



Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries (Signature books series)

By M.C. Ricklefs

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This book analyzes the Islamization of the Javanese, the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, which is the nation with the largest Muslim population in the world. Java represents an important case study in Islam's spread from the Middle East to the far reaches of the globe. This process gave rise to contested senses of identity: What did it mean to be both Javanese and Muslim? For some Javanese, Hindu-Buddhism and Islam were probably alternative, not mutually exclusive, sources of supernatural power. For others, cultural boundaries were clear and one must choose between being Javanese or Muslim. The greatest of these identities were reconciled in the early seventeenth century by the greatest of Java's kings, Sultan Agung. But his successors were less comfortable with this reconciliation and thus found themselves opposed by committed Muslims. These successor kings turned to the Dutch East India Company for support, alliance with Christians further feeding rebellion. Not until a century after Agung died was Islam and the court aristocracy - the epitome of what it meant to be Javanese - again reconciled.

The result was a society deeply committed to Islam, observant of its ritual life, but admitting indigenous, non-Islamic, spiritual forces to the faith. This, after 400 years, is the "mystic synthesis" of this book's title.

Mobilizing Javanese, Dutch, and other sources, Professor Ricklefs presents a book that should be read by anyone interested in the history of Islam, of Indonesia, or, as he puts it - of "societies that move across what we think of as boundaries" - for they take us closer to the question of what we are as human beings.



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- Sales Rank: #1462549 in Books
- Published on: 2006-01-05
- Number of items: 1
- Binding: Paperback
- 275 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

M.C. Ricklefs, Director of the Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies, is the foremost historian of Java and a leading historian of Indonesia. He has published over a dozen books, including *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* and three volumes on Java from the late 17th to the late 18th centuries.

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