

Book presentation
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Malay Islamic Literature

For the study of Islam in the Malayo-Indonesian world it is of the utmost importance to know what kind of texts have been and are in circulation. As far as printed Malay (and Arabic) texts are concerned, in the last decade great progress has been made through the publications of, among others, Virginia Matheson and M.B. Hooker on Jawi Literature in Patani; Martin van Bruinessen on *Kitab Kuning*; and Ian Proudfoot on early Malay printed books up to 1920. In addition to knowledge of the availability and circulation of printed texts, that of manuscripts is of equal interest. Very important in this respect is the recently published work by Teuku Iskandar, *Catalogue of Malay, Minangkabau, and South Sumatran Manuscripts in the Netherlands*, 2 vols., Leiden 1999 (ISBN 90-71220-09-5).

This brand-new catalogue by Teuku Iskandar describes all Malay, Minangkabau, and South Sumatran manuscripts (in *rencong* and Lampung scripts) in the Netherlands, and in sum comprises 2028 different items. It consists of 1095 pages which are divided over two separate volumes. Volume One (in 748 pages) lists the holdings of the Leiden University Library (in sum 1571 items), while Volume Two describes almost 500 other items, categorized according to the

institutions where they are kept, like the Royal Institute for Anthropology and Linguistics, Leiden; Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam; Royal Household Archives, The Hague; and eleven other institutions. Moreover, this volume contains the bibliography (pp. 957-985). Nine different indexes of, amongst others, Titles, Authors, Copyists, Geographical Names, and Watermarks, conclude this voluminous work (pp. 987-1095).

It is striking that a minor part of the items described in the catalogue (pp. 1-106, to wit 259 items of the collection of the Leiden University Library) was published by E.P. Wieringa under the auspices of the Leiden University Library in 1998. Although a meticulous comparison between these two catalogues is good for philologists, a number of differences and similarities are obvious. On the whole, the catalogue which was published under the auspices of the Leiden University Library is far more ambitious, which is quite understandable from the perspective of the library. The biggest difference between both catalogues is the description of the collections of letters, which Wieringa has described in detail, while Iskandar roughly indicates them (e.g. in order to describe Cod. Or. 2229 – Cod. Or. 2242, Wieringa takes almost 150 pp., whereas Iskandar limits himself to 5 pages only). Furthermore, Wieringa gives more extensive descriptions of the other items, and adds more elaborate and up-to-date bibliographical references. A final obvious difference is that the 1998 catalogue contains many beautiful facsimile illustrations, while Iskandar's has none. On the other hand, Teuku Iskandar has followed a more humble cataloguing strategy: he has limited himself to the basic data of each item which are, of course, the same as in the corresponding descriptions of Wieringa. This different strategy has resulted in an easily manageable and orderly catalogue, despite the enormous amount of materials it opens up.

When browsing through Iskandar's work, one notices that the bulk of the described items in one way or another is relevant to the study of Islam: there are devotional treatises; *fiqh* works; sermons; prayers; mystical texts; *silsilas*; narratives about the Prophets, including the Prophet Muhammad; legal contracts; theosophical treatises; religious instruction literature; Malay adaptations of Arabic originals; theological treatises; and so forth. In other words, the work makes abundantly clear what infinite variety there has been (and still is) in Malay Islamic literary culture. In this respect, the catalogue of Iskandar forms an important addition to overviews of Malay literature, which usually focus more on *belles-lettres* and tend to pay less attention to Islamic literature. There has always been a stream within the Western tradition of Malay studies which regarded much of the Malay Islamic writings as merely derivative of Middle Eastern originals, as well as linguistically inferior as compared to 'classical' texts. As a result of this, many Malay religious writings were not considered worthy of serious study, and consequently did not figure in 'comprehensive' overviews of Malay literature. With the help of the catalogue of Teuku Iskandar, a more complete picture can be drawn up of the entire Malay literary production.

All in all, this work forms a most welcome addition to the existing research tools for the study of Malay religious literary culture. Teuku Iskandar is merited with compiling a valuable source which in a practical form gives access to all Malay manuscripts in the Netherlands. ◆

Note

* E.P. Wieringa, *Catalogue of Malay and Minangkabau Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden University and other collections in the Netherlands*; Volume One comprising the acquisitions of Malay manuscripts in Leiden University Library up to the year 1896, edited by Joan de Lijster-Streef and Jan Just Witkam, Leiden 1998.

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