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# The song of Samsu Tabriz in Ronggasasmita's *Suluk Acih*

NANCY FLORIDA

## ABSTRACT

The article contributes an excerpt from the Karaton Surakarta poet Ronggasasmita's *Suluk Kutub* (also known as *Suluk Samsu Tabriz*) along with an annotated translation of the text into English. *Suluk Kutub* is one of the metaphysical poems that belong to this Sufi poet's *Suluk Acih*, a text that he compiled in Aceh in 1815. The poem is a Javanese rendition of the meeting of Jalaluddin Rumi (Jav. Mulana Amir Kaji Rum) with his beloved, Shamsuddin Tabrizi (Jav. Samsu Tabriz). The commentary forms a short meditation on, and guide to, the specific practices of translating Javanese poetry into English – performed in part in dialogue with Ronggasasmita.

## KEYWORDS

Javanese literature; Islam; Sufism; *suluk*; Ronggasasmita; Samsu Tabriz; translation; transmission.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt is drawn from the opening section of *Suluk Kutub* (The song of the Axial Saint), a Sufi poem that tells the story of the meeting of Sheikh Samsu Tabriz with the king of Rum (Turkey). Though more famously known as the Persian teacher and beloved of the renowned thirteenth-century Anatolian poet Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), Shamsuddin Tabrizi is here presented as

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a Javanese saint who suddenly plops down in the sacred mosque of Mecca in the form of a naked three-year-old boy. The child engages the “Hajji King of Rum” (the Rumi figure) in a metaphysical debate of sorts. The tiny child eventually wins the debate, first by posing questions that the learned king cannot understand and then by manifesting himself as the embodied truth of a form of experiential knowledge of the Absolute that the bookish Maulana Rum could never have imagined. This excerpt is from the opening section of the *suluk*: it begins with a brief introduction of Samsu Tabriz as a Javanese saint, continues with the tale of his arrival in Mecca and his meeting with the King of Rum and, finally, recounts the opening section of their debate.

*Suluk Kutub* belongs to a compilation of *suluk* (Sufi songs) titled *Suluk Acih* (The songs of Aceh) that were compiled and, at least sometimes, composed by the Surakartan court poet Mas Ronggasasmita in 1815, at a time he found himself stranded in Aceh in the course of an interrupted hajj. A son of Yasadipura II, Ronggasasmita was a member of the prolific Yasadipurana family that was at the heart of literary production in the early nineteenth-century Surakartan Kadipaten. Ronggasasmita, an uncle of the *pujangga* Ronggawarsita, was deeply involved in the Shattariyah *tarekat* and was almost certainly exiled along with Ronggawarsita's father in 1828 for covert participation in the rebellion of the Yogyakarta Prince Dipanagara (Florida 2019: 153-184). Ronggasasmita's version of *Suluk Kutub* forms a significant reworking and expansion upon an earlier rendering of the tale in *macapat* verse. That earlier version dates back to at least the early eighteenth century and can be found in a manuscript that was produced for the Kartasuran queen Ratu Mas Blitar in 1729-1730.<sup>2</sup> In addition to *Suluk Acih*, Ronggasasmita authored *Serat Walisana*, a history of the early period of Islamization in Java and a work that incorporates several of the *suluk* from *Suluk Acih*.<sup>3</sup>

This excerpt is taken from a manuscript witness of *Suluk Acih* that is stored in the Karaton Surakarta. The manuscript, which is comprised of some seventeen *suluk* texts in 2822 lines of verse, was inscribed in 1867 on commission of Ingkang Sinuhun Kangjeng Susuhunan (ISKS) Pakubuwana IX (r. 1861-1893). In the preface to the compilation, the copyist reveals that Pakubuwana IX produced this codex in order that the hearts of those who are “clouded by forgetfulness, puzzled by profundity” may be “opened and filled”. The manuscript is inscribed in Karaton Surakarta Kadipaten script, on paper that is now very darkened and brittle with age (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This version, which is discussed by M. C. Ricklefs (1998: 108-110), is found in Radya Pustaka MS. 348 (1729-30: 48-51).

<sup>3</sup> Ronggasasmita (1955).

<sup>4</sup> M. Ronggasasmita, *Suluk Acih* compiled in Aceh, 1815; inscribed in the Karaton Surakarta, 1867. MS. KS 502/Sasana Pustaka 15 Ca. For a fuller description of the manuscript and its contents, see Florida (1993: 280-283).

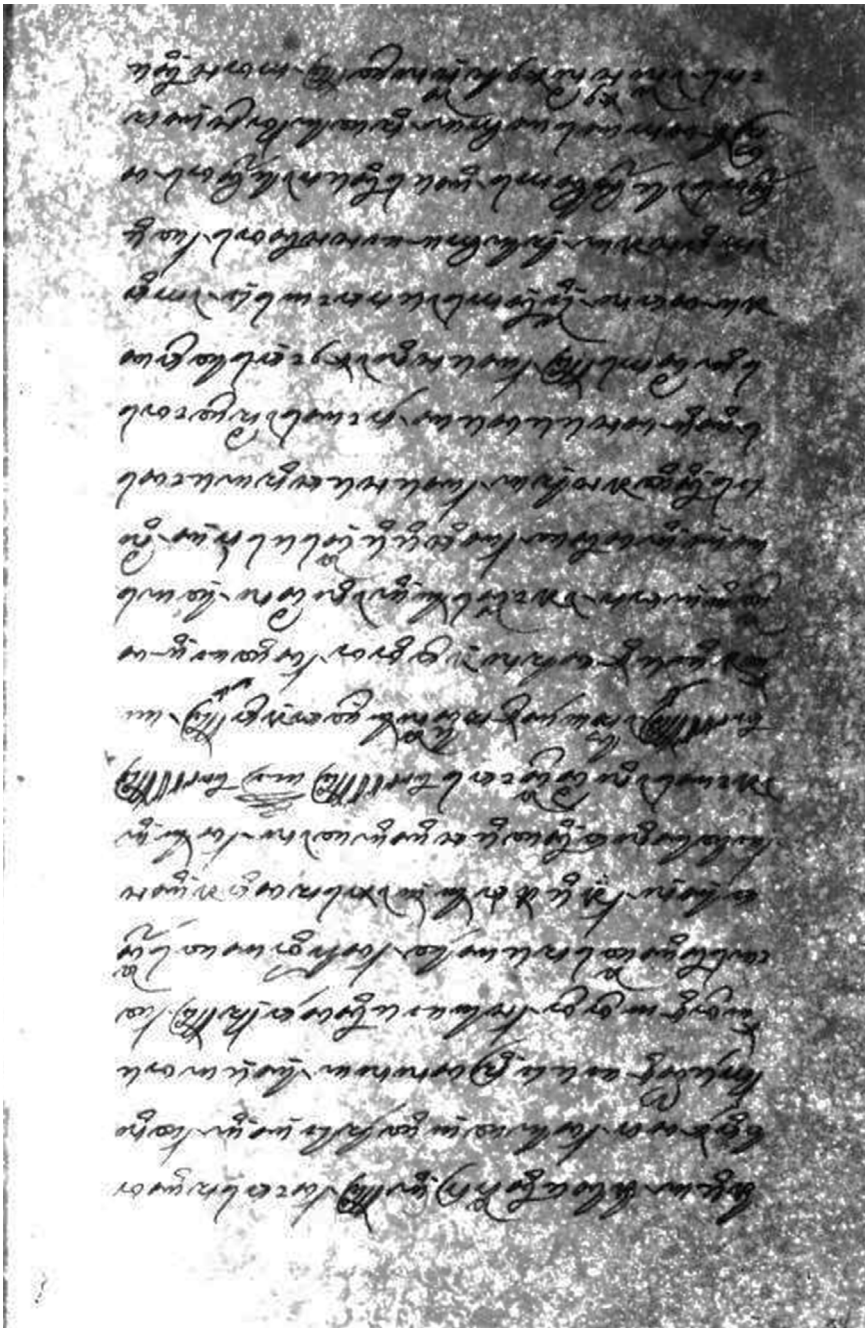


Figure 1. M. Ronggasasmita, *Suluk Kutub* (*Suluk Seh Samsu Tabriz*), composed in Aceh, 1815; inscribed in the Karaton Surakarta, 1867. MS. KS 502/Sasana Pustaka 15 Ca: 34.

**The Excerpt:** The first 31 stanzas of Mas Ronggasasmita's 72-stanza *Suluk Kutub* (also known as *Suluk Seh Samsu Tabriz*) from a *Suluk Acih* witness that was inscribed on commission of ISKS Pakubuwana IX (r. 1861-1893) in the Karaton Surakarta in 1867 (MS KS 502/Sasana Pustaka 15 Ca): 34-46.<sup>5</sup>

**Gambuh**

7u, 10u/12i/8u, 8o

1. Wontĕn malih kojah insun\*  
lah ta iki carita Wali Kutub\*\*  
saking Jawi nama Seh Sangsu Tabariz\*\*\*  
langkung wantĕr tekadipun  
tur karamate kinaot

2. Myang warnanira bagus  
dĕdĕg pidĕksa rada arangkung  
alalana mring Ngarab pindha rarya lit

ingkang ngumur tigan taun  
pan sarwi wuda kimawon

**Gambuh<sup>6</sup>**

(Melodic mood is vibrant and rather brash)

1. I've yet another tale to tell –  
this, the story of the Axial Saint:<sup>7</sup>  
from Java he came; Seh Samsu Tabriz, his name.<sup>8</sup>  
Most bold were his convictions,<sup>9</sup>  
and his powers,<sup>10</sup> unsurpassed.

2. And very handsome, he was  
elegant, stately, tall and slender,  
wandering far<sup>11</sup> to Arabia in the form of a little  
boy,  
who was but three years of age,  
and was completely naked too.

<sup>5</sup> With variant readings from renditions of the text found in *Sĕrat Suluk warni-warni*, compiled by Sĕmantri (Surakarta, 1886), MS. RP 332: 57-67; *Sĕrat Suluk warni-warni tuwin wirid Syattariyah*, compiled by K.G.P.H. Cakradiningrat (Surakarta, 1864), MS. RP 333: 70-83; and *Soeloek Samsoe Tabariz*, in Drewes (1930: 267-330). For variant readings of the Javanese lines marked with asterisk, see "Notes to Javanese Text" following the excerpt and translation.

<sup>6</sup> In Gambuh verse, the melodic form "tends" to divide the five-line stanza into three semantic units: lines 1-2, line 3, lines 4-5. The divisions fall where the singer would take her breath.

<sup>7</sup> The Axial Saint (*Wali Qutb*) is the polar saint about whom the whole world revolves. There is said to be one in every age.

<sup>8</sup> The historical Sheikh Shams al-Din Tabrizi (ca. 1185-ca. 1247) was a learned scholar and Sufi dervish who became the beloved muse and teacher of Jalal al-Din Mohammad b. Mohammad al-Balkhi al-Rumi (Jalaluddin Rumi [1207-1273]). Shams was born in the city of Tabriz in what is now northwestern Iran. According to hagiographical traditions, he met Rumi in the Anatolian city of Konya in 1244. For full biographical details, see Lewis (2000: 134-202).

<sup>9</sup> Alternative translations of the line would be, 'Most determined was his resolve' or 'Most intense, his grasp of Knowledge'. Indeed, while the word *tekad*, which I translate here as 'convictions', is more commonly understood as 'resolve' or 'daring' in contemporary Javanese usage, I have come to note, however, that *tekad*, in *suluk* literature often means something different from, or much more than, the *tekad* (resolve) of ordinary usage. Originally from the Arabic *i'tiqād* ('belief' or 'doctrine'), or, as William Chittick says in his *Sufi path of knowledge*, "a knot tied in the heart" (Chittick 1989: 335), the sense of the word *tekad* in *suluk* often connotes something like 'spiritual understanding' or 'grasp of esoteric knowledge'. It can also denote [religious or spiritual] 'persuasion[s]' or 'principle[s]'. See, for example, the debate on *tekad* among the various wali in *Suluk Musawarat*, another of the *suluk* included in the *Suluk Acih* compilation (KS 502: 61-67). At times, the word *tekad* also appears to connote 'behavior, action, or practice'.

<sup>10</sup> The word translated as 'powers' is *kramat* (Ar. *karāma*). *Kramat* denotes preternatural powers that emanate from, or can be miraculously produced by, a spiritually empowered individual or thing.

<sup>11</sup> Rendered as 'wandering far' is the word *alalana*, a word that connotes purposeful wandering,

3. *Ing praptanira nuju  
ari Ju/mngah pēpak kang pra kaum (35)  
myang ulama lēbe modin lawan kētip\*  
muwah saleh para jamhur  
neng ma[s]jid dil kharam kono*

4. *Lan pandhita gung-agung  
miwah Mulana Amir Khaji Rum  
dereng kondur dennya saking mungah kaji  
ing ari Jumungah kumpul  
kang rare prapta dumrojog*

5. *Tanpa larapan uluk  
ing salame asalam ngalekum  
ya tuwanku Mulana Rum Amir Khaji  
lan para jumngah\* sadarum  
pan samya jawab gumoroh*

6. *Ya ngalayi salamu  
eh ralya-lit linggiha sireku  
lajēng lēnggah ing ngarsane Amir Khaji  
ngandika Sang Mulana Rum  
eh para jumngah sapa wroh*

3. Now, his coming fell upon  
a Friday, when all of the observant,<sup>12</sup>  
and the *ulama*, *lēbai*, *modin* and *kētip*,<sup>13</sup>  
with the pious and the learned,<sup>14</sup> were  
in the sacred Mosque of Mecca<sup>15</sup> yon,

4. with the greatest of the scholars,<sup>16</sup>  
and the Mulana Hajji King of Rum,<sup>17</sup>  
[who'd] yet to return from making his hajj.  
On that Friday they were gathered,  
when the child appeared, a sudden,

5. without warning, tendering  
greetings, "Asalam ngalekum,"<sup>18</sup>  
my Lord, Mulana Hajji King of Rum,<sup>19</sup>  
and all ye that are gathered here".<sup>20</sup>  
All of them answered, thundering:

6. "Yea, *ngalayi salamu*.<sup>21</sup>  
Hey, little boy, it's well you take a seat."  
So he sat down in front of the Hajji King.  
The Mulana of Rum then spoke,  
"O, all ye assembled, who among you knows

often in search of metaphysical knowledge (*ngelmu*).

<sup>12</sup> The word translated as 'the observant' is *kaum*, a word that without a modifier usually means the "professional" Muslim religious community, those who live about the mosque, and can be "hired" to perform prayers.

<sup>13</sup> I have chosen not to translate these technical terms, designating different officials among the Muslim religious. The *ulama* are 'the [religious] learned'; in Javanese, the *ulama* are usually understood as those learned in Islamic law or *fikh*, those who are qualified to give juridical opinions, or *fatwa*. The *lēbai* are mosque officials, whose duties often include record-keeping. The *modin* are the mosque officials who call the faithful to prayer. The *kētip* (*khatib*) are the readers (and the preachers) in the mosque.

<sup>14</sup> The word translated as 'the pious' is *saleh* and the word translated as 'the learned' is *jamhur*.

<sup>15</sup> The Meccan Mosque, the Masjid al-Ḥarām that surrounds the sacred cube (the Ka'ba) toward which all Muslims orient their prayers, forms the holiest site in Islam.

<sup>16</sup> The word translated as '[Muslim] scholars' is *pandhita*, a Sanskrit word that usually, but certainly not always, indicates non-Islamic priests.

<sup>17</sup> Maulana/Mulana is a Muslim religious leader, sometimes rendered in English as *mullah*. The word translated here as 'King' is *amir* (Prince or King). A *hajji* is one who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Rum is (Ottoman) Turkey. This is the Rumi figure: Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273). According to hagiographical traditions Rumi and Shamsuddin Tabrizi met not in Mecca, but in Konya.

<sup>18</sup> The child tenders, in Arabic, the standard Muslim greeting *assalam[u] alaikum*.

<sup>19</sup> The child addresses the Hajji King as *tuwanku* ('My Lord'); the register is *krama*.

<sup>20</sup> The texts of both RP 332 and RP 333 have *nujum* (fortune teller; one who divines fortunes from the stars), instead of *jumngah* (those assembled for Friday prayer). The tone of Samsu Tabriz's question, of course, is considerably different in the two versions.

<sup>21</sup> Those assembled in the Mosque respond to the child, in Arabic, with an approximation of the standard response, *ngalaikum salam*.

7. Rare kang darbe sunu  
para jumngah sadaya umatur  
dhuh pukulun datan wontèn kang udani  
sudarmeng rare puniku  
ing Ngarab ngriki tan tumon

7. just whose son this child could be?"  
All those assembled there did answer,  
"O, Majesty, there's none who knows  
the father of this child<sup>22</sup>  
in Arabia here, he is unknown.

8. Inggih prayoginipun  
tuwan dangu pribadi puniku  
asalipun rare saking ing ing-ngěndi\*  
ngandika Amir Kaji Rum  
eh thole insun tatakon

8. And so indeed, it would be best  
that my Lord do ask of him yourself  
from whence it is the child does come."  
The Hajji King of Rum then spoke,  
"Hey little one,<sup>23</sup> I ask you now

9. Ing ngěndi pinanangkamu  
dene / tanpa larapan praptamu (36)  
lare matur ya Tuwanku Amir Khaji

9. from whence it is you come –  
for your coming caught us unawares."  
Humbly did the boy answer, "Oh, my Lord, King  
Hajji,  
I'm not yet willing to reveal  
just how I've come to be here.<sup>24</sup>

dereng purun jarwa ulun  
purwane ing praptaning ngong

10. Amba tanya rumuhun  
lawan para saleh para jamhur\*  
angandika Mulana Rum Amir Khaji  
yo thole apa karěpmu  
aběcik takona mring ngong

10. First, let me put a question to  
all the pious and all the learned here."  
Then spoke the Mulana Hajji King of Rum,  
"Now, boy, whatever you will,  
'tis well, then, that you ask me:

11. Apa kang dadi luhung\*  
apadene mas'alah ing ngelmu  
ingkang ngěkak miwah ingkang gaip-gaip

11. whether it be matters high and noble  
or matters of knowledge (*ngelmu*) that concern  
Ultimate Truth (*ngěkak*) and the Innermost of  
Mysteries (*gaib-gaib*).<sup>25</sup>  
The tiny child then softly said,  
"That's easy, Sir, since you agree.

kang ra[r]ya lit alon matur  
gampil tuwan yen wus sagoh

<sup>22</sup> Translation note: this line points in two directions, serving as the predicate of the previous line and the subject of the following one.

<sup>23</sup> The endearment 'little one' is a translation of *thole*. The word *thole* (from *konthole* ['his penis']) is a common endearment for little boys.

<sup>24</sup> At the outset of their dialogue, the king of Rum refers to himself with the first-person personal pronoun *ingsun* that is normally reserved for kings and God. He speaks "down" (*ngandika*) to the child, in the register of *ngoko*. The child Samsu Tabriz speaks "up" (*matur*) to the king, addressing him in *krama inggil*. For himself, he uses the *krama andhap* first person personal pronoun *ulun* in the first instance and the *kawi ngong* (sometimes used to speak "down") in the second. In this early part of the dialogue, the King consistently speaks "down" to the child in *ngoko*, while the child, inconsistently, speaks "up" to the king in *krama* and in *ngoko basa-antya*. This speech pattern continues up through stanza 19.

<sup>25</sup> The word *kak* (Ar. *ḥaqq*) designates the ultimate truth and the ultimate reality that belong to God. The Javanese *gaib-gaib* (Ar. *ghayb*, the unseen) here, and elsewhere, indicates the innermost mysteries of the divine in His hiddenness.

12. Dene tètaken\* ulun  
gaibing Allah lan malihipun  
gaib ingkang Mukamad inggih kang  
pundi\*\*  
ngandika Amir Khaji Rum  
eh jabang yen sirarsa wroh\*\*\*

13. Gaibing Allah iku  
pan Mukhamad de Mukhamad iku  
il ha'ibing pan iya Allah sayèkti\*  
iku yen sirarsa wèruh  
rare gumujèng turnya lon

14. Dhuh tuwanku nateng Rum  
tuwin para jumngah para jamhur  
panjawabe Mukamad ghaibing Widdhi

kaakèn punapa iku  
Mukamade ing Ywang Manon\*

15. Punapa/dene lamun (37)  
Allah ingaran gaibing Rasul  
Allah iku kaakèn aparing nabi\*

eh thole insun tan ngrungu  
kaya ujarmu mèngkono

16. Mara jarwaa gupuh  
sèka ngèndi pinangkanireku  
rare matur ya tuwan Mulana Khaji  
dereng purun jarwa ulun  
malih amba atètakon

12. My question then is this:  
the Innermost Mystery of God, and  
the Mystery of Muhammad – where and what are  
they?"<sup>26</sup>  
Spoke the Hajji King of Rum,  
"O child,<sup>27</sup> since you'd like to know –

13. the Innermost Mystery of God  
is Muhammad, whereas Muhammad is  
the Mystery, indeed, of God, in truth.  
There it is, since you wished to know."  
The child laughed, his words were soft,

14. "O, my Lord, Ruler of Rum,  
and all ye assembled, ye learned,  
you answer that Muhammad is the Mystery of  
the Almighty – <sup>28</sup>  
acknowledged, then, as what  
is Muhammad (of/to/by) All-Seeing God?"<sup>29</sup>

15. And the same goes for this: if  
God is called the Mystery of the Messenger,  
then what (to/of/by) the Prophet is God claimed  
to be?"<sup>30</sup>  
"Hey, little one, never have I heard  
the likes of what you say!

16. Hurry now, do tell us  
from whence it is you've come."  
The child replied, "O, my Lord, Mulana Hajji,  
not yet willing am I to reveal.  
Rather I'd put a question again

<sup>26</sup> The Javanese *kang pundi* includes the senses both of *where* and *what*.

<sup>27</sup> Rendered as 'child' is *jabang* (infant, newborn baby); in the RP 333 and Drewes readings, the king addresses Samsu Tabriz as 'dwarf' (*bajang*).

<sup>28</sup> Translated as 'the Almighty' is *Widdhi*, a Kawi word used to indicate the greatest of the gods.

<sup>29</sup> The final two lines of stanza 14 are extremely difficult to translate. Alternatively, they may be read: 'What is Muhammad recognized to be in relation to (or by) All-Seeing God?'; 'What then is the Muhammad of All-Seeing God claimed to be?'; or 'What then does All-Seeing God recognize this Muhammad to be?' In the variant reading of these lines in RP 333 (*kaangkèn punapa iku / Mukhamad dening Hyang Manon*), the meaning tends more toward: 'Acknowledged then as what / is Muhammad by All-Seeing God?' Translated as 'All-Seeing God' is the Kawi *Ywang Manon*.

<sup>30</sup> The translation of lines 2-3 of stanza 15 is, again, difficult. Alternatively, when read together these lines could be glossed: 'God is recognized to be what [in relation] to/by/of the Prophet?' Both of these questions (What is Muhammad to God? and What is God to Muhammad?) ask the king – and the readers – to reflect upon how we are to understand the relationship between God and the Prophet? – and, by extension, the relationship between God and man.



17. Ing tuwan Sang Amir Rum  
miwah para saleh para jamhur  
salat jumngah kang tuwan sĕmbah punapi

lawan salat limang wĕktu  
ulun arsa wruh kang yĕktos

18. Ngandika Sang Amir Rum  
tuwin para jumungah sadarum\*  
iya thole sun salat jumungah iki  
lawan salat limang wĕktu  
tan liyan nĕmbah Hyang Manon

19. Lamun nora kadyeku  
nora ĕšah sĕmbah pujinipun  
wus mutamat ingkang iki dalil kadis\*  
kang ralya lit duk angrungu  
guguk wĕntise den-ĕntrog

20. Sun sidhĕp tan kadyeku  
ya tuwanku mulana nateng Rum  
ing panĕmbah tuwan anĕmbah Ywang  
Widdhi  
luwih saking sewu luput  
prasasat nĕmbah ing dhe/yos (38)

17. to you, my Lord, O Prince of Rum,  
and to you, ye pious and learned ones:  
in your Friday prayers (*salat*),<sup>31</sup> to whom is it  
you pray?

And in your daily prayers of five?  
This I'd like to know in truth."

18. Then spoke the Prince of Rum,  
along with all those gathered there,  
"Indeed, little one, in my Friday prayers<sup>32</sup>  
and in my daily prayers of five,  
none do I worship save All-Seeing God.

19. For were it any other  
invalid would be that worship, that prayer.  
For thus it is ordained in the Qur'an and Hadith."  
The little child, when he heard this,  
guffawed and slapped his thigh,

20. "I do not think it to be like that,  
my Lord, Mulana King of Rum.  
The prayers you pray to Almighty God  
are a thousand times wrong and more –  
'tis the like of praying to idols.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Salat* (Ar. *ṣalāt*) are the canonical prayers (*practices of worship*) that, as one of the "pillars of practice", must be performed in a prescribed manner according to strict rules by every observant Muslim at five specified times every day. The Friday noon *salat* should be performed in the mosque in the company of other members of the Muslim community.

<sup>32</sup> Although the question is put to (and, it is written, answered by) the king and all the assembled worshippers, the answer is in the singular voice of the king owing to the first-person singular pronoun (*ing*)*sun* in the third line.

<sup>33</sup> There is a marked shift in register in this stanza on the part of Samsu Tabriz: The child abruptly speaks down to the king in a mixture of *ngoko* and *madya krama*, while, for the first time, using the royal (*ing*)*sun* first-person pronoun for himself. The child's tone is cheeky and rather coarse. The king, however, does not respond in shifting his register, but rather continues mostly in *ngoko* to the child with *krama inggil* references for himself. And yet his language is growing more respectful in tone. This speech pattern continues through stanza 30. According to Gericke and Roorda (GR) and Poerwadarminta, these *deyos* would be Chinese idols (GR I 1901: 598; Poerwadarminta 1939: 103). Gericke and Roorda note that *deyos* is derived from the Spanish *dios* (god). Edwin Wieringa, however, has suggested to me that it is much more likely to have been adopted from the Portuguese (and Latin) *deus* (personal communication, June 2021).

21. Paněmbah tuwan ngawur  
siya-siya tan wrin gěnahipun  
ing asale sěmbah tuwan saking pundi  
dhatěng pundi purugipun  
pundi ěnggon ing Hyang Manon

22. Dhělēg Amir Kaji Rum  
para jamhur kabeh ting palinguk  
dennya kaluhura[n] sabda lan ralya lit  
dangu-dangu mojar sang Rum  
ya thole insun tan wěroh

23. Ing ěnggon ing Ywang Agung  
paraning sěmbah insun tan wěruh  
miwah witing sěmbah insun tan udani  
nulya rare iku muwus  
eh tuwan-ku Rum kang katong

24. Miwah pra saleh jamhur  
pangucap kaya rare timur  
anggurayang tanana ingkang amirib  
amuji němbah Ywang Agung  
tuwan jarwakna maring ngong

25. Kaakěn apa iku\*  
Allah dene paduka Amir Rum

angandika molana Rum Amir Khaji  
ya kunthing marma sun sěbut  
sun mulya-mulya Ywang Manon

21. Your worship, Sir, is such a sham.<sup>34</sup>  
It is worthless,<sup>35</sup> for you don't understand  
from whence your worship comes,  
and whither it is going,  
and where Almighty God does dwell."

22. Stunned was the Hajji King of Rum,  
and the learned ones, left slack-jawed,  
bested by the words of a little boy.  
Finally, Noble Rum did speak,  
"Yea, little one, I do not know

23. where it is the Almighty dwells.  
Whither my prayers, I do not know.  
And from whence my prayers, I'm unaware."  
At that the child then did declare,  
"Hey, my Lord, you King of Rum,

24. and all ye pious learned ones,  
you speak like little children,<sup>36</sup>  
groping about, there's none of you that's meet  
in your worship of Almighty God.<sup>37</sup>  
Now, Sir, just explain to me –

25. what, then, is considered to be  
God, (to/by) you, my Lord, O honoured  
Prince of Rum?"<sup>38</sup>  
Spake the Mulana, Rum's Hajji King,  
"See here, dwarfling, I do call to  
and do praise Almighty God

<sup>34</sup> The word translated as 'sham' is *ngawur*, a word with no English equivalent. In at least one sense of *ngawur*, to *ngawur* is to do something pretending that one knows what one is doing, when that is not at all the case. In order to *ngawur*, however, one needs to have enough knowledge of the practice to "fake it, to get away with it, to pull it off". An alternative translation would be, 'Your worship, Sir, is bullshit'. For a consideration of the kind of "bullshit" this would be, see Frankfurt (2005).

<sup>35</sup> The compound word *siya-siya* here is used in its Malay sense as 'worthless' or 'in vain'. This repeats the usage in the 1729–1730 version of the poem. See *Suluk Seh Samsu Tabred*, in *Sěrat Ngusulbiyah lan sapanunggilanipun: Yasan-dalěm Kangjěng Ratu Mas Balitar*, compiled and inscribed Kartasura, 1729-1730. MS. RP 348: 49.

<sup>36</sup> Note the change in register. The child Samsu Tabriz is now addressing the king and the company of worshippers predominately in *ngoko*, thus speaking "down" to them.

<sup>37</sup> Alternatively: 'There's none of you that's meet / to worship Almighty God'.

<sup>38</sup> Or: 'What, then, acknowledged to be/is God (by/to) you, my Lord, O honoured Prince of Rum?' In effect, by asking the king how he understands his relation to God, the child repeats, in a more personal register, the questions he put forward in stanzas 14 and 15.

26. *Ya dene gawe ingsun  
lawan gawe manungsa sadarum  
andadekkèn bale aran bumi langit  
/miwah ing saisinipun (39)  
dinadekakèn Hyang Manon\**

26. because He did create me  
and did create all mankind;  
He made the chambers called heaven and earth,  
and everything they do contain<sup>39</sup>  
were made by the Almighty.

27. *Myang swarga narakeku  
awal akir lahir batin iku  
nora liyan kabeh titah ing Ywang Widdhi*

27. And heaven and hell,  
beginning and end, outside and inside –  
all these are none other than the creations of the  
Lord.”<sup>40</sup>

*rare alit asru guguk  
ah gēnah apa Sang Katong*

The little boy howled with laughter,  
“Ah! What’s this, Your Majesty?

28. *Pangucapira iku  
para saleh tuwin para jamhur  
pamuwuse tanana ingkang pĕrmati  
moreg mung pijĕr katungkul  
padha dhikir lenggak-lenggok*

28. These words that are uttered by  
all the pious and the learned –  
there’s nothing discerning in what they say:  
rocking to and fro, ever consumed  
in *zikir*,<sup>41</sup> their heads swinging back and forth,

29. *Pijĕr sujud arukuk  
wus marĕm sĕmbah ing pujinipun  
tangeh lamun praptaa ingkang ginaib*

29. always bowing and prostrating themselves,<sup>42</sup>  
satisfied with their prayers, their worship;  
there’s not a chance they’ll ever reach the  
Hiddenness.<sup>43</sup>

*pĕngrasane wus pinunjul  
tanana grahiteng batos*

Thinking themselves already arrived,  
none understanding the depths within.

30. *Eh Mulana Kaji Rum  
tuwin para saleh para jamhur\*  
rare alit kewala pasthi udani  
kang kaya ujarmu iku  
yen kabeh titah Ywang Manon*

30. Hey! Mulana Hajji Rum  
and all ye pious, all ye learned,  
any little child is sure to already know  
the likes of what you say –  
that God created everything.

<sup>39</sup> This line faces in both directions – serving as part of the predicate of the first words of the preceding line (“He made...”) and, at the same time, as the subject of the line that follows (“Were made by the Almighty”).

<sup>40</sup> Note here the marvellous metaphysical multivocality of the word *titah*. While *titah* means ‘creature[s]’, it also indicates ‘the word or command (of God)’, reminding us of the Quranic *kun fa-yakūnu* (‘Be! and it becomes’). The Javanese *titah* thus affirms in a single word the direct creative power of God’s Word. I am grateful to Edwin Wieringa for reminding me of the metaphysical import of this particular instance of multivocality (personal communication, June 2021).

<sup>41</sup> The practice of *zikir* comprises the repetition of set formulae (such as *la illaha illallah*) accompanied by prescribed bodily movements and breath control.

<sup>42</sup> The prostration (*sujud*) and the bowing (*rukuk*) are prescribed movements/positions in the performance of canonical prayer (*salat*).

<sup>43</sup> That is, the Mystery, the truth that is Hidden within each man (*ginaib*).

31. *Nanging sireku ngawur  
angarani tan wruh paranipun  
amir matur ya tuwanku rare alit  
paduka jarwa rumuhun  
asal tuwan kang sayēktos*

31. But all of you are surely shams,<sup>44</sup>  
saying you know not the end, the way."<sup>45</sup>  
The king spoke humbly, "O my Lord, sweet child,  
Majesty, please, reveal it now-  
from whence, in truth, my Lord, you come."<sup>46</sup>

32. *A/ngandika Seh Samsu (40)  
Tabari eh Mulana Kaji Rum  
saking ěmbuh saking tanbuh prapta mami  
kابه kadadeyan [d]urung  
kang dadi dhingin pan ingong*

32. Then declared Seh Samsu  
Tabariz, "Hey, Mulana Hajji Rum,  
from 'who knows - who could ever know' come I.  
Nothing was created yet -  
I was the first to come to be,

33. *Inggang ghaibul guyub  
durung dadi Allah lawan Rasul  
durung dadi ingsun kang dadi rumiyin  
kang luwih mulya pan ingsun  
saking sakeh ing dumados*

33. the deepest Mystery of One;<sup>47</sup>  
before Allah and His Prophet came to be -  
they were not yet - I was first to come to be.  
I am He that is still more high<sup>48</sup>  
than the whole of all creation."

\*\*\*

In the Javanese text above left, the symbol ( / ) marks page breaks in the primary manuscript (page number in parenthesis at the end of the line). The asterisk ( \* ) after a word or at the end of a line indicates the presence of a variant reading or readings from the other manuscripts/ texts consulted.

The primary manuscript consulted:

KS 502. MS inscribed for ISKS Pakubuwana IX at the Karaton Surakarta in 1867 (Florida 1993: 280-283).

Other manuscripts/texts consulted:

RP 332. MS inscribed by Sĕmantri in Surakarta, 1886 (Florida 2012: 238-240).

RP 333. MS inscribed by R. Panji Jayaasmara for K.G.P.H. Cakradiningrat in Surakarta, 1864 (Florida 2012: 240-245).

Drewes edition. Compiled by G.W.J. Drewes from six MSS of undetermined provenance (Drewes 1930: 290-317).

<sup>44</sup> The word whose sense I take as 'being a sham' is *ngawur*; see note to stanza 21 above.

<sup>45</sup> That way, that end (*paran*) would be man's way from his origin in God and the way of return back to Him, that is, the end - and the beginning.

<sup>46</sup> Following this lengthy rebuke from the learned child, there is a sudden shift in register on the part of the hajji king: the king now "speaks humbly up" (*matur*) to the child in the register of *krama inggil*, addressing the boy as 'majesty' (*paduka*). For the remainder of the dialogue, Samsu Tabriz's "speaking down" to the king intensifies: he addresses the king in *ngoko lugu*, addressing him as *sira*, while referring to himself with the royal *ingsun*, the imperious *ingong*, and, occasionally, the intimate *mami*. Their roles and positions have been reversed. Alternative translation for the final line: 'What is your true origin'?

<sup>47</sup> That is the *ghaibul guyub*, the "coming together" of the Mystery or the Hiddenness of the One.

<sup>48</sup> Translated as 'high' is the Javanese *mulya* (august, exalted, noble, splendid, glorious).

VARIANT READINGS AND NOTES TO THE JAVANESE TEXT

*Stanza 1*

\* The line has one too many syllables. Variant reading, RP 333 (70) and Drewes (292): *lah iki kojahingsun*.

\*\* The line has one too many syllables. Variant reading, RP 333 (70) and Drewes (292): *wontěn caritaning wali kutub*.

\*\*\* Variant reading, RP 333 (70): *Seh Samsu Tabriz*. Drewes (292): *Samsu Tabarit*.

*Stanza 3*

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (71): *myang ngulama lēbe modin marbot kětib*.

*Stanza 5*

\* Variant readings, RP 332 (58) and RP 333 (71): *nujum*, instead of *jumngah*.

*Stanza 8*

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (71): *asalipun pun rare saking ing ngěndi*. Drewes (294): *asalipun pun rare saking ing pundi*.

*Stanza 10*

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (72) and Drewes (294): *lawan para jumungah sadarum*.

*Stanza 11*

\* Variant readings, RP 332 (58), RP 333 (72), Drewes (294): *Apa kang adiluhung*.

*Stanza 12*

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (72): *patakon*, instead of *tětaken*. Drewes (294): *patanyan*.

\*\* Variant reading, RP 333 (72) and Drewes (296): *gaibing Mukhamad punika kang pundi*.

\*\*\* Variant reading, RP 333 (72) and Drewes (296): *mesēm ngandika Amir Rum/ eh bajang yen sira tan wroh*.

*Stanza 13*

\* Variant readings, MS RP 332 (59): *ing ghaibing pan iya Allah sayėkti*; and Drewes (296): *ing ghaibe pan iya Mukhamad sayėkti*; RP 333 (73): *ing ghaibe pan iya Mukhamad yėkti*.

*Stanza 14*

\* Alternative transliteration: *Mukamad de ing Ywang Manon*. Variant reading, RP 333 (73) and Drewes (296): *kaangkěn punapa iku/ Mukhamad dening Hyang Manon*.

*Stanza 15*

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (73): *Allah iku kang kěnapa dening nabi*; Drewes (296): *Allah kaakěn punapa dening nabi*.

*Stanza 18*

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (73) and Drewes (296): *saha para saleh para jamhur*.

## Stanza 19

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (74) and Drewes (298): *wus muhtamad kang muni ing dalil kadis*.

## Stanza 25

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (75): *Kaangķen napa iku*; Drewes (300): *Kaakķen apa iku*.

## Stanza 26

\* The stanza is repeated in the primary manuscript, the second time with a minor correction, that is, the addition of the *ing*, in the penultimate line.

## Stanza 30

\* Variant reading, RP 333 (75) and Drewes (302): *miwah para jumungah sadarum*.

## COMMENTARY

It seems fitting to begin this commentary with a brief note on some of the principles that guide my practice of translation. These principles are, in part, extrapolated from the words of the author of the excerpted *suluk* above. In another of the *suluk* that belongs to the same compilation of metaphysical teachings, Ronggasasmita provides his readers with specific principles to guide the “correct” reading of difficult texts. He then discusses the connection between adherence to those principles and the permissible transmission of esoteric knowledge. Translation may be rightly thought to be a particularly intense, and possibly perverse, form of reading. It is certainly tied to knowledge transmission.

I have drawn these principles from the closing stanzas of *Suluk martabat sanga* (The song of the nine levels), a text that concerns the nine levels of being encompassed by the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>49</sup> In these stanzas, Ronggasasmita addresses four admonitions to those who would come after him – his future readers. The admonitions concern the reception and dissemination of the Sufi teachings that his poetry discloses. Ronggasasmita cautions his readers to be discrete (*den-aķemi*), thoughtful (*den-nastiti*), diligent (*den-tabķeri*), and careful (*den-ati-ati*) with this esoteric knowledge. By exercising *discretion*, he means that readers need to hold it fast, that is, to keep these teachings to themselves, to be ever judicious in choosing with whom to share the knowledge. By practicing *thoughtfulness*, he means that his readers should exercise the bravery and strength of will that is necessary to hold to these teachings both “inside and outside”, both in their spiritual practices and in their worldly pursuits. Before turning at last to the need for *carefulness*, Ronggasasmita spills by far the most ink on the merits of *diligence*; and it is from his musings on the meaning of *diligence* that I have distilled the principles that guide my practice of translation. For in this *suluk*, Ronggasasmita explores *diligence* specifically as a form of reading practice.

<sup>49</sup> Ronggasasmita, *Suluk martabat sanga*, in *Suluk Acih* (inscribed on commission of ISKS Pakubuwana IX, in the Karaton Surakarta, 1867), MS. KS 502/Sasana Pustaka 15 Ca: 46-55. The principles and the discussion are to be found in stanzas 67-85, at the end of the eighty-five-stanza poem.

In his directives on diligence, Ronggasasmita begins by admonishing his readers that it is of utmost importance to study the “venerable laid-by works” (the *lěpiyan*), that is, those works that have been laid aside to be venerated but perhaps are no longer read. For him, it is imperative that they be taken off the shelf, opened, and read with careful attention – if possible, he says, one should read them both day and night.<sup>50</sup> He goes on to tell us to “study [them] with utmost loving care” and to “taste and feel the meaning (*murad*) and the (intended) sense (*maksud*)”.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, he calls us to active participation in the “making sense” of what we are reading. “Draw them together (that is, the thoughts inscribed in the text and those developing in the understanding of the disciplined reader), daring to bring out the sense.”<sup>52</sup> In effect, he invites, even demands, readers (and, by extension, translators) to engage in reciprocal dialogue with his works in order to bring forth their meaning. He also calls readers to attend to the difficulty of these works, cautioning us that it is not only those passages that are immediately apprehended as complex whose meaning can be tricky. The apparent “easy marks” too can just as well trip one up.<sup>53</sup> In short, he admonishes us, his readers, both to take the time to recognize complexity (especially when it is not immediately evident) and to sweat out the meanings that we participate in making.

Ronggasasmita then goes on to remind those who would come after him that successful, meaningful textual interpretation, or the making of deeper sense from what we read, requires a foundation of knowledge that can only be acquired by the extensive reading of a host of texts in the pertinent field (in Ronggasasmita’s case, that would be in the field of Islamic metaphysics). Those who transmit knowledge, say by translation, without such “diligence”, he says, are frauds and deserve to have their mouths stuffed with rocks.<sup>54</sup> In his final words on “diligence”, Ronggasasmita notes that reading texts, especially the “venerable laid-by works” that comprise the Sufi literature that he focuses upon, are *useful* (possessed of *faedah*) and that they form “teachings for the future”.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, in the brief fourth admonition, he tells us that we must “take

<sup>50</sup> *Siyang-dalu, den-talaten maca iku / sagung kang lěpiyan* (By day and night, read with care and diligence / all the venerable laid-by works), KS 502, stanza 70: 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Den-srěgěp ngiling-ilingi / rasakěna murade lan [mahsudira]*, KS 502, stanza 71: 55. *Murad* usually indicates the extended sense or significance of a passage, discerned by interpretation; *maksud*, on the other hand, points to intended meaning (of a word, a chunk of text, or of a behavior).

<sup>52</sup> *Den-gumathuk, ing tekadnya nyambut-nyambut*, KS 502, stanza 72: 55. Alternative, and, I think, equally apt translations: ‘Draw the thoughts together, your practice is to bring out the sense’ or ‘Draw the thoughts together, from within your deep understanding, bring out the sense’. The differences in the three translations come from three different interpretations/understandings of the word *tekad*; for more on *tekad*, see note 8 to the opening stanza of the excerpt above.

<sup>53</sup> *Den-gumathuk, ing tekadnya nyambut-nyambut / manawa kapiran / utawa kang tutul pětis* (Draw the concepts together, daring to bring out the sense/ If you’re at a loss [confused]/ Or they seem like easy marks), KS 502, stanza 72: 55.

<sup>54</sup> See KS 502, stanzas 75-8: 56-57.

<sup>55</sup> *Mokal bae ingkang para aoliya // Nganggit suluk, yen tan ana pedahiun / pan pasthi kinarya / wuwulanging wuri-wuri* (It is absurd to think that the holy wali // Would have composed these *suluks*, were they of no use / For surely, they were writ of old / As teachings for the future), KS 502, stanzas 83-84: 57.

care”, and by this he means that we should put into practice, in life, what we as a community of readers can learn from the dusted-off manuscripts that we should be reading.

The members of the “New directions in Javanese literature” group formed one such community of readers. Many times, over the course of our year in Jerusalem (2018-2019), those of us who formed this community self-consciously aspired to adhere to at least some of Ronggasasmita’s principles, pouring out our collective “brain sweat” in more-or-less-successful attempts to make sense of the Javanese texts that we read together. Excerpts of those texts are provided in this collection of readings. The hope, of course, is that in the end we will not have earned ourselves mouths stuffed with rocks.

#### MAKING SENSE OF JAVANESE POETRY THROUGH TRANSLATION

Guided by these general principles, in my actual practice of translation I attempt to make sense of whatever it is I am reading by heeding the following twelve “rules” I have made for myself.

- (1) Trust the poet whose work I am translating. If the poetry does not seem to make sense, it is almost certainly because of my own lack of understanding. Confusion is a sign that I need to think and work harder. Javanese poetry is not easy and is often self-consciously complex.
- (2) Do not presume an easy understanding of the gist of a stanza (or even a line) and then imagine that the rendering of the gist in prosaic paraphrase would form an adequate translation.
- (3) Do not be fooled by the seemingly simple.
- (4) Unless it proves truly impossible, translate each line as a unit of meaning. Respect the paratactic construction of the poetry.
- (5) Respect the form of the poetry, its musicality, and its economy of language. Attempt to replicate these in the translation.
- (6) Attempt to replicate the syllable counts and the rhythms of the Javanese in the translation.
- (7) Make every attempt to allow the syntax of the Javanese to dominate the syntax of the translation.
- (8) Pay heed to how the melody and the singer’s breaths contribute to producing the sense of a line or lines.
- (9) Pay heed to ambiguity; if possible, render the ambiguity in translation. If that proves impossible – or lacking in grace – call attention to the ambiguity in a footnote.
- (10) Pay heed to the multivocality of words – Javanese poetry often plays on this multivocality. It is, however, almost never possible to adequately and artfully render this play in translation. For this reason, it is often necessary to note the alternative sense or senses of the word or line in footnotes.
- (11) Pay attention to the silences in the Javanese, for example, the frequently “missing” or “obscured” agents of actions. The subjects of predicates are often undesignated and sometimes subject to slippage.
- (12) Take note of the impossibilities of translation, for example, the problem



of conveying the differences and shifts of register that are important parts of meaning-making in Javanese but that are absent in English.

I will spend what space remains to me to bring forward just a few examples to illustrate how I work, wrestle, and sometimes play, with these idiosyncratic “rules”. First, let us turn to the very difficult lines in stanzas 14-15 in which the child Samsu Tabriz poses the question that stumps the self-assured Hajji King of Rum. Indeed, the Prince of Rum voices his confusion, saying that he has “never heard the likes” of such words, and so he does not even try to answer. The Javanese boy’s question to this Rumi figure follows immediately after the king has rattled off the oft-repeated Sufi platitude that Muhammad is the mystery and/or inner hiddenness (*ghaib*) of God and that God is the mystery and/or inner hiddenness (*gaib*) of Muhammad. In response to this rote recitation, the child then asks the king to elucidate how he understands the relationship between God and the Prophet and, at the same time, asks how the Almighty Himself – and then the Prophet – understand that relationship. What are they to each other, and of each other? The questions that Samsu Tabriz poses, by extension, challenge the king and the assembled scholars to consider the nature of the reciprocal relationship that attains between God and man, God and His creation.

14. *Dhuh tuwanku nateng Rum  
tuwin para jumngah para janhur  
panjawabe Mukamad ghaibing Widdhi*

*kaakĕn punapa iku  
Mukamade ing Ywang Manon*

15. *Punapa/dene lamun  
Allah ingaran gaibing Rasul  
Allah iku kaakĕn apaning nabi*

*eh thole ingsun tan ngrungu  
kaya ujarmu mĕngkono*

14. “O, my Lord, Ruler of Rum,  
and all ye assembled, ye learned,  
you answer that Muhammad is the Mystery  
of the Almighty –  
acknowledged, then, as what  
is Muhammad (**of/to/by**) All-Seeing God?”

15. And the same goes for this: if  
God is called the Mystery of the Messenger,  
then what (**to/of/by**) the Prophet is God  
claimed to be?”

“Hey, little one, never have I heard  
the likes of what you say!”

The lines are deep, rich, and overdetermined by ambiguities. My struggle with the translation is evident in the choices offered among English prepositions in the final line of stanza 14 and the third line of stanza 15. In stanza 14, the child’s question encompasses the questions of Muhammad’s ontological status as a “part” of God, Muhammad’s relation to God, and the nature of Muhammad’s acknowledgement by God. Again, in the following stanza, the question challenges the hajji king to consider what God *is* in relation to the Prophet, what He *is of* the Prophet, and what He is claimed or acknowledged to be *by* the Prophet. For the English language reader, these are all different questions; the Javanese encompasses and expresses all of them simultaneously.

In the first instance (stanza 14), the child saint dares the king to consider what the Prophet *is* to God and the nature of God’s relation to Muhammad.

<i>panjawabe Mukamad ghaibing Widdhi</i>	you answer that Muhammad is the Mystery
	of the Almighty -
<i>kaakĕn punapa iku</i>	acknowledged, then, as what
<i>Mukamade ing Ywang Manon</i>	is Muhammad <b>of/to/by</b> All-Seeing God?

Is the Prophet a part of God, a participant in Him? At the same time, Samsu Tabriz is asking the king to speculate on what it is that God acknowledges the Prophet to be and on what the ontological status of the Prophet is within the divine intellect. Is God the grammatical object of the prepositional phrase [of/to] or is God the acknowledging agent [by] - or is He both at the same time? In the following stanza, the tiny child asks the hajji king to answer the same or similar questions concerning the nature of God in relation to the Prophet. For further evidence of the ambiguities, and of my wrestling with them, see the multiple alternative translations I offer of these poetic lines in footnotes 29 and 30. My attempts to negotiate these complexities in the notes may serve to elucidate the imperatives that drive some of my idiosyncratic rules: for example, rule one (on the confusion being mine, not the poet's and on the self-conscious complexity of Javanese poetic text); rule nine (on the place of ambiguity); rule ten (on the importance and effects of multivocality); and rule eleven (on silences between languages). But not these rules alone.

My translation of these two verses also demonstrates the workings of rules two (the gist is under erasure), three (it's never simple), and four (take each line as a unit) - along with rules six (approximate the syllable count), seven (follow the Javanese syntax), and eight (find meaning through breath). For example, in translating stanza 14, it would have been simpler (and smoother) to mingle and rearrange the last two lines of the verse, thereby supposedly determining their "gist", then to render those lines as, 'What does God acknowledge Muhammad to be?' or 'What do you take Muhammad's relation to God to be?' But it is, I think, a mistake to assume that one can determine a simple gist or meaning of Javanese poetic text under the surface of the poem's presumably transparent language. For poetic language is not transparent, but translucent - its form works to shape its sense. It is also wrong to think that meaning is simple. Perhaps most dangerously, it is a mistake, I think, to flatten complexity, especially when working with metaphysical texts. Though giving rise to its own problems, respecting the integrity of individual lines (rule four) helps to avoid these and other potential pitfalls.

My work and play with rules six and seven (syllable count and syntax) here should be evident: one can see that I have attempted to replicate (or, at least, approximate) syllable counts of the Javanese in my English and, excepting the third line in stanza 15, that I have rather slavishly followed the syntax of the Javanese in my English translation. Rule eight (meaning is produced by melody and breath) is one that is fundamental to understanding "classical" Javanese poetry. It is through breath and melody that semantic units can be distinguished. In the *Gambuh* verse form, the melody and breath divide the stanza into three units: the divisions falling where the singer would take her

breath. The first two lines are joined melodically as are the last two, with the third line standing more on its own. The melodic expression participates in the production of meaning. So, for example, in stanza 14, the fourth line does not form an evaluation of line three ('You answer that Muhammad is the Mystery of the Almighty'). If it had been an evaluation, I would have translated this line (*kaakĕn punapa iku*) as something like, 'What do you mean by that?'. Rather, it opens a new melodic line to connect with the final line of the stanza and is thus translated, instead: 'Acknowledged then as what...'

I have yet to mention rule five on the formal considerations of my "composition" that concern musicality and the economy of language. That I strive to respect the poetic form of the Javanese poetry in my translations is a constant. In my efforts to do justice to the Javanese poets with whom I am in dialogue as I write, I aspire to assonance and alliteration and attempt to shape my language into a kind of rhythmic prose. Brevity and economy are crucial in this endeavour. My successes and failures at these efforts are to be judged by others.

Finally, I would like to touch upon one of the impossibilities I encountered in the course of translating this excerpt. And here I turn to my rule twelve: take note of the impossibilities of translation, for example, the problem of conveying the differences and shifts of register that are important parts of meaning-making in Javanese but that are absent in English. The sometimes-subtle shifts in register over the course of the dialogue between the Rumi figure and the child Samsu Tabriz are important markers in the progress of the debate itself and in the evolving revolution in power relations between the two characters. It is impossible to render these shifts adequately in English. I was sorely tempted to render the "low Javanese" (*ngoko*) utterances in a coarser or more colloquial English than those in "high Javanese" (*krama* or *krama inggil*). This, however, would have been a mistake. Gods and kings are revered as the most refined of beings, and because they are at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, they "speak down" in *ngoko* to almost all those whom they address. But, as refined beings, their language is, of course, elegant. The most flowery *krama* vocabulary comprises the utterances of those who are situated below their interlocutors, who are in the position of speaking up to their "betters". How, then, can one mark this linguistic complexity in translation? How might these differences in voice and register to be rendered in a way that conveys the economic elegance and hauteur of the "low Javanese" spoken by the nobility and distinguishes it from the (differently elegant) refined flowery "high Javanese" spoken to them by the humble folk in their service? I have yet to arrive at a solution. (For the excerpt above, I have marked the major shifts of voice and register in the notes to the translation.)

At the outset of the dialogue, or debate, the lofty king of Rum consistently refers to himself as *ingsun*, the first-person singular pronoun that is reserved for kings and gods. He calls the child by a number of epithets, most frequently *thole*, a familiar endearment for a small boy (it is a shortened form of *konthole* ['his penis']), but he also calls him *jabang* ('newborn infant') and *kunthing*

(‘dwarf’). In these opening stanzas, the linguistic register of the august king is a haughty *ngoko*; that of the naked child Samsu Tabriz, a humble *krama inggil*. But the child’s language is not entirely consistent in this and never attains the refined heights of sustained *krama inggil/krama andhap*. Then, in the twentieth stanza there is a marked change in the child’s linguistic register. At this juncture in the debate, after the king has been stumped by the boy’s initial questions, Samsu Tabriz alters his speech register, moving away from the predominantly *krama inggil* forms that he had been using to shift among the intermediary language levels of *krama*, *ngoko basa-antya*, and *madya krama* in his subsequent addresses to the king. And it is not just the register, but also the tone of the child’s language that grows ever cheekier as he rebukes the learned hajji king. In stanza 21, he goes so far as to denigrate the king’s worship as a sham, or even as “bullshit”.<sup>56</sup> Yet the Rumi figure stubbornly persists in his kingly *ngoko*. It is not until the very end of the excerpt (stanza 31) that the utterly chastised king of Rum, having finally recognized the spiritual superiority of the child, shifts to address the saint in the register of *krama inggil*.

31. [...]
   
amir matur ya tuwanku rare alit
   
paduka jarwa rumuhun
   
asal tuwan kang sayektos

31. [...]
   
The king spoke humbly, “O my Lord, sweet child,
   
Majesty, please, reveal it now –
   
from whence, in truth, my Lord, you come.”

Responding to the chastened king, the little boy proclaims:

32. Angandika Seh Samsu
   
Tabari eh Mulana Kaji Rum
   
saking ěmbuh saking tanbuh prapta mami

kabeh kadadayan [d]urung
   
kang dadi dhingin pan ingong

33. Ingkang ghaibul guyub
   
durung dadi Allah lawan Rasul
   
durung dadi ingsun kang dadi rumiyin
   
kang luwih mulya pan ingsun
   
saking sakeh ing dumados

32. Then declared Seh Samsu
   
Tabariz, “Hey, Mulana Hajji Rum,
   
from ‘who knows – ‘who could ever know’
   
come I.

Nothing was created yet –
   
I was the first to come to be,

33. the deepest Mystery of One,
   
before Allah and His Prophet came to be –
   
they were not yet – I was first to come to be.
   
I am He that is still more high
   
than the whole of all creation.”

It is clear from both the content and the linguistic forms of their utterances that the positions of the child and the king are now reversed. The king, with the humble *matur*, embraces his inferiority to the boy. And Samsu Tabriz, taking on the haughty kingly/godly *ngoko* that had previously marked the address of the king, completes the linguistic and ontological revolution. At one and at the same time, the tiny, naked Sufi saint verbally declares and linguistically

<sup>56</sup> See stanza 21, line one and, especially, footnote 34. Samsu Tabriz calls the king himself a “sham” or perhaps a “bullshitter” in the opening line of stanza 31.

signals the existential perfection of his attainment of mystical union with the One. And it is because of the phenomenological, supra-discursive reality of that attainment that Samsu Tabriz is now manifest as “the deepest Mystery of One”. Being so manifest, he both declaims and linguistically demonstrates that he (the imperious *ingong*) is ontologically prior both to Allah (here, the name of God) and to the Prophet, and that He (*ingsun*) – though a tiny naked child who came out of nowhere – is more exalted still than the whole of creation, prior to and encompassing all things, persons, and concepts that have ever, or will ever, come to be.

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