



Legends and Legacies of Siti Jenar: Ecstatic Sufism and the Politics of *Shath*


The legend of Siti Jenar is among the most widely known and controversial tales in Javanese Islamic literature. While the details vary enormously, the core of the story is the same. Siti Jenar is the saint (*wali*) who passes beyond religion, as it is usually defined. He comes to know that there is ultimately only one reality -- that of Allah -- and that we all share in it. He is put on trial for publicly proclaiming the doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) that identifies the human soul with the essence of Allah (*dat*) and for rejecting modes of ritual performance required by Shari'ah including the Friday prayer. He was then executed on orders from the other wali. There are many versions of the story in Javanese chronicles (*babad*) and religious texts. Many more that circulate as oral tradition. There is a continuous string of new books, most of the in Indonesian instead of Javanese and websites retelling the story for contemporary audiences.

Keywords: Sufism, Islam, Java, Indonesia, Siti Jenar, Unity of Being

Kisah syekh Siti Jenar merupakan salah satu cerita yang paling terkenal dan kontroversial dalam literatur Islam Jawa. Meskipun banyak detail variasi kisah yang berbeda, inti cerita yang dideskripsikan memiliki jalinan yang sama. Dia biasa didefinisikan sebagai seorang wali yang memiliki nilai sakralitas istimewa yang bahkan melampaui sakralitas agama. Dia mengetahui bahwa pada akhirnya hanya ada satu realitas - yaitu Allah - dan kita semua berbagi di dalamnya. Dia diadili karena secara terbuka menyatakan doktrin kesatuan wujud (*wahdat al-wujud*) yang mengidentifikasi jiwa manusia dengan esensi Allah (*dat*) dan menolak cara-cara pelaksanaan ritual yang diwajibkan oleh Syariah, termasuk salat Jumat. Dia kemudian dieksekusi atas perintah dari wali lainnya. Ceritanya memiliki beragam versi yang dikisahkan dalam babad Jawa, teks-teks keagamaan, dan beragam cerita lisan. Serangkaian buku-buku baru juga terus bermunculan, sebagian besar hadir dalam bahasa Indonesia, bukan bahasa Jawa dan beragam situs-situs untuk menceritakan kembali kisah ini bagi pembaca kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Sufi, Islam, Jawa, Indonesia, Siti Jenar, Kesatuan Wujud

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Introduction

Siti Jenar was one the *Wali Songo* (nine saint) said to have brought Islam to Java in the fifteenth century. He is put on trial for publicly proclaiming the doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) that identifies the human soul with the essence of Allah (*dat*) and for rejecting modes of ritual performance required by *Shari'ah* including the Friday prayer. The other *wali* practiced and taught what can be called orthodox or more accurately orthoprax Sufism. They were Sufis, but taught that mystical truths and mystical practice must be contained within a vessel (*wadah*) of conventional *Shari'ah* centric Muslim piety -- *Shalat* (the five daily prayers), *Puasa* (fasting) during Ramadan, and for those with sufficient means, the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and that mystical truths concerning *gnosis* or the union of the human soul and the divine essence (*zat*) should be reserved for advanced students. This kind of mysticism also holds fast to a conventional understanding of Muslim monotheism (*tauhid*) according to which there is an absolute metaphysical distinction between Allah and his creation. Travelers on the mystical path eventually reach a point where they are overwhelmed by the presence and experience of Allah and even share in the divine names and attributes -- knowledge, compassion, mercy and most of all love. They share his perception (*wahdat al-shuhud*) but remain ontologically distinct. The Siti Jenar legend is included in the major *babad* (chronicles) and more explicitly religious texts including *Serat Cabolek* and *Serat Centhini*.¹ There are also numerous orally transmitted versions of the story. Siti Jenar has become an archetype in Javanese culture. For Javanese mystics who believe the rituals (*ibadah*)

mandated by Islamic law to be unnecessary for travelers on the mystical path leading to union with Allah, he is an archetype of courage, truth and defiance of hypocrisy. For those who maintain that ritual performance is an essential element of Islamic piety he is the archetype of heresy. Our analysis of the legend of Siti Jenar is guided by Eliade's theory of archetypes and repetition. Eliade argues that in traditional societies cities, myths and rituals are constructed through the replication of primordial events.² In this paper we suggest that Eliade's insight can be employed in the analysis of the "repetition" of religious debates and conflicts. We begin with the trial of the ecstatic Persian Sufi al-Hallaj that took place in Baghdad in 922, examine the ways in which the archetype is transformed and repeated with the spread of Islam to Southeast Asia and the establishment of the 15th century Javanese ecstatic Sufi Siti Jenar as a local archetype. We conclude with an analysis of the trial of an ecstatic Sufi in the east Javanese town of Situbondo that took place in October 1996.

The core of this paper is an analysis of religious and political themes debated in the Siti Jenar legend. It is based on and includes a translation of sections of a Yogyakarta manuscript of *Babad Demak*, a chronicle of the first Javanese Islamic state.³ We have selected this text as the basis for this discussion for two reasons. The first is that it is among the most theologically complex variants of the Siti Jenar legend. The second is that while the language of the text is that of central Javanese court poetry, the concepts it considers are rooted in a pan-Islamic discourse concerning the unity of Allah (*tauhid*) and relationships between legalistic and experiential piety. The manuscript dates to the early twentieth century, but preserves the

¹ For a translation and analysis of *Serat Cabolek* see Soebardi, *The Book of Cabolek: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation and Notes. A Contribution to the Study of the Javanese Mystical Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), and Soebardi, "Santri Religious Elements Reflected in the Book of Tjenthini," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde* 127, no. 3 (1971):331-349. Both texts include accounts of "heretical" Sufis in the tradition of Siti Jenar.

² Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 6-16.

³ Slamet Riyadi and Suwadi (eds.) *Babad Demak I* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Proyek Penerbitan Buku Sastra Indonesia dan Daerah, 1981).





discourse of Javanese Islam as it was prior to the rise of modernism which led to the rise of a stricter, more *Shari'ah* centric understanding of Islam among the Javanese *ulama*. As such it provides a window into the nature of Islamic theological discourse in pre-modern Java and relationships between Islam, understood as a transcultural discourse system, and local culture.

There are numerous variants of the Siti Jenar legend all of which build or expand on a common narrative that centers on his trial conducted by the synod of *Wali* at the mosque of Demak, the first Islamic state in Java.⁴ This core narrative can be summarized as follows:

- a) The Wali notice that Siti Jenar does not attend the Friday Prayer.
- b) They summons him to appear to explain and account for his actions.
- c) He complies only when Allah and Siti Jenar are invited.
- d) He explains the teaching of the unity of being to the wali.
- e) He is executed, but triumphs by demonstrating his mystical attainments and magical powers

The fact that in most versions of the Siti Jenar legend the "heretic" is killed or vanishes but, at the same time emerges victorious in the theological debate that leads to his execution, is illustrative of the enduring tension between these theologies and social groups associated with them. The distinction between social groups who insist on a *Shari'ah* - centric understanding of Islam and others favoring an understanding similar to Siti Jenar's is fundamental in Javanese religious and social life. The legend of the teachings and death of the heretic/saint provides a lens through which the historical development and contemporary forms this dynamic tension

can be viewed. The lens is simultaneously telescopic and microscopic. Telescopically it allows us to look beyond the nuances of particularly historically situated discourse, revealing major fault lines in the Javanese (and Indonesian) Islamic tradition which give rise to discourse, debate and conflict. It is also illustrative of the ways in which Javanese theological disputes are related to those of the larger Muslim world. It is microscopic in the sense the examination of the debates described in particular variants of the legend provide insights into the nature of the broader theological questions discussed and debated at particular times and places.

This paper includes four sections. The first describes debates about the unity of being theology and ecstatic mysticism in Sunni Islam. The second concerns Southeast Asian variants of these debates. This section focuses on the well-documented debate between Hamzah Fansuri and al-Raniri. The third concerns the trial of Siti Jenar as described in *Babad Demak*. The final section concerns the ways in which this debate continues to be repeated in Javanese and Indonesian religious discourse. It relies primarily on the ethnographic research in the Javanese cities Surakarta and Yogyakarta.

The Siti Jenar Legend and Classical Sufism

The Siti Jenar legend is a local narrative that provides a Javanese context for debates concerning relationships between Sufism, *Kalam* (systematic theology) and the *Shari'ah*. It's major theme is conflict between *Shari'ah* - centric *ulama* and ecstatic Sufis, who embrace the teaching of *wahdat al-wujud* and disregard the ritual program mandated by *Shari'ah*. Sufism is a quest for a deep emotional understanding and experience of the unity of Allah. There is a basic distinction

⁴ Discussions of the Siti Jenar legend and partial translations can be found in Nancy Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future* (Durham: Duke University Press 1995); Dowe Adolf Rinkes, *The Nine Saints of Java*, trans. by H. Froger trans (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1996) (a translation of Dutch language studies from the early twentieth century); Soebardi, *The Book*

of Cabolek (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975); P. J. Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature. Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting*, trans. by M.C. Ricklefs (Leiden: KTLV, 1935/1995); and Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java. Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).





between Sufi theologies based the unity of being and others which teach the unity of vision (*wahdat al-shudud*). The unity of being theology is rooted in the assumption that the goal of mystical practice is the realization of pre-existing ontological identity of the human soul and the essence of Allah. The unity of vision theology holds that while the soul and the divine essence are ontologically distinct, in the state of mystical union human consciousness is overwhelmed by the divine and that the mystic acquires the consciousness of Allah.⁵ Bousfield observes that, in a strictly logical sense, the teaching of the unity of being, “makes a mockery out of the *Shari’ah*.”⁶ The question at issue is, however, not that simple because many proponents of the unity of being hold that this knowledge should be reserved for travelers on the final stages of the mystical path and that premature revealing these truths can lead to confusion and impede the spiritual development.

It is for this reason the distinction is that between sober (Arabic *sahw*) and intoxicated (Arabic *sukr*) Sufi practice is as significant as that between unity of being and unity of vision theologies. The question at issue is not that of the relationship between Allah and humanity, but rather the personal conduct and social behavior of mystics. Intoxicated Sufis, overcome by the divine sometimes make what are, from the perspective of the *Shari’ah*, heretical, ecstatic statements (Arabic *shathiyat*). Contemporary Persian lexicons define *shathiyat* as “certain words resembling infidelity, which are uttered by the Sufi in overpowering ecstasy.”⁷ Ernst has shown that this tendency within Sufism emerged in the tenth century.⁸ The issues that arose at that time strongly resembles those at issue in

accounts of the trial of Siti Jenar. They continue to motivate elements of religious discourse and at times conflict in contemporary Indonesia.

Ernst argues that the origins of ecstatic Sufism can be found in the experience of the Prophet Muhammad, as recorded in *Hadith Qudsi*.⁹ This is an important body of Muslim scripture, accepted as revelation for Allah external to the Qur’an. A well-known example is:

And my servant continues drawing nearer to Me through superogatory acts until I love him; and when I love him, I become his ear with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks.¹⁰

This text clearly provides a basis for the unity of vision because of the statement that the mystic acquires Allah’s sight and hearing. By the middle of the eighth century Sufis had extended this to the speech of Allah. Ernst cites the following statement of Jafar al-Sadiq as an example of this development. The speaker is the Prophet Moses.

He [Allah] replied to me: “None but I can bear My speech, none can give me a reply; I am He who speaks and He who is spoken to, and you are a phantom between the two, in which speech takes place.”¹¹

This text provides a basis for the unity of being theology developed by Ibn al-Arabi. It suggests that in the ultimate sense all speech is from and of Allah. Ecstatic Sufis put this theology into practice. Among the earliest was Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.875). In a state of mystical intoxication, he is reported to have stated: “Praise be to Me, how great is My majesty!”¹² On another occasion he said: “Under my garment there is nothing but God.” His own students tried

⁵ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

⁶ John Bousfield, “Islamic Philosophy in Southeast Asia,” in *Islam in Southeast Asia*, ed. M.B. Hooker (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1983), 130-159.

⁷ Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State university of New York Press, 1985), 3.

⁸ Ernst, 2.

⁹ Ernst, 9.

¹⁰ William Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam, A Reconsideration of Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Hadith Qudsi* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 70.

¹¹ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 10. Jafar al-Sadiq was the sixth Shi’a Imam. He had great influence on the development of mystical theologies in both Sunni and Shi’a Islam.

¹² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 49.





to kill him. He was, however, invulnerable and his opponents were wounded by their own knives.¹³ Other intoxicated Sufis claimed to be greater than the Prophet Muhammad or to have seen Allah in streams and plants. From the perspective of *Shari'ah* these statements are *shirk* – associating other beings or powers with Allah – and apostasy, the punishment for which is death. Ascetic Sufis have mixed feelings about *Shari'ah*, a common view is that mystical practice supersedes *Shari'ah* based piety. This led al-Hallaj to make the following statements: “I became an infidel to God’s religion, and infidelity is my duty, because it is detestable to Muslims” and “May God veil you from the exterior of religious law, and may he reveal to you the reality of infidelity. For the exterior of the religious law is a hidden idolatry, while the reality of infidelity is a manifest gnosis.”¹⁴ On another occasion Hallaj described *shari'ah* as a preliminary stage of the mystical path:

Know that Man remains standing on the carpet of the *Shari'ah* as long as he has not reached the outpost of *tawhid*. But when he attains it, the *Shari'ah* is eclipsed from his vision and he occupies himself with the glimmerings that dawn from the mine of sincerity. And when the glimmerings come upon him continuously, and the dawning pursue him uninterruptedly, affirmation of unity becomes a dualistic heresy for him and the sacred law a folly.¹⁵

Al-Hallaj is the most famous of the ecstatic Sufis. In both the Muslim world and the scholarly community outside of it he is a symbol of the *shath* tendency in Islamic mysticism. He is particularly well known for two reasons. The first is that a substantial number of his works have survived. The second is that he is singled out for criticism by other Muslim mystics and theologians including al-Ghazzali and ibn al-Arabi. Hallaj is also the most famous of the Sufi martyrs. He was executed in 922 C.E. for publicly

proclaiming the doctrine of the unity of being and for suggesting that the rites of the *hajj* could be conducted at a locally constructed substitute *Ka'bah*.¹⁶ After a trial that Ernst suggests was politically motivated, Hallaj was given two thousand lashes, his hands and feet cut off and his body cremated.¹⁷

To understand the intensity of the opposition to ecstatic Sufism it is necessary to explore the views of the sober Sufis, *ulama* and of political authorities – all of whom are threatened by statements such as “I am the truth.” Despite its apparent departure from Quranic monotheism, the doctrine of the unity of being is of secondary importance in the discourse about ecstatic Sufism. A unity of vision theology can just as easily produce the types of ecstatic statements that the authorities found so alarming. Opposition to the movement was, and is, based primarily on the fear that the *public pronouncement* of simplified versions of complex metaphysical doctrines might lead the masses of ordinary Muslims to neglect or ignore modes of ritual performance mandated by Islamic Law. The purpose of *Shari'ah* is twofold: to regulate the life of the Muslim community in this world, and to prepare individual Muslims for life in the world to come. The two concerns are linked because ritual performance is believed to serve worldly as well as soteriological purposes. It is the source of Allah’s blessing – on which worldly well-being depends – and is simultaneously the key to the gates of paradise. Legal texts describe the acquisition of the types of legal knowledge necessary for the performance of devotions as obligatory for all Muslims. The Shafi scholar Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri put it this way:

... fathers and mothers must teach their children what will be obligatory for them after puberty. The guardian must teach the child about purification, prayer, fasting and so forth and that fornication, sodomy, theft, drinking, lying, slander and the like are unlawful; and

¹³ Schimmel, 50.

¹⁴ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 3.

¹⁵ Ernst, 71.

¹⁶ Lois Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

¹⁷ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 107.





that he acquires moral responsibility at puberty and what this entails.¹⁸

For al-Misri *Shari'ah* is never dispensable because it is the path to heaven. Al-Misri includes a discussion of Sufism and “the delusions of would-be Sufis.” For al-Misri the true Sufis are the sober mystics who understand *shari'ah* as a fundamental element of the faith, even for the most advanced mystics. Imam Nawawi, a thirteenth century Sufi and Hadith scholar is quoted as defining Sufism as:

.... having Godfearingness privately and publicly, living according to the *sunna* in word and deed, indifference to whether others accept or reject one, satisfaction with Allah Most High in dearth and plenty, and returning to Allah in happiness or affliction. The principles of treating the illness of the soul are also five: lightening the stomach by diminishing one's food and drink, taking refuge in Allah Most High from the unforeseen when it befalls, shunning situations involving what fears to fall victim to, continually asking for Allah's forgiveness and His blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) night and day with full presence of mind, and keeping the company of him who guides one to Allah.¹⁹

From this perspective Sufism is simply an extension of the modes of piety required of all Muslims. This is what is known as sober Sufism. Al-Misri is highly critical of ecstatic Sufism:

Others claim to have attained gnosis and contemplative knowledge of the Divine, to have passed through spiritual states and stations and to have reached nearness to Allah, while they know nothing of this except the words. You might see one of them reiterating these terms, thinking it above the combined learning of the first and last, and looking with condescension upon the scholars of Sacred Law, hadith and the other disciplines, to say

nothing of the ordinary Muslims. Sometimes a common person will keep their company for many days, picking up these artificial phrases and parroting them as if he were speaking divine revelation, with sneering contempt for scholars and worshipers, saying that they are veiled from Allah while he has attained the Truth, and that he is one of those brought near to Allah – while Allah considers him a debauched hypocrite and that transformed ones know him to be an ignorant fool who has not acquired sound knowledge, perfected his character, or kept watch over his heart, but merely pursued his own his own fantasy.

Others roll up and put away the carpet of the Sacred Law, rejecting its rulings and considering the unlawful and the lawful to be equal, saying “Allah does not need my works, so why should I bother?” One of them may say, “Outward devotions have no value, only hearts mean anything. Our hearts are aflame with the love of Allah Most High, and we have attained to gnosis of Him. If we are bodily immersed in this world, yet our hearts are in worshipful seclusion in the presence of the Divine. Outwardly we may give in to our desires, but not in our hearts.” They claim to have surpassed the rank of the common people, beyond the need to school the lower self with physical devotions, and that gratifying bodily lusts does not divert them from the path of Allah Most High because of their firmness therein. The exalt themselves above the level of prophets who used to weep for years over a single mistake.²⁰

Al-Misri's criticism is exceedingly harsh. He describes ecstatic Sufis as *munafik* (hypocrites) and as libertines who indulge in all sorts of vices and as corrupters of the common people. All of this points to the conclusion that they should be considered *zindik*, heretics who pose a danger to state. The punishment is death. This is the crime

¹⁸ Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *The Reliance of the Traveler, A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, trans. Noah Ha Mim Keller (Evanston: Sunna Books, 1991), 11. This compendium

of Islamic law is among the texts studied in Javanese *pesantren*.

¹⁹ Al-Misri, 862.

²⁰ Al-Misri, 788-789.





that al-Hallaj and most subsequent ecstatic martyrs, including Siti Jenar, were accused of.

Al-Misri cites many examples of statements by sober Sufis in support of this position. Many of the luminaries of this tradition were highly critical of al-Hallaj and supported the action taken against him by the state. There criticisms were very similar to those of the *ulama*. For present purposes the statements of al-Junayd, al-Ghazzali and Ibn al-Arabi are the most significant because of their influence on the development of Islam in Java.

Abul Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) was a contemporary of al-Hallaj. He has come to be regarded as the greatest of the Sufi masters of the classical period of Islamic thought. Most of the subsequent Sufi brotherhoods, including those in modern Java, trace their spiritual lineage to him. He is well known for emphasizing sobriety and for defining the goal of mystical practice as what Schimmel terms: "life in God." He accepted intoxication as a preliminary state on the path, but not as the ultimate goal. The goal was, for al-Junayd, the "second sobriety" in which human characteristics are transformed following an encounter with the divine.²¹ Ernst observes that in many respects al-Junayd's theology was similar to that of al-Hallaj, and that Hallaj was greatly influenced by the elder master. But al-Junayd was also a legal scholar and held that mystical practice must be rooted in the devotions required by *Shari'ah*. Al-Misri cites the following saying attributed to al-Junayd concerning ecstatic Sufis:

Someone said to Junayd, "There is a group who claim they arrive to a state in which legal responsibility no longer applies to them." "They have arrived," he replied, "but to hell."²²

Al-Junayd's critique of al-Hallaj was based on legal, rather than mystical criteria. There is a legend that he signed his death warrant.

On the day that the imams gave the *fatwa* requiring his execution, Junayd was in Sufi clothing and did not sign it. Since the caliph had said that Junayd's signature was necessary, Junayd put on the turban and robe [of the jurist], went to the *madrasah* and gave the *fatwa* response, "we judge according to the external, he must be killed, and the *fatwa* is according to the external."²³

Like al-Junayd, al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) was highly critical of ecstatic mystics.

When anyone claims there is a state between him and Allah relieving him of the need to obey the Sacred Law such that the prayer, fasting and so forth are not obligatory for him, or that drinking wine and taking other people's money are permissible for him – as some pretenders to Sufism, namely those "above the sacred law" have claimed – there is no doubt that the *imam* of the Muslims or his representative is obliged to kill him. Some hold that executing such a person is better in Allah's sight than killing a hundred unbelievers in the path of Allah the Most High.²⁴

Ernst argues that al-Ghazzali distinguished between two basic types of *shath*. The first takes the forms of metaphysical or mystical truth claims including al-Hallaj's statement "I am the Truth." The second are in incompressible utterances of Sufi's in a trance like conditions. Al-Ghazzali condemned both for the same reason: that common people would miss the opportunity for salvation by arriving at the conclusion that devotional acts required by the *shari'ah* are not necessary.²⁵

Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) is known among Sufis as the Great Shaykh. His formulation of the doctrine of the unity of being is the most complex ever formulated. While Ibn al-Arabi taught that ultimately the only being is that of Allah, he also taught that life should be governed by and

the trial of al-Hallaj. It is however typical of the sober approach to the law and to ecstatic mystics.

²⁴ al-Misri, *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 789.

²⁵ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 14.

²¹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 58-59.

²² Al-Misri, *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 789.

²³ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 131. This cannot have happened because al-Junayd died eleven years prior to





judged in terms of the “scale of the law.”²⁶ He was critical of those “lesser gnostics” who fall into the trap of heedless and succumb to *shath*.

Do you not see that when the spirit is heedless of itself, it intrudes upon and is audacious toward the Divine Station? Then it claims Lordship, like Pharaoh. When this state overcomes it, it says “I am Allah” or “Glory be to me!”, as one of the Gnostics has said. This is because he was overcome by a state. That is why words like this have never issued from a messenger, or a prophet or a friend who is perfect in his knowledge.²⁷

When we see someone in the community who claims to be able to guide others to Allah, but is remiss in but one rule of the Sacred Law – even if he manifests miracles that stagger the mind – asserting that his shortcoming is a special dispensation for him, we do not even turn to look at him, for such a person is not a shaykh, nor is he speaking the truth, for no one is entrusted with the secrets of Allah Most High save one in whom the ordinances of the Sacred Law are preserved.²⁸

Chittick argues that Ibn al-Arabi’s works have often been misunderstood and misinterpreted by Muslims as well as by western orientalis. Some have assumed that because he argues for the unity of being that he was not concerned with external modes of Muslim devotion. Attempts to link him to the tradition of al-Hallaj or to use his works to defend *shath* are examples of one of the ways in which his thought is distorted.

Sober Sufis and legalists alike condemn *shath* on theological grounds. Taken literally these statements come close to the Christian teaching of the incarnation of the divine. To the extent that they encourage ordinary Muslims to neglect the ritual duties required by *shari’ah* they endanger their salvation. But since the ninth century the

charge brought against practitioners of *shath* has been *zandaqah* heresy that is dangerous to the state. The question is why should statements such as “I am the Truth!” be treason as well as heresy. There are two reasons. The first is that for the Shi’a as well as the Sunni it challenges the exclusive claim of the *kalif*, in the case of the Sunni and the *Imam* in the case of the Shi’a to be the successor of the Prophet Muhammad. According to Sunni political theory the ruler is alternatively the *kalif* of the Prophet, or according to a stronger version of the theory, of Allah.²⁹ Massignon describes his duties as follows:

In Islam, the sovereign, the Imam, the “Caliph” of the Prophet of God, must first and foremost “prescribe what God commands, and prohibit what he forbids,” to every member of the Community of believers. ... [This power of the Caliph] is called *hisba*, the enforcing of [Islamic] morals, when it refers to the inspections of streets, markets and schools; and *nazar al-mazalim* when it refers to the halting of unusually serious wrongs committed by government officials, exposed through appeal to the sovereign.....The Imam is the foremost of the *imam salat*, of those in charge of the Friday public prayer; and he insists on performing this “liturgical” duty personally when he has time to do so. Likewise, the pilgrimage and holy war.³⁰

The Sunni use the term *imam* for leader of the Friday prayer. For the Shi’ah the Imam is the divinely inspired leader who must come from the lineage of the Prophet. Literal interpretations of *shath* especially when coupled with unity of being theology suggest that anyone can potentially enjoy the direct experience of and communication with Allah. If this is true, religion can no longer serve to legitimate political authority. To the extent that *shath* trivializes

²⁶ On Ibn al-Arabi’s understanding of *Shari’ah* see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 26.

²⁷ Chittick, 320.

²⁸ al-Misri, *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 790.

²⁹ See Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 44-45.

³⁰ Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 386.





ritual performance, it invalidates the ceremonial aspects of the legitimization strategies of imperial Islam, all of which are centered on the public celebration of Muslim holy days, the feast at the conclusion of the fast of Ramadan, the feast of sacrifice celebrated in conjunction with the *hajj* and the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.

Both of these concerns are apparent in court discussions that culminated with the execution of al-Hallaj. The jurist ibn Dawud reasoned as follows:

If what God revealed to His Prophet is true, if what the Prophet came to impart to us is true, then what Hallaj says is false.³¹

It follows from this that if what Hallaj say is true, what the Prophet says is false, and also what his successors say, and hence that their claims to authority are baseless. A letter encouraging al-Hallaj's execution states:

O Commander of the Faithful, if he is not put to death, he will change the canonical law, and everyone will apostatize under his influence; which will destroy the state; allow me to have him killed.

Another source puts it this way:

His heresy, his blasphemy, his sorcery, and his claims to divine power have been revealed and made public. If the Commander of the Faithful does not carry out what the *fuqaha* [jurists] have ruled on, there will be people who will rise up and be emboldened to rebel against God and His Prophets.³²

Al-Hallaj was known as a street corner preacher, capable of moving large crowds to action. When combined with the theological problems his teachings posed for a state based on the assumption that the monarch was, at a minimum, the successor of the Prophet Muhammad, the

danger he posed to the state is clear. This same charge has been leveled at ecstatic mystics down to the present day.

Shath and the Unity of Being in Southeast Asia

Al-Hallaj became the archetype for ecstatic Sufism throughout the Muslim world. He became a mythical figure, known as much through legend and through the attempts of his critics to refute him as through his own teachings. Numerous scholars, including many contemporary Indonesians, have observed that the legend of Siti Jenar shares many features with the tale of al-Hallaj³³ Massignon understood Siti Jenar as being among the "survivals" of al-Hallaj. He was inclined to see a direct historical link between the Persian and Javanese martyrs.³⁴ There references to al-Hallaj Malay language Islamic texts. It is, however, not clear that Siti Jenar and the tradition associated with him were directly influenced by the teachings of al-Hallaj. Feener has suggested that the Siti Jenar legend may well have been inspired in part by references to al-Hallaj included in works by later Arabic scholars including al-Ghazzali and Ibn al-Arabi, rather than by Hallaj's own teachings.³⁵

Ibn-al Arabi and al-Ghazzali both had an enormous impact on the development of Islam in Java and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. It is almost certain that Southeast Asian Muslims came to know of the al-Hallaj legend through their works. This does not, however, account fully for the importance of "Hallaj like" legends in Javanese Islam. It is equally possible that anti-*shari'ah* Sufism was invented independently. Indeed, the logic of the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* almost immediately raises questions about the need for ritual performance. If Allah and the human soul

³¹ Massignon, vol. 1, 346.

³² Massignon, vol. 1, 556.

³³ HAMKA, *Perkembangan Tasauf dari Abad-Keabad* (Jakarta: Pustaka Keluarga, 1952); Solichin Salam, *Wali Sanga Dalam Perspektif Sejarah* (Jakarta: Kung Mas, 1989); Abdul Munir Malkhan, *Seh Siti Jenar dan Ajaran Wihdatul Wujud* (Yogyakarta: Percetakan Persatuan, 1985). Also see the references in note 3. For references to al-Hallaj in the works of the 16th century Acehese Sufi Hamzah Fansuri see

G. Drewes and L. Brakel, *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978).

³⁴ Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 287-290.

³⁵ Michael Feener, "A re-examination of the place of al-Hallaj in the development of Southeast Asian Islam." *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde* 154, no. 4 (1998): 571-592.





are one, what is the need for Allah to pray to Allah. This is the position taken by Siti Jenar in *Babad Demak*. If this position is granted, the only theological reply that can be made in defense of the *Shari'ah* is that it is based on the word of Allah, and that Allah, who is and speaks truth must be true to his word and worship himself. The other response, also found in *Babad Demak* and in the trial of al-Hallaj is social and political: if this teaching is accepted the mosque will be deserted and the power of the state threatened. However, the fear the mosque will be empty has religious and ethical as well as political dimensions. Even if the view that *ibadah* (A. ritual performance) are not necessary for those who have reached the end of the mystical path is accepted, it does not imply that *shari'ah* is not necessary for the masses. Statements and teachings discouraging ritual performance would lead many not to union with the divine, but on the road to hell.

Debates concerning *shath* and the doctrine of the unity of being have played important roles in the history of Islamic discourse in Southeast Asia since the time when Islam first came to the region. The trial of Siti Jenar is believed to have taken place in the late 15th century. There are, unfortunately, no surviving contemporaneous accounts. Religious debates in 16th and early 17th century Aceh are much more fully documented. One of the most famous concerns the mystical poetry of Hamzah Fansuri who was active during the reign of Sultan Ala'-Din Ri'yat Shah (1588-1604).³⁶ Fansuri was a proponent of a complex version the unity of being theology based largely on his interpretation of the writings of Ibn al-Arabi and Jili. Fansuri's mystical thought is extremely complex and subject to variant interpretations. It can be read, as was read by his subsequent critics and supporting the view that humans are Allah, and as excusing or justifying the most extreme forms of *shath*.³⁷

Al-Attas summarizes Hamzah Fansuri's teachings concerning the relationship between Allah and humanity as follows:

Three different orders of the Spirit can be distinguished in Hamzah's system, and this is in keeping with the Sufi doctrine of the spirit particularly as expounded by Jili. But the distinction between the three different orders of the Spirit is merely mental, not real. In reality, there is but one Spirit which viewed in relation to God is uncreated and viewed in its relation to Man is created. The Spirit referred to under different names mentioned earlier such as Light, Intellect, Pen, etc. and under the guise of different names is created, but created only in the special sense, that is as being derived from the spirit of God (*Ruh Allah*), which is uncreated and not necessarily as coming in the ontological level below the Creative Word Be! In the saying of the Prophet: 'The Spirit is created two thousand years before the body,' the word created means to become manifest (*zahir*), and here Hamzah identifies the spirit with the command of God: *al-ruh min amri rabbi* – the Spirit is of the Command of my Lord. The word *min* can be interpreted in two ways; it means of or from. When it is interpreted as 'of' it denotes identity as in the case of the Spirit being of the same nature as the Command; when it is interpreted as 'from' it denotes proceeding from as in the case of the Spirit proceeding from the Command of God. In the latter sense the Spirit is created, meaning it has come in the ontological level below the Creative Word; whereas in the former sense the Spirit is uncreated, being in the ontological level above the Creative World. This is what Hamzah when he says the Spirit is neither creator, i.e. uncreated nor creature, i.e. created.³⁸

³⁶ On Hamzah Fansuri see Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malay Press, 1970).

³⁷ There is no direct evidence that the author of *Babad Demak* was influenced by the writings of Hamzah Fansuri.

There are, however, striking similarities. This would suggest that, at the minimum, they shared a common religious vocabulary.

³⁸ Al-Attas, 87.





Hamzah Fansuri understood the prophet Muhammad as the messenger of God, in the conventional sense, but also as the vehicle through which the divine manifests itself in the world. He wrote:

I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay; Adam is the father of the flesh and I am the father of the spirits; I am from God and the Faithful are from me; I am from God and the world is from me; I am the Light of God and the world is from my light.³⁹

It is not clear whether or not Hamzah Fansuri engaged in *shath*. However, in a work entitled *The Adept* he expresses approval of statements by al-Hallaj, Yazid and other, which could be and were interpreted as being the most extreme form of *shath*.

Hence Ali, may God be well pleased with him says: "I see nothing but that I see God within it. Mansur Hallaj too, from excessive love, utters "I am the truth!" Ba Yazid too utters in the same vein: "Glory be to me – how great is my glory!" Shaykh Junayd Baghdadi also utters; "There is none in my cloak other than God!" Sayyid Nasimi also utters; "Verily I am God!"⁴⁰

Hamzah Fansuri also associates modes of religious practice that are clearly in violation of *shari'ah* norms with Sufi shaykhs.

The *Gulshan* says: O Muslims! If you only knew what idols are, you would assuredly know that the true path is to worship idols. If the polytheist knew his idols truly, how would he become erroneous in this religion? For this reason, Shaykh Aynu'l Qudat, worshipping a dog, says *Hadha rabbi* – that is 'This is my Lord' – for he does not see the dog, it is only his Lord that he sees.⁴¹

Hamzah Fansuri's *The Drink of Lovers* includes a more explicit discussion of *shath* as a category of religious action:

As for those who could not contain the secret of their love and are wont to burst forth – like Mawlana of Rum who exclaimed: I am God! I am God! I am God! such exclamations or utterances are provoked by intoxication and not by their hearts; desire. Similarly, it is the same in the case of Shaykh Mansur al-Hallaj who uttered: 'I am the Truth!' We must not imitate their utterances for we are not in the state of being overwhelmed. But if we are truly enamored and intoxicated – not being able to contain our secrets – whatever we say of such utterances will not be sinful.⁴²

Nurul-din al-Raniri was Hamzah Fansuri's most vocal and ferocious critic. Al-Raniri was a Gujarati (Indian) *ulama* who arrived in Aceh in 1637 and soon found favor with Sultan Iskandar Thani.⁴³ Raniri was a sober Sufi and was also opposed to any version of the unity of being theology that maintaining that the divine essence is located in the universe. He leveled a host of charges against Hamzah Fansuri that are typical of Islamic heresiography. As al-Attas observes, many of these charges are based on what appear to be deliberate misreadings of Hamzah Fansuri's works. This is obviously true in the case of the charge that Hamzah was a Mutazilite who taught that the Qur'an was created and the world eternal.⁴⁴ The charge of Mutazilism is particularly informative. The Mu'tazila were a school in the *kalam* tradition that emphasized the unity of Allah and the concept of rationality. Long before Hamzah Fansuri or al-Raniri's time the school had virtually vanished from the Sunni Muslim community. It was, however, a standard feature of Islamic discourse to refer to one's opponents as being either Mutazilites of crypto-Shia. This style of discourse had been known in

³⁹ Al-Attas, 91.

³⁹ Al-Attas, 453.

⁴¹ Al-Attas, 454.

⁴² Al-Attas, 446.

⁴³ On al-Raniri see Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, *Raniri and the Wujudiyah of 17th Century Aceh*, Monographs of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society III, 1966.

⁴⁴ Al-Attas, 33.





Java since at least the sixteenth century.⁴⁵ It seems that Raniri was willing to resort to almost any possible charge to discredit Hamzah Fansuri's version of Sufism.

As al-Attas observes, there were philosophical differences concerning the nature of being involved in this dispute. The issue of *shath* also looms large in Raniri's polemic. He regards Hamzah Fansuri's formulation of the theology of the unity of being as a trick or veil to legitimize the view that Allah is the world and the world is Allah.

[In reality] they are ashamed of the people of Islam and they fear that they might be proved wrong by the generality of the schools and by religion. If they openly declare: "We are God and God is us" they will not be accepted by them. So they hide themselves behind perforated veils that their evil words and strayed belief may not be seen. And they couch their words: "God is indeed ourselves and our beings are His Self and His Being" in disguise.⁴⁶

From this it would appear that Raniri regarded Hamzah Fansuri's theology as a thinly veiled attempt to legitimize ecstatic Sufi and to provide a theological foundation for statements such as "I am the Truth." Raniri's own discussion of *shath* lends further support to this position.

Know, O Seeker! that ecstatic expression (*shathiyyat*) that escape from the tongues of the wise caused by their extreme intoxication such as "I am God!" and "I am the Truth!" and such like [would seem to] reveal to us that God, the Creator and the created are one being. But God forbid that they mean this, for their ecstatic expressions are involuntary. Such expressions occur on their tongues when they are unconscious of themselves and uttered when in the midst of intoxication; like those who talk in their sleep when they dream of something they desire; and like those who become habitually hysterical with words [*latah*]. These are involuntary actions.

Similarly, this is what the people of Allah experience during their ecstatic utterances; they become extinct in themselves of night in their contemplation of God. Then it occurred upon their tongues when they were uttering the habitual "He is God!", or "He is the Truth!", to transform the 'He' into 'I'. Such an occurrence is caused by God upon their tongues without their endeavor. The Sufis call those who utter *shathiyyat* 'they who are in the state of being overpowered' and 'they whom God has caused to be exempt from the recordings of the Pen.' It is permitted to them to utter in such a state only such words as 'I am the Truth!' However, according to the Law they are to be condemned. It is not permitted to them to [slip into] the erroneous beliefs of the Deviators and the Heretics or to do deeds God does not favor. Should their self-extinction and their intoxication be complete, they would still not be free from the responsibility of Do's and 'Don'ts, for God Most Exalted is ever prevailing upon their intellect in such a manner that He preserves them from committing acts contravening the Law.⁴⁷

This passage clarifies the nature of Raniri's opposition to Hamzah Fansuri and to the type of religious discourse current in the court of Aceh during his period of influence. For Raniri, Hamzah's formulation of the theology of the unity of being was an attempt to provide a theological foundation for the most extreme forms of *shath*, i.e. to establish the truth of statements such as "I am the Truth!" Raniri's view was that those who said such things did not really believe them. Consequently, Allah would not punish them, but they are subject to punishment in this world. He seems to imply that even the most intoxicated Sufis, if they are genuinely intoxicated, do not hold themselves above the law. This implies that those who do not comply with the demands of the *shari'ah* are not genuine Sufis and that they should suffer

⁴⁵ See Martin, Woodward and Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason*, 139.

⁴⁶ al-Attas, *Raniri and the Wujudhiyyah*, 104.

⁴⁷ al-Attas, *Raniri and the Wujudhiyyah*, 110-111.





punishment in this world and will suffer the pains of hell in the next.

Raniri's critique of Hamzah Fansuri was most like motivated by political as well as theological concern. He arrived in Aceh at a time when Sultan Iskandar Muda was conducting a campaign against both customary law (*adat*) and heterodox mysticism.⁴⁸ Even Hamzah Fansuri had complained about heterodox modes of religious practice and exaggerated claims of spiritual attainment.

Every young and well-bred, every old and white-haired, Go forth for months in seclusion, searching for God in the Wilderness! Everyone becomes a 'Sufi', Everyone becomes a 'Passionate Lover', Everyone becomes a 'Spirit' Going about wrathful and sour-faced!⁴⁹

An anonymous text translated by al-Attas indicates that Hamzah Fansuri's writings were often interpreted as claiming that Allah and creation are identical.

Then Hamzah Fansuri in the land of Aceh composed a book entitled Drink of Lovers, in it are manifested teachings on the doctrine of Oneness of Being. He made symbolic statements pertaining to the relationship between God Most Exalted and the creatures, such as the analogy of the name cotton and cloth; and the sun and its reflection; and the waves and the ocean; and the earthenware vessels and the clay. Then this knowledge entered into the breasts of the dull-witted, and it became as it were a poison most venomous, and they refused to let go their hold on it.

Hamzah Fansuri was also known for sarcastic remarks about the *ulama* and particularly the *Qadi* or judge.

Glory be to me! It is such a wonder. He is nearer than the jugular veins; How amazing that the Judge (*Qadi*) and the Preacher (*Khatib*) should be so close and yet so luckless.⁵⁰

He was equally critical of the wealthy.

If you make companions of the rich, in the end you will be destroyed. There verbal profession of faith is not accompanied by belief, because they do so not with pure intention.⁵¹

Given the context of Iskandar Muda's religious policies, it is not surprising that Hamzah Fansuri's teaching fell out of favor. Indeed, with the combination of mystical teachings which could be interpreted as encouraging neglect of the *shari'ah* and criticism of the *ulama* and the wealthy it is not hard to understand that he was considered a *zindik* – a heretic whose teaching is a danger for the state. Had he lived longer, he and not Siti Jenar might well have become the al Hallaj of the Malay world.

Babad Demak -- Text and Translation

It is possible to add sections as needed. A section may consist of several sub-sections, typed in bold-italic and numbered list style, like the following example.

The version of the Siti Jenar legend included in *Babad Demak* is significant primarily due to the complexity and variety of the theological positions presented in the trial of Siti Jenar. The text itself present a number of difficulties. It is written in *tembang* a Javanese poetic form intended to be performed orally. The genre includes 15 distinct meters each of which has rules governing the number of lines per stanza, the number of syllables in each line and the final vowel of each line. Each meter evokes a particular mood ranging from erotic to violent. All but two cantos of this text were composed in the *Asmaradana* meter which sorrowful and generally used for tragic tales. As Florida notes, these texts are extremely difficult to translate.⁵² They are difficult even for well-educated native speakers to grasp, as words and sentences are sometimes altered to fit the rhyme scheme. This also poses difficulties if one's purpose is to come to terms with the theological message of the text. It is often the case that the ways in which

⁴⁸ al-Attas, *Raniri and the Wujudiyah*, 11.

⁴⁹ al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*, 4.

⁵⁰ al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*, 4.

⁵¹ al-Attas, 4.

⁵² Florida, *Writing the Past*, 85.





technical Arabic vocabulary is used, or not used, provides an important key to interpreting Javanese and other Southeast Asian Islamic texts, in part because the use of these terms is indicative of familiarity with classical Arabic works. But when the choice of words is motivated as much by poetic convention as by the need for theological clarity, the task becomes far more difficult. One can only speculate about why the author chose to use a particular Arabic or Javanese term. The choice of a particular phrase may be the result of a theological claim or alternatively it may have been chosen to adhere to the rules of a poetic tradition.

Our translation does not follow the word order of the original. We have attempted to convey the meaning of the text in something approaching standard English. Nor have we preserved the canto-by-canto organization of the original. We have chosen instead to divide the text into semantic segments, rather than breaking it in ways which reflect its poetic, rather than narrative structure. Interpretive comments follow each section of the text.

Translation and Commentary

Touching on another subject, we shall speak about the *Wali*.⁵³ All of the *Wali* gathered at the Demak Mosque after the Friday prayer. They said to Sunan Giri: "It is advisable to summons Seh Lemah Abang, because he has deserted the *Shari'ah* and refuses to observe the religious practices it requires. This is prohibited in the case of saintly teachers (*pandhita wali*). He should be reprimanded so that in the future he will comply with the demands of the *Shari'ah*. Sunan Giri agreed to send messengers to summons the rebel.

This passage states the basic problem from the perspective of the *ulama* gathered together at the Demak Mosque. At this point, there is no severe criticism of Siti Jenar. Only the intention

to bring him back within the fold of the *shari'ah* is apparent. On this point, the text translated by Rinkes is more explicit. It explains that many people, including one the Sultan's sons had become students of Siti Jenar, and that as a result they had stopped coming to the mosque. This portion of the text concludes with a statement that Siti Jenar must be stopped because Javanese are attracted to easy doctrines.⁵⁴ This concern is similar to those expressed by both Hamzah Fansuri and al-Raniri about the pseudo-Sufis of Ache and the popularization of complex mystical teachings. This same concern is found in accounts of the trial of al-Hallaj who is described as a street corner preacher as well as a sophisticated Sufi theologian.⁵⁵ *Babad Jaka Tinkir* is more elaborate. Here, the initial discussion of Siti Jenar is held immediately after the *Garebeg Malud* which commemorates the birth of the prophet Muhammad. This is the most important of all public Javanese state ceremonies. Siti Jenar has failed to attend. This indicates that in this text emphasis is placed on the political as opposed to theological dimension of his heresy.⁵⁶

Santri Kodrat was assigned the task. Malang Sumirang was chosen as his companion. Both were well educated students. They were quickly on the way and arrived at the place where Siti Jenar was practicing asceticism (*mertapa*). Seh Lemah Abang was there, meditating (*tapa*) in a cave. The two messengers offered their greetings (*uluk salam*), which he returned from inside the cave. The messengers replied that his lordship [Sunan Giri] wished to speak with him. Siti Jenar answered slowly: "Lord Siti Jenar not is here. Only Allah is in the cave. You messengers return home quickly." In their hearts the two messengers could not understand this, so they left without taking their leave and arrived home in the blink of an

⁵³ *Wali* is an Arabic Javanese term for Sufi saint here the reference is to the nine *Wali* who played major roles in the establishment of Islam as the religion of Java.

⁵⁴ Rinkes, *The Nine Saints of Java*, 22.

⁵⁵ Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 1, 275.

⁵⁶ Florida, *Writing the Past*, 185-186. Florida notes the political nature of the trial of Siti Jenar, but does not connect it with the more general consideration of the role of *zandaqah* in the Islamic tradition.





eye. They reported to Sunan Giri. After paying homage (*sembah*) they said: “Your humble servants have carried out your order to summons Siti Jenar.⁵⁷ Your humble servants found him in a cave. Your humble servants offered him greetings and conveyed your order for him to appear before your lordship. Siti Jenar then answered ‘Seh Lemah Abang is not here. Only Allah is in the cave.’ He then fell silent and would not say anything more.” Prabu Satmata (Sunan Giri) responded: “Return quickly and Summons Allah of the inside of the cave.”

Making a *sembah* the two messengers left the audience. Arriving quickly at the cave, they conveyed the message to the one called “Lord Allah who talks.” Siti Jenar said gently: “Lord Allah is not here any longer.” Siti Jenar has taken his place. You messengers return home quickly.” The messengers left quickly. As soon as they arrived in Bintara, they reported to their lord: “Your lordship sent us to summons Allah from his cave. The one inside the cave replied: ‘Lord Allah is not here any longer Siti Jenar has taken his place.’ We were then ordered to return home.” The leader of the *wali* said: “Return there quickly and summons them both. Invite both of them, Lord Allah and Siti Jenar. Make both of them come.” The messengers said: “Your will be done you lordship,” and departed quickly. When they arrived at the cave they implored: “Lord Allah Siti Jenar. Please come immediately to speak with Prabu Satmata. Siti Jenar came out of the cave immediately. He set out quickly, accompanied by the messengers.

This passage frames the conflict that is to follow in the deliberations of the *wali*. It’s use of a variety of Arabic and Javanese terms poses interpretive difficulties. Sunan Giri is described as the most senior of the *ulama*. This would suggest that he occupied the position of *Penghulu* at the court of Demak. This official is charged

with the responsibility for regulating the affairs of the state mosque and others in the kingdom. Rinkes’ text is more explicit on this point, describing Sunan Giri as the *penghulu*. It was, then Sunan Giri’s responsibility to see to it that other *ulama* and the general population complied with *Shari’ah* regulations. With respect to Siti Jenar, his role is similar to that of the *Qadi* of Baghdad Abu Umar, who consulted with a number of prominent *ulama* prior to the trial of al-Hallaj.⁵⁸ Siti Jenar outwits Sunan Giri, his messengers and the other *wali*. He refuses to come out of his cave until both Siti Jenar and Allah are summonsed. At least implicitly, he forces the other *wali* to validate his position even before the inquest begins. His statement: “Only Allah is in the cave” is clearly *shath*.

In this passage Siti Jenar is also referred to as Lemah Abang which means red earth. The significance of this name is not explained until the end of the text when Siti Jenar says that he was the son of the Sultan of Cirebon who had cursed him and turned him into a worm. Another variant of the tale, that is common in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, is that the name Lemah Abang, which means “red earth” is an indirect reference to the north coast of Java. According to this tradition Siti Jenar was originally a worm, but was transformed into a human being when he overheard Sunan Kalijaga discuss the secret teaching of the perfection of life.

This portion of the text presents a number of philological difficulties which make it difficult to determine its position on important theological matters. Siti Jenar’s cave is called *mertapa* and his asceticism *tapas*. Generally speaking, *tapas* is a type of meditation used to acquire magical power (*kesekten*). Both terms are of Sanskrit origin and are rooted in Java’s Tantric past. Contemporary Javanese maintain that this is not the type of meditation that brings about union with Allah because it focuses attention on a particular source of power. As Anderson has

⁵⁷ *Sembah* is a Javanese gesture of respect and submission involving placing the palms of the hands together with the thumbs touching the tip of the nose.

⁵⁸ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 102.





observed this type of power is morally neutral and can be used for either good or evil.⁵⁹ Many contemporary Javanese mystics believe that the quest for power is a distraction that prevents one from attaining knowledge of or union with the divine. *Semadhi*, a type of mediation in which self-awareness vanishes is said to be the appropriate means for approaching Allah. It is unfortunately not possible to determine if the author of *Babad Demak* used to term *tapas* as an indirect criticism of Siti Jenar, or if he used it simply because it is a word for mediation and *semadhi* will not fit the rhyme scheme. Similarly, the term *Pandhita* – sage – which is of Sanskrit origin and is commonly used in the *wayang* is used conjointly and seemingly interchangeably with the Arabic *wali* – saint.⁶⁰

Siti Jenar is described as meditating in a cave. This suggests a withdrawal from society. This practice is typical of Hindu and Old Javanese modes of devotion. It was condemned by Hamzah Fansuri who described it as being among the practices of pseudo-Sufis. It is, however, described as being among the means of attaining union with the divine in the *suluk* literature. One of the texts translated by Zoetmulder states:

The asceticism of one who is superior who is in the lonely forest consist of concentrating wholly upon one matter, without allowing the vision to be diverted. He considers not the difficulties (of where he is), but only Him who protects his body (life), He regards nothing else, but is concerned only with the Creator.

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Claire Holt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

⁶⁰ The fact that this episode is common to most renditions of the Siti Jenar legend, but not found in *Babad Jaka Tingkir* indicates that the later may be a novel retelling of the legend not based directly on previous accounts. The fact that *Babad Jaka Tingkir* is obscure origin supports this view. Even after years of exhaustive research Florida could not identify the date or author of it work. It was apparent at least copied, which given the context of the Javanese literary tradition could also mean rewritten by someone in the company of Pakubuwana VI of Surakarta while he was in

Many contemporary Javanese mystics share this view. It is common for those bent on attaining mystical knowledge to retreat to remote mountainous or coastal areas that are understood as being both dangerous and highly charged with spiritual power (*gawat*). A contrasting view is that such practices should be performed in seclusion in a mosque. While it is not stated this would appear to be the position that Sunan Giri takes.

When he arrived at the Bintara Mosque Siti Jenar approached Prabu Satmata, touching his hands as a sign of respect for the older, more senior *wali*. He greeted the younger ones. Then all of the sages (*pandhita*), the young and the old, sat down. The entire company was assembled for the deliberations (*musawarat*). Sunan Giri spoke softly to Siti Jenar. "I have summonsed you and all of the other sages so that we may all disclose our opinions and search for a consensus concerning the attainment of the perfection of life (*ngelmenira*)."

At this juncture, the encounter between Siti Jenar and the other *wali* remains formal and polite. Siti Jenar pays respect to his superior and conveys the appropriate Arabic greeting to the others.⁶¹ The text states that he conveys "*salam*" (peace). This is probably a reference to the *Shari'ah* mandated greeting: "*salam 'alaikum*" (peace be upon you). The deliberations are described in terms appropriate for a discussion of *Shari'ah* concerns. They are described as deliberations – *musawarat*- intended arrive at consensus. One might expect that the Arabic

exile in Ambon (1830-1849). The copy on which Florida's translation is based is the only one known to exist. In no way does this diminish its value for our current purpose. As a seemingly distinct version of the Siti Jenar legend, this text provides an extremely valuable example of the ways in which the story has been retold. It provides an important example of the ways in which the "repetition of archetypes" is influenced by the social, political and in this case, geographical location to the teller of the tale.

⁶¹ In this respect *Babad Demak* is quite different from Rinkes' text in which Siti Jenar is executed almost immediately on his arrival at Demak. Rinkes, *The Nine Saints of Java*, 23.





term *mufakat* (unanimous consensus) or *ijma* (consensus in the legally recognized sense) might have been used here, but neither fits the rhyme scheme. The Javanese *disami* is used instead. It is however clear that the reference to consensus of the *ulama* which is among the four sources of law in Sunni Muslim jurisprudence. The others are the Qur'an, Hadith and logical analogy. At the same time the reference to the "Perfection of Life" indicates mystical rather than legal matters will be the subject of the consultation. What follows is the most complex section of the text in which the individual *wali* express their views on the nature of perfection. It presents a number of difficulties, perhaps the most vexing of which is that the term *sukma* is used interchangeably for Allah and the human soul. Again, it is difficult to distinguish poetic from semantic usage.

Babad Jaka Tinkir presents a very different account of the initial encounter between Siti Jenar and the other *wali*. Here the *wali* and other Islamic officials hold a preliminary discussion, the conclusion of which is that Siti Jenar is guilty, and that unless he recants his heresy that he must be put to death. This ruling is in accordance with the Shafiite legal dictum that a heretic must be offered the chance to recant, and that if he chooses to he is admonished, but spared execution.⁶² This suggests that the author of *Babad Jaka Tinkir* was concerned more with legal questions than with theological and mystical debates. The following extended discussion of the perfection of life is not found in *Babad Jaka Tinkir*.

Sunan Kalijaga explained his view in detail. "That which is called *Edat* (The Divine Essence) refers to the fact that Allah reigns with the power of life and death. His reign is

eternal. He gives life to the cosmos (*jagad*). This is the wonder of Allah. (*Ywang Sukma*).

This and many subsequent segments of the text make reference to the attributes or *sifat* of Allah as well as *dhat* - the divine essence. This indicates that Javanese *ulama* of the time were involved in discussions of *kalam* (theological) issues as well as Sufism and the *Shari'ah*. This tradition has continued to the present day. The study of the twenty attributes of Allah is a basic element of Islamic education in the Javanese *pesantren* system. Most Javanese *ulama* accept the list of twenty attributes devised by the fifteen century North African scholar al Sanusi whose works are still widely read.⁶³ Sunan Kalijaga is speaking of Allah as the all-powerful, the eternal and the creator. His reference to "power over life and death" refers to the common Asharite doctrine of *qadar*, the divine determination of events which is held to be orthodox throughout the Sunni Muslim world.⁶⁴ A similar statement is included in *Kitab Usulbiyah*, a work concerning the history of the prophets written by Ratu Pakubuwana, the mother of Pakubuwana II of Kartasura. It reads: "He cannot die; he gives life to creation which is called the existence of God who creates it, without being greater (than he), from grace."⁶⁵

In this passage, we find the first occurrence of the most difficult philological and interpretive problems presented by the text. Sunan Kalijaga uses the word "*Edat*" which is derived from the Arabic *dat* for the essence of Allah. But in his final statement he refers to Allah as *Ywang Sukma*. This is a semantically complex Javanese term that can be used alternatively for Allah and the human soul. In subsequent passages, it is often not easy to determine which usage is intended. It must often be inferred from the context in which the

⁶² Al-Misri, *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 596.

⁶³ See Moehammad Said, *Kitab Tauhid Sifat Duapuluh Awwaluddin Ma'rifatullah* (Bandung: Alma'arif, 1964), for an example of an Indonesian text concerning the 20 attributes.

⁶⁴ On *qadar* see Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981 (1910)), 78-80.

⁶⁵ M.C. Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java, 1726-1749. History, Literature and Islam in the Court of Pakubuwana II* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 83.





term occurs. The polysemic nature of this term is illustrative of the immanent understanding of divinity common in Javanese mystical thought. The use of *suksma* in *Babad Demak* is congruent with that described by Zoetmulder in his analysis of the Javanese *suluk* literature where it is used for both the individual and the “immaterial” world soul that gives life to all humanity.⁶⁶ The use of this polysemic term does not necessarily suggest support for the totality of Siti Jenar’s theology. Contemporary Javanese often explain that Siti Jenar was wrong because he claimed that he was the totality of Allah, rather than an emanation of the divine essence. The use of *sukma* for both Allah and the soul could be interpreted as supporting either of these positions. The difference is subtle but of great importance to many Javanese mystics.

Sunan Kudus came next. “*Edat* is the invisibility, formlessness and voicelessness of Allah. Only Allah is great. He has power over life. He is eternal and unchanging.”

This passage is rooted in the distinction between the essence or *dat* of Allah, which can be understood as being without form or voice, even though speech (*kalam*) is clearly one of the attributes. There is universal consensus that the speech of Allah is the Qur’an. It also suggests an Asharite understanding of Allah according to which the *sifat* or attributes exist apart from the essence. While a great deal of the text focuses on the essence of Allah, it is generally discussed in terms of his names and attributes. The issues involved here are extremely complex. The Asharite view is that the attributes (*sifat*) of Allah exist independently of his essence. The competing Mu’tazila view was that the “attributes” could not be ontologically distinct from the essence, because to make them independent, would be to establish more than

one reality as eternal. This, in their view was a subtle form of polytheism.⁶⁷

In most Muslim theologies, including those of the Sufis, the nature of the essence is mysterious. As Goldziher puts it: “The Absolute cannot be approached, it cannot be cognized.”⁶⁸ Based on his reading of the works of Ibn al-Arabi, Chittick describes the essence as follows: “the ultimate reality that is the foundation of all other realities. The essence cannot be known in positive terms. Human knowledge of the essence amounts to an acknowledgment that the essence is there and a recognition that we cannot know it.”⁶⁹ Zoetmulder noted similar themes in the *suluk* literature. One of the texts he translated states: “He who created (rules) this world is without shape or form.”⁷⁰ Contemporary Javanese mystics explain that Allah can be known through his attributes and names, but that the essence is more than the sum of the names and attributes. It can be known, but only through mystical experience and cannot be described in words. The text appears to be wrestling with the same problem. On many occasions it refers to the essences, but almost invariably discusses it in terms of names and attributes.

Sunan Bonan said quietly: “The meaning of faith (*iman*) is living with God’s grace (*nugrahaning*) and reciting the *bismillah*. This is the correct way of living: to have faith and to speak well.

Sunan Bonan speaks from the perspective of simple faith and piety. However, in the Asharite tradition, faith is a matter of word and deed. The level of faith depends on both accepting the power and authority of Allah and on performing the ritual duties required by Islamic law. Sunan Bonan’s statement would appear to be linked to the doctrine of *takwa* or complete faith in Allah

⁶⁶ Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism*, 189.

⁶⁷ For discussions of these issues see Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973); Richard Martin, Mark Woodward and Dwi Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam Mu’tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: One World, 1997).

⁶⁸ Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 96.

⁶⁹ William Chittick, *Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Cosmology. The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xvii.

⁷⁰ Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism*, 196.





and resignation to his determination of events. These perspectives are still an important element of piety among conservative Javanese Muslims. Reciting the “*bismillah*” – *bismillah rahmani rahim* – In the name of God, the Compassionate the Merciful - is among the most common devotional acts in the Muslim world. It is recited on all formal occasions and whenever one feels in need the Allah’s blessing and mercy. It can also be used to ward off evil or danger. In Java, it is commonly recited to protect oneself or others from evil spirits.

Pangran Wuryapada explained his perspective, “Only Allah (*sukma*) lives eternally moving from this world (*donya*) to the next (*akherat*). He is eternal and unchanging. He has power over the entirety of the cosmos.”

This passage introduces the categorical distinction between *donya* and *akherat* on which the *wali* ultimately based their evaluation of Siti Jenar. *Donya* is a Javanese spelling of the Arabic *dunya* (closest). This is an abbreviation for *al-dar al-dunya* – the “closest abode” or “this world.” In Java, it refers to the portion of the cosmos inhabited by humans. It is located in time. *Akherat* is a Javanese spelling of the Arabic *akhirah*, an abbreviated form of *al-dar al-akhirah* – the last abode, hereafter or eternity. This is the eternal abode of Allah from which humans originate to which they will return. It is very commonly stated that life in *donya* is a preparation for *akherat* and that even in life the mystical path takes one into the eternal realm. The statement that Allah moves between the two realms is similar to ibn al-Arabi’s view that Allah is necessarily simultaneous first and last and that his existence (*wujud*) is the source of the existence of the world.⁷¹

⁷¹ See Chittick, *Principles of ibn al- ‘Arabi’s Cosmology*, 203-204.

⁷² Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 224.

Sunan Giri explained his view. “In truth, Allah is immortal and lives eternally. He has power over our bodies, the world and the universe.”

Pangran Cereborn added: “In truth, Allah lives. The meaning of *dat* is clear. In reality, it is the spirit (*sukma*) that has eternal life and which gives life to the world.

Pangeran Geseng added: “The spirit lives eternally giving life to a billion worlds. It proceeds from Allah the almighty. Allah’s Holy Messenger (*Rasul*) is his representative and the adornment of his power.” He continued: “First Muhammad is, in truth, the one who reigns over the universe. (*Sabuwana*). Second, Allah is the Lord (*gusti*). Third, the exalted *dat* has power of life and death over the world.”

Sunan Giri and Pangeran Cereborn add little to the discussion. Pangeran Geseng introduces the common mystical understanding of the prophet Muhammad. that is most fully developed in the work of ibn al-Arabi. Muhammad is described as the Perfect Man - *insan kamil* – and as the cause and source of creation. Schimmel puts it this way: “The Perfect Man is the spirit in which all things have their origin; the created spirit of Muhammad is, thus, a mode of the uncreated divine spirit, and he is the medium through which God becomes conscious of Himself in creation. The discussion of Muhammad in this and subsequent sections of the text link Javanese Islam to the larger Sufi discourse concerning the role of the Prophet in creation and the mystical path.⁷² The reference to a multiplicity of worlds is difficult to interpret because Sufis commonly use the term *alam* – world - to refer to any particular segment of the cosmos.⁷³

Then Seh Majagung spoke, explain his perspective. “Within *dat*, life is eternal. The

⁷³ See Chittick, *Principles of ibn al- ‘Arabi’s Cosmology*, 258.





Light of Allah is like the radiance of the sun, becoming the light of life. The Light of Allah is eternal.

Sunan Ngampel spoke quietly. "The Light of Allah is the aspect of Allah that constitutes the all-powerful spirit (*sukma*) that lives eternally and gives life to the world."

Seh Majagung and Sunan Ngampel continue the discussion of light. Light is among the most common symbols used in Islamic theology and mysticism. The use of light as a symbol for Allah originates in the "Light Verse" of the Qur'an:

"Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as there were a niche and within it a Lamp, the Lamp enclosed in Glass: The glass as it were a brilliant star lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west whose oil is well-nigh luminous though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom he will to his light. Allah doth set forth parables for men and Allah doth know all things."⁷⁴

Light symbolism plays an important role in the mystical theologies of ibn al-Arabi, al-Ghazzali and other Sufi masters. Schimmel suggests that the 12th century Sufi scholar Suhrawardi played a central role in the development of light mysticism and quotes the following passage:

The Essence of the First Absolute Light, God gives constant illumination, whereby it is manifested and it brings all things into existence, giving life to them by its rays. Everything in the world is derived from the Light of his Essence.⁷⁵

Light symbolism can also be found in the *suluk* literature.⁷⁶ The theology of light continues to play an important role in Javanese mysticism. The divine essence is often described as the

"source of light." Mystical experience is often described as the appearance of different colors of light.

Seh Maulana spoke slowly: "In truth, Allah cannot be understood as "this" or "that." Allah is the spirit (*sukma*) that gives life to the entire universe. Nothing but his spirit has power over life and death."

Seh Maulana's statement resembles Sunan Bonan's. He appears to dismiss complex theological speculation. It is not unlike the position al-Ghazzali took near the end of his life when he denounced both *kalam* and the detailed legalistic teachings of the *Shari'ah* centric *ulama* and defended the simple faith of the masses.⁷⁷ It also reflects the position that the totality of Allah cannot be grasped by the human mind. Concern with the over intellectualizing of religion is also a common theme in Javanese religious discourse.

Pangeran Lembang said gently: "Truly blessed (*nugraha*) is the Holy Prophet (*nabine*) to be one (*tunggal*) with the true *dat*. Receiving the Essence, the teacher is in truth the *dat* of Allah.

Pangeran Lembang extends the discussion of the Prophet Muhammad, arguing that virtue of attaining union with Allah, he has become one with the essence. *Kitab Usulbiyah* includes a more elaborate formulation of this doctrine. It states: Allah said 'Indeed Muhammad, you are the first and also the last are you are. You are my secret essence.'⁷⁸

To this Siti Jenar added: "In truth Allah pays homage to (*sujud*) and prays (*rukuk*) to Allah. Allah prostrates himself (*sembah*) towards himself. Allah receives the names of Allah. Both of them are one. The servant (*kawula*) and his lord (*gusti*). Also, Allah's most Holy Prophet. All three of them, their condition is that of *dat*. The nature of this *dat* is that of the Almighty. Actually, there is no Allah. It is

⁷⁴ *The Holy Qur'an English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, Yusuf Ali (trans.)

⁷⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 261.

⁷⁶ Zoetmulder, *Pantheism and Monism*, 155.

⁷⁷ Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 158-162.

⁷⁸ Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds*, 65.





only a name. Allah has no form. Muhammad is the Light of Allah. He is Allah's Prophet. Siti Jenar is his successor. He is both Lord (*gusti*) and servant (*kawula*). In truth, the perception of the servant is the same as that of the Lord. Siti Jenar is like a child. There is no perception of duality. Rightly, there is only Siti Jenar living eternally in the world (*donya*) and the hereafter (*akherat*). Although we both live, our names are the same because of our shared qualities.

Siti Jenar's statement is a very strong formulation of the unity of being theology. Not only does he claim that the divine essence are one, he identifies himself with the Allah and the totality of creation. His is a monistic doctrine similar to that described by Zoetmulder in a discussion of another variant of the Siti Jenar legend. Here Siti Jenar describes the physical body as Allah, and states "it is better that we speak frankly. I myself am Allah." It is clear whether Siti Jenar is in an intoxicated state, but his statements are either *shath* or an attempt to provide a theological foundation for intoxicated utterances. Many Javanese texts and contemporary Javanese can accept the identity of Allah and the soul or innermost essence of humans⁷⁹. Very few would accept the equation of the body and Allah. Most find such statements shocking. *Babad Jaka Tinkir* also includes a passage in which Siti Jenar explains the unity of being theology. It is however, quite different and relies heavily on the Javanese concept of *rasa* to explain the relationship between creator and created. *Rasa* is a complex term that can mean feeling, emotion and a subtle sense or perception. In this discourse, he argues that all of his actions as a created being are in the subtle sense actually the actions of Allah.⁸⁰ Here Siti Jenar does not resort to *shath* to make his point. The *wali* respond by accusing him of extreme determinism, a charge that is not made in *Babad*

Demak. This suggests that at least as far as their discussions of mysticism are concerned the two texts are not closely related. In the text translated by Rinke Siti Jenar states only that: "There is no Friday, there is no mosque, only Allah is indeed. Nothing has Existence at present, save He."⁸¹ This is a clear and simple form of *shath* that rejects the distinction between creator and created and the ritual devotions of *shari'ah* centric Islam.

The *suluk* literature provides an explanation of *shath*, but it is not clear that these texts were meant for wide distribution or public discussion, indeed subsequent sections of *Babad Demak* seem to indicate that such teachings are best kept secret. Other Javanese texts, including *Kitab Usulbiyah*, also warn against the dangers of open discussion of mystical knowledge, the necessity for linking mystical practice and *shari'ah* centric piety and the dangers of publicity mongering teachers.⁸²

Earth and firmament, are you; devil and Satan are you, the Throne and the Chair are you; the Table and the pen are you. Consider the symbolic expressions of the exalted fool. His words are ravings, but they provide material for contemplation to those who know (seek) the truth.⁸³

Sunan Giri spoke next: "You are correct by saying this. However, do not preach this doctrine or the Mosque of Demak will be empty. Hold to the faith of the one who practices the *shari'ah*. Do not ignore the Friday prayer, so that [following your example] many will come to pray at the Demak Mosque.

Sunan Giri's reply to Siti Jenar is a very mild one. It takes the form of a conversation between two adepts. It is in keeping with the catholic tradition associated with al-Ghazzali, who was extremely reluctant to condemn others as "non-believers," but who maintained that mystical teachings should be kept from those not capable

⁷⁹ See for example, Anthony Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (Canberra: Center for Oriental Studies, Australian National University, 1965), 66-7.

⁸⁰ Florida, *Writing the Past*, 188.

⁸¹ Rinke *The Nine Saints of Java*, 23.

⁸² Ricklefs, *The Seen and Unseen Worlds*, 102-103; Woodward, 1989, pp. 130-134.

⁸³ Zoetmulder, *Islam in Java*, 221.





of understanding them.⁸⁴ Sunan Giri's response to *shath* is in fact milder than al-Ghazali's. It is simply a warning. At this point he does not appear to hold the view that Siti Jenar should be killed in conformity with the law. His attitude changes when the discussion shifts from theology to ritual performance.

Siti Jenar laughed loudly and said that he did not believe in the *Shari'ah*. "Ki Lurah, if life is devoted entirely to prayer, man will feel anxious about himself. Being completely involved with *Shari'ah* regulations. His mind will focus on the knowledge (*ngelmine*) of the ignorant (*jail*) and the lustful ones and will become completely absorbed in their teachings. If one truly accepts the teaching of the unity of servant and Lord, he becomes Allah at will. Allah does not pray. He does not desire to eat and does not sleep as long as he lives. But he gives life to the world."

This is the critical passage in the *Babad Demak* account of the trial of Siti Jenar. Siti Jenar not only renounces *Shari'ah* but condemns it as being the path to ignorance and lust, rather than to knowledge and piety as is taught by the *ulama* and sober Sufis alike. From their perspective Siti Jenar has gone beyond simple neglect of ritual duties to what is clearly unbelief. He use of the expression Ki Lurah is an insult to the other *wali* because it is a term of address for a village head man.

Sunan Giri's hear was startled when he heard Siti Jenar's discourse, because he held the same opinion. Seh Maulana spoke loudly and crudely: "If you are indeed Allah, are you willing to die? Because you believe in the Holy Prophet, who is the foundation of the *Shari'ah*, there is no reason for you to remain in the world. If the Lord Allah Siti Jenar is visible in the world, surely the Mosque of Demak will be empty. It is better that you return to the hereafter.

Here it would seem that Sunan Giri accepts Siti Jenar's theological statement, but he and the

other *wali* have made it clear that this esoteric doctrine should be kept secret and the *Shari'ah* maintained. What they will not accept is *shath* or any public statement that resembles it. Seh Maulana is visibly angry and departs from the typically polite Javanese manner which has characterized the discussion so far. He offers the same political justification for the execution of ecstatic mystics found in the writings of al-Raniri and in accounts of the trial of al-Hallaj. Given the fact that the mosque, and participation in its rituals played a central role in Demak and all other Javanese/Islamic states, the statement "the mosque of Demak will be empty" means, the state will be destroyed. He also associates the Prophet Muhammad and the *Shari'ah* with *dunya* and Allah with *akherat*. His logic is that if Siti Jenar is actually Allah, he should return to his proper domain.

Siti Jenar smiled and said: "I do not pay attention to faith (*iman*). Heaven and earth are both my property. The material and the spiritual are both my qualities. There is no Allah but me. I will leave all of you *wali* and return home to heaven. Heaven is the place from which I have come." Siti Jenar then rose to the sky. He was barely visible, looking down from the heavenly gate of Allah's mercy. He was radiant like the sun that climbs up over the mountains, its rays flickering. All those who saw him were in awe. Sunan Giri uttered the greeting (*salam*) and the one who had returned home returned it.

Muslims have long debated the meaning of *iman*, but at the most basic level it means accepting Allah and what he revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Siti Jenar's statement clearly makes him guilty of apostasy. His statement that he is Allah is typical of ecstatic Sufis. It is in this passage that Siti Jenar begins to display his miraculous powers. His bodily ascent to heaven resembles the *Miraj* or ascent of the Prophet Muhammad no matter how he is to be judged by *shari'ah* this miracle makes it clear that

⁸⁴ Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and practice of al-Ghazali* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 14.





he is in fact a saint and that his proper place is in heaven. In a general sense this passage is similar to myths surrounding the execution of al-Hallaj which came to be regarded as proof of his sainthood.⁸⁵

Sunan Giri implored: "Leave something behind for me as a relic." The one in Heaven answered: "Yes, receive my coat as a substitute for me. The irony of this will lead you to change your views when you are shamed by my departure." As soon as it was flung down from the gate, the coat became a man, whose appearance was the same as Siti Jenar's. He stood with his arms crossed as if in prayer, but did not speak.

Sunan Giri spoke slowly, whispering to Pangeran Palembang: "Siti Jenar was willing to return to heaven with his physical body, but now it has returned. It is advisable to sentence him to death by fire. As soon as the fire was prepared, Seh Maulana acted quickly. Drawing his sword, he pronounced the sentence: "Look up to heaven. Look down to earth. Perform your meditation. Your death is near." He stabbed Siti Jenar with the sword. His chest was slashed to ribbons, but the sword was without effect. Siti Jenar was invulnerable. He was stabbed again and again, but without effect. It was like stabbing a shadow. And he was silent. He was stabbed repeatedly, but remained invulnerable.

Seh Maulana cried out loudly: "Siti Jenar will not keep his promise. He promised to accept death and also to watch over the faith. But he does not die and is invulnerable to weapons. This is the work of Satan, who is tempting him."

This section of the text includes motifs similar to those included in Middle Eastern accounts of the execution of ecstatic Sufis. The reference to Siti Jenar's invulnerability can be understood in the context of both Javanese and Middle Eastern traditions. As Ernst observes, the

legally mandated punishment for apostasy is death by the sword. This is what Seh Maulana attempts, but, as in the case of Abu Yazid al-Bistami, the attempt fails. The reference to death by fire resonates with the fact that al-Hallaj's body was burned after his execution and that in fact, if not in law, this means of execution was commonly used. Legally, death by fire was understood as an affront to Allah, because it is a punishment appropriate only in the hereafter.⁸⁶ Massignon, however, points out that the motivation for cremation was not rooted in the charge of heresy, but rather that of sorcery, and was used to prevent the sorcerer from reassembling the severed parts of his body. In the case of al-Hallaj this punishment was carried out because of the claim that he had encouraged people to worship his body as Allah⁸⁷. This would indicate that the author of *Babad Demak* was familiar with such legal subtleties. In Java, invulnerability is not necessarily a sign of sanctity. It can be acquired either through Allah's grace or through the practice of *tapas*. However, given Siti Jenar's ascent to heaven, it would seem that this is yet another way in which the ecstatic saint tricks, and makes fools of his opponents.

Then Siti Jenar lost his invulnerability. His wounded chest was in shreds moving to and fro. Yet he stood looking like a *gana*.⁸⁸ Seh Maulana spoke loudly: "What sort of person has such wounds, but does not bleed?" Immediately blood oozed from the wounds. Seh Maulana said again: "These are the wounds of an ordinary person, who sheds red blood, not those of a servant and his Lord." Immediately the bleeding changed. White blood came forth. Seh Maulana spoke again: "This is like a dying tree, standing bleeding white plant sap. If you are truly the Perfect Man (*wong sampurna*) you will take your body to heaven. Servant and Lord should not be separated." In the blink of an eye the body fell, appearing bright as the sun as it died.

⁸⁵ See Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 1, 560-575.

⁸⁶ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 110.

⁸⁷ Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 1, 558.

⁸⁸ A *gana* is a type of being in the Javanese *wayang* that combines the characteristics of gods and demons.





This passage also combines motifs common to the larger traditions concerning intoxicated Sufis with local Javanese symbols. It is a local Javanese version of the tale of the *dhikr* (testimony) of the blood included in legendary accounts of the execution of al-Hallaj. After his execution, al-Hallaj's head is said to have cried "Ahad! Ahad!" (The only One! The Only One!" for two hours and his blood to have written Allah on the ground in more than thirty places.⁸⁹ In this text the story of the blood is set in a continuation of Siti Jenar's frustration of the *ulama*. In Java, red is associated with the lower soul or *nafs*, and with human passion and impiety, while white is associated with purity. Seh Maulana's comment that one united with Allah would not bleed red appears to be based on the association of red and human passion. When the blood turns white, he can offer only an *ad hominem* reply. One of the texts translated by Rinke is closer to the legend of al-Hallaj. Here it is stated that the blood smelled sweet and that it *dhikr*-ed "There is no God save Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" – the confession of faith that is fundamental to Islam. The account of Siti Jenar's death is, however, considerably less dramatic. There is no mention of invulnerability. He is beheaded with a single stroke. According to this text, Siti Jenar's body then vanished and presumably returned to heaven.⁹⁰ The account of Siti Jenar's death included in *Babad Jaka Tingkir* expands on the *dhikr* of the blood, but makes no mention of invulnerability. Indeed, he is ridiculed for dying from a single blow.⁹¹ Here Siti Jenar's blood changes from red to black to yellow to white and then spoke proclaiming Siti Jenar's immortality. The blood then returned to the head which joined itself to the body. Siti Jenar bestows blessings on his executioners and vanishes. At this point there appears to be a break in the narrative structure of *Babad Demak*. It does not state that Siti Jenar's body returns to heaven, but the actions of the other *wali* indicate that it has.

Seh Maulana then resorted to a legal trick allowed by the *Shari'ah*. He found a dead dog, one from ' , and used it as a substitute for Siti Jenar. He stabbed it in the neck, wrapped it in a burial shroud and put a *kopyah* (skull cap) on its head. The body was placed on the veranda of the mosque facing the *kiblat*. In front of a large audience, he described Siti Jenar's sins and stated that because he had turned his back on the law of the Prophet his corpse had been transformed into that of a dog.

We are unable to explain the reference to a "legal trick." It is clear, however, that the *wali* find it necessary to cover up Siti Jenar's sainthood in order to maintain the authority of the law. The reference to dogs and sometimes pigs is common in the literature concerning ecstatic Sufi's. According to Islamic law dogs and pigs are unclean and forbidden (A. *haram*). Al-Hallaj is said to have kept dogs and even to have eaten with them. They were explained at externalizations of his lower self (A. *nafs*). The same text states that ordinary humans have dogs inside of them, which they follow, but the fact that al-Hallaj's dogs followed him was a sign of spiritual purity, even if his external acts violated *shari'ah* norms.⁹² Dogs also figure significantly in other Javanese texts concerning intoxicated mystics. Pangeran Pangung is said to have been burned at the stake because he brought two dogs named *Imam* (A. faith) and *tawhid* (A. the unity of Allah) to the Friday prayer with him. Prior to his execution he is said to have feed the dogs cooked rice, and to have composed a *suluk* text sitting in the flames.⁹³

The word was spread throughout the country that Siti Jenar had been executed and that he had become a dog. The neck wound was very apparent. A student of Siti Jenar's was in the forest herding goats. His name was Lonthanasmara. Hearing the news that his teacher had been sentenced to death by fire and that his corpse had been transformed into

⁸⁹ Massignon, vol. 2, 351.

⁹⁰ Rinke, *The Nine Saints of Java*, 23.

⁹¹ Florida, *Writing the Past*, 193.

⁹² Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol.1, 182.

⁹³ Rinke, *The Nine Saints of Java*, 123-151.





that of a dog, he left the goats and ran to the mosque. When he arrived, he said harshly: "Send Allah who has been left behind to the Lord my teacher. I am Allah who herds baby goats.

Lonthanasmara's statement is exactly what the *wali* had feared, an indication that Siti Jenar's teachings had spread among the peasants, and that consequently there was danger that the mosque would be deserted. It is a clear statement that *shath* is also *zandaqah* – a heresy dangerous to the state.

Seh Maulana became very angry. He drew his sword and stabbed Ki Lonthang brutally. His body collapsed and his eyes rolled to the side. As he died, he greeted (*salam*) the crowd. Then, riding on his whip he disappeared never to be seen again. All those who saw this were awed. The dog's body was quickly thrown into the fire and was instantly consumed by the flames. After the fire died down a voice was heard saying: "All of you sages have wronged your fellow creatures. While you are sages your white is tainted with red. In the future, I will find vengeance and cause grief to your descendants. The people of the palace will destroy the *wali* when the court is moved to Mataram and there is a great king with a passion for conquest. When he wanders through the land making war, then I will have vengeance. If you do not yet know my name, I am the son of the sage Resi Busu of Mount Serandil. I was cursed by my father and became a small worm and was thrown into the Krendhawahana forest. While I was living in the mud, I was forgiven by the all mighty. I became human again. Siti Jenar is my name. All of you stand fast in Islam." Long after it had fallen silent, the sages pondered Siti Jenar's words and his clear state of perfection.

The execution of Siti Jenar's disciple recalls the treatment of al-Hallaj's disciple ibn-Ata at the hands of the vizier Hamid. Al-Ata was one the

few willing to defend al-Hallaj at his second trial and to publicly embrace his doctrine. When questioned about his faith he also condemned the vizier for corruption and exploitation of the poor. He cursed him, calling on Allah to give Hamid the worst of deaths. As a result of this bold statement, his teeth were pulled out after which he was beaten severely with his own sandals and died.⁹⁴ The text translated by Rinkes also includes an account of the execution of Siti Jenar's disciples. Here *Babad Jaka Tingkir* is quite different. Here the disciples are described as broken hearted but are not executed.⁹⁵ The conclusion to the *Babad Demak* text was probably added to justify the conquest of the Javanese coastal states by Mataram. It is not included in either *Babad Jaka Tingkir* or Rinkes text. The references to the destruction of the *wali* by the people of the palace, is probably a reference to Sultan Agung's conquest of Surabaya, in 1625. This would seem to link Siti Jenar and his teachings with the Mataram court. However, this is clearly not the case. As Rinkes, Soebardi and Ricklefs note, the trial of ecstatic Sufi's continues to be a significant theme in literary and religious texts written at the various courts of the Mataram dynasty. There are, however, significant differences between these trials and those of Siti Jenar recorded in *Babad Demak*. The most important of these concerns the role of the king in the trials.

The text concerning the execution of Pangeran Panggung is set in the third reign of the kingdom of Demak. Already the Sultan plays a much more prominent role than he does in the trial of Siti Jenar. In this text, the ecstatic mystic refuses to enter the fire until personally asked to by the monarch.⁹⁶

Siti Jenar and Javanese Islam

As Ricklefs and others have observed, it is difficult to use Javanese texts such as *Babad Demak* or *Serat Cabolek* as sources for the reconstruction of the details of historical events. One reason for this is that until the mid-

⁹⁴ Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 1, 530-531, provides several versions of this incident.

⁹⁵ Florida, *Writing the Past*, 198.

⁹⁶ Rinkes, *The Nine Saints of Java*, 128.





nineteenth century this was a manuscript tradition and Javanese scribes appear to have had few scruples about rewriting the past to suite the political, intellectual and religious needs of the present. But the details of who said what to whom when are not our primary concern. We are concerned rather with the ways in which religious debates stretch across time and space and the ways in which archetypical debates are repeated in diverse textual, historical and cultural contexts. If al-Hallaj is the archetype of *shath* in the Arabic and Persian traditions, Siti Jenar, who in most respects replicates the Hallajian pattern, is the archetype of ecstatic mysticism in Java. He represents an important, though often persecuted variant of Javanese Islamic thought. There is, however, a long tradition of radical Sufism according to which those who have achieved insight into the very nature of Allah and worship him constantly in the internal (*batin*) spiritual sense and therefore have little, if any, need for the external (*zahir*) forms of Muslim piety.

Sunan Giri is the archetype for traditional Javanese Islamic scholars. The position of most traditional Javanese *ulama* has been, and still is, that Sufism is an essential component of Islam, but that the mystical path must be enclosed within the system of ritual piety required by Islamic law. The *ulama* are concerned not only with the advanced mystic, but also with the great masses of ordinary people for whom the law is a source of moral and ritual guidance.

An equally important theme is the role of normative Islam in Javanese Islamic states. Invariably the most powerful argument used against Siti Jenar is that if his teaching were allowed to spread "the Demak Mosque would be

empty." In Demak, and all subsequent Javanese States, including modern Yogyakarta and Surakarta the state mosque is the location of the most important state ceremonies, which commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the Haj or pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹⁷ As is clearly stated in the version of the Siti Jenar legend translated by Florida, failure to participate in these ceremonies is treason. Informants from the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta confirm this.⁹⁸ In Surakarta members of the court were required to participate in the Friday prayer until the end of the colonial period. Both in the text and in contemporary court circles there is strong disapproval of Siti Jenar's disregard for these ritual obligations. At the same time the mystical doctrine of the unity of being has long been, and despite the increasing emphasis on orthoprax and orthodox Islam in contemporary Indonesia, still is, extremely common. This teaching is, however, usually regard as a secret to be shared only among advanced mystics. A great many texts, including the one translated here, warn against violating the law and tradition of the prophet Muhammad.⁹⁹ The Javanese concept of kingship, the architecture of the Yogyakarta *kraton* (J. palace) and in the state ceremonies that Siti Jenar subjects to ridicule are based on this combination of normative piety and mystical practice.¹⁰⁰ The doctrine of mystical union and the of orthoprax ritual both find expression in the *Garebeg* rituals. Officials, *ulama*, and the general public crowd into the mosque while the Sultan sits on a throne referred to as a "seat in heaven" and is believed to achieve union with the Allah.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ On the role of Islam in Javanese state ceremonies see Mark R. Woodward, "The Garebeg Malud in Yogyakarta: Veneration of the Prophet as Imperial Ritual." In: *Journal of Ritual Studies* 5, no. 1 (1991): 109-132.

⁹⁸ Florida, *Writing the Past*, 358-359.

⁹⁹ G. W. J. Drewes, *Directions for Travelers on the Mystical Path* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 37.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Woodward, "The "Garebeg Malud" in Yogyakarta: Veneration of the Prophet as Imperial Ritual." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 5, no. 1 (1991): 109-132.

¹⁰¹ The architecture of the Yogyakarta *kraton* is based on the doctrine of the Perfect Man. A lamp at the center of the palace is a representation of the house of Allah within the body of the Perfect Man. In the *Garebeg* the Sultan is believed to attain union with Allah. Mark Woodward.





The intertwining of politics and theology gives rise to complex and variable understanding Siti Jenar. In the Surakarta court, he is never referred to by name, but only as “the traitor.” Court officials in Yogyakarta hold similar views. Even those who hold theological views similar to those expressed by Siti Jenar, maintain the that *shari’ah* based state ceremonies are essential elements of the political and religious life of the community. Florida identifies Siti Jenar with the common person and shows that in the twentieth century his legend has been associated with and used by leftist or populist groups, because he flaunts the authority of both the state and the *ulama*. In the 1920's communist organizers in Kelaten, a market town in the Surakarta area, explicitly linked themselves to the Siti Jenar legend. Brotokesowo, who was one of the founders of the communist movement in the area was also a religious teacher. He claimed that his lineage of teachers lead directly to Siti Jenar and through him to Ibn al-Arabi, al-Hallaj and al-Ghazzali. He encouraged landless peasants to reject the authority of the Surakarta court, the colonial state and the *ulama*. This combination of religious and political activism was particularly dangerous to the authorities because many of the local *ulama* were major land lords. The fact that in the text translated here, Siti Jenar’s students are goat herders indicates that the association of peasant movements and radical Sufism has deep roots in Javanese history and culture. Similar tensions can be found in modern Javanese society. In central and east Java *ulama* and other Islamic leaders often associate Siti Jenar and his teachings with the Indonesian Communist Party, blaming “the heretic” for the wave of violence and mass killings that swept the region following the abortive coupe of 1965. Other Javanese, particularly those associated with *aliran kepercayaan* or mystical sects, believe him to be a martyr willing to sacrifice his life for religious truth.

The development and persistence of the Siti Jenar legend cannot be understood solely as a symbolic reflection of class conflict. It is also is a theological debate which transcends class distinctions. Proponents of theological positions similar to that of Siti Jenar range for villagers and the urban poor to aristocrats and intellectuals. Debates about the relationship between *Shari’ah* centric piety and mystical practice can be found in every economic and social class, and even within families. The Surakarta court provides an important illustration. Pakubuwana X considered the rituals required by the *Shari’ah* to be an essential part of his religious life. He regularly attended the Friday prayer at the state mosque. His son Pakubuwana XI was very different. He did not visit the mosque except for official ceremonies and did not perform the five daily prayers, though he did visit the mosque inside the palace to listen to *Qur’an* recitation. The same pattern can be found in ordinary families. Pak Mul, a bricklayer in Yogyakarta is a traditional Javanese healer (*dukun*) whose devotional life centers on pilgrimage to holy graves and meditation. He never attends Friday services. His daughter is a *hajji* and an active member of the Muslim modernist organization Muhammadiyah. When asked about this seeming contradiction, both replied that each individual must find his or her unique path to God.

Some Javanese mystics openly teach the doctrine of the unity of being, and the view that *shari’ah* centric piety is unnecessary for travelers on the mystical path. One put it this way:

People at the highest levels do not have to follow Islamic law or pray five time a day because Allah governs their lives directly. They are nothing more than his tools. Others must follow the law, because it is the will of Allah as revealed to Muhammad. It is the closest these people can come to Allah. It would be a mistake for them not to follow it.

“Order and meaning in the Yogyakarta Kraton,” in *Java, Indonesia and Islam* (New York: Springer 2011), 137-167.





Most Javanese mystics, including those associated with *aliran kepercayaan* do not openly criticize Islamic law. While many neglect the five daily prayers, most refrain from pork and alcohol and conform with *Shari'ah* mandates concerning circumcision, marriage and funerals, accepting the guidance of local *ulama*. There are also small Sufi orders inspired by Siti Jenar' legacy.¹⁰²

Shath and the open teaching of unity of being theologies are far more controversial with in the *santri* (J. observant) section of the Muslim community. Here it can still lead to trials and public unrest. The Situbondo affair of 1996 is a remarkable example.¹⁰³ In this case *shath* and the government's response to it led to a rampage of destruction in the east Javanese town in which five people died, cars were burned in the streets and a court house and twenty Christian churches destroyed. The rioting began when an Indonesian court sentenced a young Muslim preacher to only five years in prison for slandering Islam. The 26-year-old preacher known only as Saleh was a member of a small Sufi order – *Tariqoh Muhammad* with branches in East Java and Madura that teaches *hakekat* (ultimate truth) and *ma'rifat* (gnosis). Details are sketchy but in Java, these terms are strongly associated with the unity of being theology. Salah approached a local *ulama* with questions concerning the Prophet Muhammad, the five daily prayers and the death of Kyai As'ad Syamsul Arifin. The *ulama* subsequently explained that Saleh had claimed that Muhammad was not a prophet, that advanced mystics did not need to perform the prayers because they have become one with the *Qur'an*. He claimed to have learned this from a mystical teacher named Mudarso, who, in turned had learned it from Kyai As'ad Syamsul Arifin. He also claimed that Kyai As'ad's death was not

“perfect” because he did not yet fully understand the mystical teachings.

To understand public reaction to Saleh's claims it is necessary to understand something of Kyai As'ad's stature in the Islamic community of Sitobundo. Kyai As'ad was the last surviving member of the group of *ulama* who founded Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1928. NU represents the traditional Javanese *ulama* and their followers in Indonesian public life. It is Indonesia's, and probably the world's largest Muslim organization. Its leaders are widely regarded as saints. Situbondo's Muslims are deeply devoted to NU and to Kyai As'ad, who led Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah that has more more than 14,000 students. Like most NU *ulama* Kyai As'ad was a Sufi.¹⁰⁴ But for NU, Sufism is the sober mysticism of al-Junayd and al-Ghazzali. Saleh's claim that Kyai As'ad was the source, albeit an imperfect one, of his doctrine has little credibility. His teachings, including renunciation of *Shari'ah* mandated ritual obligations and the claim to have become one with the speech of Allah – the *Qur'an* – are typical of the ecstatic Sufi tradition.

The *ulama* with whom Saleh discussed these matters reported him to the police. He was arrested and on October 10, 1996 convicted of the crime of defaming one the religions recognized by the Indonesian state. He was given the maximum possible sentence – five years' imprisonment. Angry crowds had gathered throughout the trial. When the verdict was announced, the judge was denounced as “unjust.” On the streets preachers explained that Saleh was a Muslim who had defamed his own religion and refused to pay respect to the *ulama*. They demanded the death sentence. What happened next is not entirely clear. Apparently, a rumor started that Saleh had taught the doctrine of *hulul* – incarnation and/or that he was a Christian, had

¹⁰² Mark Woodward, “Tariqah Naqshbandi Bayanullah (TNB): Localization of a Global Sufi Order in Lombok, Indonesia.,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 55-65.

¹⁰³ We followed these events in real time as they were reported in the Indonesian press. Press reports are

included in Hariyanto. (ed), *Melangkah dari Reruntuhan Tragedi Situbondo* (Jakarta: Penerbit PT Grasindo, 1998).

¹⁰⁴ Syaifullah, “Mengenal Sosok Pahlawan Nasional, KH As'ad Syamsul Arifin,” *NU Online*, last modified January 12, 2022, <https://www.nu.or.id/jatim/mengenal-sosok-pahlawan-nasional-kh-as-ad-syamsul-arifin-1EOCp>.





escaped and was hiding in a church. The mob then burned the courthouse and more than two dozen churches.

The charges brought against Saleh were modern versions of those employed in the trials of al-Hallaj and Siti Jenar. The denial of the prophethood of Muhammad figured significantly in the deliberations leading to al-Hallaj's trial as was the charge of incarnationism.¹⁰⁵ The political context was an inversion of the archetype of al-Hallaj. At the time of al-Hallaj's execution the authorities were concerned that a mob might rescue him from prison and that he might overthrow the existing political and religious orders. The situation was the reverse in the case of Saleh. The crowd demanded his execution, and held the court to be "soft on heresy." They placed themselves in the position of the *qadis* of tenth century Baghdad and of Sunan Giri in *Babad Demak*. In the context of modern Indonesia, Saleh is clearly a *zindik* – a heretic whose teachings endanger the state. The difference in modern Indonesia, ethnic and religious discord are recognized as among the forces threatening political stability.¹⁰⁶

Saleh has only a middle school education. It is impossible to determine the extent of his religious knowledge, or if he has ever heard of al-Hallaj. Being Javanese it is almost certain that he is familiar with the legend of Siti Jenar. The same can be said for the crowd that demanded his education. There are more than a thousand years and half a world separating the trials of al-Hallaj and Saleh. The social and political contexts of the two trials were vastly different. Tenth century Baghdad was the center of the Muslim world and was rife with inter-Islamic conflict. Twentieth century Situbondo is a small city in east Java in which social discord is the consequence of a

combination of Muslim/Christian conflict, ethnic and class divisions. But in both cases ecstatic Sufism and *shath* are capable of sparking violent confrontations. Ernst suggests that by the twelfth century the ecstatic Sufi tradition had lost its vigor and that when Ibn al-Arabi's formulation of the doctrine of the unity of being came in to vogue that *shath* moved into "more formal literary and philosophical molds."¹⁰⁷ While it is true that *shath* like statements can be found in Sufi poetry the tradition of *shath* trials in Javanese Islam – from Siti Jenar to Saleh – indicates that the archetype of al-Hallaj continues to repeat itself. It is not possible to predict when or where the next such trial will be or its outcome, but it is highly unlikely that Saleh will be the last survival of the Hallajian tradition.

Competing Interests

The authors have no affiliations with any party that may influence the objectivity of the research results.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with all ethical standards and did not involve direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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¹⁰⁵ Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol.1, 524.

¹⁰⁶ Accounts of the Situbondo affair published in the Indonesian press focused primarily on the destruction of churches. This was strongly condemned by the NU leadership and the National Council of Ulama. Christian observers were inclined to hold Muslim intolerance responsible for the riots. Muslims emphasized economic

inequalities and the fact that many Christians in Situbondo are wealthy Chinese as the causes of unrest leading the explosion of violence. Privately, a number of NU leaders acknowledge that at the very least, Saleh's *shath* was the spark that started the fires.

¹⁰⁷ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 6.





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