

ISLAMIC PENETRATION IN MINDANAO AND SULU

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The use of the word "penetration" here invites a variety of meanings, two of which are relevant. At one level, "penetration" refers to the physical aspect of the coming of Islam, which is generally associated with specific historical dates. On another level, it describes what may be termed as the intellectual aspect¹ —the adoption of Islam as a vibrant socio-cultural force among the peoples that embraced it.

The necessity to make such a distinction stems from the fact that even today, we tend to lump these two levels of penetrations of Islam into a single phenomenon. Furthermore, such a distinction should remain and be reinforced for significant reasons. One reason is historiographical in nature: to delineate men from events—which this paper wish to emphasize. There is, for example, a wide difference between the coming of a Muslim or Muslims to places like Mindanao and Sulu, either as itinerant travellers and not as religious proselytizers on one hand,² and the adoption of Islam through the preachings of Muslims on the basis of missionary purposes or other reasons on the other hand. In some cases, however, where the two levels of penetration are at one in the form of a cause-and-effect phenomenon (which is highly obvious in this particular inquiry), then non-distinction is excusable and poses no problem. Since this paper focuses on a particular case in the Islamization process, and inasmuch as its ramifications have not yet been authentically investigated i.e., the methodologies or processes in preaching or adoption of Islam, it is suggested that a distinction between the two levels of penetration be sustained for academic reasons.

Corollary to this argument—and as an appeal to students of Islam in this part of the world—a distinction should also be held between the Arabs and Islam for rather peculiar reasons.³ From personal observation, some Muslims Filipinos, particularly the Maranaos of Lanao,

consciously or unconsciously, tend to take the concept Arab and Islam as synonymous, as an indivisible term. While their disposition on this case can be explained, there is a marked distinction between the two concepts if viewed in the same manner earlier discussed.

To illustrate this point: there is no disagreement to the prominent role the Arab Muslims took in laying the groundwork for the preaching of Islam in Malaysia,⁴ including Mindanao and Sulu, but in no way were they responsible for the greater segment of the Islamization process in the region. It is almost a universal knowledge that the native missionaries, some originally merchants,⁵ had done most of the conversion and carried out other missionary activities.

This paper aims to present fairly the two aspects of Islamization, although the intellectual aspect will be discussed deeper. In this manner, it may be possible to derive additional information on the adoption of Islam in Mindanao and Sulu, which to date still remains a dark chapter in the overall Islamization of Malaysia. This paper is by no means definitive; it is preliminary. The lack of primary sources, especially archaeological data, was a big handicap in this inquiry.

Nonetheless, this paper will examine, not only why and how Islam got accepted in the region, but significantly why and how Islam has managed to display vigor and vitality, to become a dynamic force that has played a dominant role in the lives of its converts.

The Advent of Islam

The coming and adoption of Islam in southern Philippines must be viewed in a wider context because the latter is an integral part of a vast movement: the massive penetration and expansion of Islam in Southeast Asia.⁶ As such, the different theories on the introduction and expansion of Islam to Malaysia in some respects also hold true to Mindanao and Sulu,⁷ although all of these theories are identically repeated or literally applicable.

Islam in Sulu

Much has been written about the coming of Islam,⁸ which will serve as a general reference of this paper. The exact date of the coming

of Islam to Sulu is still undetermined, primarily due to the lack of sufficient data and sources. Many scholars have attempted to date the coming of Islam to Sulu. These at best are approximations mainly based on traditional sources, particularly the **salsilas** or genealogical accounts. The **salsilas**, however, are imbued with legendary and mythical elements and thus are far from being accurate and substantive. Nonetheless, the **salsilas** still remain primary sources whose relevance and, perhaps, authenticity are being confirmed by valuable findings in recent years.⁹

The Sulu Genealogy, by far the leading traditional account in Sulu, reports of a certain Tuan Masha'ika who came to Sulu—an event considered significant to the beginnings of Islam in the Philippines. The account, however, does not explicitly reveal whether Masha'ika was a Muslim or not, although it can be gleaned that he must have been subjected to Islamic influences. One reason is that his name, Masha'ika, is a derivative of the Arabic word **shaik**, which in its nearest meaning is “a tribal leader” or for a relevant Islamic connotation, Shaik-ul-Islam. Another tacit proof of Islamic influence on Masha'ika is that he begot a certain **Maumin**¹⁰ — a name which must have been derived from the Arabic term **Mu'min** (believer), or if one were to give it an Islamic coloring, from a convenient phrase, **Amir-ul-Mu'minin** (Commander of the Faithful), the title assumed by Caliph Ali, the fourth Muslim patriarchal caliph of Medina.

The account on the coming of Masha'ika to Sulu is rather scanty. It does not tell where he came from and when he arrived, nor does it mention whether his child, Maumin, was a man or a woman. (The term **Mu'min**, from which the name seemed to have been derived, can refer to either male or female.) The significance of the account, its inadequacy notwithstanding, is that it showed the beginnings of Islamic influence in the area, and could possibly “suggest the existence of a Muslim family in Sulu, although it did not signify at all the Islamization of the areas.”¹¹

A Sulu **salsila** reports that an Arab Muslim missionary, Sharif Auliya Makhdum (Makdum in later sources), landed in the old town of **Bwana**, in Sulu around 1380 A.D.¹² Makhdum was said to be a noted Arabian **qadi** (judge) who came to Malacca sometime in the middle of the fourteenth century and converted its ruler, Sultan Muhammad Shah, to Islam.

The circumstances surrounding the coming of Makhdum to Sulu is not fully revealed. One school of thought says that Makhdum came to Sulu to preach the Islamic faith, after his successful proselytizing campaigns in Malacca. Saleeby,¹³ the earliest if not the first Islamicist in the Philippines, contends that Makhdum was a true missionary who purposely went to Sulu to preach his faith. Another group advances the idea that Makhdum was actually a trader, and if he became a missionary, it was a later development. That the coming of Makhdum to Sulu was for trade, possibly being involved in the China trade, was suggested by Gowing who says that "Makhdum landed in Sulu not on an arab dhow, but on a Chinese junk."¹⁴ Saleeby, however, pursues his point further on Makhdum's missionary disposition:

. . . the successes of Makhdum in preaching a new faith to people as independent in their individual views and as pertinacious in their religious beliefs, practices, and customs, as the Tausogs of Sulu must have been at his time certainly remarkable and creditable to a high degree.¹⁵

Makhdum was also noted for so-called "magic and medical powers."¹⁶ He was reported to have travelled extensively in the islands of Sulu and made many converts to Islam. In Bwansa, where he was most successful in his missionary tasks, the people built a mosque in his memory. The people of Tapul, an outlying district of Sulu, claim descent from him and continue to venerate him as a prophet, while the people of Sibutu, a far-flung island in the Tawi-Tawi region of Sulu, contend that his grave is in the area.¹⁷

Makhdum's religious activities are significant in many ways, although their value would probably have easily diminished if these were not followed up by subsequent missionary work. First, they laid the ground-work for later Islamic preachings not only in Sulu but also in other parts of the Philippines where Islam gained foothold. Second—and this is relevant to the expansion of Islam in many parts of the world—the peaceful character of his preachings partially softened the commonly held notion that Islam gained many adherents in the world through the sword.

The *salsilas*, supplemented by traditional sources, relate that in 1390 A.D., ten years after Makhdum landed in Sulu, a certain Rajah

Baginda came to Sulu with a horde of warriors.¹⁸ It should be noted that Rajah Baginda was not an Arab but a dashing Muslim prince from Menangkabaw, Borneo.¹⁹ Apparently because he was accompanied by an army, he was at first given a cold welcome by the people who anticipated a possible show of force. But the people, after knowing that Rajah Baginda was a Muslim, received him well.²⁰

While there are isolated cases of coercion in the process of Islamization, Rajah Baginda's coming and his ultimate reign over Sulu cannot be considered a violent or coercive act, unless his appearance with a company of *wazirs* (ministers) and top army officials would be considered a gesture of planned invasion, or a show of force. The fact that Rajah Baginda received the blessings and support of the people he ruled for quite a period of time, without any reported case of harassment, that he was able to effect large-scale conversions lends credence to the contention that Islamization was not a tyrannical or coercive process.

With respect to the Islamization of Sulu, the importance of Rajah Baginda's period can be described through what Majul ascribes to Baginda as "being a Muslim coming to stay with Muslims, Rajah Baginda could have served to strengthen Islamic consciousness in the areas",²¹ a movement that was initiated by Makhdum and then reinforced by later missionaries.

Perhaps the most dramatic aspect of the Islamization of Sulu was the coming of Abubakr.²² Abubakr was reported to be the second Arab Muslim missionary to reach Sulu in 1450 A.D. from Palembang, Sumatra via Borneo. He came all the way from Arabia through Baghdad, then to Sumatra before he reached Sulu. His mission to Malaysia, according to sources, was ignited by an enthusiasm to preach the doctrines of Abu-Ishaq, which were embodied in a book titled *Dar-ul-Mazlum* (The House of the Oppressed).²³

The Annals of Malacca tells that Abubakr was a famed jurist, an eminent member of Malacca's *fuqaha* (jurist) class. His success in Malacca led him to Sulu where he married Princess Paramisuli, Rajah Baginda's daughter. Later, Abubakr became the *qadi* (judge) and *imam* of Rajah Baginda's court. He was also conferred the title of *muallim* (religious teacher) for his dedication in teaching law and religion in local

madrasahs (schools) and in mosques of which he was highly credited for their construction.

Because Rajah Baginda did not have a son, he appointed Abubakr as his successor. When Abubakr came to power, his expertise on jurisprudence, came into play: he framed laws according to Islamic injunctions and settled cases along Islamic framework. In this manner, he became the people's spiritual master and temporal overseer.

Abubakr's most important and perhaps lasting contribution to the Islamization of Sulu was the establishment of the Sultanate, where he assumed the powers of a **caliph** (from Khalifa, meaning successor) patterned after the Islamic Caliphate.²⁴ Claiming authority over Sulu and other islands, Abubakr, who assumed the title of a sultan, reorganized the government, appointed **wazirs** and **panglimas** (governors) and instituted reforms. The Sultanate, as an institution, with its tremendous power over Sulu, was the largest single factor responsible for the Islamization of Sulu, Abubakr, in his 30-year reign, founded a new dynasty that did not only advance the Islamization process²⁵ but preserved and safeguarded Islam during the two colonial periods in the Philippines.

Another traditional account relates that Islam was strengthened by seven Arab brothers who came all the way from Arabia.²⁶ With the exception of meager archaeological data supporting this theory,²⁷ the account has not been substantially authenticated.

The Islamization of the Tawi-Tawi region in Sulu, is credited to a certain Sayid Alawi Balpaki, and a certain Mohadun.²⁸ Balpaki was said to have come to Tawi-Tawi about 40 years before Makhdum, as indicated by the date of his death, 1310 A.D., which was clearly inscribed in his tomb.²⁹ Assuming this account is true to some extent, it can then be inferred that Islamic influence started taking roots in Sulu soil as early as the end of 13th century A.D.

Islam in Mindanao

The coming of Islam to Mindanao, paradoxically, did not originate from Sulu, which for its expected geographical proximity, is a logical jumping board. But it was a separate thrust that came directly from the Malay Archipelago;³⁰ it was given substance with the coming of

Sharif Kabungsuwan, who landed at the mouth of the wide Pulangi River, now Cotabato River, in 1475 A.D. about 25 years after Abubakr landed in Sulu.³¹

The coming of Sharif Kabungsuwan to Cotabato to a degree parallels that of Rajah Baginda's coming to Sulu. The intentions of Sharif Kabungsuwan who was accompanied by a horde of bold and seasoned Samal warriors, could not be readily ascertained. Sources are too meager for ascertaining whether Kabungsuwan came to conquer, but they tell that he also founded a sultanate, in the same fashion as that of Abubakr in Sulu. They also report of minor skirmishes between Kabungsuwan's forces and those of well-established groups in Cotabato,³⁵ but the early Magindanao *salsilas* record significant positive impressions of the dealings of Kabungsuwan with the powerful Cotabato leaders.

To reconcile warring groups of the region, Kabungsuwan formed alliances and, in many cases, served as an arbitrator-mediator between the volatile factions.³⁶ It was largely through this process that Kabungsuwan succeeded in affecting later conversions in the region. Kabungsuwan later founded the Sultanate of Magindanao which has vaster domain than the Sultanate of Sulu and that included what today are the Lanao provinces. Like the Sultanate of Sulu, the Sultanate of Magindanao was also instrumental in the Islamization of Mindanao.

Some believed that Kabungsuwan went to the *ranao* (lake) region (now the Lanao provinces) but this is not reported in the *salsilas*. However, a common tradition among the people of Lanao tells that Sharif Alawi, Kabungsuwan's brother, landed in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental in the northern shores of Mindanao and from there, he extended Islam to the shore people of the beautiful lake.³⁷

From Mindanao and Sulu, Islam sluggishly moved on to the neighboring islands. When the Spaniards came in 1521, the now city of Manila was a Muslim kingdom under Rajah Soliman and the adjacent town of Tondo was also a Muslim kingdom under Rajah Lakandula.³⁸ The massive Spanish conquest and colonization, however, reduced, if not entirely eliminated, these kingdoms, and repulsed further Islamic expansion in northern Philippines, so that Islamic influences in the Philippines are now only observed in the original places where it was preached. These are Mindanao and Sulu.

The Islamization Process

The Islamization process in Mindanao and Sulu cannot be fully appreciated by the mere illustration of events, dates, and persons associated with the physical advent of Islam in the area. These are not substantial evidences to show why Islam, a religion and civilizational force that grew out and flourished in the deserts of Arabia, formed a strong cultural fiber in the social matrix of the Philippine Muslims; how Islam has steadfastly governed and shaped the Philippine Muslims' ideals and aspirations inherent in the faith itself for many centuries, despite their being a minority amid diverse cultural and ethno-linguistic aggrupations. There must be reasons for this phenomenon, and for this particular inquiry, these reasons are capable of being distinct in style, dynamic in force and vital in appearance.

This inquiry is therefore narrowed down to, or crystallized in one phrase: **the adoption of Islam, how and why?** The second part of this paper therefore will analyze the various reasons, established or circumstantial, why Islam was accepted in the area, taking into account the preachings and conversion processes which appear to be among the potent factors in Islamization.

The different theories on the Islamization of Southeast Asia,³⁹ particularly Majul's, are still generally speculative. Although these theories are constantly being substantiated by current research, they are not yet definitive. Since there virtually are no accounts on the intellectual aspect of the adoption of Islam in Mindanao and Sulu, it is deemed proper to use these theories to support some major points of this paper, especially in presenting other factors that may be significant in further understanding Islamization.⁴⁰

The Intellectual Adoption of Islam: A Case Re-stated

In Mecca, the cradle of Islam, there was among the Arabs a general transformation immediately prior to the rise of Islam.⁴¹ The catalyst of this transformation was economic: the development of commerce, i.e., the caravan trade, in the region. Commerce uprooted the ideals and values, as well as institutions and systems of the nomadic-pastoral society of Mecca. It painfully opened the way to an entirely new socio-

cultural force—a mercantile type of society. Commerce, then prompted the arduous transformation of a pastoral society, a social aggrupation governed by common economic interest, to a mercantile society held together by blood-kinship relations.⁴²

This economic change, characterized by a change in the mode of production, ushered in changes in the occupational levels of the Arabs. Class re-alignments were inevitable; different social customs emerged; moral and ethical values changed; significantly, religious-spiritual values broke down. Thus, it can be seen that changes were also social, which ramified the religious, moral, ethical, and spiritual levels. It was this general disorder, particularly the spiritual confusion among the Arabs, that prepared the way to the evangelical rise of Islam.⁴³ The prevailing local opinion that Islam was born for the sake of being born is therefore incorrect. The rise of Islam was a cause-and-effect phenomenon. Islam had to develop and exist, albeit by Divine Ordination, because it responded to a general transformation by reducing, if not eliminating the disorder of such a transformation, and effecting a semblance of new human order. Briefly, this then was how Islam emerged and developed.

Islam's acceptability, varied from area to area and people to people, but the reasons for its adoption generally followed the pattern discussed.⁴⁴

Theories on the Adoption of Islam

One of the most significant aspects of the Islamization of Malaysia is the role of international trade, according to Majul.⁴⁵ This theory asserts that Islam was brought to Malaysia by Muslim merchants who were actively engaged in the flourishing East-West trade, principally the Egypt, India, and China trade.⁴⁶ Significantly, the merchants spent sometime at their various ports of call in the Malay archipelago. Their stay was prompted by two reasons. One reason was that they had to wait for about six months for the monsoons which helped propel their vessels.⁴⁷ The other reason was to avoid becoming prey to the pirates in the trade routes. The merchants' stay therefore offered opportunity for closer interaction with the natives.

International trade, however, was important, not only as the chief vehicle for the coming of Islam, but for its intrinsic values that are

relevant to Islamic principles in the intellectual adoption of Islam in the Malaysian region.

The concept of wealth among Malaysian societies, particularly among the pre-Islamic Filipinos, used to be communal.⁴⁸ When it became hereditary, i.e., parents to children in specific shares, it may have led to the development of individualism. Individualism may not then be a loose interjection to suggest that the peoples must have accepted Islam, because it is actually on individualism that Islam took solid roots.⁴⁹ Sources thus far have not recorded economic rifts among the pre-Islamic peoples of Mindanao, save for their later incursions in trade as a new source of livelihood, but there certainly existed a semblance of it at a later time due to the existence of an under-privileged group—the slave class. Although slavery is one of the institutional brands of typical Malaysian societies, including the Philippines, a slave can emancipate himself by buying his freedom, and can even earn a new social rank or distinction in the social structure.⁵⁰ Thus the quest for wealth, in whatever form it was, must have developed among the slave class so that when trade was finally developed, the slaves were able to participate in it and detach themselves from the intricate social handicaps of being a slave. This is not a unique phenomenon, however. As it will be seen later, a major reason for the acceptance of Islam in Indonesia was the departure from existing century-old practices, one of which was the intricate Hindu caste system. In a sense, the **sudra** or slave class must have thought of trade as one of its doorways to emancipation.

In another context, attention has been drawn in to the Islamic acceptance of the equality of believers, who, collectively make up the **ummah** (community)—a principle more suited to trade than to the hierarchical societies typical of Malaysia.⁵¹ Aside from that, the very simplicity, and indeed the austerity, of the Islamic faith might be regarded as compatible to the needs of a trading class. John Legge observed:⁵²

In the cosmopolitan centers and ports of the Indies, where people from different parts of the world clustered in their separate identities, and met on common footing only in the market place, a faith which made no distinction of race or class which could cut across communal divisions and help to establish a new society.

That there exists an intrinsic or intellectual relationship between Islam and commerce, is not really a myth and should not be summarily dismissed. Clifford Geertz,⁵³ viewing the entire Islamization process in Malaysia, argues favorably:

For Hinduism's attempt to sacralize a political community built around the inequalities of military power, Islam substituted an attempt to sacralize a commercial community, built around the commonalities in economic motivation.

Such a thesis actually helps explain why the original Islamic strongholds, the various ports of call (like Sulu in the Philippines) where indigenous Muslim traders continue to play a leading role—have remained among the most devout Muslim areas in the region today.⁵⁴

The second important theory on the Islamization of Malaysia is the politico-economic theory.⁵⁵ This theory seeks to explain the various political and economic factors related to both the rulers of the native principalities within the main trade routes and merchants in the adoption and preaching of Islam. The local rulers are viewed as priestly ordained, and their sovereignty are sacralized upon observed Hindu hierarchical procedures.⁵⁶ The jurisdictional authority of the rulers was therefore sanctionally vested, and any attempt by their subjects to go against this authority was not tolerated. Under normal circumstances, the thwarting of a particular reign was possible if upheld or legitimized. Various forms of legitimization may be applied, but the two common ways are: the usual Hindu ritual of installation of a new ruling family, or by rebellion through an equally strong political power.⁵⁷ It is in the latter context that the personality of the merchant becomes relevant and his role interjected.

The merchant, staying in foreign lands of the Indies far from his native abode, was prone to seek a high degree of stability—a sense of guarantee for his life from external danger, and for the security of his goods which were greatly imperilled by pirates along the trade routes.⁵⁸ Thus, the merchant, by backing a rising dynasty or by supporting one principality against another, undoubtedly can entrench himself and protect his interests. This developed into a new form of relationship between the merchants and the rulers. Also, a system of alliances and

mutual associations, symbiotic in form and practice, were developed between them. The native rulers enter into such alliances for political expediency. Van Leur aptly summarizes this symbiotic relationship:⁵⁹

The Moslem traders served to legitimize the independence of the petty chiefs from a central authority or simply established a new dynasty. Those legitimizing the rule of the prince and the ruler himself are viewed as partners in the exploitation of the agrarian population and in the control of international trade.

Stressing the point further, Majul, quoting Van Leur, pointed out that "the ruler would guarantee the economic position and privilege of the Moslem traders while these, in turn, would accept and support the rule or dynasty of the ruler and deal or share with it in all in economic ventures."⁶⁰

The politico-economic theory in a lesser scale can be seen in Sulu and Mindanao. The alliances that were formed by Rajah Baginda and the Tausogs have a strong bearing on mutual interests which, later, were capitalized to further the Islamization process. In the case of Cotabato and Lanao, the politico-economic theory is sharply seen. Sharif Kabungsuwan consolidated his power by effecting alliances between his group and the various hostile factions in the area, thereby adding impetus to the process of Islamic conversion. Even if Mamalu and Tabunaway of Cotabato were already Muslims,⁶¹ such an assumption could only make it appear that Islamization in Cotabato and adjacent places may not have undergone as rigid a process as that possibly of Sulu and Lanao considering that Muslims may have preceded Kabungsuwan in Cotabato and must have effected initial conversions.⁶²

The alliances brought in positive dimensions towards the Islamization process. They later allowed intermarriages, and many scholars are agreed that the marriages of merchants to local women became a convenient state where conversion can suitably take place.⁶³ Abubakr, for example, got married to the daughter of Rajah Baginda. There is no recorded account on whether Sharif Kabungsuwan or the members of his group had married local women, but the fact that they stayed, settled and ruled the area for some time, offer fertile grounds to speculate that marriages took place between them and the natives, paving the way for conversion.

Perhaps the case of Lanao in the alliance-marriage process is clearer. Alliances between the Lanao and Magindanao datus, specifically the Iranons and Maranaos, took place.⁶⁴ Thus it appears that a reason for the adoption of Islam in Lanao was political expediency—as a means of self-defense against rival groups in the area. The other form of alliance was marriage between Iranons and Maranaos that today have left traces and accounts of in Lanao.

The so-called intrinsic relationship between Islam and commerce may have been manifested in Sulu, which geographically is accessible to foreign trade. This has not yet been proven, however, but inferences suggesting that the early Muslims in Sulu, like Makhdum, were traders, may lend some credence to this relationship.

In Lanao, the absence of such trade did not hamper the adoption of Islam at a period corresponding to or later than the Islamization period of Sulu and Cotabato. That Islam may have been adopted at a later time is based on the fact that Lanao was then an agricultural society and that Islamization in the Philippines was a large-scale urban phenomenon.

The crusader theory⁶⁵ on the adoption of Islam, has little bearing in this inquiry. It finds a substantiation at a much later period when the intrusion of the West was more apparent. The missionary theory is more relevant if it is subsumed under the political-economic theory already discussed, although it gives more meaning to the conversion process which will be discussed later.

The role of Sufism is perhaps the least entertained theory.⁶⁶ As a theory, it is not fully developed, but it is provided with tangible support.

Sufism,⁶⁷ as a late development in Islam, in its beginnings operated along Qur'anic and Islamic orthodoxy. But as it stressed more and more the all-surrounding nearness of the supernatural—which the rational Muslim theologians took pains to impart—it drew from such sources as older pre-Islamic beliefs and practices.⁶⁸

It is not therefore surprising to witness the Sufi evangelical movement bringing Islam to peoples of different religious and cultural background; to those belonging to the ancient cultural centers of Western Asia and Egypt; to people whose former religions were either wholly

animistic, or with an overlay of Hinduism in India, Sumatra, Java, and in some southern parts of the Philippines.

Since the preaching of Islam was carried out by the orthodox theologians, Sufi guilds and brotherhoods in varying **tariqahs** (orders), often ended in a kind of compromise. Such compromise left much of **the old animistic ideas which were still effective in the life and thought of the new converts.**⁶⁹ In other words, Sufism incorporated many non-Islamic elements which were always subordinated to Qur'anic principles, or simply given Islamic coloring.

Thus, the Sufi speculative system,⁷⁰ while not an explicit part of the teachings of Muhammad, could not just be cast out as an accretion, so long as it remained within the folds of Islamic orthodox tradition. And it was this speculative system, combined with the missionary and their use of non-Islamic elements, that is considered one of the greatest factors in the spread of Islam throughout the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia.⁷¹

Hence, it is not only the labelled "syncretism" of Malaysian societies,⁷² but also the Sufi eclectic version of Islam, that made possible a situation of compatibility, or at least a compromise, which paved the way for the acceptance of Islam in the area. It is relevant to surmise here that the previous exposure of Malaysian societies to Hindu-Brahmanic pantheistic traditions and Buddhist elements, on top of their animistic base, may be considered as the **preparation evangelica** for the rise of Islam in the local setting.

This sustains the relevance of the Sufi theory in the acceptance of Islam, in southern Philippines, inasmuch as Islam, before it reached Southeast Asia, first passed through India⁷³ where it absorbed much Hindu mystical influence.⁷⁴ Since the Malaysian societies before the coming of Islam were havens of deeply rooted Hindu and Buddhist influences supported by a strong animistic base, it is not strange for Islam to be adopted in the area as it did in Hindu India. More specifically, the influence of Sufism in the varied cultural and religious practices of the people of Mindanao and Sulu are not only physically discernible; it is also seen in the indigenous art and literature.⁷⁵

All of these enumerated theories, on further analysis, are not enough to fully account for the adoption of Islam. It appears that the

most important aspect of this inquiry which deserves full attention is **whether or not** the adoption of Islam in Mindanao and Sulu bears intellectual implications to warrant Islam's becoming an ideological force that improves and elevates human conditions, and/or finding in the faith the answers to their incessant inner or spiritual cravings which their former institutions perhaps had failed to satisfy. It can be said that the acceptance of Islam had its own ideological significance.⁷⁶

A deeper analysis may reveal the relevance of the pre-Islamic cultural heritage of the people. The philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism were all deeply rooted and widely embraced in the Malaysian region. This is why this region, which is composed of various cultural groups with different idiosyncracies, was earlier classified as having a common cultural stock.⁷⁷ There was uniformity in their culture, including their customs, beliefs, practices, systems, and institutions. These were in one way or the other levelled by the so-called Great Traditions of which Hinduism and Buddhism are a part. These influences are deeply embodied in the culture of the people so that, despite the coming of other cultural forces and their corresponding innovations, its major roots still exist.

There came a period when Southeast Asia received and felt changes around its existing physical and intellectual environment. The development of international trade catalyzed changes and innovations.⁷⁸ Because of these changes, some of which were drastic and rigid, the people began to experience inconveniences over their previous sets of beliefs and institutions. Social values became irrelevant, economic institutions became ineffective, and religious tenets crushed apart. Most of these were no longer functional, and were soon eroded because they no longer satisfied the various demands, spiritual yearnings and inner cravings of the people. In a way, the changes can be considered a malaise, which needs a solution, in order to restore even a semblance of a new social order. This might be compared to the disorder that took place among the pre-Islamic Arabs—a phenomenon that opened the way to Islam.

Applying this point to Southeast Asia, a scholar says that "the Islamization of Indonesia and the Malay world represented not only an attempt to depart from Hinduism and Buddhism, as these two systems were not only incompatible with the 'aboriginal Indonesian way of life'

but an effort as well to do away with the Hindu caste system”⁷⁹ So that, in a related context, the decline of the vast commercial and political empire of Madjapahit also corresponded to the loss of Hindu-Buddhist influences.

This theory is not fully substantiated in the particular places where the adoption of Islam is analyzed, but it has many strong points that can hold through for the meantime. Certainly, there are essential elements that have attracted the people to Islam. But before these elements are discussed, the process of conversion may be best discussed since it was actually through it—if only to re-emphasize the peaceful character of the Islamic preachings—that much can be said about the general adoption of Islam in the region.

The preaching-conversion aspects of the adoption of Islam were remarkably peaceful. There were reported cases of coercion, as mentioned earlier, but they were insignificant, as these were isolated cases. But what made the conversions unique and successful can be discerned from the bearing of the purveyors or preachers of Islam; of their being patient, diligent, dedicated, and unassuming. Some of them, who reached this area, were earlier described as sacrosanct in their behavior that “upon their arrival on the shores, they would silently stand on the beaches and perform their prayers—to the awe and bewilderment, if not fear, of the natives who are unfamiliar with the rituals of Islam.”⁸⁰

Arnold, quoting Padre Gainza in the latter’s observation in the preaching of Islam in the Philippines, says:⁸¹

The better way to introduce their religion into the country, the Mohammedans accepted the languages and many customs of the natives, married their women, purchased slaves in order to increase their personal importance, they succeeded finally in incorporating themselves among the chiefs who held the foremost ranks in the state. Since they worked together with greater ability and harmony than the natives, they gradually increased their power more and more, as having a number of slaves in their possession, they formed a kind of confederacy among themselves and established a sort of monarchy which they could make hereditary. Though such a confederacy gave them power, yet they felt that necessity of keeping on friendly terms with the old aristocracy, and of insuring their freedom to those classes whose support they could not afford to lose.

Moreover, an American made the following comments on the Muslim missionaries in the Philippines.⁸²

They had all the fanaticism of the Spanish priests without the accompanying greed for gold. They were the most purely altruistic preachers of the world. Their utter sincerity inspired the confidence of their savage hosts. The priest of Muhammad were among the potent spreaders of civilization in the history of man. Their religion did not tear down the strip and destroy as did that of the early Christians. The priests of Muhammad brought culture and writing and the arts, and they added these things to the culture they found in their new lands. They were not destroyers but were satisfied to improve the old culture.

Another factor relative to the conversion process is the role of the local courts, or **agamas**. This simply means that once a ruler is converted to Islam, his subjects followed immediately. The underlying reason or justification for this process is best explained in an analysis of the Hindu-Javanese concept of kinship, an age-old but fast diminishing institution — the so-called **god-king** concept.⁸³

According to this concept, the king is an embodiment of divine grace and the acme, as well as the center, of the state which is considered a reflection of the over-all universal order.⁸⁴ Grace and blessings, and what can be fittingly described by the Arabic word **barakat** (radiance), emanates from the king in order to ensure the well-being of his people. The king is the source of peace, prosperity and bountiful harvests, and of power in warding off disasters and calamities, natural or otherwise. His **barakat** is the life force of the state. The degree of **barakat**, that the king's subjects receive depends on their proximity to the royal presence, physical, as well as spiritual. Hence, imitation of the king's beliefs is a necessary procedure his subjects had to follow. Similarly, when the king or local chieftain embraced Islam, his court also followed suit.

This theory is still loose, but it is logical enough to surmise that the patriarchal elements in our present society might be a later accretion of the god-king concept. The god-king concept, according to sources, was not considered a factor in the conversion of the Philippines to Islam. However, it is not irrelevant because the existing patriarchalism in our society, which may or may not be an innovation of the god-king concept, must have been related to the Islamization process in one way or another.

The intellectual adoption of Islam in the Philippines is still far from being fully explained. Certain elements of Islam must have appealed to the natives, as it did to the people of the Malaysian region and these are the only gauge that can be observed. In line with this, it is proper to cite here the observations of scholars about the intellectual adoption of Islam by the natives. The Dutch sociologist, W.F. Wetheim, offers a significant view:⁸⁵

Islam gave the small man a sense of individual worth as a member of the Islamic community. According to Hindu ideology, he was merely a creature of the lower order than the members of the higher castes, or, even, in his quality as a Muslim, the superior of such of them as were not Muslims themselves, even though he still occupied a subordinate position in the social structure.

The other attraction to Islam, which is still not fully undetermined but which cannot be simply dismissed, is its simplicity. There is no doubt that Islam simplified many things for the common man. The obnoxious rituals of his paganistic cult, characterized by idol-worship, head-hunting, human sacrifices, and a precarious priesthood were obliterated by Islam.

Islam gave the native a sense of spiritual guidance which made him depart from the meaningless teachings of the **pandita** (native religious teachers) and the magicians. It reaffirmed in him his awe-inspiring feelings, though not in a different context, and gave him a new sense of direction—the path of Allah. Islam simplified man's laborious beliefs in a pantheon of gods and goddesses to a simple but tacit belief in one Supreme God, as the source of his life and well-being. It changed his tedious and inhuman rituals under the intercession of a complicated priesthood to a simple pattern of daily prayer. Finally, Islam fostered in him a new sense of moral and ethical values in his relationship with every member of his family and community of Muslims.⁸⁶

In a more advanced context, Majul has synthesized the effects of the adoption of Islam among the natives of Mindanao and Sulu:⁸⁷

By adopting Islam, a segment of the population of the Philippines became a part of a wider religious community from the Pillars of Hercules to the borders of China. Those people in the Philippines gained from Islam a high sense of religious community, new laws, a

more developed political organization, a new system of writing, and above all, a new ethical outlook on life. Having adopted values that transcended their race and particular culture, they began to consider themselves as a historical people, yet assuming all the time that their history was not the result of their own making or efforts. Without this consciousness as well as all the benefits that Islam brought to the peoples of Sulu and Mindanao, they would have been easily swept away by Western colonialism and relegated to the limbo of conquered peoples.

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NOTES

1. This term was used by W. Montgomery Watt, **Islam and the Integration of Society** (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1961), p. 5.

2. Gregorio F. Zaide, **Philippine Political and Cultural History** (Manila: Philippine Education Co., Rev. ed., 1957), Vol. I, p. 42. Ibn Batutah, one of the famous and well-travelled Muslims, may be considered as the earliest Muslim to reach the Philippines in the course of his voyage to China. He was not reported to have preached Islam in the Islands. See Sir Henry Yule (ed.) **Cathay and the Way Thither** (London: The Haklyut Society, 1915, Vol IV, p. 103).

3. The Maranaos, particularly the non-literate and non-exposed group, show high regard and cordiality to an Arab. If an Arab they had known long or got acquainted with turned out to be a **Christian**, the esteem bestowed him reverts to self-remorse and silent condemnation.

4. This is to borrow Cesar Adib Majul's term in using Malaysia to represent the entire Island Southeast Asia, composed of what is now Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. See, "Theories on the Introduction and Expansion of Islam in Malaysia", **Silliman Journal**, Vol. XI, No. 4, (1964), p. 336.

5. Van Leur termed this as the "merchant-missionary" type the sociological disseminator of Islam. **Indonesian Trade and Society** (Bandung, Indonesia: Sumur, 1960), p. 60.

6. **Muslims in the Philippines** (Diliman, Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 1973), p. 35.

7. **Ibid.**, pp. 46-51. See also Cesar Majul, "Theories on the Introduction and Expansion of Islam in Malaysia", **Silliman Journal**, Vol. XI, No 4, 1964, pp. 335-398.

8. Majul, **op. cit.**, pp. 37-46; See also S. Q. Fatimi, **Islam Comes to Malaysia** (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute Ltd., 1960), and D.G.E. Hall, **A History of Southeast Asia** (2nd ed., London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1960).

9. Attempts were made to update the *salsilas*, but these were perilous on two grounds. One is that, according to Majul, the age of the materials on which they had been written cannot be an index to the age or authenticity of their early portions. (*Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 1) The second is that the updating of *salsilas* may have been grounded on selfish and dubious reasons, an act of elevating oneself to a new social ranking. This act is synonymous to the collection of the Hadith of the Prophet, as one of the basis of Islamic Law, where it witnessed the appearance of false *hadiths* (traditions) and false prophets. See Alfred Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam* (Beirut: Khayyatts, 1966), pp. 9-36.

10. Majul, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
12. Najeeb M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu* (Manila: Bureau of Printing 1908), p. 159.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
14. Peter Gowing, "Kris and Crescent: Dar-ul Islam in the Philippines," *Studies in Islam*, Vol. III, No. 1 (1966), p. 2.
15. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
16. Majul, quoting Francisco Combes, reported the attribution of magical powers to those who first brought Islam to the Philippines. *Op. cit.*, p. 54.
17. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 159. Gowing, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
18. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 42; Majul, p. 35
19. See Claude L. Pickens, "The Moros of the Sulu Sea", *Muslim World*, Vol. XXI (1940), pp. 36-40.
20. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 159, Majul, p. 55.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
22. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 160. For an account of the coming of Islam to Sulu the writer has written a similar account including Mindanao. See Datumanong Di. A. Sarangani, *The Islamization of Mindanao: A Study of Islam in the Philippines* (unpub. M.A. thesis, Middle East Area Program, American University of Beirut Lebanon. 1971), pp. 32-62.
23. Gowing, p. 4. For other details, see also Peter Gowing, *Mosque and Moro: A Study of the Muslims in the Philippines* (Manila: Philippine Federation of Christian Churches, 1964).
24. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
25. For this honor, Abubakar has been known or referred to as Paduka Mahasari Maulana Al-Sultan Sharif Al-Hashimi. Cesar A. Majul, "Arab and Islamic Influence in Southern part of the Philippines" *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (Sept. 1966), p. 65.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
28. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 60.
29. This date jibed with that of a certain Tuhan Miqbalu, who later became a local ruler.
30. The latest findings of Majul ascribed that Kabungsuwan was actually preceded in Cotabato by a certain Sharif Auliya at around 1460 A.D. The latter, however, was discovered to be the same Sharif-ul-Makhdum that landed in Sulu. It was implied that Makhdum or Sharif Auliya did some preaching in Cotabato prior to the coming of Kabungsuwan. *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 65.
31. Najeeb M. Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1905), p. 53; Gowing, *Mosque and Moro*, p. 17.

32. Saleeby, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
33. If this account is true, chances are that Kabungsuwan got his name for being the youngest, the word "Kabungsuwan" meaning "youngest" in the Malay vernacular.
34. Sarangani, *op. cit.*, p. 54. The Muslims of Sulu are originally from Borneo. They only came to inhabit the Sulu Seas when Sharif Kabungsuwan enlisted a sizable number of them in military force. Saleeby, *History of Sulu*, p. 152.
35. Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History*, p. 24; Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 66.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
37. Madki Alonto, "Islam in the Philippines," *Fookien Times Yearbook*, 1960, p. 239.
38. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 73; Zaide, *op. cit.*, p. 160, Sarangani, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
39. Beside the theories presented by Majul, the ideas expressed by J. C. Van Leur, S.Q. Fatimi, Brian Harrison, D.G.E. Hall A.H. Johns, Harry J. Benda, Clifford Geertz, in the context of the Islamization of Southeast Asia are very significant. Most of these theories will be discussed later in this paper.
40. Majul argued that there is no conflict here, provided they are viewed as complementary and supplementary to each other, without emphasizing one to the exclusion of the other. *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 65.
41. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 1-29; Tor Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*, trans. by Theophil Menzei (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960), pp. 13-30.
42. Watt, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
43. See H. A. R. Gibb, "Structure of Religious Thought in Islam", in H.A.R. Gibb, *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, Stanford Shaw and William Polk, eds. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1962), p. 184.
44. Gibb further wrote: "Islam is a concept which, phenomenalized in a number of linked diverse political, social, and religious organisms, covers an immense area in space and time. In different areas, it has presented differing features under the impact of and response to local, geographical, social and political setting. Yet each and all these retain a certain easily recognizable common Islamic stamp." "An Interpretation of Islamic History", in *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, p. 3.
45. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, pp. 46-51.
46. See Sir Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (Rev. ed., London; 1913), p. 364. Also Sir John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, 2 vols., (Edinburg: 1882), pp. 259-268.
47. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-11; Also, Brian Harrison, *A Brief History of Southeast Asia* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1960), pp. 42-47
48. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Peoples of the Philippines*, (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1965), p. 157.
49. Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society*, p. 7.
50. Kroeber, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
51. John Legge, *Indonesia* (Princeton: 1952), p. 91.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
53. Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Developments in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), p. 19.
54. Sarangani, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
55. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 49, Van Leur, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
56. For further readings on this, refer to Christopher Wake, "Malacca's Early

Kings and the Reception of Islam", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. V, No. 2 (September, 1966), pp. 104-128.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
58. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
59. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade*, p. 109.
60. Majul, "Theories", p. 374.
61. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 66.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
63. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 50; *Muslims in the Philippines* p. 66.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
65. Majul, p. 49.
66. A.H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* (July, 1961), p. 17.
67. For further details, see Arthur J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics in Islam* (London: George and Unwin, Ltd., 1964).
68. Gibb, *Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 182. See also, Henri Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions* translated by Sir E. Denison Ross (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1929) pp. 111-139.
69. Gibb, *Religious Thought*, pp. 182-183; Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
70. Arberry, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-14; Johns, p. 13.
71. Fatimi, *Islam Comes*, p. 94; Johns, p. 13.
72. Peter Gowing, "Muslim Filipinos Today", *Muslim World*, Vol. 54 (1964), p. 45.
73. See Mohammad Sali Kismadi, *Islam in Indonesia: Aspects of Political Culture* (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Graduate School of Political Science and Public Administration, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, 1970), p. 64.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
75. This can be seen in the epic literature of Mindanao. The Maranao version of Rajah Indarapatra clearly exhibits features which are reminiscent, if not identical, with Sufi influenced traditional accounts. See Nagasura T. Madale, *Rajah Indarapatra: A Study on Maranao Folk Narrative* (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Institute of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines, July, 1973),
76. This is what Majul termed as the theory of its own ideological worth (Islam). Majul, *Muslims of the Philippines*, p. 51.
77. Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. i-ix.
78. Harrison, p. 53; Sarangani, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
79. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p. 365.
80. Majul, *Arab and Islamic Influences*, p. 70.
81. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, p. 365.
82. Vic Hurely, *The Swish of the Kris: A Study of the Moros* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1936), p. 62.
83. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
84. For an elaborate discussion of this concept, refer to Robert Heine-Geldern, "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia", *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (November, 1942-October, 1943), pp. 15-30. Also Kismadi, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
85. *Indonesia in Transition: A Study of Social Change* (The Hague: W. Van Hoeve, Ltd., 1956), p. 196.
86. Sarangani, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
87. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, p. 78.

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