

*Pawang on the Frontier: Miracles, prophets, and divinities in the ricefields of modern Malaya**

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Abstract

This article unearths two Jawi manuscripts pertaining to Muslim miracle-workers, or *pawang*s, who were key intermediaries of agrarian change in the interior of modern Malaya. These compendia of frontier patois are analysed to recount a history of rice worlds and environments wherein forest clearing and rice cultivation were directly associated with the Islamic esoteric science (*ilmu*) of *pawang*s. As professional miracle-workers, *pawang*s were employed to spearhead a broad range of socio-economic activities in western Malaya. As pivots of cults joined by Malay peasants, *pawang*s were venerated as heirs of agrarian prophets and saints from earlier Islamic periods, and esteemed for their fertility rituals and miracles in contemporary forests and ricefields. This article analyses the elaborate Islamic genealogies of *pawang*s and popular historical traditions that were recorded in these texts, and investigates how these documents were informative about the religio-economic sensibilities of cultivators. This article also pays particular attention to how *pawang*s negotiated with a variety of Islamic and African spirits in Malayan forests, to lead forest clearing and rice production and to mobilize labourers. It further presents explorations into the social and spiritual cosmopolitanism of *pawang*s and peasants upon the modern Malay frontier, whose labour and connected histories are yet to be written.

Introduction

This article analyses two Jawi manuscripts of traditions that were transmitted by Muslim miracle-workers, ritual specialists and spirit mediums, known as *pawang*s. *Pawang*s, who remain neglected by

* I would like to thank Barbara W. Andaya, Nile Green, Michael Laffan, Ronit Ricci, Samira Sheikh, and Tony K. Stewart, as well as anonymous reviewers of MAS, for their invaluable comments on drafts of this article.

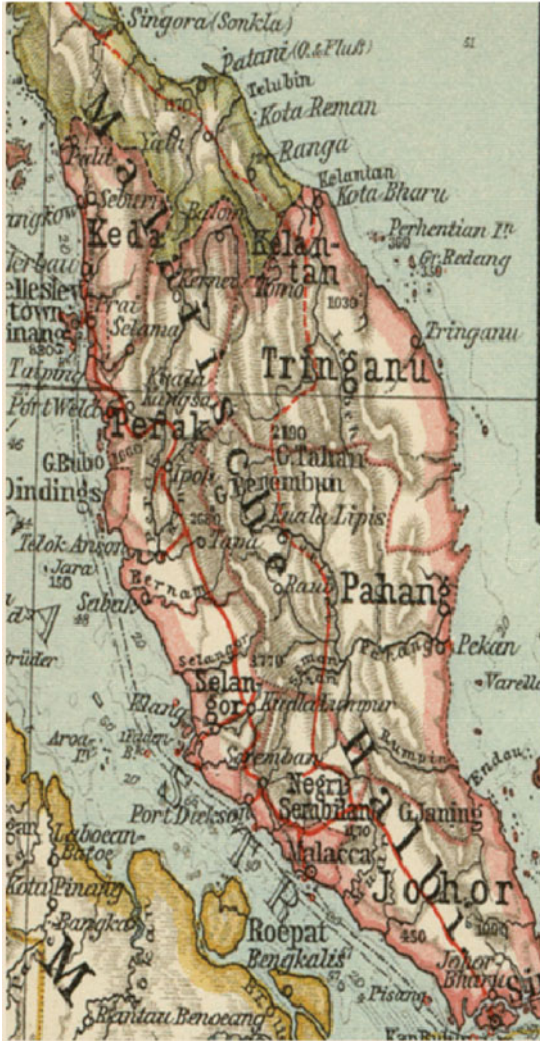
historians of Malaya, penetrated forests of the Malay Peninsula in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, negotiated with spirits, and extracted natural resources.¹ These miracle-working men and women were venerated for their esoteric science (*ilmu*) and employed by Malay peasants, as well as Chinese, Malay, and European miners. Miners were in awe of the *pawangs*' 'wonderful nose' for prospecting for tin and depended upon *pawangs*' esoteric knowledge of the terrain in western Malaya.² A traveller ploughing through the interior of nineteenth-century Malaya would have encountered a variety of *pawangs*. This traveller would have met *pawangs* in mines, *pawangs* who trapped elephants for their Asian and European clients, *pawangs* who crafted guns and bullets, and the rice *pawangs* this article focuses on.

The following sections investigate an epistle of an agrarian *pawang* from the Malay state of Negri Sembilan, and examine a *Kitab Perintah Pawang* (*Book of the Pawang's Command*) that was transcribed in the state of Perak (see Map 1). These documents of *pawangs* have been selected from a broader corpus of Malay manuscripts pertaining to religious economies and *pawangs*. A number of post-colonial scholars have dismissed these manuscripts as texts replete with legends, fantasies, magic, folklore, and entertainment, rather than the 'stuff of historians'.³ According to these scholars, these texts lacked the scientific data required for writing histories of social, economic, and cultural worlds in early modern and modern Malaya. Through examining these compendia of frontier patois, I aim to recount a history of rice worlds in the interior of modern Malaya, wherein projects of forest clearing and cultivation were spearheaded by

¹ For instance, a Malaccan imam Abdullah Al-Aydarus's 1892 epistle referred to the *pawang* as a male or female possessor of *ilmu* and the *berkat* (transferrable 'blessing' and power) of God, prophets, and divinities, and a key agent of penetrating porous, spiritual forests. Abdullah Al-Aydarus, *Inilah Surat Imam Abdullah Al-Aydarus* (Malacca, 1892). Manuscript housed at the Muhammad Hashim Collection, Kampung Kallang, Singapore.

² Cited from Abraham Hale, 'On Mines and Miners in Kinta, Perak', *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, JSBRAS, 16, 1885, pp. 303–304.

³ For instance, refer to J. C. Bottoms, 'Malay Historical Works' in K. G. Tregonning (ed.) *Malaysian Historical Sources*, Dept. of History, University of Singapore, Singapore, 1962, pp. 36–38; Ismail Hussein, *The Study of Traditional Malay Literature*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, p. 18; cited from Cyril Skinner, 'Transitional Malay Literature: Part 1 –Ahmad Rijaluddin and Munshi Abdullah', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*, 1978, pp. 470, 480–481; C. Skinner, *Prosa Melayu baharu: An Anthology of Modern Malay and Indonesian Prose*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1959.



Map 1. (Colour online) Malaya. Source: *Indien: Handbuch Für Reisende*, published by Verlag von Karl Baedeker, Leipzig, 1914. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

pawangs. Indeed, these two manuscripts contain rich data of economies in which agrarian change, extraction, and production were directly associated with the esoteric science of *pawangs* and their rituals of communicating with spirits. Spirits of the Malayan interior who were drawn into conversations by *pawangs* and were mobilized for agrarian work included prophets, divinities, demons and *jinn*s of Asian descent

and Zanggi (an appellation indiscriminately given to Black African and 'African'-looking peoples in general) origins. Moreover, the popular historical traditions of peasants in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century western Malaya have been recorded in these texts, and they are invaluable historical documents of the religious and economic sensibilities of cultivators. These manuscripts are truly products of settings wherein Muslim peasants associated the success of rice agriculture with *pawangs* and implemented the instructions of *pawangs* in forests and ricefields.

This article begins by analysing the 1922 epistle of a Tamil *pawang*, Abdullah bin Pilleh, before investigating the 144-page-long *Kitab Perintah Pawang* that was transcribed in 1879. This has been done to acquaint readers with rice worlds in modern Malaya in which agriculture was associated with the intercession and fertility rituals of actual *pawangs* like Abdullah Pilleh. Indeed, Abdullah Pilleh belonged to a prestigious lineage of *pawangs* from Negri Sembilan and was venerated as a successor of the first human *pawang*. By 1913, he commanded a cult of devotees from the villages of Sepri, Chembong, and Batu Hampar in the district of Rembau in Negri Sembilan.⁴ Abdullah Pilleh's 1922 epistle recorded a historical tradition that was popular amongst members of this agrarian cult. This tradition traced dry and wet rice production in the Malay state to the prophet Muhammad and Muslims who migrated from the Minangkabau uplands of central Sumatra to Malaya. In fact, in between the medieval and modern periods, parts of the Peninsula such as Rembau had expanded as key areas of settlement for migrants from Minangkabau, who were moving for religious and economic purposes (see Map 2).⁵ The 1922 epistle, however, remembered events from the agrarian lives of the first batch of Minangkabau migrants to Negri Sembilan, and their prophetic ancestor Muhammad, to emphasize that they were all dependent upon the powers of the *pawang*. It was highlighted here that prophets, historical colonizers, and contemporary Muslim peasants alike had to depend upon the *pawang* for successful rice production.

The *Kitab Perintah Pawang* was transcribed in the sub-district of Belanja in the upstream interior of Perak by the headman, *pawang*, and

⁴ Abdullah Pilleh, *Darihal Pawang* [Microfilm], Rembau, 1922. Housed at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Singapore, NL 24114.

⁵ Leonard Y. Andaya and Barbara W. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2001, pp. 52, 75, 97–98, 150, 168–169, 183.



Map 2. The Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. *Source: Gabriel Moss.* Courtesy of the author.

noble, Hajji Raja Yahya.⁶ The 1879 *Kitab* compiled traditions related to the role of the *pawang* in leading Muslim colonization of the frontier and in establishing the *ladang* (dry ricefield and product of cultivation upon high, dry ground). These were traditions of an economy in the north-western Malayan interior wherein a form of transhumant agriculture upon unlimited forest lands, as well as a doubling of the population of Muslim peasants since the 1830s, had produced *ladangs*.⁷ The *Kitab* meticulously described how the archetypal *pawang* led

⁶ Hajji Raja Yahya, *Kitab Perintah Pawang*, Perak, 1879; manuscript housed at the W. E. Maxwell Collection of Malay Manuscripts, Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, London, Malay 106.

⁷ Cited from Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, pp. 94–95.

labourers to clear forests, helped Muslim peasants establish *ladangs*, and negotiated with spirits of the forest to ensure agrarian change. The modern *pawang* and heir of a chain of historical *pawangs* gave religious sanction to a type of subsistence cultivation that was subsequently prohibited by the British Residency in Perak.

These traditions of *pawangs* on the frontier were recorded in the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* by Hajji Raja Yahya, who thence gifted his manuscript to the Assistant Resident of Perak, William E. Maxwell. Such scholarly collaborations between *pawangs* and representatives of the British Residencies in western Malaya were common by the late nineteenth century. *Pawangs* and Malay scribes were regularly employed to transcribe traditions that had been orally transmitted by *pawangs* and members of their cult and to copy manuscripts housed in libraries of Malay royals. A year before the *Kitab* was written, Maxwell had stressed that it was urgent to document the popular religious traditions of Malay Muslims and gain ‘explanations about various customs and ceremonies’ that were prone to ‘diminish as civilisation extends’.⁸ Following Maxwell, a list of European scholars and administrators in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Malaya looked upon *pawangs* as mines of information on Malay religion, and as prime agents of extracting natural resources. In fact, these scholar-administrators employed *pawangs* to penetrate the Malayan interior, hunt elephants, and conduct scientific experiments.⁹ They also hired *pawangs* to transmit their esoteric knowledge of the environment and resources to scribes. All these scholarly collaborations produced a plethora of Jawi and romanized Malay documents, including the *Kitab Perintah Pawang*, manuals for tin and gold mining, and botanical treatises.

The employee of the Straits Settlements Civil Service, Charles O. Blagden, referred to the *pawang* as the ‘indispensable functioning’ in western Malayan forests and ricefields. In his 1892 ethnographic

⁸ Maxwell was the Assistant Resident of Perak in 1876, and from 1878 to 1882, and was the most prolific contributor to the *JSBRAS* in the late nineteenth century. In an 1878 article on two Perak manuscripts, he stressed the urgency of obtaining information on ‘local traditions . . . customs and ceremonies’; see W. Maxwell, ‘Notes on Two Perak Manuscripts’ in R. O. Winstedt and R. J. Wilkinson (eds) *A History of Perak*, Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Singapore, 1934, p. 193.

⁹ ‘The Pawangs of Malaya’, *The Straits Times*, 4 May 1936, p. 13; Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, ‘*Kolonel Farquhar telah menyuruh orang menangkap gajah*’ in Hamzah Hamdani (ed.) *Hikayat Abdullah*, PTS Publications, Selangor, 2007, pp. 54–59; A. H. Hill, ‘Kelantan Padi-Planting’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, JMBRAS*, 24:1, 1951, p. 60.

notes, Blagden highlighted that the *pawang* was essential for ‘sowing, reaping, irrigation works, clearing jungle for planting and other agricultural operations’.¹⁰ In 1897, the ethnographer William W. Skeat advised English scholars against dismissing the faith Malay Muslim peasants placed in the magic of rice *pawang*s as ‘childish folly’.¹¹ According to Skeat, *Malay Magic* was intelligible in terms of its ‘real significance’ in forests and ricefields. Moreover, in a 1926 pamphlet, the Director of Education, Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, Richard O. Winstedt, argued that *pawang*s were ‘not mere charlatans even to the eye of the materialist’.¹² In Winstedt’s words, *pawang*s possessed weapons in their ‘spiritual “gun-room”, for rice agriculture, trapping, hunting and mining’. Even as little post-colonial scholarly attention has been paid to manuscripts of *pawang*s’ traditions, Farouk Yahya’s more recent book on *Magic and Divination* examined the ways in which manuscripts like the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* were illustrated.¹³ While Yahya adopted a strict art historical focus, this article complements his work by exploring these magical manuscripts as rich sources of historical data on socioeconomic worlds that remain inaccessible to the academy. In the Malayan interior, the ‘magic’ of Islam encouraged peasants, miners, and hunters to extract natural resources.

Amidst this conspicuous academic silence on *pawang*s and religious economies, a number of scholars of the agricultural economy in modern Malaya have acknowledged that rice cultivation was esteemed for cultural reasons and associated with *pawang*s. In the words of John M. Gullick, it was an ‘occupation hallowed by tradition and esteemed for more than purely economic reasons’.¹⁴ Following Gullick, Paul H. Kratoska, Cheng Siok Hwa, Lim Teck Ghee, and Patrick J.

¹⁰ Charles O. Blagden, ‘Pawang’ in *Notes on Matters Connected with Malacca and the Malay Peninsula*, Book I (1892); manuscript housed at the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, MS 297483. Also see ‘Editorial’, *The Straits Times*, 17 October 1954, p. 9; Raja Omar bin Raja Ali, ‘Pawang and Hantu’, *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1937, p. 10.

¹¹ William W. Skeat, *Malay Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula*, Cass, London, 1965, pp. 249–250; William W. Skeat, ‘Some Records of Malay Magic by an Eye-Witness’, *JSBRAS*, 31, 1898, p. 15.

¹² Richard O. Winstedt, ‘Malay Industries: Part 1: Fishing, Hunting and Trapping’ in *Papers on Malay Subjects*, Federal Malay States Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1926, pp. 1–2.

¹³ Farouk Yahya, *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts*, Brill, Leiden, 2015.

¹⁴ John M. Gullick, ‘The Negri Sembilan Economy of the 1890s’, *JSBRAS*, 24:1, February 1951, pp. 38–55.

Sullivan have mentioned that rice production was the most important facet of the economic life of Malays due to the high religious value of rice.¹⁵ This was in spite of the fact that rice cultivation was prone to vermin, tropical diseases, and vagaries of water supply, and that it provided a lower income than market gardening and wage labour. In brief sentences and footnotes, the aforementioned scholars recognized that Malay Muslim peasants in general conceived of the crop as a supernatural bounty and actively practised a religion that encouraged agrarian life. These scholars also mentioned that *pawangs* were indispensable experts of rice cultivation, and possessors of esoteric environmental science and magic. They orchestrated rituals in ricefields and fixed times for a variety of agricultural operations. Moreover, Ronald D. Hill's comprehensive historical geography of *Rice in Malaya* noted that 'magico-religious observances pertaining to rice' persisted within late nineteenth-century Malacca, Negri Sembilan, and Perak.¹⁶ Hill acknowledged that Malay Muslim peasants refused to substitute rice with 'more remunerative crops' due to religious sanction. He also mentioned that, in states like Perak, a system of Muslim law compelled cultivators to employ *pawangs*, to vivify their ricefields once every three months.

¹⁵ J. M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, Athlone, London, 1958, pp. 142–143; Lim Teck Ghee, *Origins of a Colonial Economy: Land and Agriculture in Perak, 1874–1879*, Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia: Federal Publications, Penang, 1976, pp. 43–44; Cheng Siok Hwa, 'The Rice Industry of Malaya: An Historical Survey', *JMBRAS*, 42:2, December 1969, pp. 133–134; Cheng Siok Hwa, *The Rice Trade of Malaya*, University of Malaya Press, Singapore, 1968, p. 1; Gullick, 'The Negri Sembilan Economy of the 1890s', pp. 45–46; Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants and Their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya, 1874–1941*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1977, pp. 228, 237–238; Patrick Sullivan, *Social Relations of Dependence in a Malay State: Nineteenth Century Perak*, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Kuala Lumpur, 1982, pp. 20, 38, fn. 139; P. H. Kratoska, 'Rice Cultivation and the Ethnic Division of Labor in British Malaya', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24:2, April 1982, pp. 286–288.

¹⁶ R. D. Hill, *Rice in Malaya: A Study in Historical Geography*, National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2012, pp. 42–45, 137, 139. Hill's references to religious rice worlds in western Malaya, whilst suffering from brevity, acknowledge the 'Malay Writer' in the Resident-Councillor's Office Malacca, Muhammad Jaafar's 1893 *khaus* addressed to the Acting Resident-Councillor that was published and translated in the *JSBRAS* in 1897. This describes Malaccan peasants' religiously ordained technologies and methods, supernatural sensibilities, and dependence upon the organizing, prophets-invoking, and pesticing *pawang*. Muhammad Jaafar, Inche, 'Darihal Pkerja'an Bersawah di Malaka', *JSBRAS*, 30, 1897, pp. 285–304. The term 'padi' is employed in Malay and Malayan English for the rice plant.

The following sections propose that Abdullah Pilleh's epistle and the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* are key historical documents for writing new economic, labour, religious, and connected histories of Malaya. In doing so, this article is inspired by Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* and his notes on microhistory. Herein, Ginzburg focused upon magical individuals who were regularly ignored by mainstream historians, and undertook a historical investigation of documents replete with 'fairy-tale and absolutely exceptional' traditions.¹⁷ Ginzburg argued that a microscopic examination of these magical individuals and traditions would provide valuable information on the 'characteristics of an entire social stratum in a specific historical period'.¹⁸ In focusing upon these manuscripts, I am also inspired by the more recent writings of a number of scholars working on historical discourse in pre-colonial and colonial India and Africa. Historians such as Daud Ali, Steven Feierman, Nile Green, Azfar Moin, Scott S. Reese, and Luise White have argued that texts full of magic, wonder, divination, spirits, and chronological anachronisms were exceptionally reliable historical documents.¹⁹ These scholars proposed that such magical materials were imperative for writing histories of social worlds that were otherwise inaccessible to the academy. These documents promised rich information on historical agents who are ignored in academic literature, and data of the magical terms these actors had used to understand their terrain, activities, transitions, and dangers.

In writing a history of religious economies and *pawang*s, I am also indebted to Michael Adas's work on the rice frontier of Lower Burma, and Richard M. Eaton's writings on the Islamic colonization

¹⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*, trans. Anne Tedeschi and John Tedeschi, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2012, pp. 202, 213, 218, 222–223.

¹⁸ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, trans. Anne Tedeschi and John Tedeschi, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1980, p. xx.

¹⁹ See Nile Green, *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion in the Service of the Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009; Azfar A. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, pp. 12, 15; Scott S. Reese, 'Urban Woes and Pious Remedies: Sufism in Nineteenth-Century Benaadir (Somalia)', *Africa Today*, 46:3/4, Summer–Autumn 1999, pp. 169, 186; Scott S. Reese, *Renewers of the Age: Holy Men and Social Discourse in Colonial Benaadir*, Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2008; Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, pp. 5, 10, 55, 70, 85; Daud Ali, 'Temporality, Narration and the Problem of History: A View from Western India c. 1100–1400', *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 50, April 2013, pp. 237–247.

of the Bengal delta.²⁰ Adas's project to write a broad socio-economic history of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Burma delta endeavoured to 'fully integrate the much neglected history of the "peasant masses"'.²¹ Adas's 'insider's history' of the frontier, however, was based upon European settlement reports. In particular, he explored reports pertaining to how rice production exponentially increased after the British annexation of Lower Burma in 1852. This article attempts to write an insider's history of the Malayan interior through analysing Jawi texts that were produced very close to the action in forests and ricefields. It aims to write a history of agrarian change through a perspective that was much closer to that of Muslim peasants, and pays attention to the religious terms these subalterns and their *pawangs* used to describe their dangerous, nutritional, and spiritual frontiers.²²

Eaton's works on the early modern rice frontier of Bengal examined Bengali literary texts and traditions relating to the miracles of colonizing *pirs* (elders; holymen). According to Eaton, these early modern and modern Bengali literary texts were produced by Muslim communities and scribes associated with the colonization of the Sundarbans forests. These communities and scribes 'mytho-historically' argued that Islamic prophets and saints were the first colonizers of the Bengal delta, and their traditions showed that charismatic *pirs* led forest clearing in the early modern Sundarbans. Nevertheless, Eaton conceded that these early modern colonizer-*pirs* were in all probability 'industrious and capable forest pioneers' who were reconstructed into Islamic colonizers by the modern period.²³ In the popular memory of modern Bengali peasants, these forest pioneers had 'swelled into vivid mythico-historical figures, saints'.²⁴ The

²⁰ See Chapter 9 of R. M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994; John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003.

²¹ Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964, p. 5.

²² I am also influenced here by the work of Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822–1920*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2006, p. 18.

²³ R. M. Eaton, 'Shrine, Cultivators, and Muslim "Conversion"', *The Medieval History Journal* 12:2, July/December 2009, pp. 206–207; R. M. Eaton, 'Human Settlement and Colonization in the Sundarbans', *Agriculture and Human Values*, 7:2, March 1990, p. 8; R. M. Eaton, 'Who Are the Bengal Muslims?' in R. M. Eaton (ed.) *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p. 271.

²⁴ Eaton, 'Who Are the Bengal Muslims?', p. 271.

manuscripts explored in the following sections, however, described rice worlds wherein *pawang*s were, in the course of their lifetimes, pivots of a 'socioeconomic system geared to the production of rice' and an Islam that 'conferred special meaning on agrarian life'.²⁵

The planter prophet and the messianic *pawang* in Negri Sembilan

Spoke God the Sacred and Mighty to the prophet Muhammad [—] endeavour to establish a ladang [dry ricefield] so as to materialise nutritional sustenance ... Muhammad established a garden and a ladang ... upon the appearance of a padi disease manifest as rats, caterpillar-like rice pests [*ulat*]... the *pawang* who was named ya Muhammad Saleh was called He was the Pawang of Provenance!
Abdullah bin Pilleh, Rembau (1922)

In a Jawi epistle dated 16 February 1922, the *pawang* Abdullah Pilleh transmitted the genealogical tradition, *Darihal Pawang* (*Of that Concerning the Pawang*), to the District Officer of Rembau.²⁶ The transmission of the *Darihal Pawang* commenced with tracing a historical period wherein 'God', 'Muhammad', the 'Earth', and 'sky' were not yet known as such, and wherefrom God created the *nur Muhammad* (light of Muhammad) as an object of divination. This light, in turn, created the aligned solar system and a plethora of supernatural beings. These beings included *keramats* (miracle-workers and miracle-working shrines), *jinns*, *hantus* (demons), *shetan* (armies of Iblis, not to be confused with Satan, Iblis), and, most pertinently, the *Pawang of Provenance*. This *pawang* was introduced by the Prophet Muhammad to God as Muhammad Saleh.²⁷

Abdullah Pilleh proceeded to introduce a slightly later historical period in which the Prophet Muhammad became paranoid about the food scarcity of his emerging community. Seeking urgent solutions, the prophet approached God and the archangel Jibrail, who had earlier transmitted the Qur'an to Muhammad. Upon the advice of God and Jibrail, Muhammad established a *ladang* and a garden for the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 266.

²⁶ Abdullah Pilleh, *Darihal Pawang*.

²⁷ Skeat suggested instead that '*hantu*' and '*shetan*' were generic terms for 'evil spirits', *Malay Magic*, p. 101.

production of rice, wheat, and millet.²⁸ The resolutely Malay (rather than Arab) prophet selected Negri Sembilan as the chosen land for food production and thereby established an Islamic work ethic of subsistence cultivation for his contemporary and future community.²⁹ Nevertheless, the pioneer planter was struck by calamity when a rice epidemic ravaged his ricefields upon their maturity. The prophet was compelled then to plead for the miracle-worker and intermediary of agrarian frontiers, the *Pawang of Provenance*, Muhammad Saleh.

Abdullah Pilleh's epistle was preoccupied with narrating historical events that demonstrated the miraculous expertise of Muhammad Saleh. Indeed, the *pawang* restored Prophet Muhammad's ricefields in seven days and won believers throughout prophetic Negri Sembilan. The epistle emphasized that dry rice-pushing prophets, historical cultivators of permanent wet rice in marshes, and contemporary Muslim cultivators alike were dependent upon the intercession of the *pawang*. Beyond the aforementioned episode of the prophet Muhammad's impotence vis-à-vis Muhammad Saleh, it elaborated upon a historical event from the medieval period that was memorialized by generations of *pawang*s and peasants in Negri Sembilan. This event was that of establishing a pioneer permanent wet rice colony at a 'broad and extensive marsh' in the Malay state.³⁰ According to Abdullah Pilleh, this historic colony was a product of collaboration between the community and heirs of Prophet Muhammad, 'human assemblies' (an allusion to non-Muslims), *hantus* (demons), *jinns*, and *shetan* (armies of Iblis). This appeared to be a reference, to which nineteenth-century oral traditions recorded in Rembau attest, to the establishment of permanent wet rice colonies in the lowland valleys of Negri Sembilan, by *circa* 773/1388.³¹ These

²⁸ The analysed Malay materials mention *ladang* production and dry rice, and cultivation in marshes and *sawah* rice (wet rice). For a critique of this 'dual typology' that 'remains entrenched in the literature', see Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. 37.

²⁹ For the association of prophets with agriculture in Bengali 'mytho-historical' literature, see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, p. 194; Ayesha Irani, 'Sacred Biography, Translation, and Conversion: The "Nabivamsa" of Saiyad Sultan and the Making of Bengali Islam, 1600–present', unpublished dissertation, UPenn, 2011, pp. 283–284.

³⁰ The conversion of a marsh to wet ricefields (*sawah*) typically took three years. See C. H. A. Turney's 30 December 1891 'Report by the Senior District Officer, Klang, on Padi Cultivation', *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor upon the Best Means of Encouraging the Cultivation of Rice*, p. 32.

³¹ Thomas J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur; Singapore, 1971, p. 61; Michael G. Peletz, *A Share of the Harvest: Kinship, Property and Social History Among the*

colonies were established by Minangkabau settlers and sheikhs who were simultaneously experts of agricultural techniques and Islam, as well as the aboriginal horticulturalists of Jakun (or related) stock.

Abdullah Pilleh's didactic epistle placed little emphasis upon orthodox historical chronology. It was instead preoccupied with listing historical episodes that were remembered in Negri Sembilan rice worlds, wherein Muhammad Saleh miraculously intervened on the behalf of colonizers. Indeed, the early twentieth-century *pawang* accentuated that the aforementioned pioneer Minangkabau wet rice colonizers were forced to beg for the intercession of Muhammad Saleh. In the fashion of their prophetic forefather Muhammad, they were compelled to do so upon persistent outbreaks of rice epidemics and vermin.

Following the fourth month of the second annual crop, the pioneer wet ricefields of Negri Sembilan were ravaged by these epidemics. A mere beckon away from the believing cultivator, the time- and space-travelling Muhammad Saleh popped up in the Malay state. He mobilized the peasantry for a seven-day-long fertility rite, *berpuar*, to expel the real cause of rice epidemics and vermin: malignant supernatural beings. The *berpuar* was a spiritual combat with the stems of *puar*, amomum cardamomum, that were described by a witness in early twentieth-century Negri Sembilan as '3½ feet long darts'.³² Spearing the four directions with *puar* stems, a war-cry-screaming Muhammad Saleh led a march of cultivators, armed with items such as gongs, elongated weapons, multi-coloured flags, and banners. They marched into the wet ricefields (*sawah*) from the upper waters of the principle river watering the parish area's valley(s) to the lower reaches. The *pawang* terrified malevolent *hantus* and rice pests in the *sawah*, in the course of reminding colonizers to befriend beneficial *jinn*s and armies of Iblis in the upstream interior through buffalo sacrifice.

Abdullah Pilleh's direct associations of dry, hill, and wet rice cultivation in Negri Sembilan with Islamic forefathers and the archetypal *pawang* serve to address lacunae in historiography on

Malays of Rembau, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988, pp. 15–18; C. W. C. Parr and W. H. Mackray, 'Rembau: One of the Nine States', *JSBRAS*, 56, 1910, pp. 2–6; Dudley F. A. Hervey, 'Rembau', *JSBRAS*, 13, 1884, pp. 241–258.

³² For a discussion of the *berpuar* ceremony, see Richard O. Winstedt, 'A Rice Ceremony', *JSBRAS*, 77, December 1917, p. 249; Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 250; Dato Sedia Raja Abdullah, 'The Origin of the Pawang and Berpuar Ceremony', *JSBRAS*, 2, November 1927, pp. 310–313. Also see Norhalim Ibrahim, *Adat Berpuar dan Pertahanan*, Lembaga Muzium Negeri Sembilan, Seremban, 2007.

peasants' Islam in Malaya. In the words of Leonard Y. Andaya and Barbara W. Andaya, Malayan historiography yet suffers from 'glaring gaps' in knowledge of the practice of Islam and the 'life of the Malay peasant' and 'common people'.³³ The contributions in Greg Bankoff and Peter Boomgaard's *History of Natural Resources in Asia* and Boomgaard and David Henley's *Histories of Foodcrop and Livestock Farming* further highlight that historians have paid 'literally no attention' to certain key subjects.³⁴ These subjects include the belief systems and popular historical traditions of Southeast Asian agriculturalists and the 'conventions, schemata and stereotypes' employed by them to define environments and resources.

The 1922 Jawi epistle is thus an invaluable document of the religio-historical sensibilities of Minangkabau peasants in modern Negri Sembilan who associated the expansion of the rice frontier and crop with the *ilmu* and miracles of Muhammad Saleh. In fact, according to Abdullah Pilleh, this *Pawang of Provenance*, who was employed by the Prophet Muhammad and fourteenth-century Muslim colonizers, lived to conduct fertility rites in the ricefields of nineteenth-century Negri Sembilan. Whilst Abdullah Pilleh's hagiography of the *Pawang of Provenance* was silent about Muhammad Saleh's genealogy, the scribe was careful to attach a section entitled 'The Descent of the Pawang of Provenance'. This section chronologically charted a list of *pawang*s who succeeded Muhammad Saleh as heirs of his chain of authority, up to Abdullah Pilleh. It revealed that the ancient, albeit time-travelling, Muhammad Saleh was only replaced by a successor-*pawang* in 1867.

Abdullah Pilleh's account of the messianic *pawang*'s encounters with the Prophet Muhammad and his Minangkabau heirs in Negri Sembilan was not simply a record of an imagined Islamic past. It served

³³ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 40–41, 109–110.

³⁴ Greg Bankoff and Peter Boomgaard, 'Introduction: Natural Resources and the Shape of Asian History 1500–2000' in Greg Bankoff and Peter Boomgaard (eds) *A History of Natural Resources in Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, pp. xv, 1–5; Peter Boomgaard and David Henley, 'Agricultural and Livestock Histories of Southeast Asia' in Peter Boomgaard and David Henley (eds) *Smallholders and Stockbreeders: Histories of Foodcrop and Livestock Farming in Southeast Asia*, KITLV Press, Leiden, 2004, p. 5; R. D. Hill, 'Towards a Model of the History of "Traditional" Agriculture in Southeast Asia' in Boomgaard and Henley, *Smallholders and Stockbreeders: Histories of Foodcrop and Livestock Farming in Southeast Asia*, pp. 19–46; William G. Clarence-Smith, 'Horse Breeding in Mainland Southeast Asia and Its Borderlands' in Boomgaard and Henley, *Smallholders and Stockbreeders*, p. 203. Also see William G. Clarence-Smith, 'Elephants, Horses, and the Coming of Islam to Northern Sumatra', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 32:93, July 2004, pp. 271–272, 280–281.

as a document of the socio-economic sensibilities and agricultural techniques of communities of Minangkabau colonizers and peasants in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Negri Sembilan. A range of European documents suggested that Abdullah Pilleh's portrayals of rice agriculture as an occupation transmitted from pious ancestors to modern Muslim peasants were far from being self-fulfilling exaggerations of a profiteering *pawang*. These documents consisted of the writings of representatives of the British Residencies in western Malaya, compiled in the 1893 compendium *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor upon the Best Means of Encouraging the Cultivation of Rice (Rice Reports)*. Multiple *Rice Reports* emphasized that the Minangkabaus of Negri Sembilan were an 'ideal peasantry' that preserved 'ancient habits and traditions'.³⁵ Herein, it was accentuated that, amongst the Malays of Negri Sembilan, the cultivators of Rembau were peculiarly prone to conceive of rice as an ancestral factor of production rather than an 'ordinary article of commerce' for sale and exchange.³⁶

Rice cultivation in Rembau was further described as being driven by customs and religio-historical precedent in the early nineteenth-century writings of an officer in the 23rd Regiment Madras Light Infantry, as well as an 1884 article of the Resident-Councillor of Malacca, Dudley F. A. Hervey.³⁷ On the one hand, according to these English records, the peasants of Rembau religiously opposed the extraction of alluvial tin deposits, fearing that the discharge would 'poison the "sawah" and impede rice cultivation. On the other hand, these cultivators abided by agricultural techniques inherited from pious ancestors, including the method of preparing the soil before harrowing by means of a large wooden "changkul" or hoe'. In spite of

³⁵ See, for example, W. E. Maxwell, 'Encouragement of Rice-Cultivation in the Malay Peninsula' in *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency*, 1893, pp. 60–61; 1892 'Report on Padi Cultivation in the District of Kuala Langat, during 1891 [—] District Office Kuala Langat, Selangor', *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor*, pp. 31–33.

³⁶ Also cited from the 1888 *Annual Report*; refer to Gullick, 'The Negri Sembilan Economy of the 1890s', p. 46.

³⁷ Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements*, pp. 117–118; Thomas J. Newbold, 'Account of Rumbowe, One of the States in the Interior of Malacca' in J. H. Moor (ed.) *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries Being a Collection of Papers Relating to Borneo, Celebes, Bali, Java, Sumatra, Nias, the Philippine Islands, Sulus, Siam, Cochin China, Malayan Peninsula, etc.*, Singapore, 1937, pp. 62, 66; Hervey, 'Rembau', pp. 256–258; Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. 133. In the Minangkabau lands of Negri Sembilan, *changkuls* were in fact wielded by women. Also refer to Gullick, 'The Negri Sembilan Economy of the 1890s', p. 46.

buffaloes being more available in Negri Sembilan vis-à-vis Malacca wherein buffaloes were employed for ploughing and puddling, the quintessential cultivator of Rembau followed the footsteps of the hoe-bearing Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, instead of harking back to a prophetic past, Abdullah Pilleh depicted the prophet Muhammad in the fashion of archetypal nineteenth-century Minangkabau *ladang*-pushers. These *ladang*-pushers were cultivators of tracts of secondary forest upslope from a garden that provided a variety of vegetables upon the piedmont. They enjoyed an ‘innate love of liberty, and freedom from all shackles’ of state monopolies over river systems that snaked into the interior.³⁸ These peasants were connoisseurs, like the first planter Muhammad, conscious of *ladang* rice being ‘sweeter and whiter, and to keep better’ than the ‘watery’ rice of wet fields.

In the manner of Malay epistles, demonologies, and manuals pertaining to *pawangs* who eradicated pests, Abdullah Pilleh’s epistle contained rich information on how Muhammad Saleh’s heirs were venerated as messianic, fertility-bestowing *pawangs*.³⁹ This is apparent in both the discussion of Muhammad Saleh’s expertise in prophetic and historical Negri Sembilan and the aforementioned section on the *Descent of the Pawang of Provenance*. Herein, through a chain of succession, Abdullah Pilleh associated himself with the esoteric science and miraculous expertise of Muhammad Saleh and his pre-1867 ‘agency as *pawang*’ (*jawatan pawang*).⁴⁰ This was an agency even the prophet Muhammad lacked. In this section, the *pawang* legitimized his succession of his Minangkabau guru ‘Pawang Dris’ (Idris of Sepri) in 1913 and command over parish areas and miracle-working shrines (*keramats*) in the district of Rembau. Abdullah Pilleh highlighted that his agency was premised on its faculties to assure Negri Sembilan the ‘extensive comprehensive healthy padi ... and bountiful pleasures’ it enjoyed under the supervision of Muhammad Saleh in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Abdullah Pilleh also elaborated

³⁸ Cited from Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements*, pp. 1, 263; William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, Longman, London, 1811, p. 66; Thomas S. Raffles, *The History of Java*, London, 1817, pp. 1, 118.

³⁹ For instance, see sections related to the *ilmu* of massacring bees, *hulat* (caterpillar-like rice pest), and rats in *Book of Charms Formerly Belonging to a Sultan Muda of Perak and Given to R. O. Winstedt by Raja Haji Yahya of Chendriang*; manuscript housed at the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, 25027/2.

⁴⁰ Abdullah Pilleh, *Darihal Pawang*, ‘Descent of the Pawang of Provenance’.

⁴¹ These *keramats* include the upstream ‘Dato Palong’, midstream ‘Dato Hulu Chembong’, and downstream ‘Menggam’. For a brief discussion of the *pawang* Idris of

upon how two of his predecessors and aspirants of the 'agency as *pawang*' and Muhammad Saleh's expertise had been fired in 1895 and 1904, respectively. These wannabe *pawang*s had been fired due to the emergence of 'poor padi' and civil strife within the peasantry of Negri Sembilan, during their period in office.

It is difficult to ascertain whether Abdullah Pilleh's epistle sought to legitimize his 'agency as *pawang*' through the aforementioned *Descent of the Pawang of Provenance*. Indeed, he had ascended from being a Tamil orphan from the village of Chembong and from being a mere 'child disciple' of the Minangkabau *pawang* Dris, to the rank of *Pawang* commanding Minangkabau parishes.⁴² Nevertheless, in addition to the 1922 epistle, a variety of materials provided snippets of information on projects of colonization in the western Malayan interior that were spearheaded by multifarious *pawang*s such as Abdullah Pilleh. Malay manuscripts, newspaper articles, and the writings of European scholar-administrators and missionaries were all equally telling of projects that involved Malay and creole (Arab-Malay) husbandmen, as well as Tamil and southern Chinese cultivators in the case of the district of Krian in Perak.⁴³ These late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century enterprises were driven by Malay, Tamil, and Arab Muslim *pawang*s and their less significant European Roman Catholic and American

Sepri, see R. O. Winstedt, 'Karamat: Sacred Places and People in Malaya', *JSBRAS*, 2:3, December 1924.

⁴² Abdullah Pilleh's 'origins' are mentioned in the 1922 epistle and elaborated upon in a twentieth-century Tamil-Malay hagiography, Abdul Kadir Ghani, *Sepintas Riwayat Hidup Toh Abdullah Pilleh*, Rembau, 1986. Also see Winstedt, 'Karamat', p. 277.

⁴³ Materials include an 1887 manual of physiological and erotic instructions for the rice-producing *mualad* (creole, patrilineal descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), a manuscript housed at the Royal Asiatic Society, Malay 120; the unpublished 1892 and 1893 ethnographic notes of Blagden; and select late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *Singapore Free Press* articles. For records of Christian missionaries, see C. Leech's (State Commissioner of Lands) 28 April 1892 memo to 'The Secretary to Government. Taiping', Edward Gasnier's (Bishop of Malacca) 14 December 1891 memo to 'Mr [H. C.] Belfield' (Bishop House, Singapore), W. H. Treacher's 23 June 1892 memo to 'The Hon. The Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements', Maxwell's 'Encouragement of Rice-Cultivation in the Malay Peninsula', W. H. Treacher's 1 April 1892 memo, L. P. Beaufort's (British Governor) 5 December 1891 memo to 'W. H. Treacher, ESQ. C.M.G.', and A. B. Stephens's (Assistant Indian Immigration Agent) 6 February 1892 memo to 'The Secretary to Government, Taiping', in *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor upon the Best Means of Encouraging the Cultivation of Rice*, pp. 5, 13–15, 19–20, 24–26, 65. Also see the 1889 autobiographical epistle of the *Missions Etrangères de Paris* priest of a Tamil Roman Catholic wet rice colony in Krian (Perak), Fr. Fee, 'Kampong Padre: A Tamil Settlement Near Bagan Serai, Perak', trans. Fr Manikam, *JSBRAS*, 36:1, May 1963; *Perak Government Gazette*, Taiping [Perak], 1894, p. 38.

Methodist competitors. Herein, the success of agrarian change was directly associated with the esoteric science and miracles of these 'pawangs'.

Abdullah Pilleh's discussion of the prototypical rice *pawangs*' 'agency' neither provided specific examples of extensions in the Nerasau valley of Rembau in the 1890s nor mentioned outbreaks of epidemics such as rinderpest from 1882 to 1884.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, it furnished valuable data on subaltern socio-economic worlds that yet remain in obscurity for most Malayan historians. Herein, agricultural progress, the rice crop, and Islam were associated with a chain of *pawangs* who, to paraphrase Eaton, were 'saints whose lives served as metaphors for the expansion of both religion and agriculture'.⁴⁵ This lineage of *pawangs* comprised Muhammad Saleh and his successor, Abdullah Pilleh, who mediated epidemic-causing spirits and determined 'extensive comprehensive healthy padi' in Negri Sembilan.⁴⁶

The Tamil *pawangs*' epistolary claims that the esoteric science of Muhammad Saleh was indispensable in Negri Sembilan rice worlds were substantiated by the diatribes of a reformist Muslim courtier. This was the *Undang* or Supreme Law Giver of Rembau, Dato Sedia Raja Abdullah bin Haji Dahan (in office 1922–38) whose successor, Dato Hajji Ipap (in office 1938–62) fined Minangkabau clan chiefs for facilitating rice *pawangs*.⁴⁷ The writings of Abdullah bin Haji Dahan berated *pawangs* who held unparalleled authority over Muslim peasants in modern Negri Sembilan, and were venerated as saints and godlike intermediaries of wet ricefields. In the words of the courtier, these *pawangs* were, in reality, 'lamentable obstacles' to the economic progress of Muslim commoners and relics of the 'pre-Islamic "Days of Ignorance"'.⁴⁸ The fact that rice production in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Negri Sembilan was directly associated with *pawangs* such as Muhammad Saleh was particularly

⁴⁴ Hervey, 'Rembau', p. 256; Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. 127.

⁴⁵ Eaton, 'Who Are the Bengal Muslims', p. 266.

⁴⁶ The 1893 collection of *Rice Reports* comprises multiple mentions of Rembauan fields being 'much better kept' than Malaccan ones, and Rembauan land being 'so thoroughly cultivated'; for instance, see Martin Lister (British Resident), 'Report on the Promotion of Rice and Other Grain Seeds in the Confederated States of the Negri Sembilan', *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor upon the Best Means of Encouraging the Cultivation of Rice*, p. 39. Also see Hervey, 'Rembau', p. 256.

⁴⁷ Peletz, *A Share of the Harvest*, pp. 159, 320.

⁴⁸ Dato Sedia Raja Abdullah, 'The Leading Saints in Rembau', *JSBRAS*, 3:3, December 1925, p. 104; Abdullah, 'The Origin of the Pawang and the Berpuar', p. 313.

apparent in a 1925 article of Abdullah bin Haji Dahan. This was written to rubbish the aforementioned *berpuar* ceremony that had been initiated by the zealously venerated Muhammad Saleh and was a fertility rite perpetuated by his heirs in contemporary Negri Sembilan. The courtier's article, however, reproduced a concise hagiography of Muhammad Saleh that was circulated in rice worlds of the Malay state. Herein, the pioneer *pawang* and his successors were attributed esoteric knowledge of a 'Book' of miracles and remedies transmitted by God to Muhammad Saleh via the prophet Muhammad.⁴⁹ This relegation of the Prophet Muhammad into the role of Jibrail, transmitting the Qur'an to Muhammad Saleh, was similar to Abdullah Pilleh's portrayal of the prophet as being dependent upon the *pawang*. These representations were testaments of Malayan frontiers whereupon cultivators called upon messianic *pawang*s and their successors rather than the historically distant and less efficacious Prophet Muhammad.

The *Pawang's Command*: traditions of Islamic colonization from the spiritual frontier

Requesting the clump of practise in this [forested] territorial space ... my anak chuchu [descendants], raiat [peasants, freemen], tentera [armies] cut down brushwood [—] fell large trees [—] plant directly through dibbling holes in the clump of practise of this territorial space ... in this earth of beasts for the ladang [—] it is not I who fells timber by cutting fine notches [—] it is the primordial Being, Pawang Sadia [—] the Vice-regent Pawang [—] Batara Guru [Siva] ... Retreat, withdraw demons and armies of Iblis! The children of Adam intend to make passage.

Kitab Perintah Pawang, 1879⁵⁰

The preceding section explored Abdullah Pilleh's 1922 epistle that associated rice agriculture with religio-historical tradition and with the intercession and rituals of *pawang*s who straddled the ephemeral boundaries between human and spiritual agency on the Malay frontier. This section focuses upon select traditions recorded in the 1879 *Book of the Pawang's Command*—a compendium of chapters, sections, and clauses of recitations, charms, and talismans that were orally transmitted. These portions of the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* were related to the prototypical *pawang's* command over operations in

⁴⁹ Abdullah, 'The Origin of the Pawang and Berpuar Ceremony', pp. 310–312.

⁵⁰ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini kata pada kemenyan tetkala akan memulakan menebas membuat ladang atau barang sebagainya' and 'Ini tangkal hujan panas atau pemadam panas'.

forests and ricefields, and the religio-historical basis of the *pawang*'s command. Moreover, these parts of the text pertained to rituals of communication undertaken by the *pawang* with eclectic spiritual beings upon the terrestrial frontier. As a concluding note specified, the manuscript was completed by Hajji Raja Yahya upon 21 Shaaban 1296 (10 August 1879) in the village of Belanja Kanan, in the interior of Perak.

My exploration of the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* aims to address the lacuna in academic literature on Islamic texts on environments and natural resources. Alan Mikhail's and Arash Khazeni's works on Middle Eastern and Central Asian environments, for instance, have argued that historians have so far neglected 'Islamic systems of knowledge about nature'.⁵¹ According to these historians, the academy has ignored Islamic literature informative about how 'Muslims have put into real world effect' religious knowledge on reclaiming environments.⁵² The scribe of the 1879 *Kitab* unfortunately provided no data regarding the connections between recorded agricultural traditions and specific peasant communities or rice *pawang*s. He also provided no information about the original transmitters of parts of the *Kitab*, beyond certain names. Nonetheless, the transmitters of the text appear to have been particularly familiar with actual trends in forests wherein *pawang*s selected precise plots (or *clumps of practice*) for prospective ricefields. Upon selected terrain, these *pawang*s spearheaded forest clearing and planting in the 'earth of beasts', which was in turn converted by the *pawang*'s rites, into the Muslim peasant's *ladang*.⁵³

These transcriptions in the *Kitab* are cogent representations of types of subsistence cultivation as well as agricultural techniques that were subsequently prohibited by the British Residency in Perak from 1888. This was done through Orders in the Perak Council such as the *Order in Council No. 6 of 1890* that was passed 'with the object of discouraging the cultivation of *ladang*' or the 'temporary and destructive use of land by transients'.⁵⁴ This Order was designed to encourage permanent

⁵¹ Arash Khazeni, 'Across the Black Sands and the Red: Travel Writing, Nature and the Reclamation of the Eurasian Steppe Circa 1850', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42:04, November 2010, pp. 593–600.

⁵² Alan Mikhail, *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p. 9.

⁵³ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini kata pada kemenyan tetkala akan memulakan menebas membuat *ladang* atau barang sebagainya'.

⁵⁴ 'Order in [the Perak] Council No. 6 of 1890: Discouragement of *Ladang* Cultivation', in *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency (1893)*, pp. 22–23.

agriculture upon potentially productive land in western Malaya so as to address the Peninsula's 'massive annual food deficit' and reduce the amount of rice being imported from Burma and Siam, to feed a burgeoning population of foreign labourers.⁵⁵ The Order was enforced under the auspices of District Offices by 1893 and through schemes such as an 1891 project to colonize blocks of land near Belanja for permanent wet rice production. As a matter of fact, it struggled to terminate *ladang* agriculture, since the 'objective of the Perak Malay was self-subsistence'.⁵⁶

According to Maxwell's 1884 survey of customary Malay land tenure and contributions to the 1893 *Rice Reports*, *ladang* was encouraged by the 'availability of land' and dire 'want of population' in late nineteenth-century Perak. In Maxwell's words, it was 'no doubt, the national Malay mode of agriculture'.⁵⁷ Significant portions of the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* described agrarian settings in which this 'national Malay mode of agriculture' had attained deep religious connotations. Herein, *ladang* cultivation was associated with establishing an Islamic presence or *clump of practice* in Malay forests, emulating historical *pawang*s and channelling God's powers to Malaya. According to the transmitters of the *Kitab*, this was a process of supernaturally converting the forested 'earth of beasts' into a Muslim *ladang*.

Chapters of the 1879 *Kitab* that captured the procedures of establishing a dry ricefield were coherent with the erstwhile Principal Secretary, Bencoolen, William Marsden's 1783 notes on 'shifting cultivation'.⁵⁸ These chapters of the *Kitab* included, on the one hand, the *chapter recited to incense whilst towards commencing upon felling establishing the ladang*. This chapter was in all probability recited before the husbandman selected and appropriated a plot (that was, in Marsden's words, an 'acre or two in extent'). On the other hand, these chapters

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Kratoska, 'Rice Cultivation and the Ethnic Division of Labor', pp. 282, 292.

⁵⁶ Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. 105.

⁵⁷ 'Order in [the Perak] Council No. 6 of 1890: Discouragement of Ladang Cultivation', in *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency (1893)*, pp. 22–23; Lim Chong Yah, *Economic Development of Modern Malaya*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1967, pp. 153–154; Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. 105. See W. E. Maxwell, 'The Law and Customs of the Malays with Reference to the Tenure of Land', *JSBRAS*, 13, 1884, pp. 75–78, 103–104.

⁵⁸ Hill has excellently discussed 'shifting cultivation' in the Malay world by introducing Marsden's writings. As Hill highlighted, nineteenth-century European writings established 'clearly the salient characteristics of rice cultivation, first in Sumatra, then in Java and the islands to the eastwards then, partly by implication, in the Peninsula', *Rice in Malaya*, pp. 36–38; Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, pp. 68–71.

consisted of the *chapter recited to the timber-knife* that reported on how the *descendants, peasants, and troops* cleared brushwood and *dislocated and deviated roots and sprouted to the sky* large trees through lopping their branches off. Forest clearing herein was depicted as an activity of emulating historical *pawang*s and conducted under the auspices of their contemporary heir, a physically present *pawang*. These transmissions further included, first, the *chapter recited to incense towards conducting burning* that described forest clearers being led by the *pawang* to violently conquer the ‘earth of beasts’ and set fire to cleared timber and underwood that was adequately arid; second, the *recitation whilst burning* that elaborated on how the *pawang* channelled the ‘permission of God the All Powerful’ into Malay forests for burning the last logs in the clearing; and, third, the *chapter recited whilst directed towards planting the seed directly* that portrayed how the *pawang* facilitated sowing in shallow holes across the ricefield. Typically, according to Marsden, bluntly pointed five-foot-long sticks were used to make shallow holes into which approximately five seed grains were dropped.⁵⁹ This operation that followed a month- or two-month-long period of comprehensive burning marked the miraculous conversion of the ‘earth of beasts’ to the Muslim’s *ladang*.

The transmissions recorded in the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* moreover serve as windows into forests in nineteenth-century Malaya, wherein agrarian change was directly associated with the labours of historical *pawang*s and prophets. These *pawang*s included the primordial Being, Pawang Sadia (Skr. *sadhya*, accomplishment or perfection), and Pawang Asal (Ar. *asl*, provenance or extraction), who served as the first Vice-regent Pawang, of Sadia. Other such *pawang*s of the *Kitab*, which often confused *pawang*s with prophets and divinities, were the prophets Noah and Adam, and rice divinities such as the Batara Guru (Siva), who was also the grandson of Noah.⁶⁰ The image of historical *pawang*s as pushers of agricultural labour emerges in the *Kitab*’s preface, *Origin and Genealogy of the Pawang*, that was transmitted by a *pawang*, Puan

⁵⁹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*, ‘bab ini kata pada kemenyan tetkala akan memulakan menebas membuat ladang atau barang sebagainya’, ‘bab ini kata kepada parang yang takukkan pada tanah tepung’, ‘bab ini kata kepada kemenyan tetkala akan membakar’, ‘ini kata tetkala membakar’, and ‘bab ini kata tetkala akal menugal’.

⁶⁰ G. E. Shaw, ‘Malay Industries: Part 3: Rice Planting’, *Papers on Malay Subjects*, Federal Malay States Government Press, 1926, pp. 20–21. Maxwell refers to the *semangat padi* as the ‘Malayan Ceres’, ‘Encouragement of Rice-Cultivation in the Malay Peninsula’, *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor upon the Best Means of Encouraging the Cultivation of Rice*, p. 53.

Jambi (the Madam of Jambi, Sumatra). She was, in turn, credited with preserving the transmissions of a list of *pawang*s including a prominent agrarian *pawang*, To' (Elder) Sheikh Idrus.⁶¹

The *Origin and Genealogy* traced a historical setting wherein 'God was not yet referred to as Allah, and the Prophet not yet referred to as Muhammad'. This was an era when the light of Muhammad, the sky, Earth, solar system, heaven, hell, *jinns*, humanity, Iblis, and angels had not been created.⁶² In this atmosphere, the lonesome Pawang Sadia was the only existing Being. Longing for a consort, Sadia created the bird-like *bidadari* (hourai), the Pawang Asal. Serving as the vice-regent of Sadia, Asal created the whole solid Earth in seven days, and generated further *pawang*s, elements, humanity, *jinns*, *shetan*, Iblis, raw husked rice, and parched rice. For its creative labours, the bird-like *pawang* was gifted the mantle of the 'elder, sheikh and expert of the forest' (*to' sheikh belantrawan*) by the elder Sadia. This mantle was, in turn, to be passed on by Asal to successive human *pawang*s, who were to penetrate the newly created forests. Even over the course of recounting spectacular genealogies of Iblis, *jinns*, divinities, and divinities, Puan Jambi's *Origin and Genealogy* prevented its audience from forgetting the socio-economic relevance of the chronicle of the pre-human *pawang*s, Sadia and Asal. It emphasized that contemporary human *pawang*s were in reality vice-regents of the pioneer *pawang*s in Malay forests and heirs of their Creative *ilmu*. *Pawang*s in modern Malaya were heirs of the cloak of 'elder, sheikh and expert of the forest'.⁶³

The *Origin and Genealogy* also introduced the prophet Noah as the first human *pawang*, as well as pioneer of *ladang* production and husbandry with iron tools. Beyond this preface, multiple sections of the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* referred to Noah as the prophet of timber. Forest clearing in modern Malayan forests as such required the intercession of the historical *pawang* Noah, who still presided over timber and was exclusively invoked by contemporary *pawang*s.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the *Kitab* is replete with chapters that refer to forest pioneers as 'the children

⁶¹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'Salasilah daripada Tengku Puan Jambi [...] menyatakan Asal Kejadian Pawang'.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ The trope of gifting and inheritance of the mantle of *to' sheikh belantrawan* appears to be evocative of Sufi literature pertaining to sheikhs handing over *khirqas* to appointed successors.

⁶⁴ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. For instance, see 'Salasilah daripada Tengku Puan Jambi', 'bab ini jampi hantu kayu', 'bab ini kata tetkala menebang kayu anak pintu itu', 'ini kata kepada kemenyan akan penebat', and 'ini tangkal harimau'.

of Adam', 'the human descent of Adam [—] the people of Islam', and 'the party [—] children of Adam'. These vividly connected agrarian projects with the *pawang* and prophet Adam, who was venerated by select peasant communities in nineteenth-century Perak as the father of the *semangat padi* (vital force or soul of rice).⁶⁵ According to a popular religio-historical tradition documented by the Acting Assistant District Officer of Krian (Perak), G. E. Shaw, in 1911, the prophet had migrated to western Malaya upon his expulsion from Eden. Anxious about food scarcity in his emerging community, Adam sacrificed a son and daughter 'into the plains ... chopping them into small fragments ... scattering these over the ground'.⁶⁶ In the course of six months, and miraculously, these chops gave birth to 'wide plains waving with golden harvest'. The chopped children of Adam collectively became the rice-soul and survived to impregnate modern Malay ricefields and assure bountiful harvests, annually.

In an 1881 pamphlet on *Malay Myths*, Maxwell referred to traditions of the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* like the *Origin and Genealogy* as traditions of 'Perak *pawangs*, or Shamans'. In his words, these were 'firmly believed in by the Malays' despite inconsistency with the 'teachings of orthodox Muhammadanism'.⁶⁷ As a scholar of Malay religious evolution, the Assistant Resident was primarily interested in the *Kitab* as a 'jumble of aboriginal superstition ... Hindu mysticism ... [and] Muhammadan nomenclature'. He remained oblivious to how *Myths* compiled in the 1879 manuscript were elaborate Islamic genealogies of agrarian *pawangs* and prophets, whose heirs physically penetrated forests in

⁶⁵ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. For example, see 'Ini tanggal hujan panas atau pepadam panas', 'Salasilah [transmitted by] Ngah Johor Andong', and 'bab ini jampi sakit kepala panah Ranjuna'. For the specific association of Adam with agriculture in Bengali 'mytho-historical' literature, see Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*, p. 194; Irani, 'Sacred Biography', pp. 283–284.

⁶⁶ Shaw, 'Malay Industries: Part 3: Rice Planting', pp. 20–21. The trope of rice plants emerging from corpses and 'bloody and murderous sacrifices' is also evident in Sumatran, Javanese, and Rembong mytho-historical traditions; see Maribeth Erb, 'Cuddling the Rice: Myth and Ritual in the Agricultural Year of the Rembong of Northern Manggarai, Indonesia', *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, 10, 1994, p. 180; P. E. de Josselin de Jong, 'An Interpretation of Agricultural Rites in Southeast Asia, with a Demonstration of Use of Data from Both Continental and Insular Areas', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 24:2, February 1965, pp. 284–285; Dana Rappoport, 'To Sing the Rice in Tanjung Bunga (Eastern Flores), Indonesia', *Austronesian Soundscapes: Performing Arts in Oceania and Southeast Asia*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2011, p. 110.

⁶⁷ W. E. Maxwell, 'Two Malay Myths: The Princess of the Foam, and the Raja of the Bamboo', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 13:4, October 1881, pp. 521–523.

modern Malaya and negotiated with *genii loci* of the frontier. Maxwell also paid little attention to how the esoteric science of *pawang*s was meticulously described as essential for agrarian change throughout Muslim history, from the prophetic era of the first *ladang* cultivator Noah, to the modern period. However, in an undated memo attached to the 1879 *Kitab*, he mentioned that the grandson of Noah and rice divinity, Siva, was regularly invoked by Muslims ‘in remote hamlets . . . at clearing jungle for a ricefield’.⁶⁸ Similarly, in the 1881 pamphlet, the Assistant Resident noted that *pawang*s had established lucrative careers in Perak rice worlds, by showing the ‘antiquity of the *pawang*’s profession’ through the *Origin and Genealogy*.⁶⁹

Although the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* commenced with a genealogy of forest pioneering prophets and *pawang*s, like Abdullah Pilleh’s later epistle, it was not simply a record of an imagined Islamic past. It was a document of the agricultural sensibilities, conventions, and techniques of colonizers in contemporary Malaya, and possibly Sumatra. For instance, the *Kitab* represented rice or *ladang* rice as a prestigious supernatural product for nutritional sustenance that was passed down from historical *pawang*s and prophets to modern peasants. It made no reference to rice as a monetized commodity for exchange or sale. This representation of subsistence rice production in fact reflected the character of an agricultural economy in the upstream interior of north-western Malaya, wherein land was a factor of production instead of a commercial article. This economy was mentioned in Hill’s *Rice in Malaya*, notes in the 1893 *Rice Reports*, and late nineteenth-century European journals of expeditions to Perak. These writings made multiple mentions of *ladangs* that were widespread upon tracts of secondary forest upslope from gardens cultivating vegetables such as Indian corn. These dry ricefields had been produced by a form of transhumant cultivation in between the 1830s and late 1870s, and an approximate doubling of the population of ‘agriculturalists and their dependants’ in this period.⁷⁰ Cultivators of these *ladangs* were in turn described by their European observers as ‘superstitious’ Malay Muslims who bore a ‘fertile imagination’.⁷¹ These peasants

⁶⁸ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See Maxwell’s note ‘Still in remote hamlets [. . .]’ attached to *Kitab Perintah Pawang*.

⁶⁹ Maxwell, ‘Two Malay Myths’, p. 521.

⁷⁰ Cited from Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, pp. 94–95.

⁷¹ For instance, refer to A. T. Dew, ‘Exploring Expedition from Selama, Perak, over the Mountains’, *JSBRAS*, 19, 1887, pp. 111–112, 114, 118, 121; Leonard Wray, ‘Journal of a Collecting Expedition to the Mountain of Batang Padang’, *JSBRAS*, 21,

were convinced that the frontier was populated by supernatural forces and spirits, and they organized cultivation around rituals of mediating these spirits.

Within a broader corpus of Jawi manuscripts collected from Perak, the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* was the most detailed record of the intercessionary rites of the *pawang* and the *pawang*'s physical authority in ricefields. Manuscripts that contain data on the subject include the *Undang Undang ke-99* (99 Laws, of Perak) that has been traced to a 'family of sayyid courtiers' in the reign of the Sultan of Perak, Iskandar Zulkarnain Shah (1752–65). Another such manuscript is an untitled Jawi record of the *Peraturan Resam Pawang Melayu* (Arrangement and Customary Usage of Malay Pawangs) that was gifted to Winstedt by two Perak headmen in 1913.⁷² The 12th, 29th, 59th, and 80th chapters of the *Undang Undang ke-99*, for instance, were related to questions posed by the Sassanid emperor, Anushirwan (d. 579) to his minister. Nevertheless, these chapters were telling of a resolutely Malay (rather than Persian) setting wherein the *pawang* was the ruler of the ricefield, was 'entitled to maintenance from the faithful', and was free from state taxation and forced labour. These chapters described a world wherein *pawang*s were venerated for their powers to correct 'matters that were improper' in the ricefield through incantations. Furthermore, they were employed by peasants to conduct a tri-yearly ritual of vivifying rice that was strikingly similar to the *berpuar*.⁷³

The *Peraturan Resam* alternatively was a compelling portrayal of the agrarian science and practices of *pawang*s who penetrated the forests of modern Perak. Remarkably, the *Peraturan Resam* was a first-person narrative told from the viewpoint of the western Malayan husbandman who looked upon the *pawang* as being the 'second in line for obeisance'

June 1890, pp. 124, 126, 130, 137, 156; W. H. Treacher's 5 April 1892 memo to 'The Colonial Secretary', *Reports Furnished by Order of His Excellency the Governor upon the Best Means of Encouraging the Cultivation of Rice*, pp. 5–6.

⁷² James Rigby, 'Law: Part II—The 99 Laws of Perak' in *Papers on Malay Subjects*, Federal Malay States Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1908. Also see *Untitled [Peraturan Resam Pawang Melayu]* (Perak, Undated); manuscript housed at the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, MS40334. Moreover, refer to Richard Winstedt, *Shaman, Saiva and Sufi: A Study of the Evolution of Malay Magic*, Constable, London, 1925, p. 143; Richard Winstedt eventually romanized the *Peraturan Resam Pawang Melayu* and published it as 'The Ritual of the Rice-Field', *JMBRAS*, 7:3, October 1929.

⁷³ Refer to the 12th, 29th, 59th, and 80th *babs* of Rigby, 'Law: Part II—The 99 Laws of Perak'. *The Straits Times* articles suggest that this was a period when *pawang*s were remunerated in *gantangs* in comparison to cash by the mid-twentieth century; see 'Editorial', *The Straits Times*, 17 October 1954.

after God and the Prophet Muhammad.⁷⁴ The document explained how the *pawang* gifted tools to the colonizer, taught techniques of forest clearing, and planted seeds directly through dibbling within seed plots. These were in fact seed plots that the *pawang* had earlier tasted, selected, and partitioned. When sowing was complete, the *pawang* called for the gating of the ricefield. Upon harvest, the *pawang* reaped the delicate rice-soul to preserve it for the following cycle of cultivation, and advised peasants to appropriate reaping tools and techniques that did not upset the rice-soul. Thereafter, the *pawang* organized the pounding, airing, cleansing, and storing of reaped rice.

In the fashion of the aforementioned traditions and Abdullah Pilleh's later epistle, significant parts of the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* served as windows into forests and ricefields wherein *pawang*s were physically engaged in spearheading agriculture. According to a series of chapters, the quintessential *pawang* was indispensable throughout agrarian operations in modern Malaya due to the fact that he had inherited tools and items that had originated from the body of the pre-human *pawang*, Asal. These items and tools, passed down from the Creator Asal to the contemporary *pawang*, consisted of the inner heart of the divinity Indra (*Indra rasa*). The *Indra rasa* was transferred from the body of Asal to Malayan clearings via the *pawang*'s teeth, and it miraculously transformed into raw husked rice that was sown in forest clearings, to repel dangers of the frontier.⁷⁵ Another item—the 'freer from dirt and danger and disastrous arthropods'—emanated from the finger and toenail of the *pawang* into the ricefield.⁷⁶ Other similar items consisted of incense for mediating spirits, and the protector of crops, the 'freer from dirt and danger, disaster, and antidote to the venomous and gnomes'.⁷⁷ Incense materialized in forests and ricefields through the snot of the *pawang* and the protector of crops was described as having fallen from heaven, only to be sprinkled upon the ricefield off the beard of the *pawang*.

The bodily presence of the *pawang*, however, is most apparent in two chapters concerning forest clearing. These were, on the one hand, a *chapter recited to the timber-knife* wherein the iron of blades was claimed to be a metallic form of the *pawang*'s semen and, on the other, a

⁷⁴ *Peraturan Resam Pawang Melayu*; Winstedt, 'The Ritual of the Rice-Field', p. 437.

⁷⁵ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'bab ini kata kepada beras'.

⁷⁶ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'bab ini kata kepada bertih'.

⁷⁷ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'bab ini kata tetkala akan memula menebang ladang' and 'bab ini kata kepada tepung tawar'.

chapter recited towards swinging the light hatchet.⁷⁸ According to these parts of the *Kitab*, frontier-traversing *pawangs* regularly inspected the tools and notches of forest clearers, and they selected plots and organized colonization through *petua* (Islamic jurisprudential opinion, fatwa). After the preliminary clearing of brushwood upon a prospected plot, *pawangs* inspected the first notch made by the labourer with the timber-knife and subsequently checked on the forest clearer's 'fine notching of three punches' with the light hatchet.⁷⁹ If these inspections were favourable, these 'elders, sheikhs and experts of the forest' appropriated the plot for a *ladang* field, marked it with talismans, and issued a *petua* of colonization for their clients.

Upon selecting the plot, according to three sections of the *Kitab*, the archetypal *pawang* began rice agriculture through erecting a *genggulang* (an altar or platform for propitiating spirits). By the late nineteenth century, *pawangs* were employed to erect *genggulang*s to invite spirits to cooperate with both peasants and miners, for planting and excavating tin ore.⁸⁰ According to the 1879 *Kitab*, modern *pawangs* and heirs of the Creator Sadia used these altars to propitiate prophets and divinities who visited the western Malayan interior such as Noah and Muhammad. The *pawang*, for example, called upon Muhammad to assist in planting and to protect the cultivator throughout forthcoming agricultural operations by harnessing communities of *jinn*s and angels.⁸¹ The *pawang* did so through erecting the altar, burning incense, and through Islamic rituals of remembering the name and life of the prophet. In addition, the *pawang* invited a list of divinities and historical *pawangs* to the plot, to fill the altar with unseeable items that appeased the Prophet Muhammad. These historical *pawangs* included the son-in-law of Muhammad, Ali; the Pandava divinity, Bhima; and Pawang Chulan, who was regularly invoked across the pages of the *Kitab*. Elsewhere in the *Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals)*, Chulan was portrayed as a south Indian descendant of Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great), who crossed the Indian Ocean and impregnated the Ocean's princess. Chulan's offspring, in turn, made their way to Palembang (Sumatra) to promise Malays bountiful

⁷⁸ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'bab ini kata kepada parang yang takukkan pada tanah tepung' and 'ini kata tetkala akan mengayun beliong'.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ See Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 256.

⁸¹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini sandaran dijampikan kepada kemenyan-kemenyan itu dibakar usapkan diri kita yang jadi pawang' and 'bab ini kata tetkala menarik tudung'.

harvests. They miraculously converted dry hill rice clearings into fields of ‘luminous golden rice’.⁸²

Pawangs’ rituals of communication and the work of spirits in Malay forests

The essays in Ruy Blanes and Diana E. Santo’s recent volume, *Social Life of Spirits*, proposed that academic writing on Asian and American frontiers focus upon the corporeality of spirits and the thin line between human and spiritual agency. These writings also suggested that scholars should systematically explore the ways in which mediums communicated with spirits and analyse how spirits possess an ‘intentionality capable of directing and exerting actions’.⁸³ Indeed, in their *History of Malaysia*, Andaya and Andaya mentioned that Malayan forests from early history were perceived to be ‘haunts of demons and spirits’.⁸⁴ The work of extracting aromatic woods, resins, and rattans, as such, was tied to the ‘mastery of the secret and esoteric knowledge’, supernatural powers, and a ‘special language’. Entering the Perak interior in the 1870s, explorers such as Maxwell and the deputy commissioner of the Perak Expedition complained that the never-ending forests of north-western Malaya were yet replete with ‘homes of ghosts’.⁸⁵ To travel upon this ‘horrid ghostly’ frontier, these explorers were forced to rely upon the occult sciences and

⁸² *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See ‘*fasal ini menyatakan perintah genggulang’*, ‘*bab ini sandaran dijampikan kepada kemenyan-kemenyan itu dibakar usapkan diri kita yang jadi pawang*’, and ‘*bab ini kata tetkala akan mengisi genggulang*’. The ‘*Salasilah daripada Tengku Puan Jambi*’ mentions the tradition of historical *pawangs* such as Chulan, Rambaian, and Jamuna to ‘appease’ the ‘hovering’ great-great grandchildren of Noah via *genggulangs*. For the chronicle of Chulan, see ‘*Alqisah [2]*’ and ‘*Alqisah [3]*’ Text of *Raffles Ms. No. 18*, romanized by Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, compiled by Cheah Boon Keng, in *Sejarah Melayu: The Malay Annals—MBRAS Reprint 17*, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Kuala Lumpur, circa 1998.

⁸³ See Diana Espírito Santo and Ruy Blanes’s ‘Introduction: On the Agency of Intangibles’, Grégory Delaplace’s ‘What the Invisible Looks Like: Ghosts, Perceptual Faith, and Mongolian Regimes of Communication’, Florencia C. Tola’s ‘The Materiality of “Spiritual Presences” and the Notion of Person in an Amerindian Society’, Mark Harris’s ‘Enchanted Entities and Disenchanted Lives along the Amazon Rivers, Brazil’ in Ruy Blanes and Diana Espírito Santo (eds) *The Social Life of Spirits*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2014, pp. 6, 25, 67, 71, 83.

⁸⁴ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 12, 48, 136–137.

⁸⁵ Cited from F. A. Swettenham, ‘Journey ... from Durien Sebatang on the Perak River to Slim, and Down the Slim and Bernam Rivers to the Sea’, *JSBRAS*, 5, June 1880, pp. 65–66.

‘curious customs’ of spirit mediums, and beg for the ‘dispensation of Providence’.⁸⁶

This section argues that the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* is the most detailed Jawi collection of rituals of communication undertaken by *pawang*s with multifarious spirits in the modern Malayan interior. These conversations with the spirits of prophets, divinities, *pawang*s, fire beings, gnomes, and Zanggi *jinn*s and demons allowed clients of the *pawang* to penetrate forests in western Malaya and extract natural resources successfully. To a lesser extent, shorter Jawi documents such as Abdullah Pilleh’s epistle and the aforementioned *Peraturan Resam* noted that *pawang*s actively negotiated with spirits to spearhead rice agriculture in western Malaya. The Tamil *pawang*’s 1922 epistle, for example, highlighted that select *hantus*, *jinn*s, and *shetan* who lived in the upstream interior of prophetic, medieval, and modern Negri Sembilan had triggered rice epidemics and were expelled by *pawang*s. Nonetheless, Abdullah Pilleh emphasized that amoral *jinn*s, demons, and armies of Iblis had regularly cooperated with Muslims in forest clearing, and that these spirits could be befriended through the propitiatory rituals of *pawang*s.⁸⁷

The 1913 *Peraturan Resam* was a first-hand narrative of how the Perak husbandman directly associated the success of a broad spectrum of agricultural activities with the *pawang*s’ propitiation of spirits. Herein, the selection of a lucrative plot was connected to the *pawang*s’ rituals of communicating with the spirit ‘elders who held the clump of practise’ or plot.⁸⁸ Efficient forest clearing was associated with the *pawang*s’ negotiations with ancestors who continued to live in the Malayan interior to supervise deforestation. Planting and harvesting proceeded, otherwise, through the *pawang*s’ rituals of befriending the prophet Muhammad and ancient *pawang*s. The friendly prophet managed seeds that were directly planted in dry hill clearings of the Perak interior. To ensure bountiful harvests, the ancient *pawang*s collaborated with peasants to reap the crop. Furthermore, the 1913 *Peraturan Resam*

⁸⁶ Cited from *ibid.*, pp. 65–66; W. E. Maxwell, ‘A Journey on Foot to the Patani Frontier in 1876: Being a Journal Kept During an Expedition Undertaken to Capture Datoh Maharaja Lela of Perak’, *JSBRAS*, 9, June 1882, p. 26.

⁸⁷ For instance, the ‘*Descent of the Pawang of Provenance*’ highlights that Pawang Dris, in the ninth year of office, made an oath to the ‘*ghaib* [unseeable] people’ to not discard the *berpuar* ceremony; see *Darihal Pawang*. For a concise account of *pawang*s’ ‘spirit friends’ in the Peninsula, see Zainal Abidin, ‘The *Akuan* or Spirit Friends’, *JSBRAS*, 86, November 1922, pp. 378–384.

⁸⁸ Unnamed Perak headmen, *Peraturan Resam*.

reported on how the *pawang*s simultaneously expelled a list of spirits who were detrimental to agriculture from the ricefield. These included Earth *jinn*s, gigantic fire beings, Earth gnomes (*jembalang bumi*), and female banshees.⁸⁹

Alternatively, multiple transmissions that were recorded in the 1879 *Kitab* connected the success of intricate agrarian activities to the powers of God and supernatural beings who were invoked by *pawang*s. Through sophisticated negotiations in the modern Malayan interior, *pawang*s acquired the transferrable blessings (*berkat*), talismans, and exorcist powers of God, prophets, historical *pawang*s, and *bataras*. These *bataras* were characterized in the missionary Rev. J. Perham's 1881 study of Dyak divinities as 'saving powers' and as divinities who possessed a 'superior knowledge' of agriculture and protected the rice crop against evil spirits. According to Perham, *pawang*s enjoyed a 'special acquaintance' with these divinities and called upon *bataras* to collaborate with peasants in the annual cycle of cultivation.⁹⁰

Such an image of *bataras* was evident in multiple sections of the *Kitab*, including a *Genealogy* transmitted by a *pawang*, Ngah Johor Andong.⁹¹ This *Genealogy* that was compiled in the middle of the *Kitab* reintroduced the pioneer *pawang*s, Sadia and Asal. It elaborated upon how their creation of the Earth had a side effect. It inadvertently allowed demons and armies of Iblis (collectively, the *hantu shetan*) to start roaming the Earth.⁹² From this early moment onwards, agrarian operations such as forest clearing were condemned to draw the ire of demons and the armies of Iblis and, as such, could only proceed with the support of *bataras*. A charm transmitted by Ngah Johor Andong with this *Genealogy* clarified that agrarian change upon this demonic frontier depended upon the *pawang*s' faculties to employ armies of *bataras*. The *pawang* penetrated the interior, befriended divinities such as Batara Guru (Siva) and Batara Kala (Siva the Destroyer) through incantations and charms, and requested their armies for a series

⁸⁹ These included Earth *jinn*s, *bhutas* (gigantic fire beings), Earth gnomes (*jembalang bumi*), and female banshees (*langsuyir*). Unnamed Perak headmen, *Peraturan Resam*. Also see W. E. Maxwell, 'Folklore of the Malays', *JSBRAS*, 7, June 1881, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Rev. J. Perham, 'Petara, or Sea Dyak Gods', *JSBRAS*, 8, December 1881, pp. 134–136, 138, 141–147, 149; also see R. J. Wilkinson, 'Batara Guru', *JSBRAS*, 30, July 1897, p. 307.

⁹¹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. Refer to 'Salih daripada Ngah Johor Andong' and 'ini kelaminnya [the subsection of the *Salih*]'.
⁹² This section elaborated upon how the primordial *pawang*s' act of 'breaking the cylinder of essence' (*baluh dzat*) to create the Earth had a side effect—the 'beginning of the *hantu shetan*'s roaming of the earth'.

of tasks.⁹³ On the one hand, upon the selection of a plot, these *batara* armies were employed to convince spirits who ruled the plot to share it with the client of the *pawang*. These spirits of the plot consisted of *keramats* (miracle-workers), *jinns*, fairies, lesser divinities, and a list of divinities such as Indra. On the other hand, prior to becoming protectors of seeds that were planted in holes across the plot, these *batara* armies ‘disciplined and punished’ belligerent demons and armies of Iblis who had been roaming Malayan forests since the era of Creation.⁹⁴

In general, the *Kitab Perintah Pawang* was a compendium of conversations undertaken by *pawangs* with an array of spirits, to initiate functional relationships. Significant portions of the 1879 *Kitab* document the recitations of *pawangs* who guaranteed fruitful deforestation, planting, and reaping, through their functional friendships with divinities, spiritual elders, and cosmic *pawangs*. The aforementioned *chapter recited to the timber-knife*, for example, showed that efficient forest clearing depended upon the *pawangs*’ invocations of *bataras* and a cosmic *pawang*, Si Raja Pawang (the sayyid *pawang* of the Sun and Moon).⁹⁵ Herein, Si Raja Pawang was befriended by the contemporary *pawang*, called upon to ‘stand positioned’ with the forest clearer, and appointed as the actual agent to clear brushwood, dislocate roots, and chop timber. With the support of Batara Guru, Batara Kiswa (Krsna), and Batara Bisnu (Visnu), the cosmic sayyid *pawang* notched the timber-knife and ‘lifted the traps of fronds’ that engulfed Malayan forests.

Further recitations transmitted by *pawangs* such as an Itam Dembut described how agricultural activities from sowing down to reaping in contemporary Malaya required the intercession of eclectic friendly

⁹³ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. Refer to ‘Salih daripada Ngah Johor Andong’ and ‘ini kelamannya’. According to Skeat, Siva had ‘numerous manifestations and titles attributed to him by the Malays’ including Batara Guru and Batara Kala (Skeat translates the epithet of Siva, Kala, as ‘Black’ instead of ‘Time’, perhaps inaccurately); see *Malay Magic*, pp. 85–92. The ‘main deity of Perak’, Batara Guru, along with the Muslim armies of Batara Kala and Batara Sakti (seemingly confused by ethnographers including Skeat as both the divinity Brahma and divinity Sakti) are often indistinguishable in the *Kitab* as *bataras* and as the ‘historical *pawangs* of the land’ produced through the loins of the dry rice pioneer, Noah; see ‘Salasilah daripada Tengku Puan Jambi’.

⁹⁴ This was done through summoning the spiritual ‘rajas of the great virgin forests [—] recently felled forests and ricefields’. *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See ‘Salih daripada Ngah Johor Andong’.

⁹⁵ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See ‘bab ini kata kepada parang yang takukkan pada tanah tepung’ and ‘ini katakan kepada Parang Penako’ itu’.

spirits.⁹⁶ These portions of the *Kitab* reported on how the incanting *pawang* began cultivation by gathering a congregation of friendly spirits to shield the bodies of peasants engaged in dibbling and direct seed planting.⁹⁷ This congregation was formed by a list of prophets, spirit elders, *keramats*, ancient *pawang*s, and the yet-living ‘graves of instructors of Islam’. When sowing was complete, the *pawang* invited a deity to the modern Malayan ricefield, to serve as the playmate, foster mother, nurse, and ‘enchantress’ of the hearts of seeds that had recently been planted, for a period of six months.⁹⁸ This deity was referred to, in Itam Dembut’s transmission, as the ‘crosser of 190 afflictions and illnesses’ and as the Gandum Suri Sulong (the Eldest Queen of Wheat).⁹⁹

Having employed this maternal deity, the *pawang* proceeded to communicate with seeds sown within holes dibbled across the ricefield and requested these seeds to reside under ‘foster care for a period of five months’. Speaking directly to these seeds, the *pawang* informed them that, upon the sixth month of reaping, they would return from Earth to the palace of God.¹⁰⁰ The final recitation of Itam Dembut compiled in the *Kitab* elaborated upon the *pawang*s’ harvesting of the delicate rice-soul upon the sixth month of *ladang* cultivation. This act of clipping the freak ear, however, was performed by friends of the modern *pawang* who were invited to the Malayan ricefield. These friends consisted of a list of historical *pawang*s such as Chulan and the Pandava divinities, Bhima and Ranjuna (Arjuna).¹⁰¹

The trope of negotiating with spirits to pursue agrarian transformation was not one peculiar to Malay materials like the *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. The earlier *Sejarah Melayu*, for instance, narrated

⁹⁶ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. The ‘*bab ini kata tetkala akan menugal dikatakan kepada kemenyan*’, the ‘*bab ini kata kepada bertih*’, the ‘*ini kata kepada beneh*’, the ‘*kataan kepada kemenyan*’, and the ‘*Perintah semangat teriak Itam Dembut . . . ini kata mengambil semangat*’.

⁹⁷ These peasants were regularly described as the ‘*anak chuchu raiat tentera*’.

⁹⁸ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. ‘*bab ini kata tetkala akan menugal dikatakan kepada kemenyan*’ and ‘*ini kata kepada beras*’.

⁹⁹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. ‘*bab ini kata tetkala akan menugal dikatakan kepada kemenyan*’ and ‘*ini kata kepada beras*’.

¹⁰⁰ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See ‘*ini kata kepada beneh*’; John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago: Containing an Account of the Manners, Arts, Languages, Religions, Institutions, and Commerce of its Inhabitants*, A. Constable and Co., Edinburgh, 1820, pp. 360–363.

¹⁰¹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. ‘*Perintah semangat teriak Itam Dembut . . . ini kata mengambil semangat*’. The collective of *pawang*s collaborate to return the *semangat* to the ‘storage womb of the *kalimah*’ (*lailahalilallah muhammadrasulallah*) and to ‘Sadia Kala’. Such *semangat*-friendly methods included clipping rice with the *tuai* (tiny reaping knife concealable in the palm of a hand) instead of sickle-harvesting.

anecdotes from the life of the historical superhuman from Perak, Badang. Herein, Badang's powers to 'shiver huge trees into pieces', 'extract the all-embracing forest from its roots', and 'reconstruct the deep forest into a somewhat wide plain' were described as powers gained through his negotiations with a *hantu* (demon).¹⁰² The 1879 *Kitab* nonetheless is the most detailed Jawi collection of conversations and negotiations undertaken with 'African' (Zanggi) *jinns* and *hantus* in Malayan forests to transform forested tracts into ricefields. This was apparent in chapters of the *Kitab* that recorded *pawang*'s rituals of communicating with Afrasian spirits to colonize a plot selected by the *pawang* and peasant. For example, in a ritual of communication pertaining to colonizing the plot (or *establishing the clump of practice*), the *pawang* spoke to *jinns*, demons, and armies of Iblis in the forest, and bargained with these potentially hazardous spirits. These spirits comprised *hantus* who lived in ravine valleys and within timber and *jinns* such as the *jinn ghai Zanggi perkasa tuha* (old gallant Zanggi forest banshee).¹⁰³

Amidst this conversation, the *pawang* befriended these spirits, converted them into agents of agriculture, and bound them into an unseeable (*ghaib*) letter of agreement. According to the terms of this contract, these *hantus* and *jinns* were to collaborate with a list of Muslim colonizers who had been readied by the *pawang*, upon the frontier. These Muslim agents of rice agriculture in turn, consisted of clients of the *pawang*, prophets, elders, *jinns*, fairies, lesser divinities, and divinities.¹⁰⁴ This *ghaib* contract legally bound the aforementioned demons and Zanggi *jinn* to perform a series of agrarian tasks. To promote cultivation, these spirits were obligated to awaken and revitalize a community of sleepy spirits who lived on the head, foot, and navel of individual rice plants. These spirits were also required to discipline a group of spirits who regularly bullied the delicate 'rice child' (crop) and inflicted fevers, anxiety, and delirium upon peasants. These belligerent spirits were in turn depicted in the *Kitab* as *anak rajas*

¹⁰² *Alqisah [5]*' Text of *Raffles Ms. No. 18*, in Cheah, *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 96–104.

¹⁰³ These included the residents of ravine valleys, the forest *polong*, and the red snake-appearing resident of timber, *penanggalan*. *Jinns*, fairies, *mambang*s (lesser divinities), *dewas*, Chandra, and Indra are also described in portions of the *Kitab* as descendants of the historical 'Imam Jamala' vis-à-vis the rebellious Jan, the predecessor of Iblis. See *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'Salasilah daripada Tengku Puan Jambi'.

¹⁰⁴ This *ghaib* letter of agreement was a surat muapakat. *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini kata pada kemenyan tetkala akan memulakan menebas membuat ladang atau barang sebagainya'.

(the royal offspring) of the historical *pawang*s, Ranjuna and Bhima.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, upon being drawn into the aforementioned contract, spirits like the *jinn ghai Zanggi perkasa tuha* were employed by the *pawang* to control the spread of 190 varieties of pests, crawlers, reptiles, and arthropods in the ricefield. These rice pests were described in the *Kitab* as the *raiat* (freemen) of the prophet, King Solomon, who had spread over the Earth in the course of history.¹⁰⁶

Rituals of communication related to forest clearing and dibbling in the *Kitab* further elaborated upon how the *pawang* transformed the 'earth of beasts' into a *ladang* field, through another unseeable contract. This was a contract the *pawang* made with the aforementioned Zanggi *jinn* and another 'Sumatran and Zanggi' spirit, the *jinn bumi jembalang tanah* (the androgyny of the Earth *jinn* and gnome).¹⁰⁷ Numerous sections of the *Kitab* portrayed this androgynous spirit as the cause of tremors, obstacles, and severe physical and psychological infirmity in the Malayan interior. The *pawang*, however, fearlessly communicated with both these belligerent *jinn*s, converted them into companions and lovers, and, thereafter, tied them down by a contract. According to the terms of this letter of agreement, these spirits were legally bound to banish their 'descendants, freemen, armies', and idols from ricefields, to allow the complete autonomy of Muslim peasants who employed the *pawang*. Moreover, upon being drawn into this contract, these *jinn*s were obligated to protect the child (crop) of the dry ricefield throughout the six months of cultivation from 190 types of disease.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini dikata dahulu daripada berlaung'. This disruptive image of spiritual *anak rajas* is accentuated in sections of the *Kitab*, and is similar to the image of 'actual' *anak rajas* in late nineteenth-century Perak that we find in historiography. For instance, see B. W. Andaya, *Perak, the Abode of Grace: A Study of an Eighteenth Century Malay State*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1979, p. 31. Also refer to the British Resident, J. W. W. Birch's 'Report on Perak, 2 April 1875' in P. L. Burns (ed.) *The Journals of J. W. W. Birch, First British Resident to Perak, 1874-1875*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur and New York, 1976, pp. 390-391.

¹⁰⁶ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini dikata dahulu daripada berlaung'.

¹⁰⁷ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'bab ini kata tetkala akan menugal dikatakan kepada kemenyan'. Also see 'bab ini kata tetkala akan mengisi genggulang' and 'bab ini kata kepada parang yang takukkan pada tanah tepung'. I am grateful to the *pawang*s, Muhammad Hashim, M. A. Ridhwan, and Abas Ali Al-Aydarus, for sharing demonologies of the Sumatran-African spirit.

¹⁰⁸ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. 'bab ini kata kepada kemenyan tetkala akan membakar', 'bab ini kata tetkala akan menugal dikatakan kepada kemenyan', 'bab ini kata tetkala akan mengisi genggulang', and 'bab ini kata kepada parang yang takukkan pada tanah tepung'. The rice

Other Zanggi spirits named in the *Kitab* included a convulsive *hantu* identified as Zanggi Ilyas and a *Stiff Haired Courtier of the Zanggi Mountain*, who haunted the forests of Johor, Perak, and Sumatra. Rituals of communication transmitted by two *pawangs*, such as Naam and Imam Ungu Haji Abdul Kadir, showed how these potentially hazardous Zanggi spirits were reformed by *pawangs*. In the course of conversations in the Malayan interior, the *pawang* transformed these spirits who molested, sickened, and injured the bodies of Malay Muslim peasants into being guardians of these clients of the *pawang*. These Zanggi spirits were, in turn, warned by the *pawang* that, if they refused to reform and protect peasants, they would suffer petrifying punishments that would be administered by a list of prophets, *pawangs*, and divinities.¹⁰⁹ All the aforementioned portrayals of Zanggi spirits were in line with how popular Islamic traditions in northern Malaya referred to East Africans as ‘residents of the *hulu*’ (upstream interior) by the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ In a similar vein, these references to Zanggis in the 1879 *Kitab* were consistent with how courtiers and commoners in contemporary Perak conceived of Zanggi spirits as prominent ‘genies’ of the interior.¹¹¹ Indubitably, to cite from Helene Basu’s work on the migration of East African spirits, manuscripts such as the *Kitab* were sophisticated historical records of the ‘high mobility of [Zanggi] spirit pantheons’ across the Indian Ocean.¹¹²

On the whole, *pawangs* befriended prophets, *bataras*, *jinnns*, and *hantus* through rituals of communication that were reproduced in the *Kitab*

‘child’ is called the *Seri mani* (a reference to the Ceres-like divinity, *Seri*, and sperm, *mani*).

¹⁰⁹ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See ‘*bab ini kata kepada kemenyan akan melambas tanah dan hantu hutan*’, ‘*bab ini perkataan memberi kepala nasi*’, and ‘*ini kelamannya* [the supplement, to *Salih daripada Ngah Johor Andong*]’.

¹¹⁰ Cited from R. A. W. Hamilton, ‘The Boria’, *JSBRAS*, 82, 1920, pp. 142–143.

¹¹¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 142–143; W. E. Maxwell’s mention of ‘*Abdi*’ in Perak consisting of ‘Habshi [East African] Slaves and Their Descendants’ in ‘The Law Relating to Slavery among the Malays’, *JSBRAS*, 22, 1890, p. 254; and R. O. Winstedt’s ‘The Perak Genies’, *JSBRAS*, 7:3, 1929, pp. 460–466.

¹¹² Helene Basu, ‘Drumming and Praying: Sidi at the Interface Between Spirit Possession and Islam’ in Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds) *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 303–304. Also see Ioan M. Lewis, *Religion in Context Religion in Context Cults and Charisma*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 140–145. For an exploration of the interweaving relationships of spirit cults in Bihar and labour relations and the articulation of ‘bondage’, refer to Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1990.

and employed these spirits for agrarian transformation. The economic advantages of these associations between *pawang*s and their clientele of peasants on the one hand and spirits on the other were ensured through penal threats. This was evident in the aforementioned friendships, contracts, and bargains initiated by *pawang*s with spirits. Herein, spirits' refusals or failures to collaborate with the agrarian *pawang* and peasant were declared as being tantamount to treason (*derhaka*) against God. Andaya and Andaya have highlighted that Islamic control was maintained in Malay societies through associating *derhaka* against representatives of God on Earth, Sultans and *rajas*, with the 'odious culturally abhorred' crime of treason against God.¹¹³ The 1879 *Kitab* was a compelling portrayal of frontiers, whereupon a form of Islamic hegemony was being implemented through converting potentially hazardous spirits into workers who laboured to establish the Muslim peasant's *ladang*. Through rituals of communication, the *pawang* warned spirits that their refusals to collaborate with the *pawang* were tantamount to *derhaka* against God and that treasonous spirits would be violently punished. According to the *Kitab*, treasonous spirits would be slaughtered by the *pawang*, would find their ears, eyes, tongues, and hearts being crushed, or would die excreting under a stone from Khorasan (Iran). Other rebellious spirits would be trapped by the *pawang* and hurled from Malayan forests to an East African (Zanggi) whirlpool that swallowed exorcized spirits.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

This article has unearthed and investigated two manuscripts of traditions that were transmitted by *pawang*s who served as key intermediaries of agrarian transformation in western Malaya. These magical individuals and their anti-scientific methods have been neglected by post-colonial historians of Malaya, and these *pawang*s have been condemned by Muslim reformists as relics of the pre-Islamic 'Days of Ignorance' and as obstacles to Malay economic progress. This article has endeavoured to cast a microhistorian's lens upon

¹¹³ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 27, 47, 64, 81–82, 86.

¹¹⁴ *Kitab Perintah Pawang*. See 'bab ini tangkal menyelibehkan hantu ayer dan berjamu dia', 'sempena hantu bhuta', 'bab ini jampi bhuta', 'bab ini kata pada kemenyan tetkala akan memulakan menebas membuat ladang atau barang sebagainya', 'sempena hujan panas Imam Shamsulddin', 'bab ini jampi hujan panas atau ayer sireh', 'ini tangkal hujan panas atau pemadam panas', 'ini pemadam panas', and 'ini jampi [unclear] atau pemadam panas'.

the Islamic esoteric science of these actors who were pivotal to a broad range of socio-economic activities in the modern Peninsula. In focusing upon religious economies and *pawangs*, the preceding sections have extrapolated data from manuscripts that were in essence most explicit about local spheres of extracting natural resources, producing rice, and appropriating technologies. Nevertheless, I have suggested that a study of *pawangs*, religious economies, and magical texts bears the potential of leading historians into environments wherein *pawangs*, peasants, labourers, and spirits were not simply fixed or immobilized in their spheres of operation. On the contrary, they appear to have been plugged into broader Indian Ocean networks. Moreover, it has been argued that such materials portrayed environments that were composite socio-economic worlds. These were indeed worlds shared by Malay, Tamil, and Arab *pawangs*; Malay, creole, Tamil, and Chinese husbandmen; European Orientalists and missionaries; and a list of Afrasian spirits and supernatural forces. As such, this article presents rudimentary explorations into the social, spiritual, literary, and geographical cosmopolitanism of 'subaltern' *pawangs* and peasants, whose labour and connected histories have yet to be systematically written.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31:3, July 1997, pp. 735-762.

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