22</sup> Taking full advantage of the monsoons, Arab traders were able to calculate the time taken to reach their destination and for the return journey with great accuracy.<sup>23</sup>

For these Southern Arabian Arabs, however, it was more than just their enviable strategic position, the monsoons, the aridity of the region and their entrepreneurial skills that stimulated them to become traders. Their active involvement in trading activities, particularly in the Indian Ocean, was also encouraged by the existence further north of a fairly high form of organized society living in conditions of prosperity. This society provided an important market for their merchandise from the East, including above all essentially luxury goods.<sup>24</sup> The advent of Islam (622 A.D.) further motivated the Arabs to be more venturesome, spurred by the motive of spreading the new faith in addition to trading activities, and by 651 A.D. they had already sent their first emissary/mission to China.<sup>25</sup> The rise of two powerful dynasties, the Umayyad Caliphate in

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22 G.R. Tibbets, "Pre-Islamic Arabia", pg. 217.

23 S.M. Imamuddin, "Arab Mariners and Islam in China", *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, Vol. XXXII, Part III, July 1984, pg. 159.

24 History has shown the presence of a nearly continuous period of human civilisation in the Middle East or Southern Europe from the time of the Sumerians onwards. This continuous period of civilised society is believed to have created an almost permanent demand for these eastern products, although varying in intensity depending on the degree of civilisation at a given time. See G.R. Tibbets, "Pre-Islamic Arabia", pg. 183.

25 See J.V. Mills, "Arab and Chinese Navigators in Malaysian Waters in About A.D. 1500", *IMBRAS*, Vol. 47, Part II, 1974, pg. 7.

the West (660-749 A.D.) and the Tang Dynasty in the East (618-907 A.D.) also encouraged the sea trade between the eastern and western parts of Asia and enabled the Arabs' trade to flourish significantly.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the Arabs, the Persians are also noted as having been actively involved in the Eastern trade. It appears that their most important trading port during the ninth and tenth centuries was situated at Siraf, to the south of Shiraz on the Persian Gulf.<sup>27</sup> They are known to have sailed to China as early as the Sasanid Dynasty (234-634 A.D.) and on the way they also traded with the Malays.<sup>28</sup> The presence of Persian traders in China as early as 300 A.D, separately from the Arabs, is clearly indicated by the existence of a Persian settlement and counting houses in Canton as noted in Chinese records.<sup>29</sup> These records also indicate that it was from here that the earliest known emigration of large numbers of Muslim traders to the Malay World originated. It took place toward the end of the ninth century following an abortive revolt in 878 A.D. against the Tang Emperor.<sup>30</sup>

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26 Uka Tjandrasasmita, "The Sea Trade of the Moslems to the Eastern Countries and the Rise of Islam in Indonesia", in *Studies in Asian History. Proceedings of the Asian History Congress 1961*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1969, pg. 93.

27 Bertold Spuler, "Trade in the Eastern Islamic Countries in the Early Centuries", in D.S. Richards (ed), *Islam and the Trade of Asia. A Colloquium*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970, pg. 14; Alastair Lamb, "A Visit to Siraf, an Ancient Port on the Persian Gulf", *IMBRAS*, Vol. XXXVII, Part 1, July 1964, pg. 9; Brian E. Colless, "The Traders of the Pearl. The Mercantile and Missionary Activities of Persian and Armenian Christians in South-East Asia", *Abr-Nahrain*, Vol. 1X, 1969/1970, pg. 24. For their presence in north Sumatra, see Nazir Ahmad, "Traces of Persian Influence in China and South East Asia During the 14th and Early 15th Century A.D.", *Studies in Islam*, Vol. XVIII, Nos. 1-2, January-April 1981, pp. 54-55.

28 Alastair Lamb, "Takuapa: The Probable Site of a Pre-Malaccan Entrepot in the Malay Peninsula", in John Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds.), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1964, pg. 81; Brian E. Colless, "Persian Merchants and Missionaries in Medieval Malaya", *IMBRAS*, Vol. XLII, Part II, December 1969, pg. 12 & 14. For a discussion of Persian activities in Kelang, Kedah, the East Coast and Melaka, see Brian E. Colless, "The Traders of the Pearl. The Mercantile and Missionary Activities of Persians and Armenian Christians in South-East Asia", *Abr-Nahrain*, Vol. X, 1970-71, pp. 104-121.

29 Caesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction", pg. 339.

30 Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969, pg. 11.

These emigrants took refuge at Kalah on the west coast of the Malay Peninsular, which some historians believe is the present-day Kedah (Merbok estuary).<sup>31</sup> The conclusion that it was Kedah, however, is inconclusive due to conflicting accounts given by various Arab geographers as to the site. Recent historical and archeological researches have come up with new suggestions concerning its most likely location, which include either Kelang in the Malay Peninsular or Takuapa in present-day Southern Thailand.<sup>32</sup> Despite the confusion that shrouds its location, what is certain is that Arab and Persian trading ships had fully penetrated the seas of South East Asia by the seventh century and continued to frequent those waters for almost the next thousand years.<sup>33</sup> Apart from Kalah, other parts of the Malay World were also frequented by these traders following their departure from Canton, including ports under the domination of the kingdom of Srivijaya.<sup>34</sup>

Even though the Middle Eastern traders, particularly the Arabs were acquainted with the Malay World from early times, at first the products of this region did not constitute the bulk of their trading items of commerce and their trading activity there was not as extensive as it was with China.<sup>35</sup>

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31 George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 71 & 78; S.M. Yusuf, "The Route of Arab Mariners Through al-Zabaj (Further India) [Chapter IV], *Studies in Islamic History and Culture*, Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1989, pg. 139. For a discussion of the accounts of Arab geographers about the location of Kalah, see G.R. Tibbets, "The Malay Peninsula", pp. 24-33.

32 For an enlightening discussion of the candidature of Kelang as the possible location of Kalah, see S.Q. Fatimi, "In Quest of Kalah", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, September 1960, pp. 62-101; see also his article, "Peace, Unity and Universality", *Intisari*, Vol. 1, No. 1, n.d., pg. 28; and Brian E. Colless, "The Traders of the Pearl", Vol. 1X, pg. 24. Paul Wheatley, who also tried to identify the exact site of Kalah, however, arrived at a conclusion that none of these places fit all the accounts given by various Arab geographers. He concluded that Kalah could be any place along the coast from the Mergui Archipelago to the west coast of the Malay Peninsular. See Paul Wheatley, "Desultory Remarks on the Ancient History of the Malay Peninsula", in John Bastin & R. Roolvink (eds.), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1964, note F, pp. 68-70; For a discussion of the archeological evidence, as opposed to literary findings, for the candidature of Pengkalan Bujang in Kedah and Kakhao Island near Takuapa in Southern Thailand, see Alastair Lamb, "A Visit to Siraf", pp. 1-19; for the candidature of Kakhao Island, see also Lamb's article, "Takuapa: The Probable Site", pp. 76-86.

33 Paul Wheatley, "Arabo-Persian Sources", pg. 10.

34 Rita Rose Di Meglio, "Arab Trade", pp. 109-110.

35 *Ibid.*, pg. 108.



Until the tenth century, relatively limited amount of spices was traded by Arab traders and the bulk of the oriental trade goods that were brought to Baghdad, which was one of the most important market centre in the Middle East, had been largely luxury items.<sup>36</sup> Similar goods were also traded in Cairo and Alexandria and although there was mention of spices (mainly cloves and occasionally nutmeg and mace) in the commercial records, these trading items were extremely rare and expensive.<sup>37</sup> It was only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the spice trade began to increase in importance, together with textiles and dyes. The importance of spices as trading goods emerged when in Europe the mixture of pepper, ginger, cinnamon, sugar, cloves and nutmeg came into demand to cure all sorts of ailments. In addition, spices were also useful as flavoring for meat and became increasingly popular in the European diet.<sup>38</sup>

The increasing importance of the Malay World to Arab traders was clearly demonstrated when they discovered that many of the commodities which were demanded by China, India and the Arab World and (via the latter) Europe could be found in this area of South East Asia.<sup>39</sup> By the thirteenth century when bulk commodities began to enter the East-West trade, a triple segmentation of long-distance trade to facilitate trading transactions began to surface. This segmentation led to discontinuation of the traditional voyages of the Arab dhows to China and trade became organized in three sections, divided by intermediate emporia on the Indian coast and the Straits of Melaka.<sup>40</sup> This century also saw two premier South East Asian emporia, Srivijaya and Fo-lo-an which

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36 Andre Wink, "Al-Hind". India and Indonesia in the Islamic World-Economy, c. 700-1800 A.D.", *Itinerario*, Vol. 12, Part 1, 1988, pg. 44.

37 Anthony Reid, "An 'Age of Commerce' in Southeast Asia History", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, February 1990, pg. 12.

38 See Kenneth R. Hall, "Trade and Statecraft in the Western Archipelago at the Dawn of the European Age", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 54, Part 1, 1981, pg. 22.

39 Rita Rose Di Meglio, "Arab Trade", pg. 108.

40 Andre Wink, "Al-Hind", pg. 44.

Paul Wheatley believed is Kuala Brang in Trengganu, being regularly frequented by Arab traders.<sup>41</sup>

By the fifteenth century, the segmented trading pattern was fully taken advantage of by the East-West traders and only a few junks from China still reached India. Most of them instead stopped at Melaka while Indian-owned ships covered the section between Melaka and the Indian coast and Arab-owned ships dominated the Arabian Sea.<sup>42</sup> Due to increased Arab intercourse with the various islands of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago, Melaka which was founded in the early years of that century had by this time come into prominence as the successor of Kalah.<sup>43</sup> Its strategic location in the Straits of Melaka and the conversion of its rulers to Islam encouraged an increasing number of Arab ships to make its city-port their main trading centre in the East. It has been found that in the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, apart from Arabs from southern Arabia, there were also considerable numbers of Arabs from Egypt who travelled to Melaka. These Arabs formed among others the foreigners who made up a relatively large colony of merchants in the city-port.<sup>44</sup> By the last half of the fifteenth century, Melaka became an essential terminus of the Indian Ocean trade with a population of some 40,000 to 50,000, with foreign merchants forming a large colony.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the fact that Arabs continued to be actively involved in the Eastern trade, actually from the twelfth century onward, trading activities in the Middle East had begun to show signs of decline which gradually had a significant effect on the Arab trade in the Far East. The decline of the Middle Eastern trade was attributed by a number of factors. The internal

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41 Paul Wheatley, "Desultory Remarks", pp. 60-61.

42 W.H. Moreland, "The Ships of the Arabian Seas About A.D. 1500", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, January 1939.

43 S.M. Yusuf, *Studies in Islamic History and Culture*, pg. 167.

44 Archibald Lewis, "Maritime Skills in the Indian Ocean 1368-1500", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. XV1, Parts II-III, 1973, pg. 245.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

factor was the diminishing supply of products due to devastating wars, a drop in the region's capacity to export agricultural produce, the decline in the production of its handicrafts and the contraction of its population. In addition to these circumstances, the external factors which were also instrumental in its decline were the ability of the former customers of Middle Eastern traders in Europe to produce their own commodities, the capacity of European merchants to buy the exotic products of the East directly from the producing areas and the expertise achieved by the Europeans in producing more competitive goods which greatly undermined the products of the Middle East.<sup>46</sup>

Beginning from the closing years of the fifteenth century, the Arab trade in the Far East suffered another crucial blow. Following the success of the Christian Conquistadors in the Iberian Peninsula, the Portuguese waged a campaign to eliminate the Muslims elsewhere in the world. For the one and a half centuries that followed, the Portuguese managed to control the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean which significantly affected the previous Arab monopoly of trade in the Ocean which had never been seriously challenged before.<sup>47</sup> The fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511 was an important turning point that contributed to the diminishing role played by Muslim traders, particularly the Arab traders from the Middle East in the waters of the Malay World. Although with much reduced trade relations, contact with the Middle East continued to flourish through Islam.

### **Islamization of the Malays**

Islam has been a driving force which has brought about political and social change in Malay society. So important is Islam to the community that its introduction has been a source of revolution

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46 See Charles Issawi, "The Decline of Middle Eastern Trade 1100-1850", in D.S. Richards (ed), *Islam and the Trade of Asia. A Colloquium*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970, pp. 245-266.

47 Caesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction", pg. 338.

from within.<sup>48</sup> As Muslims, the Malays were proud of their Islamic heritage and regarded themselves as an integral part of a wider brotherhood and civilisation. Since becoming Muslim, elements from the Middle East had exercised a great influence in shaping the society. The significance of this influence has long attracted the interest of scholars and orientalists because its introduction to the region demonstrates a distinctive uniqueness compared to other parts of the Muslim World. Despite its distance from the Muslim heartland in the Middle East and no evidence to show any military expedition or specially assigned missionary efforts by Muslim rulers from there or from the Indian subcontinent to spread the religion to them, today, Malays constitute one of the biggest groups in the Muslim population of the world. The Islamization of the Malays which took place during the period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century proved to have a radical effect on their lives and marked an important watershed in their history.<sup>49</sup>

As in other aspects of their history, most of the studies on the Islamization of the Malays were initially dominated by Western historians and orientalists, which subjected it to an interpretation which sometimes conflicted with local perspectives. In the study of the Islamization of the Malays *vis-a-vis* the role and importance of the Middle East in bringing about this process, three issues have dominated the discussions.<sup>50</sup> The first issue is the origin of the preachers who introduced and spread the faith to them. Although various other theories have been put forward on the origin of these early preachers, including Champa and China, the discussions which focussed on Indian and Arab origins eclipsed other discussions.

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48 See Syed Hussein Alatas, "On the Need For an Historical Study of Malaysian Islamization", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, March 1963, pg. 63.

49 For the discussion on the importance of Islam in shaping the history of the Malays and the rejection of the Western orientalist views, who discounted its significance, see Syed Hussein Alatas, "Reconstruction of Malaysian History", *Revue du sud-est Asiatique*, Vol. III, 1962, pp. 219-245.

50 For a brief survey of theories of Malay Islamization, see Syed Farid Alatas, "Notes on Various Theories Regarding the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago", *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXV, Nos. 3-4, July-October 1985, pp. 162-175.

Most of the orientalist who have studied the spread of Islam to the Malay World, however, have arrived at the conclusion that Islam was brought to the region from the Indian subcontinent, instead of from Arabia or Persia.<sup>51</sup> The theory that the religion was brought from the Indian subcontinent was first mooted by the Dutch scholar Pijnappel, the first professor of Malay Studies at the University of Leiden. Pijnappel, however, asserted that Islam in this region was brought by Arabs, though they did not come directly from Arabia, but rather from Gujerat and Malabar.<sup>52</sup> The theory of Indian origin of Islam in the Malay World was further enhanced by the study in 1912 A.D. made by J.P. Moquette who found that the style of gravestones at Pasai dated 1428 A.D. (17 Dhul Hijjah 831AH) identical to the style of the stone found at the grave of Maulana Malik Ibrahim (d. 1419 A.D.) at Grisik. Following this discovery, it was established that the gravestones at both Pasai and Grisik were similar to those found at Cambay and Gujerat.<sup>53</sup> Taking this as evidence, later scholars on the study of the Islamization of Malays such as R.A. Kern, B. Schrieke, G.H. Bousquet, B.H.M. Vlekke, J. Gonda, T.W. Arnold, R.O Winstedt, Brian Harrison and others also conclude that Islam was introduced to this region from the Indian subcontinent.<sup>54</sup> Their assertion to this theory was further supported by the fact that the Indians of the Gujerati ports were major ship-building centres and by the fifteenth century their merchants were familiar traders at Malay ports.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the theories proposed by these orientalist, there were, however, several scholars who put forward the theory of the "Arab factor" in the introduction of Islam in the Malay World. One of the

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51 Ismail Hamid, "A Survey of Theories on the Introduction of Islam in the Malay Archipelago", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. XX1, No. 3, 1982, pg. 89.

52 G.W.J. Drewes, "New Light on the Coming of Islam to Indonesia?", *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Vol. 124, 1968, pg. 440.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 443-444.

54 See S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute Ltd., 1963, pp. 5-6.

55 S. Arasaratnam, *Islamic Merchant Communities of the Indian Subcontinent in Southeast Asia*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1989, pg. 5.

earliest to come up with this theory was Professor Keyzer of Delft Academy, one of the earliest scholars of Muslim law in Holland, who linked the coming of Islam with Egypt where the Shafi' school has of late occupied an important place. Other Dutch scholars, Niemann and De Hollander, who also studied the Islamization of the Malays also pointed out the role played by Arabs, so did other scholars including John Crawford, William Marsden and the Portuguese historian, Diego de Couto.<sup>56</sup> T.W. Arnold who studied the propagation of the Muslim faith was also of the opinion that although the religion was introduced by missionaries from southern India, nevertheless proselyting efforts were also actively undertaken by Arabs.<sup>57</sup>

The study of the Islamization of the Malays *vis-a-vis* the prominent role played by Arabs from the Middle East in the process, however, is far from complete if local traditions are not taken into account as being as important as archeological findings or cultural indications. Looking at the Malay traditions, it clearly appears that the early Muslim missionaries who converted their forefathers to Islam were Arabs who came directly from Arabia. Most of them married native women after converting them to the faith and the role of preaching the new religion was then continued by their descendants. Some of them converted native rulers and married into their families and later inherited from them and became sultans or rulers of certain states; still others held religious offices such as Qadis, Muftis and religious teachers.<sup>58</sup>

Among the Malay literary works which mention the role of Arabs in the process of Islamization are Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai and Sejarah Melayu. In Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai the founder of the kingdom, Merah Silu is said to have seen in a dream the Prophet Muhammad and the arrival of Shaykh Ismail at its port sent by the ruler of Makkah to teach

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56 Ismail Hamid, "A Survey of Theories", pg. 93.

57 See T.W. Arnold, The Preaching of Islam. A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1979, pp. 368-369.

58 Ismail Hamid, "A Survey of Theories", pp. 94-95.

Islam to its people.<sup>59</sup> In *Sejarah Melayu*, the ruler of Melaka, Sultan Muhammad Shah, also has a similar dream in which the Prophet appears to him, teaches him the confession of faith and charges him to go and fetch Sayyid Abdul Aziz, an Arab, the next day from a ship which will arrive from Jeddah.<sup>60</sup>

In another Malay literary work, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, an Arab missionary, Shaykh Abdullah al-Yamani is said to have come directly from Arabia and converted to Islam the ruler of Kedah, who was subsequently known as Sultan Muzaffar Shah.<sup>61</sup> Early descriptions of the role of an Arab missionary are also found in the Achehnese chronicle, which reports that Islam was introduced into the northern tip of Sumatra sometime around 1112 A.D. by an Arab preacher, whose name is given as Shaykh Abdullah Arif. One of his disciples, Shaykh Burhanuddin, later continued Shaykh Arif's islamic missionary works as far away as Priaman on the west coast.<sup>62</sup>

The second issue which dominated the discussion of the Islamization of the Malays, which in a way is also related to the first, is when the religion was first introduced to this region. The findings by researchers on the subject have concluded that it is impossible to determine the exact date but there is a possibility that Islam was introduced to this region in the early centuries of the Hijrah, long before any historical notices of such

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59 G.W.J. Drewes, "New Light", pp. 437-438; See also W.G. Shellabear, *Sejarah Melayu*, Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1984, pp. 41-42.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 437-438, See also *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

61 Ismail Hamid, "A Survey of Theories", pg. 95.

62 See Syed Naguib Al-Attas, Preliminary Statement, pg. 11.

63 See for example the supposition made by T.W. Arnold on this possibility, on the ground that extensive Arab commerce with the East existed from the very early times. In the second century B.C. the trade with Ceylon was wholly in Arab hands and by the beginning of the seventh century of the Christian era, their trade with China through Ceylon received a great impulse. By the middle of the eighth century Arab traders were to be found in great numbers in Canton, while in the tenth to the fifteenth century, until the arrival of the Portuguese, they were the undisputed masters of the trade with the East. See T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, pp. 367-368.

influences were at work.<sup>63</sup> Accounts given by Malay traditions, however, indicate that the religion was established in the region at its earliest at the beginning of the twelfth century. Apart from a report given by the Aceh chronicle which said that Islam was introduced to the area around 1112 A.D., another report mentions that in 1204 A.D., Sultan Johan Shah, said to have come from the "windward" converted the people there to Islam. He married a daughter of Baludri of Aceh and became the ruler of the kingdom for almost thirty one years. After his death, his son, Sultan Ahmad succeeded him as the new Sultan of Aceh.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to these accounts, another kingdom in north Sumatra which composed the realms of Perlak and Samudra was also reported to have been Muslim by 1282 A.D.<sup>65</sup> The establishment of Islam in this area was also reported by Marco Polo, the great Venetian traveller, who on his voyage back from China visited Perlak in 1292 A.D. and mentioned that the townspeople of the kingdom were Muslims, while the hill-people were not living in a civilized manner.<sup>66</sup>

In Trengganu on the northeast coast of the Malay Peninsular, a stone inscription dated 1302 A.D. discovered at Kuala Brang indicates that there were early Muslim settlements in the state.<sup>67</sup> A study on this inscription which is written in Jawi and is strongly influenced by Arabic shows that it was written by someone who had a deep knowledge of the Malay language of that time. The content was a proclamation of Islamic law which seem to have been directed to the ruler and people of Trengganu. With this proclamation, officially Trengganu emerged as the first Islamic state in the region. Despite the fact that Trengganu proclaimed its Islamic law in the early fourteenth century, this does not mean that Islam came to the area in that century. There is a possibility that Islam had already been

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64 S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes To Malaysia*, pg. 38.

65 Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement*, pp. 11-12.

66 Henry Yule (Trans. and edited with Notes), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, London: John Murray, 1926, pg. 284.

67 Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement*, pg. 12.



practiced there a few centuries earlier, and therefore the date 1302 A.D. on the inscription stone should be taken as the date of the proclamation of Islamic law in Trengganu, not as the date at which Islam was introduced in the state.<sup>68</sup>

Whatever the arguments on the date of the Islamization of the Malays among scholars who have studied the subject, they are, however, unanimous in their opinion that the process was set on a firm footing in the early fourteenth century and accelerated at a faster pace during the following centuries, ultimately leading to the conversion of the population of the surrounding areas in the region to Islam.<sup>69</sup> On the basis of the available evidence and arguments, it seems clear that the suggestion made by B. Schrieke that the Islamization of the Malay World actually occurred in the course of the sixteenth century and later as a result of the antagonism between the Muslim traders and the Portuguese which culminated with the capture of Melaka in 1511 A.D. is almost untenable.<sup>70</sup>

The third issue, which dominates discussions of the Islamization of the Malays is how it took place and what were the factors that led to the process. Scholars seem to agree that trade played the major role in the Islamization of the Malays, a theory which was first suggested by Tome Pires who wrote in approximately 1515 A.D.<sup>71</sup> While it was clearly through trade that Islam was initially introduced in the Malay World, it seems highly questionable that the large scale conversion that took place in the

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68 See Hamdan Hassan, "Batu Bersurat Trengganu: Kajian Mengenai Isi Kandungan dan Tafsiran Bacaannya", in Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali (ed), *Trengganu Dahulu dan Sekarang*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Muzium Malaysia, 1984, p. 27; Shafie Abu Bakar, "Identiti Keagamaan dan Tradisi Pengajian di Trengganu, Warisan, No. 3, 1982, pg. 17.

69 See for example the three phases of Islamisation proposed by Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement*, pp. 29-30.

70 See B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies, Part Two, The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1957, pp. 231-237.*

71 Ismail Hamid, "A Survey of Theories", pg. 97; See also Raymond Leroy Archer, "Muhammadian Mysticism in Sumatra", *The Moslem World*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, July 1938, pg. 231.

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries can be explained adequately as resulting only from these early trading contacts.<sup>72</sup>

In this context, it is also important to look at the local perspectives, while not denying the role played by traders, Arab and non-Arab, in the process. Looking at the Malay literary works discussed above, it is clearly demonstrated that the process which converted the Malays to Islam took place from the top, whereby Arab preachers came directly from Arabia and converted the Malay rulers to the religion. These court literatures seemingly show that only after the rulers had embraced Islam did their subjects follow suit. This episode as described in Malay literatures also indicates that the Arabs who converted the Malay rulers were not traders, but preachers who came purely to propagate the religion of Islam.<sup>73</sup>

The fact that the overwhelming majority of Malays in Indonesia and Malaysia are Muslims suggests that the Islamic faith was received and welcomed with greater enthusiasm there than anywhere else in South East Asia. It also suggests that the acceptance of the faith by the people of this region was voluntary rather than a result of the use of force or military expeditions sent to South East Asia by any Muslim power that reigned supreme in the Muslim World of the Middle East or the Indian subcontinent.<sup>74</sup> In the process of spreading the religion, although sometimes the sword has been drawn in support of the cause, preaching and persuasion rather than force and violence have been the main

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72 Syed Farid Alatas, "Notes on Various Theories", pg. 165.

73 The use of these Malay literary works to support the evidence that Islam was introduced from Arabia, however, was rejected by among others, T.W. Arnold who argued that there is no historical basis for such a belief, and he strongly believed that all evidence available seems to point to India as the source where the Malay received their faith. See T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, pg. 370.

74 Muhammad Saleem Ahmad, "Islam in Southeast Asia: A Study of the Emergence and Growth in Malaysia and Indonesia", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, 1980, pp. 134-135. According to S.Q. Fatimi who quoted from Groeneveldt, Chinese sources gave an account that Mucauiyah, the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty and the Muslim navy made plans to invade the Malay lands in 674. His intention, however, was abandoned when he received a report showing the peaceful, equitable and settled condition that prevailed there under the ruthlessly just rule of Queen Sima. See S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, pg. 69.

characteristics of this missionary movement.<sup>75</sup> Given the nature and scale of the acceptance of Islam by Malays which was unique by itself compared to what was happening for instance in the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent, their Islamization will continue to be a subject of discussion by Western orientalists and local scholars alike.

## The Influence of Islam on Malay Culture

Despite the fact that Islam has changed the culture and social behaviour of the Malays, several Orientalists who have studied its practice and influence among them consider the process which took place about seven hundred years ago to be not a spectacular landmark in their history. J.C. Van Leur who was not impressed by the process, suggests a parallel between Islamization and Indianization since, according to him, "both these world religions were only a thin, easily flaking glaze on the massive body of indigenous civilization".<sup>76</sup> Even R.O Winstedt, a scholar of Malay culture, did not recognize the significance of the religion in Malay life and believed that any Islamic influences in the society have been mixed with Hindu belief.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the conclusions made by some of these Orientalists, others such as Van Nieuwenhuijze acknowledged that Islam undoubtedly is an important ingredient in Malay culture and has acted as a means for their social and cultural self-identification.<sup>78</sup> The theory of the insignificance of the Malays' Islamization upheld by several Western orientalists, on the other hand, was strongly repudiated by a number of local scholars, the strongest critique of the opinion being offered by Syed Hussein Alatas

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75 T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, pg. 409.

76 J.C. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society*, The Hague and Bandung: Van Hoeve, 1955, pg. 169.

77 R.O. Winstedt, *The Malay Magician: Being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, pp. 73-74.

78 C.A.O. Van Nieuwenhuijze, "Legacy of Islam in Indonesia", *The Muslim World*, Vol. LIX, Nos. 3-4, July-October 1969, pg. 210.

and Syed Naguib al-Attas, who believed that the advent of Islam is the most momentous event in the history of this region.<sup>79</sup> The Islamization of the Malay World is also believed to have provided one of the most important ideological factors that have transformed the culture of the area.<sup>80</sup> This transformation of culture through a change in religion has been made possible because Islam stresses not only correct belief but also right conduct.<sup>81</sup>

The transformation of Malay culture by the influence of Islam and the Middle East was first begun by Pasai. After its conversion to Islam, the Muslim ruler of Pasai bore the title al-Malik al-Zahir which was an imitation of the name of the Mamluk Sultans in Egypt which suggests the association of the kingdom, at least by name, with this Muslim empire of the Middle East.<sup>82</sup> In the thirteenth century, Pasai grew into an important Muslim political power in north Sumatra and there is evidence to show that a branch of the Pasai royal house ruled in Kedah in the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>83</sup> As a Muslim kingdom, Pasai acted as the patron of Islam in this region, and its court and mosque emerged as the earliest centres of Islamic education in the Malay World.<sup>84</sup>

When Ibn Battuta visited Pasai in 1345/6 A.D, he mentioned that its Sultan, al-Malik al-Zahir, was a religious man who walked on foot to Friday prayers and was fond of religious debates. He was also very

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79 See Syed Naguib al-Attas, Preliminary Statement, pp. 4-10; Syed Hussein Alatas, "On the Need for an Historical Study of Malaysian Islamization", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, March 1863, pp. 67-74.

80 Caesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction", pg. 337.

81 Mohd. Taib Osman, "Islamization of the Malays: A Transformation of Culture", in Khoo Kay Kim, et al., *Tamadun Islam Di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980, pg. 1.

82 See B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, pg. 261.

83 W.F. Stutterheim, "A Malay Shacir in Old-Sumatran Characters of 1380 A.D.", *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. XIV, 1936, pp. 276-277.

84 Ismail Hamid, "The Earliest Centers of Islamic Studies in the Malay World", *Hamdard Islamicus*, Vol. IX, No. 1, Spring 1986, pg. 73.

zealous in propagating Islam to the surrounding areas by means of conquest and he had the upper hand over all the non-Muslims in the vicinity who paid poll-tax to him.<sup>85</sup> As an important centre of Islam, Pasai was visited by noted Muslims such as al-Muntazir, a descendent of the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad who died there in 1407 A.D.<sup>86</sup> Pasai was also an international meeting place of Islamic scholars and theologians who came from the world of Islam to disseminate religious knowledge, and it is also reported to have hosted such 'ulama' as Qa Amr Sayyid from Shraz, Taj al-Din from Isfahan and Amr Dawlasa from the Sultanate of Delhi.<sup>87</sup>

After the ruler of Melaka became Muslim, he concluded a family alliance with the Sultan of Pasai by marrying the latter's daughter. Both Pasai and Melaka then emerged as important centres of Islamic learning and were instrumental in the propagation of Islamic faith throughout the Malay World. Although Pasai claimed priority as a theological centre, it was Melaka that was destined to become one herself.<sup>88</sup> As a place where theologians and preachers gathered, discussions became more frequent and ultimately Melaka emerged as a leading centre of Islam in the region during the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. Even when Pasai was on the decline, its importance as a religious centre continued and the 'ulama' of Melaka still referred to it on problems related to religion.<sup>89</sup>

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85 Ibn Battuta, (Trans. and Selected by H.A.R. Gibb), *Ibn Battuta's Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1939, pg. 274.

86 B. Schrieke, *Indonesian Sociological Studies*, pg. 262.

87 See Ibn Battutah, *Rihlah*, 4, Arabic Text with translation into French by C. Defremery and B.R. Sanguinetti (Paris, 1893) p. 230; Cited from Ismail Hamid, "The Earliest Centers", p. 74. See also, Alijah Gordon (edited and Annotated), *The Propagation of Islam in the Indonesia-Malay Archipelago*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian, Sociological Research Institute, 2001, pg. 33.

88 For a discussion of Melaka as a religious centre, see Shafie Abu Bakar, "Kitab al-Durr al-Manum dan Kitab al-Luma' Sebagai Pancaran Budaya Ilmu di Melaka. Permasalahan dan Pengaruh Lanjutannya", Paper Presented at the International Conference on Malay Studies, University of Malaya, 21-23 August 1989, pp. 1-27.

89 Caesar Adib Majul, "Theories on the Introduction", pg. 344.

Following the fall of Melaka, Aceh rapidly rose to become the most important commercial, cultural and religious centre of the Malay World; for the Muslim merchants and traders had moved away from Melaka and chosen Aceh as their base for their trading activities. Along with the merchants and traders, there had come to Aceh, scholars of Islam and men of letters, and by 1560 A.D, Aceh had emerged as the most important centre of learning, culture, and commerce, replacing the fallen Melaka. From the *Bustanus Salatin* of al-Raniri, we learn that during the reign of Sultan ʿAli Riʿayat Shah (1571-1579 A.D) some of the sciences of the Muslims were already taught at Aceh Darul Salam including the intellectual sciences (*al-Maʿqulat*) taught by Muhammad Azhar, a learned Shafiʿ scholar who came from Egypt.<sup>90</sup>

Being an extension of the legacy of Pasai and Melaka as a leading centre of Islam, Aceh also inherited several of their traditions including that of Islamic writings which were spread through the medium of the Malay language.<sup>91</sup> According to Winstedt, to Aceh, the significance of the Malay language was equivalent to that of Latin to Europe in the Middle Ages.<sup>92</sup> The extensive use of the Malay language in Aceh for the flowering of Islamic literature and religion led to its modernization and made its widespread use possible throughout the Malay World. Its use also enabled it to spread as a vehicle for philosophical discourse and as a language of Islamic philosophical literature.<sup>93</sup> The comprehensive utilization of the Malay language also enriched its vocabulary through the

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90 T. Iskandar, *Bustanus Salatin*, Bab II, Fasal 13, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966, pg. 32.

91 Ismail Hamid, "The Earliest Centers", pp. 74-75.

92 R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969, pg. 88.

93 Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement*, pp. 6-7.

borrowing of large number of Arabic, Persian and some Turkish words.<sup>94</sup>

The extensive use of the Malay language also led to the widespread utilisation of the Arabic script as a medium of writing which was known in Malay as Jawi.<sup>95</sup> In Aceh, the Malay language and Jawi writing, apart from being used to spread knowledge, were also used as a means of communication, even with the West. Among the earliest surviving examples of Aceh's correspondence is the "golden letter", being a

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94 There are a number of works which deal with words of Middle Eastern origin borrowed by the Malay language following Islamization. For the Arab loan-words in Malay, see for example, Amran Kasimin, *Perbendaharaan Kata Arab Dalam Bahasa Melayu*, Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1987; Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, *Arabic Loan-Words in Malay - A Comparative Study*, Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya Press, 1983. For the Persian-loan words in Malay, see Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, *Persian and Turkish Loan-Words in Malay*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1982; G.E. Morrison, "Persian Influences in Malay Life (1280-1650)", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 28, Part 1, March 1955, pp. 55-56; Nazir Ahmad, "Traces of Persian Influences in China and South East Asia During the 14th and Early 15th Century A.D.", *Studies in Islam*, Vol. XVIII, Nos. 1-2, January-April, 1981, pp. 54-55; Engku Ibrahim Engku Ismail, "Pengaruh Syi'ah-Parsi Dalam Sastra Melayu", in Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar (ed), *Warisan Dunia Melayu*. Teras Peradaban Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur: Biro Penerbitan GAPENA, 1985, pp. 111-112. See also Russell Jones, *Arabic Loan-Words in Indonesia. A Check-list of Words of Arabic and Persian Origin in Bahasa Indonesia and Traditional Malay in the Reformed Spelling*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1978. For a discussion of the influence of Arabic on Malay phraseology, see S. van Ronkel, *Mengenai Pengaruh Tatakalam Arab Terhadap Tatakalam Melayu*, Jakarta: Bhratara, 1977; see also C. Skinner, "The influence of Arabic Upon Modern Malay", *Intisari*, Vol. 2, No. 1, n.d., pp. 34-47.

95 It is not known who actually named the Arab alphabet used by Malays "Jawi writing" or "writing by the people of Jawi". It is rather ironic that as believed by many, Jawi refers to Java since it was not until 1478 that the Island of Java came under Muslim domination. Before and after the advent of Islam in the island, Javanese already had their own writing which was entirely different from the Jawi writing. Arab sources, however, do mention the term al-Jawah from before the middle of ninth century, but the term is applied to the people of Sumatra and Malays in general. In fact when Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta visited the island they called it Java. It seems that the Arabs identified the land inhabited by the Malays in the region as Java. Even though there is no concrete basis of argument for the use of the term, the writing was already used since the early days of the Muslim kingdoms in north Sumatra. Existing evidence, however, suggests that the writing was well established by the early fourteenth century and this is indicated by the Trengganu inscription stone dated 1303 A.D. For a discussion on the use of the term "Jawi" and its use following the Islamization of Malays, see Omar Awang, "Kesan Pengaruh Uagama Islam dan Bahasa Dalam Bahasa Melayu", in Hamdan Hassan (ed) *Islam Dan Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors, 1979, pp. 93-107; Omar Awang, "The Trengganu Inscription as the Earliest Known Evidence of the Finalization of the Jawi Alphabet", in Lutfi Ibrahim, et al., *Islamika III*, Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Pengajian Islam, 1985, pp. 190-191; Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, pp. 286-287 (Note 1).

communication between Sultan Iskandar Muda (reign 1607-1636), the greatest ruler of Aceh and King James I of England dated 1615.<sup>96</sup> The letter, which uses the Malay language and Jawi writing is remarkable in its style and format in which it borrowed heavily from the Middle East. Its sumptuous illuminations portrayed elements of Safavid (in the beautiful blue dome-shaped ‘unwan) and Ottoman (in the floral poppy motifs) influence, fused in the indigenous interpretations.<sup>97</sup>

The use of the Malay language and Jawi writing in Aceh, however, were most extensive in the dissemination of religious knowledge. The most impressive and definitive findings on its earliest use for the purpose are found in the book, ‘Aqa’id al-Nasafi which deals with the fundamental beliefs and faith of the Muslims based upon the essentials of the religion of Islam.<sup>98</sup> The contents of the book were not only widely taught and studied in Aceh, but also throughout the Malay World from the late sixteenth century.<sup>99</sup> The extensive use of the Malay language and Jawi writing also led to the flourishing of various fields of knowledge and literature in the language. More importantly, various branches of Islamic studies such as Islamic law, tradition, Qur’anic exegesis, philosophy, Sufism and so forth received much attention from religious scholars who

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96 Apart from this “golden letter” there are a few other early seventeenth century manuscripts connected with the correspondence between Aceh and Westerners now extant. These include a copy of a letter from the Sultan of Aceh to Queen Elizabeth I, dated 1011AH/1602AD and the original letter which bore the stamp of Sultan Alauddin Shah of Aceh giving trading authority to Captain Harry Middleton. See W.G. Shellabear, “An Account of Some of the Oldest Malay MSS Now Extant”, *JBRAS*, July 1898, pp. 108-111.

97 Three-quarters of this letter from Sultan Perkasa Alam Johan (Sultan Iskandar Muda) of Aceh whose reign marked him as the major power of the Western Indonesian Archipelago to King James I of England, dated 1024AH/1615AD are devoted to describing the majesty of the Sultan, his great wealth and the breadth of his dominions. This letter which is nearly one metre high is regarded as one the oldest and most beautiful illuminated royal Malay letters and also the largest and the most spectacular the British collection ever had. See Annabel Teh Gallop and Bernard Arps, *Golden Letters. Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, London: The British Library and Jakarta: Yayasan Lontar, 1991, p. 34.

98 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the ‘Aqa’id of al-Nasafi*, Kuala Lumpur: Department of Publication University of Malaya, 1988, p. 5.

99 *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.



began to write on them and contributed to a large body of books known in Malay as Kitab Jawi.<sup>100</sup>

One of the earliest and most notable authors of Kitab Jawi in Aceh was Nuruddin al-Raniri, who wrote *Kitab Da' Khalaq al-Samawat Wa al-Ard* (The Creation of Heavens and the Earth) in 1639 A.D. at the request of Sultan Iskandar Thani of Aceh (reigned between 1636 A.D. and 1641 A.D.).<sup>101</sup> Al-Raniri was a prolific Kitab Jawi author who produced more than twenty three books.<sup>102</sup> By the early nineteenth century, the Kitab Jawi tradition was by no means confined to Aceh, but had spread throughout the Malay World and Arabia. In Hijaz, prominent authors of Kitab Jawi include Muhammad Arshad bin Abdullah al-Banjari,<sup>103</sup> Abdul Samad al-Falembani,<sup>104</sup> and Daud bin Abdullah al-Fatani, who is described as by

100 Literally, Kitab means "books" and Jawi refers to the Malays, as the Arabs in the past referred to all people in the Malay World as Jawi or Jawah. Therefore, Malay writing using the Arab alphabet is called Jawi writing. See Mohd. Nor Ngah, "Islamic World-View of Man, Society and Nature Among the Malays in Malaysia", Mohd. Taib Osman (ed), *Malaysian World-View*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1985, p. 6. See also footnote 103.

101 Mohd. Noor Ngah, "Some Writing of Traditional Malay Muslim Scholars Found in Malaysia", in Khoo Kay Kim, et al., *Tamadun Islam di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980, p. 11.

102 Mohd. Noor Ngah, "Islamic World-View of Man", p. 7. Among other famous books by him are *Sirat al-Mustaqim* (the Straight Path) which was written in 1054AH/1644AD. For list of his books, see Wan Mohd. Saghir Abdullah, "Al-Allamah Syeikh al-Raniri", *Majalah Dian*, No. 92, September 1976, p. 55.

103 The most famous Kitab Jawi by Muhammad Arshad bin Abdullah al-Banjari is *Sabl al-Muhtadin* (The Way of the Guided) which was completed in 1195AH/1780AD. For the life of Shaykh Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari, see Wan Mohd. Saghir Abdullah, "Syeikh Muhammad Arsyad bin Abdullah", *Majalah Dian*, No. 102, October 1977, pp. 97-102.

104 Abdul Samad al-Falembani's famous book is on Sufism, entitled *Hidayat al-Salikin* and completed in 1192AH/1778AD. Although the book is actually a translation of al-Ghazali's *Bidayat al-Hidayah*, Abdul Samad also added to it some of his own personal views. In addition, he also wrote *Sayr al-Salikin* which actually an adaptation of al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. His other works include *Zuhrah al-Murd Bayan Kalmah al-Tawhd* on scholastic theology based on the lectures of the Egyptian calim Shaykh Ahmad 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Damanhur which were delivered in Makkah; the *'Urwah al-Wuthqa* which deals with awrad and is supposed to be recited at certain fixed times. His other works include *Nasihah al-Muslim Wa Tadhkirah al-Mu'minn F Fida' al-Jihad F Sabl Allah Wa Karamah al-Mujahidin F Sabl Allah* and *Ratib 'Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani*. See Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, *Peradaban Dalam Islam*, Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press Sdn. Bhd., 1982, p. 169 (Chapter X, "The Islamic Concept of Education According To Shaykh 'Abdu's-Samad of Palembang And Its Significance In Relation To The Issue of Personality Integration"). For the life and works of Abdul Samad al-Falimbani, see also Wan Mohd. Saghir Abdullah, "Syeikh Abdus-Samad al-Falimbani", *Majalah Dian*, No. 100, August 1977, pp. 91-99.

far the most productive author of Kitab Jawi in the nineteenth century.<sup>105</sup> Another remarkable Kitab Jawi author who established his name in Makkah in the nineteenth century was al-Nawaw al-Jaw al-Bantan al-Tanar who wrote more than forty one books.<sup>106</sup>

Apart from Kitab Jawi, the use of Jawi writing in Aceh also enabled the non-Arabic literate Malays to understand the contents of the Holy Book when ‘Abd al-Ra‘uf bin Ali al-Jawi al-Fansuri al-Singkili produced the first Malay commentary on the whole Qur’an, *Tarjuman al-Mustafd*.<sup>107</sup> The commentary has been traditionally regarded as an authoritative translation of Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta’wil of al-Bayaw (d. 685AH/1285AD).<sup>108</sup> Kitab Jawi and the commentary on the Qur’an were widely used as texts in religious teaching throughout the Malay World and were instrumental not only in the spread of Islamic knowledge, but also in the growth of the Malays’ intellectualism.<sup>109</sup> In the nineteenth century, before

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- 105 Mohd Noor Ngah, *Kitab Jawi: Islamic Thought of the Malay Muslim Scholars*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1983, p. 6. His total works number more than sixty one books, the greatest being *Furu’ al-Mas’ail* written in 1254AH/1838AD. For a life and a brief discussion of 12 of the works by Shaykh Daud bin Abdullah bin Idris al-Fatani that are still in print, see Virginia Matheson and M.B. Hooker, “Jawi Literature in Patani: The Maintenance of an Islamic Tradition”, *JMBRAS*, Vol. 61, Part 1, 1988, pp. 19-27; See also H.W.M. Shaghir Abdullah, Syeikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fatani. *Ulama’ dan Pengarang Terulung Asia Tenggara*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Hizbi, 1990.
- 106 A.H. Johns, “From Coastal Settlement to Islamic School and City: Islamization in Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula and Java”, *Hamdard Islamicus*, Vol. IV, No. 4, 1981, p. 20. See also the description of him in C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970, pp. 268-276.
- 107 See Peter Riddell, “Earliest Quranic Exegetical Activity in the Malay-Speaking States”, *Archipel*, No. 38, 1989, p. 108. ‘Abd al-Rauf was born around 1615 in Singkel, Aceh, a small town on the west coast of the island of Sumatra. He spent approximately nineteen years studying exegesis, jurisprudence and other Islamic sciences in Arabia during the 1640s and 1650s before returning to Aceh in approximately 1661. Apart from *Tarjuman al-Mustafd*, ‘Abd al-Rauf’ also wrote about twenty books, one of his most well-known works being *Umdat al-Muhtajin*. He died around 1693.
- 108 Peter Riddell, “The Source of ‘Abd al-Rauf’s *Tarjuman al-Mustafd*”, *JMBRAS*, Vol. LVII, Part 2, 1984, p. 113.
- 109 See Omar Awang, “The Major Arabic Sources Which Determined the Structure of Islamic Thought in the Malay Archipelago Before the Nineteenth Century A.D. in the Field of Law, Theology, and Sufism”, *Islamika*, 1981, pp. 80-85. For a recent comprehensive study of the use of Kitab Jawi in the teaching of Islamic knowledge throughout the Malay World, which includes Arabic Grammar (Nahw, Sarf and Balaghah), Jurisprudence (Fiqh), Usul al-Fiqh, Doctrine (Tawd, Aqidah and Usul ad-Dn), Quranic Exegesis (Tafsir), adth, Morality and Mysticism and Histories of Islam, see Martin van Bruinessen, “Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu”, *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Vol. 146, 1990, pp. 226-269. For a discussion on the features and contents of Kitab Jawi, see Mohd. Nor Ngah, “Islamic World-View of Man”, pp. 8-45.

these Kitab Jawi were printed locally, they were printed in Makkah, Bombay, Istanbul and Cairo.<sup>110</sup>

After several centuries of use as a vehicle for the spread of religious knowledge with Kitab Jawi as its main torch-bearer, the Malay language and Jawi writing were firmly established throughout the Malay-speaking World.<sup>111</sup> Even with the advent of the British administration when the use of Romanised script was encouraged, Jawi continued to be favoured by the Malay public who had come to look upon it as their own national script.<sup>112</sup> In Johore, following the extension of British administration to the state, its Sultan, Sultan Ibrahim made a special request that apart from the official use of English and Malay in the court of justice and departments, the Malay written language, the Jawi, should also be given official recognition.<sup>113</sup>

The advent of Islam and the widespread use of the Malay language and Jawi also led to the emergence of Malay Islamic narratives as written literature.<sup>114</sup> These narratives had their origin as a genre of Islamic

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110 Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning", pp. 230-231. One early bookshop in Singapore known to sell religious books, Qur'an and Hikayat published in these places was the Haji Muhammad Taib Haji Abdul Shukur, 11 Baghdad Street, Singapore. See the advertisements for the bookshop which appear regularly in Neracha. For example Neracha, Vol. 2, No. 58, 6 November 1912; Vol. 3, No. 115, 24 December 1913

111 For the development of the spelling, see Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, "Jawi Spelling", *IMBRAS*, Vol. VI, Part II, June 1928, pp. 81-104; R.O Winstedt, "Jawi Spelling", *IMBRAS*, Vol. XIX, 1941, pp. 227-233 and W. G Shellabear, "The Evolution of Malay Spelling", *ISBRAS*, July 1901, pp. 75-135.

112 This fact was demonstrated by Za'ba who points out that before 1941 in Malaya, all Malay newspapers and journals were in Jawi since it was strongly favoured by the majority of the Malay public. Attempt by some at that time to produce them in Romanised script proved abortive since Malays regarded it as alien. See Zainal-Abidin b. Ahmad, "Malay Journalism in Malaya", *IMBRAS*, Vol. XIX, 1941, pg. 248.

113 Letter of Sultan Ibrahim of Johore to the Governor of Straits Settlements, Sir Arthur Young, 11 May 1914; Appendix in Ahmad Fawzi @ Mohd. Ahmad Pawazi bin Mohd. Basri, "Johor 1855-1917: Perkembangan Dalam Pentadbirannya", M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1972, pg. 344.

114 Siti Hawa Haji Saleh (ed), "Kesusasteraan Hikayat Sebagai Suatu Genre: Suatu Perbincangan Berdasarkan Hikayat Ismayatim", Cendekia. Kesusasteraan Melayu Tradisional, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987, pg. 282.

literature which had existed since the time of the Prophet.<sup>115</sup> Following the tradition of Muslim storytellers in early Islamic times, Muslim missionaries who preached Islam to the Malays also used Islamic narratives for propagating religious consciousness to their audience. These Islamic narratives, which are popularly known as the Malay Islamic Hikayat and were recited on special occasions and for entertainment, include the Hikayats of the Prophet Muhammad, the Ancient Prophets, the Companions, Muslim Heroes and Pious Muslims.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to these Islamic Hikayats, other works of this type, particularly of Persian origin, including epics and romantic literature, were also brought into Malay literary life, thus enriching its various genres. Earlier Malay literary works which were directly of Persian origin are mostly on the theme of Muslim patriotic history with reference to the Persian scene. Books of this nature had a direct consequence, particularly in Melaka, on the efforts which were made to link the traditions of its Sultans and their court with those of the Middle East. The most important work of this literary type is Hikayat Iskandar Dhul Karnain, which was used as a source by the compiler of the *Sejarah Melayu* for his genealogy of the Sultans of Melaka.<sup>117</sup>

Other famous Malay Hikayats which are also of Persian origin include Hikayat Amir Hamzah and Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah, which have been demonstrated partly to be faithful translations from

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115 Ismail Hamid, *Arabic And Islamic Literary Tradition With Reference To Malay Islamic Literature*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 1982, pg. 115.

116 For a comprehensive and detailed discussion of each of the categories of the Hikayat, see Ismail Hamid, *The Malay Islamic Hikayat*, Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1983, pp. 52-193.

117 The way the book was written bears some resemblance to Firdausi's method in compiling the Shah name, which traces the history of Persian kings through Alexander and Darius down to the time of Mahmud of Ghazna. Probably that epic, or more likely, a Malay compilation based upon it, were known to the writer of *Sejarah Melayu*, and suggested a method for introducing the material from the Alexander legend, as well as the generations of Persian successors. Since the first ruler of Melaka (about 1400) is called Iskandar Shah, we may believe that the story was current and perhaps the actual Malay translation was made quite early in the fifteenth century. See G.E. Marrison "Persian Influences in Malay Life (1280-1650)", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 28, Part 1, March 1955, pg. 60 & pg. 63.

Persian in so far as their Persian originals have been preserved.<sup>118</sup> These two Hikayats, particularly Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah, proved to have a strong influence on the Malays. In a famous episode in the Sejarah Melayu, there is a description of how in the highly charged atmosphere during the war with the Portuguese, the restive young Malay nobles keeping guard sent a messenger to the Sultan, requesting that Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah be read to them, hoping to gain encouragement from his exploits.<sup>119</sup> In addition to books of historical literature, the Hikayats, other Persian forms of literature were also adapted into Malay, including books on legends, tales and theology.<sup>120</sup>

The introduction of Islam to the Malay World also brought other Middle Eastern literary traditions into Malay literary life including poetry, Sha'ir. The Malay Sha'ir, however, had its origin and influence from the type of Arabic and Persian poetry which first came to the Malay

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- 118 The main difference between the Persian and Malay versions is their respective titles: In Persian Hikayat Amir Hamzah is known as *Dastan-e Amir Hamzah*, while the unique Persian manuscript of the Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah gives the title as *Gisse-ye Muhammad-e Hanafiyah*. See L.F. Brakel, "Persian Influence on Malay Literature", *Abr-Nahrain*, Vol. 1X, 1969/70, pg. 5.
- 119 Muhammad Hanafiah was the son of 'Ali, the Fourth Caliph, who died 700 A.D. and subsequently became a hero of the Shiites. In the Malay World, Muhammad Hanafiah represented the Muslim warrior par excellence as far back as the Melaka empire. See Annabel Teh Gallop and Bernard Arps, *Golden Letter.*, pg. 71. The incident referred can be found in W.G. Shellabear, *Sejarah Melayu*, pg. 203.
- 120 One of the much discussed works in this genre is the book of theological literature, *Kitab Seribu Masalah* (The Book of One Thousand Questions). The book is said to have been developed from one thousand questions put to the Prophet by a Jew, Abdullah bin Salam, who was then convinced of the truth of Islam. It was adapted in 1273AH/1856AD from Persian by Kiyai Agus Muhammad Mizan. The content of the book, however, is only an imagination of its author which contradicts the historical evidence found in Islamic history. The actual fact is that Abdullah bin Salam embraced Islam when he first met the Prophet, not after asking him one thousand questions as portrayed by the book. See Mohd. Noor Ngah, "Sumbangan Penulis-Penulis Islam Terhadap Kesusasteraan Melayu", *Persidangan Antarabangsa Pengajian Melayu 25 tahun*, October 1978, pg. 4; R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, pp. 148-152; Robert Allen Blasdel, "A Descriptive Catalogue of Mohammedan Literature Now Published in the Malay Language With An Estimate of the Religious Values of Such Literature For the Malay People", M.A. Thesis, Kennedy School of Missions, Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1930, pp. 47-49. See also Ph. S. van Ronkel, "Malay Tales About Conversion of Jews and Christians to Muhammedenism", *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. X, 1932, pp. 56-65; Russell Jones, "Ten Conversion Myths From Indonesia", in Nehemia Levtzion (ed), *Conversion To Islam*, New York/London: Holmes Meiers Publishers Inc., 1979, pp. 129-158.

World via the Sufi literature.<sup>121</sup> The originator of Malay Sha'ir was Hamzah Fansuri, who was also the earliest Malay writer in the genre, in addition of composing a number of prose works.<sup>122</sup> Sha'ir was well established in Malay literature in the sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century it was widely used all over the Malay World.<sup>123</sup> Another early prose form introduced to Malay literature was Ruba'i which had its origin from Persia.<sup>124</sup> Apart from Sha'ir and Ruba'i other Arab-Persian poetic genres found in the Malay literature include Bayt, Nazam, Mathnawi, Kit'at, Qasidah, Marhaban, Berzanji, Hadrah, Dabus and Zikr.<sup>125</sup>

The influence from the Middle East on Malay society and cultural life was not only confined to language, writing and literature, but it was also a source of influence which flavoured a number of Malay cultural performances. The flavour fitted the Malays well since they assumed that a material culture which is Middle Eastern, Arabic or to a certain extent Persian, symbolises Islamic culture. In addition, the performances are also an important factor of their cultural identity, and a source of authority and legitimacy in defining the realm of Malay-Islamic tradition.<sup>126</sup> In Penang, the Boria performance might be linked to the Persians, since probably Shi'ite

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- 121 Syed Naguib al-Attas, *The Origin of Malay Sha'ir*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1968, p. 15. The earliest surviving example of a Malay Sha'ir, however, is found inscribed on a tombstone found at Minje Tujoh, Aceh dated 1380 AD. See W.F. Stutterheim, "A Malay Sha'ir", pp. 278-279.
- 122 It appears that he lived and flourished in the period preceding and during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah of Aceh (1588-1604) and he probably died before 1607. See Syed Naguib al-Attas, "New Light on the Life of Hamzah Fansuri", *IMBRAS*, Vol. XL, Part 1, 1967, pg. 48.
- 123 Ahmad Kamal Abdullah, *Unsur-Unsur Islam Dalam Puisi Melayu Moden*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988, pp. 47-48.
- 124 Shafie Abu Bakar, "Ruba'i: Pengaruhnya Di Dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu", in Siti Hawa Haji Salleh (ed), *Cendekia. Kesusasteraan Melayu Tradisional*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987, pg. 95.
- 125 Harun Mat Piah, "Puisi Melayu Tradisional: Sedikit Tentang Masalah Penyelidikan dan Bidang Kajian", *Jurnal Budaya Melayu*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1978, pg. 51. For a discussion of these genres, see also Abdul Rahman Hanafiah, "Kesusasteraan Arab Parsi Dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu", *al-Islam*, April, 1978, Jun 1978.
- 126 Mohd. Anis Md. Nor, "The Zapin Melayu Dance of Johor: From Village to a National Performance Tradition", PhD. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1990, pg. 30.

elements were strong in the early days of the Settlement. The performance used to be a religious observance of the tenth day of Muharram (called Ashura to commemorate the brutal murder of the Prophet's grandson Husayn at Karbala) and was celebrated by parties of local amateurs putting on a form of dramatic show and song contests called Boria which presented a re-enactment of the Karbala tragedy in all its poignant pain and pathos.<sup>127</sup>

In Johore, a cultural performance, the Zapin or Malay folk dance also had an Arabian origin, but its development among Malays was attributed to the dance tradition of the Hadhramaut Arabs which then influenced the Malay dance. The folk dance is considered a manifestation of Malay-Islamic evolution and involved the interaction of Arabic influences through its musical instruments; the gambus (lute or 'ud), marwas (hand drums) and dok (long drum).<sup>128</sup> Zapin is normally performed at a particular social gathering such as a wedding ceremony, in addition to commemorating religious celebrations associated with the Prophet's birthday, the Islamic New Year and the festivals of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Zapin was highly regarded by Malays and it was the only dance tradition which was allowed to be performed in or near the mosque. The dance's seemingly Arabic origin was not only a symbolic representation of Islamic culture but was also considered by Johore Malays to be a permissible performance tradition allowed by the rigorous and strict code of Islamic conduct.<sup>129</sup>

From the Middle East was also the origin of several other popular Malay cultural performances, but adapted and given local settings. In some cases, these cultural performances were brought by Arabs, while others, even though they originated from the Middle East, were brought to the

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127 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, "Malay Festivals: And Some Aspects of Malay Religious Life", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 22, Part 1, March 1949, pp. 102-103; see also A.W. Hamilton, "The Boria", *JSBRAS*, September 1920, pp. 139-141; By the Honorary Editor, "The Penang Boria", *Malaya in History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, April 1965, pg. 40; H.T. Haughton, "Notes and Queries", *JSBRAS*, July 1897, pp. 312-313.

128 See Mohd. Anis Md. Nor, "The Zapin Melayu Dance of Johor", pp. 30-32.

129 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

region through India or elsewhere. In Trengganu, the traditional Rodat, singing to praise God and the Prophet accompanied by the beating of a special small Malay gong (rebana tar) actually originated from the Middle East, but was brought to the state by traders from Sambas, Borneo who traded there.<sup>130</sup> Another popular Malay cultural performance which was Arab-influenced, although likely to have passed through India but adapted to the local environment, was the Ghazal.<sup>131</sup>

The Islamization of the Malays, however, did not mean a complete change in their lifestyle or a total following of the cultural pattern of the Middle East. One aspect of Malay life which was well guarded by them was the kingship. As in the pre-Islamic era, the Malay kingship and the concept of government was centred around the King (Raja). When they became Muslim the name of the institution was changed to Sultan. In Malay society it was the Sultan who was the object of loyalty, not the Caliph who held the leadership of the ummah. This explains why even though the Middle East has been a source of various influences, the British Malaya Malays' response to political developments there, particularly with regard to Muslim leadership, was comparatively less aggressive as compared to the Indians or even the Netherlands East Indies Malays.

In addition to politics, another aspect in which the Malays did not follow their Middle Eastern counterparts entirely was that of costume. Partly due to climatic difference, the Malay attire was little influenced by Middle Eastern dress, even though in a way it conformed to Islamic requirements.<sup>132</sup> While it was common for religious scholars and Hajis

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130 Hashim Embong, "Kesenian Rodat Di Trengganu - (Pengenalan dan Asal-Usulnya)", *Warisan*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1979, p. 27; Mubin Sheppard, "The Trengganu Rodat", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1938, pp. 109-114.

131 Ghazal is an Arabic poetic genre believed to have originated in Arabia in pre-Islamic times, which passed into Persian, Turkish and Urdu as well as Malay. Ghazal has acquired different meanings in these languages, and in Persian and Urdu it developed into a vehicle for serious poetry used by famous poets including Ghalib and Iqbal. See Dato Abdullah bin Mohamed, "The Ghazal. In Arabic Literature and in Malay Music", *Malaysia in History*, Vol. 14, No. 1, October 1971, pg. 24.

132 See Zainal 'Abidin bin Ahmad, "Malay Manners and Etiquette", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XXIII, Part III, 1950, pg. 67.



to wear the turban and the skull-cap and at times to appear in a white robe like their co-religionists in the Middle East, the wearing of the veil by women was ignored or modified according to local condition while complying to the religious requirement. The same applied to some of the Malay practices and adat, which even though they were contrary to Islamic norms, were until recently, widely practiced. Take for example the practice of the matrilineal inheritance law of Adat Pepatih in Negeri Sembilan where the female is given a higher allocation of the shares which is contrary to the Islamic rules of the Faraid. Until recently, before the Malays' understanding of Islam was enhanced by the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence of the 1970s', some other practices like "Main Pantai" (the offerings to the spirit of the sea before the beginning of the fishing season) on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia and Mandi Safar (sacred bath taken on the last Wednesday in the month of Safar of Muslim calendar) in Melaka which are contrary to the teachings of Islam were still widely observed.<sup>133</sup>

## Conclusion

From the Middle East as it is shown by historical evidence came the elements that played an important role in influencing various aspects on the development of the Malay society. Through trade, the Middle Easterners, particularly the Arabs developed a close relationship with the Malays. This bond was further enhanced with the process of Islamization. Being Muslims, the elements from the Middle East particularly culture, apart from religion has tremendously influenced the Malays. The intercourse that was initially related to trading activities has turn out to be a lasting interaction when Malays became part of an ummah with fellow Muslims in the Middle East. Relations with the Middle East which brought about the process of Islamization has changed the course of history of the Malays and the region in general.

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133 For the discussion on Mandi Safar, see Zainal 'Abidin bin Ahmad, "Malay Festivals And Some Aspects of Malay Religious Life", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 22, Part 1, 1949, pp. 103-104 and M.A. Rauf, *A Brief History of Islam. With Special Reference To Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 89-90.

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