

EARLY ISLAM IN NUSANTARA: *The First Trace of Islam through the Spices Trade*

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Abstract

The history of the entrance of Islam became the most important and the most obscure event in the discourse of Indonesian history. The authors note two fundamental problems concerning this "Early Islam": terminological problems and geographical problems. By using structural approach and through the procedures of Heuristics, Source Criticism, Interpretation, and Historiography, the study found that Islam came to Banda-Maluku Islands since the first year of Hijri calendar, or between the 7th and 8th century, practiced by the nomadic Muslim travelers in several important cities, Banda and Ternate. Secondly, nutmegs and cloves were the main commodity trade that has captivated Muslim merchants to come to Banda Islands in the early period, thus, it made the region as the gate of Islam entrance in North Indonesia. Finally, the process of Islam institutionalization in the harbor cities such as Banda, Ternate, and Hitu reached its peak in the 13th and 14th century. This was evidenced by the changes of *Kolano* to Sultanate, the establishment of Islamic Confederation in Hitu and Banda, and the formation of OK (*Orang Kaya*, literally means "rich people") "organization"—an organization of the rich people which regulated the trade issues. These findings are considered to make Banda Naira (Maluku) as the "new challenger" in the discourse of Early Islam in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Early Islam, Spices Trade, Nusantara*

Abstrak

Sejarah masuknya Islam menjadi peristiwa paling penting namun sekaligus paling tidak jelas dalam diskursus sejarah Indonesia. Penulis mencatat dua problem mendasar perihal "Islam Awal" ini; *Pertama* problem terminologis, dan *kedua* problem geografis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan *strukturis*, lewat tahapan prosedur; heuristik, kritik sumber, Interpretasi dan historiografi, penelitian ini menemukan; *Pertama*, Islam hadir di kepulauan Banda-Maluku sejak kurun pertama tahun hijriah, atau abad ke-7 dan ke-8 M, dipraktikkan para musafir muslim yang nomaden di sejumlah pelabuhan penting, seperti; Banda dan Ternate. *Kedua*, adalah Pala dan Cengkeh sebagai komoditi utama perdagangan yang telah memikat para saudagar Muslim di periode awal menuju pulau Banda, dan menjadikan kawasan itu sebagai pintu masuk Islam di Nusantara dari jalur Utara. *Ketiga*, Proses pelebagaan Islam di kota-kota pelabuhan seperti Banda, Ternate, dan Hitu mencapai puncaknya pada abad ke-13 dan abad ke-14. Dibuktikan dengan perubahan bentuk *Kolano* menjadi Kesultanan, berdirinya pemerintahan konfederasi Islam di Hitu dan Banda, dan terbentuknya "organisasi" *Orang Kaya* (OK) yang mengatur masalah perdagangan. Temuan ini sekaligus memposisikan Banda Naira di Maluku sebagai "penantang baru" dalam diskursus Islam Awal di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Islam Awal, Perdagangan Rempah, Nusantara*

INTRODUCTION

In the discourse of Islamic history in Indonesia, there are various versions of Early Islam; First, the discovery of an old graveyard in North Sumatra numbered in 676 H (1297 AD) under the name of Sultan Malik as-Saleh (King of Samudera Pasai Kingdom) in the 13th century. Secondly, is the assumption of a Dutchman named Snouck Hurgronje who mentioned that the entry of Islam in Indonesia, in the 17th century, was through the Indian-Muslim traders. These two opinions are then challenged by Hamka who believed that Islam has existed in Indonesia since 650 AD or seven years after the death of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Moreover, Hamka's argument was strongly supported by the findings of T.B. Arnold who cited Chinese sources regarding the presence of Islam since the intersection of the 7th century as evidenced by an Arabian leadership in Muslim community on the west coast of Sumatra (Arnold, 1913).

Apparently, the early entrance of Islam in Indonesia is much vaguer than the heritages of Islam itself which were strongly inherited through several channels; (1) Trading, (2) Marriage, (3) Education, (4) Sufism, (5) Art, and (6) Da'wah. These different types of channels have left their marks to this day. The trading channel leaves a form of settlement called "Pekojan"; Marriage channel leaves a mixture of different races within a community; Education channel creates *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school); Sufism channel leaves traces in the stories of Babad and Hikayat, raising popular figures such as; Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin, Syekh Abdul Shamad, and Nurruddin Ar-Raniry. The art channel leaves such architectural works of ancient mosques in Demak, Cirebon, Banten, and Aceh. The da'wah channel leaves the teachings of the *Wali* which still become a tradition today.

Academic debates in concern with Early Islam are thought to be caused by two basic problems, namely; terminological problems and geographical problems. Terminological problems related to the meaning of "Islam" are defined in a simple explanation by some scholars; As a formal symbol that appears in Arabic calligraphic writings in several artifacts, or in the form of regional Islamic figures. On the other hand, other experts define Islam more on the principles and values practiced in the social life, culture, and politics of a society (Azra, 2002).

The first definition gives a consequence that an area has been introduced to Islam if there are Islamic symbols embodied with Arabic writings in some old buildings or in graves that have shahada sentences and/or if there are Islamic leaders who play a significant role in the region. Subsequently, the second definition gives a consequence that an Islamic region is where the institutionalization of Islamic principles and values has been established in every aspect of a society.

Thereafter are the geographical problems. These are the issues of distance between the region of introduced Islam and the region of Islamic sources. In this case, regions like Semenanjung Malacca, Sumatera, and Java are very popular regarding the "Early Islam" in Indonesia. Yet, this geographical fact implicitly denies other important factors, such as the commercial aspect that once dominated the world since pre-Islamic

times and has created the goods distribution channels connecting many distant regions. This geographical consideration, ultimately, also ignores the important role of the farthest regions in Indonesia, such as Maluku in the discourse of Indonesian Islamic history. Moreover, it is added with the impressions attached to Maluku that is identical with Portuguese Christianity and Dutch Protestantism.

The discourse of Early Islam in Indonesia is increasingly getting complicated by the actions of Western scientists who deliberately reduce the role of Islam in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects toward the independence of Indonesia. Snouck Hurgronje, in his studies of Aceh, has reduced the role of Islam to make a distinction between Islam and Tradition (Azra, 2002). Geertz (1960) also suggested the term of "religion of Java" instead of Islam to analyze the Islamic phenomenon in Javanese society.

This paper will present a study that offers the role of Banda Naira Islands in Maluku as an important area in the field of worldwide spices trading back then as well as the entrance of Early Islam in Indonesia. The findings may be regarded as an objection to the earlier research, but the author refers to call it as a complement for the previous findings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a structural approach which assumed that historical reality, ontologically, is a loose social structure allowing the emergence of individuals or particular social groups who have a different insight and desire with the society in general and trying to change it (Lloyd, 1993). In the context of this structural method, Islam is seen as a new element that influences the socio-cultural system of the people in Banda Islands so that it creates social changes in the belief and government system as a proof of its presence.

The study was conducted on primary sources and monuments (artifacts). Documents (archives) collection was done for the primary sources while as for the monuments, an in-depth study of several Islamic building artifacts (mosques, cemeteries, inscriptions) and manuscripts such as hand-written Qur'an and Islamic writings of the past was done. The study was also directed to several Islamic myths in Banda Islands.

The collected data were brought to be selected through validity and reliability test by using source criticism techniques (external and internal criticism). After the data passed the selection, it was then followed by data interpretation using a number of common paradigms. In the last stage, a data description was performed logically and systematically in the form of historiography (Garraghan, 1957; Gottschalk, 1986).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Banda Naira and The World Spice Trading Network

In the BC (Before Century), there has been a Transcontinental trade lane that connects Chang's China across the steppes and deserts to the Persian region, south to the Caspian Sea and Mesopotamia, and to the Middle Sea (port of Antioch). Its main function was to channel Eastern products including nutmegs from Maluku which were transported from Malacca to China in order to be brought westward through the Mediterranean Sea. The products were transported by camel caravans in huge quantities from South until it reached the Indian Ocean region (Chaudhuri, 1989).

Since the 7th century, Islam has spread through the Silk Road in Central Asia until it reached China. On that basis, T.W. Arnold argued that not only through the path of Coromandel and Malabar in India, the entrance of Islam in Indonesia through China also needs to be considered. The argument was based on a Chinese source that around the 7th century, there had been an Arabian leader in Arab-Moslem settlement on the west coast of Sumatra (Arnold, 1913).

One of the most important spreading areas of Islam in the silk trading network was Trans Oxiana which flows through the rivers of the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya that empties into the Aral Sea. In addition to the influence of Islam in Baghdad, including the Persian Islamic culture which also entered that region, the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara turned into a center of Persian-Islamic civilization (Roberts, 1995). The expansion of Islam to Trans Oxiana region turned out to cause conflicts with the steppe residents who were still infidels, resulting in the breaking of trade routes.

As the path on the Asian mainland had declined, the trading between the Middle East and Southeast Asia and East Asia was changing fundamentally. The coastline was growing rapidly. Burger and Prajudi (1962) suspected that the path connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea to India, towards Indonesia and China was very likely to have been known since the first century AD.

At the time when Islam reached its peak in the 10th and 11th century (Ottoman-Turkish dynasty), there comes what was known as Emporium*. Some of the popular emporiums of the time include; Aden and Mecca in the Red Sea, Muscat, Bandar Abbas and Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, as well as Cambai and Kalikut in the Arabian Sea. Besides that, there was Satgaon in the Bay of Bengal, Malacca in Malacca Strait, Canton, as well as Zaiton and Nanking at China Sea (Chaudhuri, 1989).

Since the formation of the emporiums, the commercial voyages between East and West are no longer directly pursued. Traders from the Persian Gulf were enough to reach Cambay or Calicut because trading can be done with the merchants from Malacca. Moreover, the Malacca merchants did not have to continue their voyages either to Hormuz or Aden. China was also only quite up in Malacca to obtain commodities of ex India, Persian or Arabic, as well as spices from Maluku. That is why Reid (1999) said

* Emporium is a harbor city where international trading activities are performed providing various supporting facilities such as warehousing, credit facilities, markets, lodging, docks to repair damaged ships, and so on. It is usually from the Emporium that the ruler and/or colonist undertakes the political and economic expansion to form an Empire. For more information, see Chaudhuri (1983).

that the direct trading relation of China and Maluku only last until the mid-14th century. This is since Malacca, at that time, had been transformed into a large emporium with all the complete facilities that could accommodate traders from various regions, including sailors from Banda Naira.

Some sources mentioned that Banda people were involved in the transporting and trading services. Tome Pires, for example, stated that Banda ships were generally involved in transporting spices to Gresik and then transferred to Malacca, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Patani, and Siam with other ships (Lapian, 1990). In addition, Banda's commercial fleet, according to Pires, was not very good compared to ships from Java. It is known that Banda ships only have a wooden anchor with a crew of slaves, generating a long time in reaching the distance where some even damaged and sank (Pires, in Lapian, 1990).

The route from Malacca to Banda Naira usually passed the East coast of Sumatra and along the North coast of Banten, Jepara, and Gresik, then continue to Bali, Lombok, and Nusa Tenggara to Maluku. Factually, the Malacca-Banda route has contributed significantly to the progress of ports in Banten, Jepara, and Gresik. There was also a significant impact on the rapidly growing port of Makassar as an emporium (Kartodirdjo, 1987; Lairissa, 1995) of East Indonesia in the Portuguese era.

Banda Naira had an important role in international commerce because of the cloves and nutmegs which were much needed in the world markets, such as India, China, Middle East, and Europe (Burger & Prajudi, 1962). Tome Pires noted that Banda Islands can guarantee 500 nutmegs flower (*fulli*) and 6000-7000 nutmegs a year. Even though these numbers are considered to be high, no other data can be compared.

Banda's role as a port on the Silk Route ended in the early 17th century along with the presence of the Western, such as Dutch-VOC and English-EIC. J.C. van Leur recognized major changes in the structure of trade in Southeast Asia (including Banda) due to the arrival of VOC. Meanwhile, according to Meilink Roelofsz, the changes had already occurred when the Portuguese conquered the city of Malacca in 1511 and Banda-Ternate in 1512. Nevertheless, according to Lapian (1997), the opening of sea-road connecting Southeast Asia with Europe pioneered by the Portuguese did not necessarily disconnect the spice trade. The decline occurred when the British (EIC) and the Dutch (VOC) in the early 17th century succeeded in controlling the sea lanes that cut off the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. This fact also buried the caravan trade route from Indonesia to the Middle East and Europe.

Islam in Banda Islands

The notion that Islam has reached China since the 7th century AD is based on the historical fact of Prophet Muhammad SAW hadith saying "*Tuntutlah ilmu sampai ke negeri Cina*" means to seek knowledge to the land of China. Thus, this triggers the development of Islamic civilization in China. Historically, Muslim rulers and merchants did dominate the commercial routes, both through coastal trade routes and caravans trade routes through Asia mainland. This is reinforced by the discovery of

transcontinental trade routes connecting the Middle East, China and India through Central Asia.

In the context of the entry of Islam into Indonesia, some opinions may be proposed, such as Arnold (1913) who said that at the intersection of the 7th century, there was an Arabian leader in Moslem-Arab settlements on the west coast of Sumatra. A number of Indonesian experts also said that Islam entered Indonesia by Arabian people in the Shafi'i school, either through the Indian marine trade network as well as through the Chinese transcontinental trade network. Hasyimi (1989) later concluded that Islam came directly from the Arabian Peninsula and not from India. The period of this arrival was not the 12th or the 13th century but in the first century of Hijri calendar or 7th century AD.

The final question, when and how did Islam reach Maluku, especially to the Banda Islands? In order to answer this question, the two terms need to be separated beforehand. First, the arrival of Islam in the region, and second, the process of institutionalization of Islam. The entrance process of Islam is related to the path and time of the coming of Islam and on the other hand, the process of Islamic institutionalization is in concern with Islam that has been accepted as part of the socio-cultural system of the local community.

Leirissa (1999) citing Hamka believed that Islam first entered Maluku since 650 AD or 7 years after the death of Prophet Muhammad SAW. In those days, Arab traders had brought cloves and nutmegs to ports in the Persian Gulf to be sold in the Middle East and Europe. The Arab traders later married natives and settled or even died. After their death, they have no inheritance of the tradition of Islamic worship so that their descendants return to the religion of the tribe (Leirissa, 1999).

Apparently, the argument of Hamka was in line with the folklore in Banda Naira about the presence of foreign Muslims in Banda. In the oral tradition of Banda, it is mentioned that Islam entered their territory through a man named syekh Abubakar Al Pasya who came from Persia. Its presence was due to the political upheaval that occurred due to the transition of power from the Bani Umayyah into the hands of Bani Abasiyah in 132 Hijri (750 AD). When it comes to Banda, Banda people were very interested in syekh Al Pasya because he had the ability to bring down a rain in long dry season in Banda Naira. This means it was certain that Islam had entered Banda Naira in 132 Hijri or 750 AD.

The process of Islam institutionalization in Banda Naira was revealed in an oral tradition namely *Hikayat Tanah Lonthor*. Even though this folklore was debatable that Bung Hatta doubt the authenticity of the language, several historians continued to recognize it as a variant of historical sources. Alwi (2005) even still included *Hikayat Tanah Lonthor* in his historical work titled "*Sejarah Banda Naira*" although the version of the author has little difference.

Several myths contained in *Hikayat Tanah Lonthor* are intended to reinforce the self-existence of a group of noble families who differ in social status with the common

people of the Banda Islands. It also an effort to gain the legality of their power over Banda Islands. The myth of pomegranate is like the myth of *rumpun bambu* which are generally spread in some areas in Southeast Asia.

In the tale, it was revealed about the government system of *Lebe Tel Rat At* or the Government of "*Tiga Imam Empat Raja*" or "Three Priests Four Kings" which is a collegial form of government which distinguishes religious status based on religious knowledge and experience. King Kakyai of Lonthor was an *Imam* in Negeri Lonthor, King Kelelay of Lautaka was an *Imam* in Naira Island, King Leleway of Selamon was an *Imam* in Negeri Selamon and Negeri Waer, while King Keleliang of Waer did not become an *Imam*. The Islamic experiences of the three brothers were sailed with the myth of the unknown journey of the sea, resulting in different religious status among the four brothers. That was why Keleliang who do not follow the religious journey only got a status as a King in the land of Waer. Meanwhile, religious issues, back then, were the responsibility of Leleway who an Imam and a King in Negeri Selamon is. Furthermore, the youngest daughter, Cilubintang, got a position as a leader in a new settlement on Naira Island which was known as the land of the Queen (Negeri Ratu). Negeri Ratu was a country whose line of leadership was in accordance with matrilineal ideology. In the case of Islamic law, the people of the country were subject to the King as well as the *Imam* of Negeri Lautaka.

Alwi (2007) explained that Cilubintang marries a nobleman (*Raden*) of Java and, shortly after, they went to Java. However, the book does not explain the background and how the marriage took place. This explanation becomes important because, in the classical history of Indonesia, such marriages often occur with political and economic motives. The efforts of the kingdoms in building cooperation as well as mutual influence in Indonesia demanded a marriage between nobles (political marriage) for the sake of each power and economic influence.

The relationship between Javanese (Majapahit) in Banda Naira had become so important. Not only because Banda was one of the areas which got the influence of Majapahit in eastern Indonesia as told in the book "*Negarakertagama*" (1365) by Mpu Prapanca, but also for the spice trading problems and the power to stem the influence of the Portuguese (Catholic) in Maluku. Hence, the marriage between Cilubintang and the Majapahit nobles contained in *Babad Tanah Jawi* the 7th and 8th stanzas (in Djajadiningrat, 1983) can be regarded as a form of political marriage where the model of this political marriage was similar and common in the history of inter-royal relations in Indonesia.

Based on this information, it is most likely that the political relationship between Majapahit and Banda Naira had occurred in 1365. This means that the process of Islamic institutionalization in Banda Naira probably already completed in the 14th century. This is what underlies the diaries of Portuguese arrival in London in 1512 which mentioned that Islam has existed for 100 years before the Portuguese. This Portuguese source is reasonably suspected as a period of Islam institutionalization evidenced by Banda which, at that time, had the customary governance system of *Lebe*

Tel Rat At (Tiga Imam Empat Raja leadership model) and had the structure of the Rich to be in charge in organizing the trade issues and Syahbandar.

CONCLUSION

There are three arguments about early Islam in Indonesia whose traces were found in Banda Naira Islands as the entrance to the world's spice trade. Firstly, Islam has existed in the Maluku Islands, particularly on Banda Islands since the first year of Hijri calendar or the 7th and 8th century where the existence of Islam in this period was in the form of "personal religion", adopted by the travelers of Muslim nomads in some important Banda and Ternate ports. In that span of time, there is a great possibility of cross-marriage between Muslim-Arab traders and local daughters, forming a united Muslim society. The *da'wah* was done by the travelers along with their trading activities.

Secondly, the process of Islam institutionalization in the social and cultural life of Maluku, especially in port cities such as Ternate, Banda, and Hitu, is materialized and reached its peak in the 13th century and 14th century. This is evidenced by the changes in the form Kolano to Sultanate and the establishment of Islamic Confederation in Banda and Hitu; the emergence of new institution such as The Rich (*Orang Kaya*) which regulates the trading issues; The birth of Islamic religious worship and sharia institutions; As well as the growing of various Islamic new traditions.

Thirdly, it is about the local sources, both traditional historiography as well as the oral traditions which give a relatively common explanation on the entry of Islam and the process of Islamic institutionalization in Banda Naira whose conclusions are far beyond than what is found in European-Portuguese sources. This shows that Islam had arrived in Banda Naira in the 7th or 8th century AD as "Personal Islam", and was present in the 13th century as an officially institutionalized "Cultural Islam." It also unveils new fact about Islam in Indonesia that is known to begin in Aceh and now presents Banda Naira in Maluku as one of the entrance of Early Islam in Indonesia through the North routes.

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