

Reconstructing the role of local actors in the Islamization of East Kalimantan

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Abstract

The History of Indonesian Islamization has always been described as a one-way process, where Islam was brought to Indonesia on the initiative of foreign preachers. At the same time, the local community only passively accepted it. This view is typical of colonial scholarship, which stated that Southeast Asian society was backward and could only develop with the help of foreign civilizations. However, archaeological studies challenge this view, which shows that local Southeast Asian society had an advanced life system before the arrival of foreign civilizations. According to these findings, world religions came to Southeast Asia not at the initiative of foreign preachers but were invited by local rulers for local political interests. This study examines the debate between the two approaches in the case of Islamization in the Sultanates of Kutai and Paser in East Kalimantan. This study utilizes a cross-disciplinary corroborative approach, namely archaeological analysis and local politics, to test the mainstream historical narratives. This study found that the Islamization process in East Kalimantan is part of the local centralization of power and regional struggle for political and economic dominance. The study has two significant implications. First, there is a need for criticism of the conventional History of Islamization based on the colonial paradigm. Second, methodological innovation and cross-disciplinary corroboration are needed to revive local history studies, which typically have fragmented sources.

Sejarah Islamisasi di Indonesia selama ini selalu digambarkan sebagai proses satu arah, di mana Islam dibawa ke Indonesia oleh dan atas inisiatif pendakwah dari luar. Sementara masyarakat lokal dianggap hanya penerima pasif. Pandangan ini sebenarnya mencerminkan pola pikir keserjanaan kolonial, yang selalu menganggap masyarakat Asia Tenggara terbelakang dan hanya mampu berkembang dengan bantuan peradaban luar. Namun, kajian-kajian arkeologis kontemporer menunjukkan bukti yang berbeda, yaitu bahwa masyarakat Asia Tenggara sudah memiliki sistem kehidupan yang maju sebelum datangnya pengaruh peradaban-peradaban asing. Menurut temuan ini, agama-agama dunia datang ke Asia Tenggara bukan atas inisiatif pendakwah luar melainkan diundang oleh penguasa-penguasa lokal untuk kepentingan politik lokal. Riset ini bertujuan menguji perdebatan ini dengan menggunakan kasus sejarah Islamisasi di Kesultanan Kutai dan Paser di Kalimantan Timur. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan korobortif lintas-disiplin, memadukan pendekatan arkeologis dan pendekatan politik lokal, untuk menguji narasi sejarah mainstream. Ditemukan bahwa proses Islamisasi di Kalimantan Timur merupakan bagian dari proses sentralisasi politik dan pertarungan

perebutan dominasi politik dan ekonomi. Temuan kajian ini memiliki dua nilai penting; perlunya sikap kritis terhadap narasi sejarah bercorak kolonialis, dan perlunya inovasi metodologis dan koraborasi lintas-disiplin untuk menghidupkan kajian sejarah lokal yang biasanya sangat miskin sumber-sumber tertulis.

Keywords: *Indonesian Islam; Islamization; Political history; East Kalimantan*

Introduction

This study seeks to explore the conceptual discourse surrounding the Islamization of Indonesia, specifically examining the contrasting perspectives between the conventional view influenced by colonialism and the alternative view emphasizing the agency of local rulers for their own political interests. The mainstream historical narrative portrays Islamization in Indonesia as a unidirectional process, where foreign preachers introduced Islam from outside and local communities merely accepted it passively. Al-Attas proposes that Islamization in Indonesia and Malaysia occurred in three stages: the Islamization of the body (13th-15th centuries), the Islamization of the soul (15th-18th centuries), and the subsequent development stage (after the 18th century). The first stage was predominantly carried out by foreign preachers, with the local community becoming actively involved in the Islamization process during the second stage.¹

The marginalization of local actors in cultural development is a distinguishing feature of colonial-era scholarship, which was often justified under the guise of a civilizing mission.² However, archaeological

¹Mulyadi, "Islamisasi di Kepulauan Melayu Nusantara: Studi Terhadap Analisis Filsafat Sejarah Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas", *Jurnal At-Tafkir*, Volume XII, Number 1 (2019), 100-117.

²Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; Heine-Geldern, and Robert. Conceptions of state and kingship in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia Program,

discoveries present a different perspective on the conventional belief that local communities in Southeast Asia were passive, revealing instead that these communities had sophisticated living systems in place even before the introduction of world religions by outside forces.³ Recent archaeological findings in Southeast Asia have shown evidence of complex trade networks, urban centers, and advanced agricultural practices developed independently by local communities, challenging the notion that these societies were solely influenced by outside forces.⁴ In this way, the introduction of world religions was often a strategic move by local rulers to serve their own political interests, rather than being imposed by foreign entities. This is also extended to the adoption of Islam in the region, as evidenced by the King of Srivijaya's proactive approach in seeking knowledge about Islam long before the arrival of Middle Eastern missionaries.⁵

Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1968; H. G. Q. Wales, *The Making of Greater India: A Study in Southeast Asian Cultural Change*, London, Bernard Quaritch, 1951; R. C. Majumdar, *Kambuja-desa, or An Ancient Hindu Colony in Cambodia: Sir William Meyer Lectures 1942-43*, Madras, 1944; Frank E. Reynolds, "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Some Aspects of Buddhist Symbolism and Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell Smith, Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1978.

³Donn Bayard, "Excavation at Non Nok Tha, Northeastern Thailand, 1968: An Interim Report", *Asian Perspectives*, Volume 13 (1970), 109-143; Donn Bayard, "The Roots of Indochinese Civilisation: Recent Developments in the Prehistory of Southeast Asia", *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 53, Number 1 (1980), 89-114.

⁴Paul Wheatley, *Nāgara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions*, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1983; K. W. Taylor, "Nagara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 17, Issue 2 (1986), 366-370; O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, And Region In Southeast Asian Perspectives*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999; Amitav Acharya, *Civilizations in embrace: The spread of ideas and the transformation of power India and Southeast Asia in the classical age*, Nalanda-Srivijaya research series, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013.

⁵S. Q. Fatimi, "Two Letters from the Mahārājā to the Khalīfah: A Study in the Early History of Islam in the East", *Islamic Studies*, Volume 2, Number 1 (1963), 121-140; Mohd. N. A. Jalil, "The Roles of Malays in the Process of Islamization of the Malay World: A Preliminary Study", *International Journal of Nusantara Islam*, Volume 2, Number 2 (2015), 11-20.

The argument that the Islamization of the archipelago predominantly involved the initiatives of local actors helps establish a historical foundation for contemporary studies of Islam in Indonesia, which emphasize the authentic internal dynamics occurring among Muslims, rather than merely mirroring developments in the Middle East, as suggested by the prevailing narratives of colonial narratives.⁶ From the Sufi groups that played a crucial role in disseminating and adapting Islamic teachings to local contexts in the 14th century,⁷ to the 20th-century Salafi movements advocating for a purification of Islam in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah,⁸ and the women's movements striving for a more feminist interpretation of Islam,⁹ the social processes at play have always been intricate and not simply a replication of external trends.¹⁰

The objective of this study is to reassess the involvement of local actors in the Islamization process in Indonesia, specifically focusing on the Sultanates of Kutai Kertanegara and Paser in East Kalimantan. The present study

⁶Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, *Joining the Caravan?: The Middle East, Islamism, and Indonesia*, New South Wales: Lowy Institute, 2005; Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds*, Princeton N.J., Oxford England: Princeton University Press, 2011.

⁷Michael F. Laffan, *The makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the narration of a Sufi past*, Princeton studies in Muslim Politics, Princeton N.J., Oxford England: Princeton University Press, 2011; Michael F. Laffan, *Under empire: Muslim lives and loyalties across the Indian Ocean world, 1775-1945*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

⁸N. Hassan, *Lasykar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post New-Order Indonesia*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006.

⁹Nelly van Doorn-Harder, "The Indonesian Islamic Debate on a Woman President", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Volume 17, Number 2 (2002), 164-190; Susanne Schröter, ed., *Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia: Women's rights movements, religious resurgence and local traditions*, Women and Gender, Volume 12, Leiden, BRILL, 2013.

¹⁰R. M. Feener, *Islam in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, Santa Barbara Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2004; R. M. Feener and Terenjit Sevea, eds., *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2009; Juliana Finucane and R. M. Feener, *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*, Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2014; M. C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to Present*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2012.

adopts a cross-disciplinary corroborative strategy developed by Jennifer Mason from The University of Manchester,¹¹ utilizing archaeological discoveries and political History to authenticate mythological narratives concerning the involvement of local leaders in the Islamization of East Kalimantan. The study adopts the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) developed by German sociologist Reiner Keller, integrating Peter L. Berger's sociology of knowledge with Critical Discourse Analysis and Foucault's theories. This framework elucidates how societies evolve by blending normative daily interactions with repressive political tendencies.¹² In mainstream historical narratives, the Islamization of the archipelago is frequently portrayed in a fragmented manner, either as a wholly peaceful process (as noted by Azra) or as a militaristic endeavor (as suggested by Mujiburrahman and others).¹³ By applying this theory, the research reveals that the peaceful interpersonal and the violent political and military are intertwined processes of Islamization in East Kalimantan. This research is empirical in nature, with primary data collected through

¹¹Jennifer Mason, "Mixing Methods in a Qualitatively Driven Way," *Qualitative Research*, Volume 6, Number 1 (2006), 9-25; Jennifer Mason, "Six Strategies for Mixing Methods and Linking Data in Social Science Research," *REPEC Working Paper* id:2168, eSocialSciences (2009); Jennifer Mason, "Facet Methodology: the Case for an Inventive Research Orientation", *Methodological Innovations Online*, Volume 6, Number 3 (2011), 75-92.

¹²Reiner Keller, "Analysing Discourse: An Approach From the Sociology of Knowledge," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research/Sozialforschung*, Volume 6, Number 3 (2005), 223-242; Reiner Keller, "The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)," *Human Studies*, Volume 34, Number 1 (2011), 43-66; Reiner Keller, "Entering Discourses: A New Agenda for Qualitative Research and the Sociology of Knowledge," in *Discourse Research and Religion*, ed. Jay Johnston and Kocku Stuckrad, De Gruyter, 2020, 1-33. [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

¹³Azumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Honolulu, University of Hawai Press, 2004; Mujiburrahman, "Historical Dynamics of Inter-Religious Relations in South Kalimantan," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Volume 11, Number 1 (2017), 145-174; Rahmadi, "Membincang Proses Islamisasi di Kawasan Kalimantan Dari Berbagai Teori", *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora*, Volume 18, Number 2 (2020), 12-30; Samsir, "Masuk dan Berkembangnya Islam di Kerajaan Kutai Kartanegara", *Ri'ayah*, Volume 3, Number 2 (2018), 30-42.

fieldwork in Kutai Kertanegara and Paser, as well as interviews with local authorities and scholars.

Mainstream history: Islamization as an agenda of foreign preachers

The Islamization of Kutai Kertanegara occurred in the 16th century under the reign of the sixth King, Raja Mahkota Mulia Alam (1545-1610), who adopted Islam and changed his name to Aji Raja Mahkota Mulia Islam. The story is derived from the *Salasilah Kutai*, a legendary account (*Pujasastra*) detailing the rulers of Kutai Kertanegara from the Hindu to the Islamic periods.¹⁴ The chronicle recounts the arrival of two foreign missionaries to the Kutai Sultanate, where they sought to persuade the king to embrace Islam. Initially, the king rejected their proposal; however, he agreed to consider conversion if the missionaries could defeat him in a contest of supernatural abilities. The king then vanished from sight, but Tunggang Parangan succeeded in locating him. In a remarkable display, the king conjured a massive fire in the town square, yet Tunggang Parangan managed to extinguish the flames by invoking a torrential rain after performing a two-*rakaat* prayer. Ultimately, the king conceded defeat and agreed to accept Islam.

The Islamization of the Paser Kingdom, previously known as the Sadurengas Kingdom, is also rooted in mythological history. The story of this transformation is not supported by primary sources, but rather by the oral tradition of the Paser people,¹⁵ and fragments of secondary sources.¹⁶ According to the tale, the people of Sadurengas desired to establish a kingdom, but no one was willing to become the king due to their non-

¹⁴D. Adham, *Salasilah Kutai*, Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1981, 224-232.

¹⁵Puslitbang Lektur dan Khazanah Keagamaan Balitbang Kemenag, *Laporan Hasil Penulisan Sejarah Kesultanan Nusantara Kesultanan Paser Kalimantan Timur*, Jakarta: Balitbang Kemenag, 2013, 1-96.

¹⁶Muhammad Choirudin and Indah I. Ratnawati, "Nilai Budaya dalam Buku Cerita Rakyat Paser Dan Berau", *Basataka*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2018), 45-57.

royal lineage. One day, an elder from the tribe split a branch of Petung bamboo for firewood and discovered a large egg, which she kept at home in astonishment. That very night, the egg hatched, and a baby's cry filled the air. To everyone's surprise, the baby was revealed to be a girl. This baby girl was named Princess Petung (*Puteri Petong* in the local dialect). Due to the miraculous circumstances of her birth, Princess Petung was appointed as the ruler of the newly founded Sadurengas Kingdom.¹⁷

After Puteri Petung assumed power, a fleet of five ships bearing green flags from the Demak Kingdom arrived at the harbor of Sadurengas. These ships were led by Abu Mansur Indrajaya, a disciple of Sunan Giri from Gresik, East Java. Sunan Giri was one of the Nine Saints who played a significant role in spreading Islam in Java. The purpose of this group's visit was to invite the rulers of Sadurengas to embrace Islam. Abu Mansur Indrajaya achieved this by marrying Princess Petung.¹⁸ The marriage between Abu Mansur Indrajaya and Princess Petung resulted in the birth of three children.¹⁹

It is evident that the predominant narrative of the Islamization history in Kutai Kartanegara and Paser is based on mythological tales rather than factual accounts. According to the British historian Russel Jones, mythological narratives are common in the stories of Southeast Asian Islamization, which include Pasai, Malacca, Kedah, Patani, Demak, Banjar, Tallo, and Ternate.²⁰ In all these accounts, the local Kings embraced Islam

¹⁷Aquari Mustikawati, "Cerita Rakyat Masyarakat Penajam Paser Utara: Fakta Sejarah Kesultanan Kutai Kartanegara dan Kesultanan Paser", *Totobuang*, Volume. 4, Number 2 (2016), 177-189.

¹⁸Puslitbang Lektur dan Khazanah Keagamaan Balitbang Kemenag, *Laporan Hasil Penulisan Sejarah Kesultanan Nusantara Kesultanan Paser Kalimantan Timur*, Jakarta: Balitbang Kemenag, 2013, 1-96.

¹⁹M. Tahir, *Buku Sejarah Dakwah Islam di Kalimantan: Studi Pendekatan dan Jaringan*, Palembang: Bening Media Publishing, 2022, 128-129. Rahmadi, "Membincang Proses Islamisasi di Kawasan Kalimantan Dari Berbagai Teori", *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora*, Volume 18, Number 2 (2020), 273.

²⁰R. Jones, "Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979.

after being influenced by preachers from the Middle East.²¹ Another issue is dating, a crucial aspect of any historical study, and it often poses challenges due to varying sources. Dutch historian Eisenberger suggests that the reign of King Aji Mulia Alam took place between 1565 and 1605,²² D. Adham provides a timeframe of 1545-1610,²³ the Kutai Regional Government refers to the years 1525-1600,²⁴ while Rabitah Alawiyah put the year 1724, considering Tunggang Parangan an Arab and descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.²⁵ This also applies to the mythological history of Paser. Eisenberger places Islamization in 1569,²⁶ while Hikayat Banjar mentions the arrival of Demak troops, including Abu Mansur Indrajaya, in 1526.²⁷

Archaeological corroboration: traces of the legacy of Islamization

Two significant sites in the Kutai Kertanegara Sultanate may offer valuable opportunities for archeological analysis to verify their connection to Islamization. These sites include the Palace, where the Islamization story unfolded, and the tombs of key figures such as Raja Aji Mulia Alam, Tuan Tunggang Parangan, and Datuk Ri Bandang. The Palace is believed to be situated in Kutai Lama Village, Anggana Sub-District, within the Kutai

²¹Rahmadi, "Membincang Proses Islamisasi Di Kawasan Kalimantan dari Berbagai Teori", *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora*, Volume 18, Number 2 (2020), 279.

²²J. Eisenberger, *Kroniek der Zuider- en Oosterafdeeling van Borneo*, Bandjermasin: Liem Hwat Sing, 1936.

²³D. Adham, *Salasilah Kutai*, Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1981, 224-232.

²⁴Pemerintah Kabupaten Kutai Kertanegara, "Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Kutai Kartanegara 2016 Rah Kuta Nomor 2 Tahun 2016 tentang Pelestarian Adat Istiadat Kesultanan Kutai Kartanegara Martadipura Iadat Kesultanan Ing Martadipura," 2016.

²⁵Samsir, "Masuk dan Berkembangnya Islam di Kerajaan Kutai Kartanegara", *Ri'ayah*, Volume 3, Number 2 (2018), 30-42.

²⁶Eisenberger, Johan, and Jaar van Uitgave, *Kroniek der Zuider- en Oosterafdeeling van Borneo*, Drukker/Uitgever: Liem Hwat Sing, 1936.

²⁷Sahriansyah, *Sejarah Kesultanan dan Budaya Banjar*, Banjarmasin: IAIN Antasari Press, 2015; Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama: Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII-XVIII*, Jakarta: Kencana, (2018), 327.

Regency. Numerous remnants of ancient structures have been discovered in this village across various locations. However, the exact location of the Kutai Kertanegara Palace remains unknown, as no physical traces have survive. Over time, this area has transformed into a residential zone, making it challenging to gain a comprehensive understanding of the past *due to the transformation of the area into a residential zone, leading to obscured or destroyed archaeological traces.*

It is speculated that the Palace was located near the Mahakam River, suggesting that it may have been damaged or eroded by the river's overflowing currents.

In Kutai Lama, there are three remaining sites that serve as tombs. These tombs belong to King Mahkota Mulia Alam or Mulia Islam, his son King Aji Dilanggar, and the legendary figure Tunggang Parangan. Interestingly, these graves are situated close to each other, with only a few tens of meters separating them. The tomb of King Mahkota Mulia Islam is positioned at the highest point and is the farthest from the main road. Within the cupola of King Aji Mahkota's tomb, there are four tombstones. Two of these tombstones are crafted from ironwood, while the other two are made of white stone. Each stone tombstone is placed outside the wooden tombstone. The stone tombstone is adorned with decorative tendril motifs and the Majapahit solar symbol, whereas the wooden tombstone bears inscriptions in Arabic letters. Moving on to the tomb of Sultan Aji Dilanggar, it is located approximately 25 meters southwest of Raja Aji Mahkota's tomb. Similar to the previous tomb, this one also contains four tombstones: two reddish-white stone and two ironwood markers. The wooden tombstone in this tomb also features an inscription in Arabic letters. Notably, the grave of Sultan Aji Dilanggar remains well-preserved and maintained.

The Tunggang Parangan Tomb can be found at the bottom and closest to the main road. In comparison to the previous King's tombs, this tomb

is the smallest. The interior of the tomb also differs slightly from the two previous King's tombs. The Tunggang Parangan tomb features verses from the Qur'an and prayers written on frames, which are placed around the tomb. Positioned at the front of the tomb is a prominent signboard that bears the inscription: "Tomb of Habib Hasyim bin Musaiyah (Tunggang Parangan)." The title of Habib in front of Tunggang Parangan's name serves as confirmation that he is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad with Arab heritage.²⁸ On the other hand, Tuanku Ri Bandang, who accompanied Tunggang Parangan, was a preacher from Minangkabau and successfully converted several Kings to Islam in Sulawesi, and his final resting place is located in the Kaluku Bodoa Village, Tallo Sub-District, Makassar City.²⁹

In contrast to Kutai, where traces of Islamization can still be found, the search for archaeological remnants in the Paser Sultanate reveals minimal evidence. The original capital of the Sadurengas Kingdom was situated in Lempesu Village, Grogot Sub-District, Paser Regency. The name Sadurengas is derived from the combination of two rivers, Sadu and Rengas. This location is where Princess Petung was crowned as the first ruler of the Sadurengas Kingdom and married Abu Mansur Indrajaya. Within Lempesu, there are remnants of several ancient structures, one of which is a pillar resembling a building support. Unfortunately, the site is located in dense forest, hindering efforts to determine if other parts of the structure are connected to the pillar. The Sadurengas Museum officials have not conducted any research to assess the condition of the remains

²⁸Rahmadi, "Membincang Proses Islamisasi di Kawasan Kalimantan dari Berbagai Teori", *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora*, Volume 18, Number 2 (2020), 12-30.

²⁹Hamzah H. Al-Rasyid and Husnul F. Ilyas, "Islamic Scholars' Network in South Sulawesi at the 20th Century: A Note in Wajo and Soppeng", *Al-Qalam Jurnal Penelitian Agama dan Sosial Budaya*, Volume 28, Number 1 (2022), 1-14; Irwan Abbas, Darmawijaya, and Mohamad Na'im, "Minang Ulama and Religious Conversions In South Sulawesi and North Mollucas", *International Journal of Humanities Education and Social Sciences (IJHESS)*, Volume 2, Number 2 (2022), 419-429.

of the old Palace of the Sadurengas Kingdom. No burial sites have been discovered for Puteri Petung or Abu Mansyur Indrajaya in this region. Local residents believe that several locations, such as the Pasir Mayang beach area and Puteri Petung Baths, are shrines of Puteri Petung. Nonetheless, no verified burial sites have been located in either location.

The sole artifact associated with this ancient tale is the Indra Giri Stone, a collection of stones slightly larger than an adult human's fist situated near the Paser Balengkong palace. These stones are believed to be remnants of the ballast stone from Abu Mansur Indrajaya's ship. However, the Paser Balengkong Palace Museum's management is unable to provide precise details regarding the stones' origin and whether they date back to the Sadurengas kingdom era. One remaining tomb is that of Sayyid Ahmad Khairuddin, also known as Datuk Pasir Mayang, located in Pasir Mayang Village, Kuaro Sub-District, Paser Regency. Archaeological findings in the Paser Kingdom, as well as the Kutai Kertanegara Kingdom, offer further evidence supporting the historical significance of key figures in the Islamization process. Their contributions to Islamization become more apparent when considering the political science aspects related to power centralization and consolidation during that period.

Political corroboration: the role of local rulers

The maritime trade network in the Southeast Asia region is highly active, both within the region's islands and between countries internationally. Nevertheless, historians have observed that Kalimantan failed to emerge as a major trading hub during the pre-colonial era due to widespread piracy.³⁰ This situation is ironic considering that Kalimantan was strategically located between the Strait of Malacca, a major trading center in the region,

³⁰Xu Ke, "Contemporary Maritime Piracy in Southeast Asia", Doctoral, Southeast Asian Studies Program: National University of Singapore, 2006.

and the eastern islands, which were the primary producers of spices.³¹ Some scholars argue that the piracy was merely a tactic employed by colonial powers to discredit the local population, including the coast guards who intercepted unauthorized trading vessels.³² However, numerous historical records confirm the existence of these pirates, as reported by Chinese sailors, Europeans, and colonial governments.³³ Many individuals from the Tidung, Bajau, Mandar, and Bugis tribes turned to piracy, often receiving protection from smaller kingdoms like Paser and Tanah Bumbu.³⁴ The absence of a sufficiently strong kingdom to maintain control over the situation was the main factor contributing to the rampant piracy in the waters of Kalimantan.³⁵

Before the establishment of Kutai Kertanegara, there were several small ports along the coastal area of East Kalimantan that facilitated trade between local residents and inter-island traders. These ports were primarily used for the exchange of commodities such as camphor and swallow's nests, which were highly sought after by international traders. However, once Kutai Kertanegara was founded, it took control of and closed down these small ports, leaving only the capital, Kutai Kertanegara, located at the mouth of the Mahakam River, as the main inter-island trade port.³⁶ Subsequently, the kingdom expanded its influence to surrounding areas including Penyuangan, Sangasangaan, Kembang, Sungai Samir, Dundang,

³¹Kenneth R. Hall, *A history of early Southeast Asia: Maritime trade and societal development, 100-1500*, Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

³²Adrian B. Lopian, *Orang Laut, Bajak Laut, Raja Laut: Sejarah Kawasan Laut Sulawesi Abad XIX*, Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009.

³³Andi Nuralang, "Arsip Belanda Pada Kasus-Kasus Perompakan di Kalimantan," *Naditira Widy*, Volume 2, Number 2, Balai Arkeologi Banjarmasin, (2008), 200-212.

³⁴Ger Teitler, "Piracy in Southeast Asia A Historical Comparison", accessed December 23, (2023), 67-83, www.marecentre.nl/mast/documents/GerTeitler.pdf.

³⁵Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Tumenggongs and the Development of Johor Singapore 1784-1881*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2013.

³⁶Kenneth R. Hall, *A history of early Southeast Asia: Maritime trade and societal development, 100-1500*, Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

Manggar, Sabuni, Tanah Merah, the trade railing, Tanah Malang, and also ventured inland to conquer Pulau Atas, Karang Asam, Karang Mumus, Mangkupalas, Loa Bakung, and Sambuyutan.³⁷ Following its conversion to Islam, the Kutai Kertanegara kingdom went on to conquer the Kutai Mulawarman kingdom in Martapura, and the two kingdoms were united under the name Kutai Kertanegara ing Martapura.³⁸

During this period, the intertwining of political and economic conquest with cultural and spiritual domination was a common occurrence.³⁹ The unique nature of the Southeast Asian region lies in the involvement of political and spiritual authority in such conquests.⁴⁰ Traces of this centralized ceremony can be observed in the biannual Erau festival held in the Kutai Sultanate, which is a testament to the Hindu era that endured until the Islamic era.⁴¹ The Erau festival incorporates elements from Hindu, Dayak, and Malay Islamic cultural heritages.⁴² One of its key components is the *Bapelas* ritual, which involves the worship of the King's body and soul, enabling him to fulfill his role as a leader who safeguards and blesses all his people.⁴³ Through the Erau festival, the King's power and authority are reaffirmed by the integration of ritual elements from

³⁷D. Adham, *Salasilah Kutai*, Jakarta, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, (1981), 224-232.

³⁸Muhammad Sarip, *Dari Jaitan Layar Ke Tepian Pandan: Sejarah Tujuh Abad Kerajaan Kutai Kertanegara*, Samarinda, Pustaka Horizon, 2020.

³⁹O. W. Wolters, *Early Southeast Asia Selected Essays*, Cornell University, Ithaca: New York, 2008, 2-21.

⁴⁰Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, eds., *Early interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on cross-cultural exchange*, Nalanda-Sriwijaya, Series 2, Singapore, New Delhi, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Manohar India, 2011.

⁴¹Hadinata et al., "Nilai-Nilai Islam Dalam Tradisi Erau Kutai Kartanegara", *Pusaka Jurnal Khazanah Keagamaan*, Volume 11, Number 2 (2023), 287-298.

⁴²Ulum Janah and Rosdiana, Indriastuty, Nina, "Makna Simbol Nilai Kebangsaan dalam Perayaan Erau" *Journal of Culture, Arts, Literature, and Linguistics*, Volume 4, Number 2 (2018), 123-140.

⁴³Emmy Sundari et al., "Reduplikasi Upacara Adat Bapelas Sebagai Simbol Kekuasaan Kerajaan Kutai Kartanegara", *Jurnal Panggung*, Volume 31, Number 3 (2021), 319-330.

all cultures within the kingdom, including the ruling class, the central population, and groups from the hinterland.⁴⁴

The processes of “localization”⁴⁵ and the acculturation of Islam with local cultures are thus integral to efforts to establish and reinforcing power. In its development, the Kutai Sultanate compiled the Panji Salatin, a legal code that harmonizes Islamic teachings with local traditions. It is noted that the authority of the king is founded upon Islamic law and customary practices (*Syara Menaiki, Adat Menuruni*—Islamic law ascending and customs descending), where Islamic teachings serve as the moral and legal framework for governance, while customs act as a means of communication between the rulers and the populace.⁴⁶ In addition to the elite celebrations of erau, pre-Islamic cultural practices are also preserved at the grassroots level, such as the Selimpat tradition, which consists of a series of rituals (similar to Selamatan) marking various life stages, from conception to death.⁴⁷ From a normative-doctrinal perspective, this situation may pose challenges and could potentially provoke calls for purification, similar to movements observed in other regions of Indonesia.⁴⁸

By contrast, a more historical analysis reveals that the process of Islamization in the Sadurengas kingdom, later known as the Paser Sultanate, was closely intertwined with local political dynamics. The

⁴⁴M. Y. Sani, “Era: Ritual Politik dan Kekuasaan”, *Jurnal “Al-Qalam”* Volume 18, Number 2 (2012), 297-309.

⁴⁵O. W. Wolters, *Early Southeast Asia...*, 2-21.

⁴⁶Makmun Syar’i, “Undang-Undang Panji Selaten Dan Beraja Niti Tentang Hukum Islam Di Kesultanan Kutai Kertanegara”, *Islamica*, Volume 5, Number 1 (2010), 142-151; Iskandar and Materan, “Nilai Kearifan Lokal dalam Naskah Panji Salatin (Refleksi Filologis Manuskrip Kesultanan Kutai Kartanegara)”, *Fenomena: Jurnal Penelitian*, Volume 13, Number 2 (2021), 103-118.

⁴⁷Santri Ayu, Materan, and Muzayyin Ahyar, “Selimpat: Antara Tradisi Lokal dan Normatifitas Islam dalam Masyarakat Kutai”, *Pusaka: Jurnal Khazanah Keagamaan*, Volume 10, Number 1 (2022), 125-139.

⁴⁸N. Hassan, *Lasykar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post New-Order Indonesia*, Leiden: University of Utrecht, 2005.

establishment of the Sadurengas kingdom originated from the escape of a group of nobles from the Kuripan Kingdom in South Kalimantan following their defeat in the Civil War.⁴⁹ This civil war was triggered by King Sukarama's decision to appoint his grandson, Prince Samudera, as his potential successor, despite having sons. Following King Sukarama's death, Prince Samudera was forced to flee due to threats from his uncles.⁵⁰ Prince Samudera sought assistance from the Demak. The King of Demak agreed to help Prince Samudera on the condition that he convert to Islam. Prince Samudera agreed to the terms, and with the support of Demak forces, he successfully regained the throne in 1526, adopting Islam and assuming the title *Sultan Suriansyah (also known as Suryanullah)*.⁵¹

During the expedition to South Kalimantan, a thousand troops from Demak, led by Katib Dayan, were sent to assist the Banjarmasin kingdom.⁵² The army then proceeded eastwards towards Sadurengas and Tanah Bumbu, which were under the authority of the Banjar kingdom.⁵³ Abu Mansyur Indrajaya, a prominent Demak envoy, married Princess Petung, the ruler of the Sadurengas Kingdom, and converted her to Islam.⁵⁴ The decision of the Paser ruler to embrace Islam was seen as a political necessity. By adopting Islam, which originated from Demak, they could stand on equal footing with the more powerful Banjar and Kutai kingdoms,

⁴⁹Wahyu I. Putra, "Peran Lembaga Adat Paser Dalam Pelestarian Nilai-Nilai Sosial Budaya Lokal Di Kabupaten Paser Kalimantan Timur", Magister, Program Pasca Sarjana, Universitas Negeri Makassar, 2017.

⁵⁰Ita S. Ahyat, "Perkembangan Islam di Kesultanan Banjarmasin", *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, Volume 10, Number 2 (2012), 233-248.

⁵¹Johannes J. Ras, *Hikayat Banjar: Penterjemah Siti Hawa Saleh*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1990.

⁵²Rahmadi, "Membincang Proses Islamisasi...", 12-30.

⁵³Ita S. Ahyat, "Perkembangan Islam di Kesultanan Banjarmasin", *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, Volume 10, Number 2 (2012), 233-248.

⁵⁴Puslitbang Lektur dan Khazanah Keagamaan Balitbang Kemenag, *Laporan Hasil Penulisan Sejarah Kesultanan Nusantara Kesultanan Paser Kalimantan Timur*, Jakarta: Balitbang Kemenag, 2013, 1-96.

and be shielded from potential invasions.⁵⁵ Additionally, their Islamic identity would facilitate their engagement with the inter-island trade networks dominated by Islamic realms in Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi.⁵⁶ Furthermore, this move might help dispel any allegations of them being a haven for pirates. The Sadurengas Kingdom had long been associated with piracy, and by embracing Islam, they aimed to shed this negative image.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the Islamization of East Kalimantan is more intricate than mainstream historical myths suggest. It challenges the notion that Islam was brought to the region solely by Middle Eastern preachers aiming to spread the religion, while the local community simply accepted it passively. Through the use of corroborative cross-disciplinary methods, such as archaeological and political science approaches, this study demonstrates that it was the local rulers and elites who initiated the adoption of Islam. In the case of Kutai Kertanegara, the Islamization described by Tunggang Parangan can be supported by archaeological evidence, as the main characters in the story are historical figures whose graves have been found. However, in the case of Paser, the available evidence is not as extensive and cannot be used to prove the historicity of Islamization. Additionally, the study shows that the Islamization in Kutai Kertanegara coincided with the centralization of economic and political power in the lower Mahakam area, as evidenced by local political records. On the other hand, the Islamization in Paser was a political decision aimed at aligning with the Banjar and Kutai Kingdoms and establishing better

⁵⁵Puslitbang Lektur dan Khazanah Keagamaan Balitbang Kemenag, *Laporan Hasil Penulisan Sejarah Kesultanan Nusantara Kesultanan Paser Kalimantan Timur*, Jakarta: Balitbang Kemenag, 2013, 1-96.

⁵⁶Victor Lieberman, "Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830". *Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands Volume 2*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

relations with regional trade networks dominated by Muslim traders.

From a broader perspective, the process of Islamization through political and military mechanisms, which reflects the initiatives of local actors, is a theme observed in numerous cases across the archipelago. For instance, the Islamization of the Gowa-Talo kingdom by Datuk Ri Bandang and Datuk Patimang evolved into a strategy for promoting Islam in South Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara.⁵⁷ A similar case is observed in Banjar, where the Demak Sultanate agreed to assist Prince Samudra in a civil war on the condition that he embraced Islam.⁵⁸ Likewise, in Java, the Mataram Islamic kingdom's expansion into East Java revealed a complex intertwining of economic, political, and military interests with the objectives of Islamic propagation.⁵⁹

These research findings carry two significant implications. Firstly, it is imperative to critically analyze the conceptual framework of the historical narrative of Islamization in Indonesia. Traditionally, this narrative has portrayed Islamization as being solely driven by Middle Eastern preachers, while local communities played a passive role. This perspective echoes colonial scholarship during the 19th and early 20th centuries, which considered local Indonesian people as backward. It believed that progress could only be achieved through the influence of more advanced civilizations. Secondly, this study presents an exemplar of

⁵⁷Abbas, Darmawijaya, and Na'im, "Minang Ulama's And Religious Conversions In South Sulawesi And North Mollucas", Volume 2, Number 2 (2022), 419-429; Hamzah Harun Al-Rasyid and Husnul Fahima Ilyas, "Islamic Scholars' Network in South Sulawesi at the 20th Century: A Note in Wajo and Soppeng", *Al-Qalam*, Volume 28, Number 1 (2022), 1-14; Bahtiar, "Orang Melayu di Sulawesi Selatan," *Walasuji*, Volume 9, Number 2 (2018), 237-387.

⁵⁸Mujiburrahman, "Historical Dynamics of Inter-Religious Relations in South Kalimantan," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Volume 11, Number 1, (2017), 145-174.

⁵⁹M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since C.1200*, 3rd ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001; Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions (c. 1830-1930)*; Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to Present*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2012.

conducting cross-disciplinary investigations in a corroborative manner. It demonstrates the potential to enhance local historical narratives, which often suffer from a dearth of written sources and are frequently regarded as inferior. By employing verification and falsification techniques from other fields such as archaeology and political science, these narratives can be fortified and validated.

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