

Book Reviews

Islam and Identity in Eastern Indonesia. By Michael Hitchcock. Hull: University of Hull Press, 1996. 208 pp.

Located on the north coast of eastern Sumbawa, Bima has played an instrumental part in the cultural history of eastern Indonesia. Linguistically Bima belongs in eastern Indonesia; its population speaks a central Malayo-Polynesian language whose closest affinities are to some of the languages of Flores and Sumba, over which it once claimed sovereignty. For centuries, however, Bima's rulers have aligned themselves with major centres to the west of the archipelago and have made Bima a conduit for the cultural traditions of western Indonesia.

First mentioned in the *Nagarakertagama's* litany of Majapahit dependencies, Bima's aristocracy has always acknowledged its historical connections to Java and, in its narratives, has long claimed the Pandawa, Bima, as its royal ancestral founder. As an intermediary port in trade that passed from Melaka via the coastal ports of Java to Ternate, Bima was more than a stopping place; it had the great advantage of being able to trade its sapanwood to Melaka and its cotton cloth to the islands of Maluku.

Given its strategic location, Bima became a locus for influences from all directions. The sources of its Islam are therefore remarkably diverse. The first inspiration to Islam came via Makassar during the early part of the seventeenth century. Two legendary figures credited with the conversion of the rulers of Tallo' and Gowa, Datu ri Banda(ng) and Datu ri Tiro, are also said to have visited the port of Sape but not Bima itself. A generation later, Abdu'l Kadir, known posthumously by the title "Mantau Wada Watu" in recognition of the stone tomb erected in his honour, became the first Bimanese ruler to convert to Islam. His son and grandson, as his successors, continued their close association with

Makassar, joining with Makassar's forces against the Dutch both in Sulawesi and in Java.

Only in 1669, after the conquest of Makassar, did Bima sign a contract with the Dutch East India Company that purportedly, but never actually, severed relations with its allies and relations in Makassar. In 1676, Bima's Sultan, Nuruddin Abu-Bakar Ali-Sjah, under his Makassar title, Mapparabung Daeng-Mattalli' Karaeng-Panaragang, led a contingent of Makassar troops in the Trunajaya revolt against the Susuhunan and the Dutch Company. Eventually surrendering to the Company, he and his followers joined another group of Makassarese troops in the Company's defence of Cirebon against Bantam.

It was this same Sultan who against the wishes of the Company carried on a correspondence with the Yang Dipertuan, ruler of Minangkabau, and at his behest allowed many Malays and Minangkabau to take up residence in Bima. At court, this group of settlers was granted special status as scribes and advisers to the Sultan. As a result, Bima adopted Malay as the literary language in which to record its origin and genealogical narratives. A good example of this is *Ceritera Asal Bangsa Jin dan Segala Dewa-Dewa* (Chambert-Loir 1985), perhaps one of the most hybrid texts in Malay literature, combining Javanese, Malay, and even Makassar traditions, in an Islamic format that shows clear traces of the influence of Ibn Arabi. This narrative links the genealogies of the Pandawa, of Izkandar, and of Sangir Gading, recounts the conversion of Darmawangsa to Islam and brings the narrative to the Maharaja Indera Zamrut, ruler of Bima, to whom all the rulers of Java, Bali, Manggarai, and Sumba pay tribute.

Some idea of Bima's history and the origins of its Islamic traditions is essential to appreciate that Bima is no ordinary place. Its identity as an Islamic society draws on its remarkable past. This book by Michael Hitchcock is the first of its kind to focus on this Islamic identity. It proffers a much needed ethnographic account of contemporary Bima. Yet its social and historical analysis, rather than drawing out the features of Bima's heterogenous cultural traditions, proceeds by curious attempts at exemplification.

Bima is thus considered as an exemplar of Indonesian Islam. The

reader, for example, is told:

The Bimanese, like the majority of Indonesian Muslims, are Sunnis. ... All Sunni Muslims belong to one of the four schools of jurisprudence; the Bimanese, in common with most Indonesians, are followers of the School of Shafa'i. (p. 49)

Such general exemplification tends, however, to erase the special features of Bimanese Islamic identity whereas the details of Bimanese life which the book also recounts serve only to confirm Bima's distinctiveness.

Bima's traditions are also interpreted as resonant with wider cultural patterns found in societies in eastern Indonesia and more generally in Southeast Asia. In its settlement patterns, gendered division of labour, and in the symbolic importance of its ruler, Bima's traditions are seen as broadly similar to those in other areas of Indonesia. On occasion, however, this recourse to underlying similarities prompts a quest for spurious interpretations rather than recognizing the full significance of Bima's Islamic identity. Thus, for example, Hitchcock explains:

According to a former Sultanate minister, A.D. Talu, devout Muslims liked to sleep on the west side of the house, preferably with the feet pointing to the west so that when they awoke they would face Mecca. There are, however, good reasons for considering alternative explanations, especially since other eastern Indonesians express a strong preference for the west. The Savunese, for example, claim that their ancestors originated in the west ... whereas the Ema of Timor see the sun as an ancestral personification and build their houses with entrances to the west so that the sleeper will not set eyes on the rising sun when he awakes. (p. 78)

The author is a specialist in the study of material culture and his notable interests come to the fore in this volume. More than half of the volume is devoted to the material arts of the Bimanese: basketry, pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, and weaving with its variety of supplementary decoration. This attention to the material arts includes sketches of the tools of carpentry, a list of wood used for different purposes and another list of plants used for dyeing, drawings of houses (although without the indigenous terminology for its various parts), photographs of looms and of supplementary weft designs. One entire chapter is de-

voted to the Bimanese kris known as a *sampari*. If there were any doubts about the diversity of cultural influences that Bima has absorbed, one need only look to its material arts for the physical embodiment of its remarkable history.

REFERENCE

Chambert-Loir, Henri. *Ceritera Asal Bangsa Jin dan Segala Dewa Dewa*. Bandung: Penerbit Angkasa & Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, 1985.

James J. FOX

James J. Fox is Professor in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University.