

READING 2

Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton, *In the Balance: Themes in Global History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), selections from chapter 13, "Traditions and their Transformations."

Abstract: This essay explores the relationship between material conditions and ideas. It also examines the relationship between economic, social, and political changes and transformations in religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions. Using the specific example of the Islamic world in the post-1500 period, it looks at how ideas were transformed in response to changing material circumstances, and how such new ideas reconstructed the world. In particular, it explores the notion of cultural rebirth, or the revival of past tradition as a means of reinterpreting and reconstructing the present.

Traditions and Their Transformations in the Islamic World

The cohesion of the Islamic world in 1500 was reflected in the claim of the Egyptian scholar Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1505) that his works had reached not only North Africa beyond Egypt but also West Asia and India. Islamic institutions of learning, *madrasas* (colleges of Islamic law) flourished in al-Suyuti's Egypt, especially in Cairo, but also in more distant Islamic centers such as Timbuktu. Like European universities, which taught Christian theology and canon (Church) law, *madrasas* were centers for the teaching of Islamic law and theology.

Islam in West Africa

The Muslim traveler known as Leo Africanus observed about 1510 that Timbuktu on the Niger River was more than an African commercial center. From its origins as an oasis market town for trans-Saharan trade at the beginning of the twelfth century, from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries Timbuktu was a center for the transmission of Islam in West Africa and had its own *madrasa*. Leo Africanus wrote that "here are great stores of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the king's costs and charges." Furthermore, he described a center of learning and scholarship, where "hither are brought diverse manuscripts or written books out of Barbary, which are sold for more money than other merchandise." The book trade's high value reflected the importance placed on knowledge. The libraries of Timbuktu contained practically the whole of Arabic literature. A list of required readings for students in higher studies at Timbuktu in the second half of the sixteenth century includes twenty-five titles, all of them classics in Islamic studies.

Islam flourished in West Africa, though indigenous religious beliefs continued to dominate the lives of people outside the scholarly and commercial elites of urban centers such as Timbuktu. Syncretism characterized the early spread of Islam in West Africa. Whether in the Sudanic states of West Africa such as Songhay, the royal palaces of Central African states, or the East African cities, by the sixteenth century an urban elite culture invariably included scholars and writers, geographers, and mathematicians, all representative of the amalgam of Islamic or Christian learning alongside indigenous beliefs.

In Muslim West Africa, the written word was considered the word of God and as such provided power and protection. The important Sudanic book by Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Fulani al-Kashinawi, *A Treatise on the Magical Use of the Letters of the Alphabet*, describes the use of amulets containing small pieces of paper on which were written portions of the Qur'an. But the word was also a magical charm that conferred power to nonbelievers; Arabic script or an imitation thereof appeared on inscribed brass vessels and painted cloth used by non-Islamic peoples at great distances from the faith's strongholds. At times the magical properties and protective power believed by some to be conferred by Islam conflicted with the ideas of the *ulama*, the Islamic clergy. For example, the Muslim ruler of Songhay, Sunni Ali (1464/5–1492) persecuted the *ulama* of Timbuktu for criticizing his claim that he could turn himself into a vulture and make his armies invisible.

Islamic *Jihads* in Africa

Beginning in the sixteenth century, a wave of *jihads* (holy wars) swept over parts of West and West-Central Africa. Africans who studied in Mecca and Medina during their *hajj* (pilgrimage) absorbed ideas about *jihads* and conversion to Islam. When they returned to Africa, they took these ideas with them and helped to transform local political and social protests into Islamic reform movements. The *jihads* in the Senegambian region that established the Muslim-dominated state of Bundu in the 1690s is one example. Agricultural reforms accompanied the replacement of traditional elite by Muslim rulers. In contrast, the eighteenth-century victories at Fuuta Jaalo, south of the Gambia, installed Muslim rulers but did little else than convert their slaves to Islam. Reform movements continued into the nineteenth century and became increasingly representative of civil unrest in the wake of the Atlantic era.

Christianity and Islam Meet in Africa: Ethiopia

Rumors of the presence of a Christian stronghold in North Africa had long inspired European voyagers to seek the fabled "Kingdom of Prester John" as a possible ally in their wars with Ottoman Muslims. Portuguese merchants finally reached the long-sought goal with their sixteenth-century capture of

East African coastal trading towns that eventually led them north to the highlands of Ethiopia, where Christianity had thrived as a state religion since the fifth century.

The Islamic State of Ahmad Gran

However, by the time the Europeans arrived in Ethiopia it had already fallen under Muslim control. Beginning in 1531, through a powerful and successful *jihād*, an Islamic religious reformer, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim or Ahmad Gran (1506–1543), had consolidated territory across the Ethiopian plateau with the aid of Ottoman weaponry. The Portuguese fleet, commanded by Vasco da Gama's grandson and carrying several hundred Portuguese soldiers, encountered fleeing Christians, joined the battle, and helped turn the tide against Ahmad Gran, who was killed in battle in 1543. For almost a century afterward, the Portuguese maintained a presence in Ethiopia, building an impressive stone castle at Gondar and dispatching Jesuits to Ethiopia. The Jesuits were eventually expelled in 1634, and Omani Arabs in Upper Egypt captured Nubia and entrenched themselves in the Sudan until the late eighteenth century.

Islamic Empires and the Transformation of Tradition

At the same time that Portuguese merchants and missionaries were expanding into Africa, three powerful Islamic empires dominated a zone stretching from North Africa across West to South Asia. Though Islamic civilization flourished under all three, cultural and ideological differences distinguished the transmission of Islamic tradition under the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals and brought about transformations in that tradition. Cultural syncretism characterized both the Mughal Empire, including Persian and Hindi language and literature, along with Islam and Hinduism, and the Ottoman Empire, combining the Arabic and Persian languages, literatures, and peoples with Turkish peoples, language, and literature into an Islamic state. Under the Safavids, however, tensions among different divisions of Islam resulted in religious persecution, much as the hostilities between Catholics and Protestants drove conflicts in Europe during the Reformation and its aftermath.

The Ottoman Empire

During the reign of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), the expansion of Ottoman power reached its peak, with conquests in North Africa and the Balkans. Although initially the role of sultan was identified as both a religious and a political authority, by the time of Suleyman, the sultan had become a secular ruler and the *ulama*, a state bureaucracy. Suleyman's predecessor, Mehmet the Conqueror (r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481), established eight *madrasas* to train religious scholars as teachers, judges, and

scribes; these then became the civil officials of the empire and staffed the state bureaucracy.

Ottoman writers and thinkers were also trained in these institutions. They included the encyclopedist Taskoprulu Zade Ahmet Husamuddin Effendi (d. 1553), who wrote biographies of *ulama*, scientists, mathematicians, and Sufis (Islamic mystics), along with compendia of religious and secular sciences. But by the late sixteenth century, the influence of religious authorities discouraged interest in the practical sciences. In 1580, for example, because of disapproval voiced by the chief Ottoman religious official, the Shaykh al-Islam, construction was halted on a new observatory in Istanbul modeled on that of Ulugh Beg in fifteenth-century Samarkand, and the partially finished building was torn down.

Nearly all the Arabic-speaking lands were part of the Ottoman Empire, which also included Anatolia and southeastern Europe. Turkish, however, was the language of the ruling family and the military and administrative elite, somewhat like Persian at the Mughal court. Western Turkish literature took root and expanded with the Ottomans in the fifteenth century, mainly after the capture of Constantinople and the transformation of that city into the great Turkish imperial capital, Istanbul ("Islam abounds"). Baqi (d. 1600) was one of a number of outstanding poets to appear at the Ottoman court. A great lyric poet, he flourished during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent, and his literary masterpiece was an elegy written upon Suleyman's death. His poems vividly reflect the happy life of the upper classes in sixteenth-century Istanbul, the colorful landscape and the picturesque scenes of the pleasure resorts in and about the capital. Like all Turkish court poets, he also wrote about the transitory nature of the world, advising that one should love, drink, and be merry, for all the beauties of life were doomed to perish.

Ottoman writers produced a vast number of prose works, though most were devoted to religion, history, and government correspondence. Two works that deserve special attention because they were outside these categories of prose were *Dede Korkut* ("Grandfather Korkut") and Evliya Chelebi's *Seyahatname* ("Book of Travels"). *Dede Korkut* was a collection of twelve tales taken from oral literature and written down in the fifteenth century.

Grandfather Korkut, the minstrel who recites the tales, strongly resembles a pagan shaman. These stories were based on the reminiscences of the nomadic Turks concerning their life in their original home in Central Asia. They composed much of it as they migrated across West Asia. *Dede Korkut* is thus one of the oldest surviving examples of Turkish literature. The text that we possess today relates the life of the Turkish lineage groups in Anatolia, the deeds of their leaders, and their battles among themselves and against the Georgians and Greeks living along the Black Sea. It is now considered the national epic of Turkey.

Evliya Chelebi (1611–ca. 1680) came from a completely different world, the Ottoman court and the cosmopolitan city of Istanbul. After receiving a good traditional Ottoman education, he was smitten by wanderlust and embarked upon an amazing life of travel. For forty years he roamed the Ottoman Empire in West Asia, Europe, and Africa, officially and unofficially, on military campaigns, business, diplomatic, and financial missions. This peripatetic life provided the basis of his renowned ten-part *Book of Travels*. As a result of an insatiable curiosity, Evliya was able to give a remarkably comprehensive description of every place he visited, often city by city, from Hungary to the Caucasus and from the Crimea to Ethiopia. His work is packed with extensive material on religious, economic, political and social history, anthropology, folklore, and linguistics. Mixing fact, fiction, and humor, it is a monumental compilation that is a veritable treasure of information on seventeenth-century West Asia and neighboring regions.

The Safavid Empire

The Ottoman state was suspicious of the most radical forms of Sufism, devotional sects of Islamic mystics, and suppressed them, while sanctioning more acceptable, moderate forms of sufism. Sufism was also suspect to the Ottomans because of its association with its political and religious rivals, the Safavids (1501–1722), who traced their beginnings as leaders of a small Sufi sect in Iran under the Mongols. By the fifteenth century, however, the Safavids were becoming increasingly attracted to Shi'ite beliefs, the Islamic tradition that had originated among followers of the prophet Ali as the legitimate successor to Muhammad. The struggle between the Ottomans and the Persian Safavids over control of Anatolia and Iraq acquired religious overtones, as the Safavids were Shi'ites and the Ottomans became more Sunni (orthodox) as their empire expanded to include the main centers of Islamic urban culture.

Safavid *shaiks* (religious leaders) appealed to their followers with a combination of Sufi and Shi'ite ideology. By 1500, the Safavids had a strong military force, which, combined with the leadership of a charismatic figure, Shah Ismail I (r. 1501–1514), allowed them to capture the Iranian city of Tabriz, which they made their new capital, and to begin their dynasty. Under Shah Ismail, Shi'ism was imposed on the predominantly Sunni population of Iran. Sunnis were persecuted, along with Sufi orders that differed from that of the Safavids. Shi'ite shrines and other institutions were built under state patronage, and Shi'ite scholars were imported from Syria and Iraq. The best Sunni scholars and literary figures, including Sufi poets, moved to Mughal India, where the court language was Persian and the ideology Sunni.

The Ottomans defeated Shah Ismail in 1514 and weakened the Safavids, but in the late sixteenth century Shah Abbas (r. 1587–1629) successfully revived

the Safavid state through mercantilist policies, such as support of the silk industry. Shah Abbas was also able to expand the Safavid territories. Isfahan was reconstructed in the seventeenth century as his new capital, and its beauty reflects the accomplishments of Shah Abbas. But his reign also witnessed the resurgence of the religious leadership of the Shi'ite *ulama*, who claimed that only an *imam*, a descendant of Ali, could understand the teachings of the Qur'an and be the legitimate leader of the Islamic community. By the early eighteenth century, they usurped the religious authority of the Safavid state and helped to bring about its collapse.

The Mughal Empire

A powerful and vibrant example of syncretism emerged in the encounters between Hinduism and Islam in India, where the imported faith of Islam collided with indigenous Hindu traditions, sometimes violently and sometimes as part of a dynamic relationship of cultural creativity. Mughal culture and religion in India joined Hindu and Muslim influences in a shifting balance of power that produced a rich material culture and led to equally complex syncretism in the world of ideas.

Babur (1483–1530), the founder of the Mughal (Turkish for “Mongol”) empire, was a descendant of the Turkish conqueror Timur on his father’s side, and the Mongol conqueror Chinggis Khan on his mother’s. Unlike his ancestors, however, Babur was known for his poetry in both Persian and Turkish as well as for his military exploits and, like the Ottoman scholar Evliya Chelebi, represents the ideal of the “Renaissance man,” one who is broadly skilled in many areas of knowledge and competence. His prose memoir, the *Baburnama* (“Book of Babur”), written in Persian, provides both a context for understanding his poetry and rich observations on Islamic culture and society in Central and Southwest Asia (Afghanistan) as well as Mughal India. Babur also composed versified works on Islamic law and the mystical Islamic beliefs and practices known as Sufism.

In 1556, Babur’s grandson Akbar (r. 1556–1605) took up his grandfather’s legacy and became a patron of Persian cultural influence at the Mughal court, though he married a Hindu woman and desired to bring about reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. During Akbar’s reign, Persian was made the official language of administration and law, but Akbar also encouraged Hindi literature, even naming a Hindi poet laureate. The first poet to hold this title was Raja Birbal (1528–1583), who helped popularize the northern vernacular now known as “Hindi” through poetry and through translations of Persian classics into Hindi. The most famous and popular of Hindi works in this era was a translation of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana into Hindi by Tulsi Das (1532–1623). In addition to Persian and Hindi, Akbar also patronized Urdu language and literature. *Urdu* is Turkish for “camp” and is applied to the

mixed language that developed from the blending of the invading Muslims' Persian and indigenous languages in India. Akbar himself was a Sufi, and in time Sufi poets began using Urdu as well as Persian as a major vehicle of expression. Sufis incorporated music, local shrines, and local legends into their worship.

Sufism and Sikhism

By Akbar's time, the second half of the sixteenth century, India was divided politically and spiritually into many religious and philosophical camps. Like Sufism in Islam, the devotional movement in Hinduism known as *bhakti* continued under the Mughals, whose rulers for the most part displayed tolerance of religious faiths. *Bhakti* movements borrowed little of significance from Islam and can be seen as reassertions of Hindu identity in the context of Mughal power.

In the early sixteenth century, medieval *bhakti* figures influenced the development of the Sikh religion, which was founded by the *guru* (master or teacher) Nanak (1469–1533). The sacred sayings of Nanak were recorded in a special script. This popular new community of faith flourished in the Punjab, drawing recruits of both Hindu and Muslim birth from the peasantry. However, Sikh customs and beliefs were drawn mainly from Hinduism, with little from Islam. The third *guru*, Amar Das, was patronized by Akbar, further inducing converts to the faith, which stressed community eating as well as prayer and abolished female *pardah* (seclusion) along with caste separation and the concept of untouchability. The seclusion of high-caste women was a practice adopted by Hindus from Islam, and its rejection by Sikhs can be seen as a symbol of the emphasis on Hindu identity characteristic of Sikh religion.

Ram Das, the fourth *guru*, served at Akbar's court and was granted land in the Punjab, which became the site of the sacred Sikh capital. Ram Das's son and successor, Arjun (1563–1606), completed a great Sikh temple at this spot, naming the city Amritsar ("Pool of Immortal Nectar") for its tank filled with sacred well water. Under Arjun's guidance, the Sikh scripture, Granth Sahib, was compiled and deposited in Amritsar's temple. Arjun was said to have proclaimed that "in this vessel [Granth Sahib] you will find three things: truth, peace, and contemplation." Court support for the Sikh faith had waned since the time of Akbar. Akbar's successor, Jahangir ("World Seizer," r. 1605–1627) charged Arjun with treason and had him executed.

The Mughals' tolerance for other religious faiths waned by the end of the seventeenth century. Aurangzeb, who ascended the Mughal throne as Alamgir ("World Conqueror") in 1658 and reigned until his death in 1707, abandoned religious tolerance and the policy of equal treatment of Hindus and Muslims. Ultimately, despite earlier Mughal rulers' religious tolerance and movements that united Hindus and Muslims, such as the Sikh religion,

by the eighteenth century, sharp divisions between Hindus and Muslims were evident in Indian society. Aurangzeb prohibited Hindus from holding positions of power, instead elevating Muslims. Hindu movements such as that in the state of Maharashtra led by Shivaji Bhonsle (1627–1680) challenged Mughal rule and threatened the stability of the Mughal Empire.

Reform and Revival in the Islamic World

Eventually, the Safavid Empire fell in a single battle and Mughal power declined as Hindu powers reasserted themselves, while the Ottomans were forced to ally themselves with infidel states to stay the European advance. The political decline in the eighteenth-century Muslim world provided a context for religious reform and the revival of Islam. The disruptions and decay wrought by weak political rulers created opportunities for expansion, which were seized by the *ulama* and Sufis, guardians of the traditions of Islam. A purer vision of Islamic life and society was promoted through their teachings and through holy wars when necessary.

Reformist Movements

Reformist ideas had been gathering steam even before the demise of the Islamic Empires. In the seventeenth century, leading scholars in Medina had debated political decisions together with doctrinal stances. In Syria, the scholar Abd al-Ghani of Nablus (1641–1731) strove to create a revitalized theology of reformed Sufism but with relatively little immediate consequence. Probably the most influential reformer was Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), who moved the scholarly debate to the field of action. Though a Sufi, in his youth Wahhab traveled widely and began to preach Orthodox teachings and anti-Sufism as a result of the religious corruption he saw. Wahhab's puritanism suggested the overthrow of the medieval superstructure of Islam and a return to the "pure" authority of the Qur'an and *hadiths*, or teachings. His followers, known as the Wahhabis, continued into the nineteenth century, by which time they had extended their fundamentalist views throughout most of Saudi Arabia.

Islam and the Transformation of Southeast Asian Societies

Between 1500 and 1800, beginning from coastal fringes on the Malay peninsula and around the island of Sumatra, Islam made substantial inroads into Southeast Asia, acquiring a political role as well as a religious one. Islam interacted with indigenous beliefs, as well as with Hinduism and Buddhism, in reshaping Southeast Asian societies during the period of European expansion into this area of the world. European influences formed yet another stratum in the complex, multilayered societies of Southeast Asia. Unlike the expansion of Islam through the military conquest of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, in Southeast Asia Islam was carried by Arab

and other Muslim merchants who plied the waters surrounding the Malay peninsula and the Indonesia archipelago. Its gradual and relatively peaceful spread was much like the course of Islam in West or East Africa.

In the sixteenth century, increasing numbers of merchants from the southern part of the Arabian peninsula followed Indian Ocean trade routes and settled in port cities from East Africa to Southeast Asia. Many of these merchants held a special religious position in their homeland through the claim of descent from a descendant of Ali who had emigrated to the southern Arabian peninsula, and in the Indian Ocean ports where they settled they were often given special standing as religious authorities, which in turn conferred economic and political opportunities.

Islam and Southeast Asian Rulers

Rulers of states that rose and fell in the region often made use of Islam to sanction their rule, as their predecessors had relied on Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous beliefs in earlier times. For example, Islam was adopted in the central Javanese state of Mataram, whose ruler, Agung (1613–1645), assumed the title of sultan and established the Islamic calendrical system in Java. But the rulers of Mataram often had difficulties controlling the *ulamas* and Sufis, and eventually they came to rely on Dutch support to uphold their control of the state and the Islamic clergy. This strategy proved fatal, however, leading to its defeat by the Dutch East India Company in 1629. In the case of Mataram, the dominance of Islam weakened rather than strengthened the state by forcing it to be dependent on the Dutch, who then took advantage of their position.

In contrast to Mataram, the Muslim state of Aceh worked together with the Islamic clergy and successfully resisted Portuguese and other European powers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The most powerful Acehnese ruler, Iskandar Muda (1607–1636), was described as “the ruler who enforced the Islamic religion and required his people to pray five times a day, and to fast during Ramadan and the optional extra fast, and forbade them all to drink arak or to gamble.” Both Mataram and Aceh, along with other Southeast Asian Muslim states, lost their independence in the eighteenth century, but the influence of Islam remained powerful throughout peninsular and island Southeast Asia, though not on the Southeast Asian mainland, where Buddhism and Hinduism continued as the dominant cultural and religious influences along with indigenous beliefs.

The Impact of Islamic Law

Islamic law was incorporated along with traditional legal practices into the administrative structures of new Muslim states beginning in the sixteenth century. The degree to which Islamic law was imposed varied widely, but in

the state of Aceh under Sultan Iskandar Muda in the early seventeenth century it was strictly applied through harsh punishments for gambling, drunkenness, and stealing. Throughout the seventeenth century the Islamic court of Aceh sentenced thieves to amputation. Deeply rooted local customs such as gambling associated with cockfighting and drinking the local liquor, arak, persisted, however despite Muslim injunctions forbidding them.

Islamic commercial law provided a necessary common ground for commercial transactions between Muslim merchants and their Southeast Asian counterparts. In non-Muslim ports, Muslim traders who resided there were often allowed to be subject to Islamic law carried out by the *ulama* of the urban mosque. Malay law codes of the sixteenth and later centuries followed Arabic law in matters of the sale of property, investment, and bankruptcy.

In matters of personal law, such as marriage and divorce, traditional local ideas and practices tended to shape the application of Islamic law and to moderate its harsher aspects. By traditional custom, monogamy prevailed, in part because divorce was easily obtained by either partner, and divorce was frequent. Both property and children were divided on a more or less equal basis. The court diary of the seventeenth-century state of Makassar details an elite woman's marital history that helps to illustrate this pattern of divorce rooted in local custom in contrast to Islamic law, which would not allow such freedom for a woman to divorce as she does. Karaeng Balla-Jawaya (b. 1634), daughter of one of the highest Makassar lineages, was married at the age of thirteen to Karaeng Bonto-marannu, who eventually became one of the greatest Makassar warriors. At twenty-five, she separated from him and soon married his rival, Karaeng Karunrung, the prime minister. In 1666, at the age of thirty-one, she separated from him, and she later married Arung Palakka, who was in the process of conquering her country with the aid of the Dutch. At thirty-six she separated from him, and she lived another fifty years.

Women in Southeast Asian Society

The relative freedom of sexual relations and marital practices in Southeast Asia conflicted sharply with both Islamic and Christian beliefs, which were increasingly influential after the fifteenth century. Both Islam and Christianity forbade premarital sexual relations, and Islam, in particular, imposed harsh punishments for transgressions. Islamic beliefs gradually imposed restraints on indigenous ways of life and influenced Southeast Asian societies on the Malay peninsula and throughout the Indonesian archipelago. This is particularly clear with regard to the position of Southeast Asian women, who had been independent and active participants in commerce and public social life and equal partners with men in matters of love and domestic life before the imposition of Islam.

Both Chinese and European traders, for example, often found themselves – to their surprise – dealing with women. As one European noted, “The money-changers are here [Aceh], as at Tonkin [Vietnam], most women.” Some women even succeeded in joining the upper circle of large-scale merchants and shipowners, most of whom were male. Nyai Gede Pinateh was a female harbormaster (*shahbandar*) at Gresik around 1500 and sent her ships to trade in Bali, Maluku, and Cambodia. A woman of Mon a mainland Southeast Asian ethnic group descent, Soet Pegu, used her position as sexual and commercial partner of successive Dutch factors in Ayutthaya to virtually monopolize Dutch-Thai trade in the 1640s.

Although, with few exceptions, female rulers were virtually unknown in Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Chinese political traditions, women occupied the thrones of Aceh, Jambi, and Inderagiri in the seventeenth century and exercised control over trade much as their male counterparts did. Women rulers seem to have been favored in some cases because their rule was likely to encourage trade. Though the four queens of Aceh (1641–1699) ruled at a time of political and military decline after Iskandar Muda, their reigns were associated with the maintenance of Aceh as the most important independent port in island Southeast Asia. The just rule of the first of these queens was noted by an Aceh chronicler as the reason for the primacy of Aceh in international trade at the time. Women also engaged in diplomacy as an accompaniment to their trade and political roles. These women were necessarily fluent in several languages, including European ones such as Portuguese or Dutch as well as Malay and other Southeast Asian languages.

Literacy in Southeast Asian Society

Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were sometimes astonished by the high rates of literacy they found among both women and men in Southeast Asia. A Dutch trading official at the court of Mataram in the mid-seventeenth century noted that the majority of Javanese could read and write. A Spanish observer in the Philippines stated, “So accustomed are all these islanders to writing and reading that there is scarcely a man, still less a woman, who cannot read and write in letters proper to the island of Manila.”

Throughout Southeast Asia there was a strong tradition of poetry contests as part of courtship. Love letters and poems were written on easily available local materials such as palm leaves. Women as well as men had to be able to read and write the local scripts in order to participate in these basic social rituals. After Islamic influence became pervasive, Islamic authorities attempted to suppress such practices, and women were actively discouraged from learning to read and write for fear that they would use those skills to send love letters and engage in traditional courting rituals that were seen as improper and immoral according to Islam. As both Islam and Christianity introduced new

scripts along with their religious beliefs and social values, the earlier scripts tended to disappear and a more restricted male literacy was the result.

Scripts, Schooling, and the Spread of Islam

Although the alphabetic writing scripts employed throughout Southeast Asia were probably derived from Indian script and thus used initially for the sacred literature of Hinduism and later Buddhism, the spread of these scripts served different purposes: those of commerce and daily life. The transmission of these scripts, which used a limited number of symbols, such as the Indonesian ka-ga-nga script, probably took place primarily within the home, taught by mothers to their children. Since women played an important role in commerce, they necessarily knew how to read and write, and their domestic responsibilities included teaching their children these skills.

Hindu and Buddhist monastic traditions, like those of Christian monasteries in Europe, taught literacy for sacred purposes to a largely male student population, and this tradition was strong in mainland Southeast Asia, though less so elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The teaching of Arabic for religious purposes by Islamic clergy similarly focused on men, so male literacy was associated with religious authority, which excluded women. In the absence of formal schooling outside these religious establishments, the preservation of local Southeast Asian scripts and literature, as well as female literacy, was associated not only with the needs of commerce but also with indigenous practices such as the writing of love poems used in elaborate courtship rituals that predated Islamic and Christian influence.

The spread of Islam in Southeast Asia was aided by the use of an Arabic script already modified for Persian to transcribe Malay. As Malay written in this script became the common language of Islam and of trade in the region, it served as an important conduit of Islam on the Malaysian peninsula and throughout much of the Indonesian archipelago. Another important means for the spread of Islam were the schools in which boys were taught to read and recite the Qur'an in Arabic. By around 1600, for example, there were many of these schools in Aceh, one of which had a reportedly brilliant student of the age of thirteen who later became the powerful Sultan Iskandar Muda. Such schools provided the foundation of a written culture in Malay dominated by Muslim literati. In the Philippines, within a century of Christianization, knowledge of the earlier Indonesian scripts had disappeared.

Summary

Doctrinal differences in Islam shaped the interaction of the Sunni Ottomans with the Shi'ite Safavids, as well as between both the Ottoman and Safavid states and Sufism. The notion of reformation, however, may also be used to describe more inclusive, rather than divisive, approaches to inherited

traditions. Reformation used in this sense does not imply the weaving together of traditions; rather, it describes a renewal of inherited tradition that is enriched by the incorporation of new ideas, new influences, and new adherents. Reformation understood in this way can be used to describe the development of the Sikh religion in Mughal India and the reform and revival of the Wahhabis in West Asia.