

Peter G. Riddell's Contribution to Malay-Indonesian Islamic Studies

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While the world's theology and religious studies and history departments turned their attention to the Middle East and Central Asia during the cold war and after the horrendous 9/11 incident, there were very few scholars with a universal perspective seeing Islam as a viable phenomenon moving, living and growing everywhere and shifting its shape according to new contexts. Professor Peter Gregory Riddell is one of those scholars whose studies have affected various disciplines.¹ He linked the Middle East to the Far East and Southeast Asia through both land and ocean routes. For him, reading Islam as a “phenomenon”, “religion”, “culture” and “perspective” should not be seen only through a select number of materials written in Arabic. He was instrumental in establishing this fact: that public and scholarly knowledge about the world of Islam without considering the Malay-Indonesian World is lame—a region embracing the highest number of Muslims on earth should have been viewed more closely. This became possible through the works of Peter and his colleagues whose aim was to bring the inestimable history of the Malay-Indonesian World from the margins to the center. There have been American, European and Malay-Indonesian scholars of Southeast Asia, but Peter was instrumental in bringing Malay Islamic theology and theological evidence under the canopy of Islamic Studies while working in Indonesia, the United Kingdom and Australia and developing his research at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and L'École Pratique des Hautes Études/Sorbonne (Paris).

Of course, his works should be seen along with those of his PhD supervisor, Professor Anthony Johns, both of them coming from Australia and shedding new light on the history of Islam. These two scholars made Australia the main hub for the global transregional study of Islam; the “Australian School of Islamic Studies” flourished through the works of Peter. This would not have been an easy task when a large number of scholars viewed Islam as the sole product of the Arabian Peninsula (and Persia) without the contribution of for-

1 A number of scholars having a universal perspective of Islam and Islamic studies are among our contributors in this volume, too.

eigners from the Far East. For a long time, no one had given or paid particular attention to the connection between Islam in the Malay Archipelago and the Middle East. There are still very few departments dedicated to Islam in the Malay-Indonesian World. This is not to mention what the situation could have been in the 1980s when Peter studied one of the first known Malay commentaries on the Qurʾān, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by ‘Abd al-Raʿūf al-Sīngkilī (d. c. 1693) from the late 17th century. The role played by ‘Abd al-Raʿūf can be likened to that of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and his *tafsīr* in the Arabic Zone with its translation in the Persianate region. ‘Abd al-Raʿūf is one of the main symbols of Malay-Indonesian Muslim history and cultural heritage. He is known as the first figure commenting on and translating the whole Qurʾān into the Malay language. He is as significant as Ferdowsī (d. 1020 or 1025 CE) and Saʿdī (d. c. 1291 CE) for Persian speaking communities, all of whom saved and/or reformed the language, literature and moral codes of their community. In the same way, more accurate information about ‘Abd al-Raʿūf could affect Malay culture. Peter went through every single page of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* (printed editions and manuscript copies) and challenged the whole former literature in the Arab World, Ottoman Empire and European circles. According to the latter group, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* was the direct translation of al-Bayḍāwī’s commentary on the Qurʾān. Egyptian and Turkish printing houses, perhaps consulting with Malay residents of Cairo, also reprinted it as the Jawi translation of al-Bayḍāwī’s *tafsīr*. In this context, Peter emerged as a corrective; he demonstrated that the aforementioned commentary and important symbol of Malay Islamic literature was actually not what Malays, Europeans, Ottomans, orientalist and Egyptian printing houses had been assuming for centuries. Peter showed that it was *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, another popular commentary, which had chiefly been used by ‘Abd al-Raʿūf. Peter also reformed global Islamic knowledge and stated that it was actually commentary of *al-Jalālayn* which was widely used throughout Central, South and Southeast Asia connecting Muslims from the Middle East to the Malay-Indonesian World.

To correct the literature of a lesser examined field, one should be equipped with many forms of skill and knowledge. Peter was trained as a philologist, linguist, historian, theologian, and was also quite familiar with anthropological, ethnographic, psychological and sociological methods and approaches. No wonder that he was able to reform and redirect the literature. He is one of the few scholars of Islam whose philological expertise covers Aramaic, Indo-European, and Austronesian languages. It is no easy feat to have competence in working with classical and modern Arabic, Hebrew and Malay-Indonesian languages, and also deliver lectures about ancient Malay-Indonesian literature in English, French and Indonesian, among others.

Peter's area of study was not limited to commentaries on the Qur'ān. Over the last decades, he elevated the area of Qur'ānic codices, manuscript studies, theological discourse and Muslim-Christian studies. Peter had great familiarity with Arabian and Persian culture and interacted with different communities in the Middle East and Africa for several years. But important to say, Peter knows his mother tongue quite well ... he is a master of English phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Historians and philosophers have now begun to realize that one should first know one's own language well before analyzing the other's language, culture and history.² This may explain why his textual and linguistic analyses of different languages are as accurate as his English studies.

Peter promoted a particular perspective in studying Islam; for him an inclusive perspective should be practiced throughout the world. To complete his studies, Peter used various forms of language and materials from different cultures, communities and periods. Through reading his long list of publications, one would realize that for Peter the decolonization of Islamic Studies is plausible only if one re-reads the history of religion everywhere and along with each other. Peter has demonstrated that Islam in Malaysia, Islam in Indonesia or in Southern Thailand is as significant as Islam in Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Turkistan, Bengal, Nigeria, South Africa and South America. Readers of his works are offered a transparent and realistic picture of different religious communities over the course of history.

Walking in university and college corridors in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia one may hear the name of Professor Peter G. Riddell and one of his magnificent books *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* from 2001. This book came out during a chaotic period. An army of scholars, scientists and journalists had invested a lot of time and energy to redefine "Islam" as an ideology, doctrine, politics, science, etc. But they were too busy with the "Islam of the Middle East", overlooking how Middle Easterners and Malay-Indonesians used to live, work and study with each other for many centuries, shaping each other's culture and Islam. Peter, here, emerged as a pioneer emphasizing an integrated Islamic system of life, being influenced by both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The significance of his book was to the extent that it has been cited widely in materials in Arabic, Malay, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and is still used as a textbook in the European context. It is one of the most reliable works about the history of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Peter's works also show his competence in Biblical, post-Biblical, Qur'ānic and post-Qur'ānic literature. While speaking to him, it came to our attention

2 Such concerns are also evident in recent projects by the Iranian philosopher, Javād Ṭabāṭabā'ī and his critique of "the University".

that he knows the Qurʾān and its disciplines (viz., *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*) better than some Muslims—reciting verses by heart with accurate pronunciation of Arabic words, and analyzing their structure and meaning—which gives you an impression that he is an Arabist, too. This is also evident in one of his recent books, *Malay Court Religion, Culture and Language: Interpreting the Qurʾān in 17th century Aceh* (Brill 2017). In this book, Peter provides one of the first ever deep analyses of Qurʾānic recitation systems, which is rarely done in scholarly and Islamic discourse. This book also proved that Malays had begun translating and interpreting the Qurʾān before ʿAbd al-Raʿūf, at the turn of the 17th century. In so doing, he focused on a rare manuscript (Camb. Ms. or. li.6.45) preserved in the Cambridge University Library which belonged to the Dutch Professor and Arabist, Thomas Erpenius (d. 1624). The manuscript is a Malay commentary on Chapter 18 of the Qurʾān, *Sūrat al-Kahf*, originally related to a Biblical story dedicated to the People of the Cave. His chapter, *Reading the Qurʾān Chronologically: An Aid to Discourse Coherence and Thematic Development* on the history and chronology of the Qurʾān, dedicated to his colleague and co-editor, the late Andrew Rippin (d. 2016), is a purely historical analysis of Qurʾānic structure and formation. It deals with Peter's critical reading of the German philologist Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930) and various Muslim scholars about the chronology of Qurʾānic chapters.

Through the academic journey and career of Peter, Islam like other religions and belief systems is manifested as a phenomenon that has evolved throughout history, over centuries, and changes its form and format contextually and absorbs alien culture while it keeps moving and growing regardless of its geographical region. For Peter, Islam and Islamic studies are transregional and geographically interconnected from West to East and vice versa.

Peter spent a substantial amount of time living outside Australia with over 17 years living in Asia, Middle East and Europe. He was also the initiator and founder of important projects with a global reputation. For example, he was founding director of the Centre for Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Relations, London School of Theology (1996–2007), and founding director of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Other Faiths, Melbourne School of Theology (2008–2014). He also established the Indonesian language program in the first year of operation of Phillip College, Australia in 1976, the Iran/Australia postgraduate student exchange program in 1990, and designed the West Bank/Australian Women and Children Rehabilitation and Development Project, 1994–1995, among many others.

His impact as a postgraduate supervisor should be highlighted: significant work with many students who themselves have become prominent in the field (significant academics in their own right in Australia, UK, USA, Indonesia). With

more than twenty-five PhD students and twenty-five major research masters, Peter has enriched the academic context with well-grounded scholars, thinkers and critics.

Beyond all these professional activities, Peter is a lovely, friendly, kind, supportive, responsive, prompt and gentle mentor, colleague, co-author and co-editor, animal lover and musician ... he plays guitar as beautifully as he writes articles and books. With his excellent sense of humor, you would always enjoy speaking to him and exchanging laughs. For many of us, he is one of the best friends, best advisors and colleagues with whom we can always share our personal and academic stories—he is always available nicely, patiently and supportively.

We, as editors of this Festschrift, would like to specially thank our senior and junior colleagues and friends who accepted the invitation to come on board and write chapters in honor of Professor Peter G. Riddell, and celebrate his important contribution to the field. We know how busy all have been during the pandemic, dealing with various sorts of uncertainties, life entanglements, homesickness, family issues, health challenges, etc. This volume would not have been possible without their kind and prompt support and attention, for which we are truly grateful.

We hope that Peter, his supportive wife Anna, and their children, Rachel and James, relatives and friends enjoy reading this work written in homage to his great achievements and career.

1 Book Organization

This volume contains three parts with twelve chapters by junior and senior scholars who are well familiar with the significance of Peter's contribution to the field. **Part 1** deals with “manuscripts and inscriptions”, as the main elements shaping Peter's studies and on which Peter's research has had a lasting impact. This part begins with a chapter by Annabel T. Gallop about all known Qur'an manuscripts from Southeast Asia held in British collections, which is compatible with Peter's contribution to Malay-Indonesian Islamic studies. Chapter Two by A.C.S. Peacock addresses Arabic Texts in Buton (Southeast Sulawesi) in the light of the La Ode Zaenu Manuscript Collection, through which unknown works with valuable features are brought to light. The Third chapter is the result of a team work project based on the Maritime Asia Heritage Survey agenda led by R. Michael Feener. Majid Daneshgar, Gregorius Dwi Kuswanta, Masykur Syafruddin and Feener, himself, have (re-)examined a rare Persian inscription in Bireuen, Aceh from the 15th century, whose existence invites scholars

to revise the literature about Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian World. **Part 2** covers “Qur’ānic commentaries, translations and theological concepts”, a theme frequently examined by Peter over the last decades. It begins with chapter Four by Johanna Pink who examines the popularity of a pre-modern commentary, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* in Indonesia and the way it is offered to the market by publishers and translators. She also looks at various versions of *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* produced in Indonesia and how they may have contributed to the Indonesian religious context. Chapter Five deals with reading and studying the Qur’ān in Aceh, where the oldest known Qur’ān commentaries were also produced. In this chapter, Edwin P. Wieringa goes through a versified translation of the Qur’ān in the regional Acehnese language by the religious scholar and poet Teungku Haji Mahjiddin Jusuf (1918–1994). Chapter Six authored by Majid Daneshgar is about a rare and old manuscript of *tajwīd* and *tafsīr* kept in the Marburg University Library, Germany. Through this chapter, the formation of Islamic sciences in the Malay-Indonesian world is discussed. Han Hsien Liew writes Chapter Seven, which is about the concept of anthropomorphism in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili’s (d. 1693) and his treatment of Qur’ānic verses related to the bodily attributes of God. This part ends with chapter Eight by Farouk Yahya’s transregional analysis of the magical uses of the Seven Sleepers in Southeast Asia. This chapter aims to shed light on the role played by sacred figures and texts in the occult practices of the region. Our **Part 3** is about the “critical reading of culture and identity”, important questions that Peter often raised in his lectures and works. It begins with chapter Nine by Mulaika Hijjas who critically examines “recent framings of Jawi as inherently Islamic”. Chapter Ten is authored by Khairudin Aljunied who reviews the relationship between reason and rationality in Southeast Asia in the light of a modern discourse put forward by Harun Nasution (1919–1998). Chapter Eleven by Michael Laffan deals with Raden Mas Kareta and the intersections of VOC Chamber of Enkhuizen and Muslim networks crisscrossing the Indian Ocean. Chapter Twelve by Julian Millie on “Narrative Paratheatrical” examines Islamic ritual in which participants give representation to elements from narratives in embodied performances. The author’s analysis reveals the difficult position of paratheatrical embodiments, rendered inaccessible by the division of the spheres of contemporary public life.

On Citation Style:

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