

## A 15th-Century Persian Inscription from Bireuen, Aceh: An Early ‘Flash’ of Sufism before Fanṣūrī in Southeast Asia

Majid Daneshgar, Gregorius Dwi Kuswanta, Masykur Syafruddin and R. Michael Feener

Aceh<sup>1</sup> has long been recognized as a major historical center of Islamic culture in Southeast Asia, and its rich surviving source base of manuscripts, grave-stones, and other standing monuments have attracted the attention of some of the leading scholars in the field for more than a century. Peter Riddell’s work has made major contributions to this body of scholarship, starting with his pioneering work to untangle the Arabic textual sources of the oldest surviving Malay-language commentaries on the Qur’ān: Ms Or. Ii.6.45 kept in the Cambridge University Library is the oldest known commentary<sup>2</sup> and the *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sīngkel.<sup>3</sup> His work on these two texts—produced near the start and the finish of the 17th century, respectively, shed considerable light on the intellectual milieu of Muslim scholarship in the Aceh Sultanate. In this contribution to Prof. Riddell’s *Festschrift*, we continue on in this spirit to identify some of the broader Muslim textual traditions circulating through northern Sumatra, but during an even earlier period of the 15th century. This essay focuses not on manuscripts, but on texts transmitted via the more durable support of stone on a pair of grave markers at Bireuen that have recently been systematically documented by the Maritime Asia Heritage Survey (MAHS).<sup>4</sup> Those objects have preserved lines in both Arabic and Persian that open up a new vista onto the cultural dynamics of an early period of the

- 1 An earlier version of this article was presented in Paris at the European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (EuroSEAS) 2022, conference.
- 2 Peter G. Riddell, *Malay Court Religion, Culture and Language: Interpreting the Qur’ān in 17th century Aceh* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
- 3 Peter G. Riddell, “The Sources of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (247)/57 (1984): 113–118.
- 4 The MAHS is led by R. Michael Feener (PI), with Patrick Daly and Noboru Ishikawa (Co-PIs), and based at Kyoto University’s Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Its open-access archive of database records, photographs, orthophotomaps, 3D models, oral history interviews, architectural drawings and digitized manuscripts is available online at: R. Michael Feener (ed), *Maritime Asia Heritage Survey*: <https://maritimeasiaheritage.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp>.

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history of Islam in Southeast Asia. Understanding the content and contexts of early Persian inscriptions from Sumatra both contributes to our understanding of the complexities of Islamization in the region, and opens up new questions for exploration about the range and depth of cultural engagements on the eastern frontiers of an expanding Persianate world in the 15th century.<sup>5</sup>

## 1 Some Persian Inscriptions in Indonesia: An Overview

Inscribed gravestones have commanded a prominent place in studies of the early history of Muslim societies in the Archipelago.<sup>6</sup> This has particularly been the case in northern Sumatra, where studies have been made of stones from Pasai,<sup>7</sup> Peudada,<sup>8</sup> Pedir,<sup>9</sup> Daya<sup>10</sup> and Lamri,<sup>11</sup> as well as the sultanate of

- 5 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974); Bert G. Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Verl. Das Arab. Buch, 1999). The concepts of the "Persianate World" coined by Hodgson and of "Persophonie" coined by Fragner have recently attracted increased attention from a new generation of scholars. See, for example: Nile Green (ed.) *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (California: University of California Press, 2019), Abbas Amanat, and Assef Ashraf (eds). *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Andrew CS Peacock, and Deborah Gerber Tor (eds), *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World: Iranian Tradition and Islamic Civilisation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017); Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). For a reappraisal of Persian elements in the formation of Muslim traditions in Southeast Asia in particular, see: Claude Guillot, "Persia and the Malay World; Commercial and Intellectual Exchanges," *Studia Islamika* 27.3 (2020): 405–442.; Majid Daneshgar, "Persianate Aspects of the Malay-Indonesian World: Some Rare Manuscripts in the Leiden University Library" *Dabir* 8 (2021): 51–78.
- 6 Elizabeth Lambourn, "Tombstones, Texts, and Typologies: Seeing Sources for the Early History of Islam in Southeast Asia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 51/2 (2008): 252–286; R. Michael Feener, Patrick Daly, E. Edwards McKinnon, Luca Lum Enci, Ardiansyah, Nizamuddin, Nazli Ismail, Tai Yew Seng, Jessica Rahardjo, and Kerry Sieh "Islamisation and the formation of vernacular Muslim material culture in 15th-century northern Sumatra," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 49/143 (2021): 1–41.
- 7 Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus, *Les Monuments funéraires et l'histoire du Sultanat de Pasai*. Vol. 37 (Paris: Cahier d'Archipel 37, 2008).
- 8 L. Kalus and C. Guillot, "Note sur le sultanat de Peudada, fin xve-début xvie s." *Archipel* 83 (2012), 7–15.
- 9 Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus, "Note sur le sultanat de Pedir. Début du xvie siècle [Épigraphie islamique d'Aceh. 3]." *Archipel* 78/1 (2009): 7–18.
- 10 Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot, "La principauté de Daya, mi-xve–mi-xvii siècle [Épigraphie islamique d'Aceh 6]" *Archipel* 85 (2013): 201–236.
- 11 Feener, et al. "Islamisation and the formation of vernacular Muslim material culture in 15th-century northern Sumatra".

Aceh.<sup>12</sup> These materials have revealed aspects of the cosmopolitan circulations of commerce and culture that linked northern Sumatra with the broader Muslim world and beyond since the 13th century.<sup>13</sup> In their study of Pasai inscriptions, Kalus & Guillot have, for example, called particular attention to the presence of ‘Bengali Turks’ at Pasai and their role in conveying cultural elements from the expanding Persianate world of that time to influence the development of court styles in Sumatra.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, there are several known Persian inscriptions dating from the long 15th century in Sumatra that hint at the extent of interactions with Persianate literary culture on that Indonesian island even before the rise of Aceh sultanate at the turn of the 16th century.

### 1.1 *In Barus*

The earliest such inscriptions might be those found at Barus, on the west coast of Sumatra. One, which has been tentatively dated to 772 H./ c. 1370 CE<sup>15</sup> (or perhaps to 972 H. /c. 1564 CE<sup>16</sup> is from the tombstone of a Muslim woman whose name also has been given diverse readings. Kalus reads one element of the name as being the Malay word “*Tuan*” (sic. *توهن*), however the text may actually be read as Persian, rather than Arabic with the addition of a Malay word.<sup>17</sup> Another stone from Barus presents more obviously Persian elements: the grave-stone of one Shaykh Maḥmūd which shows the date of 829 H./1425–1426 CE. The headstone is inscribed with a couplet from the *Shāhnāmah* (*Book of Kings*) of Ferdowsī (d. c. 1020 CE) addressing the subject of mortality and the impermanence of ‘worldly life’:

جهان یادگار است و ما رفتنی؛  
ز مردم نماند بجز مردمی

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- 12 Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot, “Cimetière de Tuan di Kandang. [épigraphe islamique d’Aceh. 8],” *Archipel* 88 (2014): 71–147; Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot, “Cimetières d’Aceh, Varia 1”, *Archipel* 91 (2016): 55–103; Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot, “Cimetières d’Aceh, Varia 11”, *Archipel* 93 (2017): 31–84.
- 13 See R. Michael Feener, “The Acehnese Past and its Present State of Study”, in *Mapping the Acehnese Past* edited by R. Michael Feener, Patrick Daly, and Anthony Reed (Leiden: KITLV, 2011), 1–24; Riddell, *Malay Court Religion*, 2017.
- 14 Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot, *Les monuments funéraires et l’histoire du sultanat de Pasai à Sumatra, XIIIe–XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Cahiers d’Archipel, 2008), pp. 69–74.
- 15 Ludvik Kalus (2003, 305, n° 1).
- 16 See; *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land-, en volkenkunde* 70 (1930): 92.
- 17 Ludvik Kalus, “Les sources épigraphiques musulmanes de Barus”, dans *Histoire de Barus, Sumatra. Le site de Lobu Tua. II—Etude archéologique et Documents* (Paris: Cahiers d’Archipel, 30, 2003), p. 305, n° 1.

The world is a perpetual remembrance and we all leave it in the end;  
 People will leave nothing behind but their good deeds

We have examined various aspects of this complex inscription from Barus in a separate study.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.2 *Geudong*

An inscription found in Geudong (Aceh Province) is dated 847 H./1443–1444 CE marks the grave of a daughter of the Persian scholar Mauālānā Starābādī/Estarābādī. The source of some Persian verse inscribed on that stone had not been identified in previous studies.<sup>19</sup> It is, however, actually that of Muḥammad bin ‘Alī Ghazā’irī (d. c. 426/1034). The quatrain presented here is often cited as evidence of Muḥammad bin ‘Alī Ghazā’irī’s orientation and his devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* (‘The People of [the Prophet’s] House’) Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn) as intercessors on the Day of Judgment. The place of Shi’ism and broader manifestations of devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* in the early history of Islam in Indonesia have and continue to be the subject of considerable scholarly debate.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of the discussion in this paper, this quatrain, as well as the other Persian poetry quotations from Barus and Pasai, helps to establish something of the broader context for the inscription on the stone from Bireuen that will be discussed below.

### 1.3 *In Pasai*

Perhaps the most well-known Persian inscription in all of Indonesia is that on a tombstone at Candi Uleeblang in Pasai. The inscription was first published by Hendrik Karel Jan Cowan in 1940 and has since been cited in a numerous books and articles on the history of Islam in the Archipelago. The stone marks the grave of Nā’inā Ḥusām al-Dīn (d. 823 H./1420 CE), and its inscription includes an incomplete ode (*ghazal*) by the Persian poet, Sa’dī on the theme of mor-

18 Majid Daneshgar & R. Michael Feener, “A Rare Reading of Ferdowsi’s *Shahnamah*: The 15th-century Persian Inscription on the Makam Shaykh Papan Tinggi,” (forthcoming).

19 See, Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus, *Les monuments funéraires et l’histoire du Sultanat de Pasai à Sumatra (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles)* (Paris: coll. Cahiers d’Archipel, 37, 2008), 301–302, n° TSA 21. Graves, inscriptions and manuscripts including the name of Starābādī/Estarābādī are found in Mecca as well as India, too. This issue will be addressed by Daneshgar and Feener in a forthcoming study.

20 For a critical overview of these debates, see: R. Michael Feener and Chiara Formichi, “Debating ‘Shi’ism’ in the History of Muslim Southeast Asia,” in Chiara Formichi and R. Michael Feener (eds) *Shi’ism in South East Asia: ‘Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), pp. 3–16.



FIGURE 3.1 The gravestone of Nā'ina Ḥusām al-Dīn (d. 1420)

PHOTOGRAPH BY R. MICHAEL FEENER

tality. The stone itself was quarried and likely carved in Cambay.<sup>21</sup> Here again we seem to have evidence of some admiration for celebrated works of Persian poetry in 15th-century Sumatra, albeit not necessarily a level of local engagement given the overseas origin of the object.

### 1.3.1 Teungku Sareh Inscription

Of a less literary nature is another Pasai tombstone (grave XVIII) from Teungku Sareh Cemetery, dated to 844 H./1440 CE. This one includes only a handful of Persian terms, rather than quotations of poetry, and is inscribed on local stone from Aceh—rather than on an object imported from Gujarat. This stone was introduced by Elizabeth Lambourn in 2004 and later studied by Guillot and Kalus as well.<sup>22</sup> Here we propose a different reading of the Persian terms in this inscription and the deciphering of the date, indicated here in red:

1. عطاء الله
2. بن اسمعيل شب<sup>23</sup> دو
3. شنبه نهم<sup>24</sup> مائة ربيع الاول
4. «سنة 844»

1. *Atā'ullāh*
2. *bin Ismā'īl shab-e do-*
3. *Shanbat nohom-e māt-e Rabī' al-Awwal*
4. *sanat 844*

1. 'Atā'ullāh
2. son of Ismā'īl, the night of Mon-
3. day the ninth of the month of Rabī' al-awwal
4. [in] the year 844

21 H.K.J. Cowan, "A Persian inscription in north Sumatra", *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 80/1 (1940): 15–21.

22 Elizabeth Lambourn, "The formation of the batu Aceh tradition in fifteenth-century Samudera-Pasai," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 32/93 (2004): 211–248.; Guillot and Kalus (2008), pp. 298–299, n° 8.

23 Both Lambourn and Kalus read this word as "شه" (Shah).

24 Lambourn did not provide a reading for, "نهم" (*nohom*/the ninth), though this was detected by Guillot and Kalus in 2008.



FIGURE 3.2 The Teungku Meurah Cemetery (MAHS-IDN-ACH-BRN-JUA-S-001) in Bireuen  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARITIME ASIA HERITAGE SURVEY

Lambourn's posited that the text of the inscription may have been produced or commissioned by a Persian speaker. However, the use here of a *tā' marbūṭa* (ة) instead of simple *hā* (ه) at the end of the word *māh* (the month) may indicate that the engraver was perhaps not fully familiar with original Persian orthography. Also we propose that *shab-e doshanbeh* or *shab-e doshanbat* (شب دوشنبه/شب دوشنبه) should not be understood literally as “the night of Monday.” As traditionally in Persian (and other languages including Malay) the latter part of a day can be referred to as the evening of the day that follows. As such, “the evening of Monday” would indicate sometime late in the day on Sunday, thus correlating to the inscribed date of 9 *Rabi' al-awwal* 844H. / Sunday 16 August 1440 CE. This may indicate that some in Pasai were familiar with such Persian usage in the 15th century—while also reflecting Malay conventions of referring to an evening with reference to the day that follows—i.e. *malam senin* (‘evening of Monday’) to refer to the latter part of Sunday. It thus might also be the case that a Malay speaker preparing the Persian text did so following conventions with which he was already familiar.

This aspect of the inscription may be especially important to consider as reflecting the same calendrical conventions used in the Persian inscription from Bireuen discussed below. Both of them are located in relative proximity to each other in the present-day province of Aceh, and their calligraphic styles are similar to some extent as well.

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## 2 A Persian Inscription from Bireuen

Not far from Pasai, in Bireuen, is the site<sup>25</sup> of another gravestone bearing a Persian inscription that also dates to 844 H./1440 CE. The Teungku Meurah Cemetery is a plot along the eastern side of the highway, bounded on all other sides by rows of shops and homes, and continues to serve as the family cemetery of Mr. Munzir. Several new graves can be found in its southwest corner, but to the east of there are a number of older burials, including six marked with ancient tombstones. These older funerary monuments take the form of slabs reminiscent of those known from older sites in Pasai. One of the graves (MAHS-IDN-ACH-BRN-JUA-S-001-F-0005) is marked with head and footstones that feature textual inscriptions. The first known photos from this site was taken by De Vink in 1912 and reproduced in 1917.<sup>26</sup> Those photos of what De Vink designated as Tomb 1 were used by Kalus and Guillot for their publication of the inscription and the basis of their French translation,<sup>27</sup> as they did not visit the site themselves.<sup>28</sup> This grave is marked with a pair of stones, oriented toward the *qibla* with a headstone at the north and footstone on the south. Interactive 3D models of both the head and footstone have been produced for the MAHS archive and are available online.<sup>29</sup> These new digital renderings form the basis of the interpretation presented below.

Both of these rectangular slabs feature textual inscriptions, most of which were recognized by Guillot and Kalus as Arabic texts from the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*. Those elements of the inscription are comprised of excerpts from canonical sources that are not uncommon in Muslim epigraphy of the period in Southeast Asia and beyond. The epitaph and a poetic quotation in Persian on the stones, however, are considerably rarer, and pose further challenges of

25 This site (MAHS-IDN-ACH-BRN-JUA-S-001) is on Tgk. Chik Di Tiro Road (Bireuen-Takengon highway km.1), Gampong Bireuen Meunasah Tgk Di Gadong, Kota Juang District, Bireuen Regency, Aceh Province (GPS: 5.1954 / 96.702421). In September 2021, it was systematically documented by the *Maritime Asia Heritage Survey* Indonesia Field Team: Multia Zahara, Ahmad Zaki, Greg Kuswanta, Ario Wibhisono, Sofiani Sabarina, Fauzan Azhima, and Sari Novita.

26 They were included in the eleventh and twelfth list of De Vink's photos from Aceh for the Netherlands Indies Archaeological Service. *Oudheidkundig Verslag*, 1917.

27 Ludvik Kalus & Claude Guillot, "Cimetières de Sumatra, Varia (Épigraphie islamique d'Aceh 12)," *Archipel* 94 (2017): 13–50. <https://doi.org/10.4000/archipel.443>

28 Ibid.

29 Headstone: <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/teungku-meurah-cemetery-headstone-ee64f2c6c88449d5b92cce58bb9965bc>.

Footstone: <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/teungku-meurah-cemetery-footstone-c85ab6484b3b4bd0899ab3979893969d>. We thank Alexandru Hegyi for producing the high-definition images used in our illustrations of these stones.





FIGURE 3.3 South face of the footstone (MAHS-IDN-ACH-BRN-JUA-S-001-F-0005A)  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARITIME ASIA HERITAGE SURVEY



FIGURE 3.4 North face of the footstone (MAHS-IDN-ACH-BRN-JUA-S-001-F-0005A)  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARITIME ASIA HERITAGE SURVEY

identification and interpretation. Here we use the enhanced documentation of these objects produced by the Maritime Asia Heritage Survey to build upon the pioneering work of De Vink, Guillot and Kalus to suggest revised readings of those parts of the inscription, and to contextualize this source material within broader discussions of the early history of Islam in Southeast Asia.

The foot stone bears the epitaph. Guillot and Kalus read the name of the deceased as “*tuān* Mund” (توهن مند), reflecting their similar reading of the Malay word *tuān* in the inscription from Barus discussed above.<sup>30</sup> Prior to Guillot and Kalus’ publication, Teungku Taqiyuddin Muhammad from the Center for Information of Samudra Pasai Heritage (CISAH) and MAPESA<sup>31</sup> had read the inscription in situ, arriving at a different rendering of the name of the deceased as ‘Yuhān Mīn’.<sup>32</sup> We argue here that further consideration of the Persian text on the reverse of this same stone (discussed below) prompts a consideration of elements of Persian in the epitaph section of the stone as well. Within this context the second element of this ‘name’ (more properly ‘title’) may actually be read as the Persian *mand* (مند) meaning ‘Lord, Holder, Owner, Possessor’.<sup>33</sup> Usage of this Persian term was adopted into languages ranging from Hindustani to Mongolian, reflecting broader dynamics of the late medieval Persianate world. At the same time, the connotations of this Persian term seem to reflect in some similar valences that of the Malay *tu(h)an*—perhaps thus presenting something of a similar honorific combination in two languages.<sup>34</sup> In consideration of this proposed Persian reading, we would thus interpret the epitaph as:

هذا القبر توهن مند  
نقلت من الدنيا يوم الخميس اثنا  
عشر يوما من شهر ذوالحجة

30 Kalus & Guillot, “Cimetières de Sumatra, Varia” (2017): 13–50.

31 Masyarakat Peduli Sejarah Aceh (MAPESA) is a local NGO (LSM / *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat*) dedicated to the study and public awareness of Aceh’s Islamic heritage. They regularly publish reports and studies of historical sites, artefacts, and manuscripts its website: <https://www.mapesaaceh.com>.

32 The results of his work were presented online in a contribution to the MAPESA website “Bireuen 600 Tahun Silam Bukan Legenda,” <https://www.mapesaaceh.com/2021/4/bireuen-600-tahun-silam-bukan-legenda.html>.

33 Viz., *Borhān-e Qāṭi’* and *Dehkhoda Dictionary*.

34 One might conjecture that توهن is possibly a misspelling of “Ta-han<sup>a</sup>” meaning castle, territory and “guard”. See, W. Yates, *A Dictionary, Hindustani and English* (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1847), 163. *Tuhan-mand* might then be glossed as the ruler of a particular territory or even a fortified settlement one who is a guard or owner of a ruling territory. Such a reading, however, remains conjectural—and indeed would seem to be rather a stretch.

This is the grave of the Tuhan-Mand<sup>35</sup>  
 who has passed from this world  
 on Thursday, the 12th day of Dhū l-Hijjah

The reverse of this stone bears a somewhat harder-to-read Persian text. The execution of its calligraphy bears similarities to that of the stone at Teungku Sareh discussed above, and which was also inscribed in the same year (844H). It would not be too farfetched to consider the possibility that both stones were produced within a shared milieu of material cultural production, if not indeed by the same workshop. The selection and presentation of the text of this inscription furthermore indicates a considerable familiarity with Persian literature by at least some in 15th-century Sumatra.

We propose here that the text can be transcribed and translated as:

(الف) سنت<sup>36</sup> أربع وأربعون ثمانمائة  
 (ب) روزت بستودم و نمیدانستم؛ شب با تو غنودم و نمیدانستم  
 (پ) ظن بردا بدم بمن<sup>37</sup> کمن من بودم؛ من جمل تو بودم و نمیدانستم

- A) *Sanat arba'a wa-arba'ūn<sup>a</sup> thamān-mi'at*  
 B) *Rūzat be-sutūdām-o na-mīdānestam; shab bā to ghonūdām-o na-mīdānestam*  
 C) *Ẓann bordā bodām be-man ke-man man-būdām; man joml<sup>a</sup> to būdām-o na-mīdānestam*

35 Equally, in Hindustani literature the name of شاهمند/*shahmand* is found that can be defined as the one holding the kingdom or ruling authority. Other Indo-Mongolian names which are fallen in the category of the holders of social, political, mystical and scholarly authority (viz., Khān, Khājah and Shāh) are found in the following sources as follows:

See: Johann August Vullers, *Ioannis Augusti Vullers Lexicon Persico-Latinum etymologicum: cum linguis maxime cognatis Sanscrita et Zendica et Pehlevica comparatum, e lexicis persice scriptis Borhāni Qātiū, Haft Qulzum et Bahāri aqam et persico-turcico Farhangi-Shu'ūrī confectum, adhibitis etiam Castellī, Meninski, Richardson et aliorum operibus et auctoritate scriptorum Persicorum adauctum* (Bonnae ad Rhenum: Impensis Adolphi Marci, 1864) T: II, 482–485. For names, see Abu'l Fazl-i Mubarakī Allamī, *Akbar-Nāma* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1872 and 1878), I; also Khāfi Khān, *The Muntakhab-al Lubāb*, ed. Maulavis Kabīr al-Dīn Aḥmad and Ghulām Qādir, Vol. II (Calcutta: The College Press, 1870).

36 This writing of سنت instead of سنة to indicate 'year' is not uncommon in pre-modern Persian texts.

37 The version of these lines attributed to Rūmī adds here the word بخود.

- A) The year eight hundred forty-four (844 H./ 1440 CE)  
 B) “By day I praised You, but never knew it; by night slept with You without realizing  
 C) Fancying myself to be myself [self]; but no, I was You and never knew it.”<sup>38</sup>

Following the date of the epitaph above is a quatrain of Persian poetry that has not been recognized in the work of scholars who have published previously on this gravestone. It is, most likely, a variant reading of lines generally ascribed to Rūmī (d. c. 1273 CE) from his *Kulīyyāt-e Shams*,<sup>39</sup> though it has been ascribed by some to Awhād al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. c. 1238).<sup>40</sup> In either case, however, the form of the poem inscribed on the gravestone at the Teungku Meurah Cemetery presents a slight variant of the most common wording of the third line—a reading which to our knowledge has been most widely transmitted through its inclusion in the text of the *Lama’āt* (‘Divine Flashes’) of Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 1289). Fakhr al-Dīn’s collection of mystical poems was widely popular across the Persianate world of the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>41</sup> The postulation of the transmission of this particular verse by Rūmī via its anthologization in Fakhr al-Dīn’s work is—at least—coincidental with the manuscript evidence we have of a “very old anthology of poems” from Aceh that was produced sometime after 1450 and which draws chiefly upon the work of ‘Irāqī.

Moreover, the placement of these particular lines on this gravestone is rather unusual in relation to the more common subjects of death, judgement and/or the afterlife that tend to dominate early Muslim epigraphy in Southeast Asia. Here we are presented with Persian-language expressions of Sufi metaphysics—perhaps the earliest surviving evidence for such in Southeast Asia.

38 Based on the English translation of Chittick: Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Divine Flashes*, trans. and Introduction by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson. Preface by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

39 Rūmī (nd. ii: no. 1424): 1333 Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Mawlavī, *Kulīyyāt-e Shams-e Tabrīzī be-enḍemām-e Sharḥ-e Ḥāl-e Mawlavī*, ed. Badī‘ al-Zamān Forūzānfar (Tehran: Şedāy-e Mu’āşir, 2004), II: no. 1242: 1333.

40 Ḥāmid ibn Abī al-Fakhr Awhād al-Dīn Kirmānī, *Divan-e Rubā’iyyāt*, ed. Aḥmad Abū Maḥbūb with an Introduction by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī (Tehran: Surūsh, 1366/1987), no. 184: 119.

41 For more on ‘Irāqī and his *Lama’āt*, see: Peter Lambourn Wilson, William C. Chittick, & Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Ed. Trans.) *Divine Flashes* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).



FIGURE 3.5 Headstone (MAHS-IDN-ACH-BRN-JUA-S-001-F-0005B)  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARITIME ASIA HERITAGE SURVEY

### 3 Sufism in 15th-Century Sumatra

The Sufi cosmology reflected in the Persian poetry of the Teungku Meurah inscription is that of the ‘Unity of Being’ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), Sufi interpretations of this doctrine were widespread across the medieval Muslim world, even while fiercely contested at a number of particular times and places.<sup>42</sup> In the historiography of Islam in Southeast Asia, the earliest proponent of *waḥdat al-wujūd* has generally be identified as Ḥamza Faṣṣūrī (16th/17th century).<sup>43</sup> Ḥamza’s Malay-language writings drew upon, *inter alia*, the work of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī<sup>44</sup> (d. 1492), including his commentary on ‘Irāqī’s *Lama’at: Ashi’at*

- 42 For a broad contextualization of these debates, see: A.D. Knys, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). On proponents and critics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Southeast Asia in particular: A.H. Johns, *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1965); Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Raniri and the Wujudīyah of 17th Century Aceh* (Singapore: Malaysian Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, 1966); Aliefya M. Santrie, “Martabat (Alam) Tujuh: Suatu Naskah Mistik Islam dari Desa Karang, Pamijahan,” in Ahmad Rifa’i Hasan (ed), *Warisan Intelektual Islam Indonesia: Telaah atlas Karya-Karya Klasik* (Bandung: Mizan, 1987), 105–129; Nabilah Lubis, *Seeks Yusuf Al-Taj Al-Makasari: Menyingkap Intisari Segala Rahasia* (Bandung: EFEQ & Penerbit Mizan, 1996); Oman Fathurahman, *Tanbih al-Masyi, Menyoal Wahdatul Wujud: Kasus Abdurrauf Singkel di Aceh Abad 17* (Bandung: EFEQ & Penerbit Mizan, 1999); Oman Fathurahman, “Ithaf al-dhaki by Ibrahim al-Kurani: A Commentary of Wahdat al-Wujud for Jawi Audiences”, *Archipel* 81 (2011), 177–198.
- 43 For debates over the dating of Ḥamza’s life, see: Claude Guillot, and Ludvik Kalus, “La stèle funéraire de Hamzah Fansuri,” *Archipel* 60/4 (2000), 3–24; Vladimir I. Braginsky, “On the Copy of Hamzah Fansuri’s Epitaph Published by C. Guillot & L. Kalus,” *Archipel* 62/1 (2001), 21–33.
- 44 Jāmī’s work served as a source for Sufi works written by Southeast Asian ulama for centuries. A 17th-century copy his *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah* was even made by the renowned Yūsuf al-Maqassārī, and preserved in the Sprenger Library, Berlin. For more on Jāmī and his *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*: Nicholas Heer, *The Precious Pearl: al-Jāmī’s al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah together with his glosses and the commentary of ‘Abd al-Ghafār al-Lārī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979) and Heer, Nicholas. 2013. “Two Arabic Manuscripts in the Handwriting of Shaykh Yūsuf al-Tāj,” (2013): <http://hdl.handle.net/1773/4881>; and on its reception in the Malay world: Mohamad Nasrin Nasir, “Nūr al-dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī in Sufi writings in Malay,” in *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī’s Works in the Islamicate World, ca. 9th/15th–14th/20th Century*, edited by Thibaut d’Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 196–223. Paul Wormser, “The Recreation of Jāmī’s Lavā’ih by Ḥamza Faṣṣūrī,” *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī’s Works in the Islamicate World, ca. 9th/15th–14th/20th Century*, edited by Thibaut d’Hubert and Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 367–377.

*al-Lama'āt* ('Rays of the *Flashes*'),<sup>45</sup> and thence influenced subsequent developments of Sufism in Southeast Asia. Debates over *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Southeast Asia over the centuries that followed, and particularly those centered around the vehement critiques of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī in 17th-century Aceh<sup>46</sup>, have attracted considerable scholarly attention for decades. To date, however, little was known to modern historians of engagement with Sufi metaphysics in the region prior to the work of Ḥamza Faṣṣūrī. One major exception to this may be in one of the earliest Malay Islamic manuscripts kept in Leiden University Library (Or. 7056). A recent carbon-dating report on its material suggests a "70.5% probability that this bark was collected for processing between 1450–1521 CE,"<sup>47</sup> dating then from not long after the Teungku Meurah inscription. It is also nearly contemporaneous as other manuscript witnesses kept in Iranian collections.<sup>48</sup> That Malay text presents a collection of earlier Persian materials, including passages from Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (a.k.a. Hamadānī), Sa'dī, Rūmī, and others.<sup>49</sup> The deciphering of the Persian inscription from the Teungku Meurah cemetery presented in this paper thus offers a further glimpse into the introduction of Sufism even earlier in the 15th century. It attests to the local production of textual inscription drawing on Persian literary tradition, present-

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- 45 Vladimir I. Braginsky, "Universe-man-text: The Sufi concept of literature (with special reference to Malay Sufism)", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 149 (2) (1993): 201–225.
- 46 Discussions of al-Rānīrī's work, and his entanglement in Islamic scholarly debates and court power struggles have attracted the work of a considerable number of modern scholars. E.g., Gerardus W.J. Drewes, "De herkomst van Nuruddin ar-Raniri," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 2de Afl (1955): 137–151; Wormser, *Le Bustan al-Salatin de Nuruddin ar-Rānīrī: Réflexions sur le rôle culturel d'un étranger dans le monde Malais au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Cahiers d'Archipel, 2012). Petrus Voorhoeve, "Van en over Nuruddin ar-Raniri," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 107/4 (1951): 353; P. Voorhoeve. 'Short note: Nuruddin ar-Raniri,' *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 115 (1959): 90. Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Rānīrī and the Wujūdīyah of 17th century Aceh* (London: Monographs of the Malaysian Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, III, 1966).
- 47 But there is also a 24.9% chance it was collected 1586–1623 CE, which is also quite old in the terms of Malay Islamic manuscripts. See: Majid Daneshgar (2022).
- 48 One of the oldest copies is kept in the Malek Library and Museum, Tehran, n. 2055, from the 9th century AH/15th century AD. See, Fakhr al-dīn 'Irāqī, *Lama'āt*, edited by Muhammad Kh<sup>v</sup>ajavi (Tehran: Mulavi, 1363/1984).
- 49 Alessandro Bausani noted that this Malay anthology includes a fragment that appears to have been lost to the standard recensions of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī's *Masnāvī*, identifying lines that may "be placed somewhere in section 1: 3743 of the *Masnāvī*". See, Alessandro Bausani, "Note sui vocaboli Persiani in Malese-Indonesiano," *Annali dell'Ist. Univ. Orientale di Napoli* 14 (1964), 1–32. Majid Daneshgar, "An Old Persian-Malay Anthology of Poems from Aceh" *Dabir* 7 (2020), 61–90.



ing in stone a glimpse of elements of a Persianate literary culture in Southeast Asia at least a century prior to the literary career of Ḥamza Fanṣūrī.

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