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Document

International Symposium on Archipelago Manuscripts VIII: In Search of Local Islam in Manuscripts

Yumi SUGAHARA

Based on a collective desire to discuss and disseminate information on the maintenance, preservation and benefits of manuscripts in the Archipelago, the International Symposium on Archipelago Manuscripts VIII was held from July 26-28th 2004, with the theme "Considering Manuscripts from Various Perspectives". The Seminar took place at Wisma Syahida UIN Jakarta, Ciputat and included representatives from Masyarakat Pernaskahan Nusantara (The Association of Archipelago Manuscripts/ MANASSA), the Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies (C-DATS) Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS), Universitas Islam Negeri (The State Islamic University/UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Badan Litbang Agama dan Diklat Keagamaan (The Boards of Religious Research and Development, and of Religious Education and Training) of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, EFEO, KITLV, the Pusat Bahasa (The Centre for Language Development), Gramedia Publisher, YOI, and a number of other institutions.

The symposium aimed to:

- 1. Explore the various ideas and concepts about the development of research into manuscripts, and how to properly use them as a source of scholarship and cultural knowledge, as contributed by experts in the field of manuscripts, people interested in manuscripts and representatives from various other disciplines;*
- 2. Formulate long-term agendas and programs to publicise methods of preserving, maintaining and using manuscripts, with the inclusion of a broad range of viewpoints;*
- 3. Hold an intellectual exchange with other countries about the development of research into manuscripts, and obtain a commitment from other countries, particularly in terms of financial support, in order to encourage this kind of research;*
- 4. Produce various new findings and results in relation to manuscripts.*

Manuscripts are a record of culture, as they contain written text concerning thoughts, knowledge, cultural traditions and social behaviours from the past. There are clearly many more manuscripts than non-written cultural relics in Indonesia, such as temples, palaces, mosques and so on.

Manuscripts—which have up until now often been disregarded and have only received attention from certain groups, in particular philologists and librarians—in fact record broad meanings and dimensions, as they are the product of tradition and include various cultural characteristics from particular periods. As a result, in the context of cultural scholarship, manuscripts are an important resource for explaining the past.

Efforts by a number of academics from both Indonesia and abroad to reveal the contents of these manuscripts have prompted further research activities. Several institutions have paid attention to these manuscripts, in terms of both financial support and the coordination of activities related to manuscripts, such as symposiums, seminars, workshops and so on. In the context of religious manuscripts, for example, over the last 3 years Balitbang Agama dan Diklat Keagamaan Depag RI has begun to implement a “Research Program on Religious Manuscripts in the Archipelago”, which involves a number of researchers from various regions in Indonesia.

The wealth of manuscripts in the Archipelago is closely linked to the permeation of broader Islamic traditions in the Malay Archipelago from the 7th century. Islam helped to enrich the literacy traditions because it inspired the emergence of the Jawi script (using Arabic characters), and therefore encouraged the development of literacy traditions in Malay society. This tradition in turn significantly contributed to the creation of a large number of manuscripts, particularly religious manuscripts.

The production of Islamic manuscripts in the Archipelago increased from the 16th century through to the 18th century, particularly when Aceh became the centre of Islamic intellectual activities. A number of well-known ‘ulamā’ came from this region, including Hamzah Fansuri, Shamsuddin al-Sumatrani, Nuruddin al-Raniri and Abdurrauf Singkel, who were extraordinarily productive in writing manuscripts, both for teaching and learning, and for other purposes. This manuscript writing tradition in Aceh then spread to a number of other areas in the Archipelago, such as Sulawesi, Java and others. As a result, many local manuscripts can be found in these areas, which store knowledge specifically related to that area.

Considering the links between Islam and the manuscripts in the Archipelago as explained above, manuscripts are clearly one of the most important elements in efforts to reconstruct Islamic intellectual thought, in this case local Islam, because manuscripts reflect the cultural, social, political and intellectual links between local culture and Islam in a particular area. Therefore, research into

manuscripts will enrich local Islamic discourse in both Indonesia and in the broader Southeast Asia.

The role of these manuscripts is highly significant in the context of local Islam, particularly when it is taken into consideration that studies into local Islamic discourse have not yet been maximised.

Manuscripts have important meaning in Islamic studies in Indonesia, and in the Southeast Asia more generally. Indonesian Islam has up until now been an interesting field of study, but has not received serious attention. Attention that is too focused on global and contemporary studies has forgotten about local Islamic discourse. The emergence of Indonesian Islam with its own characteristics cannot be ignored. The links between Islam and local culture, such as exist in Indonesia, are themselves valuable intellectual resources. Indonesian Islam provides a real picture of what is often referred to as "local Islam", a discourse which reflects the relationship between the cultural, social, political and intellectual elements of local culture and Islam in a particular area.

Local Islam encompasses two important concepts: First, it constitutes a concept about the unique and special situation of a particular religious practice. This uniqueness exists because of the influence of local culture, but can also occur as a result of normative religious teachings being incorporated into everyday life. Second, local Islam encompasses elements of the interaction between culture and religion that occurs throughout history. Therefore, studies in local Islam mean continuously monitoring the process of cultivation between religion and culture.

The main attempts to study local Islam involve research and the observation of local aspects and meanings, along with engineering local Islamic discourse in a particular social and political milieu. The purpose and function of Islam in one region cannot be equated with the situation in another region. There needs to be a detailed study about Islam in a particular region in order to understand the patterns of interaction and Islamic cultural movements in that area. This is because religious phenomena in an area can only be understood using the "social experience" approach, which means understanding the religious interpretation of the people who experience it.

The strength of local Islam has caused a number of unfortunate interpretations, because Islam in Indonesia is considered to be peripheral and pseudo-Islam. The clearly localised elements of Islam in Indonesia are a cause of misunderstandings about Islamic discourse in Indonesia. These misunderstandings are discernible from the colonial period. For example, Sir Thomas Raffles, Governor General of England, portrayed Islam in Indonesia as an unauthentic form of Islam. Clifford Geertz's classic work on Islam in Java also misrepresents Javanese Islam. Geertz portrays Islam in Indonesia through the window of Islam in the Middle East and a modernist understanding of Islam which assumes the existence of universal Islam. Unfortunately, such opinions are taken for granted and have become the standard discourse of Islam in Indonesia.

Misunderstandings about Indonesian Islam are caused by a lack of information about the real nature of Islam in Indonesia. This lack of information is the result of the scarcity of research carried out by Muslim academics in Indonesia, who certainly understand much more about Islam in their region, and the fact that there is not a complete Islamic research centre that is well-managed, which carries out continuous research and employs qualified experts. Thus, like it or not, they consult data that is already available and which is largely the work of Western academics, and the simple writings of colonial administrators, mainly consisting of bureaucratic reports. Another basic reason for these misunderstandings is the insufficient amount of extensive research based on local sources (manuscripts), as the main source of information about Islamic civilisation in Indonesia. In this context, this symposium on manuscripts has a highly significant purpose.

An important point about this International Symposium on Archipelago Manuscripts VIII is that for the first time since the coordination in 1996, the symposium took place at a religious higher education institution, namely UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta. Also for the first time, the Department of Religious Affairs, through its *Balitbang Agama dan Diklat Keagamaan*, was significantly involved in supporting the activities of the symposium.

Efforts to preserve and maintain manuscripts in the Archipelago are the responsibility of the entire community. However, in this context, the involvement of institutions such as the Department of Religious Affairs is essential, as they oversee the various programs and agendas carried out in the framework of conserving and using these Islamic manuscripts in the future. The Department of Religious Affairs also has a network in almost all regions of Indonesia, which can be used to carry out research into the numerous local manuscripts. Meanwhile, religious higher education institutions such as UIN and IAIN (State Institutes for Islamic Studies) have to take a larger amount of responsibility for at least two reasons:

First, UIN and IAIN have strong human resources in the field of Islam, particularly in terms of familiarity with Arabic, the language often used in the manuscripts. Malay and Javanese manuscripts are generally written in the Arabic script (known as *Jawi* or *Pegon*), so a command of the script and language is highly significant. Philologists—who generally have a background in secular education—have often considered Arabic to be an obstacle in their research into these religious manuscripts. It is not surprising, therefore, that these manuscripts, particularly those in Arabic, have been neglected up until now.

Second, UIN and IAIN have prioritised the data recorded in these religious manuscripts. Their maintenance and use as an educational tool will in turn strengthen the basis of UIN and IAIN as educational institutions concerned with Islamic knowledge. Easy access to the manuscripts will hopefully help provide

a broader understanding of Islam, especially in terms of its development in the Malay-Indonesia region.

The Symposium's agenda began with a welcome dinner with the Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs (at that time), Prof. Dr. H. Said Agil Husin Al Munawwar, on Sunday 25 July 2004. This included representatives being welcomed with speeches from the symposium organisers, including Prof. Dr. Achadiati Ikram (MANASSA), Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra (UIN Jakarta), Prof. Dr. Koji Miyazaki (C-DATS Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), and the Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs.

On Monday, 26 July 2004, the session began with the Keynote Speech by Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, as Professor of History at UIN Jakarta, with the theme: "Manuscripts and the Reconstruction of the Socio-Intellectual History of the Archipelago".

A number of papers focused on the benefits of manuscripts as a resource for studies on local Islam, including the papers by Peter Riddell (Brunell University) who wrote an article (presented in-absentia) deals with semantic change from *Kitab Malay* to literary Indonesian; Yumi SUGAHARA (C-DATS) who reconstructed the islamization in the 19th century Java through Ahmad Rifai Kalisalak manuscripts; Toru AOYAMA (C-DATS) about the significance of manuscripts in religious studies in Java; Uka Tjandrasmita (UIN), who demonstrated the importance of synergy between manuscript research, historical archaeology, and Islamic studies; Jamhari (PPIM UIN Jakarta) about the need to develop "rich philology", that is, the strengthening of manuscript research methodology through various theoretical approaches in order to uncover meaning in local Islamic cultural rituals; Erwan Nurtawab (Pusnira Jakarta) about the tradition of writing manuscripts on Tafsir in Malay, Sundanese and Javanese languages; Fakhriati (IAIN ar-Raniri, Aceh) about Acehese Islamic manuscripts; Nyimas Umami Kalsum (IAIN Raden Fatah Palembang) about Islamic manuscripts from Palembang; and a number of other papers.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this International Manuscript Symposium was a milestone in making links between cultural research traditions, in this context manuscript studies and religious research traditions (read: Islam), particularly those that use manuscripts as the main resource for their studies.

On one hand, a tradition of religious research, in this context Islam, has been developed in a number of religious higher education institutions, such as UIN, IAIN, and various institutions of the Department of Religious Affairs. However, thus far, this religious research tradition has not taken root, because it is dependent on universal religious texts and does not make full use of texts that are specific to the context, such as manuscripts, which often encompass local values and culture.

On the other hand, a research tradition that pays attention to cultural resources such as these manuscripts has been developed in a number of higher education institutions such as UI (University of Indonesia), UGM (Gadjah Mada University, Jogjakarta), Unand (Andalas University, Padang), Unpad (Padjadjaran University, Bandung), and a number of other secular universities. However, thus far, this research tradition has not taken full advantage of the availability of religious manuscripts, particularly the many manuscripts written in Arabic.

In this context of bringing together the two research traditions above, the Manuscript Symposium organized by a committee headed by Dr. Oman Fathurahman (UIN Jakarta) was greatly appreciated.

Yumi SUGAHARA is a committee representative from C-DATS, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS).