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REVIEWING RELIGIOUS CLASSIC MANUSCRIPT FROM INDONESIAN  
SOUTH BORNEO PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper reviews a highly valued, original, classic religious reading text, written by Islamic scholars in Indonesia, South Borneo. The existence of the manuscript reflects the intellectual capacity of Indonesian Islamic scholars in the past and also the tradition of knowledge transmission. The religious written work has been a significant material to be examined, in order to study the history, influence, and contributions to the present Islamic knowledge. One of the manuscripts is Nur Muhammad's Story, the classic one written by a Banjarese Islamic scholar named Sheikh Ahmad Syamsuddin al-Banjari (1618-1680). This manuscript described scientifically the ways of thinking and the development of Islamic studies in South Borneo (Banjarmasin). Besides Aceh, Palembang and Banten, Banjarmasin is also an important point of reference where the birth of religious works took place in the 17th, 18th, and 19th Centuries, respectively. Banjarmasin has since then become an important reference for understanding the development of Islamic studies in Indonesia. Unfortunately, limited data, contrived codification efforts, and small number of studies related to religious readings in this region have resulted in the poor spread of publications on this important information. Hence, this scrutiny of the book (Nur Muhammad's Story) published in the 17th Century made significant contributions and led to the birth of similar studies in the future.



## INTRODUCTION

In the world of *tasawuf*, the concept of ‘*Nur Muhammad*’ is an interesting topic to discuss. The study of this concept became important when Islam arrived in Indonesia. It has often been used as a reference point within various contexts that it keeps attracting Muslim’s attention to this very day. The name *Nur Muhammad* was firstly introduced by Ibn Ishaq, the last writer of Prophet Muhammad’s history, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. *Nur Muhammad* narrates the journey as the beginning of world creation. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, the concept of *Nur Muhammad* became very popular by a well-known Sufi Sahl al-Tustari. This was also presented by a controversial Sufi named Al-Hallaj and it became a chain of his main precepts, instead of *hulul* and *wahdatul adyan*. According to him, *Nur Muhammad* was a guide for all prophets, and, for that reason, religion brought by prophets basically have the same principles. Al-Hallaj believed that all prophets formed emanation, as stated in his *hulul* theory (Fauzan 2009).

The theory of *Nur Muhammad* was then continuously written by Ibnu Arabi (638 H/240 M) in his books, *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* and *Fusus al-Hikam*; but prior to the popularity of the books he had actually written about *Nur Muhammad* in his brief composition titled *Syajarat al-Kaun*. According to Ibnu Arabi, *Nur Muhammad* was the source of human happenings and the source of knowledge of the prophets and Islamic scholars. In other words, *Nur Muhammad* was a real spirit of the prophets, since the delegation period of Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad and also since the presence of *Martabat al-Wilayah* within Sufi’s mystics. The knowledge of prophets and Islamic scholars was due to the light shed by *Nur Muhammad* that became the mother of any form. This idea was then systematised and confirmed by Abdul Karim al-Jili (832) in his book *al-Insan al-Kamil fi Ma’arifah al-Awa’il wa al-Awakhir*. He related it to a concept of ‘complete human’ or *insan kamil* (Fauzan 2009).

In the region of Nusantara, the idea and concept of *Nur Muhammad* spread among Malay Sufism along with the entry of Islam. The concept of *Nur Muhammad* in Malay, as stated by Fauzan (2009), cannot be separated from the history of the coming of Islam into Nusantara. In Malay version, *Nur Muhammad* was written directly and in preliminary contained history such as *Bustan al-Salatin* by Nuruddin al-Raniri, *Hikayat Anbiya’*, and *Tambo Minangkabau*. The most popular version of this story is *Tarikh Mukhtasar*, edited by Sheikh Syamsudin Sumatrani in 1646 which was adopted from the Persian script of *Rawdat al-Anbah* by Husaini in 1495. The newest copy was written in 1856 by Ki Agus Haji Khatib Thaha from Palembang. This story also appeared in *tasawuf* poems such as in a written work by Hamzah Fansuri in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

From the concept of *Nur Muhammad*, a new classic was made up about this theory such as *Asrar al-Insan fi Makrifah al Ruh wa al-Rahman* by Nuruddin al Raniri, as well as trilogy by Hamzah Fansuri (Barus-Aceh); *Asrar al-‘Arifin*, *Syarab al Asyiqin*, and *al Muntahi*, and *Nur al-Daqaiq* by Syamsuddin al Sumatrani (Pasai). In the book, *Asrar al-Insan* stated that Allah created *Nur Muhammad* from *tajalli* (manifestation) of attributes of His Jamal and Jalal, so that *Nur Muhammad* became caliphs in the sky and earth. *Nur Muhammad* marked the beginning of what has happened beyond the sky and earth. The book of *Asrar al-‘Arifin* tells about the theory of *wahdat al wujud* which was firstly introduced by Abdullah Arif in his book *Bahr al-Lahut* and then was developed by Muhammad bin Fadhlullah al-Burhanpuri through the theory of *Martabat Tujuin* the book of *Tuhfah al-Mursalat ila Ruh al-Nabi*. Then, in *al Muntahi* by Hamzah Fansuri, it states that *wujud* is the only true God, the absolute Being. *Wujud* is being manifested in two stages of *ahadiyah* and *wahidiyah*. From the book of *Nur al-Daqaiq*, it also discusses *wujudiyah* and the seven stages.

Various theories of *Nur Muhammad* in the form of the seven stages can be found in several books by Malay scholars, such as *Siyarus Salikin* by Sheikh Abdul Shamad al Palimbangi; *Manhalus Syafi* by Sheikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fathani (Thailand); introduction to the stages of seven by Sheikh Abdul Muhyi Pamijahan (West Java); and *Al-Durr al-nafis* by Sheikh Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari (El-Muhammady 2004). Then, in Banjarese context, *Nur Muhammad* was firstly discovered from works of Sheikh Syamsuddin al-Banjari (1618-1680). He played an important role in Banjarese spiritual life in the Sultanate of Banjar. Moreover, Sheikh Syamsuddin is well-known as the founding father of sufism philosophy in the Sultanate of Banjar which is similar to the concept developed in Aceh Darussalam Kingdom (Syukur 1988).

Winstedt (1961) stated that the oldest manuscript of '*Hikayat* (the Story) of *Nur Muhammad*' by Sheikh Syamsuddin al Banjari was found in Jakarta in 1668. Zamzam (1978) and Ahmad (2005) stated similarly that a manuscript of "*Asal Kejadian Nur Muhammad*' (the beginning of *Nur Muhammad*) was written by Sheikh Ahmad Syamsuddin al-Banjari in 1668. However, this book is popularly known as "*Betawi* script" than "Banjarese script", since it was found in Jakarta and saved by the National Library of Jakarta with code ML. 378 C.

### **HISTORICAL SETTING OF MUSLIM BANJAR IN TERMS OF THE CLASSICAL MANUSCRIPT**

The historical setting of the Islamic Banjar people when Sheikh Syamsuddin al Banjari wrote the book of *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* has a relationship with the entry of Islam into the Sultanate of Banjar. Therefore, this section gives a brief description about the history and development of Islam in Banjarmasin, which is an important region from the viewpoint of classical written works by Banjarese scholars.

During the Conference on Prehistory of the Entry of Islam to South Kalimantan, held in Banjarmasin in 1973 and in another one "History of the Entry of Islam in South Kalimantan" held also in Banjarmasin in April 1976, there have been several scripts on how Islam came to Borneo. Artha (1976) said that Islam was brought to Banjarmasin in 1250 and developed around 1295. However, several arguments about the advent and development of Islam in Banjarmasin is not supported by strong evidences. Commonly, Islam and the Islamic Sultanate of Banjar coincided with the growth of South Kalimantan on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1526.

In the early development of Islam, the region of Demak has greatly influenced the Banjar people. The understanding of Islam was explained by scholars from Demak. According to Basuni (1985), Islam was brought to Banjarmasin by Sunan Giri (1442-1506). Sunan Giri was the student of Sunan Ampel, Surabaya enabled him to connect with Banjarmasin. Meanwhile, R. Sekar Sungsang as prince of the Kingdom of Dipa Amuntai was also students of Sunan Giri. For that reason, R. Sekar Sungsang converted to Islam and became King of Nagara Daha with the title Raden Sari Kaburangan (1475-1500).

Wujudiyah (philosophy) has been the most dominant sufism sect in the Sultanate of Banjar for more than two centuries (1526-1801). This sect is now the official sect believed by the Sultan and Banjar people. Besides, Sufism by Hamzah Fansuri and Sheikh Syamsuddin Sumaterani influenced the belief through mutual relationships between the Sultanate of Banjar and Aceh. The relationship can be seen from gifts such as *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* by Sheikh Syamsuddin al-Banjari which was given to the Sultan of Aceh and *Sirath al Mustaqim* by Nuruddin al Raniri to Sultan of Banjar.

The book "Sejarah Banjar" elaborates on the exchanges of both books that showed a close relationship between the Sultanate of Banjar and Aceh. A sufism group by Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin Sumaterani and a group by Nuruddin ar-Raniri has great impact

on the Sultanate of Banjar. In summary, the Sultanate of Banjar was influenced by sufism for a century (Ideham 2003; Norwahidah 2009). The manuscript contains a primary story with a flat plot. It has a brief version since it merely contains 11 pages, each page is 15x20 cm in size, and has 15 lines. The story is simple, but due to the stereotypical plot on Malay literature, it becomes longer than ten pages. Briefly, the book of *Nur Muhammad* tells about *Nur Muhammad* (Muhammad's Light) as an early creation before God created the universe. Thereafter, the discussion on *Nur Muhammad* (pro and contra) progressed as well as discussion and written works by contemporary Banjarese scholars. Moreover, sufism, perfection, and "sabuku" learners in Banjar stated that *Nur Muhammad* is the key to opening the mystery, understanding and doing makrifah to Him. Based on these elements, it is interesting to study the contents of "*Hikayat Nur Muhammad*" by Sheikh Ahmad Syamsuddin al-Banjari, making it a classical written piece by Banjarese Islamic scholars.

### **INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS MANUSCRIPT BY BANJAR ISLAMIC SCHOLARS**

In the context of Islamic studies in Indonesia, a large volume of information from authentic sources and local Islamic context have become an important primary research source. An appreciation of local sources will lead to the appreciation of the diversity of Islam in Indonesia as a product coming from a local-culture acculturation process with Islamic religious values and norms (Fathurrahman 2007). Thus, these are manuscripts that can be taken into account as a representation of various authoritative-and-the-most-authentic local sources that are capable of giving historical information within a particular period. The manuscripts are one of the nation's cultural heritage among other artefacts, of which their contents reflect the people's thoughts, knowledge, customs, and behaviours in the past.

During the historical journey of Islam into Nusantara, especially in the Indonesian context, the existence of the manuscripts is inseparable from the great Islamic tradition that had already spread in Melayu-Indonesia since the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. In this case, Islam is believed to bring about a tradition of writing for Melayu-Indonesian people, so that during its development, Islamic tradition would have encouraged the presence of many manuscripts, particularly religious ones related to the process of Islamisation in Indonesia involving prolific Islamic scholars in their era. Tjandrasasmita (1999) stated that the tradition of writing, copying, and disseminating religious manuscripts in Melayu-Indonesia have a close relationship with the Islamisation process. In general, those manuscripts were written for the purpose of transmitting Islamic knowledge of events that took place in some religious institutions, such as Islamic boarding houses, *surau*, *dayah*, *rangrang*, to mention a few (Ambary 1995).

Majority of these religious manuscript contents have discussions on *tasawuf*, as Islam in Indonesia began to grow with the influence of *tasawuf* concept. The manuscripts of written works are: (1) generally written in two languages, Arabic and local languages or Malay and (2) written by Islamic scholars for the sake of knowledge transmission, either transmission between Malay-Indonesia scholars and Middle East scholars or between Indonesian scholars and their students in many regions. Through this writing tradition, Malay-Indonesian people began to develop a habit of documenting all their important thoughts and happenings using Javanese writing (Malay language using Arabic characters) or Pegon language (Javanese and Sundanese languages using Arabic characters), and also Arabic language itself.

The next period of the development of Islam in Indonesia was signed by a transmission brought by scholars who had come back from *Haramain* and this is believed to strengthen the tradition of writing (Ikram 1997), so such a tradition supports the presence

of big manuscripts, especially religious ones, which form an integral part of Indonesian manuscripts with contents of Islamic studies.

Based on this, Banjarmasin occupies a strategic position in Islamic studies development because Banjarmasin is one of the central regions for Islamic studies and has contributed to a larger number of religious writings and classical literatures in Banjarmasin, besides Palembang, Aceh or Banten (Steenbrink 1985). Although, Islam came later in Banjarmasin than in other regions, the productive contribution of its scholars is sufficient. The early period of religious-writing tradition in Banjarmasin was endorsed by Sheikh Syamsuddin al-Banjari's (1618-1680) writing on *Nur Muhammad*, which was much influenced by Ibnu Arabi concept.

The other Banjarese religious writing was the hand written Al-Quran by Datu Kandang Haji (Zamzam 1978; Kusasi 2003). Zamzam (1978) in his thesis titled *Syekh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari sebagai Ulama Juru Dakwah dalam Sejarah Penyiaran Islam di Kalimantan Abad ke-13 H/18 M dan Pengaruhnya di Asia Tenggara*, writes briefly about the story of Datu Kandang Haji's preaching, as he lived in the same era as Datu Sanggul (Tatakan-Tapin): "*Datu Kandang Haji adalah salah seorang dari dua orang datu (satunya lagi Datu Sanggul di bagian Selatan Banjarmasin, Tatakan Rantau dan sekitarnya) yang aktif berdakwah, mengajar masyarakat mengaji Alquran, dan menghidupkan pelaksanaan shalat Jumat di bagian Utara Banjarmasin (Paringin, Balangan, dan sekitarnya). Beliau wafat dengan meninggalkan Alquran tulisan tangan, sepasang terompah, dan tongkat untuk berkhotbah*". Besides that, according to utterances of Banjar-Balangan indigenes, although majority of his heritage has not been documented, the historical heritage proofs of the presence of Datu Kandang Haji related to his activities to preach do exist, for example, the erection of some mosques such as Al-Mukarramah (in Halong district), Sirajul Huda (in Paran village, Paringin district, Balangan), and a number of historical stuffs like glass plates, *cukmar* or wooden sticks, and many more.

Islamisation period and Islamic Studies have grown rapidly since the coming of Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari and Sheikh Abdul Wahab Bugis to South Borneo in 1772, after completing their studies in the Middle East. They established Kampung Dalam Pagar Martapura with the help of their students and the Banjarese until it became the centre of Islamic growth in South Borneo. Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari was popular and well-known for his prolific work and being one of the productive Islamic scholars in his era. His religious manuscript content focuses on daily problems of the local indigenes, so they occupy an important position in society. That is why al-Banjari's manuscripts, for instance, a book of *Sabil al-Muhtadin*, are said to be 'Malay great work' – written work having artistic impression, culture and great thoughts, as well as a nation's tradition. The work is considered as a nation's heritage since it represents the nation's collective thoughts and experiences throughout the centuries, as reflected by faith, life philosophy, tradition, knowledge concept, customs, language, art, social and cultural character; which all together form the image and cultural identity of the nation (Ahmad 2000). According to Wahid (1985), Sheikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari is a scholar who dared to give (1) guidances that are able to serve peace and to fulfill people's needs or local aspects with his visionary opinions; (2) religious interpretation and discussion that are based on local cases such as his idea on customary law continence property, joint property, or property of husband and wife in the context of inheritance-heir, to mention a few.

Another manuscript that is interesting to study is *Al-Durr al-Nafis* written by Sheikh Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari. This manuscript talks about *tasawuf* concepts with a focus on systemic structured *tauhid*. The main *tasawuf* lessons cover *maqamat*, God, human events, relationship between human and God, which are all inter-related with one

another, such that they think that there is only one form. Mansur (1985) thinks that Muhammad Nafis's *tasawuf* concept is influenced by the philosophy concept, particularly Neo Platonism. The concept of *tauhid* in Muhammad Nafis's teachings is the one developed by Ibnu Arabi and Abdul Karim al-Jilli (the founder of *Insan Kamil* theory), "*Yang ada hanyalah Allah dan selain Dia adalah tidak ada, kalau selain Dia itu ada maka cara beradanya adalah melalui tajalli atau kezahiran, hingga Dia berada di tiap zarah ujud*". Thus, tasawuf concept in the book is *paham wahdatul wujud* that says everything in this world consists of outer aspects (*aradh* and *al-Khalq*) and inner aspects (*jauhar*), that is *al-haq*. This concept is pioneered by Ibnu Arabi, Abdul Karim al-Jilli, and Jalaluddin Rumi. The main discussion comprises *tauhid af'al*, *tauhid sifat*, and *tauhid zat*. Then, what are the significance of those religious manuscripts? Fathurrahman (2007) stated that there is a relationship between Islam and Indonesian manuscripts. It is obvious that religious manuscripts have become an important element in a bid to reconstructing a number of Islamic intellectual thoughts, especially local Islamic thoughts, because the manuscripts reflect the meeting point between cultural, social, political, and intellectual elements in local culture and those of Islamic culture in a particular area. As a result, intensive studies on such manuscripts enrich Islamic local discourse in Indonesia as well as in Southeast Asia and in local Islamic context. The roles played by the manuscripts are also significant, studies on local Islamic discourse have not been properly done, especially in South Borneo as reported by Azra (1998) and Steenbrink (1985).

#### MANUSCRIPT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BANJAR SCHOLASTIC COMMUNITY

Based on the discussion, it was found that '*Hikayat Nur Muhammad*' contains stories about the origin of events of every creature that stems from the Light of God or to be called *Nur Muhammad*. The theme of *Nur Muhammad* and all of its variants include Sufism teaching materials at a high level (muntahi'), though it is not found in detail and there is no in-depth discussion about Sufism. Meanwhile, in such materials can be found related details as the books of *muktabarah* Sufism, such as *Al-Hikam*, *Al-Ihya*, or *Futuhah Makkah*. However, given the diversity of Banjar social conditions at that time, the information contained in this book has been remarkable when compared with the conditions in its era. The presence and discourse which are discussed in the book of *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*, either directly or indirectly has a strong influence on the life of Sufism and the people's mindset or the next generation of Banjar scholars. Regarding the historical setting and understanding of Islam for Banjar community in the early formation of the Islamic Kingdom of Banjar, the data showed that Sufism is one of the materials which is rapidly growing and is being studied by various groups and layers of society. In particular, *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*'s book makes Sufism in Banjarmasin region to grow and become dynamic. Therefore, it is said that history recording Sufism development in the Banjar is not only dominated by *akhlaki* Sufism introduced by Sufi Hasan al-Basri or Junaid al-Baghdadi, but also *wahdatul wujud* Sufism pioneered by Abu Yazid al-Bustami (874 M) with the understanding of al-Fana al-Baqa and al-Ittihad, Husien ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) with the understanding of al-Hulul, and Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (1165 M), with the theory of Khalq and al-Haq. The influence of the ideas of *wahdatulwujud* Sufism can be seen from the Sufism delivered by Hamzah Fansuri (Aceh), Sheikh Shamsuddin as-Sumatrani (Sumatra), Sheikh Siti Jenar or Sheikh Lemah Abang with "Manunggaling Kawula Gusti" concept (Java). Thus, although Islam came much later to Banjarmasin region compared with other regions in Indonesia, the dynamics of Islam development in Banjarmasin is promising and have contributed immensely to the archipelago of Islamic civilization.

The theme of *Nur Muhammad* has also become one sacred entity that is always discussed in the Sufism life of the Banjar society, especially in a limited context. It is also even considered as a mystery and hidden theme. This means that not every member of the

general public has known and is able to learn about. It can thus be seen from the books under the influence of *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* taught only to certain circles, and the high-class society in Sufism study strata (*muntahi*). In fact, sometimes, there are pros and cons with the theme, because of the inability of people to understand it well or there is no mursyid who is qualified to teach, hence, it tends to cause deviation.

### CONCLUSION

The concept of *Nur Muhammad* has also encouraged a better understanding of the Insan Kamil prototype. Therefore, it has become a strong appeal for people to learn and study Sufism. Thus, if it is then said that the introduction to the nature of *Nur Muhammad* is the last station of the search to God *makrifah*, the dignity of *Nur Muhammad* is of great importance and the introduction of *Nur Muhammad* is the 'perfect knowledge or perfect science'. Nevertheless, there are many interesting things presented in the manuscript being discussed, their effects on the lives of Banjar Sufism community and thoughts of the next generation scholars. It is clear that the existence of *Hikayat Nur Muhammad* manuscript and discourse has become the theme of the discussion, as the earliest human being created by God before the creation of the whole universe. Either directly or indirectly, it has a strong influence on the lives and thoughts of Banjar people or scholars of the next generation. Clearly, various books on Sufism produced later by Banjar scholars seemed to have an attachment and may even be said to be a continuation of the manuscript of *Hikayat Nur Muhammad*. The books continue to be the main reference in enabling the public understand Sufism. In fact, the study of Sufism which is specifically talking about *Nur Muhammad* also run quest.

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within a glass, the glass is as if it was a pearly (white) star lit from (the oil of) a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is all knowing" (Quran An-Nuur: 35).

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