

A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY,
THE LEGACY OF SCHOLARS AND THE SPREAD
OF ISLAMIC CIVILISATION
ACROSS CONTINENTS

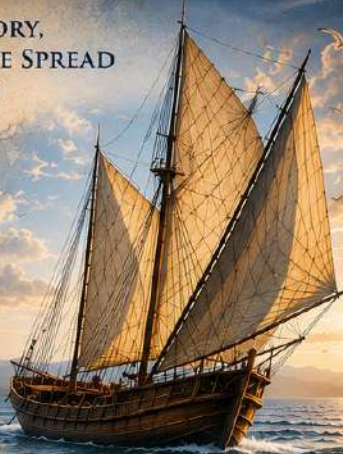


ARABIA

INDIA

MALACCA

NUSANTARA



FOOTSTEPS OF NUSANTARA SCHOLARS ACROSS THE WORLD

*Their journeys. Their wisdom. Their legacy.
A civilisation that continues to inspire.*



RIZA ATIQ ABDULLAH BIN O.K. RAHMAT



Footsteps of Nusantara Scholars Across the World

Riza Atiq Abdullah bin O.K. Rahmat

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Email: rizaatiqrahmat@gmail.com

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Synopsis

Footsteps of Nusantara Scholars Across the World takes readers on a remarkable journey across the Malay Archipelago and beyond, tracing the legacy of scholars, preachers, traders, and spiritual figures who played vital roles in spreading Islam through wisdom, education, culture, and noble character. Beginning from the ancient port of Barus in Sumatra, continuing through Kedah Tua, Java, Makassar, Vietnam, and eventually reaching Cape Town in South Africa, this manuscript reveals how interconnected maritime networks helped shape one of the world's most vibrant Islamic civilisations.

Written in a reflective travelogue style, the book combines historical narratives, personal journeys, and spiritual reflections. It explores the lives and contributions of prominent figures such as Sheikh Rukunuddin, Syed Jamadil Kubra, Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Giri, Sunan Ampel, Raden Fatah, Sunan Kalijaga, Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari, Imam Haron, and Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus Salaam. Through their stories, readers witness how Islam spread peacefully across diverse societies — not through conquest, but through knowledge, trade, compassion, education, and cultural understanding.

The manuscript also highlights the enduring influence of Islamic scholarship and da'wah across generations. From ancient mosques and tombs to living educational institutions and vibrant Muslim communities, the legacy of

these scholars continues to shape societies today. More than a historical record, this work is a reflection on civilisation, identity, spiritual resilience, and the responsibility of preserving knowledge and values for future generations.

Ultimately, **Footsteps of Nusantara Scholars Across the World** invites readers to rediscover the greatness of the Malay Archipelago as an important centre within the global Islamic network — where the sea became a bridge of da‘wah, and faith became a force that connected peoples, cultures, and continents.

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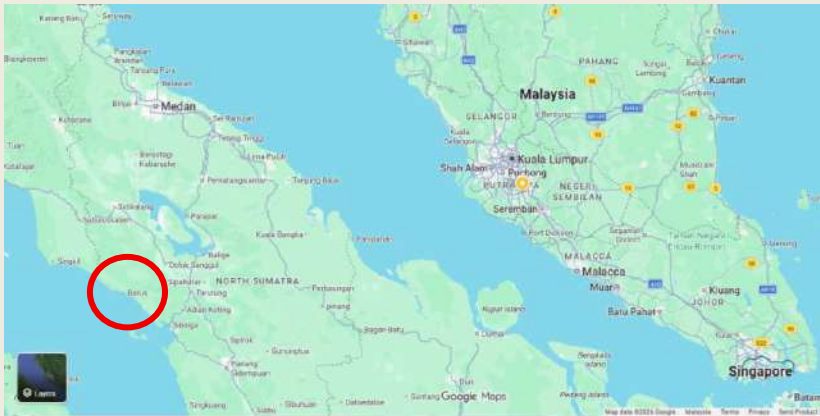
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Chapter 1

Sheikh Rukunuddin

The Preacher at the Port of Barus

The Port of Barus was a very important place in ancient times. Located on the western coast of Sumatra, Barus became a stopping point for ships from various regions such as Arabia, India, and China. For hundreds of years, traders came to Barus to buy and sell goods. One of the most famous products from Barus was camphor, a fragrant substance used in medicine and religious ceremonies.



*Location of Barus on the West Coast of Sumatra
(Source: Google Maps)*

During the time of the Pharaohs, Egypt was well known for the practice of preserving bodies as mummies. This

process required special materials such as perfume oils, resin, and preservatives. One of the most valuable substances was camphor, believed to have originated from Barus and several other regions in Southeast Asia.

Even before the Common Era, Barus was already a busy port filled with trading ships. People from many nations gathered there, speaking different languages and exchanging not only goods but also cultures. Through these interactions, Islam was gradually introduced to the local people by Muslim merchants. They spread the message of Islam peacefully and wisely while carrying out their trading activities.

However, when other ports such as Melaka emerged as larger and more strategic trading centres, Barus slowly declined in importance. Over time, the port was no longer the main centre of trade. Nevertheless, Barus remains historically significant because it demonstrates how people from many nations once lived together and shared knowledge, culture, and religion.

There was a preacher who arrived in Barus during the early period of Islam. His real name is unknown because the people of the Malay Archipelago in the past rarely mentioned personal names, especially those of highly respected individuals. Such figures were usually known by honorific titles. He became known as Sheikh Rukunuddin. His story is closely associated with the early history of Islam

in Barus and throughout the Malay Archipelago. Barus was an important port in Sumatra during ancient times, and he is believed to have been among the earliest preachers to arrive there when the area served as a meeting place for traders from many countries.



The Tomb of Sheikh Rukunuddin in Barus. He passed away on 13 Safar 48 Hijrah at the age of 102 years, 2 months, and 10 days.



The burial area of Sheikh Rukunuddin indicates that a Muslim community had already existed in Barus since the era of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

According to local traditions and historical studies, Sheikh Rukunuddin came together with Muslim merchants from the Middle East or Persia. At that time, Barus was already famous as a centre of camphor trade, attracting merchants from abroad. In this environment, Sheikh Rukunuddin conveyed the teachings of Islam with wisdom and gentleness. He did not force people to accept Islam, but instead preached through noble character, honesty in business dealings, and friendly relations with the local community.

The people of Barus who witnessed his admirable character gradually became attracted to Islam. Slowly, an early Muslim community was formed in the area. His missionary efforts were also supported by other traders who practised Islamic values in their daily lives.

Sheikh Rukunuddin eventually settled in Barus until the end of his life. His tomb is now located within the Mahligai Cemetery Complex, an important historical proof of the early presence of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. The gravestones in the area display Islamic artistic features influenced by foreign cultures, particularly those from the Middle East.

Based on the recorded date of his death and his age of more than 102 years, Sheikh Rukunuddin is believed to have lived during the same era as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and may even have been one of his Companions. His

presence is highly significant because it illustrates how Islam spread throughout the Malay Archipelago since the time of the Companions, and perhaps even during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ himself — not through warfare, but through trade, noble character, and humanitarian relations.

The missionary efforts of Sheikh Rukunuddin in Barus eventually led the Indonesian government to officially recognise Barus as the starting point of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. A special monument was erected and inaugurated by Indonesian President Joko Widodo on 24 March 2017.

Sheikh Rukunuddin was also said to have established Masjid Al-Muhajirin, considered one of the earliest mosques in the Malay Archipelago. The mosque functioned as a place of worship and a centre for Islamic missionary activities in Barus. Although the original building no longer exists, its role has been succeeded by the Grand Mosque of Barus.

He was also associated with the writing of several classical Malay manuscripts, including *Kitab Al-Muhajirin*, *Kitab Al-Tawhid*, *Kitab Al-Syifa*, and *Kitab Al-Futuh*. These works later became important references for scholars who came to the Malay Archipelago.



The Kilometer 0 Monument of the Spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, a symbol marking the beginning of Islam's arrival in the Malay Archipelago.

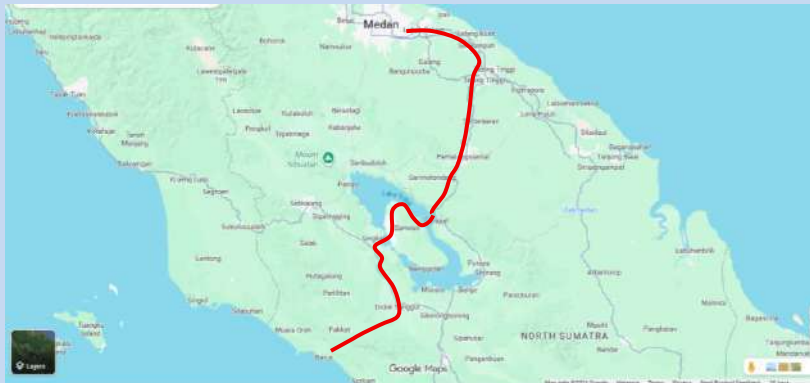
Our journey to Barus began with a flight from KLIA to Kuala Namu International Airport in Medan, North Sumatra. Upon arrival, we continued our overland journey to Parapat, travelling along winding roads surrounded by lush green scenery, before spending the night there to rest after the long journey.

The following morning, we traveled by vehicle to Samosir Island, located in the middle of Lake Toba, a vast lake whose natural beauty brought peace to the soul. The journey seemed to open a space for reflection as we witnessed the greatness of God's creation before our eyes.

From there, we continued our journey to Dolok Sanggul. We stopped briefly for lunch and to perform the Zuhr prayer combined with the Asr prayer before resuming our journey. By late afternoon, around 5:30 p.m., we finally arrived in Barus — a destination rich in history and the main purpose of our journey.



Journey from KLIA to Kuala Namu, Medan
(Source: Google Maps)



Journey from Kuala Namu to Barus
(Source: Google Maps)



Taking a ferry across to Samosir Island.



Crossing back to the mainland from Samosir Island.



Barus Town



The jetty that replaced the port that was more than 2,000 years old.

As we walked away from the tomb of Sheikh Rukunuddin, our hearts were filled with emotions that were difficult to describe. Quietly, a profound question crossed our minds — how, during the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, were there already individuals brave enough to cross vast oceans and reach this distant and unfamiliar land of the Malay Archipelago?

We imagined that they were not merely sailors, but preachers carrying a great trust. They may have come as traders, conducting business at busy ports, yet behind their trade activities they spread the light of Islam through wisdom and noble character. Through their businesses, they sustained their lives, and through them they nurtured the spread of Islam in lands that were not originally their own.

Even more moving was the realization that they did not merely stop briefly, but chose to settle there. They left behind their homeland, families, and everything familiar to them, then built new lives in foreign lands — establishing mosques, educating communities, and eventually passing away in lands that had once been strangers to them.

This journey filled us with a deep sense of gratitude. Had it not been for their perseverance and sacrifices, perhaps the light of Islam would never have reached us today. This visit taught us that the faith we inherit today did not come easily, but was built upon the sacrifices of people we may never know personally — yet whose contributions continue to live within our souls.

Chapter 2

Sheikh Mahmud

Among the Earliest Preachers in Barus

His full name was Mahmud bin Abdul Rahman bin Muaz. His story is frequently mentioned in the historical traditions of Barus as one of the earliest figures who contributed to the spread of Islam in the region. He was believed to have come from Yemen and, according to local tradition, was a descendant of Muaz bin Jabal, who had been sent by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to Yemen as his representative. At that time, Barus was an important port that served as a meeting point for traders from various regions such as Arabia, Persia, and India, thus creating opportunities for the spread of Islam.

According to oral traditions passed down through generations, Sheikh Mahmud arrived in Barus as a scholar and preacher. He was said to have conveyed the teachings of Islam with wisdom and gentleness, similar to other early Islamic figures in the Malay Archipelago. Through noble character, honesty, and close relationships with the local community, he successfully attracted the interest of the people to learn about and embrace Islam.

The presence of Sheikh Mahmud was also associated with the existence of an early Muslim community in Barus. He

was believed to have played a role in guiding the community in matters of worship and daily life, while helping to establish the foundations of one of the earliest Muslim societies in the region.

Sheikh Mahmud also traded between Barus and Singkil, which forms part of the local historical tradition illustrating the close connection between trade and Islamic missionary work along the western coast of Sumatra. This account is often presented as an example of how Muslim traders played an important role in the spread of Islam.

At that time, Barus was a major trading centre famous for its camphor and forest products. Traders sailed along the western coast of Sumatra using sailing ships. Sheikh Mahmud was among the merchants who travelled to Singkil to obtain camphor and other goods.

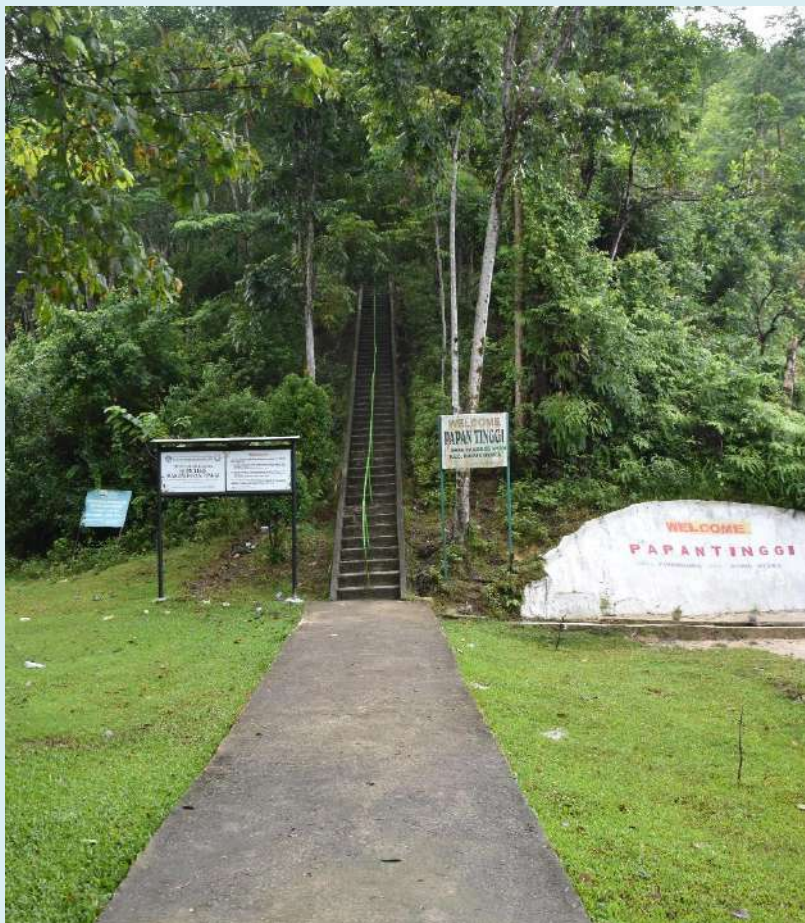
During his journeys, Sheikh Mahmud was not only involved in trade, but also in preaching Islam. He interacted with the local people of Singkil in a kind and noble manner. Through honesty in business dealings and his trustworthy character, he gained the confidence of the local community. As a result, many people became interested in learning about Islam.

The activities of Sheikh Mahmud made Singkil not merely a centre of trade, but also a place that helped expand economic networks and the spread of Islam in the region.

Sheikh Mahmud used his own wealth to finance missionary activities and to establish madrasahs for teaching Islam and training preachers. His life was not long, as he passed away in 44 Hijrah and was buried in Barus. Although he had passed away, his missionary work continued through the preachers who had benefited from his guidance.



The Tomb of Sheikh Mahmud in Barus.



The entrance pathway to the burial complex of Sheikh Mahmud.

His tomb is located on a hill in Barus, and many visitors continue to visit the site despite having to climb nearly 1,000 steps.



The Tomb of Sheikh Mahmud on the hill.

After visiting the tomb of Sheikh Rukunuddin, we continued our journey to the KM 0 Monument — the symbolic marker of the arrival of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. We stood there for a moment, imagining the earliest moments when the light of Islam first illuminated this land. However, time did not allow us to remain there for long. Evening was approaching, and we had to return to the hotel with hearts still filled with curiosity.

The following day, our journey became even more challenging. Our destination was the tomb of Sheikh Mahmud, located on a much higher hill. While the

previous tomb could be reached by road, this time we had to climb nearly one thousand stone steps. Every step felt heavier, our breaths became shorter, and sweat drenched our bodies. Yet upon reaching the summit, all exhaustion seemed to disappear. This visit felt deeply meaningful — a spiritual encounter with one of the earliest preachers who had long departed, yet whose contributions continue to live on until today.

From there, we descended and headed towards the old port area. The bustling atmosphere of the past no longer remained — only ruins stood silently as witnesses to history. Today, a jetty has been built to replace the ancient port in order to serve local needs. Despite these changes, we could still sense that this was once the place where early preachers and traders first set foot, bringing with them the light of Islam.

On our return journey, we stopped once again at Dolok Sanggul to have a meal and perform our prayers at Masjid Raya Al-Amin. If during our arrival we had viewed it merely as a mosque, this time we looked at it with admiration. In a mountainous region far from the coast, Islam had long taken root — proving that the early preachers never knew the meaning of fatigue.

Our journey then continued to Parapat for the night. Here too stood a magnificent mosque beside Lake Toba — another sign that Islam continued to flourish even far from its original centres.

The next day, we travelled to Sipiso-Piso Waterfall before continuing our journey to Kabanjahe. There, we stopped at the grand mosque to perform the Zuhur and Asr prayers together. Once again, a sense of amazement entered our

hearts — in the middle of remote mountainous regions stood a mosque serving as the centre of community life. We also stopped in Berastagi to buy local fruits. Yet beyond the freshness of the produce, one thought continued to occupy our minds — the sheer number of mosques we encountered throughout our journey in these remote inland areas. It was not merely a coincidence, but evidence of the determination of earlier preachers who crossed mountains and valleys to bring Islam to every place they could reach.

This journey ultimately became a profound reflection for us — that the faith we enjoy today is the result of the sacrifices of people we may never have known, yet who gave everything to spread the truth throughout the world.



The Kilometer 0 Monument of Islamic Civilisation.

Chapter 3

Sheikh Abdullah, the Preacher of Ancient Kedah

The Ancient Kedah Kingdom was among the earliest civilisations in Southeast Asia, developing in the northern region of the Malay Peninsula, particularly around the Bujang Valley. This kingdom is believed to have existed since at least the 2nd century CE and to have reached its peak as an international trading centre between the 5th and 10th centuries. Its strategic location along the trade route between India and China made Ancient Kedah an important port for merchant ships carrying various goods such as spices, beads, metals, and forest products.

Archaeological studies conducted by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) at the Sungai Batu site have yielded highly significant discoveries in Southeast Asian history. Through carbon dating methods, researchers found that iron smelting activities in the area had begun as early as around 788 to 500 BCE. Therefore, the Ancient Kedah Kingdom had already existed nearly 800 years before the birth of Prophet Isa (Jesus) عليه السلام and nearly 1,400 years before the birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Ancient Kedah was referred to in foreign sources by various names such as Kadaram in Indian and Tamil records and

was associated with Langkasuka in several early accounts. Archaeological evidence discovered in the Bujang Valley area, including the Sungai Batu site, shows that the people of Ancient Kedah had achieved a high level of advancement, particularly in iron smelting, port construction, and maritime trade activities. The Sungai Batu site, for example, proves the existence of one of the earliest iron industries in the region, making Kedah one of the important iron producers of its time.



Ancient iron furnace at Sungai Batu. The iron industry in Kedah has existed since the 8th century BCE.

From a cultural perspective, Ancient Kedah received strong influences from Indian civilisation, particularly Hindu-

Buddhist traditions, which can be seen through the construction of temples and religious artifacts. Nevertheless, the kingdom was not isolated; instead, it became a meeting point for various cultures, including traders from China and the Middle East. These interactions eventually opened the way for the arrival of Islam in the region in the centuries that followed.



The Sungai Mas inscription stone indicates that Buddhism was once the religion embraced by the rulers and people of Kedah.



The temple ruins in Bujang Valley show that Hinduism was also once practiced by the people of Ancient Kedah.

The first ruler of Kedah to embrace Islam was Sultan Muzaffar Shah I, who ruled from 1136 to 1179. His original name was Phra Ong Mahawangsa, bearing the royal title Seri Paduka Maharaja Durbar Raja II. Sheikh Abdullah bin Sheikh Ahmad bin Sheikh Jaafar Qumairi from Yemen is associated as the figure who played a role in the Islamization of the ruler. Local tradition associates this event with the renaming of the state as Kedah Darul Aman. With the king's permission, Sheikh Abdullah built a tower on the summit of Mount Jerai to call the azan and to commemorate the change of the ruler's name and the state's name.



The original tower was built by Sheikh Abdullah bin Sheikh Ahmad, who preached in Kedah until the king embraced Islam.

In addition, the tower served as a landmark for ships arriving from distant lands. At his own request, Sheikh Abdullah was buried on this mountain, and the place is now known as Padang Tok Sheikh. During his lifetime, he was a trusted advisor to the king and served as a special royal advisor.



The tomb of Sultan Muzaffar Shah I, the first ruler of Kedah to embrace Islam.

Our journey from Kuala Lumpur began early in the morning as we travelled along the highway towards Sungai Petani, Kedah by car. Without delay, we headed directly to the Sungai Batu archaeological site — a historical location that serves as evidence of the existence of the Ancient Kedah civilisation since as early as the 8th century BCE. A deep sense of excitement filled our hearts as we realized that we were stepping into a place that preserved traces of an ancient civilisation in the Malay Archipelago.





We then visited the Bujang Valley Museum to observe the artifacts inside and the temples surrounding it.





That night, we stayed at Jerai Hill Resort, located approximately 1,000 feet above sea level at the foot of Mount Jerai. The cool mountain air and refreshing night breeze seemed to prepare us for a more challenging journey the following day.

After breakfast, we began our ascent towards the summit of Mount Jerai to visit the monument associated with Sheikh Abdullah. The drive itself felt thrilling — the narrow and winding roads forced us to move slowly, as though every bend brought us closer to history. However, the real challenge began when we had to continue on foot, climbing stairways stretching nearly one kilometer through the lush green forest.

Upon reaching the summit, we fell silent for a moment. Before us lay a vast natural stone plateau — peaceful, open, and seemingly created especially for gatherings of

knowledge. We imagined the place once filled with hundreds of students sitting around a teacher, listening to lessons that nourished both the soul and the intellect. At that moment, we finally understood why this place had been chosen. Besides its elevated position as a landmark visible from afar to ships arriving from the Middle East, it also symbolised the beginning of a civilisation — an early point in the development of Islam in this region. Mount Jerai is not merely a mountain, but a silent witness to the long journey of da'wah that crossed oceans and generations.



The natural plateau at the monument area marking the beginning of the Islamic Kingdom of Kedah, known by the local people as Padang Tok Sheikh.

Chapter 4

The Legacy of Syed Jamadil Kubra in Kelantan

Syed Jamadil Kubra was among the important figures in the network of Islamic propagation in the Malay World, including Kelantan. He was also known as Syed Hussein Jamadil Qubra or Sayyid Jamadil Qubra al-Hussein. He is believed to have originated from an Arab (Hadramaut) lineage and played the role of an Islamic scholar who spread Islam through peaceful approaches, education, and social relations with the local community. In the context of Kelantan, his role is often associated with the early strengthening of Islam through networks of scholars and traders connected between regions such as Pasai, Java, and the east coast of the Malay Peninsula. He successfully attracted the interest of the local community in understanding Islam more deeply, not merely in terms of rituals but also in the formation of morals and social life.

In Kelantan, the influence of Syed Jamadil Kubra was not necessarily in the form of direct political rule, but rather in the development of traditions of knowledge and spirituality. He was said to have been part of a network of scholars who contributed to the emergence of early Islamic learning centres, which later developed into pondok institutions. This tradition continued into later periods and became a strong

foundation for Kelantan's identity as the state famously known as the "Veranda of Mecca".

In ancient times, Kelantan was better known as the Kingdom of Cermin. This kingdom (also referred to as Jermin, Cermin or Chermin in several sources) was an early Malay kingdom associated with the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, particularly in the regions of Kelantan and Patani. The kingdom often appears in oral traditions and several old Malay chronicles as one of the early political entities before the emergence of more organised Islamic kingdoms.

Its strategic position near maritime trade routes made it a potential early trading centre linking merchants from the Malay Archipelago, India, and perhaps even the Arab world.

Its existence is believed to have begun around the 14th century and continued until the early 17th century. Its capital city was originally located on the coast like many other kingdoms, but it was later moved to the area now known as Bukit Panau or Danau Tok Uban in order to avoid attacks from Siam, and also because the area was rich in gold.

One of its kings was named Bharubasa. Syed Jamadil successfully carried out his missionary work so effectively that Paduka Raja Bharubasa embraced Islam and adopted the name Sultan Mahmud. This conversion is estimated to have taken place between 1339 and 1362.

Syed Jamadil married a Kelantanese princess, Puteri Selindung Bulan, and intensified his missionary efforts by building mosques. Masjid Kampung Laut is believed to have been built by him.

He later changed his wife's name from Puteri Selindung Bulan to Puteri Syahirah. After the princess passed away, he married another Kelantanese princess. From both marriages, he left behind many descendants. They commonly used the names Wan and Nik, although not all individuals bearing the names Wan and Nik are his descendants, and not all of his descendants use those names. From time to time, they organise gatherings to strengthen family ties.

Syed Jamadil not only carried out missionary work in Kelantan, but he also travelled to the Kingdom of Champa in Vietnam and the Majapahit Kingdom in Java. Towards the end of his life, he also preached in the Kingdom of Gowa in Makassar, Sulawesi. His descendants continued his missionary efforts and left a very significant legacy that remains visible until today.

His tomb in Mojokerto, East Java, is continues to be visited daily by groups of guests and visitors.

Perhimpunan Besar Kekeluargaan Syaikh Jumadil Kubra's
Post

KEKELUARGAAN SYAIKH JUMADIL KUBRA & PELANGARAN SEKRETARIAT
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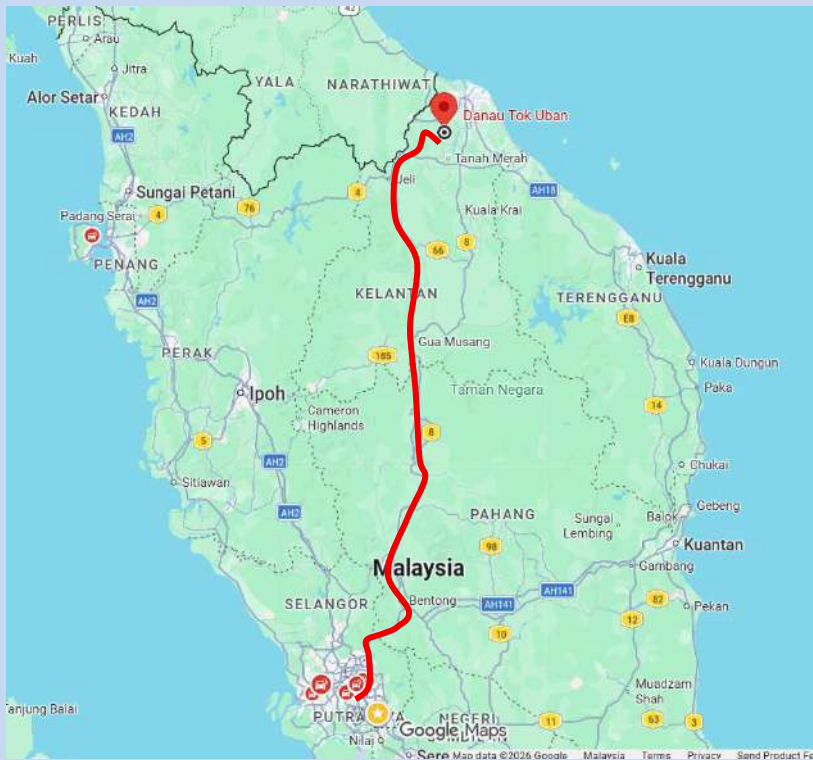
Notice of the gathering of Syed Jamadil Kubra's descendants in 2025 at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kelantan Campus.



The tomb of Syed Jamadil Kubra in Mojokerto, East Java. Every day, this tomb is visited and prayed for by many visitors.

After gathering the necessary information, we departed from Kuala Lumpur for Danau Tok Uban. This journey felt especially meaningful because the destination we sought to explore was not merely an ordinary place, but a site rich in historical significance. Danau Tok Uban is believed to have once been the administrative centre of the Kingdom of Cermin, as well as the place that witnessed the important conversion of Raja Bharubasa to Islam by Syed Jamadil Kubra around the middle of the 14th century. Realising this, every step of our journey seemed

to bring us closer to the pages of Islamic history in the Malay Archipelago.



Source: Google Maps



A mosque beside Danau Tok Uban.

We then travelled to Kampung Laut to see the mosque believed to have been built by Syed Jamadil Kubra.



The original site of Masjid Kampung Laut. Due to floods and the rising river levels, the mosque was relocated to Nilam Puri. It was later moved back to Kampung Laut on higher ground.



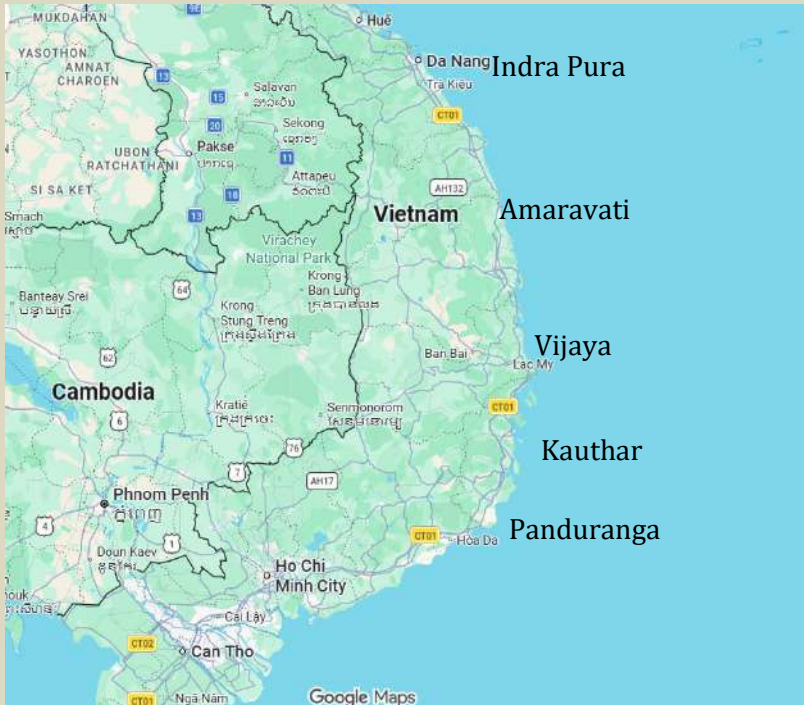
Chapter 5

The Legacy of Syed Jamadil Kubra in Vietnam

Long ago, there existed the kingdoms of Champa, an important maritime civilisation along the central and southern coasts of Vietnam, which flourished from around the 2nd century until the 19th century CE. This kingdom was founded by the Cham people, who belonged to the Austronesian family, similar to the Malays of the Malay Archipelago. Champa was not a single permanent kingdom, but consisted of several regions such as Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthara, and Panduranga, which at times united under one rule and at other times fragmented. Its strategic location along the trade route between India and China made Champa a prosperous trading centre that was open to various cultural and religious influences.

In terms of political and cultural development, Amaravati and Indrapura were among the earliest important centres. Amaravati was renowned as a centre of Hindu worship, particularly the worship of Shiva, while Indrapura later developed into a centre of Mahayana Buddhism around the 9th century. Vijaya subsequently emerged as a strong political and military centre from the 11th to the 15th centuries, marking the final golden age of Champa before its decline. Meanwhile, Kauthara became known as a local

religious centre with the famous Po Nagar temple, while Panduranga in the south remained the last region to preserve the identity of Champa until the 19th century.



The Kingdoms of Champa
(Source: Google Maps)

In terms of religion, Champa underwent significant transformations throughout its history. In the early period, Hindu influence was highly dominant, followed by the growth of Buddhism, especially in Indrapura. However, beginning around the 10th century, Islamic influence

entered through trade networks with Arab and Malay merchants. Islam later developed particularly in the region of Panduranga, giving rise to Cham Muslim communities that still exist today in Vietnam and Cambodia. This demonstrates that Champa functioned as an important bridge linking the Malay world, India, China, and the Islamic world.

The fall of Champa occurred gradually due to continuous pressure from the Dai Viet kingdom in the north. The most significant event was the major attack in 1471, which led to the fall of the capital city of Vijaya. After that, the territories of Champa became increasingly smaller until finally Panduranga, the last kingdom of Champa, was officially dissolved under the Nguyen Dynasty in the 19th century. Although Champa no longer exists as a kingdom, the cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage of the Cham people continues to live on until today, making it one of the important components of Southeast Asian history.

At the time when the Champa Kingdom was weakening, a prominent Islamic scholar arrived. His name was Syed Jamadil Kubra. He, who was also known as Syed Jamaluddin al-Kubra, was among the important figures in the spread of Islam in the Champa region along the coast of Vietnam. His role in Champa is often associated with early missionary efforts that introduced Islam to the local community, particularly among the elites and ruling class.

In Champa, Syed Jamadil Kubra is said to have played the role of a preacher who used wisdom and social relationships in his missionary work, including through trade networks and marriage ties. In oral traditions and several Malay historical sources, he is associated with efforts to convert some of the rulers of Champa to Islam, or at least pave the way for the acceptance of Islam within the royal court. This role was important because the acceptance of Islam by the ruling class usually accelerated the spread of the religion among the wider population, as happened in many other Malay kingdoms.

In addition, Syed Jamadil Kubra is also seen as a bridge between the global Islamic world and the Malay world as well as Champa. Through networks of scholars and traders, he helped shape an intellectual and missionary network that extended across the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia. This development facilitated the spread of Islamic teachings among local communities that had previously been influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. This approach enabled Islam to develop peacefully and gradually within Champa society.

When Syed Jamadil Kubra arrived, the Champa Kingdom had already begun to weaken and was frequently attacked by the Dai Viet Kingdom from the north. In this situation, he intensified his missionary efforts and, according to several sources, was associated with the conversion of Champa rulers such as Che Bong Nghah or Po Bina Suar.

After some time in Champa, Syed Jamadil Kubra continued his missionary work to the Majapahit Kingdom. He was active in Mojokerto, the capital of the kingdom. After his departure, due to internal conflicts, the Champa Kingdom collapsed gradually from north to south. The kingdom in Vijaya was defeated and its capital was captured in 1471. Many Champa people fled to Kauthara, Panduranga, Khmer territories, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Melaka, Sumatra, and Java. The influence of the Champa people in Sumatra is very clear because the Minang and Acehnese languages show several linguistic similarities with the Champa language.

The legacy of Syed Jamadil Kubra's missionary work can still be seen today through the existence of Muslim communities in Vietnam. Mosques and madrasahs can still be seen alongside the temples that were built before the arrival of Islam.

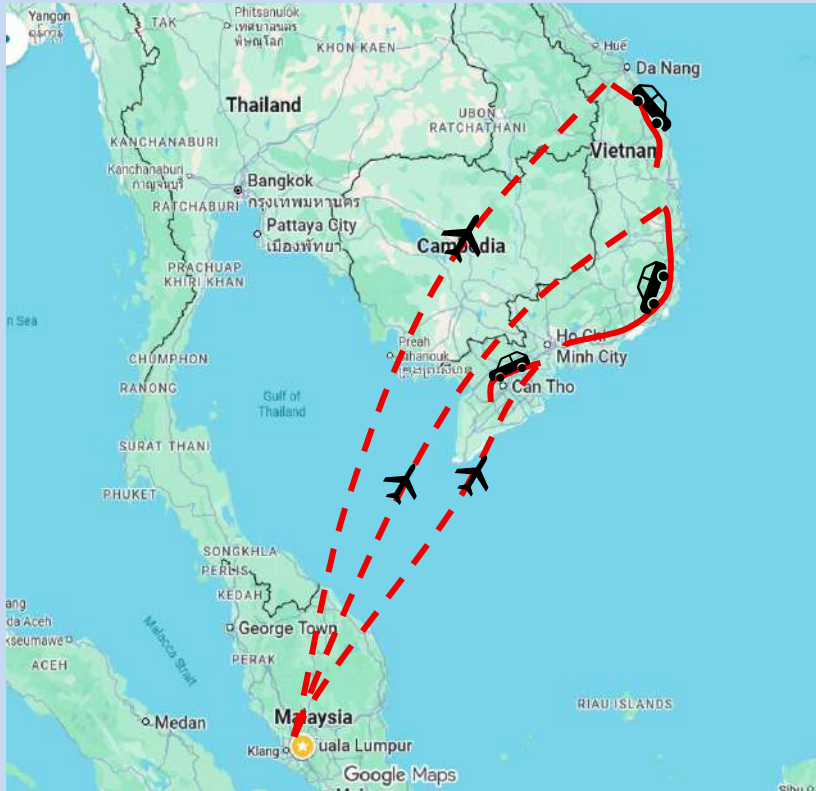
Our journey in tracing the missionary legacy of Syed Jamadil Kubra was not merely an ordinary trip, but unfolded through several different journeys across important regions in Vietnam once linked to the history of Champa.

The first journey began with a flight from KLIA to Nha Trang. From there, we travelled southward by land through Kauthara towards Panduranga (Phan Rang), before continuing the journey to Ho Chi Minh City. Each destination along the route seemed to preserve fragments of history connected to Islamic missionary activities with the once-glorious Champa civilisation.

The second journey brought us from KLIA to Da Nang. From this coastal city, we travelled to Mỹ Sơn, a sacred archaeological site of Champa heritage, then to Hội An with its rich maritime trading legacy, and finally to Quy Nhơn — an area that once served as an important centre of the Champa Kingdom.

The third journey began from KLIA to Ho Chi Minh City. From there, we continued by land to Can Tho and Tra Vinh, areas in the Mekong Delta that also preserve traces of communities and cultures connected with the spread of Islam in this region.

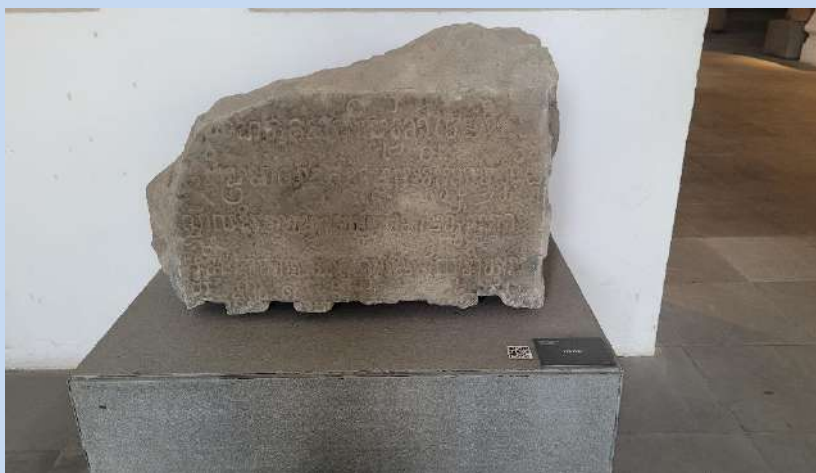
This entire journey not only connected geographical locations, but also wove together a larger narrative about missionary movements, scholarly networks, and interactions between civilisations that transcended the boundaries of time and region.



(Source: Google Maps)



A view inside the Champa Museum in Da Nang, Vietnam.



One of the inscription stones left behind by the Champa civilisation.



The temple complex at Mỹ Sơn, Indrapura (near Da Nang). Some of these temples have existed since the 2nd century CE.



The Po Nagar Temple built by the Malay-Champa people of the Kingdom of Kauthara (Nha Trang).



Po Klong Giarai: Kuil orang-orang Champa di Panduranga (Phan Rang)



Masjid An-Nikmah in Vietnam.



Masjid Nourul Ehsan in Vietnam.



*An Islamic religious school in Vietnam
(Source: Maahad Darussalam Liltadrib Al Islami).*

Our journey to Vietnam in tracing the legacy of Syed Jamadil Kubra's missionary work opened a space for deep reflection — not merely about history, but about the soul of a civilisation. Standing before the ancient temple complexes that still stand proudly today, we were amazed by the beauty of their intricate and refined architecture. Yet behind this beauty arose a question: why do these temples remain, while the palaces of the kings seem to have vanished with time?

It felt as though history itself was whispering — that the Malays of the past did not build merely for power, but

more for faith. They may have possessed great kingdoms, but what was immortalised were places of worship, not symbols of worldly glory. And when Islam arrived, the transformation was not merely in outward form, but within the same spirit — a spirit that placed religion in the highest position.

We travelled through Cham Muslim villages, and there we witnessed a truly remarkable continuity. Although their kingdom had long collapsed, although they had experienced French colonisation and now live under a communist system of governance, they still remain steadfast in holding onto Islam. The mosques still stand, modest yet alive. Small madrasahs continue to function, teaching the Qur'an to the younger generation with patience and dedication.

In that atmosphere, we felt a strength that could not be seen outwardly — the strength of faith passed down from generation to generation. The missionary work brought by figures such as Syed Jamadil Kubra did not merely touch one generation, but planted deep roots capable of enduring through the fall of kingdoms, colonisation, and the changing tides of history.

This journey ultimately taught us one profound truth — that true civilisation is not measured by magnificent palaces or vast power, but by how firmly faith is able to endure. And here in the land of Vietnam, we witnessed for ourselves that Islam continues to live on — quiet, modest, yet steadfast and never extinguished.

Chapter 6

The Legacy of Syed Jamadil Kubra in Indonesia

Syed Jamadil Kubra, better known as Syed Jamaluddin al-Kubra, is often associated as one of the earliest figures who brought the light of Islam to the land of Java. His presence in the Mojokerto region — which was once the centre of the Majapahit Kingdom civilisation and its capital — is portrayed as a meeting between two worlds: the old world rooted in Hindu-Buddhist traditions, and a new world carrying the message of tawhid.



There were many Hindu temples in Mojokerto before the arrival of Syed Jamadil Kubra.

It is narrated that Syed Jamadil Kubra arrived in Java at a time when the greatness of Majapahit still dominated the land. The city of Trowulan in Mojokerto was then a glorious administrative centre, filled with palaces, temples, and a well-ordered royal life. It was in this atmosphere that he arrived — not as a conqueror, but as a preacher who brought an approach of wisdom and gentleness. He gradually approached the local community, interacted with nobles and common people alike, and introduced Islamic teachings through good character, social interaction, and wisdom.

Syed Jamadil Kubra is regarded as part of the early generation that paved the way for the broader Islamisation of Java in the centuries that followed. His presence in Mojokerto is widely regarded as the beginning of a major transformation of a major transformation in the religious landscape of Java.

What is particularly interesting is that Syed Jamadil Kubra and his children continued their missionary efforts across various regions. They did not remain in one place alone, but travelled repeatedly between Champa, Java, and Kelantan, following the existing maritime trade routes. In fact, he also had the opportunity to preach in the Kingdom of Gowa in Makassar. These journeys were not merely physical movements, but a continuous effort to ensure that the message of Islam remained alive — connecting

communities, spreading knowledge, and strengthening scholarly networks in every place they visited.

These repeated journeys also demonstrate that the spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago did not develop separately according to regions, but through an interconnected maritime network. The sea was not a barrier, but a bridge — enabling scholars, traders, and missionary families to move from one centre to another. In this way, Champa became the gateway, Java became the centre of consolidation, and Kelantan became the foundation of continuity that expanded the influence of Islam throughout the Malay world.

This presents a broader picture of how Islam spread through family networks, the movement of scholars, and relationships between regions, rather than merely through conquest or political power. In other words, the missionary efforts of Syed Jamadil Kubra and his descendants reflected the face of Islam in the Malay Archipelago — one that spread peacefully, rooted itself in culture, and grew through human relationships that transcended seas and generations.

Syed Jamadil al-Kubra is said to have passed away in Trowulan, Mojokerto, in the year 1367 CE, corresponding to 15 Muharram 797 Hijrah — leaving behind a world that had once become the field of his missionary struggle. Yet his passing was not the end; rather, it became the

beginning of a broader continuation of the mission. The torch of da'wah that he ignited never faded, but instead continued to shine through the generations that followed.



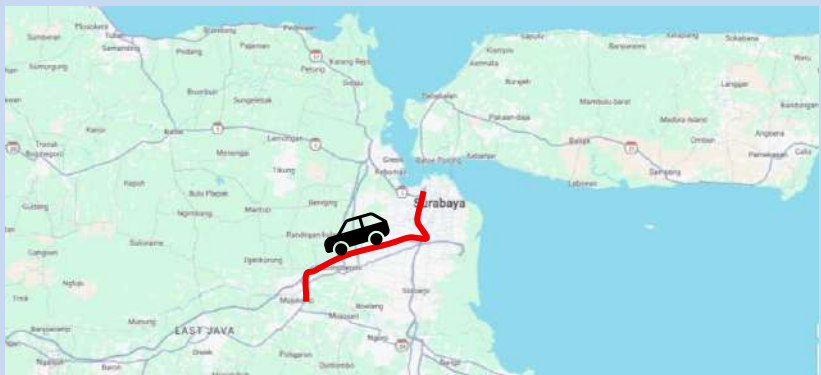
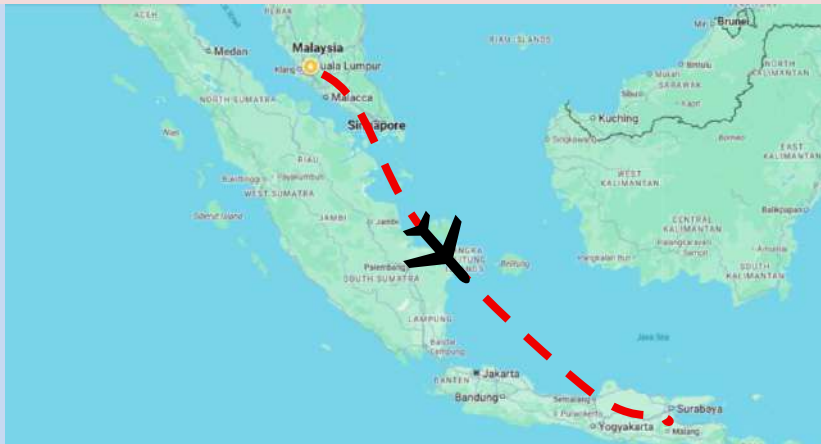
The tomb of Syed Jamadil Kubra in Mojokerto. The tomb is situated within the burial complex of Majapahit dignitaries. This shows that the Majapahit Kingdom held him in very high regard.

His son, Maulana Malik Ibrahim, emerged to continue this effort with wisdom and patience. This path was later followed by his descendants, including great figures such as Raden Rahmat (Sunan Ampel) and Maulana

Muhammad Ainul Yakin (Sunan Giri), who expanded the influence of Islam throughout the island of Java. Through wise missionary approaches — combining knowledge, good character, and cultural adaptation — they succeeded in gradually transforming Javanese society.

Eventually, these continuous efforts bore fruit when almost the entire island of Java embraced Islam as a way of life. This story is not merely about one individual, but about the continuity of a struggle — from a teacher to his children, and from the children to the next generation — crossing the boundaries of time and shaping the history of Islam in the Malay Archipelago.

Our journey began from KLIA as we boarded a flight to Surabaya. Upon arrival, we continued our journey by car, travelling westward along the toll highway. After nearly two hours of smooth travel, we exited at Krian Toll before continuing towards Mojokerto, which was once the capital of the Majapahit Kingdom.



The journey from Kuala Lumpur to Mojokerto (Source: Google Maps).



A view inside the Majapahit Museum depicting the atmosphere before the arrival of Islam.

As we stepped away from the tomb of Syed Jamadil Kubra, our minds continued to circle around a question that was not easy to answer — why did he choose Mojokerto, the centre of the grandeur of the Majapahit Kingdom, as the place to settle?

After all, he had such close ties with the Malay world — one of his wives was from Kelantan, and another from Champa. Logically, he could have chosen to settle in either of those regions, which were closer in terms of family ties and perhaps more welcoming towards Islamic missionary efforts. Yet he chose a different path — a far more challenging one.

Before us stood the image of a great empire — Majapahit, which at that time stood proudly as the dominant power in the Malay Archipelago. Perhaps, for a preacher like Syed Jamadil Kubra, that challenge itself was the calling. After his missionary efforts had touched the rulers of Kelantan and Champa, perhaps his focus shifted towards the greatest centre of power — the effort to touch the heart of a king who ruled over a vast empire.

We realised that the journey of a preacher is not merely about seeking an easy place, but about seeking the place that most needs guidance. Mojokerto was not simply a choice, but a strategy — an effort to bring the light of Islam to the centre of power, with the hope that when a king changed, the entire empire would eventually embrace that change as well.

There, we learned an important truth — that da'wah is not about comfort, but about the courage to choose the most difficult field, in order to open a wider path for the future of the ummah.



Today, in Mojokerto, mosques can be seen everywhere.

Chapter 7

Maulana Malik Ibrahim

Maulana Malik Ibrahim, also known as Sunan Gresik, was one of the most important figures in the spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. In several traditions, he is traditionally regarded as the son of Syed Jamadil Kubra, an early preacher who travelled throughout Champa, Java, and the Malay world. His mother was Puteri Selindung Bulan, also known as Puteri Syahira from Kelantan. The construction of Masjid Kampung Laut in Kelantan is often associated with both him and his father. Maulana Malik Ibrahim lived around the 14th to 15th centuries and arrived in Java at a time when the people were still deeply influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions, particularly under the rule of the Majapahit Kingdom.

In Java, he began his missionary efforts with a gentle and wise approach. He did not force people to embrace Islam; instead, he demonstrated noble character and assisted the local community in their daily lives. In addition to teaching religion, he also helped the people in agriculture and practical life skills. This demonstrates that he also contributed to strengthening the local economy and improving livelihoods. This approach attracted many people to Islam because they witnessed the beauty of its teachings through his actions.

Maulana Malik Ibrahim also played an important role in education. He established religious learning centres that became the foundation of the pesantren system in Java. There, he educated students who later became preachers and spread Islam to other regions. Among the important figures who emerged from this network was Sunan Ampel, who in some traditions is associated as the grandson of Syed Jamadil Kubra.



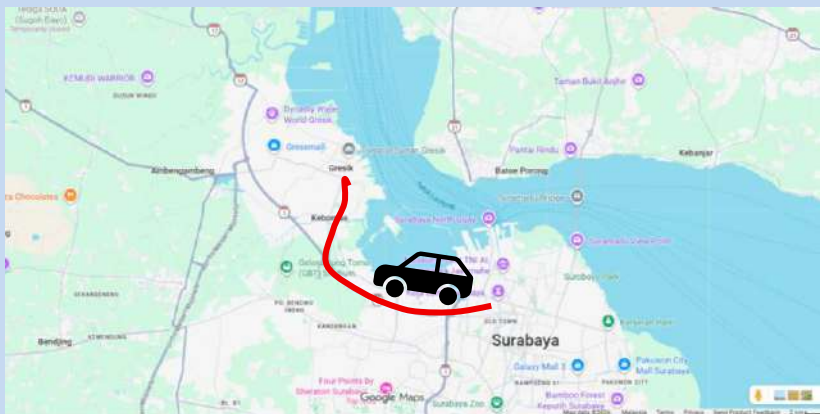
The tomb of Maulana Malik Ibrahim in Gresik, not far from Surabaya. Every day, many visitors come to offer prayers and pay their respects.

He passed away around 1419 CE and was buried in Gresik, East Java. Although he passed away long ago, his contributions and struggles in spreading Islam continue to be remembered until today. The story of Maulana Malik Ibrahim demonstrates that effective da'wah is not carried out through force, but through knowledge, noble character, and patience in educating society. A public university in East Java has been named after him: Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim.

The Distinctive Contributions of Maulana Malik Ibrahim

- Established educational institutions to produce scholars and preachers.
- Assisted the community:
 - Teaching efficient agricultural methods,
 - Introducing irrigation systems,
 - Developing entrepreneurship and economic life.
- Humanitarian approach:
 - Caring for the poor,
 - Assisting the sick,
 - Helping others without discrimination of religion.

Our journey from Surabaya to Gresik continued by car and took about an hour, yet it felt deeply meaningful. Throughout the journey, our eyes were presented with scenes that invited reflection — rows of mosques and suraus standing majestically on both sides of the road. Each one seemed to stand as a silent witness to the great transformation that once took place on this land. Quietly, we realised that the road we travelled did not merely connect two cities, but also connected the long history of a society's transformation — from one belief system to the light of Islam that now shines clearly in every corner.



Source: Google Maps.



Many mosques can be seen along the roads in Gresik.

We walked slowly away from the burial complex of Maulana Malik Ibrahim in Gresik, yet our thoughts remained absorbed in the story of this remarkable figure. One aspect truly stirred our hearts — his origins that transcended the boundaries of the world. It is said that his mother came from Kelantan, while his father was from the Middle East and had once lived in Mojokerto. Yet he did not choose either of those places as the centre of his mission. Instead, he chose Gresik — a vibrant, busy port city filled with the colours of humanity.

At that time, Gresik was the commercial heartbeat of the Majapahit Empire. Ships from many corners of the world anchored there — from China, India, the Arab world, and the Malay Archipelago. Merchants, sailors, and travellers met, exchanging goods, languages, and cultures. Amidst this lively atmosphere, Maulana Malik Ibrahim established his educational institution — not merely as a place of learning, but as a structured, systematic centre for human development.

We began to wonder whether this was a remarkably subtle yet highly effective strategy of da'wah. By choosing an international port as the foundation of education, Islamic teachings were not only spread among the local community, but were also carried abroad by traders to every corner of the world. His missionary efforts were not static — they moved and flowed like the currents of trade themselves.

Although he passed away in 1419, the echo of da'wah from Gresik never ceased. It continued to spread across Java and the Malay Archipelago, as though the seeds planted at that port had grown into a great tree whose shade extended across generations.

Some time later, when the author was invited as an educational quality assessor at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, an interesting point was shared by the university. They explained that the spirit they wished to instil in their students was the same spirit embodied by Maulana Malik Ibrahim — to produce individuals capable of going anywhere and making a significant impact on society.



Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang — among the institutions that continue his intellectual legacy.

They reminded us that Maulana Malik Ibrahim was not originally from Java, but rather a traveller with roots in Kelantan who eventually became a major figure shaping the history of East Java, especially Gresik. From a traveller, he became a builder of civilisation.

At that moment, we realised that this journey was not merely a historical pilgrimage — but a reminder that da'wah and knowledge know no boundaries. Sometimes, it is the outsider who brings the brightest light to a foreign land.

Chapter 8

Maulana Muhammad Ainul Yakin

Sunan Giri, also known as Raden Paku or Maulana Muhammad Ainul Yakin, was one of the prominent preachers who spread Islam throughout the island of Java. He was born in 1443 and passed away in 1506. He was renowned as a scholar, educator, and community leader. In several traditions, Sunan Giri is also regarded as the great-grandson of Syed Jamadil Kubra, indicating that he belonged to a vast Islamic missionary network that transcended regions. His father, Maulana Ishak or Syed Ishak, was a scholar associated with Melaka and a grandson of Maulana Malik Ibrahim.

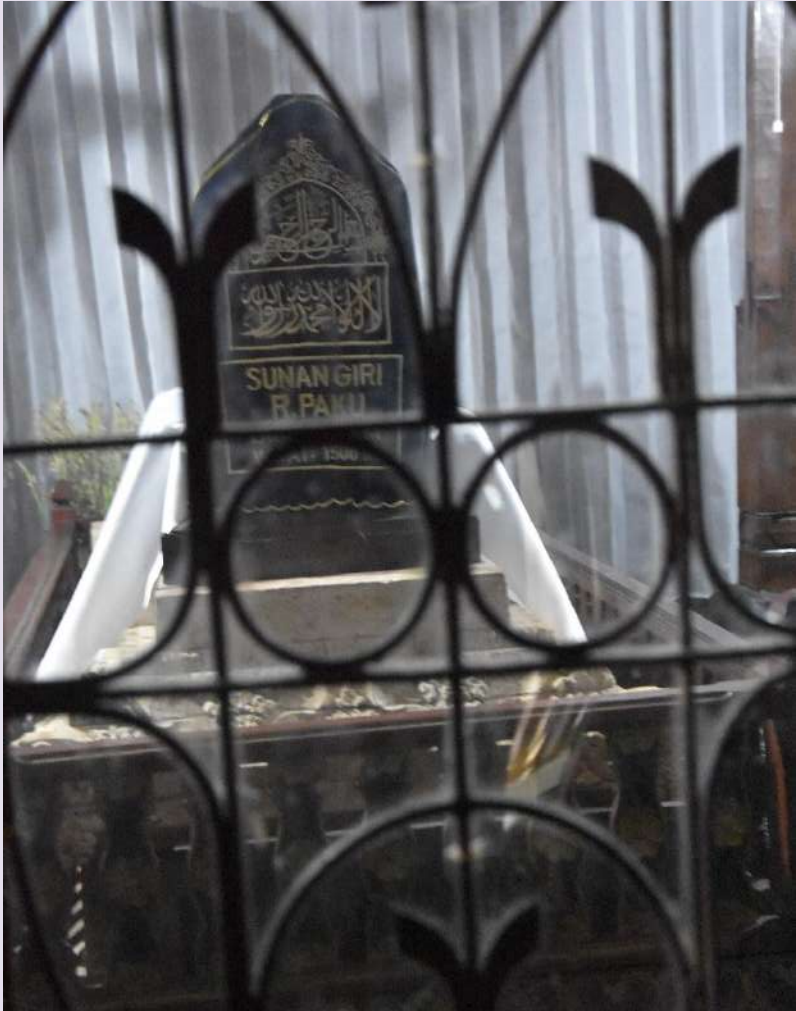
From a young age, Sunan Giri received a strong religious education. He studied under the guidance of Sunan Ampel, also known as Raden Rahmat, who was also his uncle. After completing his studies, he returned to Gresik and established an Islamic learning centre known as Giri Kedaton. This institution later became a major centre of Islamic education that produced many students and preachers who later spread Islam throughout Java and other regions of the Malay Archipelago.

Sunan Giri was famous for his wise and culturally appropriate approach to da'wah. He used a gentle method, avoided compulsion, and emphasised noble character.

Besides teaching religion, he also used cultural elements such as children's games and songs to convey Islamic teachings. This approach made Islamic teachings easier to understand and more readily accepted by society.

In addition to being a preacher and teacher, Sunan Giri also had influence in leadership. He led the Giri region as an important religious centre and became a reference point in religious matters. Many leaders and ordinary people came to him for advice. This demonstrates that he was respected not only as a scholar, but also as a wise leader.

Sunan Giri passed away in 1506 and was buried in Gresik, East Java, not far from the tomb of Maulana Malik Ibrahim. His tomb remains an important pilgrimage site frequently visited by the public. His life story teaches us that the success of da'wah depends not only on knowledge, but also on patience, wisdom, and noble character. Through his efforts and those of other preachers, Islam eventually spread widely across Java and became the principal religion of the people until today.



The tomb of Maulana Muhammad Ainul Yakin, Sunan Giri, in Gresik, East Java.



The gravestone of Maulana Muhammad Ainul Yakin (Sunan Giri).

Apart from being a community leader and establishing educational institutions to produce scholars and preachers, the unique contributions of Sunan Giri include:

- Composing children's songs to explain Islam in a relaxed and engaging way,
- Creating games to shape moral character,
- Using local culture to explain Islamic teachings.



The pathway leading to the tomb of Sunan Giri.

The tomb of Sunan Giri is located not far from the tomb of Maulana Malik Ibrahim, making our next journey feel like a continuation of the same historical trail. We continued our journey by car, initially guided by Google Maps. However, the farther we travelled, the more mosques and suraus we encountered bearing the name Sunan Giri or Maulana Muhammad Ainul Yakin, causing some confusion — which one was actually our destination?

Eventually, we decided to turn off Google Maps and simply follow the road signs along the way. In that atmosphere, the journey suddenly felt far more meaningful — as though we were no longer merely following technology, but tracing the traditional routes once travelled by seekers of knowledge and earlier travellers.



We turned off the GPS and followed the road signs.

After completing our visit to the tomb of Sunan Giri, we slowly walked down the area with hearts still filled with admiration. He was not merely a preacher, but an educator far ahead of his time. We reflected on how he introduced educational methods that were deeply connected to the spirit of the people — through songs and games rooted in local culture.

What was even more remarkable was that some of those songs and games are still alive today. They do not merely remain as historical heritage, but continue to breathe within the life of society. In fact, some of the songs he created have crossed linguistic boundaries — translated into Malay and Arabic — and remain fresh, as though untouched by time.

During the journey, we smiled to ourselves. Unknowingly, what Sunan Giri introduced centuries ago has now re-emerged in the modern world under new terms — gamification and serious games. Methods once used to educate children are now applied in professional training and even in complex fields such as business and military strategy.

It was as though history was repeating itself. We realised that the wisdom of a scholar lies not only in his knowledge, but also in his ability to understand human nature. Sunan Giri proved that the most effective education is the kind that touches the heart — through games, songs, and culture that resonate deeply with the human soul.

Chapter 9

Raden Rahmat

Raden Rahmat, better known as Sunan Ampel, was one of the most prominent figures in the spread of Islam on the island of Java. He was born in 1401 in Champa. According to several traditions, he is believed to have been the grandson of Syed Jamadil Kubra. His father was Syed Ibrahim As-Samarqandy, while his mother was Dewi Candrawulan from Champa. This indicates that he came from a family with a strong Islamic scholarly background. His real name was Syed Ali Rahmatullah. Following the fall of the Champa Kingdom in Vijaya, he travelled to Palembang, where he became associated with missionary efforts that contributed to the conversion of its ruler, Arya Damar, to Islam. He later continued his journey to Tuban, one of the major ports of the Majapahit Kingdom. At that time, the Majapahit king, Prabu Kartabhumi, had married Princess of Champa, Dewi Dwarawati, who in some traditions is associated with having family ties to his mother.

Sunan Ampel arrived in Java at a time when society was still strongly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. He settled in the Ampel area of Surabaya and began spreading Islam through a gentle and wise approach. He was later appointed by the Majapahit king as the ruler of Surabaya. Nevertheless, he did not force people to embrace Islam, but instead taught through noble character, patience, and

exemplary conduct. This approach attracted many people to learn about and eventually embrace Islam.

One of Sunan Ampel's greatest contributions was in the field of education. He established a religious learning centre that became a place of study for many students from various regions. It was here that many great figures emerged, such as Sunan Giri and Sunan Bonang, who later spread Islam to other places. This demonstrates that Sunan Ampel not only carried out da'wah personally, but also nurtured generations of preachers who continued the mission.

In addition, Sunan Ampel also played a role in guiding society and leaders. He advised rulers and helped shape a society that was more ethical and knowledgeable. Through his efforts, Islam spread widely and rapidly across Java and became increasingly accepted by the people.

Sunan Ampel passed away around 1481 CE and was buried in Surabaya. His tomb has since become an important spiritual and historical site visited by people who come to pay their respects and offer prayers. His life story teaches us that successful da'wah requires knowledge, patience, and noble character. Through his gentle and wise approach, he succeeded in bringing significant transformation to Javanese society and became one of the most respected figures in the history of Islam in the Malay Archipelago.



The tomb of Raden Rahmat (Sunan Ampel) in Surabaya. It is constantly visited by pilgrims who come to pray for his soul.

The role of Raden Rahmat Sunan Ampel was immense in the establishment of the Demak Sultanate. He was the teacher and mentor who laid the foundation for the emergence of the Islamic Kingdom of Demak in Java. At a time when the influence of the Majapahit Kingdom was weakening, Sunan Ampel played an important role in educating and guiding a new generation that would shape the future of society.

Among the important figures educated by him was Raden Fatah, his nephew, who in several sources is also

associated as the son of the Majapahit king, Prabu Kartabumi Brawijaya V, through his aunt. Raden Fatah was appointed by his father as the ruler of Demak and later became known as the first Sultan of Demak under the protection of the Majapahit Kingdom. Under the guidance of Sunan Ampel, Raden Fatah not only learned religious knowledge, but also leadership values, justice, and the responsibilities of an Islamic ruler. This education became the foundation for the formation of a kingdom based on Islamic teachings.



Masjid Sunan Ampel in Surabaya. We performed the Asr prayer in this mosque together with approximately 4,000 worshippers.

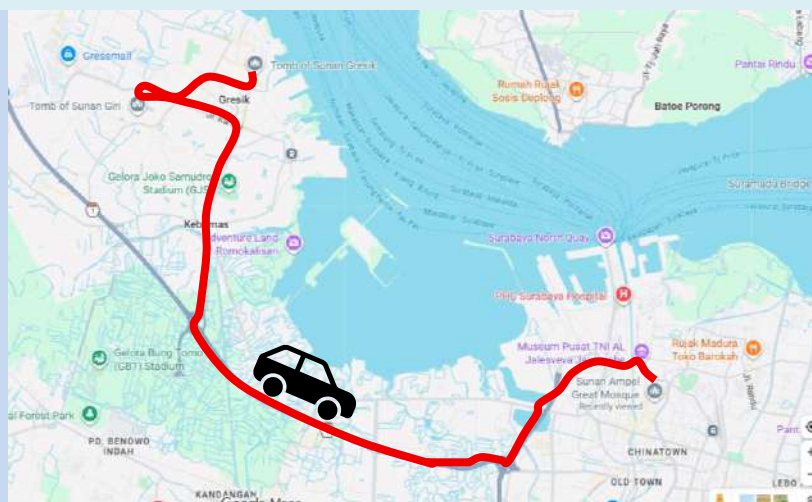
Among the unique contributions of Raden Rahmat, Sunan Ampel, were:

- Establishing a well-organised and systematic educational system in the Malay Archipelago.
- His aunt's position as the wife of the king enabled him to provide valuable advice to the Majapahit Kingdom.
- Developing a long-term and interconnected da'wah strategy. His close relationships with preachers in Kelantan, Palembang, and Java enabled missionary planning to be carried out more extensively.

After visiting the tombs of Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Giri, we continued our journey to Surabaya to visit the tomb of Raden Rahmat, Sunan Ampel. The journey felt increasingly meaningful, as though we were continuing a connected chain of missionary footsteps left by the great saints.

We arrived there close to Asr prayer time. Without delay, we immediately performed ablution and entered Masjid Sunan Ampel to perform the congregational prayer. The atmosphere inside the mosque was calm, yet filled with worshippers from various backgrounds. Looking at the vastness of the mosque, we estimated that the number of worshippers attending the Asr prayer exceeded 4,000

people. Standing shoulder to shoulder in prayer with them, it felt as though we had become part of a long historical journey — reviving the spirit of da'wah once planted by Sunan Ampel centuries ago.



Our journey from the tombs of Sunan Gresik (Maulana Malik Ibrahim), Sunan Giri (Maulana Muhammad Ainul Yakin), and finally to the tomb of Sunan Ampel (Raden Rahmat).

Source: Google Maps.

As we stepped out of the burial complex of Sunan Ampel, our hearts remained filled with indescribable admiration. Who could have imagined that from an educational centre founded by him would emerge great figures who transformed the history of the Malay Archipelago? We

remembered great names such as Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kalijaga, and Raden Fatah — the founder of the Demak Sultanate. They were not merely students, but leaders who later produced new generations of preachers, spreading the light of Islam throughout the Malay Archipelago.

We walked slowly, as though wishing to prolong that historic moment. From Ampel Denta, da'wah did not stop — rather, it expanded, took root, and branched out, creating a continuous chain of leadership across generations.

However, as we spoke among ourselves, we realised something interesting. Although his original name was Raden Rahmat, the world today knows him more widely as Sunan Ampel. In Surabaya stands the prestigious Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, a public university that carries his name and spirit of struggle. Meanwhile, in Malang, there is Universitas Islam Raden Rahmat Malang, a private institution that also preserves his original name.

Quietly, we smiled. From a humble pesantren, the legacy of Sunan Ampel now continues in the form of universities — producing new generations who are hoped to continue the same mission: spreading knowledge, building society, and making an impact on the world.

When the author was invited to conduct an assessment at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, the atmosphere of the campus — calm yet alive with the spirit of scholarship — opened the space for a meaningful conversation. The author had the opportunity to interview a postgraduate student, a young lecturer from Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Ampel Surabaya.

With great curiosity, the author asked a simple yet profound question,

“How would you compare UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim with UIN Sunan Ampel?”

The lecturer smiled briefly, as though arranging the right words, before replying calmly,

“Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Ampel — both were not Javanese. They were figures from outside Java. But what made them extraordinary was their ability to immerse themselves within Javanese society, understand the local culture and spirit, and bring about massive transformation until the people embraced Islam.” He paused for a moment, then continued more confidently,

“That is the spirit these two universities are trying to instil in their students — not merely to study, but to enter society, understand people, and bring meaningful change.”

Those words continued to echo in the author’s mind. During the journey home, the author began to realise that a university is not merely a place for acquiring knowledge. It is a place for shaping the soul — producing individuals who are not only knowledgeable, but also capable of becoming agents of transformation, just like the great figures who once shaped history on the island of Java.

Chapter 10

Raden Fatah

Raden Fatah was an important figure in the history of political and religious transition on the island of Java, particularly during the final years of the Majapahit Kingdom. He is known as the founder and first Sultan of the Demak Sultanate, which emerged as a new power when the influence of Majapahit began to decline, thereby making him a symbol of the transition from the Hindu-Buddhist world to the Islamic world in Java.

Raden Fatah was born in 1455 from a mixed lineage. According to several sources, his father was Brawijaya V, the king of Majapahit, while his mother was the Champa Princess, Dwarawati. This indicates that he grew up within a broad cultural and political environment. From a young age, he was sent to study Islamic knowledge under the guidance of Raden Rahmat, Sunan Ampel, in Ampel Denta, Surabaya. There, he not only learned Islamic teachings, but was also educated in the values of leadership, justice, and responsibility as a leader of society.

After completing his education, Raden Fatah began his activities along the northern coastal region of Java, which at that time had become a centre of international trade. This region was more open to Islamic influence due to trade relations with Arab, Indian, and Malay merchants. With the

support of the scholars, he successfully established the Demak Sultanate as the first Islamic kingdom in Java after his father appointed him as the ruler of Demak. The establishment of Demak represented not merely a political transformation, but also reflected a major social and religious transformation within society.

As a ruler, Raden Fatah played an important role in strengthening Demak as a centre of Islam. He reinforced relationships with scholars such as Sunan Giri and Sunan Bonang, who helped spread Islam to other regions. Under his rule, Demak developed not only as a political centre, but also as a centre of trade and da'wah. The Grand Mosque of Demak, built during his reign, became an important symbol of the rise of Islam, functioning as a place of worship, education, and community gathering.

Raden Fatah's role was also important in the context of the fall of Majapahit. This event occurred after his father was killed in a struggle for power. Although not all historians agree that he directly overthrew Majapahit, it is clear that the emergence of Demak replaced the role of Majapahit as the dominant power in Java and the Malay Archipelago. This transformation occurred gradually through a combination of political, economic, and religious development. In this context, Raden Fatah can be viewed as the figure who led a major transformation in the history of Java and the Malay Archipelago.



The tomb of Sultan Raden Fatah in the compound of the Grand Mosque of Demak.

Raden Fatah passed away in 1518, and after that Demak was continued by subsequent rulers. Although his life ended long ago, his contributions remain significant in the history of the Malay Archipelago. He is remembered not only as a king, but also as a leader who successfully combined political strength with Islamic da'wah, thereby laying the foundation for the development of Islamic kingdoms in Java and the wider Malay Archipelago.

One of the most interesting aspects when visiting the tomb of Sultan Raden Fatah is the design of the Demak Mosque built by the Sultan himself. This mosque is often regarded as an important event in the history of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, not only from the religious perspective, but also in terms of culture and architecture. When the Demak Sultanate began to emerge as a new Islamic kingdom in Java, the need for a grand mosque became extremely important. The mosque was not merely a place of worship, but also a centre for the spread of knowledge, community gatherings, and a symbol of the rise of Islam in Java.

According to historical tradition, the Grand Mosque of Demak was built with the cooperation of prominent scholars such as Raden Rahmat, the teacher of Sultan Raden Fatah, and Sunan Kalijaga, who was renowned for his creativity in architecture. The mosque was not built in Middle Eastern style, but instead adopted local forms, particularly the tiered roof (joglo) and wooden structure. Its main pillars, known as

saka guru, also carried symbolic meaning, representing strength and unity within the Muslim community.

Interestingly, the design of the Demak Mosque is often compared with Masjid Kampung Laut in Kelantan, Malaysia. Both share traditional Malay Archipelago architectural characteristics — constructed from wood, using tiered roofs without domes, and emphasising natural ventilation. These architectural similarities demonstrate that mosque architecture in the Malay Archipelago evolved within a shared cultural tradition, shaped by local customs, climate, and environmental conditions rather than by the mere imitation of foreign styles.



According to several traditions, Masjid Kampung Laut in Kelantan was built around 1349 by Syed Jamadil Kubra after he converted the Sultan of Kelantan to Islam.



The Grand Mosque of Demak, founded by Raden Fatah in the 15th century, continues to preserve the beauty of its traditional architectural heritage despite later expansions

(Source: [demak-great-mosque-in-central-java-picture-id962584806](https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/demak-great-mosque-in-central-java-picture-id962584806) (612×408))

Although there is no clear historical evidence that the Demak Mosque directly imitated Masjid Kampung Laut, these similarities reflect the broad cultural and Islamic networks between Java and the Malay world. Traders, scholars, and preachers travelling between these regions carried with them ideas, techniques, and values that were later translated into architectural forms. This is also associated with the movements of figures such as Syed

Jamadil Kubra and Maulana Malik Ibrahim, who frequently travelled between Kelantan and Mojokerto.

The construction of the Demak Mosque by Raden Fatah ultimately became an important symbol showing that Islam in the Malay Archipelago developed in a unique way — combining religious teachings with local culture. It demonstrates that Islamic da'wah not only transformed the beliefs of society, but also shaped their artistic identity, culture, and daily life. In this context, the Demak Mosque and Masjid Kampung Laut stand as two examples of heritage reflecting the beauty and wisdom of Islamic civilisation in the Malay Archipelago.

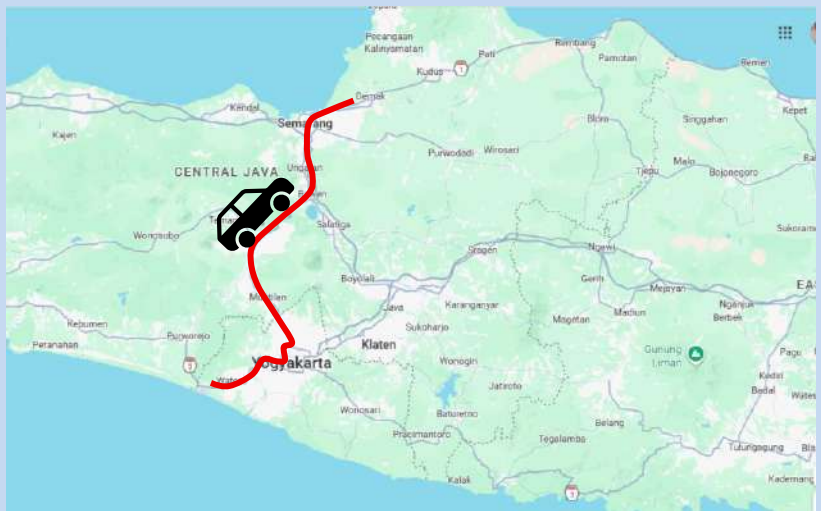
Our journey to Demak began with a flight from KLIA to Yogyakarta. Upon arrival, we continued our land journey by car heading northward along roads that brought us closer to the historic destination. Midway through the journey, we stopped at a village to enjoy lunch and perform the Zuhur prayer combined with Asar — a brief stop that allowed us to rest while appreciating the peaceful rural atmosphere.

Throughout the journey, we passed rows of villages and small towns. The scenery on both sides of the road was captivating — mosques and suraus stood in almost every area, as though forming the heartbeat of local community life. Between these settlements stretched green forests, orchards, and vast vegetable farms, adding even greater beauty to our journey.

We arrived in Semarang as the Maghrib call to prayer echoed through the city and spent the night at a hotel in the city centre. The following day, the journey continued towards Demak. Upon arrival, we headed straight to the Demak Mosque — a mosque rich in historical significance.

We performed the tahiyyatul masjid prayer before proceeding to the burial complex to visit Sultan Raden Fatah.

In that blessed atmosphere, we met a mosque officer, or takmir (known in Selangor as the nazir masjid). With great warmth, he invited us to sit on the pulpit — the very place once used by Sultan Raden Fatah himself. At that moment, it felt as though we were not merely visitors, but were directly touching a living page of history before our eyes.



(Source: Google Maps).

Chapter 11

Sunan Kalijaga

Sunan Kalijaga was one of the preachers who spread Islam very effectively on the island of Java. His original name was Raden Said. He was born in 1450 and passed away in 1513. In several traditions, he is traditionally associated with having married Dewi Sarah, the daughter of Maulana Syed Ishak bin Syed Ibrahim Asmara bin Syed Jamadil Kubra. At that time, Javanese society was still strongly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. Therefore, Sunan Kalijaga adopted a highly wise and culturally sensitive approach in conveying Islamic teachings so that they could be more easily accepted by the people.

Sunan Kalijaga's uniqueness lay in his highly creative approach to da'wah, which was deeply connected to the culture of the people. He used artistic forms such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), gamelan music, and folk stories to convey the message of Islam. Through stories and performances, he taught noble values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and faith. This approach enabled society to feel neither pressured nor forced, but instead became more interested in understanding the teachings of Islam.

In addition, Sunan Kalijaga was also well known for his patience and deep understanding of society. He did not reject local culture; instead, he adapted it to align with

Islamic teachings. For example, he incorporated Islamic elements into the arts and customs that were already widely practised among the Javanese people. This approach helped Islam spread peacefully and gradually without creating conflict.

Sunan Kalijaga also maintained close relationships with other preachers, including Raden Rahmat, better known as Sunan Ampel, who was his teacher. He also played a role in the development of the Demak Sultanate, which became the centre for the spread of Islam in Java during that period. This shows that he was not only a preacher, but was also actively involved in shaping Islamic society and governance.

Sunan Kalijaga passed away in 1513 and was buried in Kadilangu, Demak. Until today, he is remembered as a figure who successfully spread Islam with remarkable wisdom and insight. His life story teaches us that da'wah can be carried out through many different approaches, including arts and culture, as long as they lead towards goodness and bring people closer to Allah.



The tomb of Sunan Kalijaga in Kadilangu, Demak, continues to attract visitors from many regions each day.

During his lifetime, like the great preachers before him, Sunan Kalijaga also established his own educational institution. His educational approach was holistic, gradual, gradual (tadarruj), and community-based. He utilised a combination of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), mosques, and local culture as mediums of education. In the pesantren, students (santri) were educated in the foundations of the Qur'an, tawhid, fiqh, moral conduct, and

life skills through a close teacher–student relationship that emphasised spiritual development (tarbiah). In mosques such as the Grand Mosque of Demak, lessons were conducted openly in the form of halaqah, enabling the wider community to participate. Most uniquely, Sunan Kalijaga used local culture as an educational tool, such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) and gamelan music, to convey Islamic values in a subtle and easily understandable manner. This approach transformed education into more than merely the transfer of knowledge, but a comprehensive process of human development — intellectually, spiritually, and socially — while remaining closely connected to the realities of society.

This educational system produced networks of scholars, preachers, and community leaders who continued the tradition of da’wah based on wisdom, culture, and community education until today. Among the alumni of this educational system was his own son, Sunan Muria, whose real name was Raden Umar Said. He became well known for a style of da’wah that was especially close to rural and inland communities, particularly around the Mount Muria region in Central Java. While Sunan Kalijaga focused on spreading Islam through arts and culture in broader urban centres, Sunan Muria concentrated his efforts on farmers, fishermen, and village communities.

Raden Fatah himself, who became the first Sultan of Demak, and his younger brother, Pati Unus, who later

became the second Sultan of Demak, were both students of Sunan Kalijaga. His son, Sultan Trenggana, the third Sultan of Demak, is also described in several historical traditions as an alumnus of Sunan Kalijaga's educational system.

Two years before Sunan Kalijaga's passing, in 1511, Melaka fell to the Portuguese. This fall shocked the Islamic world of the Malay Archipelago, as it marked the loss of an important centre of trade and da'wah. Sunan Kalijaga and his companions rose to revive the spirit of the Muslim community. Raden Fatah's younger brother, Pati Unus, mobilised naval forces to confront the Portuguese. With the support of Islamic ports in Java such as Jepara, Tuban, and Gresik, he assembled a great fleet consisting of hundreds of ships, including powerful Javanese jong vessels capable of carrying large numbers of soldiers. These preparations reflected not only military strength, but also the determination of the Muslims of the Malay Archipelago to rise in defence of their dignity and honour.

Around 1512 to 1513, this fleet sailed across the Java Sea towards the Straits of Melaka. The long journey was filled with challenges, yet the spirit of jihad and liberation became their primary motivation.

A traditional pantun became a source of inspiration during that period:

If the city of Melaka falls,

We shall rebuild it with
timber from Java.

If what is spoken is indeed
true,

We shall sacrifice our
bodies and our lives

Kalau roboh kota Melaka,

*Papan di Jawa kami
dirikan,*

Kalau benar bagai dikata,

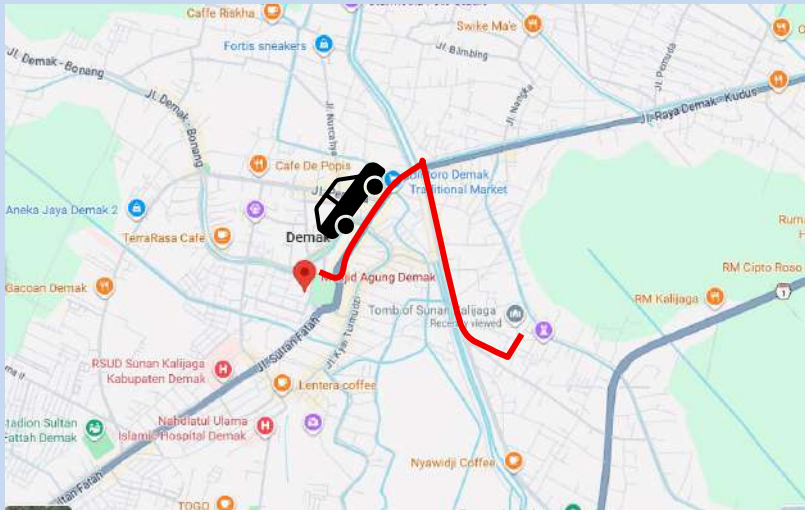
*Badan dan nyawa kami
serahkan*

Although the attack was unsuccessful, it succeeded in thwarting the Portuguese plan to attack Sunda Kelapa (the old name of Jakarta).



The tomb of Pati Unus. He was the admiral of the Demak fleet, commanding hundreds of ships in the attack against the Portuguese in Melaka in 1512 or 1513. Although the attack was unsuccessful, he succeeded in preventing the Portuguese from establishing a foothold in Sunda Kelapa (present-day Jakarta). He was given the title *Pangeran Sabrang Lor* ("The Prince Who Crossed the Northern Sea") because he led his fleet across the sea.

After visiting the tombs of Raden Fatah and Pati Unus within the compound of the Grand Mosque of Demak, we continued our journey by car towards the burial complex of Sunan Kalijaga. The distance was not far — only about ten minutes away — yet the atmosphere awaiting us there felt as though it transported us across time, from the history of the sultanate to the living spiritual heartbeat of the Muslim community that continues to endure until today. Upon arriving in Kadilangu, we saw a continuous stream of visitors arriving; some came with their families, others in groups, and quite a number came alone with faces filled with quiet devotion.



Source: Google Maps

After completing our visit, we returned to our hotel in Semarang carrying remarkable memories of how the great Muslim figures of the past transformed society through Islam. The following day, before leaving Semarang, we stopped at the Grand Mosque of Semarang and later explored the old quarter in the city centre.

The Grand Mosque of Semarang (MAS) is one of the most iconic mosques in Indonesia, located in the city of Semarang. This mosque is not merely a place of worship, but also a symbol of the revival of modern Islamic civilisation, combining elements of traditional Javanese, Middle Eastern, and European architecture within a vast and magnificent complex.

Construction of the mosque began in 2001 and was fully completed around 2006. Among its most striking features are the grand central dome and six giant automatic umbrellas in the main courtyard, resembling the umbrellas at the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. When these umbrellas are opened, the courtyard becomes beautifully shaded, creating a unique spiritual atmosphere as though one were standing in the holy land itself.

Inside the Grand Mosque of Central Java is another remarkable attraction — a giant Qur'an displayed as a symbol of the greatness of the holy book of Islam. This Qur'an is extraordinarily large, with wide pages and beautifully clear calligraphy, making it not only a reading material but also a breathtaking work of Islamic art. Its presence provides visitors with a profound spiritual experience, reminding them that the foundation of Islamic civilisation begins with the Qur'an itself.

In terms of capacity, the Grand Mosque of Semarang was designed to accommodate a very large congregation. The main prayer hall alone can hold approximately 15,000 worshippers at one time. When combined with the vast outdoor courtyard — including the open plaza with the giant umbrellas — the total capacity can reach up to 30,000 worshippers simultaneously, especially during Friday prayers and major Islamic celebrations. This immense capacity makes the mosque not only a centre of worship, but also a gathering place for the Muslim community that symbolises the strength and unity of the Muslims of Semarang.



We then continued our journey to Yogyakarta and stopped for lunch at a hilltop location known as Nepal Van Java in Magelang, Central Java.



In Yogyakarta, there is a large public university known as Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. It was established in 1951 and named after Sunan Kalijaga. The university is well known for its integrated approach to knowledge, combining Islamic studies such as Shariah, Usuluddin, and Da'wah with modern disciplines including science, technology, economics, and the social sciences. Through this approach, UIN Sunan Kalijaga plays an important role in producing graduates who are not only knowledgeable in religious studies, but are also capable

of functioning effectively in the professional world and global society.

The university has more than 20,000 students enrolled in approximately 60 Islamic and modern professional academic programmes.



Chapter 12

Sheikh Muhammad Yusuf bin Khaidir: A National Hero of Two Nations

Syed Jamadil Kubra frequently travelled between the capital of the Majapahit Kingdom in Mojokerto, Kelantan, and Champa in Vietnam. According to several local traditions, Syed Jamadil Kubra is associated with the early spread of Islam to Sulawesi in the early 15th century. Upon arriving in Makassar, he is said to have interacted with merchants and local nobles. He adopted a wise approach to da'wah — not through force, but through social relationships, noble character, and the teaching of fundamental Islamic principles such as tawhid, worship, and proper conduct. In a maritime society actively engaged in trade, this approach proved highly effective because Islamic teachings spread easily through trade networks and relationships between ports.

Da'wah continued to spread through wisdom and patience. A major turning point occurred when the ruler of the Kingdom of Gowa, Sultan Alauddin, embraced Islam around 1605 according to local historical sources. His conversion became a significant milestone because Islam was subsequently adopted as the official religion of the kingdom.

Following the king's conversion, Islam spread rapidly throughout the Kingdom of Gowa and to other Bugis and Makassar regions. Mosques began to be built, Islamic laws were gradually introduced, and scholars played important roles in educating society. Makassar later emerged as one of the important centres of Islam, continuing the tradition of spreading Islam through trade, da'wah, and political leadership.

One of the most famous preachers and warriors was Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari, whose full name was Sheikh Muhammad Yusuf bin Khaidir. He was among the great scholars of the Kingdom of Gowa and played such an important role in history that he was officially recognised as a national hero by both the governments of Indonesia and South Africa. He was born around 1626 within the royal court of the Kingdom of Gowa, making him not only a respected scholar, but also a figure of noble lineage.

He travelled extensively in pursuit of knowledge to various centres of Islamic learning, including Makkah, Madinah, Yemen, and India. When he returned to the Malay Archipelago, he brought with him profound knowledge and spiritual strength, becoming a respected preacher, community guide, and anti-colonial leader.

When war broke out between the Kingdom of Gowa and the Dutch, he fought alongside Sultan Hasanuddin, who was also his father-in-law. Sheikh Yusuf later travelled to Banten

after the Kingdom of Gowa was defeated and the subsequent ruler, Sultan Amir Hamzah, signed an agreement with the Dutch. The Sultan of Banten appointed him as Mufti. When war erupted between the Banten Sultanate led by Sultan Ageng and the Dutch in 1682, he again joined the struggle. The Dutch captured him in 1684 and exiled him to Sri Lanka. While in Sri Lanka, he continued to preach and teach Islam. At the same time, he maintained contact with his followers in Banten and Makassar whenever Hajj ships stopped in Sri Lanka.

The Dutch colonial authorities remained uneasy about his influence and activities, and in 1693 they exiled him to South Africa, to a place where there was no Muslim community and no active trading connections. In that distant and unfamiliar land, he continued his da'wah and inspired resistance against colonialism. His home and its surrounding area became a refuge for converts and enslaved people. This area later developed into one of the earliest centres of the Muslim community in South Africa. Until today, he is revered as a saintly figure and recognised as a national hero by the South African government because of his steadfast resistance against colonial rule. He passed away in 1699 and was buried within the early Muslim community that had developed through his missionary efforts. Today, the area is known as Makassar, near Cape Town.



Exterior and interior views of the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf in Makassar.



Exterior and interior views of the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf in Cape Town, South Africa. His remains were later transferred to Makassar.

In 1705, at the request of Sultan Abdul Jalil, his remains were brought back to Makassar and reburied in his homeland. His persistence in resisting Dutch colonialism led the Indonesian government to also recognise him as a national hero.

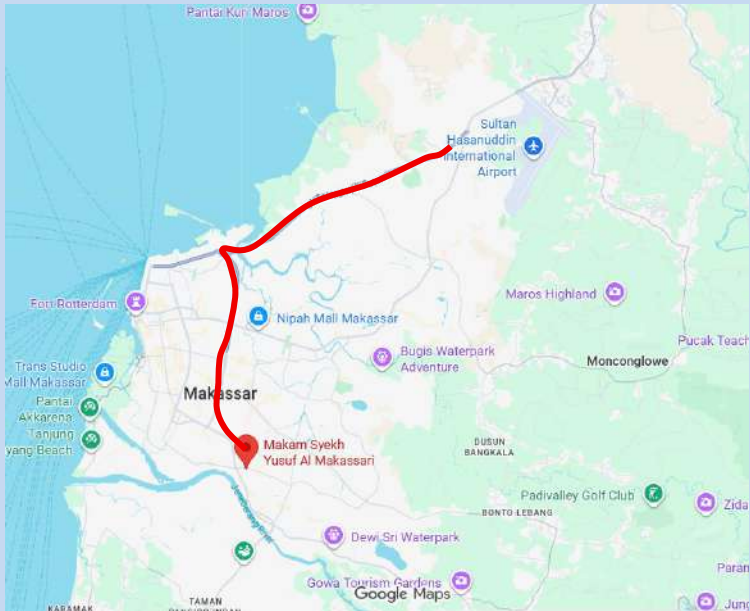
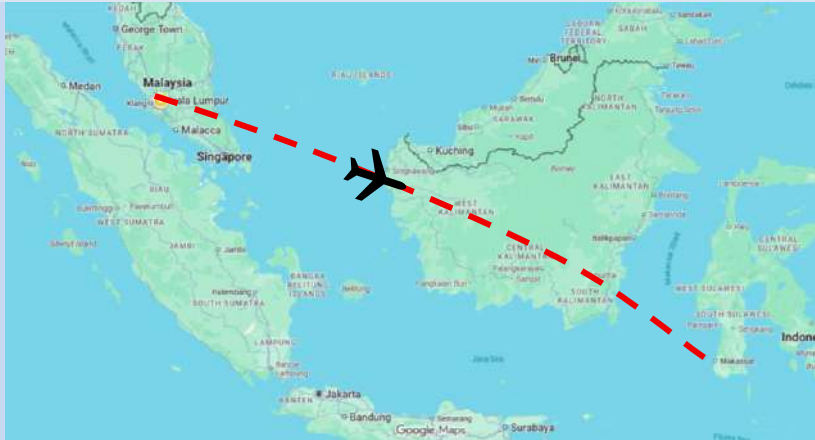
After his passing, da'wah continued to flourish in South Africa. The Muslim community grew steadily larger. They established schools to educate all children, including non-Muslims. Until today, these schools continue to thrive with their doors open to everyone. Schools offering tahfiz programmes together with courses in science, mathematics, and technology also continue to develop while maintaining high standards of quality. These schools have attracted students from around the world, including Malaysia.

Overall, Sheikh Yusuf symbolised a scholar who combined knowledge, da'wah, and struggle — from Gowa to Banten, Sri Lanka, and South Africa — making his influence transcend geographical boundaries and eras. In South Africa, he is regarded as one of the earliest figures who contributed to the development of Islam in the country.

Our journey began with a flight from KLIA, soaring across the skies of the Malay Archipelago towards Makassar. From the aircraft window, the vast blue sea stretched endlessly, as though connecting the historical journeys once travelled by great scholars with our own journey today. Upon arriving in Makassar, we continued by car to the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf, a great scholar whose legacy crossed continents.

The atmosphere around the burial complex was calm and simple. Unlike the crowded tombs of Syed Jamaluddin al-Kubra or Maulana Malik Ibrahim in Java, the serenity of the place created a far deeper sense of reflection. Away from the noise of human activity, it felt as though history itself was speaking softly — whispering the story of a scholar who not only preached in his homeland, but continued his mission even while exiled to Africa in defence of faith and truth.

Silently, our hearts were deeply moved. This visit felt not merely like a physical journey, but a journey of the soul. Standing before the tomb, we could truly sense Sheikh Yusuf's determination — struggling not only through physical resistance, but with knowledge, patience, and steadfast principles. It felt as though every inch of the place preserved a long story of da'wah, reminding us that true struggle is measured not by location, but by sincerity in conveying the truth.



Source: Google Maps

Our journey then brought us to the tomb of Sultan Hasanuddin — a figure whose name is firmly engraved in the history of the Malay Archipelago's struggle. The atmosphere surrounding the site felt calm, yet it seemed to echo with the courage that had once shaken the colonial powers of the past.



Here rested a sultan who refused to bow to pressure, choosing instead to stand firm in defending the dignity and sovereignty of his homeland.

As we stood before his tomb, we could almost imagine the spirit of struggle that once burned within him — how he rose courageously against the power of the VOC despite facing immense challenges. It was this courage that ultimately elevated him as a National Hero of

Indonesia, remembered not merely as a ruler, but as a symbol of unwavering determination and an unextinguished spirit.

This visit reminded us that history is not merely a record of the past, but a living source of strength — teaching the meaning of courage, sacrifice, and love for one's homeland.

The following day, we visited Universitas Hasanuddin. This university is ranked among the top ten universities in Indonesia. Both the airport and the university were named after Sultan Hasanuddin. We also found that there were many students from Malaysia, particularly in the fields of medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy.



Before returning to our homeland, our journey led us to the Grand Mosque of Makassar to perform the Friday prayer. By that time, the mosque had already begun to fill with worshippers, each arriving with calm and peaceful expressions while awaiting the call to prayer. However, before the Zuhur azan was heard, something deeply unexpected unfolded before our eyes.

In front of the rows of worshippers, a deeply moving ceremony took place — the conversion to Islam of seven men and one woman. With great solemnity and witnessed by thousands of congregants, they recited the shahadah, marking a new beginning in their lives. For a brief moment, the atmosphere fell silent, before being filled with prayers and a profound sense of gratitude flowing through the hearts of all who were present.

We were informed that ceremonies such as this were not unusual in Makassar; in fact, they occurred quite frequently. Yet for us, the experience left an especially deep impression. At a time when the world is often overshadowed by various challenges, here we witnessed with our own eyes that Islamic da'wah is still alive, active, and continuing to grow.

This visit became the closing chapter of our journey with a powerful reflection — that the land of Makassar is not only rich in the history of scholars and warriors, but also continues to flourish with the light of divine guidance that illuminates human hearts until today.



Grand Mosque of Makassar

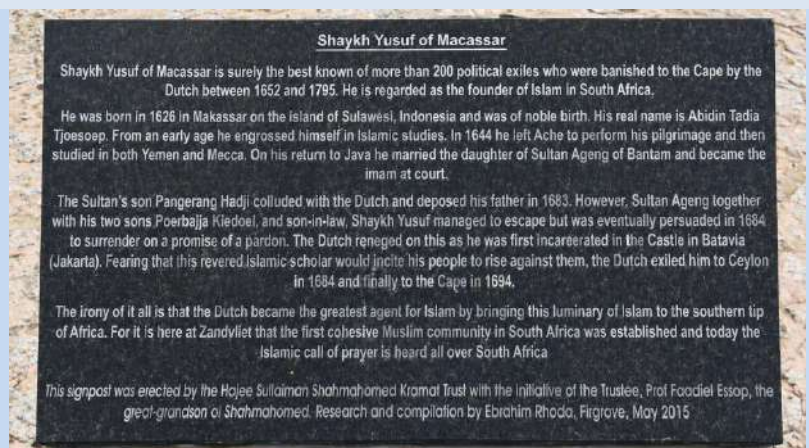
Before the remains of Sheikh Yusuf were returned to his homeland in Makassar, his tomb was located far away in Cape Town, South Africa — a place that preserves a story of sacrifice and struggle that crossed continents. Our journey there felt long and deeply meaningful; it began from KLIA, with a stop in Singapore, then across continents to Johannesburg before finally arriving in Cape Town. Every transit seemed to remind us that the legacy of a prominent scholar is never confined by geographical boundaries.

Upon arriving in Cape Town, we discovered that the city possesses a unique character of its own. Amidst its beautiful landscapes and colonial heritage exists a community known as the Cape Malays — a society with roots in the Malay Archipelago. Like Sheikh Yusuf, they were brought by the Dutch to this distant land, either as political exiles or as labourers. Yet, within that sense of displacement, they continued to preserve their Islamic identity, making Cape Town one of the important centres of Islam in South Africa.

The original tomb of Sheikh Yusuf remains well preserved and carefully maintained as a mark of respect for his contributions. He is regarded not merely as a religious scholar, but is also recognised as a National Hero of South Africa, making this place not only a site of ziarah but also a symbol of struggle and steadfast faith. Near his tomb stands a large mosque, as though bearing witness that the message of Islam he brought never came to an end — instead, it continued to live and flourish even on a land far from his birthplace.



A large mosque has been built beside the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf.



An inscribed stone stands in front of the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf in Cape Town.



An inscribed plaque on the wall of the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf in Cape Town.



Another inscribed plaque on the wall of the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf.

Chapter 13

Imam Haron

The history of Islam in Cape Town cannot be separated from the towering historical figure of Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari. When he was exiled by the Dutch to this distant land at the end of the seventeenth century, he arrived not as a defeated man, but as a scholar carrying the light of faith. Amid isolation and hardship, he began building a small community among slaves and exiles from the Malay Archipelago. Through knowledge, remembrance of God, and spiritual guidance, he united them—teaching the Qur'an, cultivating noble character, and instilling the belief that although their bodies were bound, their souls remained free. From this foundation emerged the Cape Malay Muslim community, which continues to endure to this day.

Yet the legacy of Sheikh Yusuf extended far beyond the formation of a community. Embedded within his teachings was a deeper spirit—the rejection of oppression and colonial domination. Having once struggled against colonial powers in the Malay Archipelago, he carried that same spirit to Cape Town. His da'wah was not merely about ritual worship, but also about awakening the awareness that Islam demands justice and rejects tyranny. These values gradually permeated the hearts of the community he

nurtured, laying the foundation for a long tradition—a tradition of steadfast faith in the face of oppression.

This tradition endured across generations. It flowed from one generation to another, from the earliest scholars to the Muslim community of Cape Town, who continued to preserve their identity under colonial rule and later under apartheid. Centuries later, the same spirit could be seen in Imam Abdullah Haron, more widely known as Imam Haron. As the imam of Masjid Al-Jamia, he carried forward that legacy—combining da‘wah with social struggle. Like Sheikh Yusuf, he did not see religion as something detached from society’s realities, but as a force to defend the oppressed.

When Imam Haron rose against apartheid, he was in fact continuing a long historical line—a line that began with Sheikh Yusuf in Cape Town. If Sheikh Yusuf planted the seeds of faith and courage within a marginalized community, Imam Haron nurtured them into a powerful voice against injustice. His sacrifice, which ended with his death in detention, became proof that the tradition was still alive—a tradition of da‘wah rooted in justice, courage, and unwavering faith.

Imam Haron remains one of the most highly respected Islamic figures in Cape Town, not only as an imam, but also as a champion of justice during the apartheid era in South Africa. He was born in 1924 and served as imam at Masjid

Al-Jamia in Claremont, an area that became one of the centres of the Cape Malay Muslim community.

Imam Haron did not begin his life as a full-time imam. In the early years of his career, he worked in the business sector, including with multinational companies. This reflects that he was an active professional engaged in the modern working world, not merely a religious figure.

At the same time, however, he was deeply involved in da'wah and community activities. Eventually, he was appointed imam of Masjid Al-Jamia in Cape Town, and his religious role became increasingly prominent. What made him exceptional was his ability to combine professional life with religious responsibility and social activism.

As a religious leader, Imam Haron did not merely deliver sermons and teach Islamic knowledge; he also spoke boldly against the apartheid system that oppressed non-white communities. He viewed such injustice not merely as a political issue, but as a moral and humanitarian crisis that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Through sermons, writings, and international connections, he voiced his opposition to oppression.

As an imam in Cape Town and an anti-apartheid figure, Imam Haron maintained extensive ties with Islamic organizations and international justice movements, including those in the Middle East and Europe. Through these networks, he helped convey information about the

oppression in South Africa to the outside world, thereby attracting international awareness and support.

He was also known to support the families of political prisoners and victims of oppression regardless of religion or race, whether through mosque networks, community initiatives, or informal international connections. Because of this, he was seen not only as an imam for the Cape Malay community, but also as a source of assistance—including financial aid—for those persecuted under the apartheid regime at the time.

It was activities such as these that caused the apartheid authorities to regard him as a threat. His links with the outside world—including his efforts to raise awareness and distribute aid—became among the reasons that led to his detention in 1969.

After being detained for several months, he died in custody. At the time, the authorities claimed that his death resulted from a fall down a staircase, although many believed that he had suffered abuse while in detention. His death sparked outrage and heightened awareness among both local and international communities, transforming him into a symbol of resistance against injustice.

Today, Imam Haron is remembered as a martyr for justice and as a figure who united da'wah with social struggle. His name has been immortalized in streets, institutions, and community centres throughout Cape Town. His story

reminds us that da'wah is not merely about conveying knowledge, but also about standing firmly for truth, even in the face of immense danger.



The tomb of Imam Haron in Cape Town. An estimated 40,000 people joined his funeral procession, which stretched for nearly 10 kilometres.

After visiting the tomb of Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari, our journey continued to the Islamic cemetery in Mowbray, on the outskirts of Cape Town. There lies the grave of Imam Abdullah Haron—a figure who inherited the same spirit of struggle. The grave appeared simple, without grand structures or elaborate ornamentation, yet the atmosphere surrounding it never felt empty. Visitors were constantly arriving, as though the place itself remained alive with prayers and memories of an imam who sacrificed himself for justice.

On our journey back, we passed through one of the city's main roads. Our hearts were deeply moved when we saw a road sign bearing his name—Imam Haron Road. The name was more than just a direction marker; it stood as a symbol of a nation's respect for a man who had once risen courageously against oppression.

Not far from there stood an educational institution that immediately drew our attention—The Academia Centre. This elite Islamic school does not merely provide high-quality academic education, but also places strong emphasis on nurturing future leaders. Here, students are trained not only to excel academically, but also to become principled and visionary individuals. This distinctive educational approach has made the school highly sought after, even among non-Muslims, who recognize the values and quality it offers.

This brief journey left us with a profound reflection—that the legacy of struggle does not end at the graveyard, but continues to live on in the roads named after great figures, in the institutions that are built, and in the generations that are being shaped. Cape Town is not merely preserving history; it is actively writing its future

upon the very same foundations—faith, knowledge, and courage.



The Academia Centre is an elite Islamic school located on Imam Haron Road. The school also places strong emphasis on leadership development.

Throughout our time in Cape Town, what impressed us most was the presence of so many high-quality Islamic schools. Some were elite institutions with modern facilities and internationally recognised curricula, while others opened their doors free of charge to students from all backgrounds.

Even more impressive was the inclusiveness of these schools. Their doors were not only open to Muslim students, but also welcomed non-Muslim students with great openness. In one school offering free education, we

were informed that nearly half of the students were non-Muslims.

This journey opened our eyes to the reality that in Cape Town, da'wah takes place not only from the pulpit, but also in classrooms — through knowledge, moral character, and openness that touches every human heart.



Two Islamic schools in Cape Town that place strong emphasis on leadership training.



Islamic schools in Cape Town open their doors to non-Muslim students.



Islamic schools also emphasise understanding and memorisation of the Qur'an.

As Malays, it felt as though a journey to Cape Town would not be complete without setting foot in the Malay settlement area there. It was here that the long story of the Malay Archipelago diaspora began — starting with the exile of Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari to the African continent, followed by many others brought by the Dutch either as political exiles or labourers. From a small and isolated group, they gradually developed into a vibrant community deeply rooted in the heart of the city.

We arrived in the area on a Friday, and our steps led us directly to Auwal Mosque — a historic mosque built in 1794. Its name, *Auwal*, carries a profound meaning — “the first” — because it was the first mosque established in the settlement. Although its structure is modest, the atmosphere is filled with tranquillity, as though every corner preserves stories of the faith and struggles of earlier generations.

Inside this mosque, we encountered an extraordinary treasure — an old handwritten copy of the Qur’an. This manuscript is believed to be the first Qur’an written in South Africa, produced by Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus Salaam, a great scholar who wrote it entirely from memory in the 18th century. In circumstances of hardship, without the conveniences available today, he painstakingly wrote every verse with extraordinary precision — and even more astonishingly, the manuscript was later examined and found to contain no errors.

Standing before the manuscript, we paused in deep reflection. In this age, the Qur’an is so easily accessible — available in shops, on mobile phones, with only a single touch. Yet here we witnessed how an earlier generation preserved divine revelation with extraordinary

dedication, despite living in isolation and severe limitations.

This visit was not merely a historical journey, but also a profound lesson — that strong faith is capable of producing extraordinary perseverance. In a land far from their homeland, the Malay community in Cape Town not only preserved their identity, but also safeguarded the Qur'an with great trust and devotion, making it a living heritage that continues until today.



Friday prayer at Auwal Mosque in Cape Town.

Chapter 14

Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus Salaam

After the Friday prayer at Auwal Mosque, the imam approached us with a warm smile. Although most of the congregation appeared Malay, he somehow seemed able to recognise that we were travellers from the Malay Archipelago. Without much conversation, he led us to a corner of the mosque and showed us a priceless treasure — a handwritten manuscript of the Qur'an by Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus Salaam. Tuan Guru was born in 1712 and passed away in 1807.

Before us lay a manuscript that appeared simple in form, yet extraordinary in meaning. The imam began narrating the story of Tuan Guru — a scholar from the Malay Archipelago who was exiled to Cape Town by the Dutch colonial authorities in the 18th century. In exile, he carried with him not only his physical presence; he carried with him knowledge, memorisation of the Qur'an, and an undiminished spirit of da'wah.

What was most astonishing was how Tuan Guru wrote the entire Qur'an with his own hands purely from memory. In isolation, without access to printed copies as we have today, he painstakingly wrote every verse with remarkable

precision and patience. That very manuscript now stood before us — a living testimony to the steadfast faith of a scholar who never surrendered to circumstances. This handwritten Qur'an is believed to be among the earliest Qur'anic manuscripts in South Africa.



The handwritten Qur'an of Tuan Guru. Believed to be among the earliest Qur'anic manuscripts in South Africa.

More than that, Tuan Guru was not merely a scribe of the Qur'an. He is also regarded as one of the pioneers of Islamic education in Cape Town, paving the way for systematic madrasah education and spreading knowledge among the Cape Malay community. Within severe limitations, he laid the foundation of an educated society — one that eventually developed into a strong Muslim community that continues until today.

The Original Quran

***One of the greatest legacies
achieved by Muslims living in
South Africa
is the hand written Quran, which
dates back to the 17th century.
Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus
Salaam, who was also
known as Tuang Guru, wrote the
entire Quran from memory and
he was the first Imaam of the
Auwal Mosque.
The Auwal Mosque was
established in 1794.***

Information board describing Tuan Guru's handwritten Qur'an.

As we stood before the manuscript, our hearts felt deeply moved, as though touched by history itself. It was as though our journey from the Malay Archipelago had reached a

meeting point with history — that in this distant land, there had once lived a scholar from the same region who struggled to preserve the Qur'an and build the Muslim community. This visit was not merely about seeing history, but about feeling its living presence — that the legacy of knowledge and faith continues to live across generations and borders.

Tuan Guru also played a major role in uniting the Muslim community in Cape Town, which came from diverse backgrounds — the Malay Archipelago, India, Africa, and former slaves. In an atmosphere burdened by colonial oppression, he fostered unity through knowledge and tarbiah, making the Qur'an and education the foundation of communal harmony.

Through his teachings in mosques and madrasahs, he not only educated individuals, but also cultivated a shared Muslim identity. Differences in language, culture, and origin were no longer barriers, but became united under the same faith and practices.

After that, the imam showed us an old walking stick — a stick once used by Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus Salaam while delivering sermons. The stick appeared simple, yet rich with meaning and history.

When we were given the opportunity to hold it, we experienced a feeling difficult to describe in words. It was as though the spirit of da'wah that once emanated from this

great scholar still remained within every fibre of the wood. We imagined Tuan Guru standing before the congregation — despite severe limitations, yet still filled with confidence — delivering the words of Allah and strengthening faith within the hearts of his community.

That moment became a truly moving experience. This pilgrimage was not merely about observing historical artefacts, but as though we were touching the living traces of a da'wah struggle that transcended time itself.

After leaving Auwal Mosque, we walked through the famous Cape Malay residential area. Rows of brightly colourful houses welcomed us — red, blue, yellow, and green — as though each colour carried its own story. The streets were clean and orderly, reflecting a disciplined and harmonious community.

Yet behind that beauty, our hearts wondered what conditions the early generations must have endured when Malays first arrived in this foreign land as exiles or forced labourers. From those hardships eventually emerged a community that now stands proudly with its own identity and dignity.

We were also informed that this area has now become one of the most valuable property locations in Cape Town. Rising house prices have caused some of the original residents to sell their homes and move elsewhere. This transformation adds another layer of reflection — that a place which once symbolised struggle is now facing the pressures of modern development.

This journey left us with mixed emotions — admiration for the beauty that exists, and sadness when reflecting upon the changes taking place. Yet one thing remained clear: the true heritage of the Cape Malay community lies not merely in buildings or colourful houses, but in the history, resilience, and spirit that continue to live within it.



Residential area of the Cape Malay community in Cape Town.

As we left the area, our thoughts returned once again to Tuan Guru Imam Abdullah Qadi Abdus Salaam — a figure whose legacy still feels vividly alive in every corner of Cape Town. We began to understand that he is remembered not merely as a scholar, but as a builder of civilisation.

First, he left behind an extraordinary legacy — a handwritten Qur'an produced entirely from memory. In exile, without facilities or conveniences, he still ensured that the words of Allah were preserved perfectly. Second, he succeeded in uniting Muslims from diverse backgrounds — former slaves, traders, and people of many ethnicities — transforming them into a strong community under the protection of faith.

Yet perhaps most remarkable was his effort in building an educational system. Tuan Guru did not merely teach traditionally, but established organised and systematic madrasahs that later evolved into organised and integrated educational institutions. Here, Islam was taught alongside worldly knowledge: Qur'anic memorisation, Arabic, English, science, and mathematics. This holistic educational approach produced generations who were not only knowledgeable in religion, but also capable of competing globally.

We were informed that these schools now provide high-quality education complete with strong leadership training. The uniqueness of this approach has attracted many parents, including non-Muslims, to send their children there. During our flight to Cape Town, we even met a group of parents accompanying their children to begin studies at these schools.

Students here eventually sit for international examinations such as O-Level and A-Level, opening pathways for them to pursue higher education at universities around the world. At that moment, our admiration for Tuan Guru deepened even further. He did not merely establish a traditional religious school, but laid the foundation for an educational system that was

organised, progressive, and relevant across generations
— a legacy that continues to flourish to this very day.





A female student of Jami'atul Qurra' Female Haafith Institute who became a hafizah at the age of eight.

Closing Remarks

This journey began with a simple question—where the traces of Islam in the Malay Archipelago truly began? Yet the farther we travelled, the broader the horizon that unfolded before us. From the silent ancient port of Barus, to the centres of knowledge in Java, and finally to the distant land of Cape Town, this journey ultimately revealed a clear reality: Islam in the Malay Archipelago did not spread merely by coincidence, but through the wisdom, patience, and sacrifices of its scholars.

They came not as conquerors, but as educators. They did not carry the power of weapons, but the light of knowledge, noble character, and wisdom. Through trade, education, culture, and human relationships, they touched the hearts of society and built a civilisation that was deeply rooted and enduring across generations.

Allah SWT says in the Qur'an,

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ

“Invite ‘all’ to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice...” (an-Nahl: 16:125)

This verse beautifully reflects the approach of the scholars of the Malay Archipelago—gentle, wise, and deeply touching to the human soul. They understood that the

human heart is not won through force, but softened through compassion and knowledge.

The legacy they left behind is found not merely in tombstones, ancient manuscripts, or historical buildings, but within the spirit of the Muslim community passed down from generation to generation. In mosques still alive with remembrance and knowledge, in madrasahs producing generations of huffaz and scholars, and in communities that continue to uphold Islamic values—the legacy of these scholars continues to live on.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said,

خَيْرُ النَّاسِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ

“The best of people are those who are most beneficial to others.” (Narrated by al-Tabarani, classified as Hasan)

These scholars demonstrated that the greatest benefit lies not in wealth or power, but in the knowledge they taught, the character they exemplified, and the communities they built.

This journey also teaches us that da’wah is not merely words, but an art of reaching the human soul. It requires understanding culture, patience in building relationships, and sincerity in giving without expecting reward. This was the secret behind the success of the scholars of the Malay

Archipelago—they immersed themselves within society rather than distancing themselves from it.

In a world that is changing ever more rapidly, this legacy becomes increasingly important to understand, preserve, and appreciate. We do not merely inherit history, but carry the responsibility of continuing it. Allah SWT says,

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

“And say: ‘My Lord, increase me in knowledge.’” (Ta Ha: 20:114)

This verse remains an eternal call—that the journey of knowledge and da‘wah is a never-ending journey.

Ultimately, this book is not merely a record of travel, but an invitation—to revisit history with the eyes of the heart, to understand our role in continuing the mission of da‘wah, and to realise that every small step taken with sincerity is capable of leaving a profound impact.

This journey has not truly ended.

It is still waiting to be continued—by all of us.

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GENERATIONS

“ The ink of their pens illuminated minds.
The steps of their feet connected the world. ”



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