



***Suluk Linglung: Sufi Aphorism of Sunan Kalijaga***

**Kunfuaidah Latifah<sup>1</sup> & Lady Eka Rahmawati<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Pendidikan Agama Islam, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Walisembilan Semarang

<sup>2</sup>Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, Sekolah Tinggi Islam Al-Mukmin Surakarta

Corresponding Author: [ladyekarahmawati@stimsurakarta.ac.id](mailto:ladyekarahmawati@stimsurakarta.ac.id)

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**Abstract**

*Suluk Linglung* Sunan Kalijaga is a literary work not widely known to the general public. This *suluk* reflects Sunan Kalijaga's comprehensive religious experience; it is his aphorism in expressing thoughts and ideas. *Suluk Linglung* tells of Sunan Kalijaga's anxiety regarding spiritual journeys. The research method applies a hermeneutic approach with the help of philological theory. The primary data source is *Suluk Linglung's* text, which was translated by Kasri in 1993. The data collection technique uses literature study, while data analysis involves the stages of identification, clarification, hermeneutic, and contextual analysis. The study results found that *Suluk Linglung* emphasizes the science of nature more. *Suluk Linglung* places more emphasis on the science of nature. Its principles are based on the stage (maqam) in the Sufi tradition, which ends with the *Insan Kamil* phase. The first stage is the "preparation" phase, emphasizing the dimensions of consciousness within humans. The second stage, the process phase from exoteric to esoteric, is an effort to search for the essential sciences. In the third stage, the journey to *Al Khalq*, to achieve the science of *hidayat*, he met the Prophet Khidzir (inner teacher), who taught the science of *hidayat*. The fourth stage is *Insan Kamil*, where he has gained faith. *Hidayat* reached the *tajalli* phase. Search for the essential sciences. The third stage, the journey to truth, or from being to *al-Khalq*, is an effort to achieve the Science of *Hidayat*. He met the Prophet Khidzir (inner teacher), who taught the science of *Hidayat*. The fourth stage is *Insan Kamil*, where he has gained Faith in this phase. *Hidayat* reached the *Tajalli* phase.

**Keywords:** *suluk linglung, sufi aphorism, mysticism*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The development of Islam in Java cannot be separated from the role of *Walisongo*. The political and cultural structure of Javanese society in the 14th century divided the population into several groups: (1) the prominent group, *anden* and *akuwu*; (2) *rama*, the group of free farmers led by *buyut*; (3) *Bhertya* and *kawula*, the group that made a

living as laborers and slaves (Piageud, 2013).

Observing the development of Javanese culture and political structure, the existence of *Walisongo* also underwent dynamics and changes (Kartodirdjo, 1982). The position of *Walisanga* caused the theological content of Javanese Islam at that time to be mystical. This was a natural development considering that the main direction of previous religions in

Java, which was mystical, was more accepted and recognized in Java as the teachings of Sufism (Drewes, 1965).

Among the *Walisanga*, the most steadfast in establishing the acculturation of Islamic culture with Javanese culture is *Sunan Kalijaga*. He utilized culture as a medium for preaching and received support from *Sunan Bonang*, *Sunan Kudus*, *Sunan Gunung Jati*, and *Sunan Muria*. Among the legacies closely associated with *Sunan Kalijaga* is the *Saka Tal* or the *tatal* pole in the Demak Mosque. *Sunan Kalijaga* created this pole with mystical power (Muljana, 2005). This added to the community's trust in *Sunan Kalijaga*'s teachings. The mystical power of *Sunan Kalijaga* is an attraction for the community, most of whom are far from education.

Several authors have researched the aphorisms of *Sunan Kalijaga*. Lutfianto (2018) in an analysis of the narrative structure of the episode of *Sunan Kalijaga*'s teachings to Pandanaran in the Demak Chronicle, published by Alayasastra, the Ministry of Education and Culture. This study analyzes the teachings or aphorisms of *Sunan Kalijaga* that contain moral and spiritual values such as the importance of repentance, sincerity, and devotion to God, conveyed through a cultural approach.

In addition, Thoha (2019) in his article titled *Islam dan Kearifan Berbudaya: Menggali Filsafat Dakwah Sunan Kalijaga*, states that *Sunan Kalijaga* utilized local wisdom in conveying Islamic teachings through down-to-earth aphorisms, allowing the teachings of

Islam to be well accepted by the Javanese community.

Susanto (2020) in his research, *Nilai-Nilai Keislaman pada Tembang Lir-Ilir Karya Sunan Kalijaga*, shows that the aphorisms in the song contain an invitation to improve oneself and to awaken the spiritual spirit of the Muslim community.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that the aphorisms of *Sunan Kalijaga* contain elements of preaching, moral values, and a strong approach in disseminating Islam in Java. The literature review is more directed towards social, cultural, and *da'wah* domains. This differs from *Suluk Linglung*, which emphasizes aphorisms in life philosophy, spirituality, and Javanese-Islamic mysticism. Nevertheless, both contain elements of wisdom.

*Suluk Linglung* and *Serat Dewaruci* narrate the mystical experiences of *Sunan Kalijaga*. *Serat Dewaruci* was written when *Sunan Kalijaga* was still young. At the same time, *Suluk Linglung* was written later (Hadiwijaya, 282), after he had attained the knowledge of perfection and was 'graduated' to become a wali and was titled '*Syeikh Malaya*' (Chodjim, 2003).

The book *Suluk Linglung* is influenced by Hindu teachings still rooted in society during the 16th century and is one of the sacred texts that serves as a guideline for *Islam Kejawen* (Stange, 1998). Therefore, by studying *Suluk Linglung*, one will discover the origins and patterns of thought of *Islam Kejawen*. *Suluk Linglung* is a reflection of a comprehensive religious experience, which is the aphorism of

*Sunan Kalijaga* regarding his ideas and thoughts in seeking authenticity through the practice of *nglakoni tapa ngidang* (meditating while following the behavior of deer) (Muljana, 2005) until attaining Iman Hidayat. The “*ngidang*” meditation is performed by meditating under the gurdo tree, which grows abundantly in the forest and is frequented by many deer. This action signifies the importance of always being vigilant against worldly temptations and leaving behind worldly pleasures (*zuhud*). At this phase, it corresponds to the first maqam in Sufi tradition, which is *takhalli* (the effort of purification and cleansing oneself from all the impurities of the soul, sins, and reprehensible traits, which are attached to actions, words, or arise in the heart). *Sunan Kalijaga* meditated while holding a stick. This is a metaphor for Sunan Kalijaga, who lived a life full of temptations. The ‘stick’ represents the guiding principle that must be firmly upheld: the Islamic Sharia (the Qur’an and Hadith).

In general, *Suluk Linglung* contains teachings and noble advice regarding the concept of divinity formulated as the spiritual journey of *Sunan Kalijaga* towards *Insan Kamil* (Danusuprana, 1986). As written in verses 6 - 7, which say:

“*Den becik gama nireki, agama pan tata krama, krama-kramate Hyang Manon, yen sira pranata syarak, sareh iman hidayat iku Hyang Agung, agung ing nugrahanira.*”

“*Kanugrahan Hyang Widi, ambawani kasudibyan, pangawasane pan dene kadigdayan kaprawiran, sakabeh rehing yuda, tan liya nugraha luhur utamane kahutaman.*”

**Translation:**

“Correct the existing irregularities, religion is etiquette, politeness for the glory of God the All-Knowing, if you hold on to the sharia and all the provisions of faith guidance, guidance comes from God, Allah

the Most Great, whose blessings are immense. God's blessings encompass and foster nobility of character. At the same time, His power cultivates extraordinary strength and courage, and covers all the needs of warfare, all of which are nothing but a great gift, foremost of all that is primary (virtues).” (Kasri, 1993).

Based on the explanation above, this article offers an analysis of the mystical aphorisms in the *Suluk Linglung* by *Sunan Kalijaga* that have not been widely studied before, especially from the perspective of Javanese Islamic life philosophy and spirituality. Therefore, this study is important to preserve the archipelago's spiritual literary heritage, introduce moderate values of ethics and Islam, and respond to modern society's need for inclusive and adaptive spiritual guidance to local culture.

## METHOD

This type of research is qualitative descriptive with a hermeneutic approach. This method is chosen because the research focuses on interpreting the meaning of texts in the form of aphorisms in the script of *Suluk Linglung* by Sunan Kalijaga, a work of Javanese literature. The hermeneutic approach is used to interpret or understand by the researcher's intention concerning the text or as a form to depict a more specific meaning in the model of historical and humanistic understanding (Palmer, 2003). This is to delve into the symbolic, philosophical, and spiritual meanings of the aphorisms contained in the text and to understand the socio-cultural context of Java and the *da'wah* of *Walisanga* that underlie it. This method involves collecting and

analyzing existing literature, including books and articles relevant to the research topic. The philological approach in this research is used to reveal a past event experienced as a background study of the emergence of *Suluk Linglung*, thereby uncovering thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and customs that were prevalent at that time (Baroroh, 1994).

The steps of this research begin with determining the object of study, namely the manuscript *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*. The source of this research data is taken from a book by Iman Anom entitled *Suluk Linglung*, which is a compilation of writings that spread in society in the era after Sunan Kalijaga, called the book of Duryai. This book has been translated by Khafid Kasri and published by Balai Pustaka in 1993 under the title *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga (Syeh Melaya)*. The text is analyzed and correlated with other texts that align with the *Suluk Linglung* scripture through natural data excavation.

Furthermore, data is collected through a literature study by gathering books, journals, articles, and theses related to the aphorisms of Sunan Kalijaga, *suluk*, and Javanese philosophy. By reading and understanding the subsequent text, identify and mark the aphorisms in the reading. The data analysis technique is done through identification, clarification, hermeneutical, and contextual analysis. The research results are expected to reveal the messages of aphorisms in *Suluk Linglung* and their relevance in the community's spiritual life.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Serat Suluk*

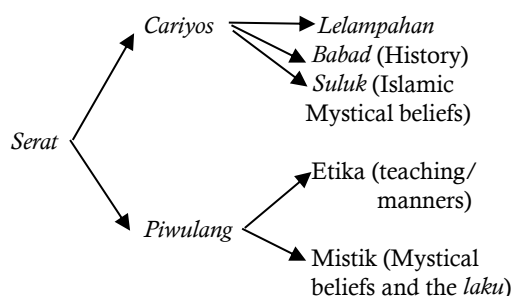
Before the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java, most of the population were followers of Hinduism and Buddhism, and they also practiced rituals inherited from their ancestors. Thus, their life was rich in cultures as one of the expressions of their appreciation for the values and beliefs they held.

The culture (Storey, 2004) taught and practiced in Java reflects a human struggle to understand God the Creator. Therefore, when Islam entered, it added a new nuance to the Javanese community, as by adopting the existing culture, Islam was able to provide new meaning to the existing cultural apparatus without totally changing it, but rather through a process of cultural acculturation.

The cultural acculturation tolerated by Islam, for example, regarding works from the ancient Javanese period (Suryadi, 1995), refers to the interpretation of the values and elements of Hindu and Buddhist culture that do not deviate from Islamic principles, resulting in the emergence of '*sufi literature*' known as *sastra/serat suluk*. *Serat suluk* has two syllables, '*serat*' and '*suluk*'. *Serat* in Javanese literature can be interpreted as a literary work in written form, as the word '*serat*' itself means writing. According to Bani Sudardi (2003), based on its content, *serat* is divided into two categories: *carios* and *piwulang*.

*Suluk* is part of a *carios* that contains Islamic mysticism. Meanwhile, *Serat Piwulang* is a text that discusses explicitly ethical teachings (Syukur, 2004) that include manners,

ways of serving, behaviors, and so on, such as *Serat Wedatama*, *Wulangreh*, *Serat Nitistruti*, and others. Besides ethics, *Serat Piwulang* also contains mysticism. Mysticism includes teachings and practices related to mysticism, such as *Serat Darmasunya*, *Serat Wirid Hidayatjati*, and others. The position of *suluk* can be illustrated in Chart 1.



**Chart 1: *Suluk* Position**

In ancient Javanese literature, the content of mystical teachings is unimportant; what matters is the mystical unity with God expressed through the work. Literary works are a vessel for the union of God and humanity. God descends into the strings of words, enchanting *Sang Kawi* (the poet) and the reader with His beauty. They then rise above human nature and experience beauty alongside God (ecstasy) (Syukur, 2004).

*Serat suluk*, in Javanese Islamic literature, is on par with *primbon* and *wirid*, as a literary work that contains education and teaching (Widyastuti, 2001). However, the three have different backgrounds and different purposes. From a linguistic perspective, *suluk* conveys its teachings using a distinctive aesthetic language. The language used in writing a *suluk* employs many symbols and allegories, making it difficult to understand by merely reading.

Classical Javanese literature is more influenced by Indian culture (Shihab, 2000), which is different from Malay literature, which is more influenced by Arab culture, so most Malay literature is written in Arabic script. Poetry is more commonly used than prose in the Javanese literary tradition, and poets write their verses as *macapat*. According to Ricklefs (1998), ancient Javanese literature after the fall of the Hindu–Buddhist kingdom around 1527 continued into the Islamic era. Several literary works are adaptations of works in Old Javanese.

The genre of *suluk* in Javanese literature contains teachings of perfection; these teachings vary depending on the philosophy being developed. *Suluk* literature is presented in the form of songs divided into several *pupuh* (stanzas), which in Javanese are often referred to as *serat macapat*, and manifested in a narrative form of questions and answers between students and teachers, parents and children, and so forth. Generally, the *suluk* literary genre, according to Sudardi (2003), is divided into four categories: 1) *Suluk* that contains Sufism teachings discussing divine issues and the stages within Sufism, including discussions on essence and wisdom; 2) *Suluk* that consists of ethical life teachings related to divine issues; 3) *Suluk* that contains historical stories related to the development of Sufism teachings; and 4) *Suluk* that contains the core teachings of Islam, or that which insults Islamic teachings.

The *Serat Suluk*'s teachings partly consist of *Wahdatul Wujud*'s teachings. *Suluk* reflects a form of cultural acculturation of Islam

into Javanese culture by providing a 'new' interpretation of the existing Javanese culture with concepts based on Islam.

The *Suluk* contains anti-Islam teachings, such as the *Suluk of Sheikh Siti Jenar*, which tells the story of a character whose fate is almost similar to that of *Al-Hallaj* and the *Suluk Darmagandul*. The teachings of *Suluk Sheikh Siti Jenar* are considered to tarnish Islam or be anti-Islam because he believes that within humans lies the True Self (God). The guidance of Islam is deemed unnecessary because, in the True Self, there is no one to worship or who worships. The True Self is God, who possesses 20 attributes. According to him, life is death, and the primary goal is to achieve life with the True Self (Sudardi, 2003). Sheikh Siti Jenar's statement angered the saints of that time. With firm resolve, Sheikh Siti Jenar refused to revise his statements, and he eventually committed suicide. Viewed from his teachings, this *suluk* contains elements of pantheistic thought mixed with Hindu-Buddhist teachings. *Suluk Linglung*, in this case, can be categorized as part of *suluk* that contains historical stories linked to Sufism teachings. The journey of Sunan Kalijaga to attain the *Insan Kamil* is narrated in *Suluk Linglung*.

#### **Aphorism of the *Suluk Linglung* of Sunan Kalijaga**

*Suluk Linglung* is a classic Javanese spiritual literary work attributed to Sunan Kalijaga, one of the Walisanga, known for his cultural approach to Islamic preaching. In this context, it is not an ordinary confusion, but rather the spiritual condition of a person embarking on the journey of *ma'rifat*, searching for God's true

essence, thus appearing 'confused' about the world. Simuh (1995) argues that *suluk-suluk* in the Javanese Islamic tradition, such as *Suluk Linglung*, represents an effort to internalize the values of Sufism into the local culture. It contains teachings about annihilation, subsistence, and *ma'rifat* conveyed through symbolic language and metaphor, making it acceptable to the Javanese community without abandoning their cultural identity.

The aphorisms in *Suluk Linglung* by Sunan Kalijaga are concise expressions rich in meaning, reflecting the spiritual journey and the quest for the essence of life. Some of the aphorisms found in *Suluk Linglung* by Sunan Kalijaga are translated by Iman Anom, Kasri (1993) as follows:

*"Ling lang ling lung sinambi angabdi, saking datan amawi sabala, kabeka dene nepsune..."*  
(Pupuh I, Bait 3)

#### **Translation:**

*"Ling lang ling lung* (a restless heart, a confused mind) still serving, even without help, always tempted by desire..."

This aphorism describes the inner confusion of Sunan Kalijaga in facing worldly desires despite having made efforts to serve God.

*"Mungguh ing kawula Gusti, kawula kang ngawula kaki, kudu nyumurupi ingsun, ana ing sabendinane, supaya slamet kalane, suket ke taman saking angin."* (pupuh Kinanti, Bait 43).

#### **Translation:**

"About the relationship of the servant with the Lord (God). A true servant must always remember and recognize their Lord daily to attain salvation, like grass that keeps swaying even when blown by the wind."

This aphorism describes the teachings of Sufism about *ma'rifahullah* (knowing God) and humans must maintain inner awareness in their lives, meaning they should be able to accept the circumstances and His decrees.

*"Yen sira wus bisa mengerti, iku tandha wus ngerti, tekan ngelmu kang sejati, ngelmu kang ira kasad mata, tan ana rupane pratanda, tan kena den anggoni."* (Pupuh Kinanti, Bait 44)

**Translation:**

"If someone can understand this, it means they have reached true knowledge. Knowledge cannot be seen by the eyes or marked physically, because knowledge resides in the inner self, it is formless and cannot be touched."

This aphorism explains the importance of spiritual achievement through self-awareness and understanding the origins of life. Proper knowledge in this sense is the knowledge of essence (*ma'rifat*), which resides within the inner self, cannot be taught externally, but can only be attained through personal spiritual experience through ascetic practices, contemplation, and unification with the Creator.

*Suluk Linglung* of Sunan Kalijaga is one of the mystical literary works of Javanese Islam that is rich in meaning and full of the values of Sufism. This text offers religious teachings and philosophical reflections on human existence, the relationship between humans and their God, and the attainment of knowledge of reality through self-awareness.

These three aphorisms provide a profound insight into the inner struggle of a human being on their spiritual journey towards *ma'rifatullah*. Starting with acknowledging inner confusion, maintaining divine awareness

in daily life, and attaining the knowledge of truth as the ultimate goal of spirituality. The values of Sufism contained within are highly relevant for modern humans who often fall into the emptiness of life's meaning. *Suluk Linglung* is a classic literary work and a guide to life that teaches the importance of balance between the outer and inner self in the pursuit of personal perfection.

### Javanese *Suluk* and Mysticism

The Javanese people's belief in God results from a cultural and religious acculturation. The Javanese believe in God as the center of the universe and the '*core*' of all life (Jatmiko, 2005). This belief is held because before everything was created, God already existed. Local wisdom has blended Javanese history into a philosophy regarding a special system that serves as a foundation for the behavior of life in a society that originates from Hindu-Buddhism.

The people readily accepted the teachings of Sufism that came to Java. According to Koentjaraningrat (1984), mystical ideas were well received because, since the time before the arrival of Islam, traditional beliefs (animism and dynamism) as well as the Hindu and Buddhist cultural traditions that had existed in Java were already dominated by mystical elements.

According to Mulder (1984), mysticism is the strongest belief of the ordinary people, and it is the essence or nature of Javanese culture; therefore, the Sufism understanding that entered Java, especially in the inland areas such as Mataram (the regions

of Surakarta and Yogyakarta), follows the concept of *wahdatul wujud*. This concept and teaching are expressed in a literary work called *suluk*.

*Suluk* literature, one of the discourses in Javanese literature, can provide concepts of mystical teachings in Islam, often referred to as Sufism. *Suluk*, which is associated with Sufi teachings, represents an effort to empty oneself of negative traits and fill oneself with commendable qualities. Therefore, *suluk* is often called mystical, that is, a path towards inner perfection, a teaching and belief that knowledge of the truth and God can be attained through inner vision; through one's inner responses, a person can communicate directly or unite through meditation, isolation, or self-seclusion.

Javanese mysticism, which is the result of the acculturation between Javanese culture and Islam, produces Javanese literary works (Jamil, 2000) in the form of *suluk* in Islam, which is another name for Sufism that represents a philosophy of life to enhance a person's soul, morally, through specific practical exercises, to express the fulfillment of the finite in the Highest Reality and to gain knowledge about Him intuitively, not rationally, which yields spiritual happiness. The essence of its reality is difficult to express in words, as its character is intuitive and subjective (Al-Taftazani, 2003).

The syncretism of *Suluk* is used as a medium for transforming Islamic values, which is very effective. As demonstrated by Sunan Kalijaga, using an artistic approach has proven to be readily accepted by the Javanese

community. For example, he invited the people to follow in his footsteps and embrace Islam and its existence and consistency. Syncretism (Amin, 2000) is practiced to Islamize the land of Java. This expression can be found in his *suluk*, *Rumeksa ing wengi*, a prayer song blending Javanese and Islamic traditions.

Other *suluk* such as *Serat Suluk Linglung* contribute to the mystic efforts conveyed by Sunan Kalijaga to the community. One *suluk* that extensively explores Sunan Kalijaga's journey from his initial ignorance to his understanding of faith and enlightenment is described in *Suluk Linglung* by Iman Anom. The model of Javanese mysticism found in this *suluk* is written in a language that is easy to understand for the era in which the *suluk* was published.

The contents of the *suluk* texts are dominated by teachings about *wahdatul wujud* (Ranggawarsita, 2003), with different styles and expressions in each of its books (Sudardi, 2003). Considering this, *suluk* cannot be separated from Javanese mysticism. The relationship between *suluk* and Javanese mysticism is a continuity of appreciation that enriches Javanese literature and culture.

## CONCLUSION

*Suluk Linglung* of Sunan Kalijaga is one of the Javanese Islamic cultures rich in noble values. This *Suluk Linglung* tells the inner experiences of Sunan Kalijaga in the search for the meaning of essence. The journey of Sunan Kalijaga to obtain the meaning of essence leads him to the stage of *Insan Kamil*. The spiritual journey of Sunan Kalijaga, contained in *Suluk Linglung*,



emphasizes the knowledge of essence to attain the faith of guidance. The search for the essence towards Allah SWT, in *Suluk Linglung* of Sunan Kalijaga, aligns with the stages (*maqam*) in the Sufi tradition that culminates in the phase of *insan kamil*.

The stages experienced by Sunan Kalijaga towards becoming a perfect human are as follows: The first phase, '*preparation*,' which emphasizes the dimension of awareness within humans. In the preparation phase, Sunan Kalijaga experienced confusion (*Linglung*), which ended with a meeting with a teacher. The second phase is the process from exoteric to esoteric, or from *Shari'ah* to *Tariqah*. This is an effort to seek knowledge of the essence with several methods (*Tariqah*), namely *ngidang* meditation (meditating while behaving like a deer). The third phase is the journey toward truth, from the created beings to *al-Khalq*, *al-Haq*. The fourth phase is the Perfect Human (*Insan Kamil*), in which one has attained the faith of guidance or the stage of *tajalli*. The concept of *tajalli* in Sufism has three types: (1) *tajalli* of the essence, which means *mukasyafah* (the opening of the heart's eye, revealing the secrets of the essence of Allah). The concept of the perfect human is the manifestation and implementation of the attainment of the faith of guidance. Although one has ascended and attained the knowledge of reality, it must continue in the descending phase to become the person one should be (*tanazzul*).

The several aphorisms discussed illustrate that the *Suluk Linglung* teaches the importance of inner honesty in facing worldly

temptations, the awareness of the continuous spiritual relationship between the servant and his Lord, and the importance of achieving actual inner knowledge. The knowledge of reality taught by Sunan Kalijaga cannot be attained merely through formal education, but rather through inner experience, *tapa btata* (ascetic practices), and contemplation.

Thus, *Suluk Linglung* is not merely a work of religious literature but also a guide to spiritual living that offers solutions to the inner turmoil of modern humans thirsty for life's meaning. The aphorisms within it should serve as a mirror for self-reflection to build a balanced spiritual awareness between the physical and the inner self, and as a reminder that the essence of true happiness can only be found through self-recognition and the unification of the heart with the Creator.

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- Interview with K.H. Muhammad Khafid Kasri, Translator of the *Kitab Suluk Linglung*, Friday Wage, June 1<sup>st</sup>. 2007, in Betengan Village, Kadilangu, Demak.
- Interview with one of the descendants of the 14th Sunan Kalijaga, R.Ay Supratini Mursidi (Ngoro Tini), 83 years old, Friday Wage, on June 1, 2007, in Modang Village – Kadilangu – Demak.