



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Rethinking Javanese Islam. Towards new descriptions of Javanese traditions**

Boogert, J.W.P. van den

### **Citation**

Boogert, J. W. P. van den. (2015, November 18). *Rethinking Javanese Islam. Towards new descriptions of Javanese traditions*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/36400>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/36400>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/36400> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Boogert, Jochem van den

**Title:** Rethinking Javanese Islam. Towards new descriptions of Javanese traditions

**Issue Date:** 2015-11-18

### 3. Orientalism: early scientific study of Java

This chapter is devoted to early orientalist scholarship on Java. One of the focal points is the relationship of the colonial power structure to the knowledge of Javanese religion. If there is a continuity in the way Javanese religion has been described -and I argue there is- and if there is a 'political' continuity running from Portuguese times to the period of the Netherlands East Indies -which seems to be the case- does the latter offer an explanation for the former? In other words, does the post-colonial adage that the misrepresentation of colonised nations, their culture, and religions is a function of colonial hegemony, help us in understanding how the concept 'Javanese Islam' came about?

#### 3.1. Popular orientalism in Java

At this moment in our story, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Europeans had been in Java for over 200 years. During the period from about 1780 until 1830 Java had witnessed the demise of the VOC, an interregnum of the Napoleonic and British rule, and a (re-)instalment of Dutch rule. As the name of the colonial state -The Dutch East Indies- indicates, the Indonesian archipelago and Java in particular had become a tropical home to the Dutch.

Brief excursions into the interior of Java had become a popular pastime for these residing Europeans. Such trips would span a couple of days and would typically include visits to one or more temple ruins and a stop-over in a small village or hamlet, while during the rides to and from the sights, the excursionists would enjoy the scenery. Such trips were often described in a sort of diary, to be published for the entertainment and education of their colonial counterparts and the interested public *in patria*. These excursions illustrate a lively curiosity for Javanese culture, particularly for ancient Javanese culture, that had become fashionable in the wake of Raffles' governorship over Java (Termorshuizen 1993).

A typical example is a trip through the Eastern parts of Java made by N. van Meeteren Brouwer, notary and auctioneer in Surabaya, in 1825. The account of the trip was published three years later in *Mnemosyne*, a Dutch

journal dedicated to history and literature. Regarding the sights he has this to say:

“... on that trip we saw old ruins, still partly present temples and necropolises of the old *Brabmanic* or *Hindu* religion.” (Van Meerteren Brouwer 1828: 300; italics mine)<sup>26</sup>

Especially people of a certain education, such as clerics or government officials, sent in essays to e.g. The Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences or to government gazettes, describing their trip and maybe an ancient inscription or some temple ruins they had encountered. Another such author is the civil servant Hendrik Domis, resident of respectively Semarang, Pasuruan and Surabaya during the 1820s. He had already published several essays on archaeological findings (inscriptions and temples in particular) in the *Transactions of the Batavian Society*, when he published his *De residentie Passoeroeang op het eiland Java* (The residence Pasuruan on the Island Java). In it he seeks to further the knowledge on the Eastern part of the Island, using the notes he assembled during his period as resident of Pasuruan from 1826 to 1830. On the religion of the Javanese he says the following:

“Generally speaking the native here has embraced the Mohammedan religion. The great ones show a great interest in their faith. There are many priests. There is a lot of superstition. The lesser Javanese, especially in the interior, even though they have adopted *the exteriority of the Mohammedan religion*, are not very familiar with the moral part of it, yes many natives merely know the names of their religious customs, and still sacrifice to the *Hindu* statues and holy trees and places, that are to be found abundantly.” (Domis 1836: 31-32; italics mine)<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> My translation of: “... wij zagen op die reis oude ruïnes, gedeeltelijk nog aanwezige Tempels en Grafsteden der oude Braminsche of Hindosche Godsdienst.”

<sup>27</sup> My translation of: “De inlander heeft alhier in het algemeen de Mahomedaanse Godsdienst omhelsd. De grooten leggen veel belangstelling voor hun geloof aan den dag. De priesters zijn talrijk. Er heerscht veel bijgeloof. De mindere Javaan, vooral in de binnenlanden, hoezeer het uiterlijke van de Mohamedaansche Godsdienst aangenomen hebbende, is met het zedelijk gedeelte daarvan meest onbekend, ja vele inboorlingen kennen van hunnen godsdienstige gebruiken niet veel meer dan de namen, en offeren nog aan de Hindoebeelden en heilige boomen en plaatsen, die men in menigte aantreft.”

What catches the eye in these two descriptions is that they refer to the old religion of Java as Hinduism. As we saw in the previous chapter, Stavorinus in the 1760s still spoke of the religion of Javanese Heathen ancestors (Stavorinus 1798: 270). Even as late as 1800, Dirk Van Hogendorp, another prominent Dutch civil servant, still described the Javanese religion as follows:

“The religion of the Javanese is generally speaking the Mohammedan, though blended with a lot of superstition, originating from the old *beathen religion*...” (Van Hogendorp 1800: 4; italics mine)<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, these accounts not only illustrate Western interest in exotic Java or the popularity of publications on archaeology. They also show that sometime in the first decades of the 19th century the pre-Islamic religion of the Javanese, previously dubbed Heathenism, had become known as Hinduism. This chapter discusses and assesses this next phase in the genealogy of ‘Javanese Islam’ by looking specifically at the contributions of Thomas Raffles and John Crawfurd.

### 3.2. Orientalism: philology, hegemony and mission

It is no exaggeration to say that Raffles and Crawfurd had a lasting impact on the academic research of Java and on the appreciation of Javanese culture. For example, their works have been of seminal importance for the domain of Javanese philology. Moreover, while during the VOC era the knowledge of Java was more or less restricted to the Northern coastal regions, during and after Raffles’ governorship the interior of Java and the indigenous way of life became subjects of scientific study and popular fascination. An illustration of their impact is the sudden boom in the popular interest for all things (Hindu-)Javanese.

Raffles’ 1817 *The History of Java* is considered a breakthrough in the study of Java. It quickly became an absolute authority, and the references to it in later works are innumerable. Almost immediately after its apparition and for at least half a century, virtually every scholar on Java used Raffles’ *History* as an essential work of reference. Crawfurd’s 1820 *History*

---

<sup>28</sup> My translation of: “De godsdienst der Javaanen is over het algemeen de Mahomedaansche, doch met veel bijgeloof vermengd, afkomstig van den ouden heidenschen godsdienst...”

*of the Indian Archipelago* is also one of the standard works on Indonesia and on Java in particular -the biggest part of this work is devoted to it. Both laymen and scholars referred to Crawfurd and Raffles. The first group consists of people such as the mentioned Van Meeteren Brouwer. The second consists of scholars such as J.F.C. Brumund and C. Poensen, who have both contributed greatly to the conceptualisation of 'Javanese Islam' as we shall see later on. They make ample use of the works of these orientalists (e.g. Brumund 1853, Vol 1: 2-22; Poensen 1864), thereby illustrating the importance of both *Histories* to the conceptualisation of Javanese religion. Finally, then, a good example of the kind of authority both still carry, even today, is the use the eminent historian of Java, Ricklefs, makes of them. In order to prove that in the first half of the 19th century Javanese society is "unified in terms of its religious identity", with the negligible exception of some small pockets of Hindus in e.g. the Tenggerese mountains, he refers amongst others to Raffles and Crawfurd (Ricklefs 2007: 10-11). As we have seen this religious identity is the mystic synthesis, and one of its key characteristics is the adherence to the five pillars of Islam.

Before I evaluate Raffles' and Crawfurd's contribution to our knowledge of Javanese religion, I will discuss the originality and breakthrough character of Raffles' 1817 *The History of Java*, which will help us to evaluate its rendition of Javanese religion. Being both civil servants and scholars, Raffles and Crawfurd are often portrayed as the first true orientalists on Java. Moreover, they are considered as the initiators of the scientific study of Java. Although, as we will see, this is not really the case, it is an understandable misconception. After all, Java and especially the interior of Java was still very much uncharted territory. The study of Javanese language had so far been largely neglected. Neither had the VOC's policy of secrecy helped to alleviate this situation. The achievements of Raffles and Crawfurd are of course nothing less than milestones. However, it is still worthwhile to nuance their status as initiators of the study of Java. Firstly, there already was orientalist study on Java, its people, languages, and culture before Raffles and Crawfurd. Secondly, the character of their works is rather that of a compilation or overview of all things to know about Java. In that sense their *Histories* -Raffles' even more so than Crawfurd's- could be said to resemble as much a *memorie* by a VOC official as a scientific treatise.

3.2.1. The academic study of Java preceding Raffles: Leyden and VOC

Prior to the advent of Protestantism in the Netherlands and the Eighty Years' War with Spain (1565-1648), the Catholic university of Louvain in the Southern Netherlands had been the only university in the Netherlands. During the Spanish occupation of the Southern Netherlands, the Northern Netherlands, or Dutch Republic, became bereft of higher education: not only was the Catholic university behind enemy lines, it was not considered a suitable place of higher education for the Protestant youth of Zeeland and Holland. Within this context and just after the (unsuccessful) Spanish siege of Leyden (1573-1574), the university of Leyden was established. From the start Oriental languages were part of the curriculum. Besides Semitic languages, there was a firm focus on Arabic. This is evidenced by the recruitment of scholars such as Josephus Justus Scaliger, who taught Roman languages and antiquity, and Arabic; Raphelengius, who taught Hebrew, and developed an Arabic typeset; and Thomas Erpenius, who taught Arabic and other 'oriental' languages. The reasons for this heavy investment in Arabic were, apart from being purely academic, also practical and religious. Practical: Leyden scholars were called upon to translate documents pertaining to diplomatic and commercial missions. Religious: by acquiring a better knowledge of the religious ideas of Muslims, and by distributing Arabic translations of the Bible and Protestant formularies, there was hope to stimulate proselytisation amongst the Muslims (Drewes 1957: 2). This multiplicity of motives will recur in the later orientalist study of Java.

It did take the university of Leyden significantly longer to start the study of other 'Oriental' languages such as Sanskrit, Old-Javanese, Malay and Javanese. In Germany and England Sanskrit and Old-Javanese (*Kawi*) was already being studied by scholars such as Sir William Jones and Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early 19th century. In Leyden the first chair for Sanskrit was installed in 1865 and was taken up by Hendrik Kern, who also furthered the study of Old-Javanese (ibid.: 7). Indonesian languages only became a university taught subject from 1876 (ibid.: 8). Scholars who set the agenda for decades to come were people such as the mentioned Kern; Brandes, who was specialised in the ancient history and archaeology of Java; Hazeu, who studied mainly Javanese *wayang* and folklore; and Stein Callenfels, whose expertise included Javanese culture, archaeology, and pre-history. Therefore, from this vantage point Crawford

and Raffles might indeed be regarded as initiators of the academic scholarship of Java.

However, Java's languages, peoples, culture and religion had already been on another 'orientalist' agenda for a much longer time. Lists of useful Malay and Javanese vocabulary were already being compiled during the first Dutch ventures into the Indonesian archipelago by people such as Cornelis de Houtman, Frederick de Houtman, and Albert Cornelisz. Ruyl tot Enchuysen (Van Dijk 1993: 67-71). Other typical examples are A. Reland (1677-1718), Nicolaas Engelhard (1761-1831), and F.J. Coyett (1620-1689) (Fasseur 2003: 19-33; Uhlenbeck 1964: 43). By the middle of the 18th century Gordijn had already translated the Javanese chronicle *Sejarah Raja Jawa*. It had been published with notes by van Iperen in the Transactions of the Batavian society in 1779 (Weatherbee 1978: 72). And as early as 1768 a translation of the Cheribon code of Law had already been effectuated (Hazeu 1905 in Uhlenbeck 1964: 43).

As we have seen, the VOC was much more than a trading corporation, it was also a military and political power. A case in point is how during the period 1680-1740 the state of Mataram became increasingly dependent on the military assistance of the VOC. In order to continue its control of the *Pasisir* (Northern coastal region of Java) and in the face of local revolt and military threats from Madura, Susuhunan Pakubuwono I (r. 1704-1719) relied on Dutch support to ascend the throne. In exchange for this support the VOC received trade monopolies and exemption from harbour dues (Nagtegaal 1988; Ricklefs 2001: 105-39). With so much at stake and so much local involvement, it is no surprise that the VOC systematically collected knowledge about the East Indies, serving the expansion and consolidation of its sphere of power. Two examples. Firstly, there were the *Generale Missiven*, the general letters in which the *Heeren Zeventien* (Gentlemen Seventeen), or board of directors of the VOC in the Netherlands, were briefed on the state of affairs. These *Missiven* were composed by the council of the Indies in Batavia, which consisted of older Company bureaucrats who had served in several posts -meaning they were well informed and knew different factories (or trading posts) first-hand. Each council member would have made an overview of a different area in which the Company was active. The joint council then dealt with all factories, according to a set pattern (Van Goor 1992). A second example is the famous 17th century orientalist Herbert



de Jager (1636-1694), who built up an expertise in the art of fortification, botany, and Oriental languages (such as Malay, Persian and Telugu) while in and at the service of the VOC (Van Dijk 1993: 62-63)<sup>29</sup>.

Summarising, while it took until the 19th century for the academic study of Java to really take off, there were already orientalists on Java as early as the 17th century. These operated under the patronage and in the service of the VOC.

### 3.2.2. Raffles *The History of Java*: a 'scientific' *memorie*

Since the impact of *The History of Java* is so undeniably massive, the question is what exactly was its merit. Why did it become such a seminal work? The answer is perhaps as simple as it is disenchanting: it is the very first scholarly attempt at capturing the entire field of Java in one book. The reason it is seminal is not so much *what* is related in it, but rather the fact *that* it relates it. Therefore, the book is a collection, the very first collection, of all available knowledge on Java at that time. However, it was neither the first nor the last *History* of its kind. It was not the last since it would soon be followed by John Crawfurd's 1820 *History of The Indian Archipelago*, which dedicates a large part to the Island of Java. It was neither the first in its kind, because as early as 1784 William Marsden had already published *The History of Sumatra*. Raffles and Marsden knew each other quite well and had on occasion discussed each other's academic endeavours and in the end Raffles wound up modelling his own *History* on Marsden's (Van den Doel and Schaepdrijver 1996: 17; Bastin 2004: 21, 31). Marsden, Raffles, and Crawfurd used the title 'History' in the sense of a 'comprehensive view' or a general descriptive account of a country or region, which is close to the original Greek sense of 'inquiry' (Weatherbee 1978: 68-69 fn. 5). Raffles' *History* thus shares quite a number of characteristics with the *memorie* in the tradition of the VOC, with the main difference that this particular one was made public.

---

<sup>29</sup> In general, however, it seems that the VOC invested more energy in the study of Malay than Javanese. The main reason seems to have been that Malay was the language of commerce in the region. There simply was no major incentive to learn local languages in order to execute its principal activity: trade. The little interest paid to language in the VOC's proselytising efforts is clearly demonstrated in the fact that they continued to use Portuguese, i.e. the language of the enemy, as Church language. I thank A.Th. Boone for bringing this point to my attention.

Therefore, I would argue, the main achievement of *The History of Java* is that it brought together and shared with the public at large all available bits and pieces, all shreds of knowledge about Java in a structured way for the first time<sup>30</sup>.

A perusal of the table of contents of *The History of Java* resembles glancing through the cabinet of a 19th century scholar that has on display the many exotic artefacts collected during his travels in the Orient. Subject headings range from “Mountains and Volcanos”, over “Character of the Inhabitants”, “Their Habitations, Dress, and Food” and “Ceremonies of the Court” to “Language” and, “Religion”. However, as pointed out repeatedly, collecting knowledge about Java was not just an end in itself, it also served a purpose, viz. effective government. When Raffles was appointed lieutenant-governor of Java in 1811, he was ordered to introduce an enlightened colonial governance, i.e. a policy that would also take the concerns of the colonial subjects into account. One of his main tasks was substituting the “vexatious system of monopoly” of the VOC with a liberalised economy (Van den Doel and Schaepdrijver 1996: 18). Free trade and a fair system of taxation was thought to be more beneficial to the Javanese than the previous system of forced delivery of export crops. It implied that the Dutch residents (the regional or provincial governors) had to become increasingly more involved in local government. This in turn necessitated an extension of the existing civil service and above all an amelioration of the education of these civil servants. Subsequent generations of colonial government in the Netherlands Indies would continue to struggle with the problem of adequately training civil servants to meet their task in the East (Fasseur 2003 [1993]). However, what is more relevant to our story at hand, is that this new taxation system would and could not be introduced before Raffles had installed a committee to investigate what kind of indigenous property law already existed in Java. (Van den Doel and Schaepdrijver 1996: 18-20; Bastin 2004: 13, 29-31). This land revenue committee, headed by lieutenant Colin MacKenzie, collected besides a huge amount of Javanese artefacts, costumes, maps, drawings, etc. a large number of Javanese texts.

---

<sup>30</sup> In 1811 John Joseph Stockdale had already published *Sketches civil and military of the island of Java*. It was a first attempt at a complete overview of all things Javanese. However, it lacked the systematic approach of Raffles. Its entry on Javanese Religion is an *ad verbatim* repetition of Stavorinus' description (Stockdale 1812 [1811]: 235-42).

Some of these texts from the MacKenzie collection were later used by Raffles for his *History*. Perhaps most notable amongst these was the work entitled “The History of Java” by the Dutchman J.A. van Middelkoop. It served as the basic framework for the two chapters dealing with the history of Java -history in the modern sense of the word. Jacob Albert van Middelkoop, who since his arrival in 1793 had served under Dutch and British rule, had already attempted to write a history of Java. It was drawn from different sources: personal researches, old manuscripts, and the “... relations of ingenious and creditable persons whose knowledge was founded upon tradition, and from the most part derived from the ancient *Patongs* or *Wayangs* of which the Javanese history is composed” (Weatherbee 1978: 73-74). Van Middelkoop’s history is thus an amalgam and one which assumes an increasingly Dutch vantage point from the middle of the 17th century onwards<sup>31</sup>. Besides van Middelkoop’s contribution, there is that of the Dutch surveyor, Major H.C. Cornelius who had supplied plans and drawings of temples in central Java. Then there are Captain George P. Baker’s detailed studies of the Borobudur and Prambanan temple complexes, and Nicolaus Engelhard’s drawings of sculptures around Semarang. And the list goes on. Raffles also managed to obtain the collaboration of distinguished Javanese gentlemen such as the *Bupati* of Torbaya (Semarang) Kiai Adipati Sura Adimanggala and the *Panembahan* of Sumenap, Natakasuma. The first had translated several *Babad* (chronicle), the latter a number of ancient inscriptions (Bastin 2004: 13, 29-31). These examples illustrate how *The History of Java* is a synthesis of reports and materials prepared and assembled by others, i.e. by collaborators and predecessors who are not always openly and clearly credited. Moreover, it is a display of the continuity that runs back to the VOC period and eventually to the Portuguese era. The continuity shows how each successive period built upon the achievements of the former.

---

<sup>31</sup> Weatherbee (1978) argues that Raffles used the “History of Java” by J.A. van Middelkoop for the basic structure of his text and not the texts purportedly given to him by the Adipati of Demak, nor the *Serat Kanda* as translated by N. Engelhard as had been previously argued by Brandes.

### 3.3. Raffles and the Batavian society: privileging philology

In the previous paragraphs we saw how, both politically and academically, Raffles built upon the achievements of his predecessors. Already during the Napoleonic interregnum governor-general Herman Willem Daendels (1807-1810) had made headway in introducing an enlightened, modern colonial government, founded on the pillars of a modern civil service, a centralised government, a modern jurisdiction based on indigenous codes of law, and a system of land rent. The implementation of the colonial project depended on the colonial administrators' knowledge of Java and the Javanese: the knowledge of their language, their history, their culture, their laws and of course their religion. Consequently, there is a striking continuity in the study of Java that runs from the Portuguese, through the VOC, to the British and then Dutch colonial era (Van Goor 2004: 29-66, 83-98). Each successive colonial power used the resources already accumulated by their predecessors. This goes as much for factories and fortifications as it does for knowledge about their colonial subjects.

Still, what the academic study of Java concerns, it is hard to overestimate the importance of Raffles' contributions. Not only is his *The History of Java* a landmark in the field of Javanology, he also actively stimulated the scholarly research of Java. For example, he revived *Het Bataviaasch Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (the Batavian Society).

Founded in 1778 by Jacobus Radermacher, a high official of the VOC, the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences was the first society of its kind in Asia, even predating the Asiatic Society by six years. It was the most important cultural and scholarly organisation of the Netherlands East Indies in the time of the VOC and during the colonial period (Zuiderweg 1991: 161-64; Groot 2009). Initially, its prime focus was on tackling problems concerning colonial society. Prior to Raffles's involvement in the Batavian Society the topics of interest ranged from geography, technology, agriculture, natural history, and to a lesser extent ethnology, tropical hygiene, history and literature. Surprisingly, with regard to the religion of the Javanese, we find nothing (Thé-Mulliner and Van der Veur 1973; Snelders 1979). Due to the death and departure of several of its prominent members in the decades preceding Raffles' arrival, the activities of the Batavian Society had declined and scholarly output had come to a standstill.

### **Javanese literature: preferred vantage point**

It was Raffles who resuscitated the society, by taking charge and setting the scholarly agenda. From that moment on, ethnographic descriptions featuring descriptions of the religion of the Javanese appeared more frequently, but especially the number of articles dealing with Javanese literature grew increasingly. As we saw, there had already been orientalists with an interest in Javanese literature before 1800, but it is Raffles and, perhaps even more so, Crawfurd who mark the true take-off of the scientific study of Javanese language and literature. The latter was, just like Raffles, a British civil servant of the first rank. He was appointed resident of Yogyakarta from 1811 until 1816 and although he worked under Raffles he opposed his land rent reforms. After Java had been returned to the Dutch, Crawfurd continued his career as diplomat in missions to Siam and Burma and as civil servant in Singapore where he was resident after Raffles. (Some argue that Crawfurd and not Raffles was the true founder of Singapore.) During his stay in Yogyakarta, Crawfurd studied the Javanese language and befriended Javanese aristocrats. He had already studied Malay language and culture in Penang before his arrival in Java. More so than Raffles he was a philologist and can be regarded as an early exponent of the idea that text provides a privileged access point for the study of other cultures (De Haan 1935: 526-29; Bastin 1954). Crawfurd thus resembles those late 18th century British orientalists such as Charles Wilkins, William Jones, and Henry Thomas Colebrooke who had ventured into the Indian literary traditions. Their translations and philological studies of Sanskrit texts had been of seminal importance to establishing a European understanding of the Indian traditions that were to become known as Hinduism and Buddhism (Schwab 1984: 51-81; Clark 1997: 75-92; King 1999: 130 in Aljunied 2005b: 14).

Raffles shared this interest in oriental languages and literature. In his inaugural speech as president of the Batavian Society, Raffles determined two focal points for future scientific research of Java. Firstly, he stressed the importance of ethnological research in areas outside Java that did not overlap with those the (British) Asiatic Society was already researching. Secondly, and more importantly, he stressed philology (Groot 2009: 167ff.). The study of Javanese language and especially of Javanese texts was thought to be the perfect entry point into the history, the thought, the customs, laws and institutions of the Javanese:

“Without a thorough *knowledge of this language* [Javanese], it is impossible to form any *accurate idea of the modes of thinking or acting* among the people of this country. *Much valuable information may be expected to be found in their books*, and when they are more generally known, an attempt may be made to develop the early history of the Island, which, with the exception of some leading facts, remains anterior to the introduction of Mahomedanism, involved in obscurity and fable.” (Raffles 1814: 13-14; italics mine)

This conviction that Javanese texts are essential to the understanding of the Javanese heart and mind, underlies the scholarly output of virtually all orientalists. Javanese literature was and still is considered the privileged access point to the culture of the Javanese. However, the study of Javanese culture and religion via Javanese literature only really took off in the second half of the 19th century and reached full maturity in the 20th century. The first half of the 19th century, then, sees the publication of the first “scientific” dictionaries and grammars of the Javanese language by people such as Gericke, T.J. Roorda, Winter, and Cornets de Groot. By doing so they paved the way for locating, translating, analysing, and discussing the Javanese literary traditions. Consequently, the early orientalists of this chapter put the study of Javanese texts firmly on the academic agenda, but their conceptualisation of Javanese religion owes more to received wisdom than to textual analysis.

#### 3.4. Hinduism and the post-colonial argument

As we shall see in the paragraphs below, Crawfurd and Raffles consider the religion of the Javanese to be Islam, however in a modified version. Islam in Java, they claim, has been changed so as to suit the specific Javanese situation. More precisely, the precepts of Islam have been mixed with native customs and laws from Hinduism. Before we look at their descriptions of Islam in Java in more detail, we will briefly consider their treatment of Hinduism in Java.

Both Crawfurd and Raffles look upon Javanese antiquities as offering a view upon the previous religion of the Javanese. After all:

“An account of the antiquities of Java is also an account of its ancient religion, for every ancient monument of the island has

been dedicated to the favourite subject of superstitions, and hardly a vestige is found of any architectural remains constructed for purposes of convenience or utility.” (Crawfurd 1820, Vol. 2: 194-95)

It is from these antiquities, from ruins and inscriptions, that the orientalis-  
tists started to puzzle together the history of Java’s ancient religion. Gradually, the findings from this domain would be substantiated by discoveries from Javanese literature, and vice versa. Crawfurd calls the ancient Javanese writings that confirm his deductions drawn from antiquities “collateral evidence” (ibid.: 219).

By looking at how much space they devote to it, we get an idea of the importance Raffles and Crawfurd attach to the religion of the Javanese. Of the 800 pages Raffles’ *The History of Java* consists of, the chapter that is dedicated to religion counts 68 pages. Crawfurd’s *History* counts about 1700 pages and spends about 55 pages on the religion of Java. What is, however, interesting is that both dedicate decisively more space to the ancient religion of the Javanese than to the contemporary Javanese religion. In Raffles, of these 68 pages 63 are spent on the descriptions of antiquities, that is descriptions of the *Prambanan* remains (a Hindu temple complex in Central Java), which leaves just about 5 pages to contemporary Javanese religion. Crawfurd spends a 42 odd pages on the subject of “The ancient religion of the Indian Islander” -which is in fact also a discussion of Hindu and Buddhist antiquities- and just 13 pages on “The character of Mohamedanism in the Indian Archipelago”.

Why would these authors dedicate more space to the previous instead of to the contemporary Javanese religion? It is tempting to argue that they were unsympathetic towards Islam and actually preferred Hinduism and Buddhism and therefore as a result spent more time on the subject of their affection than on the subject of their discontent. The result, one could be tempted to argue, is a specific kind of misrepresentation: a description of a benevolent Hinduism in a binary opposition with a dangerous Islam (e.g. Aljunied 2005a and 2005b). One of the problems with this type of post-colonial argument is that it fails to show a logically necessary connection between the scrutinised misrepresentation and the objective it supposedly serves, *in casu* colonial hegemony. In other words, it fails to explain the particularities of the misrepresentation at hand. How does the presence of a colonial power structure explain the specific way

Islam in Java is misrepresented -e.g. as dangerous, as nominal, as syncretist?

It is not sufficient to point out that a negative representation of Javanese Islam was used to advance certain colonial policies. Post-colonial criticism often points to the way colonial rule was justified as a means to uplift the still primitive Javanese. The low level of Javanese civilisation being argued on the basis of their syncretist religion. Although such arguments have indeed been furthered by colonial rulers and orientalist alike, they do not explain the actual emergence of the concept of Javanese Islam. Crawfurd, for example, represented Islam in Java in a far more positive way while serving the same cause as Raffles: colonial hegemony. As we shall see in chapter six, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje argued vehemently against the conceptualisation of a syncretist Javanese Islam, but also was a staunch advocate of the association theory<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, explaining the origin of a negative representation of Javanese Islam simply on the basis of orientalist scholarship in service of colonial policy is not sufficient. For now, it suffices to note that minimally this kind of argument is by no means conclusive. We will return to the post-colonial argument later on.

An alternative explanation for the seemingly disproportionate amount of space devoted to the ancient religion of the Javanese could simply be the novelty of it. After all, Hinduism and Buddhism had only recently been 'discovered'. The term Hinduism had been coined only as late as 1787 by Charles Grant (Oddie 2010: 45). Likewise, the term Buddhism only came in vogue in the last decades of the 18th century and in the beginning of the 19th century it was still very unclear what this Buddhism actually was. Therefore, during the first decades of the 19th century these concepts were still just gaining currency. The conceptualisation of Buddhism as a kind of reformation of Hinduism -very much analogous to the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism- only received its standardised form in the second half of the 19th century (Almond 1988: 7-32). It is therefore fitting that the first ever systematic description of the ancient Hindu temple complex of Prambanan received this much attention in Raffles' work. Similarly, Crawfurd goes to great lengths to

---

<sup>32</sup> The association theory held it that the indigenous Javanese population (first of all the elite) would be able to elevate itself by receiving a Western education and by 'associating' with Western intellectuals.



discuss all known temples, statues and inscriptions found across the whole of Java. Completely in line with the encyclopaedic character of the first orientalist ventures, he divides them into different classes, allowing him to distinguish between genuine and declining forms of worship (Crawfurd 1820, Vol. 2: 207). In his view, Hinduism in Java was degenerated, because the Javanese had failed to adopt Hinduism in its original and thus pure form. They had, on the contrary, modified Hinduism. This argument, whether correct or not, shows that the negative evaluation of religions other than Christianity by colonial orientalists is not restricted to Islam *vis-à-vis* Hinduism. Here then is another reason to question the above post-colonial argument. This focus on the pure (i.e. genuine) or corrupted (i.e. declining) character of a religion is actually a recurring theme throughout the research on Java during the 19th and 20th century. It reflects a Western preoccupation with the doctrinal purity of religions, which, as we will see in later chapters, is highly relevant to the conceptualisation of Javanese Islam as a syncretist religion.

In summary then, it seems that Raffles and Crawfurd, in their emphasis on the ancient rather than on the present religion of the Javanese, were much more motivated by scholarly enthusiasm than by a political agenda<sup>33</sup>.

If Raffles and Crawfurd refer to the ancient religions of Java as Hinduism and Buddhism, then how do they describe the present religion? To both it is an almost self-evident truth that the Javanese are Muslim. However, according to both, the Javanese are superficial Muslims, who have modified Islam, and mixed Islamic laws with native customs and Hindu laws.

### 3.5. Familiar themes: rehashing the same structures

In the previous chapter I have delineated four themes that recur in each generation of descriptions of Javanese religion. While the basic topics remain the same, more detail is added to them, making the original

---

<sup>33</sup> The proximity of philology and antiquarianism has been well established. E.g. Bauman and Briggs discuss it with regard to the study of folklore in the 17th and 18th century (2003: 70-127). The focus of Raffles and Crawfurd at the beginning of the 19th century seems to be in line with the scholarship of the period. I thank Prof. Arps for bringing this to my attention.

themes appear more robust in each consecutive phase. Moreover, these themes are usually featured as part of an argument, and these arguments become more elaborate and sophisticated. Consequently, by being rehashed time and again, these familiar themes became the stock-in-trade of the standard textbook story on Javanese Islam.

### 3.5.1. Proof of being Muslim: the practice of certain Islamic precepts

There is no doubt to Crawford and Raffles that the Javanese are Muslim. The reason for this certainty is that the Javanese observe a number of precepts of Islam. Both orientalist list a number of such precepts: the Javanese are circumcised, they pay *zakat* (alms giving), some perform the *Haji*. Moreover, they are married and buried in the Islamic fashion, they hold a number of Islamic festivals, and so on. All these practices prove that the Javanese are indeed Muslim (Raffles 1817, Vol. 1: 117, Vol. 2: 2, 4; Crawford 1820, Vol. 1: 85-105, Vol. 2: 259-61). Even though neither of the two is an expert on Islam, they seem to know more about this religion than the authors of the travel reports from previous centuries. Still, Raffles and Crawford make similar observations, and draw the same conclusion. Therefore, the first familiar theme remains the same: the Javanese are Muslim because they practice certain precepts from Islam.

### 3.5.2. Java's quick conversion to Islam

The second theme, the quick Javanese conversion to Islam, is also a topic of great interest to the early orientalists. Raffles actually begins his discussion of the religion of the Javanese by pointing out that at the end of the 14th century Mohammedan "missionaries" set foot on Javanese soil. Around the year 1475 the "Mohamedan religion" became the established faith of the country when the Hindu empire of Majapahit was overthrown (Raffles 1817, Vol. 2: 1). As a result:

"... with the exception of an inconsiderable number in some of the interior and mountainous tracts, the whole island appears to have been converted to Mahomedanism in the course of the sixteenth century, or at least at the period of the establishment of the Dutch at Batavia in 1620." (ibid.: 2)

Crawfurd as well associates the moment that Java converted to Islam with the moment when Majapahit was conquered. He pinpoints 1478 as the year of conversion (Crawfurd 1820 Vol. 2: 312). He explains the subsequent rapid advent of Islam by claiming, *inter alia*, that Hinduism did not have a strong hold on the minds of the Javanese:

“All that is important in the history of the introduction of Mahomedanism is told in a few words. The Mahomedans, in the course of several ages, had accumulated in considerable numbers. Many of them were persons who had seen the manners of other nations: all were superior in intelligence to the natives, and were capable of acting in combination for a great end; - they were actuated by a religious zeal, and, at length found an ambitious, persevering, and able leader. The aboriginal barbarians of Java, less active and civilized, with *a religion which never laid a strong hold of the imagination*, and, at the moment, as is proved in another place, for a long time on the decline, or unsupported by an active priesthood, were no match, notwithstanding their numbers, for the zeal and energy of their adversaries. The throne and government being subverted, and the leaders adopting the new religion, the progress of conversion among a people who, at this moment, would almost adopt a new religion on the authority of a royal mandate or proclamation, was necessarily rapid. (ibid.: 313-14; italics mine)

Two things attract the attention in this quote. Firstly, it contains an obvious positive evaluation of Islam *vis-à-vis* Hinduism. After all, Muslims are portrayed as more active, more civilised, and displaying a superior intelligence over their barbarian, Hindu counterparts. This is one of those instances that reveals how orientalist did not just enthuse about Java’s Hindu-Buddhist past to the detriment of the Islamic present -quite to the contrary. Secondly, Crawfurd’s explanation of the rapid conversion of the Javanese is bizarre. It rests partly on two claims: on the one hand the Islamic missionaries were very zealous; on the other hand, Hinduism did not have a strong hold on the Javanese. In what follows, however, we shall see that Crawfurd also claims the opposite of this: Islam in Java is very tolerant, because the missionaries were of a “temperate zeal”. Moreover, the Javanese still hold to their ancient institutions -amongst which Hinduism- in spite of their being Muslim. This obviously implies that Hinduism does have a strong hold on the Javanese mind. Nevertheless, regardless of Crawfurd’s rickety explanation, it

is clear that the smooth (i.e. the relative absence of violence) and quick conversion of the Javanese to Islam is a topic of continuing interest. Moreover, it is one that is not easily explained. In each step of the conceptual genealogy we come across this observation and a concomitant attempt at explanation.

### 3.5.3. Superficial Islam and absence of true belief

According to Raffles and Crawfurd, the Javanese are not true believers, but are only Muslim on the surface -i.e. the third familiar theme. Raffles holds that:

“The Mahomedan religion, as it at present exists on Java, seems only to have penetrated the surface, and to have taken but little root in the heart of the Javans.” (Raffles 1817, Vol. 2: 5)

Raffles offers a number of examples of the slight hold of Islam on the Javanese: the lack of hatred towards the Europeans as infidels, which in another instance he calls tolerance; the ease with which the Javanese supposedly reconvert to Hinduism; and -an absolute classic- their consumption of alcohol. In Raffles’ eyes the Javanese only “observe some of the outward forms of the worship and observances” of Islam” (ibid.: 2).

Crawfurd makes a similar argument. In his eyes all the inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago are “nominally of the orthodox faith” (Crawfurd 1820, Vol. 2: 259). The superficial faith of the Javanese is demonstrated by their laxity in and ignorance of their own religious principles and practices. To illustrate the laxity, he lists the Islamic precepts the Javanese do and do not adhere to. Furthermore, he draws examples from his own experience as Resident of Yogyakarta and from entertaining close relationships with Javanese aristocrats. Typically, Crawfurd mentions the reluctance to abstain from alcohol and the lack of zeal when it comes to fasting and praying. He also relates how a peasant was unaware of who Mohammed was (in the end he claimed it was the name of the village priest) and how a band of labourers makes fun of the Islamic prayers by mimicking the way an acquainted priest preaches from the *Qur’an*. Even the sultan made light of his religious obligations, such as praying, by jokingly telling Crawfurd that his mother had gone to the mosque to pray

for herself and him too. To Crawfurd such examples paint the true picture of the popular feeling on religion and they also illustrate the absence of intolerance (ibid.: 261-69).

As we have seen, even today, the idea of a superficial or nominal Islam is still an intricate part of the textbook story on Javanese religion. When it comes to explanations, though, there is not much to find in the descriptions of Raffles and Crawfurd. According to the latter, the superficiality of Islam in Java is the result of its isolation through the “commercial jealousy” of the Dutch from foreign Mohammedans (Arabs in particular), who would otherwise have promoted stricter observance of Islam (ibid.: 261).

#### 3.5.4. The Javanese adhere to practices from different beliefs

In the eyes of Raffles and Crawfurd the Javanese are not only superficially Muslim, they also modified Islam. They did so especially with regard to jurisprudence -which perhaps should not surprise us given the orientalist’s preoccupation with locating the indigenous laws of the Javanese. Both orientalists describe this modification in terms of a mixture of native customs with Islamic and Hindu laws. In Raffles’ words:

“The written law of the country, according to which justice is administered and the courts are regulated is that of the *Koran*, as *modified by custom and usage*. The Javans have now been converted to the Mahomedan religion about three centuries and a half, dating from the destruction of the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit, in the year 1400 of the Javan æra. Of all the nations who have adopted that creed, they are among the most recent converts; and it may be safely added, that few others are so *little acquainted with its doctrines, and partake so little of its zeal and intolerance*. The consequence is, that although the Mahomedan law be in some instances followed, and it be considered a point of honour to profess an adherence to it, *it has not entirely superseded the ancient superstitions and local customs of the country*.” (Raffles 1817, Vol. 1: 309: italics mine)

To Crawfurd, as well, the laws of the Javanese consist “of a commixture of native customs and of Hindu and Mahomedan jurisprudence” (Crawfurd 1820, Vol. 3: 76). A similar thought is expressed in Raffles’ description of the religion and laws of the Javanese:

“The natives are still devotedly attached to their ancient institutions, and though they have long ceased to respect the temples and idols of a former worship, *they still retain a high respect for the laws, usages, and national observances which prevailed before the introduction of Mahomedanism* (...) it may be fairly stated, that the Javans in general, while they believe in one supreme God, and that Mahomed was his Prophet, and observe some of the outward forms of the worship and observances, are little acquainted with the doctrines of that religion, and are the least bigoted of its followers (...) Property usually descends according to the Mahomedan law; but in other cases, the Mahomedan code, as adopted by the Javans, is *strangely blended with the more ancient institutions of the country*” (Raffles 1817, Vol. 2: 2; italics mine)

Summarising then, the fourth familiar theme also appears in the accounts of both Crawford and Raffles: the religion of the Javanese is, although Islam by name, a mixture of beliefs and practices from different religions. They offer three explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, Crawford and Raffles seem to suggest that the Javanese do not know their own religion, at least not its doctrines. Secondly, the modifications and mixtures are a result of the still primitive state of Javanese society. Neither the Hindu laws nor those from Islam could have been rigidly adopted in Java, because:

“... laws framed for a populous country, in which the odious institution of the castes was rigidly established, or for the shepherds of the arid and sterile plains of Arabia, could not be transferred, *without modification*, to the simple, rude, and scanty population of the verdant and luxuriant islands of the equator.” (Crawford 1820, Vol. 3: 76; italics mine)

Thirdly, the modifications are explained as a result of the way Islam gained stronghold in Java by, i.e. grafting itself on the ancient Hindu institutions:

“In most of the Mahomedan institutions of the Javanese, we discover marks of Hinduism. *The institutions of the latter have in reality been rather modified and built upon than destroyed*, and in viewing them, we cannot withhold the tribute of our applause to the discreet and artful conduct of the first Mahomedan teachers, whose temperate zeal is always marked by a politic and wise forbearance.” (Crawford 1820, Vol. 2: 266; italics mine)

For example, Javanese priests, although they are Muslim, resemble more the Hindu priests:

“The present priests of Java are the *successors in office, and almost in duty, to the priest and astrologer of the Hindu village* (...) [and] are a peaceful, contented, and respectable portion of the Javanese peasantry, living in terms of perfect equality with the ordinary cultivators.” (ibid.: 266; italics mine)

More evidence is found in the Javanese religious festivals: next to the two indubitably Islamic festivals of “*Id ul Fetre*” and “*Id ul Kurban*”, the Javanese keep two more. One is a relic of their “ancient superstitions” and is organised in honour of their ancestors. Another, “*Rabbi ul awal*”, commemorates the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, but is in all probability instituted to replace the Hindu festivals called “*Galungan*” and “*Kuningan*”. Crawford regards this as “a discreet concession made to the Javanese by the first Mahomedan missionaries” (ibid.: 262). Although he evaluates such a concession positively, it raises doubts to the truly Islamic character of these festivals, since “Every part of the ceremony puts Mahomedan decorum at defiance” (ibid.: 263).

### 3.6. Conceptual context and structuring concepts

There is a conceptual context within which it made sense to describe Javanese religion in the above terms. I shall sketch it, based on the two interconnected themes it features.

Firstly, there is the theme of degeneration. As we saw, according to Raffles and Crawford, the history of Javanese religion was one of degeneration. After all, the Javanese had not adopted Hinduism in a pure and unscathed state, they had modified it. This was manifest in the temples, and in the temple images and inscriptions found all over Java. There were, however, also indications that at some point the situation was remedied by a kind of reformation:

“From all this it will perhaps be fair to infer, that the Hinduism of Java was the worship of Siwa and Durga of the Linga and Yoni united to Buddhism; and I think we may go the length of concluding, that it was a *reformation* of the bloody and indecent worship of Siwa, brought about by sages or philosophers, by

persons, in short, of more kindly affections than the rest of their countrymen, and perhaps to keep pace with some start in civilization in the country where it had its origin.“ (ibid.: 218-19; italics mine)

To Crawfurd the Hinduism on Java was an instance of the Hinduism as reformed by Buddha (ibid.: 222). The “Hindu sect of Siwa” was considered a corruption or degeneration of a pure and genuine Hinduism. The “Hindu sect of Budha” was a reaction against and reformation of this degeneration. Crawfurd, thus, thinks of Buddhism as a reformation of Hinduism, very much similar to the way Protestantism was a reformation of Catholicism. Almond discusses how this idea of reformation, and the concomitant image of Buddha as the Luther of Hinduism, became a constitutive element in the Victorian conceptualisation of Buddhism (Almond 1988: 73 ff.). Crawfurd was therefore clearly at the forefront of orientalist research with these descriptions of Hinduism and Buddhism in Java. The theme of degeneration and reformation shows how, to the West, Java’s religious history was modelled after the European religious history. As we will see, besides its religious history, Javanese religion itself was also made sense of by turning it into a variant of a European model.

The second theme is that of an evolutionary ladder on which different cultures occupy different rungs. This theme is related to the former. After all, according to these descriptions, the reason for modifying Hinduism and Islam is that the Javanese lack the mental capabilities to truly understand these religions. Since their society is still very primitive, the story goes, the Javanese are not able to handle abstract ideas. They were not evolved enough “to relish the laborious subtleties, and the troublesome ceremonies of the Hindu religion and ritual“ (Crawfurd 1820, Vol. 2.: 231-32). They are only capable of personifying objects of nature instead. As a result of this “rude state of society”:

“...the common objects of nature were personified, and the woods, the waters, and the air, were peopled with deities, the objects of fear, or adoration, or both, with the Javanese. To this day, their belief in these local deities is hardly diminished, after the admission of the superstitions of two foreign religions [viz. Hinduism and Islam], such is the measure of their credulity.” (ibid.: 230)



Each different stage of civilisational evolution can be linked to particular religions. The lowest rung on the evolutionary ladder is occupied by those people who adhere to animism and ancestor worship. Their minds are not very evolved and they can only manage to anthropomorphise elements of nature or seek help from deceased relatives. One rung higher up is occupied by polytheists, such as the Hindus, who are capable of some abstract thought. They associate different qualities with different gods. The highest rung is that of the monotheists, whose conception of one all-powerful god is supposedly superior to all the rest.

Some comments with regard to this framework. Firstly, this evolutionary scheme has dominated social sciences and religious studies for a long time, and perhaps to some extent still does. When Crawfurd calls the Javanese “semibarbarians” we should not just dismiss this as “fiercely judgemental” (see Ricklefs 2007: 10-11). After all, within this evolutionary scheme it made perfect sense to speak of the Javanese as on a lower level of civilisation than the Europeans (but higher than e.g. the inhabitants of Borneo) and of their religion as a modified and degenerate one (cf. Crawfurd 1820 Vol. 2: 275-80; 1861a). This is not so much a question of being judgemental, but rather one of false scientific pretences. Secondly, there is a continuity linking this orientalist conceptual framework with those of the early travellers. To the latter, as we saw, the world was still very much a Biblical world, governed by an omnipotent God who had instilled religion in each man and nation. Post-enlightenment scholars, such as Raffles and Crawfurd, treated man as endowed with a natural ability or inclination to religion. That is, instead of appealing to a supernatural account for the origin of religion (i.e. God), an appeal is made to a natural cause. Often cited natural causes are man’s innate need for explanations (Why do we live? What is the meaning of life? etc.), man’s innate fear of the unknown (The existence of God or gods reduces fear), or a need to order chaotic experience into an ordered whole (see Balagangadhara 1994: 153-87). This stance is especially apparent in Crawfurd’s discussion of how different kinds of religion (more or less abstract) are suitable for different levels of civilisation:

“I need hardly add that the religious sentiment is peculiar to man. *It is, indeed, a necessary consequence of his power of contemplation, and accordingly we find it to exist in one form or another in every social condition; grovelling in the savage, sanguinary or intolerant in the barbarian,*

tolerant and enlightened only in the civilized man, and not, indeed, always even with him.” (Crawfurd 1861b: 355; italics mine)

For the purpose of this thesis, it suffices to point out that such ‘arguments’ have been proven riddled with logical fallacies and are actually quite unscientific. Therefore, it is safe to state that the early orientalist postulated the universality of religion just as the previous generation of observers had done.

As far as the structuring concepts are concerned, here too we find a clear continuity with the previous phase. As should be clear from the quotes drawn from Raffles and Crawfurd: the descriptions of Javanese religion are structured around the concepts of belief and practice. The first concept is expressed with terms such as ‘superstition’ and ‘doctrine’, the second with terms as ‘worship’ and ‘idolatry’. Only by speaking of Javanese religion in terms of the doctrines or beliefs, is it possible to speak of modifications, mixing, and degeneration. After all, the reason the Javanese modify Islam and mix it with other religions, is because they do not understand the Islamic doctrines in the first place. And only if there is a pure doctrine, can one also speak of degeneration.

Summarising, even though in the orientalist accounts the religion of the Javanese has become a separate topic of interest, and a lot of detail has been added to the descriptions of it, both the conceptual (or theoretical) framework and the structuring concepts have remained virtually the same. The only change of relevance is the substitution, or identification if you will, of ‘Heathenism’ with ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Buddhism’.

### 3.7. The legacy of Raffles and Crawfurd: orientalist descriptions of Javanese religion

The descriptions of religion in Java achieved a certain standardisation after Raffles and Crawfurd, as their renditions of the Javanese religious condition were being constantly reproduced both in the handbooks for Dutch civil service as in popular travel accounts. These texts then do not only testify to the huge influence of Raffles and Crawfurd, they also demonstrate the existence of a loop between the education of European colonials (mostly though not only *in patria*) and their experiences in the field. Their education about Java and the Javanese and their preparation

for their task in colonial service relied on scholarly accounts such as those by Crawfurd and Raffles. These accounts provided the elements, the concepts with which the colonial civil servants could structure their experiences once in the field. Their experiences in the field then in turn reinforced what they had learned from their textbooks. Eventually, their own descriptions would often be turned into new textbooks, thus continuing the said loop.

A case in point is P. P. Roorda van Eysinga, who had been a civil servant in the Dutch Indies, and mostly in Java, from 1819 until 1830. His extensive knowledge of (amongst others) Malay, Arabic and Javanese and his many experiences in the field had made him an expert on virtually all things Javanese. In 1836 he became professor at the Royal Military Academy in Breda. The courses he taught included the languages, lands and peoples of the East Indies (*Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*) (Wap 1857). For this purpose he delivered, between 1841 and 1850, a voluminous handbook for his students -a typical orientalist encyclopaedic work. His rendering of religion in Java hinges on the same themes as Crawfurd's and Raffles':

“Although nowadays the Javanese call themselves Islamists, Hinduism has far from been erased with them. They regard the ancient moments with sacred respect, still make offerings in caves, on holy sites and grave-mounds, and hurry themselves to those theatrical performances that take their imagination back to the oldest centuries.” (Roorda van Eysinga 1850: 275)<sup>34</sup>

We find a similar example in Johannes Olivier, a teacher turned civil servant. In service of the Dutch Indies he was secretary, translator, head-teacher at a government school, and director of a publishing house during the first half of the 19th century. He was well-read and clearly familiar with the principal writings on Java, as he often refers to Crawfurd, Raffles and P.P. Roorda van Eysinga -the latter whom he was acquainted with. He was editor of the journal *De Oosterling* (The Easterner) which was dedicated to the dissipation of all knowledge concerning the Dutch

---

<sup>34</sup> My translation of: “Ofschoon de Javanen zich thans Islamiten noemen, is het Hindoeïsme bij hen op verre na nog niet uitgewischt. De Gedenkteekenen der oudheid beschouwen zij altijd met heiligen eerbied, offeren nog in grotten, op geheiligde plaatsen en graftepen, en ijlen met geestdrift naar die tooneelvertooningen, welke hunne verbeelding in de vroegste eeuwen terugvoeren.”

Indies (Heemskerk 1992: 159-160). His 1836 *Tafereelen en merkwaardigheden uit Oost-Indië* (Scenes and Curiosities from the East Indies) is a mixture of a travel account and a more scholarly introduction to Java. About the religion of the Javanese we find:

“Despite the fact that the Javanese (...) profess the Mohammedan teaching, it is with them still very much *mixed with Hindu concepts*, to the effect that they have taken over nothing of the Mohammedan intolerance.” (Olivier 1836: 91-92; italics mine)<sup>35</sup>

This sounds just like a quote from Raffles or Crawfurd. Another theme, that of the Javanese as a superficial Muslim, is featured in the second volume of the same book. The Javanese:

“... have only a *very superficial knowledge* of this teaching and most times content themselves with the observation of the *exterior* ceremonies and religious practices, like the circumcision, the ablutions, the yearly fast in the month Ramazan and other *exterior* customs. The concepts of the *Hindu religious doctrines are still so deeply rooted* with the Javanese that they are only half Mohamethan.” (Olivier 1838: 173-74; italics mine)<sup>36</sup>

The Javanese is thus Muslim only on the outside: his attachment to Islam is restricted to his behaviour. The Javanese mind, however, is still attached to Hinduism.

Between 1846 and 1857 Abraham Jacob van der Aa had compiled a 4 volume work on the Dutch possessions in the East Indies that enjoyed large popularity. Having never set foot on Javanese soil, all his information is drawn from sources such as: P.P. Roorda van Eysinga, W. von Humboldt, Raffles, Crawfurd and *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* (Journal

---

<sup>35</sup> My translation of: “Hoezeer de Javanen (...) de mahomedaansche leer belijden, is deze bij hen nog altijd met zeer vele hindoesche begrippen vermengd, zoo dat zij van de mahomedaansche onverdraagzaamheid hoegenaamd niets hebben overgenomen.”

<sup>36</sup> My translation of: “(Wanneer men zegt, dat de Javanen, met uitzondering der niet zeer talrijke bedowi, algemeen de leer van den gewaanden Profet van Mekka hebben aangenomen, moet men daarbij voegen,) dat zij van deze leer slechts eene zeer oppervlakkige kennis hebben, en zich meestal vergenoegen met de waarneming der uiterlijke plegtigheden en godsdienstoefeningen, zoo als de besnijdenis, de abluïen, de jaarlijksche vaste in de maand Ramazan, en andere uiterlijke gebruiken. De begrippen van de Hindoesche leerstellingen zijn nog altijd bij de Javanen zoo diep geworteld, dat zij slechts ten halve Mahomedanen zijn:”

of the East Indies). And indeed his descriptions of Javanese religion have a familiar ring:

“Professing the faith of Mohammed has not elevated them above the superstitious prejudices and prescriptions of another religion; therefore they follow the aberrations of two religious systems.”  
(Van der Aa 1849: 48)<sup>37</sup>

A last example is that of Pfyffer zu Neueck, a Swiss officer enlisted in the Dutch Military. His *Scbetsen van het eiland Java...* (Sketches of the Island of Java...) enjoyed great popularity in its day. Originally published in German in 1829, it went through a number of reprints and was translated into French and Dutch. It reads as an introduction to Java as it describes the geographical setting of Java, its natural history, flora, fauna, and its population. Regarding the religion of the Javanese, Pfyffer zu Neueck also points out that the Javanese are only concerned with the practice of Islam as something exterior.

“The common people, that happily accept anything that pleases them as to the *exterior*, but that does not care about the essential value or about the purpose of an institution; that considers all the exterior acts and loses sight of or neglects the main point; that people are under the delusion that they comport themselves completely to the laws of Mohammed when they fast from six in the morning to six in the evening.” (Pfyffer zu Neueck 1838: 87; italics mine)<sup>38</sup>

Pfyffer zu Neueck relates this superficiality to the ancient religion of the Javanese:

“The Javanese (...) embrace Islam, but this does not prevent one from noticing a large number of customs that testify of a much greater antiquity and which are, despite the zeal of the Arab

---

<sup>37</sup> My translation of: “Het belijden van de leer van Mohammed heeft hun niet verheven boven bijgeloovige vooroordeelen en voorschriften van eene andere godsdienst; de dwalingen van twee godsdienstige stelsels worden alzoo door hen nageleefd.”

<sup>38</sup> My translation of: “Het gemeene volk, hetwelk zoo gaarne alles aanneemt, wat uiterlijk hetzelfde treft, maar zich weinig laat gelegen zijn aan de wezenlijke Waarde of aan het doel eener instelling; hetwelk al de uiterlijke bedrijven in acht neemt, en de hoofdzaak uit het oog verliest of verwaarloost; dat volk waant, zich volkomen naar de wetten van Mohammed te gedragen, als het van zes ure des morgens tot zes ure des avonds vast.”

priests, maintained and conscientiously handed down from generation to generation. One finds traces of the original worship everywhere.” (ibid.: 89-90)<sup>39</sup>

Pfyffer zu Neueck, who seems to have been quite a religious person, actually has a very positive idea of the Javanese. His text is larded with small reflections on Javanese kindness and hospitality which he relates to the way the old religion still filters through. In his opinion the religion of Buddha (that is how he calls the ancient religion) stood on a morally higher level than Islam. Apparently, he also inscribed into the theme of degeneration (ibid.: 84-85). Still, according to Pfyffer zu Neueck, Divine Providence looks after all human beings, whether they pray to it as God or as Allah (ibid. 237). His biggest desire, therefore, was that the Javanese too would see the Light and that both Mohammedan and Christian would join as one family. This sentiment of universal conciliation (*alverzoening*) is shared with the Modern strand of the Protestant missionaries who are the central topic of our next chapter.

### 3.8. Conclusion

I have argued in the course of this chapter, that Raffles’ and Crawfurd’s renditions of Javanese religion form a link in a longer chain of descriptions. On the one hand, they use and reproduce material provided by other researchers and authors. This is very obvious in Raffles’ *History*, which is very much an amalgam of snippets from various sources. For example, although he identifies Hinduism as the previous religion of the Javanese when speaking of the moment of conversion, he does not integrate this insight into the rest of his text, but continues to speak of “ancient institutions”. Moreover, both Crawfurd and Raffles draw from the same conceptual reservoir as their predecessors. They make identical presuppositions -viz. universality of religion; religious practices express religious beliefs- and remain within an identical, though less obviously theological, conceptual framework. In the course of this dissertation we

---

<sup>39</sup> My translation of: “De Javanen (...) omhelzen het Islamismus, doch dit belet niet, dat men bij hen eene menigte gebruiken opmerkt, die van eene veel hoogere oudheid getuigen, en die, ten spijt van den dweeppzieken ijver der Arabische priesters, onderhouden en getrouwelijk van geslacht tot geslacht overgeleverd worden. Allerwege vindt men de sporen der oorspronkelijke Godsvereering..”

will come to identify this conceptual reservoir as a Western conceptual reservoir. Furthermore, they recount the same 'familiar themes', only adding detail and supplying explanations and arguments. The only real novelty Crawford and Raffles contribute to the existing conceptualisation is the identification of at least one of these previous religions as Hinduism. However, the structure of the concept remains the same: Javanese religion is a mixture of Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. On the other hand, both scholars have been hugely influential. Although their accounts lack sound theorising, they are nonetheless taken for truthful renditions of Javanese reality. A case in point are the swooping theoretical conjectures in the work of Crawford that have over the years become the object of rightful criticism. Still, his description of Islam in Java carried great authority and its impact is felt to this day.

Being in the vanguard of Javanese orientalism, Raffles and Crawford were perhaps more encyclopaedists than they were scholars developing ground-breaking theories. Their inventories and classifications are but one step in the continuing consolidation of the conceptualisation of Javanese religion. This is evidenced in how almost immediately after Raffles and Crawford virtually everybody starts speaking about the Hindu and Buddhist past of Java. A visit to a temple ruin results in the description of the Hindu and Buddhist statues. People start to see traces of Hindu doctrines in what a couple of decades ago was merely dubbed superstition. Their descriptions were copied into the numerous textbooks that served as a basis for the education of the Dutch military and civil servants to be dispatched to the Netherlands Indies. By consequence, these works laid out the lines along which they were able to make sense of their own experiences in Java. As we saw, the descriptions of subsequent scholars and amateurs continually echo the structuring concepts as fixed by Crawford and Raffles.

As I have repeatedly pointed out in the course of this chapter, the way the orientalists made sense of Javanese religion is not a function of the colonial power structure. After all, there is no direct causal relationship between this power structure and the way Javanese religion was misrepresented. Neither the rise to dominance and hegemony of the VOC nor that of the Netherlands Indies can explain that Javanese religion is represented specifically as a mix of Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, nor as superficial, as syncretist, etc. The focus on the structuring

concepts and conceptual structure, however, seems to indicate that the origin of the misrepresentation actually lies in the conceptual reservoir of those who describe Javanese religion. In the following chapters we will further explore this suggestion, as we look for an alternative explanation.

Raffles and Crawford's efforts were part of the Western quest for the Javanese codes of law, Java's history, poetry, and religious literature. As we saw, the first generation of orientalists mostly provided dictionaries, grammars and the appropriate categories to divide and analyse Javanese 'literature'. With this they laid the groundwork for the 'textual foundation' of Javanese religion. We will touch upon the impact of the philological approach on the conceptualisation of religion in Java later on. Before that, we first have to devote our attention to the achievements of the men in the field, Java's first ethnographers: the Protestant missionaries.





