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Facing Mecca from Java: Two Treatises on the Establishment of the *qibla*, and Their Scholarly and Social Context

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Abstract

Between the 1870s and 1902, the Jakarta-based Sayyid 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī wrote two epistles on the correct establishment of the *qibla*. Questions on the *qibla* and, controversially, on correcting the faulty direction of prayer in several mosques in Southeast Asia, surfaced in the late 18th century and reappeared periodically until well into the 20th century. Seeking to change the established *qibla* of a mosque represented not only a strong claim to religious authority, but also a direct assault on the legitimacy of local religious leaders. Thus, Sayyid 'Uthmān's epistles were aimed not only at cementing his scholarly status, but also at intervening in the social cleavages of the time. This contribution will analyze the author's two treatises on the *qibla* and situate them within their scholarly and social context.

Keywords

qibla – *taqlīd* – *istiqbāl al-jiha* – *istiqbāl al-'ayn* – Sayyid 'Uthmān al-'Alawī – Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī – Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje – Islam in Southeast Asia

Introduction

A local chronicle of 1868 relates that 'Abd Allāh b. Fūdī (Abdullahi dan Fodio, d. 1244/1829), the brother and vizier of the founder of the Sokoto caliphate, 'Uthmān b. Fūdī (d. 1232/1817), established the direction of prayer for the new

mosque of Kano in present-day Nigeria on the occasion of a visit in 1807.¹ In contrast to many other statesmen of the Muslim world during the period, ‘Abd Allāh was not just a political and military leader, but also a scholar in his own right. He left numerous works, including a compilation of fatwas on *inter alia* mosque/prayer-related themes issued by various Mālikī muftis,² and preferred to be addressed as *mallam* (“teacher” in Hausa and Fulani) rather than ‘emir’.³ It stands to reason that his contemporaries regarded his establishment of the *qibla* for the Great Mosque of Kano to be authoritative. Elsewhere, however, there were fierce debates about the correct direction of prayer in local mosques, including debates tied directly – at several, often intersecting levels – to the power and prestige of sultans, courtly religious officials, and scholarly elites.

In Southeast Asia, the question of correctly calculating the *qibla* and, controversially, of correcting the faulty direction of prayer in several long-established mosques first surfaced in the late 18th century and resurfaced periodically until well into the 20th century. The first famous case dates to 1186/1772–3, when the eminent scholar of Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan in present-day Indonesia, Muḥammad Arshad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Banjārī (d. 1227/1812), rectified the *qiblas* of several mosques in Batavia (Jakarta), after returning to the archipelago following many years of study and teaching in the *ḥaramayn*. Around 1800, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Batāwī al-Miṣrī (d. 1263–4/1847), one of al-Banjārī’s closest companions in Arabia, did the same in Palembang in South Sumatra.⁴ Their activities not only precipitated heated discussions, but also left a distinctively Southeast Asian legacy, directly linked to the main figure of the present inquiry, Batavia’s Sayyid ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Alawī (d. 1332/1914).

1 Stephanie Zehnle, *A Geography of Jihad: Sokoto Jihadism and the Islamic Frontier in West Africa* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 201–202.

2 ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Fūdī, *Ḍiyyā’ as-siyāsāt wa-l-fatāwā al-nawāzil mim mā huwa min furū’ al-dīn min al-masā’il* (Cairo: al-Zahrā’ li-l-Ilām al-‘Arabī, 1408/1988), 90–101.

3 On ‘Abd Allāh b. Fūdī’s status as a legal scholar, see Abubaker Aliu Gwandu, *Abdullahi b. Fodio as a Muslim Jurist* (unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University, 1977).

4 L.W.C. van den Berg, *Le Hadhramout et les colonies arabes dans l’Archipel indien* (Batavia: Imprimerie du gouvernement, 1886), 163; Khayr al-Anwār (Khairil Anwar), “‘Ulamā’ indūnisiyya al-qarn al-thāmin ‘ashar: tarjama Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī wa afkāruhu,” *Studia Islamika* 3:4 (1996), 146–147; Mohd Shaghbir Abdullah, *Syeikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari: Pengarang Sabil al-Muhtadin* (Selangor: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1990), 12–13; Mohammed Hussain Ahmad, *Islam in the Malay World: Al-Falimbanī’s Scholarship* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2017), 54–55. Given the fact that al-Miṣrī was significantly younger than al-Banjārī, this companionship can perhaps be best described as a teacher-student relationship.

This contribution will introduce Sayyid 'Uthmān, and then present and analyze two *risālas* that he wrote on the subject of the calculation of the *qibla* (the first in the early 1870s, the second in 1902). I will argue that both works were composed as a direct response to local concerns and disputes over the direction of prayer in mosques in Java and Kalimantan. Far from being a mere ritual technicality, the debate over the direction of prayer had a strong bearing on questions of religious authority and social and political capital, as well as on community cohesion and individual religiosity. All of these issues are reflected in Sayyid 'Uthmān's two *risālas* and in their background and afterlife.

The Author

Sayyid 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Aqīl b. Yaḥyā al-'Alawī was born to a couple of mixed heritage in Batavia in 1822.⁵ Descended from the famous lineage of Hadrami 'Alawī *sayyids*, his father had been born in Mecca but, like many of his countrymen, at an unknown date he ventured to Southeast Asia as a scholar-cum-trader. In Batavia, he married Sayyid 'Uthmān's mother, Āmina, the daughter of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī and his (most probably) indigenous wife. As will be discussed below, this person can be identified with the aforementioned companion of Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Batāwī al-Miṣrī. Whereas Sayyid 'Uthmān's paternal grandfather, Sayyid 'Aqīl al-'Alawī (d. 1246/1830–1), is remembered as the chief 'Alawī scholar of Mecca, his father Sayyid 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī (d. 1287/1870–1) has remained a shadowy figure.⁶ He returned to the holy city for good three years after Sayyid 'Uthmān's birth, and the two were only reunited when the latter came to study in Mecca between 1841 and 1847. Due to his father's absence, Sayyid 'Uthmān was cared for by his maternal grandfather, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī, who also taught his grandson religious and other sciences, including astronomy.

Sayyid 'Uthmān embarked for Mecca in 1841, where he studied with his father and some of the city's important scholars, chief among them al-Ḥabīb Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Ḥabshī (d. 1281/1865) and Aḥmad b. Zaynī Daḥlān

5 The definitive biographical study of Sayyid 'Uthmān is Nico J.G. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A Biography of Sayyid 'Uthman (1822–1914)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Kaptein includes a translation and transliteration of the Malay poem *Qamar al-Zamān*, one of two accounts of the scholar's life that were written by his son and – in this case – his grandson, respectively. *Ibid.*, 20–49, 277–293.

6 The death dates of Sayyid 'Aqīl and Sayyid 'Abd Allāh were recorded by Sayyid 'Uthmān. Sayyid 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī, *al-Silsila al-nabawiyya fi asānid al-sāda al-'alawiyya ilā jaddihim al-muṣṭafā khayr al-bariyya*, Leiden University Library, Plano 53 F1 no. 27, 7–8.

(d. 1304/1886), who later would be appointed as successive Shāfiī muftis in Mecca in 1854 and 1871, respectively.⁷ Beginning in 1847, he pursued further studies in his ancestral land of Hadramaut. It was only in 1862 that he returned to Batavia after more than two decades in Arab lands.⁸ There, he took over the teaching duties of 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Bimawī (d. c. 1863) at the main mosque of Pekojan, the city's traditional Arab quarter.⁹

From these modest beginnings, Sayyid 'Uthmān went on to a remarkable career as scholar, publishing pioneer, and colonial advisor in Batavia. A highly prolific author, he wrote more than 130 works.¹⁰ Among his contemporary Southeast Asian Muslim scholars, only the Mecca-based Javanese luminary Muḥammad al-Nawawī al-Bantanī (d. 1897), to whom roughly 100 titles are attributed, could match his productivity.¹¹ An interesting contrast between the two scholars, however, is their language choice. Despite his undisputed Hadrami credentials, only approximately 45% of Sayyid 'Uthmān's preserved writings are in Arabic, while the majority are in Malay. By contrast, his counterpart in Mecca left an entirely Arabic corpus of a more traditional character, including many commentaries and glosses.¹² Sayyid 'Uthmān's language preferences clearly show that he had in mind for his writings an audience beyond the small circle of Southeast Asian Muslims with a sufficient level of Arabic. Moreover, his choice of literary genres is indicative of the fact that he preferred to address new issues and current debates through the medium of the *risāla* and fatwas rather than through the established form of the gloss.

From 1869 onwards, Sayyid 'Uthmān began to print his writings on his own lithographic press. His desire to reach beyond the confines of Arabic-educated

7 For hagiographic accounts of al-Ḥabshī and Daḥlān, see Ṭāhā b. Ḥasan al-Saqqāf, *Fuyūḍāt al-baḥr al-malī' min manāqib wa akhbār sayyidnā al-Ḥabīb 'Alī b. al-Ḥabīb Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥabshī* (Medina: n.p., 1426/2005), 22–27; Abū Bakr Shaṭṭā' al-Dimiyāṭī, *Nafḥat al-raḥmān fī ba'd manāqib al-Shaykh al-Sayyid Aḥmad b. al-Sayyid Zaynī Daḥlān*, ed. Ibn Harjū al-Jāwī (n.p.: Maktabat Ibn Harjū al-Jāwī, 1337/2016).

8 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 52–71.

9 Ibid., 31, 73; Muhammad Faisal, "Biografi Lengkap Syaikh Abdul Ghani Al-Bimawi Al-Jawi," *Uma Seo. Catatan Kelana Muslim Pengembara*, 2 July 2015, <https://mumaseo.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/biografi-lengkap-syaikh-abdulghani/> (accessed: 10 December 2020).

10 For a full list of known works, see Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 294–301.

11 On al-Nawawī al-Bantanī, see Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 193–195; Alex Soesilo Wijoyo, "Shaykh Nawawi of Banten: Texts, Authority, and the Gloss Tradition," unpublished PhD dissertation (Columbia University, 1997). Wijoyo (ibid., 98) could identify only forty-one extant (and printed) works by al-Nawawī al-Bantanī.

12 Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 63; Wijoyo, "Shaykh Nawawi," 92–105.

scholarly circles is also reflected in the fact that he published some of his Arabic works together with (abridged) Malay translations in the margins, as with one of his *risālas* to be discussed below. He was a trailblazer who not only disseminated his writings through his own press, but also incorporated tables and graphs in his works to make complex information more accessible to readers and to aid memorization. While his desire for accessibility is conspicuous in his *risālas* on the direction of prayer, his wish to aid memorization is clearly manifested in his *Kitab sifat dua puluh* (“The book of the twenty attributes”), his contribution to a distinctively Southeast Asian genre of Islamic catechisms (*‘aqā’id*) based on the legacy of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Sanūsī’s *Umm al-barāhīn*.¹³

The most remarkable example of the author’s openness to graphical elements is arguably his atlas of the Hadramaut, published in 1883, which, in addition to maps annotated in Arabic, included a drawing of a typical Hadrami settlement. Its main audience was clearly the Hadrami community of Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Just a year later, he wrote an Arabic work on his genealogy and the lines of transmission among the ‘Alawi *sayyids*, emphasizing that the ‘Alawiyya scholars represented a direct line of transmission of *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and *ṭarīqa* from the Prophet.¹⁵ As indicated by the elaborate *silsila* chart that takes up seven folios, this patrilineal and spiritual genealogy was extended to Southeast Asia by his father, Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Alawī.¹⁶ Similarly, he took care to promote the virtues and prestige of the *sayyids* among a broader local audience. For instance, he published a Malay *risāla* containing prophetic traditions on the *ahl al-bayt* that enjoin believers to love the members of the prophet’s household (*wajib mahabba keluarga*), to call blessings (*salawat*) upon them, and to follow their example. According to the author, reverence for the Prophet’s descendants was not only in accordance with the teachings of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, but also represented the practice of “all the great scholars” (*segala ulama besar-besar*).¹⁷

Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s identity and role as a Hadrami-Malay scholar revolved around two poles. On the one hand, he wrote books designed for the local Arab

13 Philipp Bruckmayr, “The *ṣarḥ/hāṣhiya* Phenomenon in Southeast Asia: From al-Sanūsī’s *Umm al-Barāhīn* to Malay *Sifat Dua Puluh* Literature,” *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales du Caire* 32 (2017): 27–52.

14 Nico J.G. Kaptein, “The Atlas of Sayyid Uthman ibn Abd Allah ibn Yahya of Batavia (1822–1914),” in Noel Brehony (ed.), *Hadhrāmūt and its Diaspora: Yemeni Politics, Identity and Migration* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 87–100.

15 Al-‘Alawī, *al-Silsila al-nabawīyya*, 1.

16 *Ibid.*, 7.

17 *Id.*, *Risalah ada di dalamnya hadith keluarga dinaqal dari kitab-kitab hadith yang mu’tamad* ([Batavia]: n.p., 1315/1896). As Kaptein notes, at least three editions of this work were published. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 97 n. 77.

audience which, by 1883, consisted of approximately 20,000 people across the Indonesian archipelago and the Malay peninsula and 1,600 in Singapore.¹⁸ On the other, he emphasized the genealogy, merits, and privileged status of the 'Alawī *sayyids* to Malay audiences, while endorsing local genres such as the *sifat dua puluh* literature. Moreover, as will be shown, he sometimes attempted to bolster his authority by referring to famous precursors among the Malay '*ulamā*'.

Just as he served as a bridge between the Hadrami-Arab and the local scholarly tradition, so too he played a mediating role between Dutch authorities and local Muslims. Even though his contact with European colonial society seems to have been limited in the first decades after his return to Batavia, Sayyid 'Uthmān became involved in the colonial administration from 1889 onwards: he forged a strong relationship with the Dutch Islamic Studies scholar and administrator Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (d. 1936), and was appointed Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs in 1891. His quest for religious authority was thus directed not only at the Arab and Malay Muslim community, but also at the colonial administration, to which he offered his expertise. The guidance that he offered the Muslim community often concerned issues of either direct or indirect relevance to the colonial authorities.¹⁹

Sayyid 'Uthmān's *Risālas* on the Direction of Prayer

Sayyid 'Uthmān's numerous writings on a wide range of topics, many published in the form of fatwas and *risālas*, include two epistles on establishing the correct *qibla*. As noted, such debates had been precipitated by Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī in his native Batavia roughly a century earlier. The first and shorter of the two epistles is entitled *Nafā'is al-niḥla fī wasā'il al-qibla*. Although undated, it must have been written in the early 1870s, as in his more elaborate and later *risāla* on the subject, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla fī taḥṣīl 'ayn al-qibla*, composed in 1320/1902, he notes that he had written this work "around thirty years ago."²⁰ Whereas *Nafā'is al-niḥla* was written in Arabic, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* was published as a bilingual edition. The main Arabic text is accompanied by a summary translation in Malay printed in the margins. Clearly, Sayyid 'Uthmān intended to make the work accessible to a wider readership. It is noteworthy

18 Van den Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 105–110.

19 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 103–140.

20 Sayyid 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla fī taḥṣīl 'ayn al-qibla* ([Batavia]: n.p., 1320/1902), 2 [margin].

that this vernacular version is not simply a translation, but rather a Malay *mukhtaṣar* (i.e., an abridgement with commentary) of the text.²¹ It not only omits certain details of the Arabic *matn* and uses a simpler language than the original but also contains additional information and explanations not found in the main text. Only the Malay section, for instance, gives the approximate dating of *Nafā'is al-niḥla* and specifies that the author produced a chart afterwards containing the *qiblas* of different locations in the Muslim world and beyond in a circular diagram with the Ka'ba at its centre, and another chart with the longitudes and latitudes of settlements and islands in the Malay-Indonesian world.²²

Clearly, the two treatises are closely related to each other. This connection is reflected in both content and structure. *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, for instance, addresses the following topics (*umūr*): (1) the obligation to face the *qibla* when praying; (2) the obligation to face the '*ayn al-qibla*' (i.e. the precise *qibla* or the direction of the Ka'ba itself) and not just its general direction (*jiha*); (3) the sources (*marātib*) for knowing the *qibla*, i.e. personal knowledge ('*ilm bi-l-nafs*) or knowledge through observation (*bi-ru'yat al-Ka'ba*), reliable information (*khābar thiqa*), *ijtihād* based on proof, and following a capable scholar (*taqlīd al-mujtahid*); (4) the obligation to study the proof for establishing the *qibla*; (5) the explanation of the proof; (6) a guide to the above-mentioned Ka'ba-centred *qibla* chart with instructions on how to apply it to locations in Southeast Asia (*al-buldān al-jāwīyya*), followed by the chart itself and part of Q 2:144;²³ (7) the calculation of the *qibla* by using the sine quadrant (*al-rub' al-mujayyab*)²⁴ and the second aforementioned table with geographical and astronomical data on thirty-three locations in the Malay-Indonesian world, from Aceh (Sumatra)

21 On the *mukhtaṣar* genre, see Eric van Lit, "Commentary and Commentary Tradition. The Basic Terms for Understanding Islamic Intellectual Tradition," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 32 (2017), 15.

22 Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 2 [margin]. These charts are presumably identical to those contained in *Nafā'is al-niḥla* and may be regarded as side products of the earlier work. Sayyid 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī, *Nafā'is al-niḥla fī wasā'il al-qibla* ([Batavia]: n.p., n.d.), 5, 7. Apparently, these charts were published as posters. Kaptein (*Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 83) mentions *qibla* charts among Sayyid 'Uthmān's collection of posters held at Leiden University Library. The circular chart is the only item in the work that contains annotations in Malay.

23 Given the author's liminal position as a Hadrami-Malay scholar of Java, it is appropriate that Hadramaut and Java, along with Ḥāsik in Oman's Dhofar region, are placed together in the same sector of the *qibla* chart. Al-'Alawī, *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, 4–5.

24 The sine quadrant, an instrument for measuring celestial altitudes and making trigonometric calculations, has been used by Muslim astronomers since Abbasid times. See David A. King, "Islamic Astronomy," in Christopher Walker (ed.), *Astronomy before the Telescope* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), 167–168.

in the west to Ambon (Moluccas) in the east, and from Aceh in the north to Kupang (southwest Timor) in the south; (8) the calculation using observation of the sun, complete with the relevant hours and minutes for the same thirty-three locations.²⁵

All eight issues addressed in *Nafā'is al-niḥla* are found in *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*, where they are similarly treated in separate chapters (*fuṣūl*, sg. *faṣl*). Thus, *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla* builds upon the earlier *Nafā'is al-niḥla*. Indeed, it appears to be an expanded and updated version of the former. In this regard, the word *taḥrīr* at the beginning of its title may be understood as a technical term, denoting the revised version of a text.²⁶ That the work was designed as a separate *risāla* rather than as a traditional commentary (*sharḥ*) on *Nafā'is al-niḥla* is most likely related to two factors. First, as noted, Sayyid 'Uthmān rarely wrote commentaries on earlier works, let alone on any of his own writings. Second, *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla* was composed in response to questions received by the author in 1902. Rather than responding by writing a commentary on an earlier work, he chose to write a more elaborate text that referenced the earlier treatise and reused one of its tables, but at the same time added new charts and framed the discussion of the calculation of the *qibla* through the lens of concrete queries that had been submitted to him from different parts of the archipelago.

Thus, Sayyid 'Uthmān's expositions on a topic at the intersection of Islamic ritual law and science were closely tied to current debates. What is more, he used them as an occasion to establish himself as a definitive authority vis-à-vis believers, rival religious scholars and the Dutch authorities. Arguably, the format of the *risāla* served his interests and tastes better than an auto-commentary. In an obvious effort to maximize his audience, he not only designed *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla* as a bilingual text, but also – around the same time – issued a reprint of *Nafā'is al-niḥla* and published selections from a rare text on the subject by his aforementioned Malay precursor, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī (see below).²⁷

25 Al-'Alawī, *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, 6–9. On Islamic scientific and folk astronomy and methods of calculating the direction of prayer, including the genre of *qibla* charts, see David A. King and Richard P. Lorch, "Qibla Charts, Qibla Maps, and Related Instruments," in J.B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.), *The History of Cartography. Volume Two, Book One: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 189–205; David A. King, *World-Maps for Finding the Direction and Distance to Mecca: Innovation and Tradition in Islamic Science* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 47–127.

26 Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 30.

27 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 224–227.

Given the close relationship between the two *risālas*, I base the following analysis primarily on the later and longer *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* and the interplay between its Arabic base text (*matn*) and the accompanying Malay *mukhtaṣar*.

Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla and Its Background

The title page of Sayyid 'Uthmān's *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* includes a part of Q 2:144, *fa-walli wajhaka shaṭra al-masjid al-ḥarām* ("Turn, then, thy face towards the Inviolable House of Worship"),²⁸ followed by its interpretation in prominent Shāfi'ī *tafsīrs* and *fiqh* texts. All these texts take this Qur'ānic reference to mean precisely the Ka'ba or the Ka'ba itself (*'ayn al-ka'ba*, *naḥs al-ka'ba*). First, he mentions two Qur'ānic commentaries that were widely used in Southeast Asia, al-Maḥallī's (d. 864/1459) and al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* and 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Khāzin's (d. 741/1340) *Lubāb al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl*. Next, he cites the opinions in Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī's (d. 973/1566) *Tuḥfat al-muḥtāj*, Shams al-Dīn al-Ramlī's (1004/1596) *Nihāyat al-muḥtāj*, and in *Sharḥ Bā 'Ishan 'alā al-Mukhtaṣar*.²⁹

All of these texts, save for the last one, are well-known works of Shāfi'ī scholarship. Contrastingly, the so-called *Sharḥ Bā 'Ishan* is relatively unknown and was of recent provenance at that time. Its full title is *Sharḥ al-Muqaddīma al-Ḥadramīyya* by Sa'īd b. M. Bā 'Alī Bā 'Ishan al-Daw'anī al-Ḥadramī (d. 1270/1854), and it is a commentary on an earlier *fiqh* work by 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Faḍl (d. 918/1512). It was thus a contemporary Hadrami text that Sayyid 'Uthmān may have only become acquainted with during his stay in Hadramaut. One of his notable local teachers there was 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. Yaḥyā (d. 1265/1849), who had earlier also sojourned in South and Southeast Asia between 1832 and 1835.³⁰ In any case, *Sharḥ Bā 'Ishan* came to be widely used throughout the Indian Ocean region, for instance, in traditional Islamic education in Indonesia, and among the Swahilis of East Africa.³¹ The intentions

28 Muhammad Asad's translation.

29 Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 1.

30 See Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 65–66. On 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar see Ismail Fajrie Alatas, "From 'Alid Treatise to anti-Shi'i Text: the *Risāla fī ibṭāl bida' munkarāt* of 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar Bin Yaḥyā (d. 1265/1849) and its Afterlife in Indonesia," *Islamic Law and Society* 27 (2020), 417–419.

31 The text was used, for instance, by the Tanzanian Yashruṭīyya shaykh Nurudīn Shadhili (Nūr al-Dīn al-Shādhili, d. 2007) in his critique of his reformist opponent Abdallah Saleh Farsy ('Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-Farsī, d. 1982). See Gerard C. von de Bruinhorst, "Translocality, Texts and Discourses: Ritual Transformations of Islamic Sacrifices in Tanzania," in

behind this remarkably elaborate cover page are clear. By referring to major Shāfi'ī scholarship from the Mamluk era to his own lifetime, Sayyid 'Uthmān intended to drive home one of the most important points of the treatise: The Qur'ān enjoins believers to turn in the precise direction of prayer (*'ayn al-qibla*) or to the Ka'ba itself, and not merely in its general direction (*jiha*).

In the introduction, Sayyid 'Uthmān declares that it is obligatory to acquire knowledge of the proofs to establish the *'ayn al-qibla*, because facing the *qibla* is a prerequisite for the validity of prayer, and because scholars have confirmed that this obligation relates to facing the precise *qibla* (*al-wājib huwa istiqbāl 'aynihā*). According to the author, and as the *risāla*'s title suggests, the strongest such proof (*aqwā adillatihā*) are the longitudes and latitudes. In the Malay-Indonesian lands (*buldān jāwā wa-malāyū*), he continues, the general direction is towards the setting point of Arcturus (*maghīb al-simāk al-rāmiḥ*), i.e. west-northwest.³² In fact, the majority of mosques in the region were oriented correctly. Over the years, however, knowledgeable people had identified and corrected divergent prayer-niches (*maḥārīb*, sg. *miḥrāb*) in mosques in Batavia and elsewhere,³³ certainly a reference to the abovementioned recitification of the *qibla* by Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī in several Batavian mosques in the 1770s.

After mentioning his earlier *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, Sayyid 'Uthmān explains the immediate reason for writing a second treatise on the subject, noting that earlier in the year 1320/1902 he received a question from Yogyakarta (Java), where the *miḥrāb* of a mosque was erroneously oriented towards the setting point of Aquila (*maghīb al-aṣl*), i.e. the west.³⁴ When the error was identified by a knowledgeable person, those in charge of the mosque refused to adjust it, citing the legal opinion of those who regard it as sufficient to turn towards the general direction of Mecca (*istiqbāl al-jiha*). They also claimed that this

Francesca Declich (ed.), *Translocal Connections across the Indian Ocean: Swahili Speaking Networks on the Move* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 144. On Farsy, see Mohamed S. Mraja, "The Reform Ideas of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-Farsī and the Transformation of Marital Practices among Digo Muslims of Kenya," *Islamic Law and Society* 17 (2010), 245–278.

32 On the classical association of the compass winds with star constellations, see Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, *Encyclopädische Übersicht der Wissenschaften des Orients, aus sieben arabischen, persischen und türkischen Werken übersetzt*, I (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1804), 348–351. The Malay term for west-northwest, which is introduced later in the text, is *barat-barat laut*.

33 Al-'Alawī, *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 2.

34 Whereas Sayyid 'Uthmān explains that the Arabic term *maghīb al-aṣl* refers to "the line of east and west", he defines it as "exactly the west" (*barat tepat*) in Malay.

opinion prevails over (*rajjahūhā 'alā*) that of *istiqbāl al-'ayn*, and that even believers knowledgeable of the indicators for the precise *qibla* are not obliged to act in accordance with it (*lā yalzamuhu al-'amal bi-l-'ayn*), but may follow the contending opinion that turning towards the general direction is sufficient (*yajūzu lahu al-'udūl ilā taqlīd al-qawl bi-l-jīha*). Moreover, “in order to achieve victory for their position by way of distortion and falsification, and through the vehicle of disputes and citations, they [i.e. those in charge of the mosque] went so far as to declare that what al-'Allāma al-Kurdī – following the relied-upon imams – had established regarding the compulsoriness of *istiqbāl al-'ayn* was wrong.”³⁵ It should be noted that Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Kurdī (d. 1194/1780) is thought to have been Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī's most influential teacher in Medina.³⁶ As will be shown below, he served as a major source in debates about the *qibla*.

Sayyid 'Uthmān also provides details regarding the second question sent from Banjarmasin, where the *mihrāb* of the mosque was incorrectly oriented towards the setting point of Pleiades (*maghīb al-thurayyā*), i.e. west by north.³⁷ As in Yogyakarta, the expertise of a scholar knowledgeable about the proofs for establishing the precise *qibla* was rejected by the person in charge of the mosque. Indeed, the latter not only held fast to the *istiqbāl al-jīha* approach, but also forced his congregation to orient themselves to the existing *mihrāb* and forbade them from turning towards the correct direction (i.e., *maghīb al-simāk*), claiming that the people must obey him on account of his status as a *ḥākim mujtahid* (i.e. someone able to engage in independent legal interpretation and charged with exercising this function).³⁸ He also asserted that,

35 Ibid.

36 Azra, *Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 118–119; Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurdish 'Ulama and their Indonesian Disciples,” 1998, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277034333_Kurdish_Ulama_and_their_Indonesian_disciples, 17–19.

37 Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 2–3. Whereas Sayyid 'Uthmān provides no explanation for the term *maghīb al-thurayyā* in the Arabic main part of the epistle, he glosses the term as “on the hour hand with the exact west to its left, that is, it lies between the exact west and west-northwest” in the Malay *mukhtaṣar*. Working with subcomponents such as *maghīb al-thurayyā* (west by north) requires the use of a fully developed 32-point compass rose.

38 Sherman Jackson has argued that the translation of *ijtihād* as “legal reasoning,” adopted in the wake of Joseph Schacht's pioneering work on Islamic Law, should not be treated as self-evident, not least due to the value judgments (i.e. the creative use of reason in *ijtihād* versus blind acceptance in *taqlīd*) associated with it. Sherman A. Jackson, “*Ijtihād* and *taqlīd*: Between the Islamic legal tradition and autonomous western reason,” in Khaled Abou El Fadl, Ahmad Atif Ahmad & Said Fares Hassan (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law* (London: Routledge, 2019), 257.

if his *ijtihād* is right, his reward will be tenfold. If it is wrong, his reward will be one-fold.³⁹

After reading these two questions, Sayyid 'Uthmān continues, he felt obliged to extract material from the writings of the relied-upon imams (within the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*) on the obligations of the legally accountable Muslims (*mukallafs*), and to refute these false claims.⁴⁰

After this introduction, the author divides his work into fourteen chapters, most of which coincide with the topics of *Nafā'is al-Nihla* (see above), followed by a conclusion. In the following, I focus on issues and items not found in Sayyid 'Uthmān's earlier *risāla*, and, in particular, on the conclusion.

The Content and Structure of *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*

By contrast to *Nafā'is al-Nihla*, which deals exclusively with doctrinal and technical aspects of the *qibla* question, the opening chapters of *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* focus on issues of religious legitimacy. The framing of these sections of the work was undoubtedly shaped by the two questions sent to Sayyid 'Uthmān, which included information on the contending scholars' positions and their claims to religious authority. In the first chapter, he clarifies that it is the so-called relied-upon opinions within the legal school (*al-mu'tamad fi l-madhhab*) that are binding for practice, fatwas, and legal rulings. To do so, he draws primarily on the hierarchy of Shāfi'ī scholars presented by al-Kurdī (who is mentioned in the question from Yogyakarta) in his treatise *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya fi man yuftā bi-qawlihi min a'immat al-shāfi'iyya*, which identifies al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278) and al-Rāfi'ī (623/1226) as the highest authorities, and Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. 974/1566) and Shams al-Dīn al-Ramli (d. 1004/1596) as the chief references from among the later scholars and commentators.⁴¹ In the second chapter, which relies mainly on Ibn Ḥajar and again on al-Kurdī,

39 This claim most probably derives from a hadith contained *inter alia* in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Cf. Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id wa-Manba' al-Fawā'id*, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad al-Dārānī, 23 vols. (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 1436/2015), 9:546. The similar but more widespread *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith on the issue mentions two rewards and one reward, respectively. Cf. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6919 & *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1716.

40 Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 3. The Malay version of the introduction ends with interesting caveats regarding the language and format of the Malay *mukhtaṣar*. For example, the author notes that he wrote it in Betawi Malay, i.e. the local dialect of Malay, and that, while it does not cover all the examples (*ibarat*) of the Arabic text, it contains all the proofs.

41 *Ibid.*, 3–4. On al-Kurdī's scheme, see Ahmed El Shamsy, "The *Ḥāshiya* in Islamic Law: A Sketch of the Shāfi'ī Literature," *Oriens* 41 (2013), 292–294.

he argues that the existence of this intra-Shāfi'i hierarchy requires that opinions that are not relied upon or are non-preponderant (*bi-ghayri l-mu'tamad/bi-khilāf al-rājiḥ*) within the *madhhab* may not serve as the basis of a judgment or a fatwa.⁴²

The third chapter specifies that it is prohibited to issue fatwas or rulings without the prerequisite knowledge or based on weak opinions. By stressing that distortion and deception are also forbidden, Sayyid 'Uthmān links this discussion directly (yet implicitly) to the charges levelled against the scholar in charge of the Yogyakarta mosque in the first question. Of the different authorities whom Sayyid 'Uthmān cites to support his arguments, he refers specifically to his former teacher, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, who (as mentioned) had been active in Southeast Asia for some time. Sayyid 'Uthmān notes that 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar stated in his fatwas that "in this time many people, especially from among the Muslims of Southeast Asia (*ahl jāwā*), understand the pronouncements of the '*ulamā*' in a way contrary to their intentions, because they have not acquired their knowledge from accomplished scholars (*al-mashāyikh al-mutqanīn*)."⁴³ In the brief chapter that follows and concludes this part of the *risāla*, he asserts, again referring *inter alia* to al-Kurdī's *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*, that, once one becomes aware of an error, it is obligatory to return to the truth. This statement should be understood as relating both to contending religious authorities, in general, and to the correction of an erroneous *qibla*, in particular.

It is only in the fifth chapter that Sayyid 'Uthmān turns to the doctrinal questions and technicalities relating to the direction of prayer, and he does so by presenting the sources for knowing the direction of prayer (*marātib al-qibla*). It is also here that the character of *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla* as a substantially expanded version of *Nafā'is al-niḥla* becomes evident for the first time. Indeed, the discussion, based largely on Ibn Ḥajar and al-Kurdī, is mostly taken verbatim from *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, albeit enriched with additional quotations from Shāfi'i luminaries.⁴⁴ The striking new feature here is a table which, together with a brief explanation, makes up chapter six. This table distinguishes five different groups of prayer niches (*maḥārib*, sg. *miḥrāb*):⁴⁵ (1) prayer niches whose orientation is attributed to the Prophet through broad authentication (*tawātur*); (2) prayer niches whose orientation is attributed to the Prophet

42 Al-'Alawī, *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 4.

43 Ibid., 4–6 (quotation p. 5).

44 Ibid., 6–8; id., *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, 2–3.

45 "Prayer niche" is here and elsewhere in the literature used synonymously with *qibla* and less in the sense of an architectural feature of mosques. This reflects the original usage of the term *miḥrāb*. See Nuha N.N. Khoury, "The Mihrab: From Text to Form," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998), 1–27.

through *āḥād* (reports based on a single narration); (3) prayer niches established by Muslim residents or a significant number of sojourners in places far from Mecca, the accuracy of which has not been contested by skilled people (*arbāb al-khibra*); (4) prayer niches in such places, the accuracy of which has been disputed by skilled people or that diverge from the true *miḥrāb* established by people of knowledge (*ahl al-ma'rifa*); and (5) prayer niches in such places that were either not established by Muslim residents or a significant number of sojourners, or where this was in doubt, even if their accuracy has not been contested. A separate column in the table specifies the legal implications of this categorization: whereas following the established direction of prayer (*taqlīd al-miḥrāb*) is obligatory in the first three cases, it is not permitted (*lā yajūzu*) in the remaining two, in which a re-assessment is mandatory.⁴⁶ Although this discussion builds upon the classifications (*aqṣām al-maḥārib*) of al-Kurdī, Sayyid 'Uthmān uses a very modern approach to present it, using small numbers, similar to footnote markers, to link statements in the text to the respective categories in the table.

By discussing the impermissibility of relying on contested prayer niches and the related obligation to re-assess their accuracy, Sayyid 'Uthmān goes to the heart of the matter. Accordingly, the next chapter, which is again supported by references to Shāfi'ī authorities, revolves around three points: (1) the obligation to study the proofs for establishing the direction of prayer (*adillat al-qibla*), (2) the prohibition of *taqlīd al-miḥrāb* that results from such study, and (3) the fact that calculations using geometrical instruments, based on longitudes and latitudes, represent the strongest proof.⁴⁷ This chapter is an expanded version of issues 4–5 in *Nafā'is al-niḥla*.⁴⁸ The next chapter introduces a new element: namely, a sophisticated discussion of seemingly diverging opinions within the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* on the obligatory nature of either the *istiqbāl al-jiha* or the *istiqbāl al-'ayn*, a discussion that would have been out of place in the earlier work. Sayyid 'Uthmān begins with a quotation from the fatwa collection of his teacher, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, to the effect that apparent contradictions and divergences on a given question are often the result of an imprecise use of terminology. Therefore, these seemingly divergent positions should be reconciled. Accordingly, Sayyid 'Uthmān argues that the terms *jihāt al-qibla* and *'ayn al-qibla* are used in two different senses, and that the apparent differences are

46 Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 8. The content of the table is explained in simplified terms in Malay on the margin. For example, instead of distinguishing between resident and sojourning Muslims, it refers to “many people coming to pray” (*banyak orang bersembahyang*).

47 Ibid., 9–10.

48 Id., *Nafā'is al-niḥla*, 3–4.

ostensible, not real, or merely of a terminological nature (*lafẓī*). After citing several scholars, he concludes that *al-ʿayn* represents the true intended meaning in the debate.⁴⁹

Building upon chapter nine of *Nafāʾis al-nihla*, Sayyid ʿUthmān discusses in detail the agreement of the “imams” (i.e. the major Shāfiʿī jurists) on the obligation of facing the precise direction of prayer (*istiqbāl ʿayn al-qibla*).⁵⁰ The following three chapters are devoted to the practical and technical issues of *qibla* calculations, as laid out in *Nafāʾis al-nikhla*. Reiterating that longitudes and latitudes (i.e., the coordinates) of places are regarded as the strongest proof in establishing the correct direction of prayer, he explains the meaning of the respective terms (chapter 10), connecting his theoretical explanations to locations in the Malay-Indonesian world and to a map of the Indian Ocean world inserted two pages later. He notes that some of the regions on the map are located south, and others north, of the equator. In addition, he provides information on the spectrum of latitudes of the Malay-Indonesian world in relation to the latitude of Mecca.⁵¹

Chapter eleven consists mainly of a chart and an accompanying map (see fig. 1). The diagram lists twenty-seven locations in the Malay-Indonesian world (*tanah bawa angin* or “lands below the winds” in the Malay version), for most of which data was also provided in *Nafāʾis al-nihla*.⁵² The new chart, however, gives the coordinates of the selected locations in the form of arithmetical *abjad* values,⁵³ specifying the azimuth (*samt*) of the *qibla* in each case. Based on the latter, Sayyid ʿUthmān emphasizes, as in the introduction to the treatise, that the direction of prayer is oriented in all listed locations by way of approximation towards *maghrib al-simāk* or west-northwest. Accordingly, the accompanying map shows a straight line, running from a compass rose indicating the *maghrib al-simāk*, across the Malay-Indonesian world and the Indian Ocean, towards a miniature of the Kaʿba on the Arabian Peninsula.⁵⁴

49 Id., *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 10–12.

50 Ibid., 12–13. See *Nafāʾis al-nihla*, 4. In contrast to the brief treatment in *Nafāʾis al-nihla*, Sayyid ʿUthmān provides numerous quotations from earlier scholars to support his claim here.

51 Id., *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 13–14.

52 Data for Melaka, Sambas, Bali, Sumbawa, Bima, Manado, Buton, Dili (Timor-Leste), and another location on Timor are provided only in *Nafāʾis al-nikhla*. Conversely, Banten, Madura and, significantly, Yogyakarta, one of the key locations in the epistle, are dealt with only in *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*.

53 *Abjad* refers to the numerical values of Arabic letters, which differ in their arithmetical and onomatic usage. Their arithmetical values are used in astronomical and astrological texts, while their onomatic values are primarily used in divination. See Ian Proudfoot, *Old Muslim Calendars of Southeast Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 93–94.

54 Al-ʿAlawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 14–15.

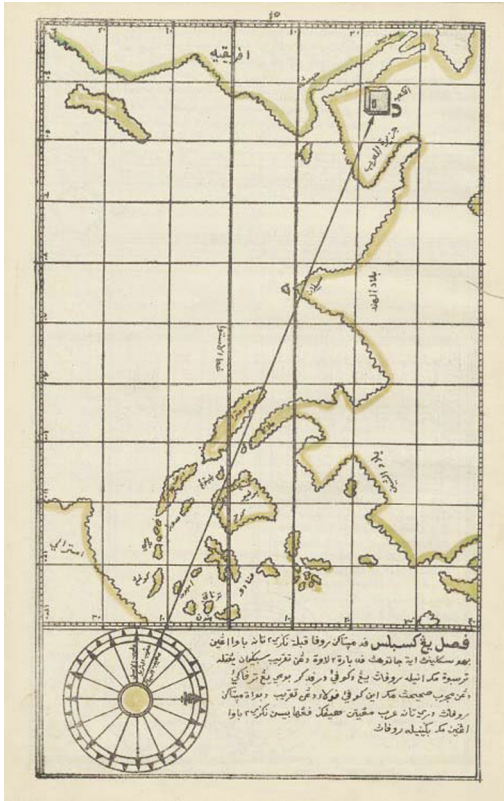


FIGURE 1 Map indicating the *maghīb al-simāk*. Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 15. (Courtesy of Leiden University Library)

In chapter twelve, Sayyid 'Uthmān introduces another method of calculating the *qibla* of locations in the region. Long established by Muslim astronomers, this method is based on the correspondence between the direction of Mecca and the azimuth of the sun when it is above the Ka'ba at noon (*ma'a muhādhāt al-shams fawq al-ka'ba*).⁵⁵ As he notes, this occurs on only two days of the year: on the sixth day of Gemini (*burj al-jawzā'*), and on the twenty-fourth day of Cancer (*burj al-saraṭān*), corresponding to 30 May and 18 July respectively. To make his explanations more accessible, he again provides a diagram. It depicts the sun standing above the Ka'ba and a compass rose that specifies the location of the Malay-Indonesian world in relation to it and indicates the common direction of prayer in the region as *maghīb al-simāk*|*barat-barat laut* (west-northwest). In addition, the diagram shows the dates of the zodiac signs

55 On this method of *qibla* calculation, see King and Lorch, "Qibla Charts," 204.

according to the solar year. This method of calculation requires establishing when the sun is above the Ka'ba according to local time in Southeast Asia, for which purpose differences in longitude must be converted at a specific rate per degree. Therefore, Sayyid 'Uthmān concludes this section with a table of the hours and minutes for the same twenty-seven locations in the Malay-Indonesian world.⁵⁶

After these technical chapters, Sayyid 'Uthmān uses chapter thirteen to reiterate his claim that *madhhab* authorities agree that facing the direct *qibla* is an obligation, that merely establishing the general direction (*jiha*) is not permitted, and that it is obligatory to study the proofs of the '*ayn al-qibla*. To highlight the deficiencies of the *jiha* approach, he includes a bilingual 32-point compass rose that specifies the subdivisions of the four cardinal directions. In addition, he cites statements made by earlier scholars to support his position and to show that accepting a *qibla* based solely on the general direction is acceptable only for those who lack knowledge of the proofs of the precise *qibla*, while those who possess such knowledge are required to perform their own assessment.⁵⁷

Towards the end of the chapter, Sayyid 'Uthmān links his discussion to the questions from Yogyakarta and Banjarmasin that had prompted him to write his epistle in the first place. He states unequivocally that “the person [in the mosque concerned] in the city of Yogyakarta who prays in the direction of the *maghīb al-aṣl* [i.e. the west] is facing towards Central Africa, not the Arabian Peninsula, let alone Mecca.” And a worshipper who faces in the direction of the *maghīb al-thurayyā* (i.e. west by north) in Banjarmasin is praying towards Ethiopia (*arḍ al-ḥabasha*). He emphasizes that such practices clearly contradict the unanimous view of the trustworthy imams on the obligatory nature of facing the precise *qibla*, as stated in the texts presented in the epistle's ninth chapter. In the same manner, he revisits other main points by referring to their exposition in preceding chapters and charts, including the obligation to rely upon the strongest indicators for the *qibla* (i.e. calculation based on longitudes and latitudes) and to gain knowledge about them, and the identification of *maghīb al-simāk* (i.e. west-northwest) as the correct direction of prayer in the region.⁵⁸ The chapter includes a map of the Indian Ocean region and a bilingual compass rose that shows the arrows of the *maghīb al-simāk* pointing from the Malay-Indonesian world towards Mecca, and those of the *maghīb al-thurayyā* and the *maghīb al-aṣl* towards Ethiopia (or what would be

56 Al-'Alawī, *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 16–17.

57 Ibid., 17–19.

58 Ibid., 19.

present-day Djibouti and Eritrea), and towards Africa (Ifriqiya, i.e. present-day southern Somalia).⁵⁹

The last chapter establishes the legal assessment on praying when not facing the *qibla* directly, and on worshippers who follow others in this practice (*man yaqtadī bihi*).⁶⁰ According to Sayyid 'Uthmān, one should distinguish between those capable and those incapable of knowing the precise direction of prayer through its strongest indicators. If the former fail to act upon the indicators, and instead – by either engaging in *taqlīd al-mihrāb* or not – follow a *mihrāb* that people with the necessary knowledge have found to be erroneous, their prayers are invalid because they fail to comply with one of the conditions of prayer (*sharṭ al-ṣalāt*). According to Sayyid 'Uthmān, the latter are believers who lack the prerequisite knowledge or capabilities, and who, despite having access to knowledgeable people to point out the precise *qibla* based on one of the proofs described earlier, continue to pray in an erroneous direction by either rejecting the true *taqlīd al-mihrāb* or by adhering to the original *mihrāb*. Their prayer is equally invalid, because the fourth level (*martaba*) of establishing the *qibla*, i.e. following a *mujtahid*, applies to them.⁶¹ As Sayyid 'Uthmān emphasizes, the critical point regarding the common (non-specialist) believer is whether he knows that the *mihrāb* is incorrect and that the imam's prayer is actually invalid. If not, then, according to the prevailing view of the '*ulamā*', his prayers are valid, and he does not need to make up for them.⁶²

In the conclusion to his epistle, Sayyid 'Uthmān reiterates that the orientation of prayer niches in Yogyakarta and Banjarmasin – towards the setting point of Aquila (*maghīb al-aṣl*) and that of Pleiades (*maghīb al-thurayyā*), respectively – are erroneous. On the question of following those who hold facing the general direction (*istiqbāl al-jīha*) to be valid or who have issued fatwas and assessments to this effect, Sayyid 'Uthmān emphasizes that the authorities of the school were unanimous “in their rejection of this view, for two reasons: first, because it represents a non-preponderant (*marjūh*) position ... and, second, because it is not permitted to issue legal opinions and rulings based on what is not preponderant within the school (*bi-ghayri l-rājiḥ fi l-madhab*). Any such opinion or ruling is at variance with what has been revealed by Allah.”⁶³

59 Ibid., 20.

60 Ibid., 21. The Malay version specifies that this expression means to follow an imam (*orang yang bermamum padanya*).

61 Ibid. Sayyid 'Uthmān is cross-referencing his statements with the technical discussions in chapters twelve and thirteen, as well as with the exposition of the *marātib al-qibla* in chapter five.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 22.

He is referring here to *tarjih* or the weighing of differing opinions, according to which opting for a preferred or preponderant opinion (*rājih*) leads to setting aside competing – and potentially valid – opinions.⁶⁴ In this respect, the Sunni *madhhabs* developed the prevailing view that it is not permitted to issue fatwas that conflict with the preponderant views of the *madhhab* established through processes of selection and authentication such as *tarjih*, *taṣḥīḥ* (favoring one opinion over another), and *tashhīr* (declaring that a view has become commonly accepted).⁶⁵ By “requiring continuity in legal application, and by creating a legal presumption in favor of precedents,” *tarjih* has been identified as a key aspect of *taqlīd*.⁶⁶ In the face of the well-documented difference of opinion within the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab* on the matter, Sayyid ‘Uthmān was careful to refrain from attributing the label *mashhūr* (commonly accepted) to his view. At the same time, he insisted that the purportedly prevailing (*rājih*) opinion to which he was subscribing was both binding and (arguably) divinely sanctioned.

Following this general rejection of merely facing the general direction,⁶⁷ Sayyid ‘Uthmān refutes some of the statements and views attributed to local religious authorities in Yogyakarta and Banjarmasin. Regarding their claims that their approach prevails over that of *istiqbāl al-‘ayn*, and that even persons knowledgeable of the proofs of the precise *qibla* are not obligated to act according to it but may continue to pray in the general direction of Mecca, he declares them invalid (*fāsida*) and distortions of statements by the imams of the divine law (*a‘immat al-shar‘*). Similarly, he criticizes what he takes to be their ill-intentioned attempts to adulterate and falsify the words of earlier scholars.⁶⁸

64 Wael B. Hallaq, “From *Fatwās* to *Furū‘*: Growth and Change in Islamic Substantive Law,” *Islamic Law and Society* 1:1 (1994), 52.

65 *Ibid.*, 58.

66 Khaled Abou El Fadl, “What type of law is Islamic law?” in *id.*, Ahmad Atif Ahmad and Said Fares Hassan (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law* (London: Routledge, 2019), 25.

67 A growing emphasis on *istiqbāl al-‘ayn* and the necessity to reassess *qiblas* in Southeast Asia is also perceptible in the works of al-Nawawī al-Bantani. In his commentary on *Safinat al-ṣalāt*, a prayer manual written by Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s teacher, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, he inserts the word *‘ayn* into the author’s formulation *istiqbāl al-qibla*. Although writing in Mecca, he instructs his coreligionists in his native Banten (Java) on how to turn towards the exact *qibla*, and not just towards the west, based on the coordinates of Mecca and Banten. Muḥammad Nawawī, *Sullam al-munājāt ‘alā Safinat al-ṣalāt* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādūhu, 1343/1924), 13.

68 Al-‘Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 22. In the introduction, Sayyid ‘Uthmān identifies al-Kurdī as the chief victim of such schemes. Here, however, he simply refers to “one of the famous scholars”. By contrast, the Malay translation again makes clear that it is about “people who dare to disprove shaykh Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Kurdī.”

As for the mufti of Banjarmasin who reportedly compared himself to the imams who were capable of independent legal interpretation (*al-a'imma al-mujtahidīn*), Sayyid 'Uthmān notes that, since this claim would be akin to blacksmiths comparing themselves to the angels who surround the divine throne (*al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūn*),⁶⁹ the mufti should be reprimanded and restrained. Finally, Sayyid 'Uthmān chastises his unnamed interlocutors for refusing to accept the truth, and for failing to return to that truth, referring again to his discussions in preceding chapters.⁷⁰

The Addressees of *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*

As a combined response to two specific questions and an expanded and updated version of an earlier epistle, published together with a Malay translation in *mukhtaṣar* form, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* was directed at different audiences, including the questioners, local scholars proficient in Arabic, and less sophisticated scholars or educated believers fluent only in Malay. The audience undoubtedly included the contending religious authorities in Yogyakarta and Banjarmasin, and the Dutch colonial authorities, primarily represented by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje. As for the unnamed religious scholars who refused to change the *qibla* in their mosques, numerous indicators in Sayyid 'Uthmān's treatise and in other sources suggest that they most probably were the chief religious officials of the respective mosques and regions.

Thus, we can safely identify the scholar criticized in the question from Yogyakarta as Haji Muhammad Cholil Kamaludiningrat (d. 1914), the *penghulu* (chief religious official) of the sultanate of Yogyakarta and head of the sultan's mosque (Masjid Gedhe or Masjid Agung). In the late 1890s, Kamaludiningrat had been involved in a conflict over the direction of prayer in the Masjid Gedhe that arose when the aspiring scholar Aḥmad Daḥlān (d. 1923) pointed out the erroneous orientation of the mosque's *qibla*. The resulting tensions led Sultan Hamengkubuwana VII (r. 1877–1921) to send Daḥlān on a second study trip to Mecca in 1903,⁷¹ the year after the publication of Sayyid 'Uthmān's epistle. In 1912, Daḥlān founded the Muhammadiyah, which promoted Cairo-influenced

69 On the interpretation of *al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūn* in the Sunni tradition, see, for instance, Abū l-Qāsim Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Shāhīn, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1437/2015), 1:582–584.

70 Al-'Alawī, *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 22.

71 M.C. Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and other visions* (c. 1830–1930) (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 222–223.

Islamic reformism in Java and provided it with an institutional framework.⁷² Thus, it is not unlikely that Daḥlān or a member of his circle provided Sayyid 'Uthmān with the question and its lament about local religious authorities. Ironically, the Batavian mufti was in full agreement with the nascent reformist circle in Yogyakarta on the question of the direction of prayer in the Masjid Agung. Even though Sayyid 'Uthmān initially may not have reacted entirely negatively to the new religious impulses disseminated in Rashid Riḍā's (d. 1354/1935) *al-Manār* and its Southeast Asian counterpart *al-Imām* (Singapore), beginning in 1905 he became – as Kaptein has shown – a bitter opponent of Riḍā and his followers in Southeast Asia.⁷³ One of the key points of dispute was Riḍā's rejection of *taqlīd*, the legal device championed in *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*. Whereas the conflicts over the *qibla* of the sultan's mosque in Yogyakarta are well-known and have become an integral part of public memory, as evidenced in the 2010 Indonesian biopic on Aḥmad Daḥlān, *Sang Pencerah* (The Enlightener), Sayyid 'Uthmān's role in this landmark event in the genesis of Islamic reformism in Java has been overlooked.

By contrast, local debates over the direction of prayer in the main mosque of Banjarmasin have left no trace in the collective memory. Rather, this case highlights the involvement of Dutch authorities in these events, especially that of Snouck Hurgronje in his capacity as Director of the Office of Native Affairs. Moreover, Dutch records make it clear that the scholar criticized in the question from Banjarmasin was none other than the mufti, i.e. the local counterpart to Yogyakarta's *penghulu*.⁷⁴ As I will now show, the identity of this religious official, whose name is not mentioned in Sayyid 'Uthmān's epistle or in Snouck Hurgronje's official correspondence, makes the case even more remarkable.

As noted by Kaptein, Snouck Hurgronje concurred with the Batavian scholar's opinion in *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla* regarding the local mufti's refusal to change the *qibla*.⁷⁵ In December 1902, the month in which the treatise was published, Snouck Hurgronje wrote to the Resident of South and East Borneo to say that he had been informed by “the Honorary Advisor [for Arab Affairs] Sayyid 'Uthmān that for some time now several persons from Banjarmasin had submitted, verbally as well as in writing, ... numerous complaints about the way

72 Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, c. 1910s-2010*, 2nd enlarged edition (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012).

73 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 161–189.

74 On the roles of the *penghulu* in Java and the mufti in Banjarmasin, see Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje, 1889–1936*, ed. E. Gobée and C. Adriaanse, 2 vols. ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1957–1965), 2:939–943.

75 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 224–225.

the mufti of Banjarmasin was exercising his function.”⁷⁶ In addition, this correspondence mentions the purported recourse of the religious official to a prophetic tradition which states that a *mujtahid* receives divine reward even for an erroneous *ijtihād*. Although it is here associated with the mufti’s response to a dispute over his determination of the beginning of the Ramadan fast,⁷⁷ this is the same tradition criticized by Sayyid ‘Uthmān in *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*.⁷⁸ Unsurprisingly, Snouck Hurgronje also referred to the mufti’s rejection of the proposed changes in the direction of prayer in the city’s mosque. Finally, based on “the information on the validity of the submitted complaints obtained from Sayyid ‘Uthmān,” he urged the Resident to look into the matter.⁷⁹

Subsequent correspondence attests to Snouck Hurgronje’s involvement in the affair and to his engagement with Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s treatise, and sheds new light on the positions of the Banjarmasin mufti. First, the mufti must have responded to official enquiries regarding his refusal to change the *qibla* of the local mosque. Referring to a written statement by the mufti, Snouck Hurgronje wrote to the Resident of South and East Borneo in April 1903 to say that the mufti’s arguments for retaining the mosque’s *qibla* were “all far-fetched and invalid”, and that the mufti’s recourse to the maxim “any divergence from *adat* [custom] is regarded as hostility” does not apply to cases in which custom conflicts with Islamic law. Snouck Hurgronje also took exception to the mufti’s citation of specific texts to support his argument that, according to authoritative legal scholars, the *mihārābs* upon which Muslim residents and sojourners had long relied were considered certain and could not be questioned by individual persons. This suggests that, like Sayyid ‘Uthmān in his epistle,⁸⁰ the mufti used al-Kurdī’s “categorization of prayer niches” (*aqsām al-mahārīb*) for his own purposes. What is more, Snouck Hurgronje says that the mufti described the *qibla* of the mosque in Banjarmasin as “particularly unimpeachable” on the grounds that the region’s greatest religious authority, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī, had assessed it roughly 125 years ago and it had been accepted unanimously ever since.⁸¹

Based on his own reading of the cited texts, Snouck Hurgronje, like Sayyid ‘Uthmān, concluded that cases such as that in Banjarmasin, where knowledgeable people had questioned the accuracy of a specific *mihārāb*, do not fall under the category of prohibiting common believers from arbitrarily re-assessing

76 Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 2:987.

77 Ibid.

78 See above.

79 Ibid., 2:987–988.

80 See above.

81 Ibid., 1:841.

an undisputed *qibla*. He was convinced that the very authorities to whom the mufti referred contradicted the latter's opinions on the *qibla*. In addition, Snouck Hurgronje dismissed the Banjarmasin scholar's argument that – as a mufti – only his own views were binding, which he had sought to substantiate with texts defining the scope of a *qāḍī's* competence.⁸² He therefore advised the Resident to give the mufti a serious reprimand, and to instruct him to work together with competent local scholars to re-assess the direction of prayer.⁸³

What is most striking about Snouck Hurgronje's advice to the Resident, however, are his comments on the role of Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī, who, he notes, had “incidentally devoted an Arabic treatise to the *qibla* in 1772, in response to the erroneous orientation of all of Batavia's mosques at that time.” This information was undoubtedly derived from Sayyid 'Uthmān, who apparently provided the Dutch scholar with a copy of this text.⁸⁴ Indeed, Snouck Hurgronje asserts that the latter composed his *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* in response to questions from Banjarmasin, and that he subsequently published a selection of the most pertinent passages from al-Banjārī's aforementioned treatise, together with their translation into Malay. On this basis, Snouck Hurgronje reasoned that it would have been “a very strange oversight” if al-Banjārī had actually been responsible for establishing the wrong *qibla* in Banjarmasin.⁸⁵

Sayyid 'Uthmān's use of a manuscript of al-Banjārī's treatise in his possession as the basis for his own partial bilingual edition⁸⁶ is interesting for several

82 Here Snouck Hurgronje most likely refers to the mufti's claim that he is a *ḥākim mujtahid*, a scholar whose opinions must be emulated, as discussed in the introduction to Sayyid 'Uthmān's epistle (see above).

83 Ibid., 1:842–843.

84 Leiden University's Snouck Hurgronje Papers special collection contains a manuscript of the treatise, copied in December 1902, the month in which *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* was published. Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī, *Mas'alat al-qibla fi l-batāwiya*, manuscript, Snouck Hurgronje Papers, Leiden University Library, Cod. Or. 7091. This is the only copy of the text known to me and I am indebted to Nico Kaptein for bringing it to my attention.

85 Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 1:842. The mosque in question was likely the Masjid Sultan Suriansyah, built under Banjar's first Muslim ruler, Sultan Suriansyah (r. 1526–1550). Thus, al-Banjārī could not have been responsible for the orientation of the mosque's *qibla*. Arguably, the mufti meant that al-Banjārī had confirmed the prevailing direction of prayer. We cannot exclude the possibility that al-Banjārī was more reluctant to point out a wrong *qibla* in his native land than he had been in Batavia before his return. On the mosque, see Abdul Baqir Zein, *Masjid-masjid bersejarah di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1999), 328–330; on other early South Kalimantan mosques, see Abdul Halim Nasir, *Mosque Architecture in the Malay World* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2004), 50.

86 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 226. I am indebted to Nico Kaptein for providing me with a copy of the text. I disagree, however, with his contention that its title

reasons. First, it shows that even though *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* refers only to authorities from the Middle East, and its author presents himself primarily as an heir to an Arab intellectual tradition, Sayyid 'Uthmān found it prudent to support his case by referring to an earlier eminent Malay scholar, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī.⁸⁷ Second, it shows that Sayyid 'Uthmān actually stood at the convergence of Middle Eastern and Malay intellectual traditions. Thus, it should come as no surprise that he had access to a rare and largely unknown treatise by al-Banjārī.⁸⁸ Indeed, it may be assumed that the text was preserved by Sayyid 'Uthmān's grandfather, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī of Batavia, who was a close companion of al-Banjārī and who may have drawn on it when rectifying the *qibla* of the sultan's mosque in Palembang.⁸⁹ Thus, it is likely that Sayyid 'Uthmān's approach to the question was informed by this text passed down within his family, perhaps in conjunction with specific anecdotes from the life of his grandfather.⁹⁰

Be that as it may, Sayyid 'Uthmān's publication of selections from al-Banjārī's treatise in a bilingual edition was intended to show that the views expressed in *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* were in agreement with those of al-Banjārī. Sayyid 'Uthmān completed his edition in February 1903,⁹¹ just two months after the publication of *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*. After a brief note on the background of al-Banjārī's treatise (i.e. his correction of the *qiblas* in Batavian mosques in 1772) and a reproduction of the author's introduction (in Arabic), Sayyid 'Uthmān provides Malay paraphrases of specific sections of the text, immediately followed by the Arabic original. Whereas al-Banjārī's treatise is longer

is *Maghīb al-aṣl*. I take the phrase *huwa al-musammā bi-maghīb al-aṣl* not as indicating the text's title but rather as an explanation of the preceding expression '*alā khaṭṭ al-mashriq wa-l-maghrib*'. Sayyid 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī, *al-Maqūlāt min risālat al-Shaykh al-'Allāma al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī* (Batavia: n.p., n.d.), 1.

87 Another case in which Sayyid 'Uthmān relied on al-Banjārī is documented in Azyumardi Azra, "A Hadrami Religious Scholar in Indonesia: Sayyid 'Uthmān," in Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 257.

88 Studies and hagiographies of al-Banjārī commonly omit the treatise. See, for instance, Karel Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia Abad ke-19* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984), 91–100; Abdullah, *Syeikh Muhammad Arsyad*, 57–77; Hj. Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah and Abdul Rahman Hj. Abdullah, "Pengaruh Besar Syeikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari," in Abdul Rahman Hj. Abdullah (ed.), *Biografi Agung Syeikh Arsyad Al-Banjari* (Shah Alam: Grup Buku Karangraf, 2016), 183–186.

89 See above and below.

90 Sayyid 'Uthmān's biography, written by his son, Sayyid 'Abd Allāh, mentions that al-Miṣrī taught him *inter alia* astronomy. See Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 58.

91 Al-'Alawī, *al-Maqūlāt*, 6.

than *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* and includes aspects of the *qibla* debate not covered in the latter,⁹² Sayyid 'Uthmān selected those sections most directly linked to his epistle. Indeed, each individual section of Arabic text is accompanied by a marginal note indicating its correspondence with a specific page in *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* (i.e. *muwafaqat pada Tahrīr*, followed by a page number).⁹³

Sayyid 'Uthmān's desire to support the arguments of *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla* with reference to al-Banjārī was most probably influenced by three considerations: (1) the acceptance of al-Banjārī's *qibla* corrections in Batavia, (2) the mufti of Banjarmasin's recourse to al-Banjārī to defend his own position and, perhaps, (3) the mufti's personal background. Indeed, whereas neither Snouck Hurgronje nor Sayyid 'Uthmān mention the mufti by name in the sources available, the incumbent during the period, Hj. Jamāl al-Dīn b. Hj. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Banjārī, was a great-grandson of Muḥammad Arshad.⁹⁴ Appointed mufti in 1896, Hj. Jamāl al-Dīn apparently remained in office until his death in 1929,⁹⁵ which suggests that he withstood Sayyid 'Uthmān's and Snouck Hurgronje's attacks during the *qibla* affair.⁹⁶

Hj. Jamāl al-Dīn is remembered in Banjarmasin *inter alia* for his expertise in astronomy, his role in establishing the beginning of the Ramadan fast (which was criticized by Snouck Hurgronje), and for the honors that were reportedly bestowed upon him by the Dutch. Known as Surgi Mufti ("the pure mufti"), a moniker that he purportedly received from the Dutch, he is revered as a local saint whose death anniversary draws thousands of visitors.⁹⁷ It is unclear

92 See, for instance, al-Banjārī, *Mas'alat al-qibla*, fols. 2a-19a. A more detailed account of the text is beyond the scope of this article and will be provided in a future study on al-Banjārī by the present author.

93 Al-'Alawī, *al-Maqūlāt*.

94 For his genealogy, see Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣiddīq b. Muḥammad 'Afif al-Banjārī, *Risāla shajarat al-arshadiyya wa mā al-ḥaqq bi-hā* (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1442/2020), 68, 84.

95 Devi Noviyanti, "Strategi Promoti Wisata Religi Makam Syekh Surgi Mufti," *Jurnal Alhadharah* 17, no. 34 (2018), 106; Wajidi, "Kampung Tua Sungai Jingah-Surgi Mufti," *Bubuhan Banjar*, 10 March 2013, <https://bubuhanbanjar.wordpress.com/2013/03/10/kampung-tua-sungai-jingah-surgi-mufti/> (accessed 25 April 2021).

96 Already in 1899 and 1901, respectively, Snouck Hurgronje had criticized the mufti for certain decisions, arguments and accompanying translations from Arabic. Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 2:950–951, 973.

97 Amran, "Syekh Surgi Mufti Kuasai Ilmu Falqiyah," *Klikkassel*, 5 July 2019, <https://klikkassel.com/syekh-surgi-mufti-kuasai-ilmu-falqiyah/>; Rizqon, "Ribuan Jemaah Peringati Haul Syekh Surgi Mufti, Sosok Ulama Banjar Yang Disegani Kolonial Belanda," *Klikkassel*, 28 August, <https://klikkassel.com/ribuan-jemaah-peringati-haul-syekh-surgi-mufti-sosok-ulama-banjar-yang-disegani-kolonial-belanda/>; Ali Abdurahman Al Habsyi, "Tuan

whether the reports about his good relationship with the Dutch are hagiographical or reflect his long-term role as state mufti after Snouck Hurgronje's departure from the Dutch East Indies. The fact that he is highly regarded today suggests, however, that Surgi Mufti did not back down from his refusal to accept a new direction of prayer in Banjarmasin's main mosque. It is clear, that his local stature was not reduced by the episode.

To the contrary, H_j. Jamāl al-Dīn is remembered as the heir of Muḥammad Arshad's legendary expertise in astronomy. As with Sayyid 'Uthmān, Muḥammad Arshad's contributions were passed on within the family. H_j. Jamāl al-Dīn's grandfather, Pangeran (prince) Aḥmad, a son of Muḥammad Arshad and the granddaughter of Sultan Tahmīd Allāh II (r. 1761–1801), was regarded as his father's chief student in astronomy and geography.⁹⁸ He is credited with writing an Arabic work on astronomy at his father's instruction.⁹⁹ Thus, Sayyid 'Uthmān and his opponent, H_j. Jamāl al-Dīn, argued for their diametrically opposed positions by drawing on similar Arab and Malay sources. In addition, H_j. Jamāl al-Dīn and Sayyid 'Uthmān shared the transmission network from al-Kurdī to al-Banjārī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī. However influential they may have been elsewhere, Sayyid 'Uthmān and Snouck Hurgronje apparently could not match H_j. Jamāl al-Dīn's clout in Banjarmasin, built upon a combination of family prestige and the power of office. Indeed, the family of Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī successfully monopolized the position of mufti in Banjarmasin from the beginning of his tenure in the late 18th century until H_j. Jamāl al-Dīn's death in 1929.¹⁰⁰

What is more, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī's correction of the *qibla* in the sultan's mosque (Masjid Agung) of Palembang would soon be called into question. This challenge triggered a conflict that was brought to the attention of the Dutch Governor-General. In June 1903, several months after Snouck Hurgronje's advice to the Resident regarding the mufti of Banjarmasin, he wrote to Willem Rooseboom (in office 1899–1904), alerting him to the fact that "most old Muhammadan prayer-houses in this archipelago" have an incorrect direction of prayer, and that this problem had been alleviated by laying out ribbons on the mosque floor to orient the worshippers in the proper manner. According to the Advisor on Native Affairs, this practice had been observed

Guru Syekh Jamaluddin Surgi Mufti Al-Banjari: Mufti Banjarmasin," *Facebook* post, 6 December 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/ceritaparawali/posts/tuan-guru-syekh-jamaluddin-surgi-mufti-al-banjari-mufti-banjarmasin-dihormati-pe/885347258246545/> (all accessed 25 April 2021).

98 Al-Banjārī, *Risāla shajarat al-arshadiyya*, 65.

99 Abdullah and Abdul Rahman, "Pengaruh Besar," 186.

100 Abdullah, *Syeikh Muhammad Arsyad*, 33–34.

at Palembang's Masjid Agung since 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī's correction of the *qibla* roughly ninety-five years earlier. According to Snouck Hurgronje, "trustworthy persons" had assured him of the validity of al-Miṣrī's calculation. Nevertheless, the current imam of the Masjid Agung, a certain Ki Agus Hj. Azharī, reverted to the old *qibla*. To support his position, he presented a petition accompanied by an old refutation of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī. This refutation had been composed during the early phases of the original debate by opponents of al-Miṣrī from influential court circles. Snouck Hurgronje disparaged this text as having been written "in bad Arabic and teeming with incorrect quotations."¹⁰¹ He added that Azharī made his case for changing the *qibla* by, amongst other things, "invoking the writings of Sayyid 'Uthmān [most likely, *Nafā'is al-nikhla* and *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*], which actually imply the opposite."¹⁰² As an explanation for the imam's idiosyncratic behavior, the Dutchman pointed to a possible intrigue against the Dutch-appointed *penghulu* of Palembang, and thus an attempt to deceive the administration.¹⁰³ It is clear that the rival scholars were using Sayyid 'Uthmān's *risālas* on the subject, as well as his grandfather's legacy, at cross purposes.

Sayyid 'Uthmān's Liminal Scholarly Heritage

These episodes immediately before and after the publication of Sayyid 'Uthmān's epistle, and the ways in which both Jamāl al-Dīn al-Banjārī, Hj. Azharī and Sayyid 'Uthmān himself drew upon the local pre-history of the debate and the work of its main actors, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī, reflect the liminal nature of Sayyid 'Uthmān's scholarship and authority. What is meant by liminality is that, notwithstanding his self-representation as primarily a product of an Arab, particularly Hadrami, scholarly legacy, Sayyid 'Uthmān's views and approaches were deeply impacted by Southeast Asian dynamics, including local scholarly heritage, as well.

101 Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 1:843–844 (quotations from p. 844).

102 Ibid., 1:844–845.

103 Ibid., 1:844. It is noteworthy that Palembang had already witnessed a major intra-community dispute over the question of the building of a second Friday mosque in the 1890s, which also prominently involved Sayyid 'Uthmān, working in conjunction with Snouck Hurgronje. See Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 127–133; Laffan, *Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 163–164. As it has been noted that this conflict flared up again in 1906 (ibid., 164), the 1903 *qibla* controversy was certainly directly related to these earlier and later struggles over local religious authority and leadership and its validation by the Dutch colonial administration.

Situated at the intersection of two interrelated – yet still distinct – scholarly traditions, his indebtedness to and engagement with earlier Malay scholarship was greater than it may seem on the surface, as will be shown in the following. Indeed, even though neither of his two epistles on calculating the *qibla* mentions either earlier conflicts or any local Malay authorities, he was located at the confluence of Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian scholarship and debates. This liminality is visible not only in his choice of a bilingual edition for his second *risāla*, but also, and even more so, in his bilingual publication of selections from Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī's treatise on the *qibla*, which was clearly designed to demonstrate their agreement on key points. Indeed, al-Banjārī and, to a lesser extent, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī, had introduced into Southeast Asian Islamic discourse most of the state-of-the-art Arabic knowledge on the legal views and technical aspects of *qibla* calculation later digested in *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*.

Al-Miṣrī's scholarly prestige is evidenced in Raja Ali Hj. b. Raja Hj. Ahmad's (d. 1289–90/1873) *Tuḥfat al-naḥīs*, the most important Malay work on the history of the Western Malay-Indonesian world. The text relates that the author's father had travelled from his base in the Riau Islands (south of Singapore) to Batavia to study astronomy with al-Miṣrī.¹⁰⁴ But al-Miṣrī's role in transmitting knowledge about the *qibla* cannot be compared to that of al-Banjārī, who was the chief transmitter of the teachings and writings of al-Kurdī, an important source for *Tahrīr aqwā al-adilla*.

Biographical accounts of al-Banjārī emphasize his role as the foremost Southeast Asian student of al-Kurdī in Medina. He addressed a number of legal questions to his teacher. These were related to the fiscal policies of the Sultan of Banjarmasin (although framed as those of “one of the Malay sultans”), including one on the validity of the practice of fining believers for neglecting the Friday prayer.¹⁰⁵ The five resulting fatwas have been preserved locally in manuscript form.¹⁰⁶ In addition, al-Kurdī's published fatwa collection, sometimes referred to as *Fatāwā al-madaniyya*, includes three legal opinions on the *qibla* that reflect many of the key positions later propounded by al-Banjārī

104 Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift*, trans. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia Berhad, 2012), 360. See Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 58.

105 Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī, *Fatāwā Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Kurdī al-Madani*, manuscript, State Islamic University Antasari Banjarmasin, SK 2x4 Sul f, fol. 1b-3b; Al-Banjārī, *Risāla shajarat al-arshadiyya*, 7; Abu Daudi (H.M. Irsyad Zein), “Riwayat Hidup Syekh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari,” in Abdul Rahman Hj. Abdullah (ed.), *Biografi Agung Syekh Arsyad Al-Banjari* (Shah Alam: Grup Buku Karangkrak, 2016), 149.

106 al-Banjārī, *Fatāwā*. I am indebted to Laila Rahmawati (Banjarmasin) for providing me with a digital copy of the manuscript.

and Sayyid 'Uthmān.¹⁰⁷ For example, it discusses longitudes and latitudes in *qibla* calculations, the rejection of *istiqbāl al-jīha*, the categorization of prayer-niches (*aqsām al-maḥārīb*), and the obligation of knowledgeable scholars to re-assess disputed or inaccurate *qiblas*.¹⁰⁸

It should come as no surprise that the *qibla* issue plays a prominent role in al-Banjārī's *Sabīl al-muhtadīn* (completed in 1195/1781), which he introduced as a reworking and exposition of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī's (d. 1068/1658) *Ṣirāṭ al-mustaḡīm*, the first major Malay work on *fiqh*.¹⁰⁹ A comparison of the chapters on the *qibla* in the two works shows that *Sabīl al-muhtadīn* was a watershed in the debate in Muslim Southeast Asia. Indeed, al-Rānīrī's earlier text lacks crucial aspects of the later discussions on the issue.¹¹⁰ First, he omits the *'ayn/jīha* distinction. Second, he does not mention *qibla* calculations based on longitudes and latitudes, but rather identifies the polar star as the strongest indicator.¹¹¹ Calculations based on the polar star, however, are only feasible in the Northern Hemisphere. Thus, al-Rānīrī does not mention Java, Banjarmasin or Palembang, but discusses calculations only for Aceh and "most Malay states" (i.e. on the Malay peninsula, northern Borneo, and northern Sumatra).¹¹²

By contrast, al-Banjārī declares that facing *'ayn al-qibla* is one of the conditions of valid prayer, and that orientating oneself towards the general *jīha* is insufficient.¹¹³ As a basis for this assertion, he cites Q 2:144, which Sayyid 'Uthmān later used as his opening quotation in *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*. If it is established that a *miḥrāb* is incorrectly oriented, al-Banjārī notes, it is not permitted to retain it by subscribing to the *jīha* approach. Citing al-Subkī,¹¹⁴ he emphasizes that in such instances persons knowledgeable of the proofs are forbidden to engage in *taqlīd*, because one *mujtahid* may not (blindly) follow another.¹¹⁵ It was most probably this statement by his great-grandfather that led Jamāl al-Dīn al-Banjārī, Sayyid 'Uthmān's opponent as mufti of Banjarmasin, to

107 Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Kurdī, *Fatāwā al-Kurdī* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 39–55.

108 Ibid., 42–43, 48–55.

109 Al-Banjārī describes *Ṣirāṭ al-mustaḡīm* as "one of the best books [of materials] translated into Malay," but cautions that the influence of Acehnese on its language makes it difficult to understand for Malay readers. Muḥammad Arshad b. 'Abd al-Allāh al-Banjārī, *Sabīl al-muhtadīn li tafaqquh fi amr al-dīn*, 2 vols. (Patani: Maṭba'at Ibn Halābī, n.d.), 1:2–3.

110 Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, *Ṣirāṭ al-mustaḡīm*, on the margin of al-Banjārī, *Sabīl al-muhtadīn*, 1:123–128.

111 Ibid., 1:126.

112 Ibid., 1:126–127.

113 Al-Banjārī, *Sabīl al-muhtadīn*, 1:184.

114 It is unclear whether the reference is to Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) or his father Taqī al-Dīn (d. 756/1355).

115 Ibid., 1:188. Al-Kurdī also notes in one of his *qibla* fatwas that the *ahl al-ijtihād* may not emulate each other. Al-Kurdī, *Fatāwā*, 48.

turn this argument in his own favor and to assert his status as a *mujtahid* who was entitled to make his own decisions.¹¹⁶

Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī notes that the Shāfi'ī imams traditionally regarded the polar star as the strongest proof (*dalil yang terlebih kuat*) for calculating the direction of prayer.¹¹⁷ However, going beyond the intellectual horizon of his precursor al-Rānīrī, he introduces calculations based on longitudes and latitudes as the relied upon method (*dalil yang muktamad*), the only one that he discusses in any detail. In the remainder of the chapter, he reiterates the obligation for a new *ijtihād* and the prohibition of *taqlīd* for capable scholars in cases of disputed *qiblas*. If two *mujtahids* hold different opinions, the more knowledgeable *mujtahid* should be followed. Persons capable of learning the necessary proofs are obligated to do so, just as one is obligated to perform ablutions before prayer.¹¹⁸

Clearly, Muḥammad Arshad al-Banjārī introduced to Southeast Asia the key points of the debate that were later championed by Sayyid 'Uthmān. Even though his two epistles on the *qibla* were based purely on "Arab" scholarship, his role as an heir of both Middle Eastern and Malay scholarly traditions cannot be discounted. Indeed, the two *risālas* were strongly influenced by al-Banjārī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Miṣrī.

Conclusion: the *qibla* debate, Sayyid 'Uthmān, and the *risāla*

In the decades following the publication of *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*, debates about the *qibla* continued to occupy Muslim communities in the Malay-Indonesian region, in the Arab world, and even in South America. Despite all his efforts, Sayyid 'Uthmān evidently did not succeed in providing the definitive resolution for such conflicts.

In 1911, a Mecca-based Malay scholar, Aḥmad Jāwī, sent a request for a fatwa to Rashīd Riḍā. The request featured a number of *qibla*-related questions, including the validity of the *jiha* approach, differences of opinion within the Shāfi'ī school, and the maxim (as conveyed *inter alia* by Sayyid 'Uthmān) that fatwas must be issued in accordance with the preponderant position within the *madhhab*. Aḥmad Jāwī also asked about the status of mosques with incorrect *qiblas* in Southeast and South Asia (*arḍ al-jāwī wa l-hindī*), and whether

116 Al-'Alawī, *Taḥrīr aqwā al-adilla*, 3. See above.

117 Al-Banjārī, *Sabīl al-muhtadīn*, 1:188.

118 *Ibid.*, 1:189–191.

the *istiqbāl al-'ayn* should be considered a prerequisite for valid prayer.¹¹⁹ It is tempting to identify the questioner with the eminent Sumatran scholar Aḥmad Khaṭīb al-Minankabāwī (d. 1334/1916), who, between 1894 and 1898, engaged in a fierce exchange of views with Sayyid 'Uthmān over the establishment of a second Friday mosque in Palembang,¹²⁰ and who wrote a treatise on the *jiha/'ayn* debate in 1324/1906.¹²¹ According to Nico Kaptein, however, the *mustaftī* is more likely to have been one of Aḥmad Khaṭīb's students in Mecca.¹²² Be that as it may, Riḍā used the occasion to voice his anti-*taqlīd* position by emphasizing that al-Shāfi'ī himself had prohibited *taqlīd*, providing another example of how the *qibla* question was used to address wider issues of scholarly authority and the conventions of Islamic law.

In the late 1920s, the fatwa committee of the Council of Religious Affairs of Kelantan (Malaysia) issued two legal opinions in response to questions on the *qibla* submitted by Muslims from Cambodia. Both fatwas addressed already familiar topics: the legal implications for congregants who followed their imam in facing the wrong direction; the *jiha/'ayn* distinction; the appropriate methods of calculation; and local cleavages arising over the issue. In one of the respective questions al-Banjārī's *Sabīl al-muhtadīn* was used as a reference.¹²³

The *qibla* debate surfaced in a different form in Suriname in the early 1930s among Javanese contract workers and their descendants. In this case, the dividing line was between reform-minded Muslims who advocated worshipping towards the east, and their opponents, who held fast to Javanese traditions, which included praying towards the west, as in their native land.

119 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Fatāwā al-Manār*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid and Yūsuf Q. Khūrī, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1970–1971), 3:1004–1005.

120 Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age*, 129–133.

121 I am indebted to Nico Kaptein (Leiden) for this information.

122 E-mail, 14 December 2020. It is not inconceivable, however, that the enquiry came from Aḥmad Khaṭīb who, despite his scholarly stature, had no reservations about requesting fatwas from Arab muftis. For instance, he asked the Meccan mufti Muḥammad Sa'īd Bā Buṣayl (d. 1330/1912) for a fatwa on whether it is permissible to sell chickens to Chinese unbelievers, a question widely debated by Malay scholars. See the collection of fatwas on the subject by Bā Buṣayl, Aḥmad Khaṭīb and other Malay muftis in Aḥmad Khaṭīb, *Fatwā mawlānā shaykh al-Islām wa muftī al-anām wa ra'īs 'ulamā' al-haram al-shaykh Muḥammad Sa'īd Bā Buṣayl*, manuscript, Snouck Hurgronje Papers, Leiden University Library, Cod. Or. 7088.

123 Philipp Bruckmayr, *Cambodia's Muslims and the Malay World: Malay Language, Jawi Script, and Islamic Factionalism from the 19th Century to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 233–237; id., “Islamic Legal Crossings and Debates in Cambodia: Evidence from fatāwā and French colonial archives in the early twentieth century,” in Mahmood Kooria & Sanne Ravensbergen (eds.), *Islamic Law in the Indian Ocean World: Texts, Ideas and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2022), 137–141.

This east/west division exacerbated political cleavages and contributed to the establishment of separate community structures that have survived into the 21st century.¹²⁴

Conflicts over the correct direction of prayer in mosques were always tied to questions of religious authority and to wider communal dynamics. This state of affairs, however, is not peculiar to Southeast Asia or to the modern period. As King has shown, between the 11th and 15th centuries, different *qiblas* “were accepted by certain interest-groups in the three major Islamic cities, Cordova, Cairo and Samarqand, and the situation in other cities and regions was similarly complicated.”¹²⁵ Similarly, in modern times, disputes in Southeast Asia and beyond were related to established and emergent interest groups within local Muslim communities.

This observation is also relevant for the role of the natural sciences, and – for the case and period at hand – the interplay between modern European astronomy and traditional Islamic sciences.¹²⁶ Whereas Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s writings are well reflective of major advancements within the latter, they exhibit very little engagement with the former. The dynamics at play were aptly described by Stolz in his discussion of the apparent scientific lagging behind of the astronomical works by traditional Muslim scholars of the 19th century: “For them, the meaning of ‘astronomy’ took shape around different priorities: the devotional value of studying the celestial phenomena, the social relevance of specific astronomical problems, and a commitment to certain pedagogical and textual practices that framed the transmission of knowledge.”¹²⁷

Why did Sayyid ‘Uthmān use the *risāla* as his preferred means of communication in such cases? That the form of the *risāla* enabled him to react quickly to a problem or debate was certainly a factor, as was the fact that he saw himself as a religious authority and advisor for both local Muslims and the colonial administration. In addition, the new medium of the journal played an important role in the rise and dissemination of Islamic reformism. Rashīd Riḍā

124 Rosemarijn Hoeffte, “Locating Mecca: Religious and Political Discord in the Javanese Community in Pre-Independence Suriname,” in Aisha Khan (ed.), *Islam and the Americas* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2016), 69–91.

125 King, *World-Maps*, 125. See also David A. King, “The Orientation of Medieval Islamic Architecture and Cities,” *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 26 (1995), 263–269.

126 On this interplay, with a special focus on astronomy in late Ottoman times, albeit largely without reference to the calculation of the *qibla*, see Daniel A. Stolz, *The Lighthouse and the Observatory: Islam, Science, and Empire in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

127 *Ibid.*, 70.

and his followers used journal articles, editorials and fatwas to publish and distribute (modern) *risālas* quickly and to an unprecedentedly wide audience. As seen in Riḍā's 1911 fatwa, questions about apparent technicalities, such as establishing the correct *qibla*, could be framed in a manner that led to discussions about the bases of scholarly and religious authority. The same applies, however, to Sayyid 'Uthmān's writings on the topic, as well as to the history of the *qibla* debate in Southeast Asia since the time of al-Banjārī. These dynamics are reflected in many of the *risālas* and legal opinions discussed in this essay, and in the wording of each *istiftā'*. The *qibla* debate went to the heart of religious authority. It was of a high symbolic value and directly affected believers in their daily rituals.

As was shown, at the turn of the 20th century the iconoclastic potential of contested *qiblas* occupied not only Muslim reformists, such as Aḥmad Daḥlān, but also some of their chief detractors. Sayyid 'Uthmān strongly opposed the rejection of *taqlīd* championed by the reformists. In the case of disputed *qiblas*, however, he advocated *ijtihād*, understood as a re-assessment in accordance with the strongest available indicators. He regarded such a re-assessment as an exercise in following the prevailing opinion within the school. In this regard, he sought to pursue reform within the confines of the Shāfi'ī school, while at the same time clearly dissociating himself from the reformist (*iṣlāḥī*) current, in whose understanding of reform the rejection of the *madhhab* edifice and its *taqlīd* mechanism played a decisive role.

Indeed, the Batavian luminary was a liminal figure: a champion of modern print technology and a defender of traditional forms of religious authority; a champion of his Hadrami 'Alawī heritage and a scholar writing chiefly for a Malay-language audience, or, at least, a Southeast Asian one; a colonial advisor or even – as some felt – collaborator, and an ardent defender of Islamic values; and, finally, the most prolific and original Southeast Asia-based Muslim scholar of his day, among whose works only a few aroused lasting interest among local audiences. That most of his writings did not become part of the local canon of traditional Islamic education is perhaps related to his preferred medium, the *risāla*, which lends itself well to contemporary issues but falls outside the genres most commonly used in Islamic education.¹²⁸ Yet, Sayyid 'Uthmān's

128 On the twentieth century canon of books used in traditional Islamic education in Indonesia and the mainland, see Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990), 226–269; Bruckmayr, *Cambodia's Muslims*, 239–252.

pioneering role cannot be discounted, especially his use of elaborate charts, diagrams, and drawings to increase the practical relevance and accessibility of his epistles.¹²⁹

129 Following his example, later scholars, such as Ṭāhir b. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Minankābawī (d. 1376/1956), would include *qibla* charts for Southeast Asia in their treatises that were even more comprehensive. A companion of Aḥmad Khaṭīb and a student in astronomy at al-Azhar, Ṭāhir al-Minankābawī published a series of practically oriented astronomical works in the second half of the 1930s. Facsimile editions of four of them are contained in Ṭāhir b. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Minankābawī al-Azharī, *Himpunan Karya Ilmu Hisab dan Falak Syeikh Thahir Al-Minankabawi*, ed. Hj Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1441/2020).