



RONIT RICCI

The Serat Samud within and Beyond Javanese Palace Circles

AGUS SUHERMAN

Wawacan Pandita Sawang sebagai Naskah Keagamaan: Tinjauan Kedudukan dan Fungsi

NINING SUDIAR, FIQRU MAFAR, ROSMAN H. Dari Pdf ke *Flipping Manuscript*: Upaya Kemas Ulang Hasil Digitalisasi Naskah Kuno Melayu di Provinsi Riau | ARSANTI WULANDARI Pujangga (Kraton) Jawa vs Agen dalam Pandangan Bordieu | ALFAN FIRMANTO Unsur Fotografis dalam Naskah Klasik (Pengalaman Puslitbang Lektur Keagamaan) | MASHURI Kesejarahan Desa-desa Pesisir dalam *Serat Sindujoyo* | DIAH AYU AGUSTINA Menguak Sejarah Bangsa lewat Titimangsa Naskah.

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Ronit Ricci

The *Serat Samud* Within and Beyond Javanese Palace Circles

Abstract: This paper discusses about Javanese text *Serat Samud* or *Suluk Samud*. The story tells about Jewish scholar, Samud Ibnu Salam who make some dialogues with prophet Muhammad. It was translated from Arabic into Javanese since 17c. There are many versions in archipelago, include Malay, Bugis, Arabic and Makassar. If its compared with another textual traditions, and this can be understood as evidence that *Serat Samud* indeed is considered important by the community of Java in the past. The text copied and read in the Javanese court, including the Palace of Surakarta and Pakualaman duchy. From the other side, its clear that the text copied outside palace, like in village and *pesantren*. This paper will formulate our ideas about presence or absence of boundaries between inside and outside of the palace of Java in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Keywords: *Serat Samud*, Palace, Javanese Literature, Javanese Palace Circles.

Abstrak: Artikel ini membicarakan teks Jawa yang berjudul *Serat Samud* atau *Suluk Samud*. Cerita teks ini mengenai seorang pandhita Yahudi bernama Samud Ibnu Salam yang berdialog dengan Nabi Muhammad. Cerita ini diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Jawa sekitar abad ke-17, kiranya dari bahasa Arab. Di Nusantara terdapat banyak versi, termasuk dalam bahasa Melayu, Bugis, Arab dan Makassar, dan ini bisa dipahami sebagai bukti bahwa *Serat Samud* memang dianggap penting oleh masyarakat Jawa di masa lampau. *Serat Samud* disalin dan dibaca di lingkungan istana Jawa, termasuk Keraton Surakarta and Kadipaten Pakualaman. Dari sisi lain, jelas juga bahwa banyak naskah *Serat Samud* disalin di luar keraton dan istana, di desa dan di pesantren. Tulisan ini merumuskan ide-ide kita mengenai ada tidaknya semacam batasan antara keraton dan non-keraton di Jawa selama abad kedelapan dan kesembilan belas.

Kata Kunci: *Serat Samud*, Keraton, Sastra Jawa, Lingkaran Keraton Jawa.

This paper explores a story that has been well known across the Muslim world for many centuries. Titled *The Book of One Thousand Questions* (hence the *One Thousand Questions*) in a range of languages and *Serat Samud* in Java, it began as a brief account in Arabic of an encounter between the Prophet Muhammad and a Jewish man and gradually grew, over the centuries, into an encyclopedic text that addresses many aspects of Islamic ritual, theology and history. As it circulated across geographical distance and through time, the story was adapted to suit and reflect a variety of perspectives and agendas.

I first introduce the ‘big picture’ history of this story, then focus on its tellings and history in Java where it underwent significant transformations between the late 17th and early 20th centuries. Exploring the history of a textual tradition like the *One Thousand Questions* offers important insights into broader cultural, religious and linguistic shifts. It also raises questions about our understanding and categorization of stories, literary genres, authorship and production sites. Although many *Samud* texts were produced in Javanese court circles it is clear that others were written outside that context and had non-*kraton* scribes and audiences. Finding very similar texts in a range of production sites can make us question the viability of an assumed *kraton*/non-*kraton* divide, but it can also encourage us to consider how similar texts may have been read and understood differently across different Javanese contexts¹

More broadly, the study of a textual tradition like the Javanese *Samud* texts offers insights and in turn raises questions about a wide range of issues related to manuscript production, writing practices, religious attitudes and intellectual history on Java.

The frame story of this textual tradition is straightforward: an important Jewish leader in seventh-century Arabia, known in most tellings as Abdullah Ibnu Salam, challenges the Prophet Muhammad with a series of questions, is convinced by the answers, and then converts to Islam. The tenth century Arabic work known as *Kitāb Masā’il ‘Abdallāh Bin Salām* grew out of several centuries of prior texts, circulating in the form of hadith traditions and Qur’anic commentaries.

The tradition of encounters between Muhammad and the Jews

1 This paper draws on Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

goes back to Qur'anic passages in which the Prophet is informed about questions he might be asked and told their correct replies. Muslim commentators have interpreted the questions as being posed by challenging Jews, and a reference to a Jewish convert to Islam has been taken to allude to Ibnu Salam, the protagonist of the *One Thousand Questions*.² The Qur'anic citations were later elaborated by some of the earliest writers of Islamic history, including Ibn Hishām, Muslim, and al-Ṭabarī. These hadith writings typically relate that Ibnu Salam heard of the Prophet's coming while he was picking dates, and that he went to meet him and asked three questions which he believed only a prophet could answer. When Muhammad replied correctly, Ibnu Salam converted on the spot.³ And so, although the Arabic text of the *One Thousand Questions* dates from the tenth century, hadith tradition locates the germ of the story in the very early and formative period of Islam, and in the context of its most sacred scripture.

With time, the Ibnu Salam accounts acquired an element central to the *One Thousand Questions*, that of questioning the Prophet and viewing his replies as a sign of his Truth. Whereas in the ninth century Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī collection only three questions by Ibnu Salam are mentioned, gradually their number multiplied until no less than a thousand were said to have been posed. No longer relegated to brief hadith narratives, the tale of Ibnu Salam had evolved into a full-fledged textual tradition. Since all tellings of the *One Thousand Questions* derive their existence, however indirectly, from the early Arabic narrative of Ibnu Salam's debate with the Prophet, and especially because the Javanese tellings seem closely linked to it, I summarize the history of this Arabic corpus briefly below.

The Questions of 'Abdallah bin Salām in Arabic

An Arabic work depicting the dialogue between the Prophet and Ibnu Salam was first mentioned in the year 963, when the Samanid vizier al-Bal'ami drew on it for his Persian version of al-Ṭabarī's *Annals*

² For an example of the questions see Qur'an 17: 85; on the Jewish convert see Qur'an 46:10.

³ Muhammad ibn Abd Allah al-Khatib Tibrīzī, *Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābiḥ*, trans. James D. Robson, 4 vols. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964) 1272.

of Apostles and Kings (A. *Tārīkh-ur-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*).⁴ The Arabic text appears to have survived in two forms: as a self-standing work, available in manuscripts and in print, and as a part of the well-known cosmography compilation by Ibn al-Wardi, The Pearl of Wonders (A. *Kharidat al 'Aja'ib*). Numerous manuscripts of the latter are found in libraries across Europe with the earliest dated from the mid sixteenth century. Many Arabic tellings of the text as a self-standing work survive in manuscript form, preserved in Algiers, Berlin, Oxford, Paris, and elsewhere.

Of special note is a manuscript found in Jakarta: the *One Thousand Questions* telling within it is undated, but another work appearing in the same volume and written by the same hand is dated 1711, strongly suggesting that the *One Thousand Questions*, in Arabic, was known already at this early date in the Archipelago.⁵ Several Arabic print editions were published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Cairo.

Beyond Arabic

Interestingly, the first translation of the Arabic text was not into another Muslim language but into Latin, as part of Peter the Venerable's twelfth-century translation scheme. His project encouraged acquaintance with, and study of Muslim religious doctrine and literature in Christian Europe, engaged in the Crusades at the time. The project, known today as the "Toledo Collection," included five texts, among them the Qur'an (in its first complete translation ever) and the *One Thousand Questions*, translated by Herman of Dalmatia in 1143 as *Doctrina Mahumet*. The Latin version of the text was then translated into several European languages. Pijper mentions translations into Portuguese and Dutch, while Bobzin found a Dutch edition printed in Amsterdam in 1658 as well as Italian (n.d.), German (1540), and French (1625) translations. The only known English translation was based on a North African Arabic text and produced by the Reverend N. Davis, a missionary of the Church of Scotland. His translation, suggestively titled *The Errors of Mohammedanism Exposed: or, A Dialogue Between the Arabian Prophet*

4 For this summary I draw on Guillaume Frederic Pijper, *Het boek der duizend vragen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1924), 35–54.

5 MS. Nr 553. Referenced in Ph. S. van Ronkel, ed., *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts Preserved in the Museum of the Batavia Society of Arts and Sciences* (Batavia and the Hague: Albrecht and Co. and Martinus Nijhoff, 1913), 323.

and a Jew, was published in Malta in 1847.⁶

Persian tellings, including those produced in South India, are important links in the history of the One Thousand Questions. The Persian texts include several additions when compared with the Arabic, most prominent among them the setting of the number of questions as one thousand, a feature that was transmitted in many translations. The Persian word *hazār* means not only “one thousand” but, generally, a great number, which may be what the translator wished to emphasize. In addition, the three pre-Qur’anic scriptures—*tawrat* (also referred to as *toret*, Torah), *sabur* (Psalms), *injl* (the Gospels)—are listed, and Abdullah is accompanied to the debate by seven hundred Jewish followers. A Turkish manuscript from 1559, known as *Kerk Sual* (“Forty Questions”), may be based on a Persian telling.⁷ In it Muhammad begins his replies to the Jews by saying “if you ask . . . then the answer is . . .”—probably harking back to and echoing the Qur’anic questions mentioned above.

Besides translations into Persian that were produced in India, the text was also translated in that country into Tamil (16th c.) and Urdu (19th c.). In the Indonesian Archipelago, the focus of my talk today, the text appeared in Sundanese and Buginese in addition to the tellings in Javanese and Malay.⁸

Javanese Tellings of Ibnu Salam’s Encounter with the Prophet

The Book of *One Thousand Question* is named in Javanese for its Jewish protagonist Samud Ibnu Salam. Known in most cases as *Serat Samud* or *Suluk Samud*, it tells a story of both continuity and change. As in other tellings, Samud’s identity within the narrative changes markedly following his encounter with the Prophet Muhammad and his subsequent conversion. In addition the story itself, as told in Java, was dramatically transformed both across time and in relation to its tellings in other, neighboring cultures.

Such transformations of the *One Thousand Questions’* in Java

6 N. Davis, *The Errors of Mohammedanism Exposed or, a Dialogue between the Arabian Prophet and a Jew* (Malta: G. Muir, 1847).

7 Pijper, *Het boek der duizend vragen*, 64–67.

8 E. P. Wieringa, Joan de Lijster-Streef, and Jan Just Witkam, eds., *Catalogue of Malay and Minangkabau Manuscripts: In the Library of Leiden University and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Legatum Warnerianum in Leiden University Library, 1998), 188.

point to the ways in which Javanese Muslims, as members of larger communities in their region and beyond, were shaping and reshaping their literary works in accordance with developments in the religious and cultural spheres both at home and in Islam's distant lands. Authors continued to present their audiences with a story famous across the Muslim world, thus connecting them to many others familiar with Ibnu Salam's dialogue with the Prophet. Concurrently, and to an increasing degree throughout the nineteenth century, they formulated a message relevant for the particular period and place in which they lived.

The shifts in the Ibnu Salam narrative in Java exemplify a broader trend through which Islamic texts were often reconfigured in order to emphasize the local forms of a global religion. Ongoing tensions related to the depth of engagement with Arabic or Arabic-derived sources and their thought-world, as well as to a continuing involvement with pre-Islamic practices central to Javanese life of the kind apparent in the Samud texts and other Javanese works, underscore the complexities and ambiguities of Islamic life and cultural production in Java.

Attesting to its popularity, the *Samud* corpus survives in at least two dozen manuscripts, but there are likely to be many more yet unknown to scholars. These manuscripts date from the late seventeenth century to the 1930s. Most texts in the corpus share the following elements: a Jew named Samud Ibnu Salam questions the Prophet Muhammad on many topics that relate to Islam; the Prophet replies to all questions, at times at length, at others very briefly; central themes raised in the dialogue include God's unity, teachings of the "seven grades of being" (*J. martabat pitu*), cosmology, rituals, genealogies of the prophets and segments of their histories, death and its aftermath, and parallel mappings of prophets, days of the week, and the letters of the alphabet on the human body. The language is quite consistent across the corpus and includes many repetitive phrases as Samud and Muhammad address each other. Titles of these manuscripts vary somewhat, but the name Samud is an important identifying marker.

The earliest manuscript extant is the Leiden Samud (MS. LOR 4001), dating from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries.

Its production site may well have been along Java's north coast.⁹ In the footsteps of this early manuscript came others, several of which mention the date of their copying, including a 1823 Samud fragment from the Karaton Surakarta that is a copy of a manuscript belonging to a man of Palembang in southern Sumatra and that attributes its teachings to Raden Rahmat of east Java, and the 1835 Serat Suluk Samud, likely produced in west Java.¹⁰ Additional Samud texts were inscribed in Java throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the story of Sèh Ngabdulsalam published by Albert Rusche and Co. in Surakarta in 1913, introducing it through the print medium to a much larger potential audience than it had previously enjoyed.

From the little information—explicit and implicit—found in these manuscripts, we can begin mapping the circulation of the *One Thousand Questions* in Java over the course of at least two centuries: most extant copies were produced in central Java, most notably in Surakarta, but the story was known also along the northern coast and in Cirebon to the west.

Despite the questions still surrounding the precise translation history of the *One Thousand Questions* into Javanese, it is very likely that at least some of its tellings, including the earliest extant, were translated directly from an Arabic source rather than a Persian or Malay one. An eighteenth-century Arabic manuscript of the One Thousand Questions found in Batavia, mentioned above, testifies to an acquaintance in the Archipelago with the story in Arabic at that early date. In terms of content, the number of questions in Arabic tellings since at least the twelfth century has remained at one thousand four hundred and four, whereas in Persian, Malay, and Tamil it is consistently mentioned as one thousand. Ali, who in early Arabic tellings is depicted as greeting the Jews, often appears as the bearer of Muhammad's letter inviting them to Islam in Javanese tellings but is only rarely mentioned in Malay ones. A question about why some children resemble their father while others resemble their mother is common to the *One Thousand Questions* in

9 G. W. J. Drewes, "Javanese Versions of The 'Questions of 'Abdallah B. Salam,'" *BKI* 142 (1986): 326; Theodore G. T. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967–70), 2: 118.

10 Samud fragment in *Para Nabi Nerangaken Bab Rijal Saha Sanès-Sanèsipun*, Karaton Surakarta Library, Surakarta, 1823 [?], MS. KS 339.1, and *Serat Suluk Samud*, Yogyakarta: Museum Sonobudoyo Library, 1835, MS. MSB P 207, respectively.

Arabic and Javanese, but not in Malay and other languages. On the final page of the Javanese Leiden manuscript we find a statement of a type that is unusual in Javanese works, most often silent regarding matters of authorship and translation. The statement relates to the text's translation history, indicating it was translated into Javanese from Arabic or that it originated in the Arab lands (*J. saka ngarabi*)—but the former possibility is more likely.

A Shifting Agenda

In the early Samud we find an emphasis on narrative detail, stories, rituals and the central role of the Prophet. In addition, Samud's Jewish identity, his wisdom and leadership position amongst his people are highlighted, portraying him as a worthy opponent for Muhammad. Both men draw heavily on the toret, the Jewish scripture, for their debate. It is the source of Samud's questions and the Prophet's replies, stressing a shared, if differently-interpreted heritage. Later Samud tellings, however, take on a different emphasis and tone as the One Thousand Questions evolved into a work centered on mystical teachings that were central to Javanese Islam.

At the core of the Book in many of its Javanese variants are the teachings of *wahdāt al wujūd* or Unity of Being, teachings which were elaborated by Ibn al Arabi in the 13th century and introduced to Indonesia in the latter part of the 16th century by Hamzah Fansuri, the poet from Sumatra who wrote in Malay.¹¹ Most broadly, these teachings attempted to grapple with the ontological relationship between God and the world (and man in particular) and address the question of whether they are one and the same, distinct from each another, or both.

Central to debates over this matter in Indonesia was the formulation of the mystical doctrine of the “seven grades of being”, or “seven grades of emanation” (*J. martabat pitu*). Adapted from Ibn al- Arabi via several channels these were probably developed by Syamsuddin as-Sumatrani (d. 1630) from the *Tuḥfa*, an important Arabic work composed by the Indian author Ibn Fadlillah of Gujerat (d. 1620) and retold in Malay and Javanese. At their heart was the idea that God is Being, and that “this

11 I use Indonesia anachronistically here, for the sake of clarity.

Being proceeds to the visible world through six stages of emanation but is involved in no change thereby".¹²

Despite criticism surrounding the concept of *wahdāt al wujūd* it is, in fact, the fundamental and central doctrine of all kinds of Sufism."¹³ Scholars in the Malay-Indonesian world continued to embrace and debate it throughout the eighteenth, and into the nineteenth centuries, among them popular, highly respected teachers like al-Palimbani and al-Fatani. Controversies about *wahdāt al wujūd* most often centered on the risk of it being misunderstood, misinterpreted and spread among those likely to take it, mistakenly, at face value, leading to pantheistic beliefs. One of the avenues by which these teachings were expressed, explored and disseminated in Javanese was by way of a literary genre known as *suluk*, one of which more popular formats took the shape of a question and answer dialogue (between husband and wife, master and slave, teacher and disciple). With time the Javanese *One Thousand Questions* gradually transformed into one such *suluk* within a vast repository.

The Ibnu Salam story is defined as *suluk* by its title in several Javanese versions. It is easy to see why its frame story fits so well with the *suluk* genre in Javanese: the question and answer format was built-in to the story as it came to Java; the pair in dialogue is in a relationship of teacher and disciple, however atypical as it involves the Prophet himself and a respected leader of another faith; and the issues raised and discussed are Islamic – and heavily mystical – in nature.

To see more clearly how the text was altered and shaped by the particular teachings it emphasizes, we may look to the way certain questions, or rather their answers, are formulated in the *Serat Suluk Samud*. An example of a reply that expounds on these teachings is found in one that explains the meaning of heaven and hell. Whereas other non-*suluk* versions of the text give long descriptions of what awaits humans destined for either fate, in the *Serat Suluk Samud* text the Prophet

12 A. H Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1965). 6. The influence of these teachings spread in Sumatra and Java, including in their literatures, until the 19th century, appearing in works like *Centhini* and *Wirid Hidayat Jati* and were also supported by the Mataram kings of Java. See Simuh, "Gerakan Kaum Shufi," *Prisma* 11 (1985). 79.

13 Azyumardi 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'i Press, 2004). 138.

explains that true heaven is the pleasure of knowing God, whereas genuine hell is found in attachment to all the ills of this world, implying that one does not need to die in order to experience the two realms but can do so in this life, if only one can overcome the obstacles of ignorance hiding this truth from view.

In the particular case of *wujūdiyyah* teachings appearing in the *One Thousand Questions* we find, through the examination of several manuscripts from different periods and places, how the importance of the doctrine increased gradually for those re-writing the text, or at least how the balance between the frame story and the doctrinal teachings shifted over time, although not in a clearly linear fashion. In the earlier Samud from Leiden, the details of Samud's relationship with the Prophet, including the letter he received from Muhammad, his presenting the letter to the Jews and his depiction as their wise leader, all appear. But in the *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam* inscribed in 1898, at the turn of the twentieth century, we find all those details missing and the text, while still employing the characters of Samud and Muhammad and a question and answer format, is entirely focused on the teachings it presents, to the exclusion of mentioning Samud's Jewish identity, the location of the debate and the final conversion scene.

Such changes in the text, highlighting the teachings while the centrality of the formulaic story decreased in importance, underscore the profound importance of this particular textual content stressed in the Javanese. They allow us to see how it differs from the *One Thousand Questions'* content in other languages in whose tellings the emphasis on conversion from Judaism to Islam was retained, and how a story – although recognizable as “the same story” – is altered to fit and express a particular doctrine. Combining this thematic emphasis with the *One Thousand Questions* frame produced powerful results: by incorporating *wahdāt al wujūd* teachings into a famous narrative employing the Prophet himself as guru, this story was used in Java as a means to circulate popular, although controversial teachings, and accord them a certain legitimacy. As Drewes has asserted, despite criticism and attempts to curb their spread these teachings became increasingly popular among many, as this text and others suggest.¹⁴

14 G. W. J Drewes, *Directions for Travellers on the Mystic Path: Zakariyya Al-Ansari's Kitab Fath Al-Rahman and Its Indonesian Adaptations*, Verhandeligen Van Het Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde, vol. 81 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).

Further Transformation

Towards the close of the 19th century new, even more dramatically transformed versions of the *Book of One Thousand Questions* story were produced on Java, in which the Prophet, the Jew and conversion to Islam no longer featured. The rise of these new versions closely corresponded temporally with a decline – and possible ceasing – of production of the older Samud story.¹⁵

Most transformed versions employ the title Sèh (a Javanized form of the Arabic seikh), and the name Ngabdulsalam to refer to their protagonist, who bears an almost identical name as his “ancestor” Abdullah Ibnu Salam. Sèh Ngabdulsalam is a guru whose disciples come to him with questions. Many of the themes Sèh Ngabdulsalam discusses remain the same as before – signifying their on-going relevance – but the rationale of embracing Islam is no longer what drives the story, since both teacher and disciples are all Muslims. We may think of this text as a lakon cabang, or branch story, of the type branching out of the Mahabharata tales in shadow puppet theater performances on Java, both connected to the literary trunk and extending away from it.

A brief comparison between the two variants of the Ibnu Salam story reveals that the basic format of a question and answer debate remains intact.¹⁶ In both texts a knowledgeable, venerable teacher bestows his teachings to a disciple (or several), coming to him with questions and eager to learn. In addition, while some of the more traditional topics do not appear, common topics discussed include iman and Islam, the daily prayers, the four stages of the path, God’s names, actions, attributes and essence, God’s Unity, the prophets, God’s light, and the relationship between the world and the human body.

Some topics which consistently appeared in the older One

15 The latest *Serat Samud* – in which Samud is the disciple – I have found is the *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam*, inscribed in 1898. The first *Seh Ngabdulsalam* book, in which the disciple turns guru, is also dated that same year (*Suluk Seh Ngabdulsalam*, Museum Sonobudoyo, Yogyakarta.). From the 1890s on and into the 1930s the latter story was copied several times.

16 This comparison is based on *Seh Samud* and *Suluk Ngabdulsalam*, the two textual variants which appear, almost consecutively, in a 1901 anonymous *Piwulang* manuscript compilation from Surakarta. *Seh Samud*, Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, inscribed 1901, *Suluk Seh Ngabdulsalam*.listed in Behrend, ed., *Katalog Induk Naskah Naskah Nusantara: Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia*. Pp. 703..

Thousand Questions versions were left out of the reworked story of *Seh Ngabdulsalam*. These include, among others, paradise and hell, God's throne, the angels, the stars, the earth's navel, the fate of infidel children, the Day of Judgment, the story of Musa and Pharaoh and the spirit.

Most importantly in terms of these changes, the disciple of the older versions emerges as teacher, bearing the name not of the Jewish Samud but (with small variation) of the Muslim convert Abdullah Ibnu Salam. There is a continuity of genre as the text is retold as a *suluk* written in *macapat* metres with many of the same themes but with others missing while new ones are added. When compared with the *Serat Samud* and the *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam* – the two texts discussed above – specifically, we find that themes like God's attributes, Muslim prayer, the stages of the sufi path and the grades of being appear in all three. All three also contain many lists and categories through which topics are presented and explained.

Themes that are added in *Sèh Ngabdulsalam* when compared with these predecessors are teachings that relate to Javanese gamelan and, to a lesser extent, wayang. Framing issues are also significant: before beginning the section on gamelan the text is reframed with the story of *Sèh Ngabdulsalam* declared completed, a new set of disciples appearing and the teacher feeling perplexed and angry at their on-going adherence to Javanese arts. Another important difference between this text and the earlier ones is the consistent mention of Arabic religious books (*kitab*) as prior sources of knowledge that inform the later text, grounding it in a particular type of authority.

The text appeared in print as *Suluk Sèh Ngabdulsalam* in Surakarta in 1913 by a Dutch publisher, Albert Rouche & Co. The edition is printed in Javanese script. Its subtitle reads:

"The content of these teachings is diverse, excerpted from Islamic books (J. *kitab*), written by scholars in ancient times. Some of its writings were later corrected by Sastrawiryan, an associate editor for the newspaper *Jawi Kandha*".¹⁷

Thus in this particular version of *Suluk Sèh Ngabdulsalam* we see how

17 *Isi piwulang warni-warni. Petikan saking kitab/inggitanipun sarjana ing jaman kina/ing mangké kaleresaké kasusastranipun sawatawis dhateng mas sastrawiryan/medhe redaktur serat kabar jawi kandha.*

the Samud story was being altered both in terms of the story's content and the forms of its authorship, appearance and potential circulation. Its narrative was recast in a more immediately relevant context and its printed form made it very visibly a book in the modern sense, with its pages numbered, its editor named and its year of publication not left to speculation. All these elements point us in the direction of the social, religious and technological changes taking place on Java which accelerated in the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth when most of the *Sèh Ngabdulsalam* versions were inscribed.

The earlier transformation of the story from a traditional, trans-local narrative to a suluk centered on mystical teachings was a prior step in the direction of this further change, one which quite radically transformed Samud Ibnu Salam from a Jewish disciple to a Muslim guru and thus raises a new set of questions: why did a story long told about a Jewish leader conversing with the Prophet and embracing Islam mutate to one of a Javanese guru replying to his disciples' questions, all of whom were Muslim from the start? Why and how was the conversion element, central to the earlier story, re-worked under changing circumstances? Or had the theme of the story shifted altogether, making the topic of conversion obsolete?

A Story for the Changing Times

I see the transformed story as presenting an alternative, or rearticulated, discussion of conversion, understood here in a broad sense that implies significant change. No longer a story portraying the historical competition between Judaism and Islam, conversion to Islam was removed as its driving rationale. Interreligious competition and conversion were reconceptualized as the narrative emphasis shifted to intra-Muslim—and intra-Javanese—concerns, tensions, and debates.

Conditions on Java in the mid to late nineteenth century—when many of the existing *Serat Samud*, *Serat Suluk Samud*, and *Suluk Sèh Ngabdulsalam* manuscripts were produced—offer potential explanations for the shifting emphasis of the *One Thousand Questions*. Economic and social upheaval brought about by the Cultivation System, the disappearance of structures of traditional authority as the colonial government usurped the power of local elites, the opening of the first railway lines, and easier

access to Arabia and to Europe, via the newly opened Suez Canal, were all among developments signaling that profound change was under way. Three processes, in particular, stand out in their centrality: the Islamic revival, the rising importance of the tarékat (Sufi “order,” brotherhood), and the increasing Dutch presence on the island.¹⁸

Although there is no explicit statement of *tarekat*-affiliation within Javanese versions of the One Thousand Questions, it was likely associated with the Shattariyya, with its speculative teachings and employment of Javanese arts in metaphorical ways. Clearly, *Sèh Ngabdulsalam*’s depiction fits that of a nineteenth century guru tarekat who, in that role, advocated a particular form of Muslim affiliation.¹⁹ As the Shattariyya was being replaced as the most popular sufi order on Java by tarekat which more strongly emphasized ritual and Islamic law, the Suluk Seh Ngabdulsalam maintained the on-going relevance of its teachings to Javanese society.

The emphasis on a local form of Islam can also be read as a call for a culture which is strong enough to recognize and retain its traditions in the face of massive technological, economic and political change. Conversely, this emphasis may reflect a Javanese acceptance of colonial attitudes that encouraged and even shaped what Dutch scholars and administrators viewed as the “essence of Javanese-ness”, including the focus on mysticism, poetry and wayang.²⁰

The Suluk Seh Ngabdulsalam is not alone among literary works of this era in its emphasis on a Javanese-oriented Islam. Although within the microcosm of the Book of One Thousand Questions’ history its shifting narrative represents a significant change, within the larger sphere of Javanese writings it can be viewed as one among several important works responding to outside pressure and changing circumstances. Such works cover a range of nuanced perspectives: they range from those, like the *Serat Dermagandhul*, which present Islam as foreign to Java, through those, like the *Serat Wedhatama*, which emphasize Javanese spirituality as the

18 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these changes in detail.

19 On the *guru tarekat* as well as other teacher-types in nineteenth century Java see Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek Tentang Islam Di Indonesia Abad Ke-19*, pp. 152-153.

20 On the latter connection see Laurie Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996). p. 119.

paramount path, to our Suluk, which re-affirms an Islam deeply rooted in Javanese soil.²¹

Just as earlier the *One Thousand Questions* was adapted as one suluk among many, so its newer version became embedded within the larger literary picture. In both cases the *One Thousand Questions* found a place within Javanese literary production of the period while concurrently invoking a broader Islamic tradition. As Azra has amply demonstrated in his study of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia, Javanese Islam was connected with, and informed by, transnational networks of scholars and pilgrims. The ideas and teachings of the kind that appeared in the Javanese *One Thousand Questions* traditions reflect this connectivity to wider circles.

The *One Thousand Questions's* transformations on Java point us, above all, to the creative energies of poets and scribes writing in Javanese between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Such changes also point to the ways in which Javanese Muslims, as members of larger communities in their region and beyond, were shaping and re-shaping their literary works in accordance with developments in the religious and cultural spheres both at home and in Islam's distant lands. Authors continued to present their audiences with a story famous across South and Southeast Asia and further afield - thus connecting them to many others familiar with Ibnu Salam's dialogue with the Prophet- while also formulating a message, both engaging and relevant, for the particular period and place in which they lived.

Continuity and Change in a Javanese Textual Tradition: Some Methodological Considerations

I have explored some of the continuities and changes in the *One Thousand Questions* as told in Java through the various *Samud* texts. In this final section I want to discuss the methodological question of how to access and assess, within an extended textual tradition, the ways in which a story does and does not transform over time and across sites of production and consumption. The issue of considering the *Samud* texts' place within and beyond the Javanese courts is relevant here yet

21 On the former see G. W. J. Drewes, "The Struggle between Javanism and Islam as Illustrated in the Serat Dermagandul," *BKI* 122.3 (1966). For an introduction to, and translation into English of the *Serat Wedhatama* see Stuart Robson, *The Wedhatama: An English Translation*, (Leiden: KITLV, 1990).

it represents just one of a series of related questions about the ways in which we categorize manuscripts, texts and genres and the indicators or parameters we define for those categories.

As already mentioned, at least two dozen *One Thousand Questions* texts in Javanese have been preserved. Within these two groups, or families, of very similar texts have been identified, one of which I'd like to briefly discuss as a way of addressing the broader categorization issues. I limit my discussion here to the use of poetic meters (*tembang*) and orthography as potentially defining characteristics of Samud texts' content and significance.

The familial metaphor, which captures the relationships between similar versions or copies of texts, implies that such texts share some common elements, in content and structure, resembling one another to various degrees without being identical, as relatives may share certain traits but not others. It also implies a continuity through time and a branching out in space as generations of a reproduced story are born, mature and give birth to their own literary offspring.

The aforementioned Javanese textual family includes seven of the older *One Thousand Questions* manuscripts in which Ibnu Salam is the disciple, not teacher. Six of these texts, although differing in length, share some of their metric sequences and the topics discussed in metrically parallel cantos (*pupuh*). For example the *Pakualam Serat Samud* and the *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam* contain a sequence of three cantos that correspond both in *tembang* choice (*dhandhanggula*, *kinanthi* and *durma*) and theme (God's names and attributes, rahsa and birth, respectively). In both texts slaughter of animals is discussed in *dhandhanggula*. There are also many similarities at the sentence and word level.²²

The three complete versions in this family consist of twenty cantos, whereas the other three contain fewer cantos, between ten and sixteen. The seventh text - the *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam* – shares over half of its cantos with this family in terms of metrical sequence and topics discussed and therefore clearly belongs to the same "family tree". These texts do not refer to each other and none mention a prior source for their composition, making it difficult to ascertain the connection between

²² The three cantos mentioned are 16,17 and 18 in *Serat Samud* and 6,7 and 8 in *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam*.

them, if and how is transpired, where and when. Dates of inscription are suggestive – but not definitive – in providing information on the texts' histories. Let us examine the texts' available details in a comparative light:

Poerbatjaraka, Voorhoeve and Hooykaas, in their 1950 catalogue of Indonesian manuscripts, devoted several pages to the Samud texts.²³ They characterized Samud (MS. PNRI KGB 405) as composed in spelling and writing that was very sloppy and ugly and concluded that it possessed a "rural character".²⁴ Interestingly, they did not mention the similarities between this manuscript and Samud (MS. PNRI KGB 434), which they saw as a "rather old rendition of the Samud story".²⁵ The latter matches the *Pakualam Serat Samud* (PP St.80) not only in all the parallel cantos but also in the final sentences of the texts which cite the good fortune to befall all those who in one way or another come in contact with them. If the assertion in the catalogue is correct this may be an example of a text from the villages or rural Islamic schools entering court circles. Indeed we know that the inscription and reading of texts like the *One Thousand Questions* was not limited to the palaces and there is much evidence that at least through the mid- nineteenth century Javanese pesantren were important sites of production and dissemination of texts, where diverse audiences were exposed to them. Textual readings were also a part of various ritual events taking place in the villages.²⁶

If we consider the *Pakualam Serat Samud*, the *Serat Suluk Samud Ibnu Salam* and the *pègon Serat Samud* (FSUI CI110) we find that such texts to a large extent, as mentioned, share the same cantos, verse forms and even wording at the line level and yet, when examined closely, present important differences amongst themselves. Although the two *Serat Samud* (Pakualam, pègon) share all twenty verse cantos they are

23 R. M. Ng. Poerbatjaraka, Voorhoeve, P. and Hooykaas, C., *Indonesische Handschriften*, (Bandung: A. C Nix & Co., 1950). 68-74. The manuscript numbers cited in the catalogue differ somewhat from those currently used by the PNRI. For the sake of consistency I cite the latter's system.

24 Poerbatjaraka, *Indonesische Handschriften*. p. 69. Interestingly, however, it is not characterized in the catalogue as "pesantren literature" and does not appear in the section under that heading. This manuscript was not microfilmed and therefore I could not examine it myself.

25 Poerbatjaraka, *Indonesische Handschriften*. p. 71.

26 Florida, *Javanese Literature in Surakarta Manuscripts: Introduction and Manuscripts of the Karaton Surakarta*. 22-23.

written in different scripts, and one is attributed to Abbas while the other has no source.

The question of script usage is important and requires further research as pègon materials have generally been neglected in the field of Javanese studies. Writing almost fifty years ago Pigeaud claimed that, with some exceptions, there was a general division on Java by which Islamic religious literature was written in pègon whereas secular texts of all kinds were written in the Javanese script.²⁷ He connected this division to the dichotomies –such as genealogies of the left and the right – commonly used for various classifications on Java.²⁸ The Samud example contradicts Pigeaud’s dichotomous argument in that the *One Thousand Questions* is a corpus which includes texts, very similar in content and style, written in both scripts. It can clearly be categorized as religious literature yet it was written, in most cases, using the Javanese, not Arabic, script. It shows that, at least in some instances, script was not an indicator of content or religious tendencies. Still, orthography was significant. It was probably an indicator of production site more than of content, with most Samud texts produced within Javanese courts that tended to employ the traditional script rather than pègon. Diverse sites of production might indicate historical trajectories and circulation patterns that were quite markedly different, as the story was retold in the same language but in different contexts and circumstances.

What such textual families, and especially the broader one expose is that, even though we remain uncertain as to many of the details regarding composition and inscription of Javanese works, we can say with assurance that some texts were copied with high degrees of continuity and consistency over at least several decades but likely longer. This meant that audiences in different places and setting-types could be familiar with the same, or very similar text, enabling them to draw on a common source. This fact was especially significant for a work like the

27 The use of “secular” in this context seems quite vague and anachronistic.

28 Pigeaud, *Literature* 27. The genealogies of Javanese kings go back through the “left side” to Hindu gods and heroes and through the “right side” to the prophet Adam and other Muslim prophets; literature is often thus classified as well, with pre-Muslim works considered “of the left” and Muslim works “of the right”. The right side is consistently accorded to Muslim themes. This dichotomy is probably rooted in –or influenced by– the Qur’an, where, referring to the positions of the righteous and sinners on the Day of Judgment, it says: “those on the right (blessed shall be those on the right); those on the left (damned shall be those on the left)” Qur’an 56:7.

One Thousand Questions, introducing as it did a range of Islamic ideas, rituals and stories.

Many questions remain open to further investigation, especially the question of how such texts were presented, listened to, read and transformed by both authors and their audiences. Did it matter that a Samud text was read within a palace or beyond its walls? Was it understood differently in both cases or is it our imagination of the rural and the aristocratic that shapes assumptions that may be misguided? Did it matter, and how, that a telling was written in pègon or in aksara Jawa? Did the use of particular tembang to convey certain passages or sections of the story impact the audience in particular ways? How do changes over time in a textual tradition reflect and also shape changing social and religious conditions? The Samud corpus offered me a “laboratory” in which to explore such challenging questions and its study in turn has raised many more.

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