

Shaṭṭārīyah Silsilah in Aceh, Java, and the Lanao Area of Mindanao

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The Shaṭṭārīyah is the earliest known Sufi (Muslim mystic) order, which gained influence in island Southeast Asia in the mid-seventeenth century. According to the short description by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* it derives its name from either a fifteenth-century Indian mystic called Shaṭṭārī or the Arabic word *shāṭir* ('breaker'), referring to one who has broken with the world. Oman Fathurahman is of a different opinion and makes clear that the Shaṭṭārīyah did not come from its centre in India but from Haramayn (the two holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina), where the Acehese scholar 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkili (d. 1693) studied for decades, before working under the protection of the Acehese court, which was at the time ruled by a Sultana. In his *Mir'at al-tullah* he made a Shari'a-based argument for the legitimacy of a woman to be a Sultana or ruler, which was extraordinary at that time.

This book is a compilation of *silsilah* left by prominent members of the Sufi order in the most Islamized parts of island Southeast Asia. 'Silsilah represents the close spiritual relationship between a *murshid* (Sufi master) and *murid* (follower, an initiated member of an order who holds the spiritual authority to practice all the Sufi teachings and rituals' (p. 1). In this book Dr Fathurahman publishes transcriptions of these *silsilah* and analyses the lineages and names in them in order to reconstruct the chains of Sufi masters or lineages (in fact, spiritual genealogies) which date back to Prophet Mohammad. Keeping record of the teachers and disciples (who received special *ijāza* or permission to pass on the knowledge) was a special characteristic of the Sufi order at a time when there were no schools for formal education. Through this chain the Sufi networks extended over the centuries and it was a custom to keep careful track of all of the names, whether in Arabic, Malay, Javanese or Sundanese.

Oman Fathurahman has collected the digitized *silsilah* from a selection of Shaṭṭārīyah-related manuscripts from several libraries and private collections in Aceh, Java, and the Lanao area of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Several manuscripts were also selected from the British Library and the Leiden University Library. After going through almost 1,000 manuscripts, Dr Fathurahman ended up with 33 manuscripts with *silsilah*: 17 in Malay, 8 in Javanese, 7 in Arabic and 1 in Sundanese. Chapter Two (pages 9–104) is the main part of the book. Each selected manuscript is codicologically examined in this chapter. Each *silsilah* text is carefully

transcribed, published and analysed in detail. Dr Fathurahman also examines the most recent name in each *silsilah*, as the last mentioned person is regarded as the 'owner of the *silsilah*'. The result is that researchers now have a systematic overview of all *silsilah* available.

In Chapter Three Dr Fathurahman offers some conclusions on the lines and genealogies in the *silsilah*. The many details in the analyses are, however, for the real connoisseurs of Sufi history. The merit of his book is that it offers more detailed information on the *silsilah* than the more general works such as those by Azyumardi Azra¹ and Peter Riddell² and that it nicely complements the studies on the Sufi order in Aceh by Werner Kraus.³

It is interesting to see the names of a few local elite woman appear in the *silsilah*. We can identify the names of female Shaṭṭārīyah followers in the *silsilah* of Nyimas Ayu Alimah (dating from the first half of the nineteenth century) in the circle of Kraton Cirebon, for instance. There are the female Sufis Nyiamas Ayu Alimah and Ratu Raja Fatimah, a *murid* of Kyai Arjain, Pengulu in the Kraton Cirebon. Both are mentioned in the Elang Panji Collections who are in the line of Shaykh Haji Abdullah. But interestingly there is also Kanjen Ratu Ibu kang Ibu Kanjen Sultan Cirebon, whose Shaṭṭārīyah *silsilah* can be traced through a Bantenese *murshid*, 'Abd al-Qahhār al-Jāwī al-Bantānī. This brings Fathurahman to a hypothesis that the Shaṭṭārīyah *silsilah* in the Cirebon area 'was linked not only to the line of Karang Pamijahan *ulama* but also to Banten'.

Although the finding of a few female Sufis in the *silsilah* may not be enough to declare the involvement of women as a fundamental characteristic of Nusantara Sufism, this subject surely deserves more attention. In this context, this reviewer rather favours a careful analysis of some hundreds of eighteenth-century letters that were sent in a constant stream from the Kratons of both Banten and Cirebon to Batavia Castle (including hundreds of diplomatic letters) in order to further trace family names and connections. For instance, no one has yet analysed the topics discussed in the 73 official diplomatic letters sent from Cirebon to Batavia during the reign of Sultan Sepuh III Muhammad Zainuddin I (1723–53).⁴ These documents kept by ANRI in Jakarta contain local names (and sometimes explain family and throne disputes) hardly mentioned in other sources. These documents may also contain some information concerning interactions and personal family ties between Cirebon and Banten.

It is commendable of Dr Fathurahman to study and analyse all the hitherto known Shaṭṭārīyah *silsilah* in a systematic philological way, from the British Library, the Snouck Hurgronje bequest in Leiden, to local treasures in the Elang Panji Collection in Cirebon and many more. He patiently works out Shaṭṭārīyah influences through the roles of individual scholars and theologians. Oman

¹ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulamāi in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004, pp. 52–109.

² Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001, pp. 69–81, 101–35.

³ Werner Kraus, 'The Shattariyya Sufi Brotherhood in Aceh', in Arndt Graf, Susanne Schröter, and Edwin Wieringa (eds), *Aceh: History, Politics and Culture*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010, pp. 201–26.

⁴ <https://www.sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/diplomatic-letters/>

Fathurahman also demonstrates the urgency to digitize more of these fragile manuscripts. So many Sufi manuscripts were lost in the past and so few have managed to survive the harshness of time and the Southeast Asian climate. In addition, document preservation was rarely in the minds of the local people in the past. It is true that sultanates and kingdoms had their own means of keeping documents and official papers. However, preservation measures were weak and many such documents and papers have been lost locally. This is also the reason why historians of early Islam in the Nusantara face enormous difficulties.

Dr Oman Fathurahman has successfully demonstrates the utmost necessity of a systematic collection and digitalization. Digital heritage facilities brings the collections together and is not only important for public access, it is also an important tool to preserve these precious works for future generations as the physical manuscripts will surely continue to deteriorate.

HENDRIK NIEMEIJER

CILENGGANG, INDONESIA

The Authority of Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History

Jessica Harriden

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Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012, xiii+370 pp.

In the preface, Harriden has explained her objective for the book as providing ‘a “long view” of gender-power relations in Burmese history’, ‘to examine women’s access to social, economic and political power over an extended historical period’ (p. vii). Harriden argues that, despite social disruptions and political upheavals brought about by British colonialism and their purported ‘civilising mission’, there is still much continuity with the pre-colonial period in terms of the nature, scope and limitations of female power and influence in Burmese society. Contributing to the vastly varied conditions of women during the different political eras she examined, continuity notwithstanding, were the socio-economic and political situations which either empowered or frustrated the agency of women in their access to power, resources and socio-political mobility. Understandably, the women did not all have a homogeneous background, which was illustrated in their differentiated access to power and prestige within each era.

Refuting the widely held notion that Burmese women have enjoyed gender equality ‘since time immemorial’, throughout her book the author recounts in detail evidence which indicates otherwise. Central to her framework of interpretation is what she sees as the Burmese worldview which constructs what is considered appropriate gender roles and gender relations through the localization of Buddhist values and practices. Burmese Buddhists generally regard all men as possessing