

**Kitab Jawi:
Islamic Thought of the
Malay Muslim Scholars**

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THE MALAY MUSLIM SCHOLARS**

by

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**Research Notes and Discussions Paper No. 33
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
1983**

Published by
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 0511

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ISSN 0129-8828

ISBN 9971-902-29-X

PREFACE

The purpose of this study is twofold: firstly, to describe the contributions of Malay Muslim scholars ('ulama') to the development of Islamic studies in this region by collecting their scattered works known as Kitab Jawi (religious books written in the classical Malay language using Arabic characters);¹ and secondly, to trace and investigate the Islamic thought of Malay Muslim scholars based on their works.

From the early period of Islam in the Malay Archipelago until today, Kitab Jawi have been used by the Malays as a major source of Islamic knowledge because most Malays do not understand Arabic. Abdullah Munshi observed that Arabic was used by the Malays only in worship and prayers.² Nowadays Kitab Jawi are still widely used in mosques, surau (prayer halls), and pondok³ in Malaysia. They were written mostly during the period from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

Although the younger generation of Malays read and write in Rumi (the Romanized script of the Malay language) and many religious books are now written in Rumi, their contents are not very different from those of Kitab Jawi.⁴ Some Kitab Jawi are simply rewritten in Rumi without change, for example, kitab Hikam by Ibn 'Ata' Allah and kitab Perukunan by 'Abd al-Rashid Banjar.⁵

This study is based on Kitab Jawi which are available in print. Hikayat (stories) are not included because they are neither written by Islamic scholars nor used for teaching purposes. The stories are highly exaggerated and not based on historical facts.⁶ The Islamic thought under study includes theological, social, economic, and political thought only because these aspects of thought are frequently discussed by Malay Muslim scholars.

NOTES

- 1 Literally, kitab means "book" and Jawi means "people of Java" which also refers to "Malays" because the Arabs in the past considered all the people in the Malay Archipelago as Javanese; therefore the Malay writing using Arabic characters is called Jawi script. Kitab in Malay usage means only "religious book"; the term Jawi also refers to the people of Sumatra and Malays in general. See R. Roolvink, Bahasa Jawi (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1975), p. 2.
- 2 Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, Hikayat Abdullah, trans. A.H. Hill (Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1970), p. 56.
- 3 Literally, pondok means "hut". These huts, usually built near the house of the teacher, are where the students reside when receiving instruction on a wide range of Islamic studies.
- 4 However, using the Roman spelling when teaching Islamic religious knowledge reduces the accuracy in pronouncing the peculiar Arabic sounds. Therefore since 1980 Islamic knowledge has been taught in Jawi again in government schools in Malaysia, especially from Primary One to Form One.
- 5 This book is most widely used because it contains almost all aspects of basic Islamic teachings.

- 6 For example, Muhammad 'Ali Hanafiyah was described as a great warrior in Hikayat Ali Hanafiyah, but according to the sources of Islamic history, he did not take part in any battle against the Umayyad caliph. Only al-Mukhtar ibn Abi 'Ubayd claimed that he fought on behalf of Muhammad. See Baladhuri, Ansab al-Ashraf, V (Jerusalem, 1936), pp. 222-23.



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INTRODUCTION

The Literature of Kitab Jawi

The writers of Kitab Jawi came from every corner of the Malay Archipelago and their villages or hometowns can be identified by their last names,¹ for example, al-Fatani (from Pattani), al-Falembani (from Palembang), and al-Funtiyani (from Pontianak). However, many of them remained anonymous; they did not wish to be named because they wrote for the sake of Allah, not for worldly purposes. A few authors of Kitab Jawi also wrote books in Arabic -- for example, Ahmad Fatani and Nawawi al-Bentani.²

Among the most popular and widely used Kitab Jawi are kitab Perukunan and kitab Jawharat al-Tawhid, a translation and a commentary respectively of Ibrahim al-Laqani's work by an anonymous Malay Muslim scholar. According to Manning Nash, kitab Perukunan and Mutiara Tawhid [Pearls of Monotheism]³ are two major sources of religious knowledge in a small village in Kelantan where he conducted his research.

The sentence construction and style of writing of Kitab Jawi are greatly influenced by Arabic, and many Arabic words are used. The spelling is more brief and more concise than the modern Jawi writing. Usually the authors of Kitab Jawi begin their writing like this:

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, I, a destitute, weak and worthless person before the Lord rich and exalted, say ...

At the end of the kitab, they ask the readers to correct any mistakes found in their writings and they beg forgiveness from Allah.

Usually one small kitab is combined with or affiliated to a bigger one. The smaller kitab is written in the margin of the bigger kitab. Almost all the names of Kitab Jawi are in Arabic, perhaps to attract the readers, but their contents are written in Malay.

Many Kitab Jawi are translations or adaptations from Arabic, but local views are also prevalent in the kitab. Sometimes even the title of the original book is changed, for example, kitab Umm al-Barahin by al-Sanusi (d. 895 A.H./1490 A.D.)⁴ was translated into Malay by Muhammad Zayn b. Jalal al-Din in 1757 A.D. under the title Bidayat al-Hidayah. Muhammad Zayn al-Din b. Muhammad Badawi al-Sambawi translated it under the title Siraj al-Huda in 1886 A.D. and a third translation was completed in 1890 by Zayn al-'Abidin b. Muhammad al-Fatani entitled 'Aqidat al-Najin'. The Umm al-Barahin was used for teaching purposes in Malacca, as acknowledged by Abdullah Munshi,⁵ as well as in Penyengat on the island of Riau, as noted by Raja Ali al-Haji.⁶

Several branches of Islamic knowledge are dealt with in Kitab Jawi, like Theology, Fiqh (Islamic law), Hadith (Tradition of the Prophet), and Sufism, but there are very few Tafsir (commentary on the Qur'an).⁷ The Malays only interpret the Qur'an when it is relevant to their discussion. At the pondok, they usually use the Arabic Tafsir al-Jalalayn by al-Suyuti although an interpretation of the Qur'an was

written in Malay by Shaykh Aminuddin Abdul Rauf b. Ali al-Fansuri in the middle of the seventeenth century.⁸

There are also very few writings on Islamic history. The Bustan al-Salatin by al-Raniri cannot be considered as a real Islamic history book because it was not based on the works of Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, Baladhuri, Tabari, Ibn al-Athir and other primary sources which were written with Isnad (using a chain of narrators). Al-Raniri based his work on 'Aja'ib al-Malakut and other unreliable books outside the sphere of Muslim historiography. There were no dates in the Bustan and therefore it is more like a hikayat than a historical work.

It was only in 1922 that Syed Shaykh al-Hadi published his first 250-page book called al-Tarikh al-Islami [The History of Islam] which, as he originally planned it, was to consist of twenty volumes. But the demand for the first volume was disappointing and he therefore discontinued the project.⁹

However, according to Drewes, there is a translation of Futuh al-Sham [The Conquest of Syria] by al-Waqidi (d. 874 A.D.), but since it is in manuscript form, it is not widely used.¹⁰

With reference to theology, Kitab Jawi explain the Sunni doctrine. When discussing Fiqh, the Kitab Jawi expound the Shafi'i school of thought. Their discussions of Sufism include mainly the teachings of al-Ghazali; the Tariqah (Sufi order) Naqshabandiyah, and Qadiriyyah.

Most Kitab Jawi were published and printed in Singapore, Penang, Surabaya, Mecca, and Cairo, but today they are mostly reprinted in Penang (Malaysia). Generally, there are no copyrights; therefore they

are reprinted several times without dates and permission from the next of kin of the authors. The authors of some kitab are unknown.

The scholars of Malay studies have not paid much attention to Kitab Jawi. However, Sir Richard Winstedt considered Kitab Jawi a part of classical Malay literature and cited several works of al-Raniri, Hamzah Fansuri, Shamsuddin of Pasai, Abd al-Samad of Palembang, and Daud b. Abdullah of Pattani, amongst others.¹¹

There are, nevertheless, several Dutch contributions concerning Kitab Jawi, for example, Doorenbos' work on Hamzah Fansuri, the work of A.H. Johns on Abdul Rauf, Niewenhuize's dissertation on Shamsuddin, and Tudjimah's dissertation on al-Raniri, -- these works were all confined to Muslim scholars from Aceh. Syed Muhammad Naguib also focused his attention on the mystical-theological polemic of al-Raniri versus Hamzah Fansuri.¹² Drewes is the only one who has presented an excellent commentary and translation of a Javanese text and two Kitab Jawi (which he called Kitab-Malay) from Palembang in his work entitled Direction for Travellers on the Mystic Path.

Ironically, Kitab Seribu Mas'alah [Book of the Thousand Questions], written by Ki Agus Muhammad Mizan in 1273 A.H./1856 A.D., received special attention from Malay studies scholars despite the fact that the book was badly written and contained wrong quotations and interpretations of the Qur'an and wrong historical facts.¹³ Nevertheless, the book was edited and translated into Dutch by G.P. Pijper and published in Leiden in 1924.

There are many more valuable Kitab Jawi written by Malay Muslim scholars which deserve our attention. One of the earliest Kitab Jawi available in

print is kitab Bad' Khalq al-Samawat wa al-Ard [The Beginning of Creation of the Heavens and the Earth] by Nur al-Din b. 'Ali Hasan Ji b. Muhammad Hamid al-Raniri who came from Rander, India, in the month of Rajab in 1047 A.H./1639 A.D.¹⁴ Written at the request of Sultan Iskandar Thani who reigned in Aceh between 1636 and 1641 A.D., the book contains the story of the creation of man, angel, jinn, and all things in the universe based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and stories told by Ka'b al-Ahbar.¹⁵

Al-Raniri also wrote a book on Fiqh (Islamic law) entitled Sirat al-Mustaqim [The Straight Path] in 1044 A.H./1634 A.D. This book was based on Minhaj al-Talibin by al-Nawawi, Minhaj al-Tullab and Fath al-Wahhab by Shaykh al-Islam Zakariyya Ansari (d. 927 A.H./1520 A.D.), and many more books of the Shafi'i school. Altogether he wrote about twenty-three books on several branches of Islamic religious knowledge including Theology, Fiqh, Sufism, and Hadith.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Muhammad Arshad b. 'Abdullah al-Banjari wrote a Fiqh book named Sabil al-Muhtadin [The Way of the Guided]. He completed his work in 1195 A.H./1780 A.D. at the request of Sultan Tahmidullah bin Sultan Tamjidullah, the Sultan of Banjar. Al-Banjari said that Sirat al-Mustaqim by al-Raniri contained many Achinese words, which were not widely understood. So he wrote his own book based on Sharh Minhaj by Zakariyya Ansari, Mughni by Khatib Sharbini, Tuhfah by Ibn Hajar al-Haitami,¹⁶ Nihayah by al-Ramli, and other books of the Shafi'i school.

On Sufism, 'Abd al-Samad al-Falembani wrote Hidayat al-Salikin in 1192 A.H./1778 A.D.; although it was a translation of Bidayat al-Hidayah by al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H./1111 A.D.), he added some of his personal views. He also wrote Sayr al-Salikin which was an adaptation from Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din by al-Ghazali.

The most productive author of Kitab Jawi in the nineteenth century was Daud b. 'Abdullah al-Fatani. He wrote more than twenty books, his greatest being Furu' al-Masa'il, a Fiqh book written in 1254 A.H./1838 A.D. based on Fatawa by al-Ramli and Kashf al-Litham by al-Mahalli. His book on prayers, Muniyyat al-Musalli, was most popular and widely used among the Malays.

Al-Fatani also wrote a book on theology entitled al-Durr al-Thamin [The Precious Pearls] in 1232 A.H./1816 A.D. and a book on Hadith called Jam' al-Fawa'id [A Collection of Useful Advice] in 1239 A.H./1823 A.D. On life after death, the punishment and agony of burial, and the suffering of a dying man, Daud al-Fatani wrote a book named Kashf al-Ghammah. Almost all his books were written while he was in Mecca.

A book on Sufism entitled Hikam [Wisdoms] by Ibn 'Ata' Allah was translated by an anonymous author and Taj al-'Arus [Crown of the Bride] also by Ibn 'Ata' Allah was translated in 1304 A.H./1886 A.D. by 'Uthman b. Shihab al-Din al-Funtiyani. In 1295 A.H./1878 A.D. Ahmad Khatib b. 'abd al-Ghafar Sambas wrote Fath Al-Arifin [Door of the Learners] which describes the practices of the Tariqah or Sufi order of Qadiriyyah and Naqshabandiyah.

One of the most popular books on Theology and Islamic Jurisprudence is kitab Matla' al-Badrayn [Rise of the Two Full Moons] written by Muhammad b. Ismail Daud Fatani in 1303 A.H./1885 A.D. It is used as a textbook by some religious schools in Malaysia.

On Hadith, 'Abdullah b. 'Abd al-Mubin wrote a book entitled Tanbih al-Ghafilin [Reminder to the Neglectful] in 1303 A.H./1885 A.D. and 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kelantani wrote Jawhar al-Mauhub [A Presented Jewel] in 1306 A.H./1888 A.D., a

translation of 400 Hadith collected by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti.

A simple book on Theology, Kitab Sifat Dua Puluh [Book of the Twenty Attributes] was written by 'Uthman b. 'Abdullah b. Yahya of Betawi in 1304 A.H./1886 A.D. Another, entitled Kashf al-Ghaybiyah, which tells us about the creation of the heavens and the earth, the creation of man, angel, and jinn, and life after death, was written by Zayn al-'Abidin b. Muhammad al-Fatani in 1301 A.H./1883 A.D.

As all the above-mentioned books classified as Kitab Jawi are available in print and are still used by Muslims in Malaysia, this study will be based mainly on them.

NOTES

- 1 Their last names are not surnames because Malays do not have surnames.
- 2 Wan Muhammad Saghir b. 'Abdullah, Dian, No. 49 (Kota Bharu, 1972), p. 48.
- 3 Manning Nash, Peasant Citizens: Politics, Religion, and Modernization in Kelantan, Malaysia (Ohio University, 1974), p. 48. I presume that Mutiara Tawhid [Pearls of Monotheism] is kitab Jawharat al-Tawhid [Jewel of Monotheism] or Permata Tawhid -- Nash's translation is not very accurate.
- 4 The Umm al-Barahin has also been translated into French, German, and English by J.D. Luciani, P. Wolff, and Frederick J. Barny respectively.
- 5 Abdullah b. Abdul Kadir Munshi, op. cit., p. 55. A.H. Hill translated Umm al-Barahin as "Mother of Explanations", but I think "Mother of Proofs" is more accurate.

- 6 Raja Ali al-Haji, Tuhfat al-Nafis (Singapore, 1965), p. 335.
- 7 G.W.J. Drewes cited three Tafsir books translated into Malay, but they are not available in print. See Drewes, Directions for Travellers on the Mystic Path (The Hague, 1977), p. 217.
- 8 HAMKA, Pengantar Qur'an al-Karim H.B. Jasin (Jakarta 1977), p. 7. Abdul Rauf's interpretation is not identical to Baydawi's Tafsir although his translation is entitled Tafsir Anwar Baydawi.
- 9 Li Chuan Siu, A Bird's-eye View of the Development of Modern Malay Literature (Kuala Lumpur, 1970), p. 10.
- 10 Drewes, op. cit., p. 218.
- 11 R.O. Winstedt, A History of Classical Malay Literature (Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1969), pp. 135-54.
- 12 Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, Al-Raniri and the Wujudiyah of the 17th Century Aceh, Monograph of Malaysian Branch, Royal Asiatic Society (Singapore, 1966).
- 13 According to sources of Islamic history, 'Abdullah ibn Salam did not ask the Prophet the one thousand questions -- he became Muslim immediately after the Prophet arrived at Medina or, according to others, when the Prophet was still at Mecca. Encyclopaedia of Islam I (Leiden, 1960), p. 52.
- 14 al-Raniri, Bad' Khalq al-Samawat wa al-Ard (in the margin of kitab Taj al-Mulk) (Penang, n.d.), p. 8.
- 15 A Yemenite Jew who became a convert to Islam probably in 17 A.H./638 A.D. and is considered the oldest authority on Judaeo-Islamic traditions.
- 16 The Tuhfah was translated into Javanese and then into Dutch by L. De Vries, Kitab Toehaph en Tuhfat al-Muhtadj li Sjarkh al-Minhaj (Batavia, 1929). The Minhaj has also been translated into French, and from French into English.