

26 Sunan Ampel of the Javanese Wali Songo

Anna M. Gade

The Wali Songo are the “Nine Saints” of Java, understood to have first spread Islam in the region during the ninth/fifteenth century. They are associated with major sites along the north coast of Java, where their tombs remain important pilgrimage sites today. Although the classical hagiography of the saints is in the Javanese language, today these figures are the focus of a resurgence of popularity in a variety of media in the Indonesian language. Some of these Friends of God are known for their asceticism or esotericism, while others are known more as teachers of normative Islam. Many of the stories of the Wali Songo relate to royal dynasties, particularly the establishment of the first Muslim states. Some others address the doctrinal issues discussed across the Muslim world in the ninth/fifteenth century, such as the esoteric concept of the Unity of Existence associated elsewhere with the figure of Ibn ‘Arabi. On Java, the period of the coming of Islam in the ninth/fifteenth century nearly coincides with the coming of European interests to the region in about the tenth/sixteenth century. (See Figure 19.)

Sunan Ampel (804/1401–883/1478), whose story appears below, is one of the earlier *wali*; in fact, he is the progenitor and teacher of several others. He is said to have had a father who came from Samarkand, Central Asia, whereas his mother was a princess from Champa, a kingdom once located in what is now Cambodia and Vietnam. Sunan Ampel’s parentage thus represents the transregional character of Islam in maritime Southeast Asia. In addition, there are possible Shī‘ī connotations to his heritage, also supported by the origin in Champa. Within Southeast Asia, Sunan Ampel is known especially for having established religious schools; his paternal heritage in “Bukhara” is often noted with respect to his learning in religious sciences such as Hadith. Among the tales of the Javanese Wali Songo,



Figure 19. There are other indigenous Indonesian Friends of God as well. Here Prince Selarasa pays homage to Kiai Nur Saiyid, who has lived apart in the wilderness so long that he seems to be inextricably entwined in it. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, BL MSS c12243-o. MSS Jav.28ff.7v-8r.

his story emphasizes his special style and effectiveness in preaching and teaching the faith of Islam. In this version of his biography, Sunan Ampel is presented as a defender of "Sharia-mindedness," which this modern text portrays as a complement to other qualities of the saints of Java.

The following text is a revised and abridged translation of a popular book on Sunan Ampel in the Indonesian language, entitled *Sunan Ampel Took Great Care in Spreading the Religion of Islam*. It is one of a series, "Perjuangan Wali Songo" ("The Struggle of the Wali Songo"). The author, A. Setiawati, writes that he compiled the account from a number of popular and scholarly sources.¹

TRANSLATION

The lineage (*silsila*) of Sunan Ampel is from 'Alī and not directly from the Prophet Muhammad. His father was Shaykh Ibrahim al-Ghazālī, or Ibrahim Asmarakandi [Arabic *As-Samarkandī*]. He was the brother of Shaykh Barebat Zainul Alam, also known as Jamāl ad-Dīn Kubrā, who lived in Bukhara. Ibrahim Asmarakandi, the father of Sunan Ampel, was able to associate with great figures of his age. Coming to mainland Southeast Asia, he was married by the king of Champa to the king's daughter, Dewi Candrawulan. With his marriage to Dewi Candrawulan, God blessed Ibrahim Asmarakandi with two sons. The older of them was named Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah, who was born in the year 804/1401 in Champa, Cambodia. Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah was someday to become known as Sunan Ampel. In his youth, he was called Raden Rahmat (Prince Rahmat) because he was from the royal line of Champa through his mother, and because of his later connections to the royal line of Majapahit on Java.

Dewi Candrawulan, the wife of Ibrahim Asmarakandi and the mother of Raden Rahmat, had a younger sister who was called Dewi Dwarawati. Dewi Dwarawati was married to the king of the kingdom of Majapahit on the island of Java, Prabu Brawijaya V (also known as Prabu Kertabumi). The king loved his new queen deeply. And with this, Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah (or Raden Rahmat), and his brother, Sayyid Ali Murthado, became the nephews of the king of Majapahit, Prabu Brawijaya.

At that time, the kingdom of Majapahit was suffering an irreversible decline. This had begun when the great king Prabu Hayamwuruk and his general Gajah Mada passed away. The kingdom had been unstable and breaking apart due to civil wars, and many small states had formed. A large portion of the taxes collected from the people did not reach the coffers of the state. With this, hunger began to spread across the land of Majapahit. As a result of famine, there arose bands of youths who wanted

to do as they pleased without having to work. Many soldiers and those who joined the palace guard were leaders in such gangs. They wanted to gain power and prestige with this social status only in order to plunder the wealth of the people. Because of this, the hearts of the people were anxiously haunted by the shadow of a death that could come upon them swiftly and at any moment.

The king was gravely concerned about the growing crisis in his kingdom. He viewed it as a moral and spiritual problem, stemming from a lack of knowledge and respect for religion among his people. The new queen, Ratu Dwarawati, suggested that they invite her nephew, Ali Rahmatullah, to come from Champa to help. With the coming of Islam, the kingdom of Champa had overcome similar problems, she told him, and in fact it was flourishing. This "Raden Rahmat" had already become well known for his religious teachings there. And so with the blessings of the king and queen of Champa, and filled with his own great eagerness to spread Islam and to assist the nobles of Majapahit, Raden Rahmat set out for Java. He traveled along with his father and his brother. Sadly, his father, Shaykh Ibrahim Asmarakandi, passed away in Tuban soon after their arrival. Not long after this, Sayyid Ali Murthado asked permission from his brother Raden Rahmat to spread Islam outside of Java. The brothers parted ways with heavy hearts, since they had always been very close.

When Sayyid Rahmatullah arrived in Majapahit, he first met with his aunt, Ratu Dwarawati. He then went to see the king. The king asked Sayyid Rahmatullah to bring moral teachings to the people. Sayyid Rahmatullah accepted this charge, and the king then granted him permission to come and go as he pleased, and especially to work in the region of Surabaya [in eastern Java]. With the arrival of Raden Rahmat in the palace of Majapahit, there were immediate changes. The spreading light of his noble character was apparent for all to see, and the wish to follow the right path was felt once more. Raden Rahmat was married to Dewi Candruwati, who was also known as Nyai Ageng Manila.

On an appointed day, the entourage of Raden Rahmat departed for the region of Surabaya. All along the way, Raden Rahmat carried out *dakwah* [Ar. *da'wa*, Islamic preaching]. The distinctive manner through which he spread Islam was unique and extraordinary. As he traveled, he thought to himself that for the people to accept a new belief, they must be approached through media they already enjoy. While on his way to Surabaya, he thought it would suit the people who lived in this area best if he were to make some rattan fans for them. Only, his fans would not be like everyday fans. As he looked at the trees around him, he chose one from which to

fashion fans. Because his work was aided by his own gifts and blessings, he carried it out rapidly and skillfully.

While still continuing along his journey, Raden Rahmat started to hand out his fans to people whom he met along the road. The fans were given out for free, just as long as the words of the *shahāda* were said in exchange. Because the fans were so nice and pleasing, the people gathered around to receive them. And when they did, with sincerity they uttered the words of the *shahāda*. For these residents of the region, Raden Rahmat explained basic knowledge about Islam. And for those who wanted to continue to study with more depth, he offered them the opportunity to learn more. The people always listened to the advice and admonition of Raden Rahmat. Their hearts were thus opened to Islam without any hardship placed upon them and with no compulsion to convert. The people praised Raden Rahmat far and wide, and his influence spread easily among the people.

There was an amazing quality to the fans that Raden Rahmat had made out of rattan. They were said to be able to cure fever and cough. Perhaps this was a blessing that Raden Rahmat had channeled from God into the fans that he made. The miraculous powers of the fans that he made were the source of wonderment among the people. As the influence of Islam seeped further into the hearts of the people, their wicked deeds also became less and less frequent. All of these were signs that Raden Rahmat was a *wali*. The hopes and the prayers of God's Friends are always heard by Allāh.

Raden Rahmat and his entourage arrived in the district of Kembang-kuning. All around Kembangkuning at that time there was still jungle with trees, great and small. There were also many marshes filled with water. What is today the capital of the district of Kembangkuning was still just a swamp, never having been touched by humans. Raden Rahmat quickly toured the area. He asked God to permit him to build a center of Islam in that place. The next day, they cleared the land quickly thanks to the help of God. As soon as the land was cleared, they constructed a simple place for meeting and for prayer. Today this is the site of a big and beautiful mosque. In this area, Raden Rahmat quickly gained two followers of influence, Ki Wira Saroyo and Ki Bang Kuning, who embraced Islam along with their families. They helped Raden Rahmat to get further acquainted with the people.

With Raden Rahmat's teaching, the people came to know how to distinguish right from wrong. The doctrine of Islam was never mixed with other beliefs, and nothing was ever preached that could ever lead people to stray from the straight path. In Raden Rahmat's preaching, the purity of Islam

was always supported by the Qur'ān and the Hadith. With great concern and compassion, Raden Rahmat instructed the hearts of the people. He was careful to impart to them the teachings of Islam, whether glorified or essential, which could actually be grasped by them at that time. The people came to love the teachings of Islam. It was not long before they began to refer to themselves as "Muslims" in great numbers. And with this, the area of Kembangkuning became a center for Islamic activity.

Raden Rahmat came to reside in a village called Ampel Denta. Here he was to become known as a *wali*, addressed by the title "Sunan Ampel Denta." ["Sunan" is a respectful term of address for a great teacher.] After he felt that his *dakwah* had been successful, he began to construct a religious boarding school (*pesantren*). The site had formerly been used to teach the nobles of the kingdom of Majapahit, along with others who wished to study to become teachers. Although many of those who followed Sunan Ampel came from among the sons of the lords and aristocrats of Majapahit, Raden Rahmat never distinguished social class among his students. With pleasure he would teach the religious knowledge that makes life rewarding (*selamat*) in this world and the next to people from all walks of life.

In Ampel, Sunan Ampel instructed his followers about the foundations of becoming a person with good character. He taught them how to perform acts of worship properly and correctly, in accord with Islam and following the Qur'ān and Hadith [Sunna]. The teachings of Sunan Ampel for which he became the most well known were five. These are that it is not permitted to do the following five things: (1) do not gamble; (2) do not drink alcohol; (3) do not steal; (4) do not smoke opium or *ganja* [marijuana]; (5) do not engage in illicit sex. As Sunan Ampel imparted these five teachings to his students, he also provided compelling reasons for them. He explained in detail the degradation and corruption caused by these five actions. Thus, his students could take these teachings fully to heart. It is not surprising, then, that many from among Sunan Ampel's students would someday themselves become saints on the same level of the original nine Wali Songo.

Prabu Brawijaya V, also known as Prabu Kertabumi, was very pleased with the accomplishments of Raden Ali Rahmatullah in improving the moral character of his people. The king himself came to realize that the teachings of Islam are the most exalted of all moral teachings. When Raden Rahmat, now known as Sunan Ampel, invited Prabu Brawijaya V (who was in fact his uncle) to convert to Islam, however, the king politely declined. The reason that Prabu Brawijaya V gave was that he wanted to be remembered as having been the last of the Buddhist kings of Majapahit.

When the great teacher Maulana Ibrahim passed away in Gresik in the year 822/1419, Sunan Ampel was already himself ranked in spiritual status among the *wali*. At that time Sunan Ampel became the mufti, or leader of the religion of Islam, for the entire land of Java. Later, when Raden Patah of Demak was to achieve the rank of the other Wali Songo, their number was fixed at nine. According to most, they are said to be the following figures: (1) Sunan Ampel; (2) Sunan Giri; (3) Sunan Bonang; (4) Sunan Drajat; (5) Sunan Kalijaga; (6) Sunan Muria; (7) Sunan Kota, also known as Raden Patah; (8) Sunan Kudus; and (9) Sunan Gunungjati. According to legend, there were also many other *wali* on the island of Java at that time, not to mention all of the other *wali* who were outside of Java. However, the Wali Songo represent the leaders of all of these other *wali* who were active during the same period. Each of the nine Wali Songo had a special task in accord with his own individual gifts and expertise.

Sunan Ampel had the talent of a special style of *dakwah*, and so he is known especially for his teaching and doctrine. An example of his *dakwah* is the following story. One day when Sunan Ampel was still alive, he was sitting under a shady tree on the banks of the River Brantas. He had just begun a tour of itinerant preaching in the district of Trowulan. Even as he was at rest, Sunan Ampel never once stopped praising the greatness of Allāh, who had created the entire world and everything that is in it.

As Sunan Ampel sat along the riverbank gazing far into the distance, suddenly a strange sight captured his attention. Sunan Ampel saw an old man who was trying to walk on top of the water. After two or three steps the man would fall in, then he would repeat. And thus it went on until the man was worn out and had to stop to rest. His efforts having failed over and over again, the old man finally sat down, utterly exhausted, and watched the current of the River Brantas with an empty stare. "When will I be able to walk on water? It has already been decades that I have been attempting this feat, but still up until now I have not had any results," he grumbled softly.

Sunan Ampel had already guessed in an instant what the old man was up to. However, just as any wise person would do, he wanted to hear the explanation directly from the man himself. Sunan Ampel approached the old man, who was sitting and resting under the shade of a tree. But Sunan Ampel was soon startled when all of a sudden the old man jumped into the river water and went back to what he had been doing. After the man had returned to the riverbank, once more panting and out of breath, Sunan Ampel addressed him respectfully.

"How long has it been that Grandfather has been making this attempt

to walk on the water?" inquired Sunan Ampel. The old man answered with a long face, "Forty years!" As he said this, he looked out at the waters of the River Brantas that had so long been the object of his efforts. Upon hearing this reply, Sunan Ampel was taken aback. "Astaghfir Allāh al-Azīm!" ["I ask forgiveness from God the Magnificent"], he exclaimed, placing his hand on his chest. "That length of time, and this all for the sake of something utterly useless!"

Hearing these words from Sunan Ampel, a man who was much younger than he, the old man was offended. He considered his own attempt to be utterly exceptional. The old man's face turned red as he tried to contain his anger. He growled, "Young man, you may not just speak up any way you please! An effort such as this, when it is successful, will surpass the level of what is merely a human power (*kesaktian*)."

"Just for the sake of crossing the river, is it really necessary to practice for dozens of years? What a waste of time! Wouldn't it be more efficient just to cross the river on a raft or a rowboat? It seems to me that by such means we would also be able to get over to the other side, and much more easily," mused Sunan Ampel.

The words of Sunan Ampel were so funny to the old man that he began to laugh heartily out loud. Sunan Ampel stayed silent, but he was smiling too. "Anybody can cross on a raft or a rowboat! I want to do that which no one else is able to achieve," the old man clarified, still laughing. "So then, Grandfather wishes to be greater than others?" Sunan Ampel asked. "That's right! I want to have expertise that no one else possesses. I desire to be seen as a sign of miracles in the eyes of others," retorted the old man with pride.

With this, Sunan Ampel was at a loss. At first he had thought that the old man had only wished to hear others praising him, since at his advanced age he would soon be approaching the edge of the grave. But with a person as arrogant as this, it is very hard to find any accommodation or compromise. So without any further ado, Sunan Ampel simply walked away from the old man, who was still standing by the river's edge.

After a while, Sunan Ampel wished to cross over the river to continue along his journey. His way was obstructed because at that time there was no still bridge. There was no sign of a boat or even a little raft. At last he was forced to rely upon his own spiritual powers (*kesaktian*). With ease Sunan Ampel glided across the river. He did this without causing as much as a ripple in the water, just as if he had been walking along a path on dry land. It just so happened that the old man saw what Sunan Ampel was doing.

The old man watched with a wide, unblinking stare. He almost did not believe what he was witnessing with his very own eyes. When he was sure that what he was seeing was actually real, he stood up at last. The old man realized that this younger man, who was walking across the waters of the River Brantas, was no ordinary person. He bowed at the feet of Sunan Ampel, asked for his forgiveness, and requested that he might become his teacher. The end of the story is that the old man became a devoted student of Sunan Ampel. Of course, Sunan Ampel really crossed the water as he did so that the arrogant man could see his own cherished desire realized, and in this way Sunan Ampel could capture his attention. In this way, Sunan Ampel's teachings could reach an arrogant person indirectly yet effectively, and without hurting his feelings or causing him offense.

Among the many students of Sunan Ampel was a student called Mbah Bolang, whose real name was Sonhaji. Once day, at about the time that the construction of the mosque at Ampel was being completed, Sonhaji began to chip away at the wall of the prayer niche, hollowing it out. When the companions of Sonhaji peered into the hole he had made in the wall of the *mihṛāb*, there appeared an image of the Ka'ba in Mecca! The companions of Sonhaji felt as though they themselves were alongside the Ka'ba too, since the pilgrims performing *tawāf* [circumambulating it] were so clearly visible. With this, the students of the school at Ampel gave Sonhaji the title "Mbah Bolang." They called him that because Sonhaji had carved out a hole in the wall (*lubang*) of the *mihṛāb* in order to view the Ka'ba. With their teacher, being Sunan Ampel, who was a *wali* possessing great spiritual gifts, it is to be expected that his students could also have the ability to acquire similar powers as well. Naturally, however, not every student would demonstrate such powers, since these are special gifts given only by God.

There is another story about the special powers of another student of Sunan Ampel. Naturally, his powers are inexorably linked to those of his teacher, Sunan Ampel. His story goes as follows. When Sunan Ampel was still alive, he had a student named Mbah Soleh. Mbah Soleh was responsible for sweeping up the mosque at Ampel, and he also served as the custodian of its grounds. His work was so thorough that there was hardly ever a speck of dust to be seen at all in the mosque, it was so neat and tidy all the time.

The worshipers who came to pray in Sunan Ampel's mosque were happy with the job Mbah Soleh did. They praised Mbah Soleh, but with humility he would always answer them, "All praises are due to Allāh, who created the world and all that is in it." Mbah Soleh was never satisfied if there was

the smallest speck of dirt in the place of worship, even if it was just one atom of dust. Not only did the people praise his work in the mosque, but people all around were struck when they would see the face of Mbah Soleh himself, which was always shining with clarity and light.

When Mbah Soleh passed away, he was buried in the yard of the mosque. The students of Sunan Ampel, and even he himself, had lost a great help upon which everyone had depended all of the time. The students of Sunan Ampel now tried to fill the shoes of Mbah Soleh, acting as the sweepers and custodians of Sunan Ampel's mosque. However, all their efforts could not match, much less rival, what Mbah Soleh could accomplish in just one day.

Mbah Soleh had passed away only a few days before when there was already a change apparent inside and outside of the mosque. The atmosphere of the mosque started to seem dark and gloomy because of the dirt that was building up, no matter how hard the students tried to clean it up. The worshipers who came to pray in Ampel's *masjid* [mosque] began to feel uneasy, because the floor of the mosque began to seem dirty as a result of the dust that was clinging to it. They started to complain about the dirt in the mosque and the untidiness of the garden around it. As they did this, they sighed and looked out at Mbah Soleh's tombstone, forlorn.

The unkempt conditions of the mosque came to the attention of Sunan Ampel. When he saw the dirt that was building up in the mosque, he pronounced the words: "If Mbah Soleh lives, let him come and clean up the *masjid*!" Sunan Ampel had barely uttered these words when suddenly Mbah Soleh appeared, sweeping up the floor under the place of the imam [prayer leader]. Of course this extraordinary event occurred by the will of Allāh, consistent with His great favor for Sunan Ampel.

In no time this amazing happening had become the talk of the town. News of a resurrection from the dead spread across the area. And with the return of Mbah Soleh, the mosque now appeared clean all the time, just as it had been before. The students and the congregants who prayed in Sunan Ampel's mosque were relieved and happy once more. This state of affairs did not continue for long, however. After only a couple of months, Mbah Soleh passed away again. His body was buried just to the east of the site where his first grave had been.

Right after Mbah Soleh died for the second time, the mosque and the yard around it became dirty again. The followers of Mbah Soleh regretted losing him once more. The students tried all over again to do Mbah Soleh's job, but they could not perform the task as well as he had. With all of their strength and effort the students tried to clean the mosque just like Mbah

Soleh used to clean it, but their results were very different from his. There was still a film of dust all over the mosque, and a layer of sticky grime clung to the floor. The students now grumbled again as they stared at the pair of two graves.

When Sunan Ampel saw that the mosque was getting dirty once again, he did exactly the same thing he had done before, saying: "If Mbah Soleh lives, the condition of the mosque must always be clean!" By the permission of Allāh, as enacted by the blessings of Sunan Ampel, Mbah Soleh came to life again as his former self. Then he swept up the mosque just as usual. And the condition of the mosque and the yard around it was clean once more. The students and those who came to pray observed *salat* [daily ritual prayer] in the mosque with contentment once again. The mosque was clean and tidy and looked after well. But a few months after this, Mbah Soleh died once more, and the mosque and its yard became dirty all over again. The students started to complain again.

Sunan Ampel spoke the words just as he did before, and Mbah Soleh revived in order to perform his task, which was to sweep up the mosque. This amazing occurrence was repeated over and over again several times. When Mbah Soleh had been brought back to life for the eighth time, Sunan Ampel himself passed away. Sunan Ampel's body was buried on the west side of Masjid Ampel. The students knew that the death of their teacher could mean that Mbah Soleh would disappear in time as well. And indeed, when Mbah Soleh passed away the ninth time, this would prove to be his last and final death.

With what they surmised to be their final opportunity to be with him on his eighth life, the students studied with sincerity from Mbah Soleh how to clean the mosque. It turned out that with five men at work they could clean up the mosque almost as well as him. Mbah Soleh instructed them with his knowledge of how to perform this task so that the mosque was clean and pleasing. A few months later, Mbah Soleh died for the ninth time. After this ninth death, Mbah Soleh did not come back to life because his medium of regeneration, Sunan Ampel, had himself passed away. The body of Mbah Soleh was reburied for the eighth time. And since that time the graves of Mbah Soleh line up in a row of nine. This row of graves belonging to Mbah Soleh lies on the east side of Sunan Ampel's mosque today.

When teaching his pupils, Sunan Ampel was always exceedingly patient and understanding. He was not averse to repeating many times over instruction and lessons that were not yet fully learned by his students. He would always say to his pupils, whoever does not yet understand this or

that may ask about it some more so that they may fully understand. As an example of this, Sunan Ampel had a pupil who was named Abū Hurayrah. This particular student was less than fluent (*fasīh*) and correct when he would recite the Arabic words of the Qur'ān. Even though he tried very hard to improve his pronunciation, it was still very poor whenever he would try to read out loud.

One day, as was his custom, Sunan Ampel was drilling his pupils in the memorization of the Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names of Allāh (*al-asmā' al-husnā*). None of the pupils in the class, not to mention any of the other students who happened to be there, had any problem repeating what Sunan Ampel demonstrated to them. Their pronunciation was fluent and correct. Then it came to be Abū Hurayra's turn. Sunan Ampel called on Abū Hurayra to recite the words *Yā Hayyu, Yā Qayyūmu*, which are expressions for the Names of God that mean "O' Living One, O Self-Sustaining One!" "Now, would you please repeat what I just said?" requested Sunan Ampel. Abū Hurayra hesitated to recite, however, because he felt he could not pronounce the words of the Qur'ān properly.

"Come on, speak up, Abū Hurayra!" Sunan Ampel asked Abū Hurayra once more. "Ya . . . ya . . . ya kayuku, ya kayumu!" uttered Abu Hurayra while bowing his head.² The other pupils tried to stifle a laugh. However, there were those who could not manage to do this, and they were forced to laugh out loud, try as they might to keep quiet. Hearing that there were some in the class who seemed to be making fun of Abū Hurayra, Sunan Ampel addressed them immediately.

"You do not need to laugh in ridicule of your classmate. Allāh created 'His Umma,' that is, all of humanity, so that there are those who are greater in ability and those who have less ability. This situation may be food for thought for all of us. Since beings are created in this way, some having more capability and some with less, we may always give thanks to God for whatever gifts that He showers upon us. With this as well, it is assured that each of us will have to confront our own shortcoming in certain areas of learning and knowledge. So if you hear or see such an area for development in a person, well then, instruct him or her so that he can do better in the future. There is no action done by a human being that escapes the awareness of Allāh," Sunan Ampel instructed his students.

Not one of the students dared to raise his head. Those who had giggled before now asked sincerely for forgiveness from Sunan Ampel. He told them that they should not do what they had done again. Sunan Ampel then turned to Abū Hurayra. "That is not correct," he said gently. "Yā Hayyu! Yā Qayyūm!" Abū Hurayra once more repeated after Sunan Ampel, "Ya

kayuku, ya kayumu." Sunan Ampel smiled. He knew that Abū Hurayra's tongue would never be able to shape the words that he uttered. Even after it was repeated many times, Abū Hurayra still could not do it as he heard. Sunan Ampel understood. Then he explained the meaning of the expressions in their own native language. The pupils all repeated what Sunan Ampel said, including Abū Hurayra.

Then Abū Hurayra spoke up to ask his teacher, "Kanjeng [Respected] Sunan, I am not able to pronounce Arabic just as Sunan Ampel does. However, *inshā'Allāh* [God willing], I am able to understand and comprehend its meaning. Is this acceptable, Kanjeng Sunan?" Sunan Ampel smiled. He was touched by the frankness of Abū Hurayra. "Of course it is all right! God will always recognize and understand your situation," replied Sunan Ampel, full of wisdom and compassion. Abū Hurayra was in fact able to absorb every lesson offered by Sunan Ampel with deep sincerity. All the knowledge that was imparted to him by Sunan Ampel he studied with profound patience and purity of heart. Thanks to his diligence, perseverance, and enduring will, Abū Hurayra was able to reach a high level of achievement. Abū Hurayra joined the ranks of the Friends of God (*wali*) and attained his own spiritual blessings (*keramah*). And from then on, the name *Abū Hurayra* was changed to *Sunan Kapasan*, [and Sunan Kapasan] became a *wali* on the same level as the original Wali Songo.

The great works of Sunan Ampel were not just in the area of spreading Islam through *dakwah*, but in his teaching he also made major contributions in the areas of language and learning. He developed the Arabic-derived script (*huruf pegon*) used for writing the Javanese language. Thanks to this alphabet, he could impart the teachings of Islam to his students. Using the languages and dialects of Java made it much easier for students to absorb and understand these lessons, since for the most part they were Javanese. They were able to study with facility, and this made them enjoy learning all the more as the teachings became firmly grounded in their knowledge. Up even until today this writing system for local languages that relies on Arabic letters is still used in religious boarding schools (*pesantren*).

The essential teachings of Sunan Ampel were also applied in advanced study. If these principles could be summarized in a list, they would be *dzatul wujud* [essential being], a quality that can be seen manifest only at the moment of death or extinction (*sarakatul maut*); *tawhīd* [divine unity], a teaching that makes humanity uphold the certainty that all existence is owing to Allāh, and unto Him we shall return; and, *marifat* [spiritual knowledge], a characteristic of a person that is the result of having mastered both *dzatul wujud* and *tawhīd*.

At the time that Sunan Ampel was carrying out these great works, his wives were also performing many great works of their own. The wives of Sunan Ampel who were the most active in this way were Nyai Ageng Manila, also known as Dewi Candruwati, and Nyai Ageng Bela. Nyai Ageng Manila bore the following children: the sons, (1) Maulana Makdum Ibrahim, also known as Sunan Bonang (one of the Wali Songo); (2) Raden Qasim, also known as Sunan Drajat (one of the Wali Songo); and (3) Maulana Ahmad, also known as Sunan Lamongan; and the daughters, (4) Siti Mutmainah; (5) Siti Alwaiyah; and (6) Siti Ashikah, who was married to Raden Patah (one of the Wali Songo). In addition, there were also children born to Sunan Ampel and Nyai Karimah, who was the daughter of Ki Ageng Bungkul. These children were (1) Dewi Murtasiah, who was married to Sunan Giri (one of the Wali Songo); and (2) Dewi Mursimah, who was married to Sunan Kalijaga (one of the Wali Songo). The followers and descendants of Sunan Ampel spread Islam far and wide, across the land of Java to the east and then outside of Java as far as Ternate. Sunan Ampel's brother, Sayyid Ali Murthado (who had come with him from Cambodia), is said to have gone to the island of Madura and then on to Bima, where he had close connections to the royal line there; eventually he died in Gresik.

Sunan Ampel was convinced that a Muslim people needed to have a king who followed Islam. To establish such a polity, however, he knew that it must have a strong foundation. Sunan Ampel therefore instructed his students to go to a place called Glagah Wangi, or Bintoro, to start such a center at which Islam could take root. A follower of his was Raden Patah (also known as Raden Hasan), the son of the king of Majapahit through a Chinese princess named Kian. He was thus a prince, although he had grown up off the island of Java since his mother was remarried when Prabu Brawijaya became devoted to his new wife from Champa. Raden Patah was asked to lead the new community at Glagah Wangi. Raden Patah was destined to become the first Muslim king there and someday himself to become one of the Wali Songo.

At first Raden Patah wanted to refuse Sunan Ampel's invitation, since the area of Glagah Wangi was short of water and it was known to be extremely barren and dry. Sunan Ampel and the other *wali* promised to help to overcome the problem of the water supply, however. They prayed to God to bring enough water to meet the needs of the new Muslim community. Then as they dug for a well, a water supply was found that was deep and never ran dry, even long after the end of the rainy season. This was a blessing from the *wali*. And with this, the area became arable for cultivation.

Raden Patah established a religious boarding school and madrasa in the area. The construction began in the year 880/1475. The effort was undertaken with seriousness and sincerity, and soon people from all over the empire of Majapahit, and even from outside Majapahit, were coming to study with Raden Patah. Glagah Wangi or Bintoro thus became a major center for the study of Islam, a popular place for Muslims to visit from far and wide, thanks especially to the trade connections of its students. And with this, the religion of Islam also became stronger among the local people.

After a while, Glagah Wangi or Bintoro became known as Demak, from the Arabic words *dhī mā'in*, meaning "having water." At the time that the great historic mosque at Demak was being constructed, in the year 882/1477, Sunan Ampel was directly involved. To remember and also to remind others of this and also his many other great works, one of the four main support pillars of the mosque at Demak is named *Sunan Ampel*.

As the *pesantren* at Demak became even more renowned among those who wanted to study Islam, the *wali* made a suggestion to Raden Patah. They had the idea that Demak could become a *kadipaten* [regency] of Majapahit. So Raden Patah went to the palace of Majapahit to meet with his father, who was the king of Majapahit, Prabu Brawijaya V. Prabu Brawijaya V granted permission for Demak Bintoro to be recognized as a *kadipaten*, and he appointed Raden Patah, who was now also known as Sunan Kota, as its *adipati* [regent or governor].

No sooner had Demak been inaugurated as *kadipaten* when some of the younger of the Wali Songo began to think further ahead. They suggested that Raden Patah might now seize power from Prabu Brawijaya V in order to rule as a Muslim king. Sunan Ampel was still the leader of the Wali Songo at that time, however. Having had a great deal of experience in such matters, Sunan Ampel took a longer and wiser view of the kingdom of Majapahit, whose influence was on the wane. According to him, Majapahit would inevitably fall in time. It would not be necessary for Demak to attack it in order to bring this about. And at the time that Majapahit fell, power would come next into the hands of an *adipati* who had once had good associations with Prabu Brawijaya V. Sunan Ampel knew this not only from his own astute reasoning but also from his ability actually to see firsthand what was going on inside the palace of Majapahit with his own spiritual vision. Thanks to the help of Allāh, he had special insight into unseen matters. Many of the other *wali*, including Raden Patah himself, agreed with the views of Sunan Ampel.

However, there was still a group of *wali* who respectfully disagreed.

They held the opinion that Sunan Ampel could be overly partial to Majapahit, since he himself had originally come to Java as an agent of Prabu Brawijaya V and he was after all a prince of the realm himself through kinship and marriage. According to them, Sunan Ampel was a wise leader, but he was also too sympathetic to the interests of Majapahit.

They noted also that Sunan Ampel had a different attitude than the other *wali* in matters of religion. The type of Islam that flourished among the younger *wali*, such as Sunan Bonang, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Muria, Sunan Gunungjati, and Sunan Kudus, was more flexible with respect to matters of religion. Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Kudus, for example, were two of the Wali Songo who were especially ingenious at harmonizing the teaching of Islam with the local customs of Java, such as the entertainments of shadow puppet theater (*wayang kulit*) and *gamelan* musical orchestras. In the views of Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Kudus, a people that may still depend on the support of old customs can more easily accept the religion of monotheism, that is, Islam. They held that when people do not feel challenged in their old habits, the elements of Islamic doctrine can seep in slowly and surely.

In contrast, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, and Sunan Drajat were all committed to spreading the teachings of Islam just as the Prophet Muhammad had done. They never compromised in matters pertaining to the established customs or revealed laws of Islam. The preaching of Sunan Ampel and his followers excelled in teaching the people to be acutely aware in the observance of the requirements of Islam. This is so that they would not stray from the true path in accord with the Qur'an and the Hadith. The people considered this an essential support for religion, one that was also connected to the world outside Indonesia. In this way, Islamic doctrine could be imparted completely free from any innovation that could cause deviation from the essence of true religion. This teaching of Sunan Ampel proved to be a great contribution to the development of Islamic law among the Muslim people. Just like the teachings of all the other Wali Songo, the teachings of Islam that were imparted by Sunan Ampel represent a true reality that could be accepted with certainty.

With this, it can be seen that styles of *dakwah* among the *wali* differed. However, these were just two different paths leading to the same destination. That single goal is nothing other than to achieve the favor of Allāh. The teachings that were spread by Sunan Ampel became known as Pure [White/Putih] Islam. Whereas, the teachings imparted by figures like Sunan Kalijaga and his followers are known as Folk [Red/Abangan] Islam."

At the time of the discussions about the future of Demak, Sunan Ampel held the view that it was best to be patient and to spread Islam to the center of the palace of Majapahit in a peaceful manner. He noted that the king had always had a favorable stance toward Muslims. Even more, the king had granted freedom to all of the *wali* to spread Islam throughout the land of Java, never forbidding them to perform their *dakwah*. This showed that he was truly a friend of religion. Given this, it would not be right for Raden Patah, who was in any case the son of the king, to attack Majapahit, according to Sunan Ampel. He asked, How would it be later if people would say that Raden Patah, student of Sunan Ampel, had attacked his very own father?

Nevertheless, the group of *wali* who seemed to be led by Sunan Kalijaga was not satisfied with this answer. Although the difference of opinion never caused a great division among the *wali*, some still wanted to attack Majapahit by force. In 883/1478, Sunan Ampel passed away. With this, the Wali Songo needed to appoint a new leader. Sunan Giri was named the new leader, and he became the *mufti* of the land of Java. Even though he had the same orientation to doctrine as Sunan Ampel, he had another point of view on the current political state of affairs. Right away he supported the position that had been held by Sunan Kalijaga and issued a *fatwā* [authoritative ruling] that Raden Patah ought to attack Majapahit. How could it be that Sunan Giri would have such a different approach than Sunan Ampel? The answer is that several important events had occurred all at once.

The kingdom of Majapahit was attacked by Prabu Grindrawardhana from the Kadipaten of Kediri, also known as Keling, in 883/1478. Starting at that time, the king of Majapahit was no longer actually Prabu Brawijaya V, the father of Raden Patah. So now Raden Patah had the right to defend his right to succession from Prabu Grindrawardhana, who had recently taken on the title "Prabu Brawijaya VI." This was because Raden Patah was the last blood descendant of the throne of Majapahit. Just when Raden Patah was ready to attack Majapahit, however, in the year 904/1498, Prabu Grindrawardhana was killed in an attack by Prabu Udara. Prabu Udara, who had now become the king of Majapahit, felt threatened by the power of Raden Patah at Demak Bintoro. He knew that an attack on him was imminent, and so he asked the Portuguese, who were in Melaka on the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula, for help in defending his kingdom.³

In 923/1517, Demak attacked Majapahit, which was now led by its new king, Prabu Udara. Before hardly anyone had been lost in battle, however,

the kingdom had already fallen easily into the hands of Raden Patah, or Sunan Kota. Had it not been the case that Demak had attacked Majapahit immediately at that time, there is a great likelihood that the Portuguese could have colonized the land of Java even before the Dutch attempted to do so.

After Majapahit fell, all of the regalia of state were relocated to Demak Bintoro in order to be in the possession of the rightful heir to the throne, who was Raden Patah. With the passing of Majapahit to the hands of Raden Patah, even more power was his to command. This fall of the kingdom of Majapahit meant that the first Islamic state on Java, that is, Demak, was established, with its king being Raden Patah, also known as the *wali* Sunan Kota. All of the *wali* gave thanks to God, because the religion of Islam now had a great influence and also a base from which to spread further. This would be the first great victory of Islam in Java. It was made possible by the great *dakwah* and the profound teaching and example of Sunan Ampel of the Wali Songo, who had first come to Java from Champa so many years before.

NOTES

1. A. Setiawati, *Sunan Ampel Sangat Hati-Hati Menyiarkan Agama Islam* (Jakarta: Penerbit TALISAM, 1997). Special thanks to James Hoesterey for locating this text in Indonesia. [For the sake of consistency through the volume, the editor has inserted Hijri dates. (Ed.)]

2. In an Indonesian language the phrase could sound as though it meant "O' my chunk of wood, O' your chunk of wood!"

3. Melaka had fallen to the Portuguese in 1511; Batavia (Jakarta) was established on the coast of Java in 1536 by the Dutch.