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Pesantren and kitab kuning: maintenance and continuation of a tradition of religious learning

One of Indonesia's great traditions is that of Muslim religious learning as embodied in the Javanese *pesantren* and similar institutions in the outer islands and the Malay peninsula. The *raison d'être* of these institutions is the transmission of traditional Islam as laid down in scripture, i.e., classical texts of the various Islamic disciplines, together with commentaries, glosses and supercommentaries on these basic texts written over the ages. These works are collectively known, in Indonesia, as *kitab kuning*, "yellow books", a name that they owe to the tinted paper on which the first Middle Eastern editions reaching Indonesia were printed. The corpus of classical texts accepted in the *pesantren* tradition is - in theory at least - conceptually closed; the relevant knowledge is thought to be a finite and bounded body. Although new works within the tradition continue to be written, these have to remain within strict

boundaries and cannot pretend to offer more than summaries, explications or rearrangements of the same, unchangeable, body of knowledge. Even radical reinterpretations of the classical texts are not acceptable. The supposed rigidity of this tradition has come in for much criticism, both from unsympathetic foreign observers and from reformist and modernist Muslims themselves. In practice, however, the tradition appears to be much more flexible than the above sketch would suggest.

The pesantren (or *pondok*, *surau*, *dayah*, as it is called elsewhere) is not the only institution of Muslim religious education, and the tradition it embodies is only one out of several tendencies within Indonesian Islam. Modernist, reformist and fundamentalist currents emerged partly in opposition to it, and to some extent developed into rigid traditions themselves. My concern here is exclusively with the former, although a strict delimitation from the other currents - with which there has always been interaction - is not possible, and in recent years even a certain convergence is perceptible. Muhammadiyah, the major reformist organisation, for instance, now has its own pesantren, where besides its usual school curriculum, classical Arabic texts are also taught (although a different selection from the classical corpus is made than in the traditional pesantren).^[1] In the average pesantren, on the other hand, there has been a shift of emphasis within the traditional corpus of texts, apparently under the influence of modernism. Different qur'anic exegeses (*tafsir*), the canonical collections of traditions (*hadith*)^[2] and

the principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) receive much more attention than a century ago, in a development parallel to (and perhaps responsive to) the modernist "return to the Qur'an and *hadith*".

It seems best to delineate the Islamic tradition with which I am concerned here by enumerating its most important characteristics, while acknowledging that none of them represents a clear-cut and unambiguous criterium, and that the boundaries with other currents are often fuzzy.

Delineating the tradition

Key elements of the tradition are the institution of the pesantren itself (the school with its core of resident students), and the crucial personalistic and charismatic role of the *kyai* (or *ajengan*, *tuan guru*, etc.) - charismatic in the full Weberian sense of the term. An attitude of reverent respect for, and unquestioning obedience to the *kyai* is one of the first values installed in every santri. This reverend attitude is extended to earlier generations of *`ulama* and, a fortiori, to the authors of the texts studied. It might even seem to the outside observer that this

attitude is deemed more important than the acquisition of knowledge; but to the kyai it is an integral part of the knowledge (*ilmu*) to be acquired. Hasyim Asy`ari, the founding father of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), is known to have been a great admirer of Muhammad `Abduh's tafsir, but to have discouraged his students reading it; his objection was not to `Abduh's rationalism but to the contempt `Abduh showed for traditional `ulama.

Although the material studied consists exclusively of written texts, their oral transmission is essential. These texts are read aloud by the kyai to a group of students, who have their own copies before them and may take notes on the proper vocalisation and the kyai's explanations of grammatical niceties or the meanings of certain terms. Students may ask questions but these usually remain within the narrow context of the text itself; there are rarely if ever attempts to relate them to concrete, contemporary situations. The kyai rarely tries to discover whether the students actually understand the texts on any but the linguistic level; elementary texts are memorised, the more advanced ones simply read from beginning to end. (In a small circle of pesantren graduates, however, there is now much talk of understanding the kitab in their historical and cultural context, and to look for their contemporary relevance). Perhaps the majority of pesantren now operate on the *madrasi* system, with graded classes, fixed curricula and diplomas, but

many important pesantren still use the more traditional method where the student reads a few specific texts under the guidance of the kyai (together with other students of various ages). For each text read he receives, after completion, an *ijaza* (usually oral only), after which he may move on to another pesantren to study other texts - many kyai are known as specialists of a number of specific kitab. Beside their more or less specialist teachings to the students in the pesantren, many kyai also hold weekly *pengajian* umum for the general public, in which they discuss relatively simple texts.

The central intellectual contents of the tradition are inscribed within the parameters of Ash`ari doctrine (as mediated especially by Sanusi's works), the Shafi`i *madhhab* (with nominal acceptance of the other three Sunni madhhab), and the ethical and pietistic mysticism of Ghazali and related writers. The vast majority of the texts studied in the pesantren^[3] - including the most recent works added to the tradition - fall within these three categories or that of the "instrumental science" of traditional Arabic grammar (*nahw*). In the last-named branch of learning, too, the cumbersome tradi-tional method (see Drewes 1971) continues to be preferred over more modern approaches. Modern currents of Islam partly defined themselves in opposition to the "petrified" madhhab and Ghazalian quietism, advocating the reopening of the gate of *ijtihad* (indepe-ndent judgment on the basis of the original sources, Qur'an and hadith) and social and political activism instead. While to the pesantren

tradition Ghazali represents the ideal pinnacle of scholarly and spiritual achievement, the fundamentalists have chosen Ibn Taymiyya as their culture hero (significantly, the latter's works are forbidden reading in many pesantren).^[4] In practice, however, there is a considerable overlap of the texts read by "traditionalist" and other `ulama.

Most kyai content themselves with teaching existing kitab kuning, but not a few have added works of their own to the tradition. There is a remarkable formal difference with the writing modernist and reformist `ulama: the latter write their works in (romanized) Indonesian (the reformist public reads works by Arabic authors also usually in Indonesian translations). To the "traditionalist" `ulama, on the other hand, the Arabic language and script represent noble values in themselves; not only do they often write in Arabic,^[5] but when they write or translate in vernacular languages, they almost exclusively use the Arabic script. The script is a badge of identity that, better than most criteria, differentiates the "traditionalists" from the other currents. Well over 500 different works by Indonesian traditional `ulama are currently in print, ranging from simple pious tracts through straightforward translations to sophisticated commentaries on classical texts.

The pesantren tradition is pervaded by a highly devotional and mystical attitude. Supererogatory prayers and the recital of litanies (*dhikr*, *wird*, *ratib*) complement the canonical obligations. Many kyai are moreover

affiliated with a mystical order (*tariqa*) and teach their followers its specific devotions and mystical exercises. A quarter of the literary output of the traditional *`ulama* consists of mystical and devotional texts. The Prophet is highly venerated and the object of numerous prayers; even the most undeserving of (those claiming to be) his descendants is deemed worthy of the highest respect. Saints are similarly venerated, and their intercession is frequently invoked. Visits to the graves of saints and lesser *kyai* are an essential part of the annual cycle; most Javanese *pesantren* hold annual celebrations (*khaul*, Ar. *hawl*) on the anniversaries of the deaths of their founding *kyai*.

A *kyai*'s charisma is based on the belief in his spiritual powers and ability to bestow blessing due to his contact with the world unseen; he is generally believed to retain this ability beyond the grave. It is this attitude towards the dead that most sharply distinguishes traditional Islam from the modernists and fundamentalists, who hold that after death no communication is possible and who condemn all attempts to contact the dead as shirk, idolatry. To the traditionalists, on the other hand, it is an integral aspect of the essential concept of *wasila*, spiritual mediation. An unbroken chain from one's teacher, living or dead, through previous teachers and saints to the Prophet and hence to God is deemed necessary for salvation. (The same reasoning is responsible for the curious fact that a *kyai*'s membership of NU is not considered to end upon his death, for that would imply that his *wasila* is cut off).^[6]

The concept of an unbroken chain to the Prophet is central to the tradition, and is encountered in various aspects of it, as in the spiritual genealogy (*silsila*) of a *tariqa*[\[7\]](#) and the line of transmission (*isnad*) of hadith and of traditional texts in general.[\[8\]](#) The chain is a guarantee of the authenticity of the tradition. The numerous Hadrami *sayyid* (who have had a great influence on the formation of Indonesian traditional Islam) are the physical embodiments of such a chain; drops of the Prophet's own blood are thought to flow in them, which makes them superior to the rest of mankind. In somewhat different form we recognize the same concept in the preoccupation of many kyai with their own genealogies and in their claims, spurious or correct, of descent from the great Javanese saints or ruling houses.[\[9\]](#) Modernists, of course, deny that heredity gives anyone claims to spiritual superiority.

The political "opportunism" for which NU is often criticised by other committed Muslims is, in the case of many kyai, a conscious emulation of the Sunni tradition's political conservatism, which considers one hour of political chaos (*fitna*) worse than a century of tyranny. Political accommodation is almost a matter of principle in the Sunni tradition, not just one of expedience. All of NU's important political moves in the past, legitimated if not actually initiated by its body of leading legal scholars, the Majlis Syuriah, are based on solid references to *kitab kuning*[\[10\]](#) - which proves that this theoretically closed corpus is not so rigid after all.

An Indonesian or a foreign tradition?

There is something paradoxical to the pesantren tradition. It is firmly rooted in the Indonesian soil; the pondok and pesantren may be called typical Indonesian institutions, in several respects unlike traditional schools elsewhere in the Muslim world. But at the same time this tradition is self-consciously international in orientation and continues to see not some place in the Archipelago but Mecca as its focus or orientation.

The kitab kuning tradition is, obviously, of non-Indonesian origin. All classical texts studied in Indonesia are in Arabic, and were written well before Indonesia was Islamicised; the same is true of many of the commentaries and glosses used, although there are increasing numbers of commentaries and adaptations written by Indonesian *ʿulama*. Even shifts of emphasis within the tradition have in most cases followed earlier similar shifts in the major centres of the Islamic world. Numerous kitab studied at present in the pesantren are of relatively recent date but were written not in Indonesia but in Mecca or Madina (even in cases

where the authors were Indonesians themselves).

The particular form of the pesantren as an educational institution, too, reflects foreign influences if not origins (possibly superimposed upon older local traditions). It resembles the Middle Eastern or Indian madrasa, and I shall discuss below to what extent these may have provided its model. Foreign influences have, over the past centuries, become stronger rather than less. Most of the great kyai completed the highest stages of their education in the prestigious centres of learning of Arabia. They are best seen, perhaps, as mediators between the great international learned tradition of Islam and its more modest Indonesian variant(s).

This is not Indonesia's only tradition that has unmistakably foreign origins; but unlike those of Chinese and Indian origins, which have become much more integrated into local culture and continue to develop independently of their foreign source,[\[11\]](#) the pesantren tradition tends to be wary of such syncretism and constantly seeks renewal at the source itself. The source par excellence, to Indonesia's traditional Muslims, is the Holy City of Mecca, the qibla or centre of orientation of all the Muslim World, and secondarily Madina, where the Prophet himself established the first mosque and where he lies buried. These Arabian, and indirectly a few Indian centres, have provided the major impulses to the ongoing process of Indonesia's islamisation.

Most of the early Indonesian authors of Islamic literature spent considerable periods in Mecca, Madina and other Middle Eastern centres of learning. Not only those with scholarly pretensions, also the early Indonesian Muslim rulers looked to Mecca, for legitimation if not also for useful ilmu, spiritual powers. It was from Mecca that, in the 1630's, the fourth Muslim ruler of Banten, Abu'l-Mafakhir Mahmud, requested recognition as a sultan, as well as the explanation of certain kitab, and even the dispatch of an expert of the Law to enlighten Banten.[\[12\]](#) A decade later, in 1641, the ruler of Mataram too requested the title of "sultan" from the ruling Sharif of Mecca, as one of several efforts to reinforce his religious legitimation (de Graaf 1958:264-8). Although our knowledge of pre-17th century Indonesian Islam is extremely limited, it seems likely that this orientation towards Mecca had been established well before the cited events.

This is not to deny that Indonesian Islam, especially during the first centuries, had a distinctly Indian flavour, noticeable for instance in the preponderance of the tariqa Shattariyya[\[13\]](#) and the popularity of various adaptations of Ibn `Arabi's *wahdat al-wujud* metaphysics,[\[14\]](#) as well as, perhaps, the choice of religious texts studied during the first centuries (see below). This Indian flavour, however, was also mediated through the Holy Cities of the Hijaz, where several great Indian `ulama (and their non-Indian disciples) taught. The Indian-born Arab, Nuruddin ar-Raniri,

represents one of the very few known direct links between India and Indonesia.

Because of this continuing foreign orientation of the pesantren tradition, it cannot be studied in isolation; in order to understand its dynamics, we have to take developments in Arabia (and secondarily India) as much into account as those in Indonesia itself. Snouck Hurgronje's pathbreaking studies of Islamic education in Mecca (1887a, 1889) still rank among the few essential works on the pesantren tradition. In the century that has since passed, scholarship on Indonesian Islam has almost entirely neglected Mecca and the other foreign centres, or contented itself with a few highly superficial observations. [\[15\]](#)

Beginnings of the pesantren tradition

We know very little of the precise origins of the pesantren, not even when the institution made its first appearance. Much that has been said about early pesantren seems to be based on an extrapolation into the past of the 19th-century institution and on much speculation. Pigeaud and de Graaf speak of pesantren as a second type of important religious

centres, beside the mosques, for a period as early as the 16th century: independent communities, often located far away in the mountains, and having their their origins in the pre-Islamic *mandala* and *ashrama* (Pigeaud 1967:76ff; de Graaf & Pigeaud 1974:246-7). There are indications that monastic communities of the pre-Islamic type existed well into the Islamic period and that new ones continued to be established,[\[16\]](#) but it is not at all clear whether these were ever educational institutions where textual learning was transmitted. To call them "pesantren" (a term that, to my knowledge, does not occur until much later) is begging the question.

Some authors have wished to see in the *desa perdikan* (Fokkens 1886) the vehicle of continuity linking the pesantren with pre-Islamic religious institutions. There is no doubt that the perdikan as an institution is of respectable age (Schrieke 1919), and several of the 19th-century perdikan villages may in fact have enjoyed that status since pre-Islamic times. However, it would seem that the existence of a pesantren in a perdikan village is quite incidental to the latter's status. Out of 211 perdikan villages listed in a late 19th-century survey (Anon. 1888), there were only four where (a part of) the revenue was explicitly reserved for the upkeep of pesantren. There were pesantren in several other perdikan villages, but these did not receive a share of the revenue and were therefore clearly not the reasons of the villages' perdikan status. The most common rationale for this status (apart from the rulers' political

reasons for establishing perdikan in the periphery, on which Schrieke has commented) was the existence of important graves. The maintenance of spiritually potent graves has traditionally been a respected religious function, irrespective of what the official religion was. The families to whom the perdikan were entrusted thus enjoyed a certain religious authority, and it is not surprising to see some of their members emerge as influential religious teachers (teaching, one would surmise, magical-mystical practices initially, and only much later also bookish Islamic learning). In due time the teaching roles of some of these men became institutionalized in the form of a pesantren with resident santri, a process that has been perceptively sketched for the case of Tegalsari by Guillot (1985). It should be stressed, however, that only a small minority of Javanese pesantren has such a background, and even these are not very old. The pesantren of Tegalsari, the oldest that still functioned until recently, was established in 1742. The first Dutch survey of indigenous education, made in 1819, suggests that pesantren proper did not yet exist all over Java. Institutions recognizable as pesantren were reported from Priangan, Pekalongan, Rembang, Kedu, Surabaya, Madiun and Ponorogo; in other districts there was hardly any education at all, or it took place in private homes and mosques. Madiun and Ponorogo (in which Tegalsari is located) then boasted the best pesantren; it was here that children from the north coast went for education beyond the elementary level (van der Chijs 1864:215-9).

There is, as far as I am aware, no unambiguous evidence for the existence of pesantren (in their 19th-century form) much before that of Tegalsari.

It should be borne in mind that there were no pesantren-type institutions in Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Lombok before the 20th century. The transmission of Islamic learning there was highly informal. Children and adults received rudimentary lessons in reading and reciting the Qur'an from a co-villager who had more or less mastered these skills; a passing haji or Arab trader would stay a few days and read, after prayers in the mosque, a kitab to those willing to learn. Where there was an local ulama of some renown, he would similarly read and explain kitab to the general public assembled in the mosque (in the way of the extracurricular pengajian umum given by kyai to those outside the pesantren). The most interested students would visit the ulama at home and even stay there, and the really ambitious would seek more learning in Java or, when possible, Mecca. It seems highly likely to me that this was also the situation in Java and Sumatra during the first centuries of islamisation, and that the first pesantren proper were not established before the 18th century.

The "pesantren" of Karang

One dubious case is the "well-known pesantren" of Karang in Banten (presumably on the mountain Karang to the west of Pan-deglang), that is occasionally referred to, primarily on the basis of its occurrence in the *Serat Centini* (e.g. Drewes 1969:11). One of the characters in this work, the ascetic Danadarma, relates that he studied three years in Karang under a certain Seh Kadir Jalena (which perhaps means that he studied there the mystical and occult sciences associated with the great saint `Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani).[\[17\]](#) The Centini's chief protagonist, Jayengresmi or Seh Among Raga, also studied at the "school" (*paguron*) of Karang, under a guru of Arab origin, a certain Seh Ibrahim bin Abu Bakar, known by the title of Ki Ageng Karang. From there he later travelled to another great school, in the East Javanese village of Wanamarta, led by Ki Baji Panurta, where he showed himself highly competent in orthodox bookish learning.[\[18\]](#)

A teacher on the Karang is also mentioned in a Javanese primbon from the Banyumas district, of unclear date. It refers to a certain Seh Bari of Karang (*Seh Bari ing Kawis*), who is said to have taught doctrines first propagated by the saints of Java. Drewes (1969:11) suggests that he may perhaps be identified with the Seh Bari whose teachings are laid down in

one of the two oldest (16th-century) Javanese Islamic manuscripts still extant. If this identification is correct, this would mean that some time between 1527 (formal introduction of Islam in Banten) and the end of the century, Karang became a well-known centre of orthodox Islamic learning - for the "admonitions of Seh Bari" are definitely orthodox and not of the syncretistic kind as are often attributed to the saints of Java. But even if Drewes is correct in making this identification (which I find rather speculative), I would hesitate to speak of a *pesantren*; the presence of a well-known teacher or lineage of teachers does not yet make a school in the sense conveyed by that term. The Banyumas manuscript does not speak of a school but only mentions the shaykh. (The Centini, incidentally, which does speak of schools, does not call them "*pesantren*" but "*paguron*" or "*padepokan*").

The Centini's Jayengresmi was a contemporary of Sultan Agung of Mataram and must therefore have lived in the first half of the 17th century. The Centini, however, was compiled in the early 19th century (although partly from older materials), and it would be naive to consider it as a reliable source on anything but contemporary matters. The *Sajarah Banten* (Djajadiningrat 1913), which is in date of composition close to Jayengresmi's supposed lifetimes, does not mention a *paguron* on the Karang (or elsewhere, for that matter) but suggests that it was a favourite spot for *tapa*, meditational practices.^[19] The only religious instruction^[20] mentioned in this text consists of the private education of

a prince at the hands of a Kyai Dukuh and of the *kali* (*qadi*) of the sultanate (ibid.:37). This seems to confirm my suggestion above, that there were, in the 16th and 17th centuries, both individual teachers of the Islamic scholarly disciplines, teaching mainly in mosques or at the court, and masters of the mystical-magical sciences based mainly (but not exclusively) in hermitages or near sacred graves. Pesantren as we know them may partly have developed out of these various locations, but not until a later period.

The kitab studied in the 16th-19th centuries

My suggestion that the institution of the pesantren did not emerge before the 18th century of course does not mean that kitab kuning were not studied before that time. Classical Arabic texts were definitely known and studied (although we can only guess how widely) by ca. 1600. A few works had already been translated into Javanese and Malay, while several Indonesian authors had written works in these languages that in style and content belonged to the orthodox kitab tradition. Around 1600, the first Indonesian manuscripts, in Malay, Javanese and Arabic, made

their way to Europe. They give us a precious, though very incomplete, impression of the aspects of the Islamic scriptural tradition then known in the Archipelago.

The Malay manuscripts (van Ronkel 1896) contain, among other things, commentaries on two important chapters of the Qur'an, two *hikayat* with Islamic themes, a text on Muslim marriage law (in Arabic, with interlineary translation) and a translation of a celebrated devotional poem in praise of the Prophet (Busiri's *Qasidat al-burda*, edited by Drewes 1955). The two major Javanese Islamic manuscripts, also (re-) edited by Drewes (1954, 1969) show little of the metaphysical speculation and syncretism so often thought to be typical of Javanese Islam. They are firmly within the orthodox tradition (of Shafi'i fiqh, Ash'ari doctrine and Ghazalian ethics), without any traces of local influence. They refer, moreover, to various Arabic kitab, which gives a clearer idea of how these authors relate to the Middle Eastern tradition.

Of the various Arabic works mentioned in the "*Admonitions of Seh Bari*" (Drewes 1969, previously known as "*the Book of Bonang*"), only two titles are recognizable: Ghazali's magnum opus *Ihya' ulum ad-din* and a work called *Tamhid*, which is probably Abu Shukur al-Kashshi as-Salimi's *at-Tamhid fi bayan at-tawhid*, of which a Javanese interlinear translation exists (Kraemer 1921:6). The latter work was, interestingly, especially popular in India.[\[21\]](#) The same two works are mentioned in the other early Javanese Muslim text (Kraemer 1921, Drewes 1954),

along with a *Talkhis al-minhaj* ("summary of the *Minhaj*", probably referring to Ghazali's *Minhaj al-`abidin*), a *Sharh fi'l daqa'iq* (possibly a commentary on the popular text on cosmology and eschatology, *Daqa'iq al-akhbar*).^[22] The other two titles, *al-Kanz al-khafi* ("the hidden treasure") and *Ma`rifat al-`alam* ("Gnosis of the world") suggest works on mysticism and metaphysics, although they could not be identified.

This short list would suggest that the emphasis in teaching was on doctrine and mysticism. The existence of several (younger) manuscripts, in Arabic as well as Javanese translations, of Burhanpuri's well-known *wahdat al-wujud* text *at-Tuhfat al-mursala* (Johns 1965) suggests that there was a strong predilectance for "pantheist" mysticism.^[23]

However, among the said few manuscripts brought to Europe from Jawa around 1600, there are also two Arabic works on fiqh, Abu Shuja' al-Isfahani's still widely used *at-Taqrīb fi'l-fiqh* (with an interlineary Javanese translation) and an anonymous (and now virtually unknown) *al-Idah fi'l-fiqh*. These form clear proof that fiqh was also studied in Java in the late 16th century at the latest (and perhaps much earlier).

Those Indonesians studying in Arabia became acquainted with a much wider range of texts, but what was taught in Indonesia itself must, initially at least, have been a rather limited and poor selection from the rich classical tradition. The knowledgeable Mahmud Yunus (1979:223-6) gives -- it remains unclear from what sources, but presumably from

oral tradition -- rather detailed information on the "pesantren" in (18th-century?) Mataram and mentions three kitab studied at the lower levels: *Taqrib* (the said fiqh work), *Bidayat al-hidaya* (Ghazali's work on sufi morality, excerpted from his *Ihya*) and a text known as *Usul 6 Bis*,^[24] which must have been Abu'l-Layth as-Samarqandi's little work on doctrine, also known as *Asmarakandi*.^[25]

The *Serat Centini*, as first shown by Soebardi (1971), contains more detailed information on the works studied in the "pesantren", but it would be rash to assume that this is valid for a period much earlier than that when the *Centini* was composed. In the discussions of its protagonists, twenty different kitab are mentioned, six of which are major fiqh texts (including the ones mentioned already, *Taqrib* and *Idah*),^[26] nine works on doctrine (including Samarqandi's introductory text and Sanusi's two well-known works on *`aqida* with various commentaries), two tafsir (the near-ubiquitous Jalalayn and that of Baydawi) and three works on sufism. This last group includes Ghazali's *Ihya* and also the only work in the list that is of disputed orthodoxy, `Abd al-Karim al-Jili's *al-Insan al-kamil*, a systematic presentation of Ibn al-`Arabi's *wahdat al-wujud* metaphysics.^[27]

The first hesitant Dutch observations on pesantren education confirm the impression given by the above sources. In the first survey of indigenous education, in 1819, the district authorities of Rembang listed

the kitab studied in pesantren there (van der Chijs 1864:217). The santri learned the basics of Arabic grammar through well-known works as Jurjani's *`Amil* (or *`Awamil*) and the *Jurumiyya* (still used in virtually every pesantren), and then read selected parts of the Qur'an and elementary works on fiqh (*Sittin*) and doctrine (*Asmarakandi* and Sanusi's small work *ad-Durra*), that were also mentioned in the earlier Javanese sources.

Towards the end of the century, L.W.C. van den Berg visited a number of important pesantren in Java and Madura and compiled, on the basis of interviews with the kyai, a list of the Arabic works commonly studied (1886). His explicit mentioning of the word "Arabic" suggests that works in other languages (presumably Javanese) were in also use but deliberately not taken notice of. (As I shall show below, around that time there was at least one famous Javanese ulama, Kyai Saleh Darat of Semarang, who wrote several works in Javanese, that were later widely used). Van den Berg's list shows a clear continuity with the earlier ones, in the sense that both the introductory works used and the prestigious texts mentioned remained the same, and that the additional titles basically represent elaborations upon subject matter already well circumscribed, no new orientations. Striking is the absence of a few dimensions of the classical tradition: while many fiqh works were studied, not a single one on its theoretical principles (*usul al-fiqh*) was listed; as tafsir, we only find those by the two Jalaladdin (*Jalalayn*:

Suyuti and Mahalli) and by Baydawi; and although Bukhari's canonical hadith collection was read by some kyai, no work of hadith was actually taught in the pesantren. In these three subjects, pesantren education has become considerably richer since the 1880's (van Bruinessen 1990). Other dimensions of the classical intellectual tradition, however, continued to remain absent from the pesantren, notably philosophy and metaphysics, [28] Van den Berg lists no works on *wahdat al-wujud*; these may have been taught in a number of pesantren, but less conspicuously and only to selected students, as is still the case at a few places.

The range of these works studied in pre-20th century Java is particularly narrow if one compares it with the intellectual horizons of the early Muslim authors from the outer islands. In the works of Nuruddin Raniri, Yusuf Makassar and Abdurra'uf Singkel, we find references to a much more varied and intellectual-ly interesting range of texts. To some extent this was, no doubt, mere name-dropping but they must have acquired at least a superficial (and in Raniri's case even profound) knowledge and understanding of the rich intellectual tradition then flourishing in the Hijaz and India. Al-Attas has culled from Raniri's works an impressive list of highly sophisticated sufi and philosophical books referred to by this author (1986:15-24). Even if one may remain sceptical towards Al-Attas' conclusion that Raniri had

actually read all of these works, it is obvious that the man was highly cultured. Yusuf, in the course of his many years in Arabia, studied with many a master and mastered no doubt more than the *tariqa* for which he remains known. He too refers in several risala to works well beyond the narrow range studied in Java.[\[29\]](#) And Abdurra'uf lists in his *Umdat al-muhtajin* dozens of Meccan and Madinan teachers with whom he studied or was acquainted. He remains silent on what exactly he studied with these masters, but from his own works it is evident that he covered the major Islamic sciences, and given the identity of his major teacher, Ibrahim al-Kurani, he must have been immersed in metaphysics as well as hadith studies too.

The classical learned tradition and its impact in Indonesia

The works that constitute the central core of the Islamic learned tradition were written during the 10th through 15th centuries. A few important works were written before that period, and new works in the same vein continue to be written, but by the end of the 15th century Arabic thought had reached its most consummate form, and no significant further

development of the tradition took place. The modes of thought, at least in the Islamic sciences, remained the same (in the other sciences, mathematics, physics, medicine, the paradigms changed under European influence).^[30] In this medieval tradition, all the sciences were considered as essentially finite systems of knowledge. The very idea of making significant additions to the body of knowledge was therefore absurd and even heretical. This view strictly limits the nature of works that can be written within the tradition. Aziz Al-Azmeh, whose recent work (1986) is an excellent analysis of the metaphysical bases of medieval Arabic thought, neatly sums up what sort of works medieval scholars and scientists wrote: "Thus dissertation of any topic falls into seven types: the completion of the incomplete, the correction of the mistaken, the exegesis of the obscure, the epitome of a long text, the assembly of disparate but connected writings (and this seems understood in terms of a spatial metaphor, without the implication of synthesis), the organisation of disorganised writing and the extraction of what had not previously been extracted, presumably from a given body of premises" (1986:152, after Ibn Hazm and Hajji Khalifa). This is still valid as a description of kitab kuning after the classical period. If we add translation into local languages as an eighth type, this summary covers virtually all kitab written by Indonesian ulama during the past century.

Finite and unchangeable though it was believed to be, the tradition was very rich. And it remained flexible because there had never been

attempts to make it consistent. Each of the sciences was a closed system, in which propositions were possible that contradicted those in other sciences. Philosophers and theologians, sufis and metaphysicians, scholars of fiqh and of hadith, each had their own discourse, sometimes at odds with the others (although there was an underlying unity of patterns of thought).[\[31\]](#) Even within the major discipline of fiqh, four schools (the survivors of an initially much larger number) were considered as equally orthodox although they differed on many points. On almost any subject, different views existed (and exist) next to each other. Such development as took place, usually under the influence of political developments, often took the form of a shift of emphasis in favour of one discipline against another. Many reformist movements within the tradition, for instance, are associated with a firm insistence on hadith as against kalam (theology) or even the established schools of fiqh. We often perceive an element of populism or anti-elite sentiment among the strong proponents of hadith. The learned elite lays claims to special privileges on the basis of its oligopolistic possession of sophisticated knowledge; hadith are relatively straightforward and can be understood without special training, and have moreover the stamp of Prophetic authority. They can therefore be used to declare the validity of the intellectual disciplines null and void.[\[32\]](#) Overall, the rational (*`aqliyya*) sciences (logic, philosophy, metaphysics, *kalam*, medicine, etc.) have since the classical period gradually had to cede field to the

religious sciences in the narrow sense, the *`ulum naqliyya* ("traditional" sciences: hadith, tafsir and other Qur'anic sciences, etc.), which means a considerable impoverishment of the tradition.

The first generations of Indonesians studying in Arabia assimilated only a fraction of the tradition as it still existed, initially those to which their own culture made them most receptive (notably metaphysical mysticism, cosmology, the *tariqa* and associated occult sciences, but also the central science of *fiqh*). In the course of time, more and more dimensions of the tradition became accepted into Indonesia's own Islamic tradition, which thus gradually became richer, in spite of the progressive impoverishment of what the Arabian centres had to offer.

[\[33\]](#)

Foreign models for the pesantren

The transmission of learning in Islam did not become formalized and institutionalised in the madrasa until the 10th century. Initially, it was primarily *fiqh* (the most essential science from the state's point of view) that was taught in the madrasa; the other sciences continued to be

transmitted more informally, in mosques (Makdisi 1981:9). By the time of the first documented intensive contacts of Indonesia with the central Muslim lands, the late 17th and 18th centuries, the two great Sunni empires (the Ottoman Empire, which included most of Arabia, and Mughal India) had centrally controlled networks of great madrasa (beside numerous schools of lower levels) with more or less standardized curricula.^[34] The Ottoman madrasa was typically built by one of the sultans or a high official, and was endowed with *waqf* ("pious foundations", usually in the form of land) that brought enough revenue for its upkeep and for allowances of food and candles to the students. Its director, the *mudarris*, received a government stipend. In Mughal India, state patronage was less pervasive, the learned establishment somewhat more amorphous and less close to the court. The subjects taught in the two empires differed little; they included the Qur'an, with much attention to its proper pronunciation (*tajwid*) and style of reciting (*qira'a*); Arabic grammar and rhetoric (*sarf, nahw, balagha*), (Hanafi) *fiqh*^[35] and its principles, *tafsir, kalam, hadith* (mostly non-canonical collections, but in the Ottoman Empire also Bukhari), as well as logic, arithmetics, astronomy, *adab* (literature) and *hikma* (philosophy and metaphysics).^[36]

The Turkish traveller Evliya elebi, who visited Mecca and Madina in 1671, reports that there were then forty madrasa in Mecca, of which he mentions twenty-two by name (1935:771-2); he also mentions four in

Madina and claims that there were many more (ibid.:640). His descriptions of them are, however, very meagre compared with those he gives at other places, and one gathers that they were not exactly flourishing (two centuries later, Snouck Hurgronje found the major madrasa in Mecca converted into private mansions). Significantly perhaps, Evliya has more to say of the numerous convents (*tekye* or *zawiya*) of sufi orders in Mecca, several of which lodged numerous residents (ibid.:772-3).

When looking for Middle Eastern models for the pesantren, we should perhaps, besides the madrasa, think of the *zawiya* as another likely candidate. It even seems improbable that the Indonesians staying in the Hijaz had at this stage much contact with the madrasa there, which were more geared to careers in the Ottoman Empire, and where moreover the Hanafi madhhab predominated. There is not much overlap between the books known to Indonesians in the 16th-18th centuries and those of the madrasa curriculum: the only common works are the two *tafsir* by the Jalalayn and Baydawi, and the *Tamhid*, studied in India but not the Ottoman Empire. The scholar and sufi who had the greatest impact on Indonesians studying in the Hijaz in the 17th century, Ibrahim al-Kurani (significantly a Shafi`i), seems to have had more interaction with Indian than Ottoman `ulama (we find more references to him in Indian than in Ottoman sources), and seems to have stood outside the Ottoman learned hierarchy. He taught also subjects that were not part of the official

madrassa curriculum.[\[37\]](#)

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, madrassa education in Arabia seems only to have further declined. Little is known of the form and content of education received by the Indonesians studying in Mecca and Madina during this period. Even the biographies of the greatest among them, Muhammad Arshad al-Banjari, `Abd as-Samad al-Palimbani and Da'ud bin `Abdallah al-Patani list only the names of some of their teachers (most conspicuously the sufi Muhammad bin `Abd al-Karim as-Samman and the *shaykh al-islam* of Egypt, Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Kurdi) and the titles of some of the works they read.[\[38\]](#) They did not study in madrassa but apparently attended the informal lecture circles (*halqa*) given by independent `ulama in various mosques; with some teachers they had apparently no more than a few private sessions.

Snouck Hurgronje's path-breaking work on Mecca has shown how by the late 19th century, education in the Hijaz was dominated by Mecca's Masjid al-Haram, which was then (and may well have been for some time) a veritable university, supervised by a government-appointed rector (*shaykh al-`ulama*), who allowed only selected `ulama to have their lecturing circles (*halqa*) there (1887; 1889:235-56). Less favoured `ulama taught at various other places in the city. The system on which the "university" was run differed from the madrassa in that there was no established curriculum; it was up to the individual teacher and his

students to decide which text was read, and the students did not live together in a college. The madrasa that had existed in the past, as Snouck Hurgronje remarked, no longer functioned.

This short historical survey, then, suggests that the Indonesians studying in the Hijaz never had significant direct contacts with Ottoman-type madrasa, and it is therefore not very likely that these formed the model on which the Javanese pesantren, with its resident santri and more or less fixed curriculum, were based. Two important experiences with madrasa-type education, however, seem to have been overlooked by previous research. In studies of Indonesian Islam, I have never seen references to Indonesians studying at Cairo's Azhar university before the 20th century. These must nevertheless have been quite numerous from the first half of the 19th century on, and possibly earlier. By the mid-19th century, the Azhar had around 30 colleges (*riwaq*), in which the students lived; one of these was reserved for "Jawa", i.e. Muslims from the Archipelago. Turks, Kurds and Iraqi Arabs also had only one *riwaq* each, which suggests that the "Jawa" must have been more than a handful (Vollers 1913; cf. Heyworth-Dunne 1938:25-6). The kitab studied at the Azhar (where *fiqh* of all four *madhhab* was taught) in the 18th and 19th centuries show moreover a much closer correspondence with the 19th-century pesantren curriculum than the syllabus of the earlier Ottoman and Mughal madrasa. Most of the works listed by van den Berg (1888) also occur in the Azhar syllabus as culled from

Egyptian sources by Heyworth-Dunne (1938:43-65). The importance of this finding should not be overrated, for the same works were also read in Meccan halqa; but it allows at least the possibility of an Azhari influence on the early pesan-tren. Perhaps the number of Indonesian students at the Azhar decreased in the second half of the 19th century because of its relative loss of status vis a vis Mecca due to Egypt's westernisation, but until then it had long been considered as "the Athens of Shafi'i learning" (cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1889:255).

The other relevant madrasa was founded more recently in Mecca by Indian Muslims, a decade before Snouck's stay there but apparently overlooked by him. In 1874, an Indian lady by the name of Sawlat an-Nisa endowed a waqf in Mecca for a madrasa (the Sawlatiyya), to be led by the celebrated and militant Indian scholar Rahmat Allah bin Khalil al-`Uthmani (Abd al-Jabbar 1385:121-7). Rahmat Allah had gained renown in India and abroad through his sophisticated (and successful) polemic with the German missionary Pfander, and had been one of the leaders of the anti-British Mutiny of 1857.^[39] After the defeat of this rebellion, he had taken refuge in Mecca, where he became one of the leading `ulama, and one of those most firmly committed to the defence of Islam against colonialism and westernisation. The Sawlatiyya was part of the movement of educational reform in Indian Islam that had given rise to the Deoband school (Darul `Ulum, established in 1867) and

numerous affiliated madrasa (Metcalf 1982). Like at Deoband, the curriculum was probably traditional, though with a heavier emphasis on hadith;[\[40\]](#) what made it modern was its institutional form, with classrooms, a fixed course of study and examinations. Many of its teachers, incidentally, were drawn from the among the `ulama teaching at the Masjid al-Haram.[\[41\]](#)

In the early 20th century, and perhaps earlier as well,[\[42\]](#) the Sawlatiyya had a great influence on Indonesia's pesantren world. Many Indonesians studied at this school and founded pesantren or madrasah (in the Indonesian sense of the term) upon their return, more or less modelling these on the Sawlatiyya. There was then yet another, similar madrasa in Mecca, also established by Indians, the Madrasat al-Falah (mentioned by Gobée 1921:199-200 and in the biographies in `Abd al-Jabbar 1385), but this seems to have had no Indonesian students. In 1934, a third madrasa of this type, named Dar al-`Ulum ad-Diniyya, was established in Mecca, this time by Indonesians, who walked out of the Sawlatiyya because of a conflict over the use of the Indonesian language that had become a matter of national pride.[\[43\]](#) The Indonesians resident in Mecca collected the money necessary to establish their own school. Over a hundred Indonesian students, most of whom had been at the Sawlatiyya, at once enrolled; Muhsin al-Musawwa, a sayyid born in Palembang, who was already a teacher at the Sawlatiyya, became its first rector.

To summarize, then, I would suggest that the *riwaq* at the Azhar university may have provided one of the models for the organisation of pesantren founded in the late 18th and 19th centuries, as well as for their curricula, and that around the turn of the century the Indian educational reform movement began to exert its influence through the Sawlatiyya. With the establishment in Mecca of the Indonesian Dar al-`Ulum, which imitated the Sawlatiyya in most respects, and which in its name echoes the reformist colleges of Deoband and Cairo,[\[44\]](#) the reformed madrasa became the dominant model to be emulated throughout the Archipelago. It was the Sawlatiyya and the Dar al-`Ulum that were the major influences in the development of traditional Islamic education in Indonesia (discussed extensively in Steenbrink 1974 and Yunus 1979).

Indonesian `ulama in Mecca

The existence of these madrasa in Mecca has been little noticed so far, largely because of the tremendous prestige of the Masjid al-Haram (and because of the towering place of Snouck Hurgronje's work on the latter in western scholarship). The great teachers at the Sawlatiyya, moreover,

also taught in the Mosque. Because of the importance attributed to the *isnad* (chain of transmission of a text), students were more likely to refer to the names of their teachers than to the institution where they studied. Changes in intellectual discourse, such as took place in the beginning of the century, were therefore commonly attributed to individual teachers rather than to institutional and wider socio-economic developments.

In retrospect, the decades around the last turn of century stand out as a decisive phase. Three Indonesian *`ulama* then teaching in the Masjid al-Haram (and not in the Sawlatiyya) exerted a great influence on their compatriots and, through their disciples and their writings, on the following generations. Nawawi of Banten (d. 1896-7), praised by Snouck as the most learned and modest of the Indonesians (1889:362-7) was the most prolific author of them. Beside his well-known tafsir (Johns 1984, 1988), he wrote works on virtually every discipline studied in the pesantren. Unlike earlier Indonesian authors, he did so in Arabic. Several of his works are commentaries (*sharh*) on kitab that were already used in the pesantren, explaining, supplementing and sometimes also correcting them (see the example in Steenbrink 1984:133-4). These commentaries virtually came to supersede the original texts. Others are commentaries on works that, due to him, have become part of the pesantren curriculum. No less than 22 of his works (he wrote at least twice that number) are still in print, and 11 of them figure among the

100 kitab that are most frequently used (van Bruinessen 1990). Nawawi stands, as it were, on a watershed between two periods in the pesantren tradition. He acknowledged and reinter-preted its intellectual heritage and enriched it with adaptations from material hitherto neglected. All contemporary kyai consider him as their intellectual ancestor, but also Ahmad Khatib Minang-kabau, the "father" of Indonesian Islamic reformism, was his student.

Ahmad Khatib (d. 1915) is best known for his polemics against the matrilineal *adat* of his native region and against the *tariqa* Naqshbandiyya (which had more followers in West Sumatra than elsewhere), but his role in Mecca was wider than that. He was one of the first Indonesians to acquire a licence to teach in the Masjid al-haram, and was made one of the Shafi`i imam there, a privilege usually reserved for the Mecca-born.^[45] Both contributed much to his influence among the entire Indonesian community in Mecca. His reformist attitude is apparent from his writing a commentary on an early text on *usul al-fiqh*, Juwayni's *Waraqat*, but it would be wrong to perceive him as a rebel against the tradition as such, in which he was deeply steeped. His students included both reformists and traditionalists (some of them even became *tariqa* shaykhs!), and two of his works are still used in several pesantren.^[46]

The third great figure was Kyai Mahfuz Termas (d.1919-20), of whom

the Javanese kyai speak with even more respect than of Nawawi. He was the venerated teacher of several of the founders of the NU, which no doubt added to his reputation. He had completed his education at the feet of the greatest Arab teachers in the Masjid al-Haram and also became an expert in Qur'an recitation (on which he wrote several books). His major work is a four-volume commentary on a fiqh work that used to be popular in Indonesia,[\[47\]](#) and he seems to have been the first Indonesian scholar to teach the canonical hadith collection of Bukhari. His favourite student, Hasyim Asy`ari took this tradition to Indonesia, where his pesantren at Tebuireng (Jombang) became the most renowned pondok hadits.

I have observed above that one of the conspicuous developments in the pesantren curriculum since the 1880's is the appearance of usul al-fiqh and hadith, and the greater variety in tafsir studied. One would be tempted to credit this to these three `ulama, who made their marks in precisely these fields. There is probably some truth in this, but only a partial one; the pattern of intellectual influences must have been highly diffuse. The reorientation towards these subjects was a general trend in the Islamic world, that had begun earlier and was also reflected in the new madrasa.

After these three `ulama, there have been no Indonesians of comparable standing teaching in Mecca. `Umar `Abd al-Jabbar's work on the `ulama

in the Masjid al-Haram in the 14th century of the hijra mentions three later Indonesians (or rather two Indonesians and a Mecca-born Malay), but these never achieved the same renown: Muhsin bin `Ali Musawwa (the first rector of the Dar al-`Ulum, d. 1935), Muhammad Nur al-Patani (a grandson of Da'ud bin `Abdallah, d. 1944) and `Ali Banjar (d. 1951). Apart from the first, they do not even seem to have had very numerous Indonesian students. The Indonesians studied at the Sawlatiyya and the Dar al-`Ulum or, when in the Mosque, with the more reputed Arab teachers. These different institutions are represented by the two contemporary `ulama in Mecca who stand out as the major authorities for Indonesians, the kyai's kyai. One is Shaykh Yasin of Padang, the rector of the Dar al-`ulum, the other Sayyid Muhammad bin `Alwi al-Maliki, whose father and grandfather also, in spite of their belonging to the Maliki madhhab, taught numerous Indonesians in the Masjid al-Haram. Both teach not only the entire range of subjects studied in the pesantren, but are also shaykhs of various tariqa.[\[48\]](#)

Mecca is no longer the most important place where contemporary Indonesians of pesantren backgrounds seek higher learning, and those who still do so usually stay for much shorter periods than in the past. I have the impression, although I cannot back it up with statistical data, that the Azhar has become much more important again,[\[49\]](#) while also the school of the Nadwat al-`ulama in Lucknow (see Metcalf 1982:335-47) has been attracting students from "traditional" circles in various

parts of Indonesia. Many more santri now continue their studies at the Indonesian state institutes of Islamic learning (IAIN), which probably offer a better education than that received in Mecca by the average student of previous generations. But an IAIN diploma still lacks the prestige and charisma bestowed by ijaza given by famous teachers with proper isnad in the major foreign centres, and the pesantren world is not likely to give up its Arabian (and Indian) orientation.

APPENDIX: Kitab by Indonesian `ulama currently used

A final short look at the works by Indonesian `ulama that are currently in print will give an impression of their lasting contributions to the Indonesian pesantren tradition. The early Sumatran mystics have virtually disappeared from sight. Hamzah and Syamsuddin are only accessible in foreign scholarly editions, and of Raniri's works only his

short fiqh work, *as-Sirat al-mustaqim* is still widely available in the Malay world, and that only because it is printed in the margin of M. Arshad al-Banjari's more substantial *Sabil al-muhtadin*.^[50] `Abd ar-Ra'uf's Malay translation and adaptation of the Tafsir Jalalayn, *at-Tarjuman al-mustafid*, is still regularly reprinted, as is one other short work, *Kitab al-fara'id* (on inheritance law).

The earliest author of whom more numerous works are available is Da'ud bin `Abdallah al-Patani. At least eighteen of his works, all in Malay, have been printed but several of these have long been out of print. His works are mainly used in Malaysia and Patani, and to some extent also in Sumatra. They include several works on fiqh and doctrine, a work on tasawwuf (after Ghazali's *Minhaj al-`abidin*) and a hadith collection (see also Matheson & Hooker 1988; van Bruinessen 1990). His contemporary `Abd as-Samad al-Palimbani is represented by his widely available *Sayr as-salikin* and *Hidayat as-salikin*, adaptations of Ghazali's *Ihya* and *Bidaya*, respectively. An anonymous fiqh work still read in parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan, *Fath ar-raghibin*, is also attributed to `Abd as-Samad by some authorities (Quzwain 1985), while others believe it to be by the third great Malay author of that period, M. Arshad al-Banjari, whose larger fiqh work *Sabil al-muhtadin* is still found all over the Malay-speaking world but rarely taught in pondok. A widely popular guide for worship, *Perukunan besar Melayu*, was compiled by his descendants from the master's teachings. Another

descendant, `Abd ar-Rahman Siddiq, who migrated to mainland Riau, became there a well-known author, but the three of his works that are in print can only be found in the Banjar area.

Nawawi Banten and his impressive contributions have already been mentioned. Two of his contemporaries, living in Indonesia, were also prolific authors and are still read. Sayyid `Uthman (Snouck Hurgronje 1887b, 1894) wrote numerous tracts in Malay, twelve of which are still found to be used in Jakarta and West Java. Several deal with fiqh, doctrine, and morals; there is a *mawlid*, a collection of litanies (*awrad*) and a work on Qur'an recital (*qira'a*). Kyai Saleh Darat (d.1903) wrote in Javanese. He translated and adapted major sufi texts (Ibn `Ata'illah's *Hikam*, parts of the *Ihya*) and a popular work on doctrine (*Jawharat at-tawhid*), and wrote on fiqh, Arabic grammar and tajwid. Several of the seven printed works that I have seen are no longer available, which shows that their popularity has been decreasing.

A younger Javanese author of great repute was Kyai Ihsan of Jampes (Kediri). His two-volume *Siraj at-talibin* (in Arabic), a commentary on Ghazali's *Minhaj al-`abidin*, is considered as the most important work recently written by an Indonesian, and studied in various pesantren by the more advanced students. The most prolific contemporary Javanese author is Mustofa Bisri of Rembang, who wrote well over twenty books, including a three-volume translation of the Qur'an, his best-known work.

Most of the kitab written in this century fall within three categories. The first consists of translations, usually with extensive commentaries, of classical works already widely used in the pesantren. Ahmad Subki Masyhadi of Pekalongan, Asrari Ahmad and the said Mustofa Bisri have made numerous such translations into Javanese, of works on fiqh, doctrine, and morality, as well as of hadith collections (the first two both translated *Riyad as-salihin*, the most "devotional" collection of *hadith*) and books of prayers and litanies. Similar works were translated into Madurese by Abdul Majid Tamim of Pamekasan.

The second category, partially overlapping with the first, consists of books with largely devotional purposes, such as texts in praise of the Prophet or the saints, litanies and prayers, and introductions to the various *tariqa*. These works are usually not part of the pesantren curriculum, but widely used by both santri and the general population. Many kyai wrote works of these types or translated Arabic devotional texts; among the most outstanding among them is Kyai Muslikh of Mranggen near Semarang (d. 1986), one of the great masters of the Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya, known especially for his translation of Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir's hagiography [\[51\]](#) and related works, and the somewhat earlier Ahmad bin Abdul Hamid of Kendal, who translated and adapted the same hagiography as well as several works on the Prophet.

The third and largest category is that of simple introductory texts for use in the pesantren or by the general public, without any scholarly pretention. Numerous `ulama, all over the Archipelago, have produced such texts. Most of these books or booklets are in the vernacular languages, except where their object is the teaching of Arabic. A distinct subgroup consists of the textbooks especially written for the (reformed) madrasah, which often deviate from the traditional way of presenting the material. Two major authors of this type of textbooks are, not accidentally, of West Sumatran origins, and wrote in Malay as well as simple Arabic: Abdul Hamid Hakim and Mahmud Yunus.[\[52\]](#)

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[1] Before Muhammadiyah's own pesantren, there were already several others with a definitely reformist orientation. The best known, but not the only one, is that of Gontor (Castles 1965). A summary survey of types of pesantren in East Java in the 1970's is given by Abdurrahman 1981.

[2] Notably those of Bukhari and Muslim; the other four collections of "authentic" (*sahih*) hadith are much less used. Non-canonical collections such as the *Riyad as-salihin* and the *Bulugh al-maram*, with their much heavier emphasis on devotional than on legalistic matters, are still more popular in the traditional milieu, but these too were hardly studied a century ago.

[3] A detailed survey of these works is given in van Bruinessen 1990.

[4] On Ibn Taymiyya's place in the late medieval tradition and his engagement with Ash`arism, philosophy, mysticism and political theory, see Al-Azmeh 1986, passim; Hourani 1962:18-22; on his impact on later fundamentalism Sivan 1985. A generation ago, the NU still had a body of censors; they placed Ibn Taymiyya's works high on the index. Many kyai, in fact, own copies of some of his works, notably his *Fatawa*, but keep them locked away to protect their pupils from their influence. Like elsewhere, such a ban only acts as an invitation to the more intelligent santri to read these works in secret.

[5] Out of the 500-odd kitab by Indonesian (and Malay) `ulama presently in print, almost 100 are in Arabic. Over 200 are in Malay and 150 in Javanese; the remainder are in Sundanese, Madurese and Acehese.

[6] Abdurrahman Wahid, personal communication.

[7] In this case, there may be shortcuts in the chain. Numerous mystics have claimed spiritual initiation, in a dream or vision, by a predecessor long dead or even by the Prophet himself. The latter was the claim, for instance, of Ahmad Tijani, the North African founder of the *tariqa Tijaniyya*; it is a highly con-troversial claim, and is rejected by

many traditionalists. The former claim is more common (also among contemporary Javanese kyai); even the silsila of the quite orthodox Naqshbandiyya contains several "jumps" across the generations due to such *ruhani* initiations.

[8] Indicative of the importance attached to *isnad* is a book by the leading Indonesian ulama in Mecca, Shaykh Yasin of Padang (the director of the traditionalist school Dar al-`Ulum there), which lists nothing but the classical kitab he is allowed to teach, with for each the name of the master under which he studied it and the entire preceding *isnad* up to the author (al-Padani 1402). For earlier examples of this sort of work see Vajda 1983.

[9] The well-known Madurese Kyai As'ad Syamsul Arifin of Situbondo (East Java), NU's *minence grise*, has recently constructed an intricate family tree showing most Madurese kyai to be descendants of the *wali* Sunan Giri. Hasyim Asy'ari and Wahab Hasbullah, two of the founders of NU, traced their pedigree to Jaka Tingkir, who according to tradition was a son of Brawijaya VI and became the first Muslim ruler of Pajang (Aboebakar 1957:41-2).

[10] Important decisions by the Majlis Syuriah are laid down in a series of volumes titled *Ahkam al-fuqaha* ("Rulings of the legal experts"), usually with the relevant references to authoritative fiqh works.

[11] With the partial exception of sections of the Chinese communities and Bali's Hindu reformists, but even here contacts with the foreign source are quite ephemeral.

[12] This mission is mentioned in the *Sajarah Banten* (Djajadiningrat 1913:49-52, 174-8). The titles of the kitab that the ruler wished to have explained are given as *Marqum*, *Muntahi* and *Wujudi-yah*, by which no specific work can be identified. Djajadiningrat believes these titles to be pure phantasy, but we may, for instance, read the last as *kitab wujudiyah*, i.e. book[s] on [the metaphysical doctrine of] *wahdat al-wujud*, which would make perfect sense in this context. In some cases, after all, this doctrine proved extremely useful for the legitimation of the ruler as *insan kamil*, perfect man.

[13] The Shattariyya, which was first introduced into Indonesia in the mid-17th century, is a tariqa of Indian origins, that never gained much of a following in the Middle East. See Rizvi 1983 and T. Yazici, *attariye*, *Islam Ansiklopedisi* 11, 355-6. The earliest Indonesian branches of the Qadiriyya and the Naqshbandiyya, too, were of Indian rather than Middle Eastern affiliation.

[14] The concept of emanation in seven stages (*martabat tujuh*), instead of Ibn `Arabi's five, is to my knowledge only encountered in

Indian and Indonesian mystical-metaphysical treatises.

[15] A rare exception is Roff's study of Indonesian students in Egypt (1970), but this is only marginally relevant to the *pesantren* tradition since most of these students belonged to other social and cultural environments.

[16] According to the *Sejarah Banten*, Maulana Hasanuddin, Banten's first Muslim ruler, founded a new *petapan* on the mountain Pinang at the instigation of his "father", the saint Sunan Gunung Jati (Djajadiningrat 1913:34).

[17] Popular tradition in Cirebon still holds that the saint himself came to Java and took part in its islamisation; his grave is even shown on Gunung Jati. Shaykh `Abd al-Qadir is, not only in Indonesia, believed to have taught his disciples invulnerability, an *ilmu* highly desirable to many Indonesians. The Bantenese invulnerability cult of *debus* is strongly associated with `Abd al-Qadir.

[18] Soebardi 1971. See Hadidjaja & Kamajaya 1979, 11 and 49-53.

[19] The Karang is mentioned as one of three mountains on which Maulana Hasanuddin, the first ruler of Banten and the bringer of Islam, practised *tapa* (Djajadiningrat 1913:38).

[20] Apart from Maulana Hasanuddin's initiation in *ilmu Islam* by two *jinn* at a deserted *petapan* (ibid.:32).

[21] As-Salimi lived in the first half of the 5th/11th century. His *Tamhid* surveys doctrine, paying especial attention to the views of the Mu`tazila and the philosophers. It is known to have been widely used in religious education in India during the 13th through 16th centuries (Mujeeb 1967:406), and seems to have been less popular elsewhere, since most of the mss. mentioned by Brockelmann are in Indian collections (GAL I:419; S I:744).

[22] This work is now quite popular throughout the Archipelago, the Arabic original as well as Malay, Javanese, Sundanese and Madurese translations being printed locally. Raniri refers several times to another (?), so far unidentified, work with a similar title, *Daqa'iq al-haqa'iq*.

[23] The great Madinan teacher, Ibrahim al-Kurani, wrote a commentary on this work especially for his Indonesian students, apparently to correct the heterodox interpretations to which it gave rise. As Simuh has shown (1982:295-6), Ronggowarsito's *Wirid Hidayat Jati* shows a clear influence of this work, with which he may have become acquainted in the *pesantren* of Tegalsari, where he studied.

[24] I.e., a work on *usul ad-din* (doctrine), consisting of six chapters (each beginning with the opening "*bismillah*").

[25] In the 19th century, this was usually the first text on doctrine studied (van den Berg 1886:537). Javanese translations (of indeterminate date) are extant in manuscript, and one was recently edited in Latin transcription (Jandra 1985-1986). This Javanese *Asmarakandi* also contains a section on elementary Shafi'i *fiqh* added by the anonymous translator (Abu'l-Layth himself was a Hanafi). The text is presently best known through a commentary written by Nawawi Banten, *Qatr al-ghayth*, and a Javanese translation by Ahmad Subki of Pekalongan entitled *Fath al-mughith*, both of which are widely used.

[26] The other four being the prestigious standard works of Shafi'i *fiqh*, Rafi'i's *al-Muharrar* and Ibn Hajar Haytami's *Tuhfat al-muhtaj* (that were more often respectfully mentioned than actually used), the introductory *Sittin* by Abu'l-`Abbas Ahmad Misri (now little used but still available) and a work not satisfactorily identifiable (Soebardi 1971:335-6).

[27] The third tasawwuf text is Zayn ad-Din Malibari's *Hidayat al-adhkiya'*, a simple work that is still widely used, together with various commentaries and translations. See for more detailed comments on these and other works also: van Bruinessen 1990.

[28] These two subjects, however, have since the 17th century virtually disappeared from Islamic education throughout the Sunni world. Only in Iran, and to some extent in India, have they remained an important part of the intellectual tradition (see Nasr 1987).

[29] He quotes, for instance, numerous sufi anecdotes, some of which are attributed to Jami's *Nafahat al-uns*, while others must be culled from unmentioned other works or heard from a range of teachers. There are also quotations from Ibn `Arabi, Muhammad Fadlillah Burhanpuri and other *wahdat al-wujud* sufis, that seem based on actual reading of their works, etc. Two copies that he made of Jami's *ad-Durrat al-fakhira*, which he apparently studied under supervision of Ibrahim al-Kurani in Madina, are still preserved (Heer 1979:13, 15; this reference was kindly brought to my attention by Professor Anthony Johns)

[30] Albert Hourani's excellent work on modern Arabic thought (1962) shows how even the thought of those who consciously departed from the tradition was still influenced by it. It pays, however, no attention to the thinkers who remained within the tradition and were not interested in a dialogue with western thought.

[31] Brought out beautifully in Al-Azmeh's important work (1986).

[32] This populist strain runs through Islamic history, from Ahmad ibn Hanbal, through Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad bin `Abd al-Wahhab to the neo-fundamentalists. In Indonesia, the modernist attack against traditional `ulama, with the call for reopening the gate of *ijtihad*, had a great impact in the first half of this century. In 18th-century Iran it took the form of a struggle between pro- and anti-`ulama currents, known as *usuli* and *akhbari* (after the intellectual discipline of *usul al-fiqh* and *akhbar*, a term almost synonymous with hadith). Perceptive observations on this conflict (which ended in a victory of the *usuli*) in Mottahedeh 1985.

[33] Some dimensions of the classical tradition, Mu`tazili rationalism and philosophy, became only known in Indonesia (apart from the summary presentation in the *Tamhid*, see note 21) in the past two decades, through modernist Muslims who studied in North America, notably Harun Nasution and Nurcholish Madjid. The latter published an important collection of classical philosophical and theological texts in translation (1984); significantly, he is much closer to the pesantren world than earlier generations of modernists. There are now students of pesantren backgrounds working on theses on previously neglected Islamic intellectual currents.

[34] On the Ottoman *madrassa* and their curricula: Uzunçarlılı 1965; Baltacı 1976; Atay 1983. These works are rich mines of source materials but somewhat ahistorical in their approach; Repp 1972 gives a more systematic treatment of the development of the hierarchy of the madrasa and the scholarly careers of Ottoman `ulama. On the Mughal madrasa (whose curriculum still continued to expand and reached its most comprehensive form, the *Dars-i Nizami*, only in the early 18th century): Mujeeb 1967:389-414; Ahmad 1985; Metcalf 1982:16-45.

[35] The Hanafi madhhab was the official one in both empires, and official sources mention only works on Hanafi fiqh. Shafi`i fiqh was presumably studied mostly in mosques, in the districts with a Shafi`i population such as Kurdistan and parts of Egypt. The relatively independent Azhar mosque and university was perhaps the major centre of Shafi`i learning.

[36] In Mughal India, philosophy and metaphysics, and the rational sciences in general, were more prominent parts of the learned tradition than in the Ottoman Empire. The *Dars-i Nizami* even included a work by Mulla Sadra Shirazi, who seems not to have been known elsewhere outside Iran (Mujeeb 1967:407).

[37] On Ibrahim, see Johns 1978 and the same author's article "al-Kurani" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.); also Rizvi 1983, *passim*. Of great interest is his intellectual autobiography, *al-Amam li-iqaz al-himam*, which was, significantly, printed in India (Haidarabad in the Deccan) in the beginning of this century (1328/1910).

[38] The most complete list of teachers in Abdullah 1987 (on Da'ud, who was the most wide-ranging scholar of the three). On the others, see Abu Daudi 1980, Zamzam 1979 and Quzwain 1985. Arshad studied especially fiqh, and his own work *Sabil al-muhtadin* is primarily based on two great classics, Malibari's *Fath al-mu'in* and Ansari's *Manhaj at-tullab*; `Abd as-Samad's chief topic was sufism, and his major works are adaptations of Gha-zali's *Ihya`ulum ad-din* and *Bidayat al-hidaya*.

[39] See Powell 1976. Rahmat Allah's refutation of Christianity was based on a deeper understanding than that of most other polemi-cists, and on an acquaintance with recent Biblical criticism. His arguments were set out in several books, and he con-vincingly defeated Pfander in a public debate. He was one of the signat-ories of the *fatwa* calling for *jihad* against the British in 1857 (*ibid.*:59-60), and led the movement in Muzaffarpur in Bihar (Ahmad 1975:328).

[40] "The [Deoband] school taught basically the *dars-i nizami* (...) The Deobandis, however, reversed the emphasis on "rational" studies in favor of an emphasis on hadis, which was to be the basis of their popular teaching (...) The most influential teacher at the school was the *shaikhu'l-hadis*; and only good students were encouraged to study the subject." (Metcalf 1982:100-1).

[41] This is evident from the biographies of these `ulama in `Abd al-Jabbar 1385.

[42] The school occurs in the biographies of `ulama studying in Mecca in the 1920's and 1930's; there are insufficient detailed biographies of earlier students to determine since when there were Indonesians at the Sawlatiyya.

[43] One account of the conflict (Aboebakar 1957:88-90) has it begin because one of the teachers tore up an Indonesian newspaper that a few students were reading; other reading than the Arabic textbooks was forbidden in the school. One participant (Shaykh Yasin al-Padani, presently rector of Dar al-`Ulum, interviewed 6-3-1988) adds that the teacher mocked Indonesian nationalist aspirations, saying that such a stupid people would never attain independence. (Given the radical attitudes of its founder, the teachers at the Sawlatiyya may well have mocked the Indonesians for their lack of firmness vis a` vis their Dutch colonisers). Others have suggested that the Indonesians' wish to be able to speak to their teachers in Indonesian rather than Arabic lay at the roots of the conflict.

[44] The Dar al-`ulum in Cairo was established in 1872 as a teacher training college, whose students were recruited from al-Azhar; the curriculum included the Islamic as well as modern "western" sciences. One of the teachers was Muhammad `Abduh (Heyworth-Dunne

1938:377-9).

[45] Snouck Hurgronje, who strongly disliked Ahmad Khatib, claims that he owed these positions not to his learning but to the fact that his father-in-law, the bookseller and "usurer" Salih al-Kurdi, intervened for his son-in-law with the Sharif `Awn, who owed him a favour (*Adviezen* III, 1846, 1853, 1914, 1928). Even Snouck, however, had to admit that Ahmad Khatib was "highly learned by Malay standards" (*ibid.*, 1846).

[46] These are the said *usul al-fiqh* work, *an-Nafahat `ala sharh al-waraqat*, and a short Malay work on doctrine, *Fath al-mubin*. He wrote much more (Abd al-Jabbar 1385:37-44 lists no fewer than 46 works), but only these two are still in print in Indonesia.

[47] His *Mawhaba dhawi 'l-fadl* is a sharh on `Abdallah Ba-Fadl's *al-Muqaddimat al hadramiyya*, known as "*Bapadal*" in the pesantren. It was printed in Egypt in 1315/1897-8 but is no longer available. His only work currently in print is a difficult text on Arabic grammar, *Minhaj dhawi 'n-nazar* (a commentary on Ibn Malik's *Alfiyya*). `Abd al-Jabbar lists 12 other works (1385:323-4).

[48] Shaykh Yasin studied in his youth at the Sawlatiyya, which he left, with the other Indonesians, for the Dar al-`ulum, of which he finally became the most prominent teacher. In his intellectual autobiography (*al-Padani* 1402), he lists his teachers and the books that he is himself authorised to teach. On Sayyid Muhammad bin `Alwi see *Tempo* 2-1-1988, on his grandfather `Abbas al-Maliki, `Abd al-Jabbar 1385:163-5. I heard that Muhammad bin `Alwi is no longer allowed to teach in the Masjid al-Haram because of his open support of, and instruction in, various sufi orders, including the Tijaniyya and the Naqshbandiyya.

[49] Al-Azhar is often, incorrectly, considered as a haven of Islamic modernism (mainly because `Abduh was once associated with it). The Indonesians studying there now are almost invariably of "traditional" backgrounds, and even among these I have heard complaints of its "old-fashioned" methods of education.

[50] Another short text, *al-Fawa'id al-bahiyya*, has similarly survived in the margin of Da'ud al-Patani's *Jam` al-fawa'id*. This work, however, is only very rarely used.

[51] *an-Nur al-burhani*, after Ja`far Barzinji's *al-Lujayn ad-dani*.

[52] Abdul Hamid Hakim wrote textbooks on fiqh (*al-Mu`in al-mubin*) and *usul al-fiqh* (*as-Sullam*, *al-Bayan*); Mahmud Yunus also on fiqh (the widely used *al-Fiqh al-wadiah*), on the science of hadith and on comparative religion.

