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Examining the Role of ‘ulamā in the Islamization Process of the Malay World

Mohd Noh Abdul Jalil*
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Abstract: This article analyses the roles of ‘ulamā’ in propagating the message of Islam in the Malay world. Islam managed to reach many corners of the Malay world in the 17th century. Evidence has indicated that ‘ulamā’ were among those who had participated actively in propagating the messages of Islam to the local people. Classical Malay texts served as the best available records to understand the roles of these ‘ulamā’ at that time. Hence, analysis are made on selected classical Malay texts in order to understand the actual roles played by the ‘ulamā’ in the Malay world at that time in transforming the understanding of the local Malay people from the beliefs in Hindu-Buddhist and animism to Islam. Three significant roles of the ‘ulamā’ at that time have been identified namely propagating knowledge to the local people, religious advisors to the rulers as well as engaging with the non-Muslims.

Keywords: Islam, ‘Ulamā’, Islamization, Malay world, Malay texts

Abstrak:

Artikel ini mengkaji peran para ulama di dalam menyebarkan kefahaman Islam di Alam Melayu. Pada kurun ke-17, agama Islam telah disebarkan ke pelbagai pelosok Alam Melayu. Bukti-bukti yang ada telah menunjukkan usaha terus menerus para ulama di dalam usaha menyebarkan agama Islam

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Kata kunci: Islam, ‘Ulamā’, Islamisasi, dunia Melayu, teks Melayu

Introduction

When Islam was introduced into the Malay world in the 13th Century, it came right into the lap of the Hindu-Buddhist environment. As such, the focus and concern of the early dāʿī and ‘ulamā’ were to address the prevailing Hindu-Buddhist beliefs and practices, and to translate Islam to a mindset that was completely different from that of Islam. It is enlightening to note that in general, these early dāʿī and ‘ulamā’ were sensitive to the people’s beliefs and feelings, as seen in the wise — and even gentle — approaches that they applied in spreading and promoting Islam to the locals. Thus, as history shows, Islam spread steadily and peacefully in the Malay world; a tradition that continues until today.

From the voluminous and rich works of Muslim scholars on faith related matters, it is obvious that they were concerned with the faith of the Muslims of their time. Based on evidence from selected 17th century Malay texts, the roles of the ‘ulamā’ then were mainly three-fold, namely: (1) to propagate and teach the correct knowledge of Islam; (2) to act as the custodians of the religion and of the faith of the Ummah; and (3) to address and confront teachings of other religions that confused and challenged the Ummah. To carry out the first role they became teachers and prolific writers; for the second they became officers and advisers to the rulers and socio-political authorities of the time; and for the third they conducted comparative studies on theologies and doctrines and came up with discursive works on other religions. Evidence for these roles is gathered from selected 17th Century Malay texts. In this article, all original quotations from the Malay texts are
included together with its English translation. The translations are the author’s.

**Propagation of Knowledge**

As stated above, one of the major roles of the ‘ulamā’ in this region, if not the very main role, was to propagate and teach Islam. Not only was their role to teach Islam to Muslims in the region but they also perceived themselves, and likewise were perceived by the Muslims, as custodians of Islam and the authority over the religion. Such was their status and the respect given to them that even the rulers stood humble in front of their authority, like a student to a teacher.

The 17th Century Malay text, *Sejarah Melayu*, narrates some examples of the earlier centuries on this type of relationship between some Sulṭāns of Malacca and the ‘ulamā’. Not only did the ‘ulamā’ go to the palace to teach the Sulṭān about Islam, but the Sulṭān too went to the ‘ulamā’ to learn about the religion from them. Accounts on these are illustrated in the *Sejarah Melayu*. One of these accounts is the grand welcome given by Sulṭān Manṣūr Shāh of Malacca (1458-1477) to Maulānā Abū Bakar, for carrying a book on Islamic theology entitled *Dūrr al-Manzūm* which the Maulānā had brought with him from his travels. The type of reception the Maulānā received from the Sulṭān illustrates the respect and warmth the palace had for the scholars of Islam during this period.

After that, Maulānā Abū Bakar descended from the ship with a copy of the book “Dūrr Manzūm”. His arrival in Melaka was warmly honored by Sulṭān Manṣūr Shāh. He was carried in procession to the palace’s court. And so Sulṭān Manṣūr Shāh studied with Maulānā Abū Bakar. Maulānā Abū Bakar praised the Sultan for his intelligence and Sulṭān Manṣūr Shāh gained a lot of knowledge from Maulāna Abu Bakar. Consequently, Sulṭān Manṣūr Shāh ordered for the translation of the “Dūrr Manzūm” into the Pasai language (Muhammad Haji Salleh 1997, 120).

terlalu terang hati baginda, banyaklah ‘ilmu diperolehlah baginda. Maka Sultan Masur Syah Durr Manzum itu disuruh ertikan ke Pasai....

Another Sultān of Malacca, Sultān Maḥmūd Shāh (1488-1511), also learned from an ‘ālim who most probably was of Indian origin, but had come all the way from Jeddah, Arabia. His son, Raja Aḥmad also studied under the guidance of this shaykh.

A ship from the West docked at Melaka. On the ship was a learned man, whose name is Maulānā Sadar Jahan, a very pious person. Sultān Maḥmūd Shāh studied with him and asked his son, Prince Raja Aḥmad to study under him too (Muhammad Haji Salleh 1997, 191).

An outstanding example that highlights the type of relationship between the two authorities is best described by the following incident recorded in Sejarah Melayu:

Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh went to Maulānā Yūsuf’s house riding an elephant, accompanied by (all) his entourage. Once Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh reached the gate of Maulānā Yūsuf’s house, his officer told the guard of Maulānā Yūsuf, ‘Inform Maulānā Yūsuf that the Ruler, His Majesty Sultān Maḥmūd Shāh, has come.’

The guard then informed Maulānā Yūsuf of this. Maulānā Yūsuf responded by saying, ‘Close the door. Why should Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh come to the house of a humble man?’

This response of Maulānā Yūsuf was conveyed by the guard to Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh. So the Sultan returned to his palace. When night fall came, he instructed all his officers to go home. When no one was around, Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh went out with only one officer. He himself carried the book.

Once Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh reached the gate of Maulana Yusuf’s house, he told the guard at Maulana Yusuf’s door.
‘Tell Maulānā Yūsuf’ and he went on to say, ‘Mahmud the humble is coming.’

The door was then opened because only the humble comes to another humble man’s house. Maulānā Yūsuf immediately went out to receive Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh and invited the Sulṭān to sit beside him. And so Sulṭān Maḥmūd Shāh began his learning with Maulānā Yūsuf (Muhammad Haji Salleh 1997, 161).

This is truly an outstanding example showing the nature of the relationship between ʿulamā’ and the Muslim rulers during the early period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. Since Islam teaches equality between people, Maulānā Yūsuf therewith manifested this Islamic concept in his relationship vis-à-vis the Sulṭān. The Maulānā was very steadfast in upholding his religion. Indirectly he was telling the ruler that the ruler should be humble in his relationship with scholars. Parading his position and authority when coming to the Maulānā’s house to seek
knowledge, was seen as inappropriate by the Maulānā. Only when the ruler changed his attitude towards the Maulānā and showed humility as a good Muslim, was the Sulṭān accepted to learn from him as his student.

This story also indicates that at that time the ‘ulamā’ did not want so close an association with political authorities, perhaps so as to be independent so that they would be able to carry out their responsibility as custodians of the religion without biases and favors. The Muslim ‘ulamā’ presented their own religious opinions based on the contents of the Islamic scripture, the Holy Qur’ān, as well as their interpretation of the sayings of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), i.e., the Ḥadīth. They saw their role as guiding people with the teachings of Islam. People were free to either accept or reject their opinions. If these opinions were seen as incompatible with the position of the palace, most of the time the ruler would ignore them, but there were also times when the rulers dismissed the ‘ulamā’ from their positions.

Religious Advisors

The early Malay texts provide evidences of a pragmatic relationship between ‘ulamā’ and political leaders during the early period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. The early ‘ulamā’ in the archipelago adopted different positions vis-à-vis the royal palace. Some of them decided to join the palace and work with the rulers directly and officially, while the majority preferred to stay away from the centre of political power and lived outside the royal ambiance to be with the people. Both were accepted forms of relationships in the eyes of the early Malays since they did not breach any Malay traditions or those of Islam.

However, there were also other instances where ‘ulamā’ did associate themselves with the royal palace and became the official advisors to the Sulṭān, holding official posts, in particular, as the Shaykh al-Islām (Grand Mufti). Among these were Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrā’ī (d. 1640), Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1666) and ʿAbdul Raʿūf al-Sinkilī (d.1693). They all served with the Sulṭān of Aceh.

Bustān al-Salāṭīn, which was composed by al-Rānīrī in Aceh during the reign of Sulṭān Iskandar Thānī in the first half of the 17th Century, provides evidence of this relationship during the early period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago.
The above narration shows that al-Rānīrī was instructed by the Sulṭān to compose a book in Malay (Jawi) about this world as well as the Hereafter. This book, which was later given the title Bustān al-Salāṭīn, therefore discusses the origins of the worlds, issues of the Hereafter, as well as the history of many Muslim rulers – among them the history of the Acehnese rulers since 1516 and their kingdom. The scholar explained that he followed dedicatedly the instructions of the Sultan:

And I humbly fulfilled the command of his Majesty whereas I have little knowledge and little understanding of the Jawi Language, but put my trust in Allah the Creator of all universe (Jelani Harun (ed.) 2004, 3).

**Examining the Role of ‘Ulamā**

**In the Islamization Process of the Malay World**

And after that, on 17th of Syawwal, I was commanded – a commandment that could not be refused – by his Majesty the most respected, most wise and generous, who has the highest sovereignty, Sulṭān Iskandar Thānī ‘Alāuddīn Mughāyah Syah Johan Berdaulat żillu ‘l-Lahi fī ‘l-Élam, lazdāda daulatuhu ayyāman mas’ūdan wa tala žilluha fī ‘l-āfāqi mamdūd. May happiness always be with him and may his reign be long and powerful across all the states, to write a book in the Jawi language which is to consist of all the terms of all existences in the seven heavens and the seven worlds (Wa ṣirātu ‘l-salāṭīni ‘l-awwalÊna wa ‘l-akhirÊn) and also on the histories of the ancient and the later kings (Jelani Harun (ed.) 2004, 2-3).

And I humbly fulfilled the command of his Majesty whereas I have little knowledge and little understanding of the Jawi Language, but put my trust in Allah the Creator of all universe (Jelani Harun (ed.) 2004, 3).
Apart from advising the Sulṭān on matters related to religion, the Shaykh al-Islām was also expected to perform other tasks within his expertise. In this case, al-Rānīrī as the Shaykh al-Islām of Aceh was instructed to compose a book on the code of conduct for the ruler and also for the subjects. Similarly, al-Rānīrī had to write for Seri Sulṭān Tāj ʿĀlam Sulṭānah Ṣafiyyat al-Dīn Shāh (1641-1675), the first female ruler of the state of Aceh and the successor to Sultan Iskandar Thānī. Al-Rānīrī was instructed to explain in writing to the people of Aceh the decisions made by him against the followers of the Wujūdiyyah movement. This treatise became his book Tibyān fī Maʿrifat al-Adyān (Al-Attas, 1986).

Besides writing specifically under the orders of the Malay rulers, al-Rānīrī also wrote other works on Islam throughout his tenure as the highest religious authority in Aceh. Among his works were Şirāṭ al-Mustaqīm, Durrat al-Farāʾīd bi Sharh al-ʿAqāid, Hujjat al-Ṣiddiṣq li dafʿ al-Zindīq, Hidāyah al-Ḥabīb fī al-Targhīb wa al-Tarḥīb and Asrār al-Insān fī Maʿrifat al-Rūḥ wa al-Raḥmān. His knowledge and ability as a prolific writer can be seen from these titles, which are not confined to a specific branch of knowledge in Islam, but are quite encyclopaedic in nature, covering such subjects as Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic theology, Islamic Mysticism and Ḥadīth.

Al-Rānīrī’s acceptance of the position of official religious advisor to the Sulṭān, i.e. as Shaykh al-Islām, was not an office which sat easy with every ‘ulamāʾ in the Malay Archipelago at that time. In fact, he represented a minority of early ‘ulamāʾ in the Malay Archipelago who had associations with the palace; many others, however, decided to distant themselves from political authorities. Among those standing apart were Ḥamzah Fansūrī (d.1500 c.a), ʿAbdul Șamad al-Palimbānī (d.1790 c.a.) and Muhammad Arsyād al-Banjārī (d.1812), whose writings had great influence on the Malays, even until today, and who represent the important legacy of early Malay Muslim scholarship in the archipelago. This class of ‘ulamāʾ felt that they ought to impart proper Islamic knowledge to the ummat. They preferred not to have a formal relationship with the palace for this gave them greater freedom in
expressing their thoughts and acting in accordance with their conscience as Muslims.

**Confronting Other Religions**

The above expositions demonstrate just how serious the 17th century ‘ulamā’ were in carrying out their roles and responsibilities towards the Ummah, both at the level of the masses as well as at the level of political authority. The works discussed above were aimed at inculcating the correct Islamic faith through the proper knowledge of Islam, and these came in the form of discourses on *tawhīd, fiqh* and *taṣawwūf*, among others. But there were also comparative discourses where the ‘ulamā’ compared the Islamic belief with that of other religions. Although such discourses were generally found in books on Islam, there were, however, ‘ulamā’ who also wrote specifically on religions other than Islam, writing on the theologies, scriptures, doctrines, sects, etc. of these religions. The ultimate objectives of such works were, on the one hand, to prove and enhance the truthfulness and genuineness of Islam and its message, and on the other hand, to prove the falsity and misconceptions of the other religions. The religions singled out most for comparative discourses were Christianity and Judaism, the reasons being that these two religions share the same history with Islam, differing only at the level of the ‘aqāid, namely the theology, doctrines, rituals and scriptures. A subject that was given a lot of attention by the 17th Century Malay scholars was the Hereafter, in particular, as precautions for Muslims not to be deviated from their faith on their deathbed. Three well known books give accounts of this, namely the *Lūbb al-Kasyf* by al-Sinkīlī (P. Voorhoeve 1952), the *Tibyān* by al-Rānīrī (P. Voorhoeve, 1955) and the *Hikayat Seribu Masalah* (Edrwar Djamaris, 1994.).

*Hikayat Seribu Masalah* discusses Islam’s position on eschatological issues vis-à-vis the positions of Jews, Christians and others. For example, there is an account of a dialogue between a Jewish rabbi ʿAbdullah bin Salām before he became a Muslim with Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH).

‘So, say to him, O Muhammad, say, do those who enter paradise, is it because of their good deeds?’ Rasulullah then answered, ‘O Abdullah, they did not enter the Paradise because of their good deeds. Only those who say that “There is no God but Allah and Prophet Muhammad is His Messenger” will go to Paradise and not because of their good
deeds. If the Jews and Christians say these two phrases, or even the idol worshippers, if they enter Islam, Paradise is for them.' 'Abdullah responded, 'True, O Rasulullah'. ‘Say O Muhammad, all Jews and Christians and worshippers of fire, idols and trees – they are all unbelievers’. ‘Abdullah then said, ‘True, O Rasulullah’ (Edrwar Djamaris 1994, 24).


Katakanlah, ya Muḥammad, segala Yahūdī dan Naṣrānī dan segala orang menyembah api dan orang menyembah berhala dan orang yang menyembah pohon kayu sekalianya itu kafir. Maka kata Abdullah, Sidiq, ya Rasulullah.

This exchange indicates that the reward for Paradise in the Hereafter is granted to those who utter the Shahādah (Islamic creed), not due to their good deeds. Another dialogue was on how Paradise looks like:

‘Say O Muḥammad, which place is similar to Paradise?’ Rasulullah answered, ‘Places similar to Paradise is the Andikini Hill in the western Arab land, second the Qāf Hill, third, the Anan Hill in the foreign land, and fourthly a place named Kabirhurasan.’ ‘Abdullah then said, ‘True, O Rasulullah’ (Edrwar Djamaris 1994, 58).

ʿAbdullah bin Salām continued asking the Prophet (PBUH) about the dimension of Bukit Qāf and the journey to this place, and if this length of time pertains to Muslims only or to the non-believers as well. The Prophet (PBUH) responded, “O ʿAbdullah, it is the fifty year journey for all the Jews and Christians and Majūsi who worship the sun and worship cows, for they are all the dwellers of Hell” (Edrwar Djamaris 1994, 57).

ʿAbdullah bin Salām also enquired about the Hereafter and the dwellers of Hell. The Prophet gave a long list of dwellers of Hell, which included Jews and Christians.
Muḥammad then answered, ‘O ʿAbdullah, Hell is the place for those who – disobey Allah’s commands – who did not pray, did not fast, commit adultery, drink alcohol, practice usury, despiteful of other Muslims, like to play musical drums and all those non-believers who worship idols and the sun worshippers, those who worship stones and wood, and other people who associate Allah with other beings, and the Jews and the Christians. They are those people who will be thrown into Hell by Allah’. ʿAbdullah then said, ‘True, O Rasulullah’ (Edrwar Djamaris 1994, 64-65).

Katakanlah, ya Muhammad, neraka yang ketujuh itu tempat siapa?’ Maka sabda Muhammad, ‘Hai Abdullah, adapun neraka itu tempat segala orang yang durhaka kepada Allah Taala tiada mau sembahyang dan puasa dan orang berbuat zina dan orang yang minum arak dan tuak dan orang yang makan ganda berganda dan orang yang dengki akan (se) samanya Islam dan orang yang gemar memalu bunyi-bunyian dan segala kafir yang menyembah berhala dan orang yang menyembah matalah dan orang yang menyembah batu dan menyembah kayu dan segala musyrik dan Yahudi dan Nasrani sekalian mereka itulah yang dimasukkan Allah Subhanahu wa Taala ke dalam neraka. Maka (kata Abdullah), “Sidiq, ya Rasulullah.”

The issue of Dajjāl (Antichrist) was also raised. According to the author, the Jews, Christians as well as the Mājūsī (who worship fire) are among those who believe Dajjāl as God and worship him. These followers and worshippers of Dajjāl are among the dwellers of Hell (Edwar Djamaris 1994, 74). As a kind of summary, the author of the text records:

‘All the righteous will be in their proper places, all the evildoers in their proper places and punished. As for all the non-believers and those who associate Allah with other beings and the Jews and Christians and the non-believing Mājūsī, and the idolaters, the tyrants and those who take usury, all of them will be in Hell. Whereas all prophets, saints, religious scholars, the righteous, the pious, the martyrs, and the muʾmin among my followers, they will all be placed in Paradise” (Edrwar Djamaris 1994, 83-84).

Segala orang yang saleh pada tempatnya, orang yang durhaka pada tempatnya disiksa. Adapun segala kafir dan musyrik dan dan Yahudi dan Nasrani dan kafir Majūsi dan
There are no Prophetic Traditions (Ḥadīth) recorded on the above dialogue between the Prophet (PBUH) and ʿAbdullah bin Salām. However, there is a Hadīth narrated by Al-Bukhārī on three questions asked by ʿAbdullah bin Salām to the Prophet (PBUH) in Madīnah regarding signs of the end of the world, the food eaten by the dwellers of Heaven and on factors which shape the physical appearance of a baby (Al-Bukhari 1987, vol. 11, 110). The Prophet (PBUH) gave his answers to those questions whereupon ʿAbdullah reiterates his approval on the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) (Al-Bukhari 1987, vol. 11, 110).

There is also a possibility that the roots of the above four questions and other remaining questions in Hikayat Seribu Masalah originated from the Jewish sources known in Islamic tradition as the Isrāiliyyat. For example, the story of Bukit Qāf is one of the popular stories in such traditions, but not in the Islamic tradition. A study by Muḥammad Ḥussain Ẓahabī on Isrāiliyyat points out the story of Bukit Qāf as an example of a weak Isrāiliyyat story (Muhammad Husain Zahabi 1988, 48-49).

Another work that carries a discourse on death vis-à-vis other religions is Lūbb al-Kashf wa al-Bayān limā yarāhu al-Muḥtaḍar bi al-ʿIyān by ʿAbdul Raʿūf al-Sinkīlī (ʿAbdul Raʿūf al-Sinkilī N.D.). He wrote this book in Arabic, and it was translated into Malay by Katib Seri Raja (Braginsky, V. 2004, 651). It is based on Kitāb al-Tadhkirah bi umūr al-Ākhīrah (The Book of the Reminder of the Events in the Hereafter) by al-Qurtūbī (d. 1272) (Al-Qurtubi, N.D.). It focuses on the experience of a person on his deathbed. This text also includes an elaboration on the essential preparations of a Muslim who is about to face death. These preparations are important in protecting Muslims from Satan, who will try to change the belief of the dying Muslim from the Islamic faith to another. For this analysis, Voorhoeve’s edition of the text, which was published under the title Bajan Tadjalli, is used (Voorhoeve, P. 1952, 91).
Al-Sinkīlī explains that Satan will appear in three appearances to the dying Muslim to persuade him to change his religion. These three appearances will be in three different colours, i.e., black, red and yellow. Black represents Satan himself, while red and yellow represent Judaism and Christianity respectively.

When the moment of death approaches, the person will see many appearances, and when the one with the black appearance approaches him, that is the devil and he must say, ‘There is no God except Allah and Muhammad is His messenger’. And when the one with the red appearance approaches him, that is the Christian and he must say ‘There is no God except Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger’. And when the one with the yellow appearance approaches him, that is the Jew, he must say ‘There is no God except Allah and Muhammad is His messenger’. And when the one with the fair skin approaches, indeed that is the Messenger, he must say ‘MasyaAllah, he was indeed one of the true believers’ (Voorhoeve, P. 1952, 91).

Telah datang kepada manusia pada ketika sakarat al-maut beberapa rupa yang amat banjak, maka apabila datang kepada rupa yang hitam maka jaitu iblis maka hendaklah ia mengutjap la ilaha illa'allah (Muhammad rasulu'llah) huwa huwa huwa. Dan apabila datang kepada rupa merah maka jaitu nasrani maka hendaklah mengutjap la ilaha illa'allah Muhammad rasulullah huwa huwa huwa. Dan apabila datang kepada rupa kuning maka jaitu jahudi maka hendaklah ia mengutjap la ilaha illa'allah (Muhammad rasulu'llah) huwa huwa huwa. Dan apabila datang kepada rupa yang putih maka jaitu rupa nabi kita Muhammad rasulullah maka hendaklah ia mengutjap masja’Allah kana min al-mu’minina’l-hakk”.

Thus, it is important for the dying Muslim to remember God every time these evil temptations come to him by repeating the Islamic creed “lā ilāha illā Allah”. Furthermore, al-Sinkīlī also mentions, at the moment of death Satan will come to the dying person in the appearances of his parents to influence him to convert to Christianity and Judaism.

Shaykh Jamaluddīn, may Allah be pleased with him, said in the book entitled Taẓkirah (Reminder), that some of the religious scholars said that when someone is on his deathbed, two Satans will sit beside him, one on the left and one on the
right. The Satan on his right will take the form of his father and will say: ‘O my child, I do love and care for you so die you as a Christian for it is the best of all religions’. And the devil on his left will take the form of his mother and say to him: ‘O my child, my womb is your crucible, and my milk is your drink, and my lap is your seat so die you as a Jew as it is the best of all religions’ (Voorhoeve, P. 1952, 92).

Although al-Sinkīlī considers Judaism and Christianity deviationists, his response to these two religions was not harsh. He does not even use the word ‘kāfir’ for the followers of these two religions. Moreover, he merely quotes the words of other scholars. In fact, the discussions on these two religions are common in the Qur’ān, as well as in the prophetic traditions. For example, in the following verse:

Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you unless you follow their form of religion. Say: ‘The Guidance of Allah – that is the (only) Guidance.’ Were you to follow their desires after the knowledge has reached you, then you would find neither Protector nor helper against Allah. (Qur’ān, 2:120)

The important message that al-Sinkīlī wishes to convey to Muslims is to prepare properly for death, by remembering God all the time. Otherwise, there is a chance that their faith will be deviated. If that is to be the case, in the Hereafter, they will have to face the consequences similar to all other deviationists. Again, the highlights of the two
Abrahamic traditions in this text have nothing to do with the author’s direct reference to the followers of these religions in the Malay world at that time. Rather, it was simply the continuation of a tradition of the Qur’ān to inform Muslims to safeguard their faith against any other religion such as Judaism and Christianity.

Conclusion

All these works indicate the concerns of the ‘ulamā’ to not only teach Islam but also to protect the faith of the Muslims of their time to remain on the right track, not to be deviated either by misconceptions about Islam through misinterpretations of Islam, or to be deluded into the beliefs of other religions. Thus, the ‘ulamā’ then were addressing issues both at the intra-religious level where the challenges came from within the Ummah, as well as at the inter-religious level where influences of other religions may affect their faith. As such, these ‘ulamā’ therefore performed their three-fold roles well, as propagators and teachers of Islam, as custodians of Islam and as defenders of the religion against non-Islamic beliefs. All these are read from the very own writings of these 17th Century ‘ulamā’ of the Malay world in the texts that they have left for posterity.

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