

## Indonesia



**Albertus Bagus Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations Through Java***

Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014. xii + 252 pages. 9 b&w illustrations; 3 maps; list of maps and figures. Hardback, £65.00/£58.50 (website price). ISBN: 978-1-4094-6396-2.

THE PRACTICE OF pilgrimage is alive and well throughout the world today. Founded on and sustained by religious practice, pilgrimage has always involved essential “real world” elements and thus involves an “outward” as well as an “inward” experience. Increasingly, in “the shifting world of postmodern travel ... rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism, or pilgrims and tourists, no longer seem tenable” (BADONE and ROSEMAN 2004, 1). Today, in both Muslim and Catholic worlds, out of necessity pilgrims have had to adjust to the “logistics” more generally associated with tourism as global mobility has become more ubiquitous. The Muslim Hajj, now involving millions of the faithful from across the Muslim world, has become, *The New Yorker* suggests, “a modern spectacle,” resembling in the words of a Saudi Arabian Minister of Hajj “twenty Super Bowls in one stadium” (*The New Yorker*, 2012). It finds its counterpart in pilgrimage to a multitude of Catholic sites across the Eurasian continent offering, as various pilgrimage websites attest, an incredible “choice of pilgrimage destinations” and a range of “pilgrimage experiences” (see <http://www.206tours.com/pilgrimages/>) which, although based on the ancient pilgrimage routes of Christendom, are no longer explicitly religious in nature. They can provide “the exhilaration that comes with being part of an ancient tradition,” or simply, “long range walking paths for the alternative tourist” (see <http://www.pilgrimroutes.com/>). It reminds us, of course, that “pilgrimaging,” to coin a phrase, has always had a temporal dimension, as the account of the travels of Ibn Jubayr in the twelfth century (PETERS 1994) or that of the English pilgrims in the fourteenth described in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* from the fourteenth century, for instance, attest.

With this new book on pilgrimage, by Albertus Bagus Laksana, we are presented with a rich ethnography of pilgrimage of a more traditional kind, one that provides deep insight into the motivations and inner experiences of the Javanese pilgrims in south Central Java. Part of an innovative new series launched by Ashgate, it will contribute to a greater recognition of a practice which defies the supposed disenchantment of modernity. In *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices*, the author sets out to show that Java has its own traditions of pilgrimage that are deeply embedded in, and form a real dimension of, a contemporary lived Javanese culture.

Early on in the book, the author draws attention to possibly the first and most celebrated modern Javanese account of pilgrimage within Java, the *Serat Centhini*, a nineteenth-century text based on seventeenth-century events. Essentially reflecting “the worldview of the Javanese Muslim,” Laksana argues that

it provided a “religio-cultural model of a Javano-Muslim identity” that was intimately connected to the idea of “Java.” It represented a “hybrid identity” related to “a set of concrete realities: a particular geography with all its natural wonders, a deeply plural society with distinctive religio-cultural customs and lore, a civilisation that was extremely proud of its glorious past, and so forth” (24).

Laksana also draws attention to the fact that the idea of pilgrimage is lodged within a classical Javanese tradition of *suluk* (mystical) literature that recounts episodes of “ascetic-wandering pilgrimage,” a practice that continues in twenty-first century Java. Indeed, as quintessentially representing “a quest for finding one’s true self,” it too, may well have been elaborated upon as a third variant in an account of pilgrimage in Java today. But although recognizing that much of what constitutes the experience of Islamic and Catholic pilgrimage in Java by the Javanese is rooted in such a shared tradition, the author is concerned to distinguish clearly the “religious” from the “cultural” and “religion” from “mythology.” His “third way” lies in a different direction.

Geography underpins the book’s argument concerning the common elements Javanese Catholics and Muslims are shown in this study to draw upon: the study is limited to south Central Java and, in particular, the Special Province of Yogyakarta. This presents an ideal site for the study since, as well as being still formally governed by a Javanese king and thus directly linked to both cultural tradition and the tradition of royal patronage of Javanese Islam (RICKLEFS 2012), it has also been the preeminent centre of Javanese Catholic scholarship and administration, and not least, despite its Western foundations, of an essentially Javanese Catholic community (SUNARDI 2014). The fact that the region also boasts Indonesia’s iconic Buddhist and Hindu temple complexes, Borobudur and Prambanan, which also remain sites of present day religious pilgrimage is also relevant.

The book is logically divided into three sections, the first and second of which detail the Muslim and Catholic experience of pilgrimage. Their titles, referring to the “Javano-Muslim” and “Javano-Christian” communities respectively, already preempt the third section, titled “Comparative Perspective,” in which Laksana draws out his conclusions about the shared heritage to be found in the pilgrimage practices of Muslims and Catholics in Java. Much of this common “Javano” cultural basis is outlined in Part One, reflecting the unquestioned preeminence and chronological precedence of the Javano-Muslim identity formation in modern Java. However, in chapter 2 (Part One) and chapter 5 (Part Two) the foundational Hindu sources of “the other” that can be found incorporated in both Javanese Muslim and Christian pilgrimage practice are succinctly identified.

Parts One and Two are each structured around a discussion of three empirical cases studies representing prominent examples of pilgrimage from each community. Clarification of the specific origins and saintly association of each site of veneration forms an essential ingredient to the book’s argument. The Islamic pilgrimage shrines are Tembayat, Gunungpring, and Mawlana Maghribi, and the Christian shrines are the Sendangsono Marian Grotto, the Sacred Heart Shrine at Ganjuran, and the Mausoleum at Muntilan. Tembayat is the shrine associated with a disciple of one of the *Wali Songo*, recognized as the nine founding saints of Javanese Islam; Gunung-

pring remembers a saint closely associated with the Yogyakarta Sultanate; and Maw-lana Maghribi, is a shrine for what is considered “the ancestor of the founders of Islam in Java” (8). The Christian shrines have a much younger provenance. The oldest, Sendangsono Marian, dating from 1929, commemorates the “birth of the Javanese Catholic community” where the first large group of Javanese were baptised in 1904; the Gunjuran shrine, established in 1930, commemorates what could be considered as the “Javanisation” of Catholicism in Java; and the Mausoleum, is the resting place of the founders of Catholicism in Java, including its first “martyrs” (no date given).

These sites inherently have broader meaning in Java because each incorporates a perceived association, whether by direct reference or proximity, to elements inextricably entangled in Java’s cultural history, such as the pre-Islamic “mythical” Goddess of the South Seas, the monumental Buddhist “shrine” of Borobudur, the dynastic history of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, or physically, to Javanese architectural traditions. This reality (tangible as well as intangible) underpins the significance of the shared heritage Laksana is drawing attention to. Thus, inevitably, such pilgrimage sites have meaning beyond the parameters of the particular religion with which they are associated, and are able to attract pilgrims of other religious persuasions and ethnicities. These elements also form part of what the author distinguishes as “Javanese mythology” which, with little further amplification, is distinguished from the belief systems of the two forms of “Javano” religion.

As many pre-Islamic spiritual (mystical) traditions (such as *selamatan*) remain important to Javanese spirituality, and where Hindu temple ruins scattered throughout Central and East Java also appear to remain a focus of continued religious significance and presumably pilgrimage (as evidenced by the small offerings and other tokens that appear anonymously at less visited sites), the question of what many have defined as the “Javanese syncretic religion” remains unexplored in this book. If the study was extended beyond the confines of southern Central Java, the question of “promiscuity” in pilgrimage practice in Java would need to be considerably broadened. One thinks, for instance, of the ethnically pluralist pilgrimage to a nominally Chinese shrine, such as the Sam Po Kong temple outside Semarang, which continues to attract large numbers of Javanese Muslim pilgrims. Or the international significance of the grave of Sunan Ampel, another of the *Wali Songo*, the founders of Islam in Java, located in the heart of the Arab quarter of Surabaya and described in tourist literature as “one of Surabaya’s main religious tourism destinations” (see *Indonesia Travel*).

What conclusions does the author come to, and what might adherents of either religion draw from this study? Ultimately, Laksana hopes the theological scholar will see the study of the experience of pilgrimage in Java as providing a “sort of comparative theological logic” and as providing “a vast array of comparative theological reflections” (223). Specifically for Indonesia, Laksana sees the possibility of a study of “the practice of saint veneration [as providing] a rich locus for Muslim-Christian encounters” (220) and as offering “the basis for a distinctive comparative theology that owes its life and crucial insights not only to both traditions *qua* religious tradition, but also to their concrete historical cultural interactions” (221). In this the author places great emphasis on the importance of participation in and the study of the “sensory experience” which is inherent in the practice of pilgrimage

for identifying the commonalities in Muslim and Christian pilgrimage practice in South Central Java. An understanding and appreciation of this common field of practice, and more explicitly its “comparative theological logic” and “theological anthropology that understands the human journey as a pilgrimage to God and the true self” (221), could, the author concludes, form a “third pilgrimage tradition.” This would emerge as pilgrims “visit the shrine of the other, or when pilgrims of one faith encounter pilgrims of other faiths in their own shrines” (223–24).

Current events in Indonesia, that have perhaps provided the motivation for this study, may not lead every observer to come to such optimistic conclusions. Given the emerging tensions in Javanese (Indonesian) contemporary society, the conclusions and suggestions put forward in this scholarly work are highly commendable, but perhaps underestimate the fact that increasingly Java is beholden to the wider changes taking place in Indonesia in which Java is but another regional culture. Contextualised globally, every indication in recent years appears to point to influences leading to a regeneration in Indonesian Islam in the course of which many elements of local tradition have become targets for reform. Similarly, in the Christian context, both that of Protestantism as well as Catholicism, introduced strains of fundamental evangelicalism carry with them universalising influences which are likely to degrade the significance of traditional cultural references in favor of a greater purity of belief.

Nevertheless, this finely crafted ethnography reminds us of the rich cultural traditions of Java, and its historical ability to constantly adapt to, absorb, and transform influences from outside. It also represents an important contribution to contemporary reality when pointing to ingredients that can be utilized in countering forces that seek to challenge the historical fabric of community in Java, and to provide the bases of reconciliation where tears have already appeared.

---

#### REFERENCES

- BADONE, E., and S. ROSEMAN, eds.  
 2004 *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- BONNEFE, M.  
 1986 *Pègrinations javanaises: Les voyages de R.M.A. Purwa Lelana: une vision de Java au XIX siècle (c.1860–1875)*. Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Indonesia Travel*  
<http://www.indonesia.travel/en/destination/531/the-ampel-mosque-and-the-tomb-of-sunan-ampel-east-java> (accessed 10 June 2016).
- PETERS, F. E.  
 1994 *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- RICKLEFS, M. C.  
 2012 *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press
- SUNARDI, St.  
 2014 Using Javanese lyrics while the Dutch call the tune: Postcolonial perspective in religious Studies. In *Dealing with Diversity: Religion, Globalisation,*

*Violence, Gender and Disaster in Indonesia*, ed. Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, 351–62. [http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403252/Focus\\_17\\_web\\_rev.pdf/173c54a9-4d45-4e88-97f6-b7f022f05b50](http://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13403252/Focus_17_web_rev.pdf/173c54a9-4d45-4e88-97f6-b7f022f05b50) (accessed 22 April 2016).

*The New Yorker*

2012 Modern Mecca: Transformation of a holy city. April 16. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/04/16/modern-mecca> (accessed 28 September 2015).

Joost Coté  
*Monash University*