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The Tale of the Skull

An Islamic Description of Hell in Javanese*

Introduction

The prophetic legend of the interrogation and subsequent resurrection of a skull by the prophet Isa, which occurs in some collections of Arabic tales of the prophets¹, has spread into various regions of the Indonesian archipelago. Apparently the Islamic version developed from an earlier Greek-Egyptian legend, with the famous Egyptian ascetic St. Macarius as protagonist, instead of the prophet Jesus (Bausani 1979:61). One of the best-known versions of the skull tale is the poem *Djumdjuma-nāma* by the Persian mystical poet Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār², which may derive from any of 'Aṭṭār's epics (Ritter 1960:754).³ The popularity of the legend has been attributed at least in part to the use made of the story by teachers of Islam, who found it an effective educational tool in the conversion of the people of Central Asia to the Islamic faith (Pennacchietti 1989:106).

While the transmission of the legend in Middle Eastern cultures has been discussed in a number of scholarly publications⁴, its transmission in Indonesian languages has not been subjected to serious study. So far, scholarly attention has been given mainly to the Malay version, which is mentioned in histories of classical Malay literature (Winstedt 1969:97-8; Iskandar 1995:353-

* This article was originally written as a short contribution to a special volume on the legend of Jesus and the skull edited by Roberto Tottoli, which will be published in Italian. At the time of writing the author was teaching at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

¹ Siderski (1933:148) gives a short summary of the legend. A more detailed account of the story is given in Weil (1845:286-91) and Knappert (1985 I:174-6).

² 'Aṭṭār's poem is discussed in Ritter (1955:100-1).

³ The Persian poem was published, with an Italian translation and a comment on its Christian foundation, by Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti in 1996.

⁴ See R. Tottoli's article on the biblical prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim literature, forthcoming.

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8; Braginsky 1998:309-10). Although versions in other Indonesian languages, including Javanese, Acehnese, and Sundanese, are mentioned in catalogues of Indonesian manuscript collections, their content, form and structure have not yet been seriously investigated.⁵ The existence of a relatively large number of manuscripts in several Indonesian languages calls for a thorough investigation of the different textual versions of the legend, which should establish the exact relationships between the Malay and other versions in various regional languages. However, the problem of the dissemination of the legend in the Malay-Indonesian world is no simple matter. Its solution is a difficult task, which requires a thorough prior investigation of the different versions in each of the regional languages, including possible oral versions. The present article is intended to set the process of investigation in motion by discussing some aspects of the transmission of the legend in the Javanese literary tradition. A brief summary of studies referring to the Malay prose version may serve as an introduction to the discussion of the Javanese text.

The Malay Hikayat Raja Jumjumah

The Malay version of the legend, usually entitled *Hikayat Raja Jumjumah*⁶, is present in at least 16 manuscripts. This relatively large number of MSS indicates that the legend was well known in the Malay-speaking areas of the Indonesian archipelago during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet, it seems doubtful that the pious legend enjoyed the same popularity as other stories of Middle Eastern origin, such as the popular romances dealing with adventurous heroes like Amir Hamza, or the tales of the prophet Muhammad that are often recited at ceremonial gatherings in Java. These romantic stories were also integrated into the performance traditions of Java and other Islamic regions.⁷

A well-known summary of the contents of the legend occurs in R.O. Winstedt's *History of classical Malay literature*, where it is classified as a Muslim legend dealing with pre-Islamic heroes. Winstedt states that there are nine manuscripts of the legend in Leiden⁸, two in London and six in Batavia

⁵ Snouck Hurgronje, who mentions the Acehnese version of the legend, admits that he has not seen any manuscript of this text. He nevertheless supposes that the content does not differ very much from the Malay version of the tale (Snouck Hurgronje 1894:173).

⁶ The name of the legend and its spelling vary, but 'Hikayat Raja Jumjumah' is the most common variant.

⁷ In Java, Madura and Lombok, Amir Hamza stories provide popular themes for the dance-drama or puppet theatre, as well as for Islamic storytellers.

⁸ This number is probably based on remarks in Juynboll's catalogue of Malay and Sundanese MSS in the Leiden University Library (Juynboll 1899:182-5).

(Jakarta). However, these numbers are no longer correct, as more MSS containing the legend have been found since Winstedt wrote this work.⁹ A more recent description of the Malay version of the text in Leiden University manuscript collections is given in E. Wieringa's catalogue (Wieringa 1998b:91-2).¹⁰ An early English translation of one of the versions of the text, entitled *The history of Rajah Junjumah*, was published in *The Asiatic Journal* in 1823.

According to Winstedt, the written version of the legend did not reach the Malay-speaking area before the nineteenth century. He writes: 'there is no mention before the nineteenth century and there appear to be no early manuscripts' (Winstedt 1969:97). However, the absence of a written version of the *Hikayat Raja Junjumah* prior to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century does not necessarily mean that the legend was entirely unknown to the Malay-speaking world before that time. In any case, the motif of a speaking skull was known before that date, as the Malay *Hikayat Indraputra* (not later than the early seventeenth century) mentions a conversation of its hero with a skull that warns him about a dangerous demon living nearby (Braginsky 1998:304-16). This indicates that one of the central motifs of the *Hikayat Raja Junjumah* was also incorporated into other Malay texts.

Apparently not always a clear distinction is made between text and motif. Thus, Bausani seems to be speaking of a motif rather than a text when he distinguishes a second Malay variant of this 'peculiar Christian-Muslim legend', which occurs in the *Hikayat Maharaja Ali*. In this case the motif of the legend has been adapted to fit into the main story 'with this peculiar freedom which is present even in the most obviously "translated" Malay *hikayat*', omitting most of the eschatological elements (Bausani 1979:60-1).

Publications of the Malay prose text known to me include that of a romanized version of Malay MS ML. 228 of the Musium Pusat, Jakarta¹¹, entitled *Hikajat Radja Djumdjumah*, which was published in the Museum's journal in 1971 (Jusuf 1971:393-415). According to this publication, the scribe completed the MS, coming to 52 pages of text in Malay prose, in 1826. Mohd. Yusof MD. Nor's anthology of six Malay *hikayat* also contains a version of the legend, entitled *Hikayat Junjumah* (Nor 1989:56-73).

⁹ The five Malay MSS of *Hikayat Raja Junjumah* in British collections listed by Ricklefs and Voorhoeve (1977:113, 119, 124, 142, 162) have the following numbers: Add. 3762, Cambridge University Library (1865); Or. 856, Cambridge University Library (1873); Malay B. 10 (IO 2603), India Office Library (1808); Raffles Malay 72 (*Hikayat Maharaja 'Ali*), Royal Asiatic Society (1805); MS 37082, School of Oriental and African Studies.

¹⁰ I am grateful to E. Wieringa and V.I. Braginsky for useful suggestions about an earlier version of this article.

¹¹ But presently kept in the National Library, or Perpustakaan Nasional.

The Javanese tale of the skull

Although Winstedt and Jumsari mention Sundanese and Acehese versions of the legend, the Javanese version has so far been largely neglected. Compared to the many Malay copies of the *Hikayat Raja Jumjumah*, the number of MSS containing the Javanese version which are mentioned in catalogues is relatively small. Behrend's catalogue of Indonesian MSS in the collection of Museum Sonobudoyo mentions a *Suluk Pathak* (skull song) in *macapat* verse, the content of which is comprised of the dialogue between the prophet Jesus and the skull of a king. This text was transliterated into Javanese script from an original MS in *pégon* in 1885 (Behrend 1990:532). A second MS of the text kept in Java is mentioned under the title *Serat Raja Kepala* (= *Serat Patak*) in Florida's catalogue of Javanese MSS in the library of the *kraton* of Surakarta (Florida 1993:269). This undated MS, which is supposed by Florida to date from the early nineteenth century, contains the story of the skull king in Javanese metrical poetry, starting in *Durma* metre.

Pigeaud's catalogue of Javanese manuscripts mentions one MS containing the tale of the skull, entitled *Serat Pathak utawi Serat Kabar Naraka* (The book of the skull or the book of tidings from hell). This undated MS, kept as LOr 5769, in the Oriental MS collection of Leiden University Library¹², was acquired by the Dutch missionary and scholar C. Poensen. He must have obtained it before the year 1869, when he retold the legend in a series of articles on 'some important Javanese literary texts' (Poensen 1869). The unfinished MS runs to 37 pages relating the legend in metrical Javanese verse (*macapat*); its final pages are blank. Pigeaud classifies the Javanese *Serat Pathak* as an 'edifying Muslim text'. He writes that for this genre 'the source material was always in Arabic, and in many cases Malay treatises were intermediary between Arabic and Javanese texts' (Pigeaud 1967:98). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Javanese literary taste preferred poetry to prose texts. Accordingly most literary works, including religious literature, were composed in verse, these poetic versions often replacing an existing prose version. Although the content of the Javanese poetic version of the legend in MS LOr 5769 resembles that of the Malay prose version of the *Hikayat Raja Jumjumah*, it cannot be assumed without further investigation that the Javanese *Serat Pathak* in this MS LOr 5769 represents a reworking of the Malay *Hikayat Raja Jumjumah*, or of any other Malay prose text of this legend.

Poensen wrote in 1869 that the Javanese held the work in high esteem.¹³ However, the fact that only a few MSS containing this text are listed in cata-

¹² The MS came into the Library's possession in 1913.

¹³ Or in the original Dutch: 'Dit werk staat bij de Javanen in zeer hooge achting' (Poensen 1869:346).

logues of Javanese MSS seems to indicate that in Java the legend was not widely read¹⁴, even if we take into account the possibility that there may be more MSS in private collections there. The poetic form suggests that the *Serat Pathak utawi Serat Kabar Naraka* was written in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. There is evidence that a version of the text was known in Javanese literary circles by the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the legend was also incorporated into the early-nineteenth-century *Serat Centhini*.

The tale of the skull in the Serat Centhini

The famous *Serat Centhini*, composed by Surakarta court literati¹⁵ working for and in cooperation with the crown prince (later Susuhunan Paku Buwana V), has been characterized as the best known of the 'vagrant students' romances' (Pigeaud 1967:227). Covering a wide range of different topics, it is usually regarded as a key to our understanding of early-nineteenth-century Java. As the work bears the unmistakable stamp of Islam, it is appropriate that it should contain a version of the *Serat Pathak*. However, one should be careful about characterizing the *Serat Centhini* entirely as an Islamic literary work. It also contains much material that is un-Islamic, and at times its authors have not shrunk from incorporating views and descriptions of practices that run counter to Islam, either being part of other religions like Hinduism or Buddhism, or originating from Javanese spirit cults. This is characteristic of the Javanese religious attitude, which made for only a partial integration of Islam in Javanese spiritual life and even fostered the creation of a specific Javanese form of Islam. Rather than in prose works, this typical 'Javanese ethos' found its literary expression in poetic syncretistic-Islamic literature, intended to be sung or recited. As in the case of the *Serat Pathak*, these texts often take the form of a dialogue (L.F. Brakel 1996:744).

In the *Serat Centhini*¹⁶ the 'skull tale' is not referred to as 'Serat Pathak', but is mentioned by two different titles in apparently hybrid Arabic: in canto 297:14 it is called 'Kitab Mamahi', in 303:46 'Kitab Tamai'. Although the legend is embedded within the larger framework of the *Serat Centhini*, the content of the *Serat Pathak* has not been adapted to the main story, as in the above-mentioned Malay *Hikayat Maharaja Ali*. The text comprises seven cantos in seven different metres.

¹⁴ The fact that a text is held in high esteem does not necessarily imply that it is preserved in a large number of MSS, as is shown by the paucity of MSS containing the poems of Hamzah Fansuri (Drewes and Brakel 1986:35).

¹⁵ The principal authors are the court poets Ranga Sutrasna, Yasadipura II and Sastradipura.

¹⁶ Quotations from the *Serat Centhini* in this article are from the printed edition by Kamajaya (*Serat Centhini* 1988).

Contents of the skull tale in the Serat Centhini

1. Canto 297, 30 stanzas in Dhandhanggula metre. Continuation of the story related in the preceding canto, telling of the adventures of the two young heroes during their stay in an East Javanese village. This is followed by a discussion of the two students with their host. At his request the main hero, Cabolang, begins the reading of the *Kitab Mamahi*, which tells how *nabi* Isa meets a skull and starts to investigate its identity.
2. Canto 298, 40 stanzas in Asmarandana metre. The skull tells about its illness, the process of dying, and the encounter with the angel of death.
3. Canto 299, 22 stanzas in Pangkur metre. It goes on to talk of its burial and the recording of its deeds in life. Its dead body is clubbed by two angels. Then it is swallowed by the earth and plunged into the fires of hell.
4. Canto 300, 19 stanzas in Sinom metre. Description of four bejewelled chairs for the prophets Ibrahim, Muhammad, Musa and Isa. When plunged into hell once more, he sees an old man being tortured by angels.
5. Canto 301, 38 stanzas in Maskumambang metre. Names of the seven fiery hells, each filled with a specific category of sinners. The latter's punishments are described: many souls are squeezed into a box filled with huge fires and boiling molten metals. The skull-king is entwined and bitten by a big snake, assisted by masses of poisonous centipedes and scorpions. This goes on for thousands of years.
6. Canto 302, 38 stanzas in Megatruh metre. A heavenly voice praises the dead king for his generosity in the past. The skull confesses that he has worshipped the idol of a cow. The prophet Isa proposes addressing a prayer to God so that the skull may be revived, on condition that he will become a faithful Muslim.
7. Canto 303, 50 stanzas in Pucung metre. As a consequence of the prophet Isa's prayer, the repentant skull becomes a human being. Devoted to continuous Islamic worship, he lives for another 800 years.

After the recitation of this tale, the hero Cabolang leaves the village of Silayang.

The Serat Pathak and Centhini versions of the skull tale compared

In MS LOr 5769 the *Serat Pathak* comprises seven cantos in four different metres:

1. Dhandhanggendis (18 stanzas)
2. Asmarandana (43 stanzas)
3. Pangkur (23 stanzas)

4. Sinom (19 stanzas)
5. Dhandhanggendis (18 stanzas)
6. Asmarandana (37 stanzas)
7. Dhandhanggendis (7 stanzas, incomplete).

The 18 stanzas in Dhandhanggula metre of the first canto of the *Serat Pathak* largely correspond to the second half of canto 297 of the *Serat Centhini*. Even so, the three opening stanzas of the *Serat Pathak* are quite different from the beginning of the *Kitab Mamahi*. The legend of the *Serat Pathak* is introduced by the opening lines: 'The story which is told is from the *Kitab Rajullah*¹⁷; the same tale is told by different people; it is extremely beautiful; if one does not believe it, one is definitely an infidel [...]'.¹⁸ These lines are quite similar to the formulaic introduction of a new section in stories told by Islamic Javanese storytellers (*dhalang kentrung*) (C. Brakel in press).¹⁹ A pious Arabic formula like the Basmala which introduces the Malay prose versions does not form part of the written text of the *Serat Pathak*. However, there is plenty of piety in the following introductory stanza, where the listeners are admonished to pay attention to the story because it describes what will happen when one dies – a classical memento mori. The story is stated to be an indispensable source of knowledge (*ngèlmu*) for people in their hour of death:

All friends listening [to this story] should realize that man in this world is as though for a while at a marketplace; organizing travelling-money; [that is what] he is aiming for in the world; to make travelling-money [for the journey of] death. When you enter the grave without travelling-money, you are like someone taking to sea without a ship.²⁰

While the idea that the world is a market for the hereafter is also found in other Islamic literary works²¹, the expression 'travelling-money for [the journey of] death' (*sangu pejah*) appears to be less in agreement with the Islamic

¹⁷ The epithet used throughout the poem for the prophet Isa is 'Rohullah', or variants of this, which is usually translated as '(from) the Spirit of God'.

¹⁸ The Javanese text reads: *Wonten carita ingkang winarni; tunggal kandha sanès kang carita; sangking kitab Rajullah; seklangkung éndahipun; yèn maida pesthiné kapisir [...]*.

¹⁹ A typical stylized prose opening of a new section by the *dhalang kentrung* whom I recorded in 1983 is: *Nèk sinigeg gantya cinarita; séjé gendhing tunggil ing kandha [...]*, 'When it is finished another story is told; the music is different, while the tale is the same'.

²⁰ The Javanese text reads: *Sakathahé sanak kang sami miyarsi; dèn rumangsa wong anèng donyanya; lir anèng pasar suwéné; agéning tata sangu; anèng dunya agéning ngulati; ginawé sangu pejah; malebu ing kubur; yèn tanpa sanguwa sira; upamané sira ngumbang nèng jeladri; datan amawi palwa*.

²¹ Edwin Wieringa pointed out to me that the idea of the world being a market for the hereafter, which also occurs in the *Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim*, according to the editor of this text, R. Jones, is 'a particularly Persian idea' (Jones 1983:20-1).

views of the hereafter presented in this text.

Being embedded in the main story of the adventures of wandering Islamic students (*santri lelana*), the *Kitab Mamahi* in the *Serat Centhini* lacks this formal introduction. The legend itself has preserved its identity as a text within a text: it is read by one of the students from a book in Arabic script, though the text has been translated into Javanese.²² The *Serat Centhini* situates the reading of the text in the evening, after the evening prayer. Enjoying the coolness of the night, Ki Wisma, the master of the house, and his two well-educated guests are sitting in the pavilion in front of the house. When the young guests ask why the local people are so impudent and treacherous, their host replies that in his opinion his people are oblivious of the time of their death and the hereafter. As a remedy Ki Wisma suggests that they 'discuss the noble tale of the skull of the king of Syria when he encountered the prophet Isa Rohullah'. He asks one of his two guests to get the *Kitab Mamahi* and recite it to certain court melodies, 'because he does not know the story by heart'. This excuse may indicate that the text belonged to the repertoire of oral storytellers, but it may also be just a way of introducing the text. According to stanza 15 of canto 297 the reader says a prayer before he starts reciting, but no Arabic formula as such has been incorporated into the text.²³

Whereas the first four cantos of the two versions have the same metres and run largely parallel, often with verbatim correspondences, in the three last cantos there is greater divergence. In the *Centhini* version the fifth canto is in Maskumambang metre, in the *Serat Pathak* it is again in Dhandhanggula (Dhandhanggendis) metre. As the Maskumambang metre has four verse lines to a stanza and the Dhandhanggendis metre nine, in the *Centhini* version the number of stanzas has more than doubled, as is evident from the first stanzas in both:

Maskumambang

1.
Aturipun risang pathak angenèni
dhuh Gusti Rohullah
ing pamirsa amba malih
warna-warnining naraka.

Dhandhanggendis

1.
Aturipun pathak mring Jeng nabi
lah Jeng Gusti Ngisa Rohullah
pamriksa kula wauné
neraka kathahipun

²² On the use of Arabic script M. van Bruinessen observed: 'Traditionalist *ulama* writing books or brochures, whether in Arabic or in one of the vernacular languages, always used the Arabic script, and many of them continue to do so' (Van Bruinessen 1990:227).

²³ As I have mentioned in a previous publication, Arabic formulas, adapted to the rules of Javanese metrics, do occur elsewhere in the *Serat Centhini*, namely in canto 356:217, in the context of a *dhikir maulud*, involving choral singing of Islamic texts accompanied by frame drums (*terbang*) (C. Brakel 1993:24).

The skull announced:
 'Oh, Gusti Rohullah,
 I have also seen
 the different kinds of hell.

2.

*Pitung pangkat pyambak-
 pyambak siksaneḱi
 inggih tundha sapta
 pangkatipun ngandhap nginggil
 sapankatnya lelampahan.*

pitung pangkat sedayanèki

*warna siksana ing tundha pitu
 pangkaté nginggil lan ngandhap
 enggangipun lawan sangangatus warsi*

There are seven separate stages of punishment,
 indeed seven steps;
 the stages go down and up,
 progressing from stage to stage.

3.

*Sangangatus warsa ngandhap lawan
 nginggil
 pangkat kang kapisan
 naraka Jahannam nabi
 pangkat kalih namanira.*

inginggil miwah ingandhap.

It takes nine hundred years to move downward and upward;
 the first stage,
 [oh] prophet, is the Jahannam hell;²⁴
 the name of the second stage is [...]

In accordance with Islamic tradition, the Jahannam hell comes first and is reserved exclusively for followers of the prophet Muhammad who have been evil-doers and have failed to follow the *shari'a*.²⁵ The text states that the third hell houses the Jewish infidel (*kafir Yahudi*) with their followers, while

²⁴ The Arabic word is *djahannam*, derived from the Hebrew *gehinnom* (valley of Gehenna), which according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is 'used very often in the Qur'an as a synonym of *nār* ("fire") and 'must accordingly be rendered by the general idea of Hell' (Gardet 1965:381).

²⁵ According to Gardet, 'Descriptions which show hell as a place made up of concentric layers of increasing depth generally put Gehenna in the higher zone, that reserved for members of the Muslim community who have committed "grave sins" about which they have not repented and whom God, in accordance with his threats, decides to punish for a time with infernal torments' (Gardet 1965:381-2).

Christian infidel (*kapir Nasarani*) are located in another hell. Fire and heat are the main characteristics of hell, the sides of which are made of red copper, and whose inside is of molten lead, boiling like a thick porridge and making a thunderous noise.²⁶ Then out of the dark appears an enormous snake with eyes like two suns. Fiercely hissing and biting and spitting poison, it tortures the skull-king continuously for thousands of years.

In spite of the difference in metre, the correspondence of the contents of each canto remains. Thus the first stanzas of the next canto continue the story at the same point and in similar wordings.

Megatruh

1.
*Sru kayungyun pathak amiyarsa tutur
 ing swara lamat dumeling
 mangkono pamiyarsanipun
 sira pathak nèng yamani
 ujaré swara katongton.*

Asmarandana

1.
*Kasmaran pathak miyarsi
 ing suwara lawat-lawat
 mangkana pamiyarsané
 sira pathak anèng neraka
 ujaré ingkang suwara.*

The skull felt deeply charmed to hear the instruction
 by the wondrous, clear voice.

This is what he heard:

'You, skull in the nether world',
 were the words uttered by the voice.

After proclaiming that during his lifetime the skull has been a virtuous and generous ruler, the voice gives the following reason for his infernal tortures: the king of Syria's only error has been that he was an infidel who did not practise the exalted religion of Islam. In reply the repentant skull-king gives a detailed description of the precious cow statue worshipped by him while alive. When he adds that the tortures of hell have taught him a lesson and that he now wants to perform the religious duties of the faith of the supreme prophet, Jesus replies: 'At present, the supreme prophet Muhammad has not yet been born; he will be the last of the prophets in the future'.

In the final, seventh, canto the *Serat Pathak* MS suddenly breaks off in the middle of the first line of the eighth stanza, in Dhandhanggendis metre, while the corresponding section in the *Serat Centhini*, in Pucung metre, finishes the legend. The beginning of the stanza recapitulates the skull's sor-

²⁶ In a publication on apocalyptic concepts in Islam, Setiawan recently pointed out that concrete information on the fires of hell is found in the stories of the prophets rather than in the Qur'an (Setiawan 2000:250).

rowful tale, which is then followed by the prophet Isa's prayer to God:

Pucung

Dhandhanggendis

1.

*Nabi Ngisa sru welas duk myarsa atur
pathak langkung tobat
rubet pakéwuh ing pati
sinangsaya kinelem anèng naraka.*

1.

*Nabi Ngisa welas amiyarsi
ing paturé pathak langkung tobat
umatur ing pakéwuhé
sedayané tinutur
ingarsané nabi linuwih*

The prophet Isa felt deep compassion on hearing the story
of the very repentant skull,
his problems and his difficulties in death;
he was in deep trouble, having sunk down into hell.

2.

*Wusing matur pundirangan mili
kang luh*

Gusti èstu tobat

*tan nembah brahala malih
sru kaduwung ngemungha kang wus
kalakyan.*

*sartané pandirangan
berajog agupuh
aturipun pathak mangkana
sanget tobat amba tan purun
nglampahi
anembah dhateng brahala.*

2. Sanggupi pun boten amanggihi

When he finished speaking, he looked anxious, his tears flowing:
'Lord, I am really repentant
and will not worship idols any more;
I am intensely sorry, but it has already happened.

3.

*Amba sengguh tiyang anglampahi kupur
manggih karaharjan
wasana kaananèki
duk nèng kubur kéwala wus manggih
siksa.*

*tiyang nglampahi kupur punika
amba siniksa ing tembé
wonten ing kubur iku
pan amanggih siksa ing ngakir*

Indeed, I used to be an infidel;
I lived in prosperity.
In the end this is what happened;
I was punished only when I reached the grave.

4.

*Nèng akérat ginada malékat ulun
angga anggalepang
sinuwir jinuwing-juwing
tanpa mendha rainten dalu siniksa.*

*ing ngakérat langkung mesanat
sakit puniku
punika Jeng nabi Ngisa
inggih punapa ta kersa Gusti
inggih sèwu pan tinikelan.*

In the hereafter I was clubbed by angels,
my body was pulverized,
torn apart, completely torn to pieces;
day and night I was tortured unabatedly.

5.

*Dhuh dhuh adhuh Gusti nabi Rohallohu
amba asru dahat
nyuwun lumunturing kang sih
ginesangna wangsul maring ngalam
donya.*

3.

*Milanipun Gusti awakmami
anenuwun amba dhateng tuwan
nuwun gesang ing mangké
ing dunya nedha wangsul*

Ah, ah, oh, Gusti prophet Rohallohu,
I beseech [you] with all my strength,
please have compassion
and bring me back to life in the world.

6.

*Prasetyamba yèn wus gesang lir duk wau
demi Allah Akbar
sadhawuh-dalem (n)Jeng nabi
anglampahi rainten dalu ngibadah.*

*pan kawula nunten anglampahi
rinten dalu asalat
amuji myang Agung
punapa parentah tuwan*

When I shall be alive again as before, I faithfully promise
in the name of God the Great
all the time to fulfil the religious duties
prescribed by the revered prophet.

7.

*Amumuji ngluhurken asma
Hyang Agung
janji amba gesang
nèng donya praptaning lalis
datan nedya nalisir agami mulya.*

*dhateng amba kawula pesthi netepi
sok uga wageda gesang.*

To pray and to worship the name of the Great Being;
I promise that when I shall live [again]
in the world, after having died,
I do not intend to stray from the sublime religion.'

8.

*Kangjeng nabi lumunturing welasipun
mring pathak naréndra
tandya ngambil toyastuti*

salat kalih rekangat sawusnya salam

4.

*Nabi Ngisa welas aningali
aturipun pathak amelas amiarsa
tanantara nora suwé
angambil toya wulu
nabi aris gènya ngabekti*

The revered prophet felt deep compassion
for the skull of the king;
at once he performed the ritual ablution
and performed the *salat* with two '*rekangat*'; after the salutation

9.

*Nulya sujud andodonga Hyang
Mahagung*

*ya Ilahi amba
sayidi ya wa lai
ya marid ya samad kang rapal
maknanya*

asalat nabi Ngisa anulya sujud

*mring Allahu tangala
seklangkung bektiné mring Yang Widi
sartané adedunga.*

5. *Ya Ilaihi ya sayidina
wa muhklana ika
mak mak dun rapal jawané*

He humbly prayed to the Supreme Being:
'Ya Ilahi amba
sayidi ya wa lai
ya marid ya samad'; the meaning of the prayer is

10.

*É Pangéran Kang Agung ambanunuwun
Tuwan anggesangna*

*pathak gumluntung kaswasih
kang mandhilis sirna kulit dagingira.*

*ing Pangéran Ingkang Agung
Gusti tuwan amba nenedha
mugi tuwan anguripna
ing pathak angeluntung
kang ilang kulit dagingnya*

'Oh, Great Lord, I beseech you
to restore him to life,

the skull, who is lying pitifully on the ground,
without flesh or skin.

11.

*Myang sageda wangsul malih
mring donyèku
sru kapéngin iman
tan antara nabi myarsi
swara nguwuh saking Arah
prenahira.*

*mugi wageda wangsul nèng dunya
malih
kepéngin yèn nginadah.
6. Tanantara nabi amiarsi
ing pangundangé kang suwara*

And if he returns into this world,
he strongly desires to observe the faith.
Soon the prophet heard
a voice speaking from the direction of Arah.²⁷

12.

*Sabda gaib dumeling pamyarsanipun
é nabi minulya
Ngisa èstu Rohollahi
nuli konen ngadeg si pathak
dènénggal.*

*kapiarsa ing pangundangé
ya nabi kang linuwung
nabi Ngisa Rohollah iki
ya pathak kang gemaluntung
kang ilang kulit dagingnya*

A mysterious, clear voice was heard saying,
'Oh revered prophet Isa,
truly Rohollahi,
tell the skull to rise quickly then.

13.

*Ingsun ingkang dhawuh
ngidèni karsamu
ing panuwunira
ingsun tartamtu (n)jurungi
panyuwuné si pathak anyuwun
gesang.*

*sun-idèni karepé bekti mring Yang
Widi
anembah mring Pangéran.
7. Milaningsun angidèni
penjaluké pathak anedha gesang*

It is I who command that your wish be granted;
I certainly favour

²⁷ Perhaps this should be read as 'Aras' (Arabic 'arsh, 'throne of God'), the place mentioned previously in the 4th canto where the soul of the skull was taken out of the fire and saw the four bejewelled seats (Centhini IV, 300:1).

his request,
the request of the skull asking to be alive.

14.

*Awit akèh sidekahé duk ing dangu
asih ing sasama
pekir miskin anak yatin
lilèng donya tan rumangsa
darbènana.*

*sawaba akèh sidhekahé
asih mring pekir kumpul
lawan asih sakèhé miskin
dunya ilang rila tan rumangsa
gadhuh*

Because in the past he gave
many meals equally
to the poor, the needy and the orphans;
he did not cling to earthly goods and did not regard them as his possessions.

15.

*Darma gadhuh kaserenan
barana gung
nora ngrasa gadhah
kabèh kagungané Widdhi
nabi Ngisa tatela pamyarsanira.*

*tan rumangsa simpen dunya
derma baé amba kersé [...?]
tan rumangsa gadhah dunya.*

He dutifully gave up the great treasures which he had on loan;
he did not feel that he owned them,
[as] everything belongs to God.'
The prophet Isa heard this clearly.

16.

*Risaksana nabi Ngisa Rohollahu
mijil Siti Maryam
pathak dènadhep liniling
sarwi nguwuh-uwuh mring pathak naréndra.*

8.

Ri saksana [...]

Immediately thereafter the prophet Isa Rohollahu,
son of Siti Mariam,
looked attentively at the skull in front of him
and addressed the skull of the king:

The many parallels between these two Javanese versions of the skull tale suggest that the texts may have a common basis, though this is not necessarily one and the same text. Comparison of the two versions shows not only that the *Serat Centhini* contains a more complete version of the story, but also that

its poetic style is more sophisticated, as may be expected from a court text. In fact, there are so many parallels in form and content between the *Serat Pathak* and the *Kitab Mamahi* in the *Serat Centhini* that in my view these two texts may be considered as variants of each other. However, more research is needed to establish how the various Javanese, Malay and other Indonesian versions of the legend are related.

Conclusion

While there is only a comparatively small number of Javanese MSS extant containing the legend of the skull, the theme of this legend – instruction on the punishments of an unbeliever in hell – must have been quite familiar in the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth century. Aside from Poensen's above-cited remark, this is indicated by the popularity of the theme in Malay literature. There are many Malay Islamic works on the torments of sinners in the hereafter, such as the *Syair Neraka*, *Syair Azab dalam Neraka*, *Syair Kanak-Kanak*, and the stories of the 'sarakat al-maut' genre (Braginsky 1993:290-303). A similar theme also occurs in the Malay poem *Syair Alif-ba-ta*, composed by the scribe Haji Zainal Abidin, who was active in Batavia in the first half of the nineteenth century (Wieringa 1998a:116). In this text, the pious author also warns believers against love of this world and worldly wealth and reminds the reader of what will happen to him when he dies. Similarly, the poem describes the 'punishment in the grave which the unbeliever is subjected to'. However, in this poem the duration of the punishment is infinite, lasting until the Day of Resurrection, after which it will even be worse (Wieringa 1998a:120-1).

Even so, although the legend about hellish tortures as presented in the Javanese *Serat Pathak* is clearly Islamic, the high respect in which this text was held in nineteenth-century Java may not be entirely due to its pious Islamic message. The existence of still earlier, pre-Islamic Javanese texts and images depicting the purification of sinners in the fires of hell proves that this concept had been adopted in Javanese culture long before the advent of Islam. A similar theme is found in one of the oldest – perhaps the oldest – extant Javanese manuscripts, the *Kuṇṇjarakarna Dharmakathana*, which has been estimated to date from the second half of the fourteenth or the fifteenth century.²⁸ This ancient text, dealing with a heavenly king's atonement in hell, also contains vivid descriptions of 'the terrible punishments which people who have lived without the Law are subjected to' (Teeuw and Robson 1981:1-2). It gives lively, terrifying descriptions of the tortures suffered in various

²⁸ Its story is also depicted in the thirteenth-century reliefs of Candhi Jago.

kinds of hell, which are similar to the tortures described in the *Serat Pathak*. The story remained popular in Java during the following centuries, as is testified by the existence of early-eighteenth-century prose versions (Van der Molen 1983:76-87).

Like the Islamic *Serat Pathak*, the Buddhist *Kuñjarakarna Dharmakathana* was characterized as 'typically an edifying story for the instruction of the faithful' (Teeuw and Robson 1981:2) and supposed to have a non-Javanese (probably Indian) origin. The parallels go even further, as the poetic version of the story of Kuñjarakarna is believed to be based on a didactic prose story which, according to the editors, was 'probably primarily destined to be used in religious circles' (Teeuw and Robson 1981:5).²⁹ Yet on one point the two texts differ significantly: the reason for which the souls are punished in hell. Whereas in the Buddhist treatise the souls are said to be punished for their wrong-doings and bad behaviour against their fellow humans in their previous life, the poor skull in the *Serat Pathak* is described as a good person, who is praised for the great kindness and generosity he has shown during his life as king of Syria. In fact, there was nothing wrong with his social conduct. The only reason why he is being tortured in hell is that he was no believer and no adherent of the true faith, but practised idol worship.

Considering the large number of manuscripts and different versions of the *Kuñjarakarna* story in Java and Bali, Teeuw and Robson suggest that one 'reason why this text is remarkable is the appeal which it obviously possessed for a varied audience' here (Teeuw and Robson 1981:3). In view of this popularity, it is not surprising that the nineteenth-century Islamic *Serat Pathak*, which is also entitled 'a message from hell' (*kabar naraka*), was held in such high esteem. In fact, this Islamic legend represents the continuation of a highly respected pre-Islamic religious genre which has been popular in Java for many centuries.

²⁹ For a discussion on the integration of Buddhist concepts with indigenous Javanese beliefs, see L.F. Brakel 1996:164.

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