ʿAbd al-Samad in Arabia: The Yemeni Years of a Shaykh from Sumatra

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This paper provides an in-depth exploration of a previously under-utilized Arabic source for the history of Islam in Southeast Asia. This text, *Al-Nafas al-Yamani* was compiled in the Yemen by ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Sulayman al-Ahdal (d. 1250 H./1835 C.E.), and includes a biographical sketch of the Sumatran scholar ʿAbd al-Samad b. ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Jawi al-Palimbani. Through a close, annotated reading of that text this article develops new insights into the configuration of people and ideas populating specific nodes of trans-regional networks in Sumatra and Arabia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time, it also brings to light important dimensions of Sufi belief and ritual practice during this important transitional period of Islamic history in Southeast Asia. This material is then further explored through a discussion of some ways in which documents of this type might be approached by historians working on the intellectual and cultural history of early modern Southeast Asia more broadly.

Keywords: Islam, Indonesia, Sumatra, Arabia, Sufism, history

This article aims to contribute to our understanding of the history of Islam in pre-modern Southeast Asia through the critical examination of previously under-utilized source material.[1] In particular, it presents a translation and close examination of an excerpt from a work written in the tradition of Arabic "biographical dictionaries" (*tabaqat*) that may serve to supplement the source bases traditionally consulted for the history of Islam in Southeast Asia and its "inter-Asia connections" in the eighteenth century.[2] The discussion begins with the contexts in which the Sufi scholar discussed in the text was born, focusing on the Sumatran city of Palembang and the Arab diaspora in the Indonesian Archi-

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2) My thinking in these terms has benefitted much from my ongoing collaboration with Prasenjit Duara and colleagues at the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute in our reading group on the "Historical Sociology of Asian Connections."

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pelago. I will then introduce the main character of our story, ʿAbd al-Samad al-Jawi "al-Palimbani," with a focus on his scholarly pedigree, and the place of his work in the reconfiguration of Sufi thought and practice in Southeast Asia. From there the focus shifts to the site where his Arabic biography was composed, the "scholars' city" of Zabid in the Yemen—and thence to a close reading of the text that reveals ʿAbd al-Samad's position in contemporary debates on Sufi thought and practice that established his place in the global scholarly networks that came together in Arabia during his lifetime.

The article concludes with reflections on how documents like this *tabaqat* text might be approached by historians working on intellectual and cultural histories of early modern Southeast Asia. There attention turns to frameworks for the interpretation of such biographical texts of individual scholars, and how they might be read in relation to the magisterial macro-histories of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean world produced by scholars like K. N. Chaudhuri (1990), Anthony Reid (1993; 1988), and Denys Lombard (1990). These works have helped us immensely in identifying some of the most significant broad historical patterns across the region during the early modern period. Moving back and forth between such "oceanic" perspectives and the individual focus presented by documents like this Arabic biographical text can, I argue, help us to better appreciate the specific character of inter-personal network linkages crucial to developing more nuanced understandings of the intellectual and cultural history of early modern Southeast Asia. For that, however, a brief introduction to this genre of Arabic biographical texts is first necessary.

Arabic Biographical Dictionaries (*Tabaqat*)

Tabaqat are collections of individual biographical entries in a more or less standardized format, and arranged in one of a number of ways, including alphabetically, by generation, or chronologically by one's year of death. Such works have long served historians of Muslim societies, particularly those focusing their work on the Arabicized "Central Lands" of Islam, as primary sources for intellectual and social history.[3] Some scholars, though far fewer in number, have also turned to such texts as sources for the history of Islam in Southeast Asia.[4] This paper presents a close reading of one such text with an eye to highlighting ways in which readings of works of this type may be integrated into

3) For more on this genre of literature, see Gibb (1962); Hafsi (1976; 1977); al-Qadi (1995).

4) The most notable work in this direction has been that of Johns (1978); Azra (2004). For work tracing even earlier connections between Southeast Asia and the Arabian peninsula through Arabic language sources, see Feener and Laffan (2005).

discussions of various aspects of the history of early modern Southeast Asia. In doing this, however, I am not claiming that studies of such materials will completely solve the problem of sources facing historians working in this field. Rather I would like to more modestly suggest that their careful use may help us in glimpsing aspects of certain developments that feature less prominently, if at all, in contemporary documents in European and Southeast Asian languages from the early-modern period.[5]

The text upon which I will focus here is entitled, *Al-Nafas al-Yamani* (al-Rahman 1979), has yet to receive such treatment.[6] It was compiled by ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Sulayman al-Ahdal (d. 1250 H./1835 C.E.),[7] a scholar who descended from a long line of South Arabian *sayyids* distinguished for their religious learning (Löfgren 1960 I, 255–256).[8] While active mainly in the Tihama and the Hijaz, the al-Ahdal family were linked through scholarly circles in Arabia to extensive networks of scholars from all around the Indian Ocean world and beyond. The author of our text, ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Sulayman al-Ahdal, in particular is reported to have both received *ijazas* from, and issued the same to, scholars "from every corner of the Muslim world" (Haykel 2014). These connections are clearly reflected in the biographies of ʿAbd al-Samad "al-Jawi" (and others) discussed in our text. Since the fifteenth century, scholars of the Ahdal family produced works across a broad range of the Islamic religious sciences, with many of them devoting considerable attention to Sufism. Some of the most illustrious scholars of their line, however, also composed important works of history and biography (Voll 2014).

ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Sulayman al-Ahdal's biographical dictionary contains entries on dozens of the most prominent figures in the Muslim scholarly networks of the eighteenth-

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5) For an overview of this earlier history of Islam in Southeast Asia, see Feener (2010).

6) In the preface to this print edition, the full title is given as: *al-Nafas al-Yamani waʾl-ruh al-rahayni fi ijazat al-qudat bani ʾl-Shawkani*. Serjeant (1950, 587) refers to this text under the title of, *al-Nafas al-yamani fi ijazat bani ʾl-Shawkani*. See also O'Fahey (1994). The use of the word *nafas* in the title plays upon a well-established Sufi trope in the form of a tradition in which the Prophet is believed to speak of Uways al-Qarani with the words, "The Breath of the Merciful (*nafas al-Rahman*) comes to me from the Yemen."

7) He studied at both Zabid and Medina under several prominent shaykhs, including Muhammad b. ʿAlaʾuddin al-Mizjaji, Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi, and Muhammad b. ʿAli b. Muhammad al-Shawkani. He eventually went on to become *mufti* of Zabid in 1197 H./ 1783 C.E., and was host to the Maghribi saint Ahmad b. Idris during his visit to this city in 1243 H./1827-28 C.E. See al-Shawkani (n.d., 267–268); al-Sanaʿi (1929, 30–31); and Brockelmann (1937–42, 1311)

8) Their line is traced back to the sixth Shiʿite Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq through such well-known saints as the miracle-working Abuʾl-Hasan ʿAli b. ʿUmar b. Muhammad al-Ahdal, whose tomb to the north of Bayt al-Faqih in the Tihama remains a pilgrimage site to this day. See al-Zabidi (1986, 195–198). Another work on this prominent family of Sufis and scholars, entitled *al-Nasiha al- ʿalawiyya li ʾl-sada al-ahdaliyya*, is attributed to Muhammad al-Samman (Hunwick and O'Fahey 1994). Muhammad al-Samman is one of the scholars listed in al-Ahdal's work as being active in the same Arabian Sufi circles as ʿAbd al-Samad.

century Yemen, and is thus a source with great potential value for research into this period of Southeast Asian Islamic history. The importance of al-Ahdal's *Nafas al-Yamani* for the study of the world of Islamic scholarship during this dynamic period has been demonstrated by Stefan Reichmuth (1999) in his study of the great South Asian hadith transmitter and lexicographer, Murtada al-Zabidi (d. 1791). This paper will focus on this biographical dictionary's entry on a figure more generally known through Malay-language sources: Shaykh ʿAbd al-Samad b. ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Jawi, often referred to in Southeast Asia as "al-Palimbani."

Arabs and the Malay-Muslim World of Palembang

ʿAbd al-Samad hailed from Palembang, South Sumatra in the early eighteenth century and it is from this place he takes the name (*nisba*) by which he is most commonly referred to in Malay sources, al-Palimbani.[9] However his Arabic biography neither supplies this name associating ʿAbd al-Samad with Palembang nor gives any information about his early years spent in Southeast Asia. Instead he is referred to by the Arabic *nisba* "al-Jawi"—signaling an association with the broader region of the Indonesian Archipelago.[10] This Arabic source thus presents us with some new perspective on the life of this important figure that compliments the information known to us through sources in Malay and European languages.

Much has been written toward a biography of ʿAbd al-Samad, despite the fact that few contemporary sources have been available to reconstruct aspects of his life beyond his own surviving writings.[11] ʿAbd al-Samad is known to be the author of a number of

9) From internal evidence from his surviving works we know, for example, that ʿAbd al-Samad dated his work entitled *Hidayat al-Salikin* at Mecca in 1192 H./1778 C.E., and the *Sayr al-Salikin* at Taʾif in 1203 H./1789 C.E. These dates are taken from the colophons of the Dar Ihya al-Kitab al-Arabiyya Indunisiyya letter-press edition of the *Sayr al-Salikin*, 4 vols. (Jakarta: n.d.), and the lithograph edition of the *Hidayat al-Salikin* published in Indonesia by Sharika Maktaba al-Madiniyya, 1354 H./1935 C.E.

10) On the use of "Jawa" and "Jawi" to refer to the Indonesian Archipelago, its people, and its products, see Feener and Laffan (2005); Laffan (2009a; 2009b).

11) Beyond ʿAbd al-Samad's own writings, another source base that has been used by some in attempts to reconstruct his biography comes from later Malay-language texts such as the *Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* (1968); See Abdullah (1980, 95–107). The validity of such texts as reliable sources of information is, however, subject to question in light of such claims as their account of his death as a centenarian martyr in a jihad against the Buddhist Siamese. While there is no other information suggesting that ʿAbd al-Samad ever returned from Arabia to Southeast Asia, some local Muslims find support for this claim in sites regarded as his burial place in both Palembang and Patani (Southern Thailand). See, for example: http://pondhuk.blogspot.sg/2013/02/kematian-syekh-abdusshamad-al-palimbani.html. Accessed June 1, 2015.

works in both Malay and Arabic, including works in the Islamic religious sciences and an influential invocation to *jihad*.[12] The bilingual body of work that he produced reflects the cultural milieu that characterized his South Sumatran birthplace, as well as the cosmopolitan world of Islamic religious scholarship that linked Southeast Asia to the broader Muslim world at that time.[13]

In the eighteenth century, Palembang was home to a number of prominent Muslim scholars and authors of Malay literature.[14] The emergence of Palembang as a center of Islamicate culture in the region was significantly linked to the growing Arab community there and its role in facilitating increased contact between Southeast Asia and the Middle East (Syamsu As 1996, 36–46). The increased Arab, and especially Hadrami, immigration during ʿAbd al-Samad's day was stimulated in part by the patronage offered by the contemporary rulers of Palembang. Attracted by such measures, Arab scholars migrated to the banks of the Musi River where they came to take prominent places in the local economy and religious hierarchy (B. W. Andaya, 1993, 204–241).

Such developments, however, were not peculiar to Palembang during that period, as Arab immigrants and their descendants in other port cities and towns of the Indonesian Archipelago became increasingly active in not only in the literary and cultural life, but also in the politics of sultanates across the region during the eighteenth century (Ho 2002). This may be seen partially as a result of changes that accompanied the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) consolidation as a territorial power in the archipelago and their concomitant withdrawal as a hegemonic naval force in the region. A number of historians have noted that this had the result of temporarily recreating something of the "open and pluralistic" patterns of commerce and communication on the sea routes that had been characteristic of earlier periods (Chandler *et al.* 1987, 57).

These developments mark the acceleration and proliferation of processes that had been at work across the broader region for some time. In the eastern isles of the Indo-

12) This last text is entitled *Nasihat al-muslimin wa-tadhkirat al-muʾminin fī fadaʾil al-jihad fi sabil Allāh*, and is regarded as having inspired the prolific genre of *prang sabi* ("holy war") texts in nineteenth century Aceh. For more on this, see Hadi (2011). Aside from his formal treatise on the subject of *jihad*, ʿAbd al-Samad also wrote letters from Arabia to rulers in Java encouraging them to take up arms against the expansion of Dutch colonial power in 1772. See Ricklefs (1974, 134; 150–155).

13) Synopses of his works in both languages can be found in Drewes (1977, 222–224). There and elsewhere Drewes (1976) included in that list the *Tuhfat al-raghibin fi bayan haqiqat iman al-muʾminin wa ma yufsiduhu fi riddat al-murtadin*. More recently, however, Noorhaidi Hasan (2007) has demonstrated that this work is more likely attributed to ʿAbd al-Samad's younger contemporary, Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari.

14) For more on this environment and the writings that were produced in it, see Drewes (1977, 219–237).

nesian Archipelago, for example, Arabs and their descendants born in ports ringing the Indian Ocean were ascending to prominent local ranks, as attested to by the late seventeenth-century tomb of Shaykh ʿUmar Ba Mahsun in the royal cemetery at Bima, on the eastern Indonesian island of Sumbawa (Noorduyn 1987, 85, 109). This is one of the earliest recorded examples of patterns of close association between Arab immigrants and local elites that was reproduced with variation across the region in the centuries that followed. In Aceh, for instance, the descendants of an embassy of Meccan sayyids established itself as a new dynasty that ruled there from 1699–1726 (Crecelius and Beardow 1979). Soon thereafter, in 1737, a Javanese royal embassy to Batavia returned to the court of Pakubuwana II, bringing with them an Arab shaykh named Sayyid ʿAlawi. This new arrival at the central Javanese capital quickly rose to prominence, being granted one of the Sultan's concubines for a wife and charge over religious affairs for the realm (Ricklefs 1998, 198–199).[15] As a result of such collaborations, cosmopolitan Muslim immigrants came to assume primary leadership roles in numerous communities stretching across the archipelago, including Siak and Pontianak in the eighteenth century (Andaya and Andaya 1982, 93; Heidhues 1998). While ʿAbd al-Samad's hometown was not governed by an "Arab" dynasty per se, the Palembang elite too came to include a number of migrant Arabs during his day—one of whom is known to have married the sultan's sister in 1745 (Azra 2004, 112). Later, as the British established themselves in Batavia during their Napoleonic-era interregnum, news of that major shift in the power dynamics of the Indonesian Archipelago were communicated to the sultan of Palembang via Arab emissaries.[16] As the life and work of ʿAbd al-Samad further demonstrate, movement between and among the ports and polities of the Middle East and Southeast Asia was complex and multi-vectored during the long eighteenth century.

Teachers and Texts

With this context established we can take up with the account of ʿAbd al-Samad's life contained in our Arabic biographical text. The entry opens by noting the date of his arrival at the Yemeni town of Zabid in 1206 H./1791 C.E. The author then goes on to praise this Sumatran sojourner as, "the very learned friend of God, the deeply understanding and

15) Michael Laffan has recently reconstructed the subsequent course of Sayyid Alawi's life after his rapid ascent in Javanese court circles, and through his transportation, detention, and later career among the expanding Muslim community of Cape Town, see Laffan (2013).

16) The royal receptions of Said Zain Bafakih, Said Bakar Rum, and Syarif Muhammad are recorded in a Palembang Malay manuscript edited by Woelder (1975, 88–89).

pious notable of Islam, [a] productive ulama and [one of the] masters of knowledge of many fields." These accolades were due in no small part to his prestigious scholarly pedigree, which established ʿAbd al-Samad firmly within the Muslim scholarly elite of his day. As our text tells us:

> He studied under the scholars of his age, from among the people of the two noble sanctuaries such as the learned Shaykh Ibrahim al-Rais . . .[17] Shaykh ʿAta al-Misri . . .[18] Shaykh al-ʾAlama Muhammad Jawhari . . .[19] and Shaykh Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Kurdi,[20] among others.

At Zabid, ʿAbd al-Samad was fully integrated into the heart of a network of Arabophone Muslim scholars that extended across the entire range of the Indian Ocean littoral and beyond, from West Africa to China. This is a milieu in which the author of our text, al-Ahdal, was fully at home—working as he did in that cosmopolitan center of Islamic learning during what has been characterized as "a period of intense and international scholarly interaction among Sunnis" (Haykel 2014).

In addition to an extensive listing of the people he studied with during his time at Zabid, this biographical entry on ʿAbd al-Samad moves on to highlight some of the subjects and, importantly, even mentions some of the specific Islamic texts, that he studied with those teachers:

> . . . he turned toward Sufism and directed most of his work toward studying and teaching al-Ghazali's *Ihya ʿulum al-din*. He called on people to occupy themselves with this book, and thus increased its prestige and maximized its benefits. . . .

Our text then goes on to emphasize, through reference to classical Arabic poetry and pious anecdotes, the exceptional qualities of Ghazali's (d. 1111) work and the benefits which its study brings to those who pursue it.

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17) Abu al-Fawz Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Raʾis al-Zamzami al-Makki (1110–94 H./1698–1780 C.E.), a teacher of Murtada al-Zabidi and a student of al-Basri and ʿAta al-Misri who took an *ijaza* in the Khalwatiyya from Mustafa al-Bakri (see below). This scholar also had a number of important connections with the al-Ahdal and Mizjaji families in the Yemen (Azra 2004, 114).

18) ʿAtaʾAllah b. Ahmad al-Azhari al-Misri al-Makki, the renowned *muhaddith* and teacher of Ibrahim al-Raʾis and Murtada al-Zabidi. He also may have had some connection with the leading family of the Egyptian Tasqiyaniyya al-Ahmadiyya order, who continued their dominance of the organization into this century. See de Jong (1978).

19) Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Jawhari al-Misri (1132–86 H./1720–72 C.E.), a well-known Egyptian traditionist with a highly-regarded *isnad* who strengthened his connections to our networks of scholars through his extended study and teaching visits to the Haramayn (Azra 2004, 115).

20) Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Kurdi (1125–94 H./1713–80 C.E.), a Sufi and legal scholar who was a student of al-Bakri, al-Nakhli, and al-Basri (see below).

> It is told that one of those who occupied themselves with this work read a book entitled, *Tanbih al-Ihya* . . . and turned towards studying it, but when he was just about to finish it, he lost his sight. He wept and supplicated God. . . . He then turned toward God, Great and Exalted, in repentance, and God restored the man's sight. Shaykh Husayn b. Abd Allah al-Hadrami[21] says, "the *Ihya* treats against the poisons of forgetfulness; it arouses the exoteric ulama and extends the knowledge of the firmly established scholars."

Al-Ghazali's *Ihya* occupied an increasingly prominent place in the scholarship of reform-minded Sufis during ʿAbd al-Samad's day. A number of scholars have commented on a perceived shift in orientation in Indonesian Islam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—one that included a renewed appreciation of al-Ghazali's work. Such developments have parallels extending well beyond Southeast Asia, for as John Voll has noted a resurgence of interest in al-Ghazali's work was one of the hallmarks of Sufi reform movements in Arabia, Africa, India, and elsewhere during the eighteenth century (Voll 1982, 36, 58, *et passim*).[22] Debates over the terminology used to refer to reformist trends among Sufi scholars of the period aside, it is clear that across the Muslim world major shifts in Islamic thought were taking place.[23]

These complex developments were, moreover, by no means limited to Sufism, but were integrally related to the reorientation of work in other fields ranging from jurisprudence and hadith scholarship to historiography and lexicography. ʿAbd al-Samad himself was to become a major figure in this project of reforming Sufism in Southeast Asia during this period, as is clear from his most popular surviving works in the form of Malay-language interpretations of and elaborations upon al-Ghazali's writings.[24] The influence of these texts on the subsequent development of the Malay *kitab* curriculum of Southeast Asian circles of Muslim learning can be traced through the works of major Malay authors such as ʿAbd al-Samad's younger colleague Daud al-Patani, who hailed from what is today southern Thailand and flourished in the early nineteenth

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21) The published edition of the Arabic text has a footnote here that reads: "He is Husayn b. ʿAbd Allah Ba Fadl (d. 979 H./1571–72 C.E.). Please see our book *Masadir al-fikr al-Islami*, 286."

22) For more on the dynamics of debates on and within Sufism during this period, see collected essays in de Jong and Radtke (1999) by Esther Peskes, Bernd Radtke, Kamel Filali, R. Sean O'Fahey, Marc Gaborieau, Jonathan N. Lipman, and Azyumardi Azra.

23) For a brief overview of these recent debates within Islamic Studies, see Reichmuth (2002).

24) Entitled *Hidayat al-Salikin* and *Sayr al-Salikin,* these works are still printed in Jawi script and available in *kitab* shops in various parts of the Southeast Asia. Drewes (1977, 222–223) mentions other editions of these texts that were published at Mecca, Bombay, Cairo, and Singapore. The *Hidayat al-Salikin* has generally served as a beginner's introduction to Sufism, drawing in part on Ghazali's *Bidayat al-Hidaya* (and other works), and arranged broadly along the *Bidayat*'s organizational scheme. More advanced students then continue with the larger, four-volume *Sayr al-Salikin* on a path that should lead adepts eventually to al-Ghazali's *Ihya* itself (Kushimoto 2014).

century.[25] Al-Patani spent most of his scholarly career at Mecca, which has long been recognized as an important center for Southeast Asian Muslims studying in the Arabian peninsula. However for earlier generations of such itinerant Islamic scholars, other cities also held considerable appeal. Prominent among such regional centers of scholarship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was Zabid, located in the Tihama west coastal plain of the Yemen.

Zabid: A Southern Arabian Center of Islamic Learning

Zabid was founded in 820 CE when, in response to several local revolts, the Abbasids appointed Muhammad b. ʿAbdullah b. Ziyad as governor of the Tihama. Soon, however, this appointed official took advantage of the distance from Baghdad to establish his own dynasty, which continued to rule the region for over two centuries with Zabid as the capital (Wilson 1985). The city remained the center of administration under the Ayyubids (1173–1229), who expended great energy in reconstructing its walls and building a number of mosques and madrasas. By 1391, a survey conducted under the auspices of the Rasulid Sultan al-Ashraf documented some 230 such institutions in Zabid (Hibshi 1977). Over the centuries that followed the city came to develop a far-flung reputation as an important center of Muslim learning.[26] In the seventeenth century, for example, Zabid attracted Southeast Asian Sufi scholars including Yusuf al-Maqassari, who spent his first years in Arabia there (Azra 2004, 89–91). Zabid continued to attract students from throughout the Muslim world until the early nineteenth century, as evidenced by various entries contained *Nafas al-Yamani*. Modern scholarship on ʿAbd al-Samad's life and work have tended to repeat very similar remarks on the importance of his studies at Medina, and the composition of his most important works at Mecca and Taʾif.[27] The time that this scholar spent at Zabid, on the other hand, has been largely neglected in earlier studies—although as our text makes clear it proved a formative part of ʿAbd al-Samad's

25) Daud b. ʿAbd Allah b. Idris al-Patani was one of the most prolific authors of such books, and among his works are Malay adaptations of al-Ghazali's *Mihaj al-Abidin*. Biographical material on this important Malay *kitab* author can be found, van Bruinessen (1998, 19–20); L. Y. Andaya (2012, 235). For more on the production of Islamic scholarship in his milieu, see: Matheson and Hooker (1988); Hassan Madmarn (2002); and Bradley (2010).

26) Attested to not only in the medieval texts of local histories (e.g. al-Dayba 1983, 47), but also in local historical memory today by drivers on the Tihama road whom I have heard shouting: "Zabid, madinat al-ʿulamaʾ!" ("Zabid, City of the Scholars!") upon approaching the (now nearly ruined) town.

27) A popular recent example of this is found in the section on ʿAbd al-Samad in Iskandar (1996, 441–443).

Arabian experience.[28]

Our text gives us a valuable description of the time that ʿAbd al-Samad spent in Zabid, as well as an intimate view into some of the ways in which particular inter-personal bonds were formed and remembered between individuals across the expansive scholarly networks of the eighteenth century. In reading this account, furthermore, one cannot escape an impression of the admiration that the author of this text—an Arab sayyid from the prominent Yemeni family of al-Ahdal—held for this Jawi shaykh from Palembang, as we read that:

> When our scholar arrived at Zabid, he continued to increase his exhortations toward the study of Ghazali's *Ihya*, and I read under him, thanks be to God, the first quarter of every chapter. I asked him for an *ijaza* (document of certification) for the study of this book, to relate that which is good in it and to benefit from its knowledge. He wrote for me in his own noble hand a very long *ijaza*, it being his way that if a student came to him asking detailed questions and he saw something good in the student, he would lengthen his praise of the student in the *ijaza*. He would also explain to the student about law and literature to increase his adherence to it, and the student would see clearly that which was presented to him. The Shaykh continued to explain for me the literature of legal decisions and the requirements of a *mufti*: it is not enough only to inquire [into the facts of a certain case] but if he has knowledge of the situation he must call attention to it in the writing of his decision. . . .

Here our text opens a window on to the micro-dynamics of the specific ways in which Sufism and the study of Islamic law were integrally related for many of his contemporaries in the networks. This aspect of eighteenth-century Muslim intellectual culture contributed to various movements for religious reform and continued to influence developments throughout the Muslim world for at least two centuries. Beyond this, our text also provides a glimpse of the personal touch that ʿAbd al-Samad had as an inspiring teacher, and how he was remembered by his former students.

The intimacy and generosity highlighted in al-Ahdal's account here testify to the importance of personal relationships in the construction and maintenance of scholarly networks—something that, while rarely glimpsed in surviving sources, is crucial to appreciate in developing our understanding of the broader processes through which the Indonesian Archipelago came to be a significant part of the global *umma* (Johns 1978, 471). Such passages in this Arabic biography of ʿAbd al-Samad also convey a sense of the respect that this Sumatran shaykh commanded from his Arabian co-religionists. The text then can serve as a point of critical reflection upon abiding, un-critical assumptions about Islamic religious authority that tend to view the Middle East as a place where

28) The major exception to this is Azyumardi Azra's groundbreaking work (2004). Unfortunately, however, he was unable to consult the text of the *Nafas al-Yamani* in preparing that study.

Muslims from many parts of Asia and Africa came to learn from "Arab" masters. The relative positions of this scholar hailing from Palembang and his Arabian sayyid disciple presented in our text thus point to a far greater range of possibilities in the kinds of relationship formed between natives of the holy land and migrants from Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) during the pre-modern period.

Sufi Practice and Scholarly Polemic

The next section of the Arabic biography of ʿAbd al-Samad moves on to provide a detailed treatment of his place within the Sufi circles of his day. These passages elaborate ʿAbd al-Samad's credentials in renouncing the vanities of this world, as well as his generosity in the sharing of his knowledge:

> Our shaykh did not see any value in this world, and his magnanimity and generosity are regarded as a wonder of wonders. He was asked by one of his best students for a book . . . and our shaykh went to his book cabinet and said, "Please take from it what you like," and the student took from it a number of precious books of great price.

However most of the "Sufi" material of this biographical entry is concerned not with hagiographic portraiture of the shaykh's spiritual virtues, but rather with technical discussions of aspects of devotional practice that were being energetically debated across the Indian Ocean networks of Muslim scholarship during his day:

> ʿAbd al-Samad took the [Sufi] way of *dhikr* (ritual "remembrance of God") from his shaykh, the great saint Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Samman al-Madani.[29] He stayed with Shaykh al-

29) Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Karim al-Samman al-Hashimi al-Madani al-Khlawati al-Qadiri al-Shadhili al-Shafiʿi (d. 1190 H./1776 C.E.) was a student of al-Hifni and Mahmud al-Kurdi (d. 1780), *khalifa* of Mustafa Kamal al-din al-Bakri in the Khalwatiyya order. He was born and died at Medina, 1132–89 H./1719–75 C.E. The listing of his works in Brockelmann (1937–42, SII, 535, 629) has been revised in Drewes (1992). Muhammad al-Samman is of particular importance here as the order he established at Medina gained considerable popularity in Muslim Southeast Asia, due to a considerable extent to the work of his "Jawi" pupil ʿAbd al-Samad and his contemporary Palembang countrymen including Muhammad Muhyiddin b. Shaykh Shihabuddin. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the order had established itself in several centers in the region, including the Dutch capital of Batavia (Drewes 1977, 224–225). By the late nineteenth century Sammaniyya practices came under considerable critique from a number of prominent members of the Arab community in Southeast Asia, including Salim b. ʿAbd Allah b. Sumayr and Sayyid ʿUthman b. ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAqil b. Yahya (Drewes 1992, 83–84). For more on his al-Samman and his students from Southeast Asia, see Muthalib (2007). The Sammaniyya order was also widely propagated in Ethiopia and the Sudan. See O'Fahey (1994, 91).

> Samman for a considerable time and took from him his way, as he in turn took it from the famous Shaykh Mustafa al-Bakri.[30] Al-Samman and al-Hifni[31] both had the same shaykh and their way is to pronounce the *dhikr* aloud, the recitation coming together [to a crescendo at its conclusion].[32]

Over the paragraphs that follow in the entry it becomes clear that practices such as *jahr* (the audible pronunciation of Sufi *dhikr*) were the subject of considerable controversy among the original audience of this text:

> It is clear that this [vocalized *dhikr*] is not forbidden or discouraged, as its detractors would have it, for a group of scholars including al-Jalal al-Suyuti[33] and the very learned al-Kitan[34] have written on the evidence for the permissibility of reciting the *dhikr* aloud. Among those who have written extensively on this subject is Shaykh Mulla Ibrahim al-Kurani[35] who has a great treatise[36] on the evidence for vocalized recitation (*jahr*). . . .[37]

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30) Mustafa b. Kamal al-Din b. ʿAli al-Siddiqi al-Hanafi al-Khalwati Muhyi al-Din al-Bakri (d. 1162 H./1749 C.E.) was an eighteenth-century *khalifa* of the Qarabashi branch of the Khalwatiyya order. He also issued the *ijazat khilafa* of the Khalwatiyya order to the later Egyptian founder of the al-Afifiyya branch of the Shadhiliyya order (Elger 2014).

31) Najm ad-Din Muhammad b. Salim b. Ahmad al-Shafiʿi al-Misri al-Hifni al-Husayni (d. 1181 H./1767–68 C.E.) was an author of Shafiʾi legal and devotional works (Brockelmann 1937–42, SII, 445) who was the Shaykh al-Azhar and head of the Khalwaityya order in Egypt during his day. See Marsot (1972, 150). For more on the sub-order founded by him (al-Hifniyya): de Jong (1978, 114–116). The networks he was involved in extend even further, as his brother Yusuf al-Hifnawi was a colleague of Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi and his students included Jabril b. Umar, the foremost teacher of Uthman dan Fodio (Voll 1982, 81).

32) The interpolated rendering of the last sentence is based upon the practice of a Sammaniyya *dhikr* session as I have observed it at a session led by a Sudani shaykh and his disciples in Sanaʿa during early August, 1997.

33) i.e. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti(d. 911 H./1505 C.E.). This renowned Egyptian scholar was the author of several works which have long been popular in Muslim Southeast Asia and continue to be used there today. For more on al-Suyuti, see Sartain (1975). For the adaptation of one of his more well-known works in Southeast Asia, see Riddell (1990).

The published edition of the al-Ahdal's Arabic text has a footnote here that reads, "His book is entitled, *Natija al-fikr fi al-jahr biʾl-dhikr*."

34) The published edition of the Arabic text has a footnote here that reads, "Perhaps this is the Sufi Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahid al-Kitani (d. 1289 H./1872–73 C.E.)."

35) Ibrahim b. al-Sharazuri al-Hasan Shahrani al-Madani al-Kurani (d. 1101 H./1690 C.E.), the Kurdish scholar and mystic who studied throughout the Muslim world before settling in Medina where he succeeded his famous teacher al-Qushashi upon the latter's death in 1071 H./1661 C.E. (*EI2*, V: 432b, 525b). This particular scholar had a profound effect on the development of Islam in Southeast Asia during the seventeenth century via the mediation of his Sumatran colleague ʿAbd al-Raʾuf al-Singkli. See Johns (1978).

36) The published edition of al-Ahdal's Arabic text has a footnote here that reads, "Entitled *al-Jawabat al-Ghurawiyyat*."

37) Kurani's position on vocal *dhikr* had also influenced earlier generations of Muslim scholars from Southeast Asia, including the seventeenth-century Acehnese shaykh ʿAbd al-Raʾuf Singkili (Le Gall 2005, 101–102).

> Shaykh Ibrahim continues on to say, and this is clearly indicated in the hadith of Abi Musa al-Ashari, in the two sound collections, and elsewhere in the texts of Bukhari on *jihad*: "Abu Musa said that we were with the Prophet (prayers and peace be upon him) and when we approached a valley we pronounced the *tahlil* and *takbir*, raising our voices, and the Prophet (prayers and peace be upon him) said, 'Oh people, stay your voices'.
>
> . . . The Prophet exhorted gently to abandon this practice of extreme shouting, but not to abandon *jahr* altogether. And among the evidence for this is the meaning of *jahr* in the Holy Qurʾan, "And you (O reader!) bring your Lord to remembrance in your very soul, with humility and in reverence without loudness in words. . . ."[38] Thus that which must be abandoned is the loud shouting and not *jahr* altogether. This verse and the sound *hadith* indicate the legality of *jahr* in the recitation of *dhikr* and its thorough recommendation.

In this discussion of *jahr* included within his *tabaqat* entry on ʿAbd al-Samad, al-Ahdal goes to considerable lengths to contextualize and re-interpret texts of Qurʾan and hadith that were frequently deployed by critics of vocalized *dhikr* in his own attempts to defend the legitimacy of the practice. The fact that so much attention is given to debates on the permissibility of the practice of *jahr* in this short biography of ʿAbd al-Samad indicates something of the importance of this issue to him and those, like our author al-Ahdal, who studied under him in the Muslim scholarly networks of the period. It also enables us to delineate some of the significant fault lines that created internal divisions even among scholars who moved and assembled along the same network pathways across the Muslim world at that time.[39]

Nodes in the Scholarly Networks

After this rather lengthy digression on the technical aspects of ʿAbd al-Samad's devotional practice, and some notes of praise for ʿAbd al-Samad's teacher Muhammad al-Samman, our text draws to a close with his authority for these practices being linked back once again to the specific teachers he studied with in the networks:

> . . . among his shaykhs is the above-mentioned Shaykh Muhammad b. ʿAbd al-Karim al-Samman, and Shaykh al-Kabir al-Mustafa Bakri, [and] a group of them, al-Shaykh Muhammad al-Daqaq and

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38) Qurʾan (7, *al-Aʿraf*, 205).

39) Polemics over the legitimacy of vocalized, as opposed to silent *dhikr*, pursued by Sufis involved in the scholarly circles of eighteenth-century Yemen came to be part of significant social and political cleavages in several parts of the Muslim world, including China. For more on this see Lipman (1997, 85–93).

al-Sayyid Ali al-ʿAttar,[40] living in Mecca with their scholarly lineages reaching back to Nakhli[41] and Basri.[42]

With this last list of scholars in ʿAbd al-Samad's lineage, we are once again reminded that the networks of this Sumatran-born scholar in southern Arabia had connections that extended from the most distant corners of the Muslim world to the very center of Mecca itself. As Azyumardi Azra's work has so clearly mapped, Arabia was a site of productive encounter between scholars from widely diverse ethnic and geographical origins who had become integrated into a shared culture of Islamic learning (Azra 2004, 8–31). The life and work of the scholar as presented by texts like the *tabaqat* entry discussed here presents us with a focused look at the construction of a particular node in the networks that shaped the development of Islam in Southeast Asia and beyond until the early twentieth century. It must also be noted, however, that these networks were reconfigured in significant ways over this period. Indeed, what might strike modern readers as the conspicuous absence of any mention of either "ethnicity" or geographic origin in this biography of ʿAbd al-Samad highlights the fact that such concerns were not at the forefront of how this individual was configured within the cosmopolitan scholarly networks of his day—and should also caution us against attempting to view that period through the lenses of our own contemporary conceptions of "identity." The Arabia of ʿAbd al-Samad was rather different from that of the "Jawi" scholars who settled in Arabia in far greater numbers a century later, who as a group were both identified, and increasingly self-identified as sharing a common identity based on their origins.[43]

In conclusion, I'd like to comment a little more broadly on the use of previously under-utilized Arabic biographical sources for the history of Islam in Southeast Asia. Such texts hold the potential to highlight aspects of various sociological "subsets" of total history—especially the intellectual, the cultural, and the religious—that might otherwise escape our attention. Through the sweeping, synthetic works of scholars like Chaudhuri, Reid,

40) This reference may be to al-Sayyid Ali al-ʿAttar (d. 1250 H./1834 C.E. or 1254 H./1838 C.E.), an Egyptian writer to whom several works of history and grammar are attributed (Brockelmann 1937–42, SII, 720).

41) Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Nakhli (1044–1130 H./1634–1718 C.E.), a hadith scholar resident in Medina who was a student of the prominent Egyptian Shaykh Muhammad b. ʿAla al-din al-Babili (d. 1077 H./1666–67 C.E.). See Voll (1980, 266).

42) ʿAbd Allah b. Salim al-Basri (1040–1134 H./1640–1722 C.E.), an important hadith scholar whose students included Mustafa al-Bakri and the South Asian *muhaddith* Muhammad Hayya al-Sindi (d. 1750). See Voll (1975, 38).

43) For more on the "Jawah colony" of Southeast Asian Muslim students and teachers at Mecca, see: Hurgronje (1970); Laffan (2003).

and Lombard we have come to recognize the development of some of the most significant broad historical patterns across Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean world during the early modern period.

Gazing at these wide horizons from within the textual confines of our entry on ʿAbd al-Samad, we might now be able to more clearly discern in the particulars recorded in this text, reflections of these broader trends as they made themselves felt in the specific times and places that he lived. These would include, *inter alia*, the rise of Islamic renewal and reform currents and the growth of regional cities, like Zabid and Palembang, during his day. Carefully contextualized readings of biographical materials such as the text explored here thus might be pursued as a way in which to view some of these macro-structures of *la longue durée* in relation to the micro-mechanics of continuity and change in a mutually informative way.

In contextualizing our readings of specific accounts of written lives we must of course acknowledge that historical structures involve more than just the sum total of innumerable individual biographies. At the same time, we should distinguish our use of such biographical sources from that of Romantic historians—and their post-modern avatars—with their pervasive penchant for particularism. In our reading of these texts we are not primarily looking for either "guiding personalities," or the atomistic amplification of isolated, internally-verified narratives. Rather, what I would like to suggest is an approach to biographical materials that traces the paths of unique human lives with an eye toward viewing the ways in which interaction with various areas of society's "set of sets" (Braudel 1982, 458-599) is integrated within the experience of individuals. Dilthey might see such an approach as enabling us to "apprehend . . . an historical whole in contrast to the lifeless abstractions which are usually drawn from the archives" (Dilthey 1989, 85). I would simply suggest that biographical texts such as the one discussed here comprise a potentially valuable source of detailed information for illustrating broader themes set forth in more synthetic, structuralist works of historical scholarship.

Braudel once framed his critique of *histoire événementielle* in relation to an anecdote about observing fireflies in Brazil:

> I remember a night near Bahia, when I was enveloped in a firework display of phosphorescent fireflies; their pale lights glowed, went out, shone again, all without piercing the night with any true illumination. So it is with events, beyond their glow, darkness prevails. (Braudel 1980, 10–11)

In my approach to this Arabic biography of ʿAbd al-Samad, however, I have been concerned not with the "flash" of one individual life as "event" in the darkness of the uncharted past, but rather reading it in the somewhat brighter shadows of larger, more enduring, historical structures. Working in this way, readings of texts like al-Ahdal's

tabaqat could be seen as a process of simultaneously trying out different lenses to help in refining our field of vision; with the hope that some of them might manage to catch and magnify some of the warmer light of such firefly flashes in a way that may just give us a better view of the broader structures of "Inter-Asia" Islamic connections.

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