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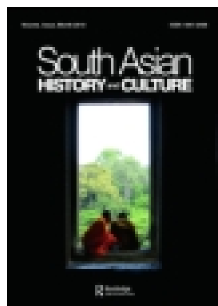

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Asian and Islamic crossings: Malay writing in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka

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Asian and Islamic crossings: Malay writing in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka

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This essay explores how a small diasporic Muslim community in the colonial era – known today as the Sri Lankan Malays – maintained its culture through the preservation of language, the transmission of literary and religious texts, the cultivation of genres and of a script. Beginning in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, the Dutch United East India Company (VOC) used the island of Ceylon as a site of banishment for those considered rebels in the regions under Company control in the Indonesian archipelago. Criminals from these territories were also sent to Ceylon, as were native troops who served in the Dutch army, and others employed in various capacities. After their takeover of the island in 1796, the British too brought to Ceylon colonial subjects from the archipelago and the Malay Peninsula, primarily to serve in their military. I examine issues of cultural encounter and religious developments through an analysis of a Malay manuscript written in Colombo in the early years of the nineteenth century. I emphasize the referencing of titles and names as well as the text's multilingual character. Through this discussion I question the notion of distinctly defined centres and margins as they pertain to the Sri Lankan Malays – situated physically and figuratively between the Malay and Arab worlds – and suggest that crossroads, connections and movement are more appropriate conceptual categories for considering their case.

Keywords: Malay; Sri Lankan Malays; Dutch Southeast Asia; manuscripts; Malay and Arab Islam

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Introduction

This article explores some of the ways by which a small diasporic Muslim community in the colonial era – known today as the Sri Lankan Malays – maintained its culture through the preservation of language, the transmission of literary and religious texts, the cultivation of genres and of a script.[1] Such an exploration requires us to imagine the world of the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the contours of Dutch Asia that included both the island of Ceylon and parts of present-day Indonesia encompassing, predominantly, the island of Java[2]; the established sea routes of trade and travel at the time, central among them the pilgrimage path from Southeast Asia to Mecca that passed through Ceylon; and the wide-ranging, active networks of Muslim scholars teaching and studying across these regions.

Beginning in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, the Dutch United East India Company (VOC) used the island of Ceylon as a site of banishment for those considered rebels in the regions under Company control in the Indonesian archipelago.[3] Criminals from these territories were also sent to Ceylon, as were native troops who

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served in the Dutch army, and others employed in various capacities. After their takeover of the island in 1796, the British too brought to Ceylon colonial subjects from the archipelago and the Malay Peninsula, primarily to serve in their military. Many of the recruits and their families lived in and around the military cantonments in Colombo, Kandy, Trincomalee and elsewhere, thus settling across the island. From the early political exiles – many of whom were members of ruling families in Java, Sulawesi, Madura and other islands – and the accompanying retinues, soldiers, servants and workers developed the community known as the Sri Lankan Malays.[4]

Manuscripts and books preserved in private collections currently owned by Malay families in Sri Lanka testify to an impressive and ongoing engagement by previous generations with a range of texts written primarily in Malay and Arabic. The majority of these have an 'Islamic character' in that they include theological treatises, manuals on prayer and ritual, well-known hadith, tales written in the Malay genres of *hikayat* (prose) and *syair* (poetry) on the battles of early Islam, heroic figures and adventures, musings on Arabic letters and mystical tracts. A striking feature of these writings, at least to one approaching them from the perspective of Indonesian or Malay Studies, is how similar many of them are to those found in manuscripts now housed in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur or Leiden. In addition, however, there are works that represent very local agendas, depict events that unfolded in colonial Ceylon or are otherwise not known from the broader eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Malay literature from elsewhere.[5]

Although the ancestors of the Sri Lankan Malays came from a range of places and linguistic and ethnic backgrounds in the Indonesian archipelago and, to a lesser degree, the Malay Peninsula, the Malay language emerged as the single most important language in which they wrote their literary and religious works. Although it is reasonable to assume that they spoke a variety of languages, at least on their arrival in Ceylon – given the different regions from which they came and the strata of society they represented – it is virtually impossible to trace the history of their oral culture. Of their writing practices we know more, but in this area too many questions remain, among them when, how and why Malay gained such prominence, doubtless at the expense of other languages spoken by the diverse communities of exiles.

Malay may have provided an option for communicating across ethnic lines as it served as a lingua franca of trade in Southeast Asia. At least in part its prominence may have derived from the fact that many of those recruited to the Dutch army in the archipelago throughout the eighteenth century, although of diverse origins, had been living in Batavia before being sent to serve in Ceylon and were therefore fluent in Batavian Malay as a result.[6] Clearly, the process by which Malay came to dominate the linguistic and literary life of the Sri Lankan Malays needs further exploration. Whatever its precise trajectory, however, I show in this article that behind or beneath the cloak of Malay lie hints and traces of a more variegated linguistic and cultural past.

Despite Sri Lanka's importance to Arab trade from pre-Islamic times, its role as a stopover site for Southeast Asian pilgrims on their way to perform the hajj and its importance to the Islamic imagination as the place where Adam first fell to earth, Sri Lanka's Muslim population has long constituted a minority among much larger Hindu and especially Buddhist segments of the population and thus, in some ways, has been marginalized both in the country itself and by scholars studying Sri Lanka's cultures, archaeological sites, languages and politics.[7] The Malays, forming as they do a small minority within the country's Muslim minority, fit the category of South Asian Islamic cultures explored in this special issue, ones that have come to be viewed as peripheral.[8] Yet numbers do not tell the full story and numerical minority status does not, by definition,

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imply negligibility. Considering the history of the Sri Lankan Malays begs the question of whether a community that is descended from many high status individuals and families, that played an important military role in Ceylon's history and that was able to preserve its heritage in the most unlikely circumstances can be considered 'marginal'. Marginal in what sense?

In the following pages, I examine a Malay manuscript written in Colombo in the early years of the nineteenth century. In doing so, I emphasize two important dimensions: the referencing of titles and names, and the multilingual character of the manuscript. The mention of titles of well-known Islamic books and treatises and the names of authors, religious teachers and leaders of sufi brotherhoods represent knowledge circuits and intellectual and spiritual genealogies central to Malay life; the manuscript's use of several languages is typical of Sri Lankan Malay writing and calls attention to the Malays' connections to a range of sources, textual traditions and communities. Through this discussion I wish to question the notion of distinctly defined centres and margins as they pertain to the Sri Lankan Malays – situated physically and figuratively as they are between the Malay and Arab worlds – and to suggest that crossroads, connections and movement are more appropriate conceptual categories for considering their case.

The manuscript

The manuscript, measuring 21.2 × 16 × 3.2 cm, is a 270-page long compendium of texts of different lengths and authorship, inscribed by several hands. Its pages are slightly faded, with several pages torn or stained, but the writing is clear and it is generally well preserved. It belongs to Mr B.D.K. Saldin of Dehiwala, a suburb of Colombo.[9] Mr Saldin (b. 1928) inherited it from his father Tuan Junaideen Saldin, who died in 1955. He does not know how it came to be in his father's possession, whether it was part of a family collection or had been acquired from elsewhere.[10]

The manuscript includes several dates and was written over the course of almost three decades and by several hands, a common practice in compendiums of its kind. The earliest date noted is 1803 while the latest, appearing on the inner back flap of the cover, is 1831. The years 1820 and 1824 are noted as well. The dating used does not conform to a single time reckoning system. The hijri or Gregorian calendar, and sometimes both, are invoked in different instances. Noting the year according to the Gregorian calendar the scribe termed it either *hijra Nasara* ('Christian calendar') or *taun Welanda* ('Dutch year'), the latter a reminder that although the manuscript was written and certainly completed in British Ceylon, its inscription was taking place only several years after the end of Dutch rule in 1796.[11]

The name of the owner (*yang punya ini surat*) appears several times in the manuscript as Enci Sulaiman ibn 'Abd al-Jalil or ibn 'Abdullah Jalil.[12] Enci Sulaiman describes himself as hailing from Ujung Pandang in the land of Makassar, currently in the province of South Sulawesi, Indonesia.[13] Makassar was also the homeland of Sheikh Yusuf, religious scholar, anti-Dutch leader and the most prominent person to be exiled to Ceylon by the Dutch.[14] Enci Sulaiman provides further, highly significant detail about his ancestry: he is descended from Mas Haji 'Abd Allah of the central Javanese kingdom of Mataram.[15]

Haji 'Abd Allah of Mataram is mentioned elsewhere in the manuscript as a renowned sheikh whose writing is being cited, although a title for his work is not provided.[16] Towards the end of the 15-page long cited text it is noted that the text (here *kitab*) itself was transmitted from the realm of Mataram. A warning is added that this text should not

be read to those disciples who have not yet engaged in *'ilm nafas* and that the guidance of a guru is essential to a correct understanding of this 'science of the breath'.[17] Indeed, discussions of this form of knowledge are common in Javanese works yet not easily found within the Malay 'classics', a fact that complements the claim that this circulating text derived from a Javanese source.[18]

Enci Sulaiman's familial history links the islands of Sulawesi and Java, and the once-powerful kingdoms of Makassar and Mataram, both of which exhibited strong resistance to Dutch advancement in the seventeenth century. The details of this history and the circumstances under which a descendent of a Javanese haji, who spent at least part of his life in Ujung Pandang, arrived in Sri Lanka remain unknown. And yet the names of places and lineages, reference to a pilgrim who returned home from Arabia, the text illuminating an important and secretive form of knowledge allow us, if we connect these small but significant dots, to view a larger and richer picture of movement and connection in which Sri Lanka was deeply embedded.[19]

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Networks of reference: names and titles in the manuscript

Because the manuscript is a compendium it offers a rather broad snapshot of the kinds of texts Sri Lankan Malays were engaging with in the early nineteenth century. It contains sections that are several dozen pages long alongside very brief treatises, diagrams and notes. There are sections on zikr, the five daily prayers, the connection between the letters of the Arabic alphabet and prayer times, prophets, angels and colours; on God's attributes, essence and names, the breath, the afterlife, the shahāda, the importance of studying with the proper guru who will not lead one astray. There are also discussions of the Light of Muhammad, the human body, Adam as first human and prophet, Muhammad's advice to 'Ali, Islamic slaughter, conception and pregnancy, forms of esoteric knowledge (*'ilmu ghaib*) that should not be revealed to all, and correct conduct for women. The list could go on, but rather than focus on an in-depth and detailed analysis of content, I wish to draw attention to what referencing in the manuscript reveals about the physical and figurative location of the Sri Lankan Malays in the early nineteenth century.

Through the mention of texts, authors, religious teachers and *tarekat* affiliations the manuscript allows a glimpse of the religious and literary world of the Sri Lanka Malays, one that was complex and, above all, interconnected. Evidence of contact, circulation and a movement of sources and individuals is abundant. That evidence, however, telling as it may be, is brief and fragmentary, indicating a direction rather than leading the way.

The manner in which titles and authors are mentioned in passing, not mentioned at all or evoked in a general way (a text is said to be 'from Arabia'; transmitted by a 'great sheikh'), is reminiscent of the practice of some of the scribes writing in Malay and Javanese in Southeast Asia during the same period.

The majority of texts cited and authors noted in the manuscript originated in Middle Eastern cities, among them Cairo, Damascus, Mecca and Medina. What I wish to highlight is that, prior to their arrival in Sri Lanka, many of these particular works were transmitted to the Indonesian-Malay world by pilgrims from the archipelago who travelled to perform the hajj, or went to Arabia – especially the Haramayn – for long periods of study and initiation. The works they carried back home circulated in Arabic, in translation, and with local interpretations, making them into pillars of Islam as it was practiced and followed in Southeast Asia. Whereas some texts were no doubt brought to Sri Lanka directly from Arabia – situated as it was on the Southeast Asia-Arabia route of the pilgrimage – others were brought there by exiles and soldiers from Java, Sumatra,

Madura and Sulawesi. The result was a textual sphere that was inextricably linked in both directions.

Let us begin with the foundational sources: citations from the Qur'an and hadith. These appear occasionally, often without referencing to source. For example, sura 112 of the Qur'an, surat al-Ikhlās, is cited in full within a longer untitled section that reads like a string of quotes from various people and texts. The sura and the longer section are written in Arabic, accompanied by an interlinear translation into Malay. The sura is prefaced by *qāla Allah ta'ala* (A. 'thus said God, may He be exalted'), but there is no indication that this is a precise quote nor is there mention of its title or location within the sequence of Qur'anic suras.[20] The well-known hadith *man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu* ('he who knows himself knows his Lord') is cited in Arabic three times, with translations into Tamil, Malay and Javanese, but only once is it attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (see Figure 1).[21]

Other, less canonical and much later sources are mentioned in passing as providing inspiration or content. Among them are the *Kitab Mukhtasar*, Kemas Fakhruddin of Palembang's mid to late eighteenth-century Malay translation of and commentary on

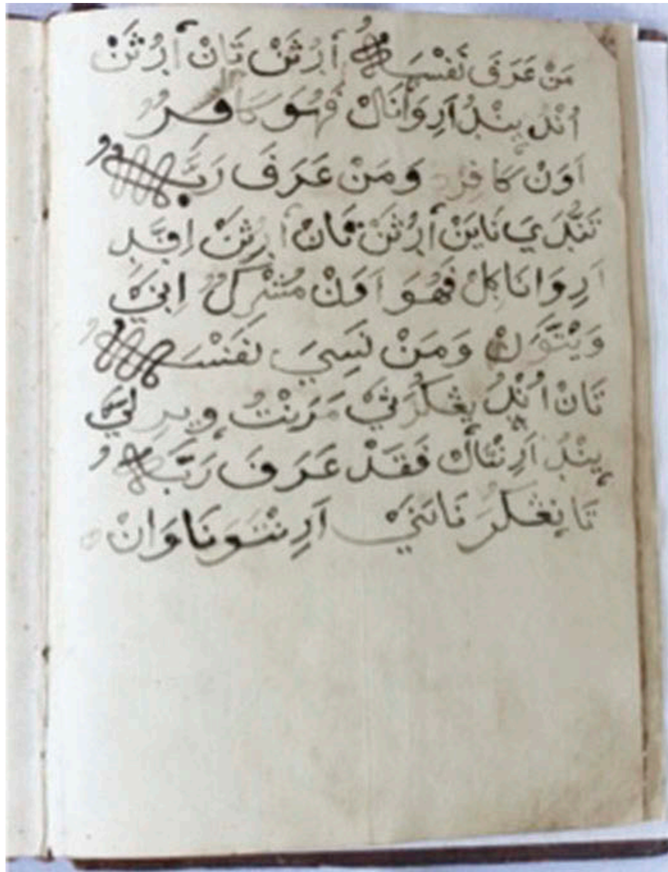

Figure 1. (Colour online) A translation of an Arabic hadith into Arabu-Tamil in the Malay Compendium.

Source: Courtesy B.D.K. Saldin.

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Sheikh Raslān al-Dimashqī's twelfth-century *Risāla fī 'l-tawḥīd*. The latter work was widely known in Indonesia in its Arabic original (with interlinear translations into Malay, Javanese and Bugis) as well as via commentaries and adaptations in Malay and Javanese.[22]

A *Kitab Bayanullah* is mentioned twice.[23] A work bearing the same title and discussing sufi teachings through allegory and allusion, written in Sundanese, Javanese and Arabic in the Bandung region of West Java around the mid nineteenth century, is listed in a catalogue of West Javanese manuscripts.[24] If these two works are related, and since the title is not common, this is probable, the mention of a *Bayanullah* in the Sri Lankan compendium may hint at traces of a West Javanese heritage, possibly deriving from the 'Banten connection' in local history, the exile of prince Raja Bagus Abdullah of Banten to Sri Lanka in the mid eighteenth century.[25]

A list consisting of book titles appears towards the end of the manuscript.[26] These books are not cited yet their mention indicates that they were known to the list's compiler. Listed, among others, are the *Kitāb Minhāju al-Qawīm*, a fiqh work deriving from 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Karīm Ba-Fadl's fifteenth-century *Al-Muqaddima al-Hadramiyya* and composed by Ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥaytamī in the mid sixteenth century. Van den Berg in his 1886 survey of texts taught in Islamic educational institutions in Java listed the *Kitāb Minhāju al-Qawīm* as a popular work, and it is still well known today[27]; the sixteenth-century *Kitāb Manhāj al-ṭullāb*, a summary of Nawawi's thirteenth-century *Minhāj al-Ṭālibīn* by Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, the Egyptian scholar whose works were highly popular across the Indonesian-Malay world[28]; al-Ghazzali's *Kitāb Minhāj al-'Ābidīn* (translated into Malay by Sheikh Daud al-Fatani in the late eighteenth century); and the *Kitāb Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, considered the earliest work on fiqh produced in Muslim Southeast Asia, written in 1634 by Sheikh Nur al-Din al-Raniri, the leading scholar of the Acehnese court under Sultan Iskandar Thani (r. 1636–1641).

In addition to the titles of works, the mention of a number of scholars and teachers strengthens the impression of a strong Southeast Asia connection. For example, one section of the Compendium is claimed by its author to be based on the fatwas of Sheikh Muhammad al-Zain, possibly referring to Muhammad Zain al-Asyi who served at the Acehnese court under Sultan Mahmud Syah (1760–1781).[29] A scholar of utmost importance to be cited in a section on zikr is Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sammān al-Madani, better known as al-Sammāni (1718–1775), Medina-born founder of the Sammaniyah.[30] His disciples from the Indonesian archipelago, several of whom became renowned scholars in their homelands upon return from Arabia, introduced his teachings to their own followers, with the Sammaniyah as a result spreading widely, especially in Palembang and Aceh.[31]

The Sammaniyah is not the only sufi order to be mentioned in the manuscript. A *silsila* covering seven pages is traced to the Prophet Muhammad, his family members and other prominent Muslim scholars, including the great 'saint' 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166), founder of the Qadiriyya.[32] Five of those appearing after him in the list bear the nisbah Qadiri, testifying to their affiliation with the order which was popular in Java and Sumatra. Even greater was its popularity in neighbouring south India, where devotion to Sheikh Muhideen (as Jilani is known) was widespread, this emphasis hinting at an important aspect of shared devotional practices amongst Tamil-speaking Muslims in India and Sri Lanka and the Malays.[33] Finally, the owner of the manuscript, Enci Sulaiman ibn 'Abd al-Jalil, describes himself as one who follows the path of the Shatariyya (M. *akan jalan tariqat lishtariyah*), the order that, with its strong speculative tendencies and association with wujudiya teachings, was the dominant sufi order in Southeast Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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The story emerging from this brief and partial overview of the Sri Lankan manuscript corresponds closely with that told by Azra in his seminal study of the ulama networks between the Middle East and the Indonesian archipelago in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sri Lanka's location in the Indian Ocean, on the maritime route between the two regions, meant that pilgrim ships travelling in both directions docked regularly at her shores. In the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, both present-day Sri Lanka and Indonesia were governed by the VOC, the Dutch East India Company, with Sri Lanka serving the Dutch as a site of exile, military service and servitude for people from the archipelago, thus forging and cementing ties between colonial subjects on both shores and, intentionally or otherwise, encouraging the creation of new religious networks.[34] Although it is currently impossible to trace precisely the movement of most texts and individuals, the mobility of people, ideas and lineages is almost palpable when reading through the manuscript's pages.

Names of authors, titles of texts and their content are telling. No less important in understanding the religious and literary culture of the Sri Lankan Malays is the prism of language.

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The languages of the Sri Lankan Malays

Sri Lankan Malay manuscripts reflect the linguistic multiplicity that characterized the community. Like many Malay manuscripts from Southeast Asia they contain sections in Arabic, often accompanied by interlinear translation or a more holistic form of translation that conveys single sentences or longer sections of the Arabic text in Malay.

In addition to Arabic, some Malay manuscripts contain writing in Arabu-Tamil, Tamil written in the Arabic script and infused with Arabic vocabulary, commonly used by Muslims in Sri Lanka and South India.[35] The inclusion of Arabu-Tamil reflects the close contacts between Malay and Tamil-speaking Muslims in Sri Lanka which formed through inter-marriage, business endeavours, residence in adjoining or shared neighbourhoods, prayer in the same mosques and the use of Tamil for everyday pursuits by members of both communities. The present Malay Compendium contains a single example of the hadith already mentioned and well known in sufi circles – *man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu* – with a translation and brief interpretation in Tamil.

In light of the diasporic history of the Sri Lankan Malays and their diverse roots in the Indonesian archipelago, one might expect some form of writing in an Indonesian language other than Malay to emerge in Sri Lanka. However, Hussainmiya, in his two pioneering books on the Sri Lankan Malays' past, in which he dedicated considerable attention to their writing practices and literary culture based on his access to a large number of manuscripts, mentioned no such finding.[36] Neither did others who have written on the subject.[37] What happened to the multiple languages brought to Sri Lanka by exiles, soldiers and servants, among them Madurese, Buginese, Sundanese, Javanese, Balinese and others? Were they entirely forgotten over time? Were they preserved in speech only, not leaving any written trace?

These are intriguing questions that until recently left much room for speculation. The manuscript I discuss, however, does contain several sections in Javanese and therefore constitutes the first available evidence of its kind attesting to the preservation to some degree of an Indonesian language besides Malay by the descendants of earlier generations, perhaps going back to the early exiles, many of whom were members of Javanese royal families or served them in some capacity. The Javanese appearing in the manuscript can be described under the following headings: two brief self-standing Javanese texts, a

Javanese translation of the Arabic text of a hadith and individual Javanese words scattered throughout the manuscript.[38]

The self-standing Javanese text discussed below is the most striking among these examples, both because it is complete and because of its content and the associations it evokes.[39] It is a well-known poem titled *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi* (A Song Guarding in the Night) that, as the title implies, offers its reciter protection from all dangers and evil lurking in the darkness, including jinn, sheytans, fire, water, thieves and others. The poem is traditionally attributed to Sunan Kalijaga, the fifteenth-century leader of the Javanese *wali sanga*, the nine 'saints' to whom is credited the conversion of Java to Islam. Accordingly, it echoes powerfully with foundational events of the Javanese past (see Figure 2).[40]

The poem in the Sri Lankan manuscript is written somewhat differently from the way it is conventionally written in Java (although there are variations there as well). Some of these

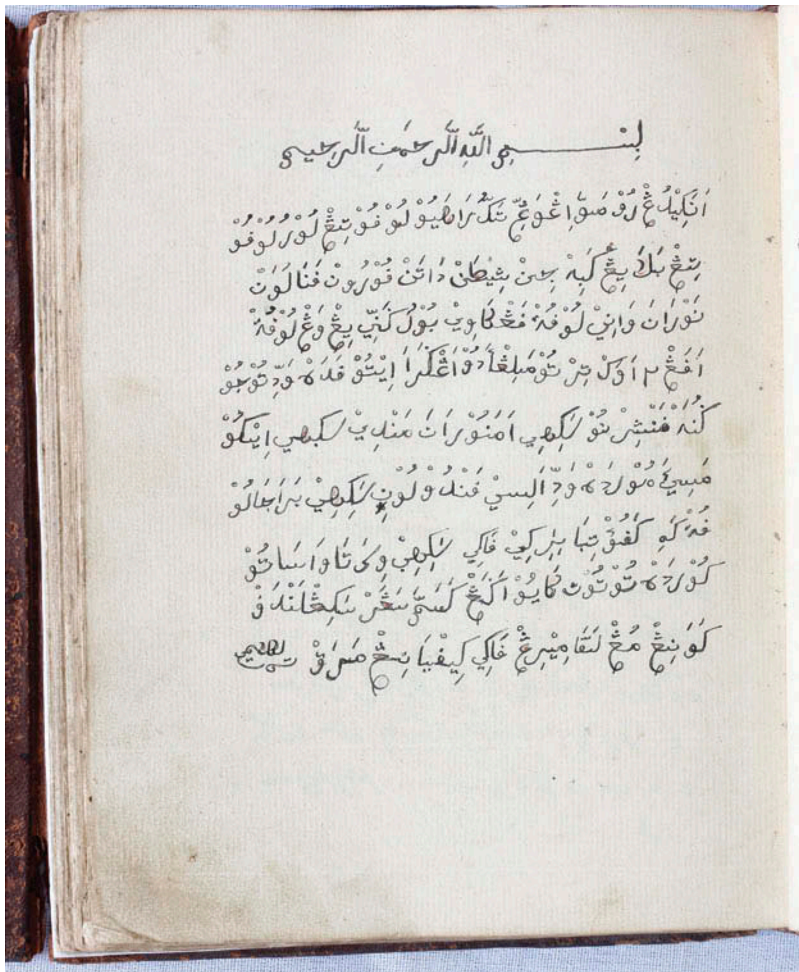
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Figure 2. (Colour online) First page of the Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi in the Malay Compendium.

Source: Courtesy B.D.K. Saldin.

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changes relate to features of the phonology of the Sri Lankan Malays, among them a nasalization that occurs at word endings that must have also found its way into what may be considered Sri Lankan Javanese.[41] Thus *bilahing* for *bilahi* (disaster, bad luck), *luputing* for *luput* (miss, escape). As well, the sound 'a' (similar to English 'o' in orange) is sometimes replaced with 'u': *adu* for *adoh* (far), *tirtu* for *tirta* (water). Some words are misspelt or are substituted by others. These features suggest that the poem may have been copied and recopied by scribes who were not well acquainted with Javanese and could not identify and correct the errors. It may also be the case that the poem was written down from memory, with the scribe basing himself on aural memory rather than a written sample.

Not only are the questions of vocabulary and content interesting here. The poem is written in *macapat*, the poetic meters in which much of Javanese literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was composed and which were not employed in Malay writing. The various macapat meters are differentiated by the number of lines per verse, the number of syllables in each line and the nature of the final syllable in each line. Not only did these meters dictate the way poets structured lines and selected words but they were also closely associated with particular kinds of literary and performative scenes and with certain moods and atmospheres. The *Kidung* is written in dhangdhanggula, a meter which according to Nancy Florida conveys a melodic mood that is lithe and flexible, 'with didactic clarity and romantic allure'.[42] The preservation of the poem's metrical properties also suggests a possible familiarity with, or perhaps distant memory of, Javanese prosody and literary conventions in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka.

Another example of self-standing Javanese writing appears in the form of a list of the numerals from 1 to 40 that fills two pages of the manuscript.[43] Whereas the *Kidung* suggests a certain acquaintance with Javanese literary tradition, the list of numerals signals a more mundane realm of knowledge in which the practical skill of counting and calculating in Javanese may have remained significant or at least worthy of mention. There are several errors in the list that indicate confusion regarding the Javanese numerals or perhaps an attempt to rely on memory with mixed results. The Javanese word for 25, for example, constitutes an exception and differs from the rest of the numerals between 20 and 30 which follow a set pattern. Rather than listing the correct yet anomalous word *selawe*, the scribe used *limalikur* which fits the logic of the sequence but is not conventionally used. After reaching 40 with the numerals listed in the low register of Javanese (*ngoko*), the scribe went back to 31 (rather than 41) and repeated the same numerals using a combination of low and high (*krama*) Javanese that is unconventional.[44] In this instance we find a hint of the complex system of Javanese speech registers that is at the heart of Javanese notions of power and societal hierarchies, albeit only a faint echo that does not constitute conclusive evidence for an in-depth understanding of that system.

The second form Javanese writing takes in the Malay manuscript is that of a brief hadith in Arabic that is translated, line by line, into Javanese.

Arabic and Javanese, both written in the Arabic script, alternate on the page (Arabic in bold, in source and translation):

bism Allah al-raḥmān alraḥīm
utawi pangandikaning Allah Ta'āla
ing ḥadith qudsī ***al insānu sirri***
wa ana sirruhu *tegesé manusa iki rasa*
nisun lan isun iku pawin rasané
In the name of God the compassionate the merciful

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And the words of Exalted God
In the ḥadīth qudsī **man is my secret**
And I am his secret this means man is my
Secret and I am his secret[45]

Interestingly the first Arabic phrase, the bismillah, is not translated into Javanese (as occurs occasionally in Javanese and Malay manuscripts) but is left as is, perhaps because it was often included as an almost obligatory opening line for texts and letters and was viewed more as a frame than a part of the text. Also incorporated into the Javanese is the term *ḥadīth qudsī* – sacred, holy traditions – referring to non-Qur'anic divine revelations to the Prophet Muhammad. Writing these Arabic words within a Javanese text composed in the Arabic script (pégon, see below) was straightforward and allowed the reader to recognize them immediately and pronounce them correctly.

The translation of the hadith itself is accurate and concise, not adding or detracting from the source text. It appears that the word *sirr* in Arabic, usually translated as secret or hidden, may have been rendered here not as *rahsa* (J. secret) but as *rasa*, a word that is not easily translated and has a range of meanings including taste, meaning, sense, flavour, sensation, experience and inner feeling of the heart. The latter translation – inner feeling, inner self – may in fact correspond quite closely with the meaning of *sirr* in sufi writings. Whether the translator had *rasa* or *rahsa* decisively in mind is difficult to determine because of spelling variations in these manuscripts, but it may also be that he intentionally played on both possibilities. The translation is followed, suggestively, by a second rendering that closely resembles the first – *manusa iku dhāt ingsun lan isun iku pawan dhāt ing manusa* – except that the key word standing for *sirr* is *dhāt* (from Arabic *dhāt*: being, essence, nature) rather than *rasa*. This appears to represent an attempt to define Arabic *sirr* in a way that complements the meanings of *rasa* or emphasizes them further, interestingly through the use of another key Arabic-Islamic concept – *dhāt* – that was employed as thoroughly Javanese.

Finally, the third manner in which Javanese was incorporated into the manuscript was in the form of individual words that seem to appear randomly throughout, used as part of local Malay vocabulary, perhaps interchangeable with corresponding words in that language. For example, we find *tembung* (word), *sethithik* (a little, few), *tiyang* (person), *iki saking* (on account of), *ojo lali* (do not forget). A diagram that features the points of the compass lists them in Javanese: *lor*, *wétan*, *kidul* and *kulon* (north, east, south and west, respectively).

It is difficult to deduce the precise level of familiarity with Javanese on the basis of these brief examples derived from a single manuscript. Nonetheless, the presence of Javanese in this otherwise predominantly Malay and Arabic compendium is significant. The *Kidung* raises questions about the transmission of Javanese poetic genres and meters to Sri Lanka. Its content – including a list of dangerous entities lurking in the night – evokes popular Javanese notions of one's susceptibility to the host of unseen yet potent beings populating the environment and recalls the foundational belief in the supernatural world that shaped the practices of Javanese kings and laymen alike. As Merle Ricklefs writes in his study of the court of Pakubuwana II (ruler of Mataram, 1726–1749): '…it is clear that to the Javanese court the phenomenal world was a reflection or echo of another world, of an unseen realm which was always present behind, and occasionally became manifest in, the visible world in which humanity lived.'[46] The *Kidung*, opening with the words *ana kidung rumeksa ing wengi* ('There is a song guarding in the night'), also recalls

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the Javanese notion of the power of particular forms of language and recitation to afford protection and refuge, extending from pre-Islamic mantras to Arabic *lapal*.[47] We might go further to suggest that the cherishing of this particular poem within the Malay community speaks to a desire to be guarded through the 'night' of exile in days past and to the way in which the expression of that earlier sentiment continued to reverberate across the generations as exemplified by the poem's preservation.

The question of script usage has been noted in passing but deserves further attention. Tamil, Malay and Javanese are written in this manuscript and others using modified forms of the Arabic script that accommodate sounds that do not occur in Arabic by adding diacritical marks to existing Arabic letters. The Arabic-Tamil script is known as Arabu-Tamil or arwi, the Arabic-Malay script is referred to as jawi and the Arabic-Javanese one as pégon.[48] The adoption of the Arabic script by speakers of these languages constituted an important dimension of Islamization and allowed for easier and more accurate rendering of Islamic terminology into Tamil, Malay and Javanese. When one looks at a manuscript page that contains alternating lines of, for instance, jawi and Arabic, one is struck by the orthographic continuity across languages and the impression that the two flow from and into one another.[49] That a single manuscript from Sri Lanka contains four languages all written, broadly speaking, in the same script offers one more testimony to the interconnectedness of South Asian Muslim communities with their co-religionists across geographical and linguistic distance.

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Concluding reflections

Exploring Enci Sulaiman's early nineteenth-century Malay Compendium along the axes of reference networks and language use, with brief forays into questions of content, prosody and genre offers a glimpse of the religious and intellectual culture of the Sri Lankan Malays. More than anything else the manuscript shows how intertwined with Islamic life in the archipelago and the Middle East (as well as South India via close ties with local Tamil speaking Muslims) were the lives of these descendants of royal exiles, soldiers, servants and their families who as a community adhered both to Islam and the Malay language.

The continuing use of Malay, both spoken and written, constituted the most pivotal connection to the wider Malay-Indonesian world to the southeast. It allowed for the preservation of texts, many of them in translation from Arabic, that were integral to intellectual and spiritual trends in the lands whence came the Malays' forefathers. The insistence on transmitting the jawi/gundul script across generations meant that texts could be recopied when old books disintegrated and that knowledge of specifically Malay genres like pantun and syair was kept alive.[50]

The intriguing questions of why the Malay language came to dominate the speech and writing of the community and how that process took shape in its initial and later stages await further investigation. For now, possessing evidence of the ongoing use of another Indonesian language, Javanese, which was once spoken by many of the early exiles, reveals something of the foundations of a community whose members came from disparate backgrounds in terms of class, language, cultural and (intra-Islamic) religious affiliations. Although still a speculative proposition I believe that future research into Sri Lankan Malay manuscripts will bring to light additional instances of Javanese writing as well as writing in other languages of the archipelago, perhaps Madurese, Sundanese or Buginese.

The Javanese texts in Enci Sulaiman's manuscript go beyond testifying to the capacity to write in that language. The *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi* – evoking the period of Java's early Islamization, the walis and their powers of protection and guidance – indicates a

certain sense of historical consciousness. The use of *tembang* and the Javanese speech registers, in however fragmentary a manner, represent additional ties to a cultural and literary world beyond Sri Lanka's shores. The numerous Arabic sections of the manuscript, almost always accompanied by detailed translations, cite the Qur'an, hadith and various works composed in Damascus, Cairo and Madina, then translated by men from Pattani, Palembang and Aceh, indicating the Sri Lankan Malays' ties to the historical heartlands of Islam and to the texts and ideas produced over generations of interactions – mutual processes of study, initiation and exchange – between those heartlands and South and Southeast Asia. The biographical information that Enci Sulaiman presents in the Compendium also reflects this history: descended from a Javanese man who travelled on the hajj to Mecca and living across the Java Sea to the northeast in Ujung Pandang, he later – for reasons unknown – continued his life in British Ceylon where he commissioned the writing of a manuscript encapsulating this tapestry of connections.

Such links, through individuals' movement across places and, equally important, through circulating texts, make it difficult to conceive of the Sri Lankan Malays in marginal or peripheral terms. Indeed, their numbers are small and they hold little political power in contemporary Sri Lanka; they are known neither to scholars nor most Indonesians today. Yet their fertile historical connections with Arab, Indonesian and Indian Muslims and their writings and practices, their own creativity in employing Malay writing and literary conventions despite a geographically separate existence from the rest of the Malay world, and their adherence to a spoken form of Malay into the twenty-first century represent a determination and sense of community that is remarkable. Perhaps the use of the Arabic script in Enci Sulaiman's manuscript is symbolic of this larger picture where crossings and contacts loom large: employed to write four different languages – Arabic, Malay, Javanese and Tamil – the script represents a standard, an equivalence across languages and communities that defies ideas of centres and margins and emphasizes the shared, the overlapping and the connected.

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Notes

1. Although there is evidence that some of the early exiles and servants from the areas under Dutch control in the Indonesian archipelago were non-Muslim, including those arriving from places like Bali and Ambon, the majority were likely Muslim from the start. With time this religious affiliation came to be synonymous with being Malay.
2. Nomenclature is often unstable and telling and this case forms no exception. I use Ceylon to refer specifically to the colonial possession. For the sake of convenience in most cases, I use Sri Lanka as a designation for the island and Sri Lankan Malays when discussing the community, employing the term with which they currently refer to themselves when speaking or writing in English. The appellation 'Malay' was one of several used in the past and present. The issue of nomenclature is beyond the scope of this article.
3. The Dutch United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Companie*) was founded in 1602 and formally dissolved in 1800 when its possessions, territory and debts were taken over

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by the government of the Dutch Batavian Republic. Banishment to Ceylon was part of a much wider phenomenon of forced migration in the Company Empire. For an in-depth study of this topic, see Ward, *Networks of Empire*. Chapter 5, 179–238, 'Company and Court Politics in Java: Islam and Exile at the Cape', is particularly relevant to my discussion, dealing as it does with the cases of Javanese exiles in South Africa.

4. For the two most comprehensive books to date on the Sri Lankan Malays' history, see Hussainmiya, *Lost Cousins*; and Hussainmiya, *Orang Rejimen*.
5. For an example of a poem depicting a local event, a squabble between Malay and Bengali soldiers serving in the British army, see Hussainmiya, "Syair Kisahnya Khabar Orang Wolenter Benggali." For an analysis of a text almost unknown in Malay elsewhere (but popular in Javanese), see Ricci, "Remembering Java's Islamization."
6. For the latter theory, see Hussainmiya, *Orang Rejimen*, 51.
7. For a history of Islam in Sri Lanka, see Shukri, *Muslims of Sri Lanka*. For detailed information on three Muslim communities in Sri Lanka, including the Moors, Malays and Memons, see Hussein, *Sarandib. An Ethnological Study*, 309–408.
8. On the politics of being Muslim in Sri Lanka, see McGilvray, "Arabs, Moors and Muslims."
9. I refer to the manuscript as the Malay Compendium throughout and list it as such in the reference list.
10. Mr Saldin and his family trace their roots to Encik Pantasih, who came to Sri Lanka from Sumenep in the eastern part of Madura, Indonesia. For a family history, see Saldin, *Portrait of a Sri Lankan Malay*.
11. For example, the dating on page 227 reads: *Tamat al kalam pada hari Ahad jam pukul tuju dua puluh tuju hari bulan Rabi' awwal tersurat tatkala didalam nakari Kalambu hijrah Nasari seribu dalapan ratus tiga* (The End. [Concluded on] Sunday at seven o'clock, 27 of Rabi' awwal, written while in Colombo, in the Christian year 1803). Transliteration from sources that do not follow a standard spelling system and are written in several languages is a vexed issue. I employ current (diacritic-free) Malay spelling conventions in most cases and use diacritics for citation from Javanese and Arabic, unless a word from the latter (i.e. sura) has entered the English language.
12. *Enci* (sometimes spelt encik or ence') is a title, defined in Wilkinson's dictionary (first published 1901) as 'master; mistress'. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, 303. Interestingly, a Javanese dictionary defines *enci* as a title for a non-Javanese, especially one from Bawean, Bandar, Sumatra or Malacca, or a term of address for a 'full blooded Chinese' (*Cina singkèk*), see Poerwadarminta, *Baosastra Djawa*, 123.
13. *Orang dari nakarinya Maqashar di Hujung Pandan.* Ujung Pandang was an old pre-colonial fort, captured and rebuilt by the Dutch in 1667 and renamed Fort Rotterdam. The famous Prince Diponegara who led an uprising in Java against Dutch rule in 1825–1830 was exiled to Ujung Pandang and died there. The city that developed on the site, known as Makassar, was renamed Ujung Pandang from 1971 to 1999. The two names are often used interchangeably. Makassar is currently the largest city on the island of Sulawesi.
14. Sheikh Yusuf was exiled in 1684 and remained in Sri Lanka for a decade, during which time he wrote extensively and gained a following. In 1694 he was exiled further to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, where he died in 1699.
15. *Turunan daripada Mas haji 'Abd Allah Jawi Mataram*. Mataram was a powerful kingdom from the late sixteenth century to the eighteenth, when it increasingly lost power and territory to the Dutch East India Company. Under Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1645) Mataram was able to expand its territory to include most of Java. It was eventually divided into two, and later three regions in the mid eighteenth century, with the royal courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta continuing its line.
16. *Inilah risala daripada shaikh kamal mukamal yaitu daripada haji 'Abd Allah nagari Mataram.*
17. *Kitab turun daripada nagari Mataram kepada anaq muridnya jangan engkau berikan membaca kepada orang yang belum mengaji 'ilm nafas ini*.
18. Discussions of the breath (Jav. *napas*) are found, for example, in the extensive Javanese *Serat Samud* corpus. See also Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism*, 142. A search for 'ilm nafas (using a variety of spellings) on the Malay Concordance Project website which documents 170 Malay texts and documents does not result in a single reference, see mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/mcp.html
19. Another name, scribbled in pencil towards the end of the manuscript, is difficult to decipher. This may be the person who either received or bought the manuscript from Enci Sulaiman, perhaps someone related to the Saldin family, the present owners of the manuscript.

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20. The manuscript pages are not numbered. For the purpose of clear referencing I have numbered the pages of my copy. The sura is on page 187.
21. Pages 4, 146 and 181, respectively.
22. Page 206. On the Arabic text and its circulation in the Indonesian archipelago from the eighteenth century onwards, its Malay and Javanese adaptations, and translations of the latter, see Drewes, *Directions for Travellers*.
23. Pages 180 and 185.
24. Ekadjati et al., *Katalog Induk,* 474–5.
25. Descendants of the Bantenese prince still reside in Sri Lanka (personal communication, Faiq Doole, June 2011). See also "Arsip Berbahasa Belanda Bawa Doole Ke Sultan Banten," *Banten Pos* (2012), June 21, 2012. bantenpos-online.com/2012/06/13/arsip-berbahasa-belanda-bawa-doole-ke-sultan-banten/
26. Page 271.
27. 'Abdallah b.'Abd al-Karīm Ba-Fadl's work is known in Java as *Bapadal* (deriving from Ba-Fadl). The Kitāb Minhāju al-Qawīm and its glosses deal with the prescriptions concerning worship (*fiqh al-'ubudiyya*); see van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning," 238.
28. Zakariyyā Al-Anṣārī also wrote the *Kitāb Fatḥ Al-Raḥmān*, a commentary on the above-mentioned *Risāla fī 'l-tawḥīd*. He died in Cairo in 1520. See Drewes, *Directions for Travellers*, 26–38. Another one of his works, the *Fatḥ al-wahhāb*, a commentary on his own *Manhāj al-ṭullāb*, also appears in the manuscript's list of titles. An early Malay translation of the *Fatḥ al-wahhāb*, titled *Mir'at al- ṭullāb*, was made by 'Abd al-Ra'uf of Singkel; see van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning," 236.
29. Page 167. On al-Asyi see Azra, *Jaringan Ulama*, 261.
30. Page 248.
31. For a list of some of al-Sammāni's well-known disciples from the archipelago, see Azra, *Jaringan Ulama*, 261–2. These disciples often introduced their fellow countrymen to the teachings while still in Arabia; see Drewes, *Directions for Travellers*, 36–7.
32. Pages 252–7. Jilani is described using multiple honorifics as 'ḥaḍhrat Sulṭān al-'Arifīn Burhān al'āshiqīn makhdūm Sulṭān Shāh 'Abd al-Qādir Muḥialdīn Jīlāni raḍi Allah 'anhu.'
33. See Schomburg, "Reviving Religion." For a list and description of the many Tamil literary works dedicated to al-Jilani, see especially, 248–99.
34. A Javanese perspective on circles of diasporic Islamic teachers and disciples appears in the eighteenth-century *Babad Giyanti*.
35. Shu'ayb 'Alim, *Arabic, Arwi and Persian*.
36. Hussainmiya, *Lost Cousins*.
37. See, for example, Burah, *Saga of the Exiled*; Hamid, "Islam Dalam Sejarah"; and Mat Piah, "Tradisi Kesusastraan Melayu Sri Lanka."
38. For an expanded discussion of these Javanese sections, see Ricci, "The Discovery of Javanese Writing," 511–18.
39. Pages 45–6.
40. On the walis, see Rinkes, *Nine Saints of Java*.
41. On the nasalization phenomenon, see Saldin, *The Sri Lankan Malays*, 51. Suryadi, in the context of analysing a Malay letter written in early nineteenth-century Ceylon that also exhibits similar added nasalization, suggests that it may point to an author of Buginese ancestry; see Suryadi "Sepucuk Surat," 5. If true this phenomenon may offer additional evidence for the ongoing use of languages other than Malay in the community and to the ways these may have mingled and altered one another.
42. Florida, *Writing the Past*, 90.
43. Pages 266–7.
44. Thus the first series of numerals is telungpuluh siji, telungpuluh dua [another error, should be telungpuluh loro but the Malay word dua, 'two,' is used rather than the Javanese loro], telungpuluh telu, etc. In the repeat series tigangpuluh siji, tigangpuluh dua [as above], tigangpuluh telu etc. appears. Thirty in high Javanese should be tigangdasa rather than tigangpuluh; 31 should be tigangdasa setunggal, etc.
45. Page 181.
46. This world view had roots in both the pre-Islamic Javanese past and the world of Islam. Perhaps most well known in this context is the powerful deity Nyai Rara Kidul – Goddess of

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the Southern Ocean – the supernatural spouse and patron of the kings of Java. Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds*, 1–2.

47. *Lapal* are texts comprising Arabic prayers, formulas and spells.
48. The term *gundhul* (bald) is used in Java to refer to the Javanese language written in an unvocalized form of the Arabic script, whereas the more common and vocalized Arabic script used to write Javanese is known as *pégon*. Interestingly, Sri Lankan Malays have retained a Javanese term yet they use it to describe Malay writing. This may attest to the dominance of Javanese among the early exiles.
49. In other instances – and this is true for Javanese manuscripts – Arabic quotes or phrases were written in the traditional Javanese script known as *aksara Jawa* and used concurrently with gundul/pégon over several centuries. Tamil Muslims too continued to employ the Tamil script in their writings. The case of Malay differs. Although a variety of scripts were used to write Malay in Southeast Asia, with Islamization the Arabic script gradually came to dominate while older scripts disappeared. On the recent discovery of a rare Malay manuscript written in a pre-Islamic script, see Kozok, *The Tanjung Tanah Code*.
50. Hussainmiya describes the compulsory jawi lessons given to Malay children whose fathers served in the Ceylon Rifle Regiment of the British Army.

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