

These quibbles apart, it has to be acknowledged that Jacq-Hergoualc'h has tackled the complex problem with great prudence and thoroughness. He has produced a handbook in the best sense which will doubtless serve Southeast Asianists and trade historians alike as a starting point and reference guide in years to come.

An equally positive judgment can be passed as regards Woodward's volume on the art and architecture of Thailand, which is in a way complementary to the one discussed above and also embodies the fruits of several years of research in the field. The book is divided into four chronological sections. It starts with a chapter on prehistoric art, including pottery, rock paintings and a few bronzes. The next part covers the first millennium, from the earliest Indian influences to the culmination of the art of Dvaravati. The following period between the 10th century and c. 1220 AD is characterized by the dominance of the Khmers, which in turn paved the way for the development of regional styles in northern and central Thailand. These are dealt with in the last section entitled "Creating a New Order". Again, the artifacts referred to in the text are fully documented in almost 100 illustrations at the end of the book. A wide range of pieces from collections in both Thailand and America makes it certain that the handbook will gain the status of a first-hand reference volume.

Tilman Frasch

JOHN RICHARD BOWEN, *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia. An Anthropology of Public Reasoning*. Cambridge (UK) and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. XVI, 289 pages, ill., general tables, maps, £ 18.99. ISBN 0-521-53189-6

In the search for an essentialized "true" Islam, Islamic legal trends were, in the past, frequently portrayed in a black or white manner. All too often, the main concern was the daily practice of Muslims, asking whether it could be considered "legal" in respect of an abstract notion of Islamic legal standards. In Indonesian Islamic studies, such an approach can be observed ever since the 19th century when scholars such as Solomon Keyzer (1823–1868), LWC van den Berg (1845–1927), Carel F Winter (1799–1859), and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) established the field.

Today's research on Islam in Indonesia requires a more complex and sophisticated approach, based on an inner understanding of the dynamics of Indonesian society, and respectful of the object of study. With his book *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia* John R. Bowen deserves to be considered one of the pioneers of such an approach.

The book is organised in three parts. In Part 1, the main thematic perspective is developed, the focus being on "village repertoires". Here, the local traditions are mapped out in a classical anthropological manner, namely bottom-up. The grassroot level and its plural cultural fabric are portrayed as being of central

importance. This lays the foundation for Part 2 ("Reasoning legally through scripture"), where the influence of scriptural legal traditions on local fabric is discussed. In these sections, there is a tendency to downplay the importance of the central legal texts and traditions of Islam by emphasizing the local village repertoires. The third part, "Governing Muslims through family", adds an account of the gender dimension in Islamic legal reasoning, casting light on questions such as "Gender equality in the family?" (Chapter 9).

Bowen's book has the merit of describing the specific situation in the area that he worked on, namely Takengon, which is a part of the Gayo highlands of Aceh province in the North of Sumatra. Here, Bowen proves that in the context of the application of Islamic family law in that region, anthropology can do more than just describe and note the daily attitudes and legal practices of the 'ordinary' people without considering the impact of Islam.

In that specific area, local tradition demands that in order to create a harmonious situation in the family, the scripturalistic approach of unequal succession (between son and daughter) should be avoided. Instead, the application of Islamic family law should ideally be based on a contextualist interpretation inspired by local wisdom (pp. 89–122). Thus, in practice, the standard universality of Islamic law is combined with a contextually interpreted Islam.

However, the question is whether this local phenomenon in the small area of Takengon can be generalized to form an analytic model for the whole of Indonesia. Hundreds of languages, thousands of dialects and very specific local traditions make this fourth most populous country in the world a veritable synonym of cultural diversity. Can Bowen's local data basis (of Takengon) serve to sustain the claims of the very general title and subtitle of this book?

In this regard, it is no easy matter to follow Bowen's style of argument. He often describes a particular case with its local symbols in great detail, e.g. the role of *kadi* Tengku Daud Arifin in resolving legal cases by binding the conflicting parties in a win-win solution. (p. 106). Bowen seems to be aware that such local and indigenous phenomena must be able to be generalized in order to achieve a universal conclusion. However, since the perspective of the book is basically grassroot- and detail oriented, the problem remains of how to raise such findings to an abstract theoretical level.

In short, probably because his approach is pioneering, the argumentation, style and expression sometimes still seem to be in the process of evolving, possibly being inspired by a cross-discourse, but being nevertheless focused on a small local community. However, seen in the big picture of a general debate on approaches to the study of Islamic law in Indonesia, this book can well serve as a starting point for further discussions, be it in anthropology or in other disciplines such as Islamic legal studies.