Thomas Gibson. *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia: From the Sixteenth to the Twenty-first Century*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 268 pp.

William Cummings

In *Islamic Narrative and Authority*, Thomas Gibson investigates how Islamic concepts of knowledge and authority interacted both with the ritual knowledge and traditional authority of Austronesian hereditary rulers and the documentary knowledge and bureaucratic authority of modern states. These three complexes are not stages of development, but networks of symbolic codes and practices whose relations Gibson analyzes with the help of Weber, Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, Foucault, and others. The result is a richly engaging profile of one group of Southeast Asians who have made use of and been influenced by a succession of imported social and political concepts.

The bulk of the book discusses seven ideal models of authority produced sequentially by the interactions among traditional, Islamic, and modern symbolic complexes, with Gibson noting that all seven models exist today. The first of these models is the Sufi concept of ruler as "Perfect Man" who claimed ultimate religious and political leadership based on his supreme charismatic authority. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Southeast Asian rulers were inspired by the Mughal ruler Akbar and Shah Ismail of Persia in adopting this model, which Gibson sees as a pragmatic choice designed to bolster their legitimacy while still allowing them to retain links to the traditional religious practices revolving around local deities and sacred sites.

Gibson's analysis is rooted in his extensive fieldwork in Ara, a village at the southern tip of South Sulawesi, home to Makassarese and Bugis, which has long been tied into maritime trading networks. The seventeenth-century Makassarese Shaykh Yusuf is a paradigmatic example of Gibson's second model of authority: the wandering cosmopolitan *shaykh* (learned master) and the networks of *tariqa* (Sufi orders) in which they were embedded. The seventeenth century is rich with such figures, individuals who brought new Middle Eastern reformist Sufi doctrines to the Indonesian archipelago, provided religious legitimacy to anticolonial struggles against the Dutch, and established local centers of Islamic learning (especially *tariqa*) that tied Indonesian societies into the larger Islamic world.

Gibson sees his next two models of authority clearly expressed in two well-known Makassarese literary epics, the *Sinriliq Datu Museng* and the *Sinriliq Kappalaq Tallumbatua*. In the case of *Datu Museng*, he embraces a mystical Islamic path in the face of the Dutch East India Company's (VOC, Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; literally, "United East Indian Company") hegemonic mercantilist control exerted over central Makassar beginning in the late seventeenth century. Andi Patunru, hero of the second epic, was modeled on the heroic Bugis figure Arung Palakka and represents a willingness to use the VOC presence to triumph over the traditional royal powers of the region. These appear to be variations on the Islamic model of authority represented by Shaykh Yusuf, and indeed there is much intertextual influence evident between

these two epics and the canon of hagiographical tales preserving the life of Shaykh Yusuf.

In the late nineteenth century, puritanical modernist Islam began to find a welcome reception among those in Indonesia disillusioned both with the traditional syncretist Islam centered on royal courts and the regulating presence of the Dutch colonial state. Modernism, indeed, provided a rich new source of symbolic codes and practices with which to contest these existing modes of authority, and Gibson effectively traces their influence on the careers of a father and son in early twentieth-century Ara. Spreading at the same time was the alternative model of authority represented by the modern school systems and secular bureaucracy promoted first by the colonial state and later by the Indonesian government. His study of the complex interplay between these two options for achieving local authority is perhaps the most fascinating part of Gibson's narrative.

The penultimate chapter of *Islamic Narrative and Authority* relates the rise to power and eventual fall of Suharto in terms of these models of authority, and in so doing takes us well beyond South Sulawesi. "During the thirty-three years he was in power," Gibson notes, "President Suharto made use of all the symbolic models discussed in earlier chapters to legitimate his rule" (p. 183). Suharto's fondness for the traditions of the central Javanese sultans, modern bureaucratic achievements, and his late turn to Islam are well known. The flourishing of political activity across the spectrum since the fall of Suharto in 1998 on the national scale and local scale back in Ara can be usefully considered a period in which advocates of different models of authority have jockeyed for power.

A particular virtue of *Islamic Narrative and Authority* is Gibson's broad analytical lens. Gibson's project—and one relevant to other historians and anthropologists who study local areas across the Indonesian archipelago—is to articulate the local in Ara in relation to regional, national, and global developments. Gibson (accurately in many cases) accuses his fellow anthropologists of a myopia derived from their "excessive attention to local forms of knowledge" (p. 192). Certainly, Ara has provided a fascinating vantage point from which to view this parade of symbolic practices, and it is probably typical of many communities across island Southeast Asia. The wide temporal view as well is encouraging, especially in a subfield which has few monographs that cut across the divides of which historians are so fond: modern versus premodern, colonial versus postcolonial.

Not surprisingly, of course, taking such a broad approach does come with risks. For example, Gibson often states that inhabitants of South Sulawesi today have access to all seven of these models of authority upon which to draw as they negotiate their social worlds. This is, of course, true, but readers would benefit from a more systematic discussion of what structural or other forces shape these choices. There are reasons why some models of authority—such as that represented here by Shaykh Yusuf—persist despite their comparative antiquity. Gibson touches on these questions at times, but a more focused discussion of these historical dynamics would nicely complement his analysis. This is not a glaring omission that flaws *Islamic Narrative and Authority*, however, and this book is valuable reading for historians, anthropologists, and others interested not just in South Sulawesi but in the ways in which we might make sense of how Southeast Asians have grappled with their worlds over the past five centuries.