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Ramadan in Java: The Joy & Jihad of Ritual Fasting (Lund Studies in History of Religions) (v. 20)

Andre Moller

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Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan is both a joy and a jihad for the Islamic community in Java, and it is arguably the most highly esteemed Muslim ritual in Indonesia (and beyond). To be given the opportunity to abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from the early morning hours till sunset during an entire month in a tropical climate - only to fill the nights with additional and supererogatory Ramadanic rituals - is thus waited upon each year and seen as a true blessing.

This is, according to the Javanese, what rightly can be denoted as the "greater Jihad." It is thus a struggle or exertion (jihad) that is both harder and more important within Islam than the "lesser jihad," or physical warfare, and it is directed towards one's own self and worldly desires. Taking into consideration that this month of fasting is of such immense importance to Muslims in Java and elsewhere, it is rather surprising to see how little scholarly activity it has caused.

Indeed, the academic attention directed towards Islamic rituals in general has been rather unsubstantial, and Ramadanic fasting makes no exception in this respect. This book aims at reducing this gap in the literature on Islamic cultures, and provides its readers with ways of approaching and understanding Ramadan - and other Islamic phenomena - in Indonesia and beyond, it is argued that we preferably may approach Islam from three different angles, that is, to discuss this study, thorough attention is thus directed not only to the classical and normative Islamic texts and the lived reality in Java, but also to the popular and contemporary Indonesian literature on Ramadan.

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