The Development of Indonesian Society

Edited by Harry Aveling

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From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day

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Preface

In 1937 the Dutch historian and sociologist J.C. van Leur wrote: "Whoever approaches the history of Indonesia enters into an unknown world." But he quickly reassured his readers: "The expression should not be taken too absolutely — in that world too, in the series of historical situations, one is again and again struck by phenomena and configurations calling up images from the familiar history of the Mediterranean and western European areas." He then went on to insist that although the similarities were there, Indonesian history must be understood in its own terms and not in those borrowed from other cultures: "Indonesian history remains a new and unknown world," he concluded, "as much by the autonomy of its historical perspectives as by the nature of its historiographic treatment."[1]

In this book, a number of eminent scholars have been asked to co-operate in providing a history of the development of Indonesian society, from the perspective of Indonesia itself. They were asked to write at a level suitable for those advanced students coming to the study of Indonesia for the first time, in such a way as to indicate not only the "facts" considered relevant to the period under consideration, but also the major trends of thought on the problems of interpretation encountered in their chosen area.

As some of the chapters show, we are still at an early stage in writing the full history of the geographical area now known as Indonesia. There is a tension between the writing of regional histories and the writing of an integrated national history. The demands on the historian are great: in terms of language ability, the location and assessment of documents, and the ability to synthesize and exploit current developments in historical thinking. Much remains to be done, but there can be no doubting the significance of what has already been achieved over the past twenty-five years. We have a clear and continuous record of "changing forms of empire and government, of power struggles

and authority transformations, of class struggles and political organizations", which one sceptic of "the current enthusiasm for the history of non-European societies" argues is the only basis for a genuine history.[2] However, we have gone beyond the doings of either just the colonial Dutch or the activities of the indigenous élite, to an approach towards a full picture of complete societies changing over time, in terms of definable, internal characteristics.

Dr Kumar shows the diversity of Indonesian societies existing between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries; Dr Carey shows how one of these societies reacted during the nineteenth century to the colonial presence. The two chapters on the twentieth century show respectively the growth of the nationalist movement, culminating in the achievement of Independence on 17 August 1945, and the changes in Indonesian politics and society from then to the present day.

It has not been easy to bring this volume to completion; the authors have been stationed in four continents, and a number of false starts have been made on various chapters before they were finally brought to fruition. There is a daunting grandeur in the survey of a period which is beyond many "specialists", it would seem.

I would like to thank the contributors, and the University of Queensland Press, for their commitment to a history such as this, and their patience.

Harry Aveling
(Swami Anand Haridas)

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II Developments in four societies over the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries

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Indonesia does not have the natural geographic and ethno-cultural unity of, say, Thailand or Vietnam; and its formation into a territorial state did not take place until the nineteenth century. It is therefore impossible to write a continuous history of the area as a whole before that period, and, instead, this chapter surveys four separate Indonesian societies — Acheh, Minangkabau, the polities of south-west Sulawesi (Celebes), and Java — from 1500 to 1800. These four societies taken together do not give a full coverage of the three centuries, but they do strikingly exemplify the diversity in economic bases, political arrangements, and civilization in general that existed throughout this period, and indicate the wealth of fascinating material still to be analyzed. Through and over this diversity, however, it is possible to see some general processes flowing, insinuating, or forcing their way. Two processes which, with the benefit of hindsight, seem of exceptional historical significance are the "Islamization" of most of the area, and its penetration by Europeans.

ISLAMIZATION AND THE FOUNDATION OF NEW STATES

Different theories have been put forward to explain the success of Islam in this region. These theories, in general, concentrate on only one aspect of Islam's total involvement with the world, and when reduced (perhaps unfairly) to their barest outlines may be classified as follows:

1. *The "occupational" theory*: Muslims came to Southeast Asia because of the region's trade potential (especially its spice trade): therefore, Islam was spread by Muslim traders. Little attention is devoted to the forces motivating the *converts:* the mere presence of Islam is often assumed sufficient explanation for its spread, presumably in the manner of disease, by contagion.

2. The "religious" theory, which emphasizes the conscious work of Muslim missionaries striving to spread their faith. A more sophisticated version, particularly relevant to Java, has been put forward by A.H. Johns,[1] who stresses the role of *sufi* sheikhs during this period of Islamic expansion. Johns' formulation does come to grips with the question of what motivated the converts, and will be discussed in more detail below.[2]

3. *"Political" theories.* The most current is the theory which explains conversion to Islam as a political move on the part of certain native rulers who wished to counter other powers (whether the old Hinduized states such as Majapahit or the new European presence) in the region by allying with other Muslim states both in the archipelago and further west.[3] A less common explanation for the spread of Islam is that it was due to wars of conquest: conversion by the sword.[4]

Such archetypal theories, however, impose a specious simplicity on this historical process, which continued over a very long period of time and was, like most such processes, complex. This assumed simplicity is perhaps the result of the sort of evidence we have for Islamization, scattered as this evidence is throughout the archipelago according to the fortuitous survival of a tombstone or the brief comments of a passing Chinese or European traveller.[5] When we look at comparable processes which have the advantage of being much better documented, it is obvious that "religious" and "political" considerations were in practice inseparable, and that in many cases even the *idea* of two separate spheres of "religion" and "politics" did not exist.[6] The mutual influence of Islam and its "host society" will be apparent in the four examples dealt with below.

It is clear that Muslims took a vital part in the formation of the new states which began to rise, the first known in the late thirteenth century and more numerous examples in the next three centuries. The earliest foundations were on the Straits of Malacca, the area where Muslims from further west would first connect with the networks of the archipelago. The northern Sumatran foundations, Samudra-Pasai, Perlak, and Pedir (or Pidië) were eclipsed in the fifteenth century by the sultanate centred on the commercial entrepôt of Malacca. Within the boundaries of present-day Indonesia, the towns of Java's north coast — Tuban, Gresik, Demak-Japara — rose to commercial prominence. The sixteenth century saw the emergence of Banten in west Java, Acheh in northernmost Sumatra, Banjarmasin on

the south Kalimantan coast, the Macassarese and Buginese centres of south-west Sulawesi and the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore in the Moluccas. By the last decade of the seventeenth century, this period of florescence was over.

What were the characteristics of these foundations? They were generally interstitial or marginal — existing on the fringes of the territory claimed by pre-existing major powers (notably Majapahit and later Mataram) and thus avoiding the consequences of possible jealousy; and also mostly situated in areas not suited to the production of enough food to sustain a large population, but possessing commercial potential — either as producers of key products (notably pepper and spices) or from a strategic location (of which Acheh is one of the best examples) for the capture of passing trade. Although some regions, such as Macassar, had begun as primarily agricultural and grew a substantial amount of rice, others, such as the Bandas, Moluccas, and Acheh, depended upon imported rice to survive.

Two other basic commodities which needed to be imported were iron and cloth, especially cotton cloth. Both were imported from India, the cloth coming from the numerous manufacturing centres of coastal India, from Gujarat round the Malabar and Coromandel coasts to Bengal. Silk cloth, a luxury, was also imported from India, and from China. The import of these and many other commodities,[7] and the export of spices and other local products, was largely in the hands of foreign traders, although in some cases — notably among the Buginese and Macassarese — the local élite gradually developed a more active role, building and equipping their own ships. By the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, Arab shipping was no longer very important in the eastern half of the Indian Ocean,[8] which was now dominated by Indian Muslim traders from Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal, although Hindu merchants from Kalinga and Coromandel (the "Klings") were important in the textile trade to Malacca. In the seventeenth century, Chinese traders, after initial resistance to Dutch control, settled into the trading niches left vacant by the Dutch East India Company, displacing a large proportion of the western Asian traders.[9]

Lastly, the origin and permanent core of these new "states" was the port town, and resources of manpower were usually very slight. Acheh, for instance, may have had a population of a hundred thousand at the beginning of the seventeenth century; this may be compared with Portugal's perhaps one and a half million at the same period, and Portugal is considered to have

been small and underpopulated among the European states of the period.[10]

What rôles did members of the west Asian Muslim communities play in the evolution of the developing port state? There seem to have been avenues of advancement for men of various talents. Sometimes the actual foundation of the polity is attributed to foreign Muslims:[11] these traditions are difficult to verify though not always implausible, and in any case not of crucial importance, since a state is more than the act of its founder. A more long-term influence was exercised through the office of the *shahbandar* (Persian: "lord of the emporium"). This office was found in many emporia of the island world: on Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi, Borneo, in the Moluccas and the Lesser Sundas. The number of men who held this position varied: in the Muslim sultanate of Malacca for instance, there were four, each of whom was responsible for a certain section of the merchant community: one for the Gujaratis; one for traders from Bengal, Pegu, and Pasai; one for traders from Java, the spice islands and Palembang; and one for the Chinese and Chams. Each of these four sections was allotted a certain quarter of the town, and its *shahbandar* was responsible for the settling of disputes, and for police functions and general "law and order" there, as well as acting as the spokesman for that community's interests. Following the modern norm of exclusiveness of representation — that is, that a man acts on behalf of one and only one nation or group and a situation of "divided loyalty" is to be avoided — we might expect that the *shahbandar* would be excluded from the running of the host state. This does not seem to have been the case: there is evidence that *shahbandar*s undertook many tasks involving responsibility and took important decisions on the state's behalf. Their administrative jurisdiction included the issue of permits to trade, they sat as judges in disputes between foreigners and subjects of the state, and there are numerous instances of *shahbandar*s concluding treaties on behalf of the state concerned. In this way the native power made an alliance with "foreigners" — including Chinese and later even Englishmen and Dutchmen as well as Indians (principally Gujaratis) and Arabs — from whose contacts with wider networks and knowledge of other parts of the world they hoped to benefit.[12]

Another avenue of advancement was military service. Turkish auxiliaries and arms played a very important part in Acheh's attacks on Portugese Malacca,[13] a series of onslaughts which

were all eventually beaten off but not without straining Malacca's military resources to the utmost. Some of the commanders of such forces stayed and became part of the local ruling élite: thus the governor of the Javanese coastal town of Tegal, in the reign of Sunan Agung of Mataram, was a Turk, and the governor of Japara, further east, was either Gujarati or Persian.[14]

The role of western Asian scholars in developing the religious life of the new states is obvious. In general, there seems to be a correlation between the prosperity of the state concerned and its ability to maintain a two-way contact with Muslim centres such as Mecca, and the level of the intellectual life of the period. The sultanates of Banten and Acheh in the sixteenth and especially in the seventeenth centuries, the period which saw the zenith of their trade-based strength, present a picture of a vigorous intellectual life, centring on a pantheon of scholars either local-born but widely travelled, or foreign, principally Arabs and Gujaratis.[15] A Malay-language Muslim literature developed during this period, to which contributions were made by the different centres of the archipelago. Though the port-states were often only tenuously connected with their own hinterlands, they were by no means isolated from each other, in cultural and commercial matters associating in a community of the sea rather than of the land.

So far we have been considering the various rôles played by Muslims at the highest level in the development of these new states: their interaction with the local élites, an interaction not of two distinctly separate entities, but of groups which were bound together both by genealogical ties and by shared culture.[16] What of the effect of this process on the population below this élite level? As always for pre-modern times, there is little direct evidence documenting general social change, but it is sometimes possible to construct hypotheses from indirect information. In this case there are some indications of basic innovations in material civilization and social organization, affecting all levels of the population. Lombard suggests that pepper cultivation was introduced into Acheh along with Islam, in the fourteenth century, probably from the Malabar coast, where it is attested at an earlier date.[17] Sericulture may have been introduced at the same time, and Lombard characterizes this period as one of a change from gathering to cultivation, from the forest to the plantation. A second major change which often seems to be associated with Islam is the habit of writing — not perhaps the

first introduction of this skill, but the development of a more widely literate society. The Macassar script, for instance, belongs to the Indic family and is therefore presumably pre-Islamic, but widespread use of the written record developed only after the Islamization of the region. Among the Macassarese and Buginese, the habit of writing became the medium for the assimilation of the technology of other nations and introduced a new precision into financial and legal matters.[18] In the Minangkabau heartland, the codification of the *adat* — the "customary law", the "rules" of society — began only with the introduction of the Arabic script. This facilitated the entry of Islamic prescriptions for human society into the total *adat*, leading to the development of the peculiarly Minangkabau ideal of equilibrium through balanced tensions, and to the development of a body of written traditions on *adat*, strengthening the intellectual foundation of discussions and debates on continuity and change.[19]

THE EUROPEAN POWERS

Students of the history of the region over this period cannot but be influenced by the knowledge that European powers eventually established domination here, as elsewhere in Asia, and naturally ask what were the sources of European strength. It is however dangerous to generalize about the Europe of this period — which was itself in a state of flux and uneven development,[20] with many trends which seem dominant from a later perspective not then assured of their place — and equally so to assume that Europeans then were very like their descendants of three hundred or more years later. No more do the Indonesian states of the period display a uniformity in their social structure which could provide a clear general contrast with European models, and on this side the paucity of quantifiable data renders generalizations even more suspect. For these reasons, it may be useful to look briefly at the historical development of the two European nations which were to play less and more important roles in this region: the Portuguese and the Dutch; and to examine certain relationships — particularly that between trade and the state, which appears to have been crucial in many of the encounters of the period — as they evolved in the European and Indonesian societies whose interactions dominated the history of the region.

THE PORTUGUESE

Perhaps the most two distinctive attributes of the Portuguese in Asia were their crusading tradition and their maritime technology. Despite the abandonment of the pan-European crusades, the tradition of the crusade remained very strong in Portugal, whose existence as a nation was itself due to a long crusade. According to one writer,[21] the capture of Ceuta in 1415 marked the transition of the crusading movement from its medieval to its modern phase, changing its nature from a struggle around the Mediterranean basin to an almost global assault of Christian faith and arms. Ceuta also impressed the Portuguese with the material wealth of Muslim cities, and its promise of riches was confirmed by the later arrival of thousands of slaves and sufficient quantities of gold out of Africa. The Portuguese thrust that this inspired was borne by their shipping. The great achievement of the fifteenth century was the development of the full-rigged ship (that is, a vessel with multiple masts, and sail which could be increased and decreased according to sailing conditions). In these sailing ships, unlike the old galleys, there was no generic difference between the merchant ship and the warship: both were routinely equipped with artillery. In this evolution the shipwrights of Spain, Brittany and Portugal took the lead,[22] thus acquiring a crucial advantage at sea over Muslim shipping, which was not designed to carry heavy armament and remained dependent to a considerable degree on human energy for ramming and boarding.[23] These ships, as is well known, carried the Portuguese round the Cape of Good Hope to India and further east, where they captured a number of coastal towns: Goa, Macao, and in 1511 Malacca, the heart of the Malay sultanate and its empire.

The Portuguese, as has often been remarked, did not control any significant territorial unit in Asia: their sea-routes were serviced and their trade centred on a chain of factory-forts. Malacca was (from 1511) their chief centre in the Malayo-Indonesian world, though they also established themselves on the islands of Ambon and Timor, and at Ternate. Although they survived, sometimes at great cost, all the attacks on Malacca, the Sultan of Ternate succeeded in reducing the Portuguese fortress in 1574, after a five-year siege, whereupon another post was opened by agreement with a rival sultan, at Tidore. But the peripheral and at times vulnerable position the Portuguese occupied does not mean that their effect on the region was

negligible. They were able to alter the trading patterns of the region, principally by making the spice trade their monopoly, at least in the first half of the sixteenth century.[24] Most other maritime trade was left to Asian shippers, though a system of passes was instituted and patrolled by the militarily more effective Portuguese ships.

Direct and lasting Portuguese influence on the societies of the region is slight. The Portuguese are usually described as more enthusiastic proselytizers than the northern European nations which followed them into Asia, and they did make some converts, especially in the spice islands of eastern Indonesia, although most were forced to change from Catholic to Protestant by the Dutch East India Company. They also introduced a genre of songs, known as *kroncong* and still popular in Indonesia today, and left a number of Portuguese words — mainly denoting material objects — in Malay, the lingua franca of commerce.[25]

The Portuguese were not able to maintain their monopoly of the trade in spices in the second half of the sixteenth century. There were various reasons for their commercial decline: a shortage of manpower — soldiers and sailors — and of shipping; the extent of *sub rosa* private trade among officers of the crown, and among the clergy; the religious prejudice which led among other things to the desire to exclude Portuguese Jews or new Christians from commerce. Political and economic movements in Europe were equally important: Philip II of Spain succeeded to the throne of Portugal in 1580, the country was drawn into his wars against England and France and against his own rebellious subjects in the Netherlands, and Portugal's coveted eastern trade became a legitimate war-prize for nations now stronger at sea than Portugal herself. The commercial centre of the Spanish empire had already shifted to Antwerp, and northern European financiers had a large share in both the Portuguese voyages to Asia and the sale of their products in Europe. The Dutch were successful in their struggle for independence, and also in displacing the Portuguese from the majority of their posts in the Malayo-Indonesian region. Though Malacca did not fall until 1641, after a six-month siege, their strategic centre, Batavia (first settled in 1617) and their ruthless action in the spice islands during the first three decades of the century had already brought to the Dutch almost all of the trade that formerly went to their Portuguese predecessors.[26]