COPYRIGHT NOTICE
Federspiel/Sultans, Shamans, and Saints

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, © 2007, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

NB: Illustrations have been deleted to decrease file size.
It is not enough to simply identify and analyse Islamic tradition in its historical form, as some sort of static body of knowledge. Islamic tradition, rather, forms a continuous stream of consciousness, which has been evolving over the centuries, and which continues to evolve in the present.

On a Sunday evening, when returning from a day at Brastagi, a mountain retreat in the interior of North Sumatra, one would have seen two meaningful phenomena unfolding. The first consisted of heavy activity at the fruit and vegetable assembly points in hilltop villages, where agriculturalists brought their products for delivery to the markets on the coast, particularly to Singapore. There was a hubbub as goods were unloaded from local conveyances into small trucks, which then drove with breathtaking speed down the precipitous mountain roads to the port at Belawan, whence small boats moved the goods rapidly on to their destinations at Medan, Singapore, or perhaps to some Malaysian port across the Straits of Melaka. This perpetual scene was testimony to a vigorous local trade vital to all the parties in the region—Christians, animists, Buddhists, and Muslims. The production, movement, and ultimate use of these agricultural products involved all types of people, and as is so often the case with open trade, religious affiliation was not much of a factor, although the multicultural aspects of the regional society were manifest.

The second phenomenon revolved around the bus stops where city workers waited for their ride back to Medan to begin the new workweek after too brief visits to their rural family homes. The closer to the city and the later it was, the more people were on the move. It was a prosperous time, and people looked forward to their week in the city, so the atmosphere was upbeat and friendly. The buses, small and large, disgorged these people into the southern sections of the city, where they milled around the shops, eating stalls, and mosques, talking with friends and relaxing as darkness fell and they enjoyed the final hours of the weekend. If one’s timing was right, the call to prayer issued from numerous loudspeakers, after which many of the men and some of the women moved toward the lighted places of wor-
ship to begin their ablutions and prayers. The mosques on the main road revealed to the traveler worshipers in long lines and undulating patterns as they stood, knelt, and prostrated themselves in the prescribed motions of Muslim worship. The entire scene—trade, travel, small pleasures, and worship—could be seen to provide a brief sketch of civilization at a normal, unspectacular time and place. Significantly, religion was integral to the portrait and natural to it without undue notice or effort exerted on the part of the believers. Islam was not born in Southeast Asia, but it became an important element in the region, almost as if it had been created for the role it fulfilled.

This book is a study of Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asia, a non-Arabic setting. In it, Islam is recognized as the religion that has been practiced by large numbers of people since the seventh century A.D. It was established by a religious and political figure named Muhammad, who lived, preached, and undertook to deliver a message he understood as a command from God to create a community of believers. That religion went on to become an identifying characteristic for a civilization that extended from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to the borders of India in the ninth and tenth centuries; and its creed, tenets, ceremonies, beliefs, and practices were given an orthodox framework by numerous scholars, rulers, and religious activists. By the fifteenth century it had split into two sizeable communities, the Sunnis and the Shi’ahs. It had also established jurisprudential schools and a number of mystical orders that crisscrossed the various regions where the followers of Islam lived and worked. Islam throughout its history has been a religion, a way of life, and a definer of culture and civilization. A Muslim is an adherent of Islam who identifies with the religion and lives in general accordance with the values and tenets both of the religion and of the civilization that has emerged to represent Islam. Here I use both terms, “Islam” and “Muslim,” in that wide civilizational sense, but do not exclude the narrower meaning of simple religious identification.

Today in Southeast Asia the principal religions are Islam, with more than two hundred million followers; Buddhism, with slightly more than two hundred million adherents; and several other religions with significant numbers of worshipers. Buddhism, both the Mahayana and Theravada sects, dominates the mainland north of the Eighth Parallel—that is, Burma, Thailand, and the Indochina states. Islam, almost entirely the Sunni sect, dominates the area south of that line—namely, southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the southern Philippines. Christianity has groups of followers throughout the region; most are Catholics, but some areas of Protestant strength predominate in the northern and central Philippines, several areas of Indonesia, and parts of South Vietnam. Hinduism is prominent on the island of Bali and has a limited number of
followers among Indian settlers throughout the region. Taoism, Confucianism, and several other Chinese religiocultural value systems have been adopted throughout the area by the overseas Chinese. Finally, shamanism and animism persist alongside the other religious systems nearly everywhere in Southeast Asia, but clearly prevail in several regions, notably West Irian, interior Kalimantan (Borneo), and the highland areas of Indochina.

It is postulated that an Islamic zone of Southeast Asia has existed historically that crosses political and geographic boundaries of the region. It consists of the territory, just mentioned, where the Sunni Muslims are located. The “Muslim Zone” serves as a true cultural area, and attempts will be made to include material here that shows this to be true. The zone was never united politically, and in the twentieth century it has been divided politically among eight distinct nation-states. Neither has it ever been consolidated culturally; a wide variety of customs exist within the territory, including significant differences within areas of the zone itself. Linguistically it is not unified either, Malay and Javanese being the two major languages and several other languages serving as regional vehicles. Ethnically there are considerable differences, although Malays and Javanese dominate, but Bugis, Minangs, Bantamese, and Chams have been prominent as well. Finally, a few Muslim activists, both historically and in the present, have “imagined” the zone as a common unit, but the concept has never been a political consideration in the public mind. The only phenomenon common in the region is the adherence of large portions of the population to common religious institutions, teachings, and values. It is only in the form of religious identification, therefore, that this very diverse group of people exhibit some commonality.

This study operates on the basis of two premises: (1) Islam is a dynamic religion that has been adapted to time and place by its followers and (2) Islam in any region can be measured for orthodoxy, not simply against the Middle East, but against the general norms of Islam throughout the world. Consequently, I shall examine Islam in Southeast Asia in terms of four large periods: the time of Islam’s arrival (up to 1300); the first flowering of Islamic identity (1300 to 1800); the era of imperialism (1800 to 1950); and that of independent nation-states (1950 to 2000). I selected these four eras only after much consideration of historical factors across the Muslim Zone. While they are not altogether satisfactory when considered from the viewpoint of political developments in one area or another, as an overall division of time the four periods offer a nice compromise that allows for discussion of cross-zone events without too much awkwardness. For general convenience, the study concludes with the end of the twentieth century. Events occurring after that time frame as yet lack historical and cultural
context for any thorough analysis, so no attempt has been made to cover those events, except in casual reference.

The study does not use a single methodological approach, but comes closest perhaps to the “historical-periods’ comparison” of G. Bergsträsser in his 1930 study of Islamic jurisprudence. He maintained that a long-lasting social institution could be properly analyzed by examining key facets of that institution at several different historical points to ascertain whether change was taking place and how the institution was responding to the changing context of history itself. For example, the place of the mosque in Islamic society could be examined in 1800, 1900, and 2000, and a comparison made about the differences among the three descriptions. Ideally, insight about the importance of the mosque over a two-century span would emerge. Bergsträsser had precisely that idea in mind, but would examine several other facets of Islam to accompany the mosque examination in order to give a
broader view of the evolution of Islam over time. My cross-disciplinary examination of Islam at four different periods in Southeast Asian history probably approximates what Bergsträsser intended. Consequently, in each era a common set of points will be examined. Each chapter will begin with an explanation of Southeast Asian developments in a wider Asian world, followed by an examination of the ethnic groups, political events, customs and cultures, religious factors, and art forms that were apparent at the time. A conclusion and a list of key readings for further investigation is provided for each chapter. A general conclusion at the end of the entire study reviews the major Islamic institutions of Southeast Asia and their meaning to Southeast Asia historically and contemporaneously.

This work is not intended to be a “history,” although a historical framework has been adopted for purposes of presentation; rather, it is a study that traverses many fields and disciplines. This must be so, because, as already observed, Muslims do not consider Islam a religion in the Western meaning of the term, but rather a particular manifestation that has shaped and influenced wide areas of human life and social institutions beyond the confines of what is often regarded as religion. Thus, we must necessarily examine it in a wider context of a variety of human experiences.

**General Background Readings**


Denny, Frederick M. 1986. *An Introduction to Islam*. A description of the terms, rites, and prominent groups in Islam.


Ricklefs, M. C. 1981. *A History of Modern Indonesia*. A history of the Indonesian nation in which several of the regional traditions are drawn together to form a composite whole.

Saunders, Graham. 1994. *A History of Brunei*. A straightforward rendition of
the Brunean attempt to create and sustain a history separate from that of its neighbors.

Steinberg, David J., ed. 1987. *In Search of Southeast Asia.* An overview of the modern nation-states of Southeast Asia, emphasizing their effort to attain independence and develop as independent cultures.