
Notwithstanding its title, the themes addressed in *The makings of Indonesian Islam* encompass more than an Orientalist construction of its narrative as a Sufi discourse. This wider scope places the book in the interstices of the history of the Islamization of Southeast Asia and colonial history. Laffan’s very rich account argues that the historiography of Islam in Indonesia is a compound of insider and outsider contributions by Muslims, Christian missionaries, colonial administrators and their scholarly advisors, with the imposing figure of the Dutch orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje dominating much of the story. While many earlier accounts have already foregrounded the role of Sufism as the main catalyst for the Islamization of Indonesia, Laffan also draws attention to scholarly progress during the last few decades which has demonstrated that this process must be understood as a longue durée and multi-facetted development from at least the fourteenth century onwards.

Setting the stage in the first part of the book, Laffan refers to the work of established authorities, such as Anthony Johns, Merle Ricklefs, and Azyumardi Azra, who have helped the field move forward to a more complex understanding than the essentialist terms in which the Islamization process was initially conceived. He also uses contributions by scholars of his own generation, such as Michael Feener, Elizabeth Lambourn, and Giancarlo Casale. Covering Muslim accounts from the fourteenth to the end of the nineteenth century, these first three chapters deliver on providing the necessary background for the later substantiation of Laffan’s claim that the recurring emphasis on Sufism was in part due to ‘the interventions of Dutch scholars’ (p. 9). Chapter 2, ‘Embracing a New Curriculum, 1750-1800’, fleshes out the broadening and deepening of Southeast Asian knowledge of things Islamic and the resulting competing Islamic discourses. The next chapter takes this a step further, invoking the alleged influence of Wahhabism in the Padri wars, raging in West Sumatra until the 1830s, as well as the emergence of indigenous pesantren or Islamic boarding schools, the popularization of transnational Sufi orders (*tariqas*), and the role of pilgrimage and printing press, as illustrations of Southeast Asia’s integration into the wider Muslim world.

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In the second part, the perspective shifts to the European gaze: of the early colonial encounters; emerging Western scholarship on maritime Southeast Asia, including attempts to come to grips with the place of Islam in the various societies across the archipelago; and the role of Christian missionary activity. It discusses the role of bias and power relations in shaping European knowledge from its summary, incomplete and often plain erroneous, beginnings into an increasingly more detailed archive. Centering on Java and Sumatra, improved communications and transportation, surveys of indigenous education, and the ‘looting of libraries of courts’ (p. 85) led indeed to ‘New Regimes of Knowledge, 1800-1865’ (Chapter 5), but they also show that a European parallel to the Muslims’ new curriculum only began taking shape in the course of the nineteenth century. Beginning with English colonial administrators such as Marsden and Raffles, the post-Napoleonic restoration of Dutch control of the Indies brought back the missionaries and led to the establishment of institutional training of administrators in both the colony and the metropole. Laffan emphasizes the various scholarly camps and factions vying for control over colonial policy making and execution in Amsterdam, Breda, Delft, and Leiden. Here we find the origins of the rivalling positions that understanding the Indies and Islam should be grounded in high Javanese literature and canonical Arabic texts on Islamic law versus those more concerned with the practicalities of colonial administration and thus the need for knowledge of functioning societies and vernacular languages. The merger of these two approaches to the study Islam and Muslim societies is found in the work of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who is the protagonist of the remainder of the book.

Focussing on the years 1882 to 1888, the third part of the book begins with a discussion of how Snouck’s daring pioneering research in Mecca shaped his outlook on the historical development and future prospects of Islam in what Laffan terms ‘a crucial colony’ (p. 127). It also informed Snouck’s call for a shift in the universities away from the study of juridical theory toward what he called ‘scientific investigation’. In so doing, he suggested the jurist could engage the help of ‘the ethnographer and the philologist’ to understand more accurately how written laws interacted with the unwritten law of Muslims (p. 137). Finally, the Mecca experience provided Snouck Hurgronje with contacts and the subsequent opportunity to forge alliances with select ‘ulama’; favouring those whose authority derived
from their place in the Meccan scholarly hierarchy and who advocated the intellectual system which had evolved over the centuries on the basis of al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) synthesis of various fields of Islamic knowledge grounded in ‘the tripartite, but mutually reinforcing, elements of Tradition, Law, and Mysticism’ (pp. 137-8). Laffan’s account of these relationships continues in the next two chapters (Collaborative Encounters, 1889-1892 and Shadow Muftis, Christian Modern, 1892-1906), where he discusses how they shaped Snouck’s career as chief adviser on native and Arab affairs and gave direction to ‘his observations of the networks of knowledge and of the tariqas in particular’, because this ‘remained his primary colonial directive’ (p. 148).

Snouck’s later years as a professor in Leiden, his continuing role as principal government advisor on the Muslim world, and his monopolization of the training of his own successors in Indonesia are the subject of the fourth part. While Sufijism remains an important issue, another challenge for Snouck and his disciples is how to gauge its prospective influence in relation to new developments, such as the rise of Islamic reformism outlined in Cairo by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. For the latter issue, Laffan draws on his earlier book *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*. This reliance on earlier work points to a weakness of the study: assuming too much background knowledge on the part of the readers. Earlier parts of the book too suffer from such obscurities and convolutions. For example, Laffan’s identification of competing Medinan, Meccan, and Ghazalian accounts are not sufficiently explained for those from outside the field of Islamic Studies. However, these shortcomings do not diminish the value of this book as an original and richly detailed contribution to writing the history of an Indonesian Islam.

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