T. Ito

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TAKESHI ITO

WHY DID NURUDDIN AR-RANIRI LEAVE ACEH IN 1054 A.H.? ¹

As is well-known, in 1637, shortly after the death of Sultan Iskandar Muda (died 1636), a Muslim scholar of Indo-Arab origin, Nuruddin ar-Raniri by name, came to Aceh. Having found favour with Sultan Iskandar Thani (1636-1641), he launched a fierce heresy-hunt against the followers of Hamzah and Shamsuddin, who were patronized by Iskandar Muda, but were now branded as adherents of the heretical Wujudiya. During the first years of the rule of the Sultana Taj al-^cAlam Safiyatuddin he retained his prominent position at Court, until 1054 A.H./1643-'44 A.D., when he left Aceh abruptly and returned to his native town of Ranir (= mod. Rander) in Gujerat (cf. Drewes 1955: 137-144).

Dr. Van Ronkel, Dr. Hoessein Djajadiningrat and Dr. Voorhoeve have stated that a reference to this abrupt return to Ranir is found in the colophon of ar-Raniri's *Jawāhir al-^culūm fī kashf al-ma^clūm* (cf. Djajadiningrat 1929: 109-111; Voorhoeve 1951: 353-354), where one reads, "...and when he had thus far completed this work it came about by (God's) decree that he was prevented (from completing it altogether), whereat he set out for his native town of Ranir" (cf. Voorhoeve 1951: 353-354). The reason for this sudden departure is not mentioned.

However, in the diary of the 'opperkoopman' Pieter Sourij, who in 1643 was sent by the V.O.C. as a commissioner to Jambi and Aceh, we read (Koloniaal Archief no. 1052, fol. 667v.-668r., dated 8 Aug. 1643, Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague):

"Dagelijck valt door een Moorschen aencomenden Bisschop, uyt Surate, extreem veel te pitchiaren, alsoo den presentlijcken, Sigh Noordin genaemt, voor een ongelooffachtigh haer wet verclaert heeft, ende ten waer, ter insichte Morrom darom Salam, hare May^{te} man met deselve hadde in't stuck van haer vervloecte weth gecommuniceert geweest, alsoo den nieuwen veel aenhanck heeft, voornamentlyck onder de Capado, te meer een Maleyer van geboort is, al lange sints levenseijnde soude hebben geweest." *I.e.:*

"Daily a Moorish Bishop newly arrived from Suratte is causing no end of discussion, because the present (Bishop), Shaikh Nuruddin by name, has branded his doctrine as heretical, and, as regards Marhum Daru'l-Salām, had not the latter, Her Majesty's Consort, shared his

¹ My great thanks are due to my mentor, Professor Dr. G. W. J. Drewes, who generously instructed me in the field of Indonesian and Islamic studies for more than two years at Leiden.

(Nuruddin's) views on the subject of their accursed law (doctrine), his hour would have struck long since, as the new (Bishop) has a good many followers, in particular among the Capado (eunuchs), and, moreover, is a Malay by birth."

Furthermore, on fol. 671v., dated 22 Aug.:

"Daer viel extreem veel te pitchiaren, wegen den nieuwen ende ouden Bisschop den Orangcailja Maradja Lilla hiel tot met den nieuw aengecomene (die in't geheel huys, ende Hoff, tot een wercq van Caritaten hadde geschoncken) genaemt Siffor Resial, afcomstigh van de Manecabers, welcke een disciple in Atchin bij Secke Maldin,² die den presenten Sick Nordijn (door valsche beschuldinge bij Marrom Daren Salamse tijden) om 't leven hadde gebracht." *I.e.:*

"There was no end of discussion on the subject of the new and the old Bishop by the Orang Kaya Maharajalela with the newcomer, Saifurrijal by name, a Minangkabau man (who had made his entire house and adjoining land a pious foundation), the latter having studied in Aceh with Shaikh Maldin, who (by a false accusation in the time of the late King) was done away with by the present (Bishop) Shaikh Nuruddin."

And:

"De gesamentlijk Raeden des Rijcx ende alle Bintares versochten de saeck, door hare May^{te} autoriteit, tusschen beide voornoemde Bisschoppen, mochten bij geleijt worden, waerop de Coning^{ne} in antwoord diende, geen papen verstant had, ende noch min hun questie conden begrijpen, de Oelebalangs bleef die saecke bevolen. In somma de geheele werelt schijnt g'infecteert met wargeesten te sijn, dat onse wercq seer vertraechden." *I.e.:*

"The joint Councillors of the Realm and all the Béntaras requested that the case between the aforesaid two Bishops be settled by Her Majesty's authority, whereat the Queen replied that (as) she did not know the first thing about religious problems, and still less could understand their conflict, the matter should be left to the attention of the Ulëëbalangs. In brief, all the world seems to be infected with muddleheads, much delaying our business."

And finally, on fol. 673r., dated 27 Aug.:

"Den nieuwen Bisschop van de Mooren genaemt Suffel Radjal, door de May^{te} binnen onthoden zijnde, wiert van de grooten conincklijck eer aengedaen, soo dat te duchten staeth den voorgigen Sigh Nordijn sijn heijlicheijt geheel verdwijnt sal blijven." *I.e.:*

² It is quite possible that the name Maldin is derived from Jamaluddin.

"The new Bishop of the Moors, Saifurrijal by name, summoned to Court by Her Majesty, was paid regal honours by the notables, so that it is to be expected that the former (Bishop) Shaikh Nuruddin's high spiritual status will be irretrievably lost."

From these passages from Pieter Sourij's diary it is clear that about two and a half years after the accession of Sultana Taj al-'Alam Safiyatuddin the followers of Shamsuddin, reinforced by a Minangkabau scholar newly arrived from Suratte, launched a counter-attack against the heresy-hunter, whose violence cannot have endeared him to the bulk of the population.

Apparently the Orang Kaya Maharajalela, who presided over the joint Councillors,³ lent a ready ear to the opponents of the all too influential Arab scholar. So he stood a poor chance of emerging victorious from this doctrinal controversy, which, in point of fact, possibly was a contest for influence with the Sultana, who, moreover, did not seem anxious to stand by her deceased Consort's religious mentor. It meant, as has rightly been supposed by Dr. Voorhoeve (Voorhoeve 1951: 360), that Nuruddin fell into disgrace with the Sultana, and, therefore, resolved to retire from the field, with his book unfinished.

Why this book was not completed until 1076 A.H./1665 A.D., i.e. more than 20 years later, by a pupil of his, is still unknown. Could its completion have had something to do with Abdur-Rauf's return to Aceh about 1072/1661 (cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1960: I, 88)? Furthermore, it would be interesting to know more about the figure of Saifurrijal, the Minangkabau scholar who carried the day in this conflict.

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³ Passim in the diary of Pieter Sourij, the Orang Kaya Maharajalela is mentioned as a quasi-King and highest Councillor of the Realm.