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# JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

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## SAJARAH LELUHUR: HINDU COSMOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF JAVANESE MUSLIM GENEALOGICAL AUTHORITY

R. KEVIN JAQUES  
*Indiana University*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper<sup>1</sup> examines a Javanese genealogy found in a MS entitled *Serat Sajarah Leluhur* in order to shed light on how Muslims attached to central Javanese royal courts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attempted to use genealogies to legitimize their rule.<sup>2</sup> It demonstrates that the genealogy recasts the cosmological ideas of indigenous,

<sup>1</sup> This paper originated during the fall of 1997 as a result of the Comparative Sacred Texts seminar at Emory University. I would like to thank Vernon Robbins, Laurie Patton, and Gordon Newby for their kind advice and support. A version was also presented at the Southeastern Regional American Academy of Religion Conference in April 1999 at Chapel Hill, North Carolina under the title 'Serat Sajarah Leluhur: The Use of Hindu Symbols to Make Muslim Theological Arguments'. It then sat on the shelf until the fall of 2004 when, as a result of a research fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, I was able to return to the text, which underwent extensive revisions during the fall of that year. I would like to thank Indiana University, especially the Department of Religious Studies, for providing me with much needed leave time to complete this and other projects.

<sup>2</sup> This is a simplified rendering of the Javanese title which reads: *Serat Sadjarah Leloehoer Dhalem Sanking Pangiwo Hoetawi Saking Panengen, Hawit Sangking Kangdjeng Nabi Adam, dhoemoegi Pandjenengan Dhalem Sapoeniko Kasambetan Serat Rodjopeotro, hing Nagari Ngjogypkarta Hadhiningrat* (The Book of the History of the Revered Ancestors in the Sanking Pangiwo Hutawi from the Prophet Adam to the Glorious Continuing Book of the Rojoputro of the Court of Yogyakarta). The MS, dated 1833, is written in Javanese with a Latin script. It is from the collection of Dr. Mark Woodward, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Department of Religious Studies, Arizona State University.

Oneworld Publications have clearly recognized the need for it, and there is good news for students that a paperback is also available.

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### *Sufism in Europe and North America*

Edited by DAVID WESTERLUND (London–New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 272 pp. Price HB £96.95. ISBN 0–415–32591–9.

'Sufism', notwithstanding its obscure etymology, is now accepted in modern Western languages as the generic term for the inward, 'mystical' dimension of Islam, considered sometimes as complementary, sometimes as opposed, to the formal Islam based on the injunctions of the *Shari'a*. In line with this somewhat vague definition, the former is often perceived as gentle and tolerant Islam, conciliatory and pacific in outlook and inner nature, and the latter as archaic, repressive, even violent and aggressive. Some in the West seem more familiar with the term 'Sufism' than many modern Muslims themselves, and it is curious to note on the one hand the increasing number of Westerners interested in and attracted towards Sufism and, on the other, more and more Muslims either denigrating or flatly rejecting its legitimacy within Islam proper. No wonder that many of those in search of common ground to enable a better understanding between cultures in the post-modern societies of the West, tend to turn to Sufism rather than to legalistic Islam, consciously or unconsciously disconnecting these two aspects of a single religious and cultural tradition.

The book under review, edited by David Westerlund, Professor of Religious Studies at Södertörn University College, Stockholm, comprises (after the editor's substantial introductory chapter) seven essays by different scholars on various aspects of Sufism, with reference to its contemporary relevance in the Western context. These essays focus on the understanding of Sufism prevalent among Westerners drawn to it by the ever-growing number of its representatives in Europe and North America and the extensive literature promoting their message and teachings.

No doubt, the materialistic, individualistic temperament of modern Western society, combined with the weakening of social, religious and spiritual values (formerly rooted in a prevalently Christian tradition) has prompted many, especially among the young, to look for answers to the fundamental questions of life in non-native traditions brought into neighbourhood in the aftermath of centuries of Western dominance, followed by the annulment of distance by global mass communication. The counterpart of many people in the 'East' being attracted to the 'West' by its alluring promises of increased material wellbeing is many Westerners looking the other way to balance socio-economic privilege with some nourishment for the soul.

In the first essay (pp. 13–35), Westerlund sets out to place Sufism within the wider Islamic context, distinguishing what he calls the exclusivistic, Islam-oriented currents of Sufism, and its more universalistic and eclectic forms. The former, he argues, appeal more to the communities of Muslim migrants firmly embedded in their native tradition; the latter to the secularized Westerners who cannot easily subscribe to set patterns of ritual, religious and social behaviour. He presents the reader with an extensive list of examples of both categories, drawing a line between traditional orders (*turuq*) rooted in Muslim cultures and climates (Naqshbandiyya, Bektashiyya, Shadhiliyya), and new movements (the esoteric teachings of Georgii Gurdjieff, the so-called Maryamiyya propagated by Frithjof Schuon, the Golden Sufi Chain initiated by Irina Tweedie), the latter often but not necessarily arising from the former (pp. 18–25).

In the next essay, American scholar Marcia Hermansen, to explain the peculiar characteristics of American Sufism vis-à-vis 'Euro-Sufism', traces the distinctive elements of American religious attitudes back to the early nineteenth century. In that period, a gradual shift occurred from 'the doctrinal particulars of the various denominations' (Protestant sects differing in doctrine, practice and institutional forms) to the 'moral character of the believer' (p. 37). This led to a predominantly individual rather than institutional approach to religion, in turn the basis for the tendency to prefer experimental modes of spirituality over the controlled, rational moral dogmatism of the Protestant temper, an increasing openness (caused by loss of genuine rootedness), toward other, non-Christian movements, among which Sufism is but one example. Following an account of the successive stages of Muslim immigration to the US from the late nineteenth to the later half of the twentieth centuries (pp. 39–43), Hermansen describes the process of cultural hybridization, typical of all Western societies but particularly pronounced in the American context. This process entails an appropriation of singular practices, isolated from the larger context, in order to broaden their appeal beyond the boundaries of formalized religion. Hence the emergence of American-born Sufi movements which, cleverly promoting themselves through modern means of advertising, have succeeded in reaching a large public, not least by re-inventing the traditional network of cooperation over the Internet.

Somewhat different, probably due to greater proximity to the Muslim heartland, was the situation in Russia, described by Ravil Bukharaev in 'Sufism in Russia: Nostalgia for Revelation' (pp. 64–94). A historical perspective makes up the bulk of the article (pp. 67–87). Through it, Bukharaev explains in detail the importance and nature of the role played by Sufi masters in Russian Muslim history, with particular focus on the Bulgar Volga region, a territory ruled by Muslim kings from the period of the 'Abbasid caliphate to the Russian conquest in 1552.

The other four articles turn around other aspects of Sufi presence in the West. A discussion by Thomas McElwain (pp. 95–108) of the rather mysterious role played by the Bektashi order, explains history and origin and its beliefs and practices. Garbi Schmidt (pp. 109–26) investigates how the charisma inherent to the Sufi master can be mediated through the Internet. Olaf Hammer (pp. 127–43) looks closely into the origin and subsequent development of selected Sufi (or allegedly Sufi) movements in the West. Last but not least,

Ian Draper (pp. 144–56) describes some features of the Haqqaniyya, a branch of the strictly Sunni-oriented Central Asian Naqshbandiyya. This movement owes its growing popularity in the West both to the charisma of Shaykh Nāẓim al-Kibrīsī, and to its presence in the British ‘new age’ capital of Glastonbury. The choice of this provincial town in rural Somerset for a new centre for the activities of the Haqqani adepts tells us more about the nature of this relative newcomer to the colourful stage of Euro-Sufism than the few pages Draper allots to the description of a typical *dhikr* meeting organized by the Western *murīds* of Shaykh Nāẓim. Open to all, and advertised both on the Internet and in the town’s numerous ‘new age’ bookshops and community centres, these *murīds* are typical of what distinguishes popular Western Sufism from its ancestor, namely the absence of any formal requirement of adherence to Islam and the naturally hidden, inner nature of its doctrines, reserved to an inner circle of carefully chosen disciples who undertake the difficult path from heedlessness (*ghafla*) to spiritual illumination (*irfān*) under the strict supervision of their ‘leader to Reality’ (*murshid bar Haqq*).

In sum, the book offers a wide-ranging survey of the main Sufi groups in Western countries providing analyses of their main characteristics and aims, the way they adapt to the particular environment and present themselves to the Western public, and the means they use to project their message. Not surprisingly, though, it will leave somewhat disoriented all those innocent enough to turn to this book in search of a better understanding of the real nature of Sufism—affirming the insightfulness of the adage, anonymously attributed to a Sufi master, that while in the old days Sufism was a reality without a name it has now become a name without a reality.

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#### *New Muslims in the European Context: the Experience of Scandinavian Converts*

By ANNE SOPHIE ROALD (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 392 pp. Price HB \$142.00. ISBN 90–04–13679–7.

As with her previous book *Women in Islam: the Western Experience*, Anne Sophie Roald has produced a well-researched and thoughtful work of considerable relevance to Muslims today. Although her fieldwork in this case is among Scandinavian Muslims, both Shi’a and Sunni, she has long familiarity with the experiences of new Muslims elsewhere in Europe and her analyses and conclusions are either applicable in other countries, or produce interesting comments on different situations, problems and solutions. As before, she is interested in Islam’s potential for change in theology and practice and, in this

book, in the part played in that change by converts. Her introduction discusses various concepts which she will adapt and use in her analysis, notably Eriksen’s theories on the globalization and creolization of culture and Schreier’s idea of ‘global theological flows’.

Drawing on the EVSS (European Value System Study) of 1990, she looks at the trend of individualism in European society and asks whether this also applies to European Muslims, the majority of whom claim that they do not follow a school of Law nor belong to any Islamic trend. She begins by examining the majority society in Scandinavian countries, since a study of converts cannot be undertaken without putting them in context. Islamophobia is discussed and its particular manifestations in Sweden, Norway and, most strongly, Denmark. Roald then looks at the reasons why Scandinavians become Muslim.

Here she gives a critical assessment of accepted models of conversion, and also indicates the factors that have to be taken into consideration when evaluating convert narratives, which she does not take at face value. She concludes that Islamic conversion differs from the model proposed by Rambo, in that the stage of ‘encounter’ with Muslims is often the first stage, perhaps because a personal contact is needed in view of the bad press Islam has today, and that any crisis tends to occur, not prior to conversion but as a result of it. The stages of conversion, from falling in love with Islam, to disillusionment with the way it is practised, and finally to realizing one can be both Scandinavian and Muslim, is developed in her later chapter on the relationship between converts and born Muslims.

She notes that new Muslims often refer to the ‘rational’ nature of Islam, reflecting both trends in Scandinavian society and most Islamist literature of the eighties and nineties. This leads her to a study of Muslim convert trends and ‘convert literature’. The ‘rational’ trend is prominent, widely popularized by the publications of the IIFSO and the Islamic Foundation, but she also examines ‘traditionalists’, and extreme movements. Interestingly, she notes that adherence to the latter is characteristic of the early stages of conversion and that new Muslims usually modify their position at a later stage.

Her analysis of convert literature (literature read and appreciated by converts, as well as written by them) reflects the variety of books and journals now available, in comparison with the limited range on offer before the 1980s, and notes the increasing popularity of new Muslims’ writings, to which converts can relate more easily. She does, however, record criticisms as well as admiration of, for example, Bilal Philips, Hamza Yusuf and Nuh (not ‘Noah’ (p. 271) or ‘Nuah’ (pp. 134, 355)) Ha Mim Keller. It seems that Gai Eaton’s inspiring books: *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (1992), mentioned briefly as a convert narrative (pp. 89–91), and *Remembering God* (2000), have not influenced Scandinavian converts, nor is there much trace of the work of Abdal-Hakim Murad (mentioned briefly as Tim J. Winters (correct spelling: Winter) on p. 283), or of the prolific output of the late Muhammad Hamidullah.

In the chapter on new Muslims in Scandinavian society, Roald describes very well the ‘gliding between various identities, where new Muslims see themselves as both ‘us’ and ‘them’ at different times’ (p. 252). This is particularly the case for female converts who wear the headscarf: they feel perfectly ‘normal’ inside,

*In this issue*

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