The ‘Magic’ of Modern Malaya: Remembering Histories of Muhammad's Guns

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Abstract
This talk explores Malay manuscripts pertaining to Muslim miracle-workers, or ‘magicians’ who were key intermediaries of guns in modern Malaya. These manuscripts are analysed to recount a history of worlds and environments wherein socioeconomic activities were associated with the Islamic esoteric science. I introduce here, professional miracle-workers who venerated as heirs of prophets and saints from earlier Islamic periods. Having inherited esoteric senses, and as direct ‘technological’ heirs of the Prophet’s guns, these miracle-workers were esteemed for their rituals and miracles in contemporary forests, mines, ‘workshops’ and stockades. This talk analyses elaborate Islamic genealogies and popular historical traditions, and investigates how ‘magical’ manuscripts are prime sources of socioeconomic histories and are informative about religio-economic sensibilities. This talk further presents my explorations into the cosmopolitanism of the Malay frontier.

Short bio
Teren Sevea is an Assistant Professor at the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses upon the history of religion and Islam in early modern and modern Southeast Asia, Islamic manuscripts of the Malay world, and Islamic connections across the Bay of Bengal. He is also the co-editor of a volume entitled Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia.