

# Chapter VI The Human Network surrounding an Arab Religious Figure in Southeast Asia who Appears in the Literature: The Case of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās in Bogor<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Considering their relatively small numbers, Arabs have played important roles in Southeast Asian societies, especially in maritime regions. Some established close relationships with influential members of host societies and intermarried. In places such as Pontianak, Kubu, Siak, and Perlis, Arabs even became rulers. In addition to being politically active, some Arabs also established themselves as religious figures. They are said to have attracted people because of their character and knowledge; they gathered disciples, established schools, and were engaged in various religious activities. Some even came to be considered as *walīs*, those close to God.<sup>2</sup> This chapter discusses the life and human network of one such figure, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1933). He was an *‘ālim*,<sup>3</sup> who established himself as a religious figure in the city of Bogor, Java. He is also known as *keramat empang*.<sup>4</sup> His biographies are known to us, and stories about his life are passed on orally among both Arabs and non-Arabs. However, there is a difference between the life of ‘Abd Allāh presented in written biographies and the orally transmitted stories in terms of his human network. In this discussion, his life and network are reconstructed based on the written biographies. Following that, a story about his connection with notable

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<sup>2</sup> *Walī* roughly corresponds to saint in English. However, I use the word “*walī*” instead of “saint” in this chapter because saint has Christian connotations.

<sup>3</sup> The word *‘ālim* (pl. *‘ulamā*) literally means “one who knows” and usually refers to a religious scholar.

<sup>4</sup> *Empang* is the name of a quarter in Bogor that is densely populated by Arabs.

members of the host societies is presented. Finally, the differences between the two kinds of his life story are analyzed.

### 1. Historical Background of Arabs in Southeast Asia

Before discussing the main subject, it is necessary to outline the history of Arab immigrants in Southeast Asia. Arabs are those people living in the vast regions of North Africa and the Middle East. However, most Arab immigrants in Southeast Asia came from the South Arabian region of Ḥaḍramawt, which is today part of the Republic of Yemen. These immigrants were Sunnī Muslims and followed the Shāfi‘ī school of law. Communities of people from Ḥaḍramawt (henceforth Ḥaḍramīs) can also be found in regions around the Indian Ocean, especially along the East African coast and in India (such as Gujarat and the Deccan Plateau).<sup>5</sup> A large-scale migration of Ḥaḍramīs to the Indian Ocean regions started in the mid-eighteenth century, and was accelerated by the opening of the Suez Canal and the introduction of steamships in the second half of the nineteenth century. Reasons for the migration varied, but chronic poverty and the deteriorating political situation of that time were likely major reasons why many people left their homeland. Meanwhile, some Indian Ocean regions increasingly accepted foreigners, and many Ḥaḍramīs headed for such places.

In the early modern period, few Arabs migrated directly to Southeast Asia. A typical pattern involved the first generation migrating to India, and their mixed blood descendants (usually of Arab fathers and Indian mothers) going further east and settling in Southeast Asia. Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1658), an Islamic scholar from Gujarat, India, who stayed in Aceh in the first half of the seventeenth century, and Munshi Abdullah (d. 1854), a modern nineteenth century Malay writer, may both fall into this category, although to what extent they identified themselves as Arabs is a separate issue. With the improvement of communication and transportation, direct migration to Southeast Asia became a realistic option for Ḥaḍramīs. By the end of the nineteenth century, the region had become the most important destination for them.

Most Ḥaḍramīs were engaged in commercial activities within the host societies; but this does not mean they were just merchants. Those religiously oriented and educated were concerned not just with earning a living, but also with spreading knowledge of Islam. They built schools and mosques and engaged in other religious activities, especially later in their lives. There was some anti-Arab feeling in the host societies, because some Arabs were notorious for financial exploitation and

<sup>5</sup> For information about Ḥaḍramawt and Ḥaḍramīs in the Indian Ocean region, see Freitag and Clarence-Smith [1997], Freitag [2003], and Ho [2006].

arrogant attitudes. However, some Arabs gained the respect of the locals because of their pious activities. Many Arabs who were engaged in religious activities came to be known as *walīs*, those close to God. In Southeast Asia, one can find many Arab (i.e., Ḥaḍramī) *walīs*. In terms of genealogy, most came from *sāda* (sg. *sayyid*) or those who trace their genealogy to the Prophet Muḥammad. In terms of religious practice, the *sāda* are Sunnī Shāfi‘īs, as are other Ḥaḍramīs, and follow ‘Alawī Tarīqa, a *ṣūfi* order started in the thirteenth century by Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Faḡīh al-Muqaddam (d. 1255). In Ḥaḍramawt, the *sāda* had an upper hand over others in religious and scholarly activities and enjoyed privileges such as exemption from taxation. With the rise of Islamic reform movements after the nineteenth century, the status of the *sāda* came into question, first in Southeast Asia and then to a lesser degree in Ḥaḍramawt. Veneration of *walīs* was also criticized, though this issue is outside the scope of the present study.

World War II was a turning point in Ḥaḍramī migration to Southeast Asia. Migration to the region stopped suddenly because of the Japanese occupation. Even after the war, newly-found nation states adopted policies that made it more difficult for Ḥaḍramīs (as well as other foreigners) to immigrate than before the war. Migration to Southeast Asia declined considerably and finally came to an end. Most Arabs in Southeast Asia today are thus the descendants of those who came to the region more than half a century ago. In terms of their legal status, these Arabs are citizens of their country of residence. The Arabic language, an important element of Arab identity, is no longer their mother tongue, though there are those who have a good command of it. Many have no experience living in their “homeland,” Ḥaḍramawt, or have not even visited there. Some claim to be more Indonesian or Malay than Arab, but this does not mean they are losing their identity as Arabs. Although direct contact between Ḥaḍramawt and Southeast Asia declined after World War II, a Southeast Asian network of those of Arab descent remains active. Many old people in the community have a knowledge of the places, history, customs, and influential figures of Ḥaḍramawt, even if they do not have firsthand experience of the region (presumably they acquired such knowledge through communication with elders and reading). When asked about the “homeland,” they can describe it enthusiastically. Knowledge of Ḥaḍramawt is not confined to the elderly. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of Arab youths studying at religious schools in Ḥaḍramawt. They study religion and the customs of Ḥaḍramawt, visit their relatives and the tombs of great ancestors, and finally become “true” Ḥaḍramīs. Literary works by Ḥaḍramī writers originally written in Arabic have been translated into Indonesian. Although few Ḥaḍramīs migrate to Southeast Asia now, the revival of movement between the two regions indicate the Ḥaḍramī network in the Indian Ocean region is very much alive.

## 2. The Life of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās

Among the Ḥaḍramī religious figures who migrated to Southeast Asia, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin is fairly well-known, and more than one literary work mentions him. However, it is difficult to take an empirical approach to studying a Ḥaḍramī known almost exclusively for his religious activities. Usually, they do not appear in official documents, periodicals, or other materials used by historians. The main sources for the present study come from *manāqib* literature. Roughly speaking, *manāqib* is a biography laudatory in nature, with emphasis on a spiritual path, virtuous conduct, and miracles (*karāmāt*, sg. *karāma*) performed by departed *walī*. Thus, they are not exactly what we consider “historical sources,” though they do record some historical events. The main focus of the analysis is not the historicity of their content, but the context in which ‘Abd Allāh’s life is presented in those works.

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās was born in 1849 (1265 A.H.) in the village of Ḥawra, Ḥaḍramawt. He was born to a family named “al-‘Aṭṭās,” which literally means “one who sneezes.” His genealogy is shown in a chart as follows:

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Muḥsin b. Ḥusayn b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭās b. ‘Aqīl b. Sālim b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saqqāf b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Alawī b. Muḥammad al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ṣāhib Mirbāt b. ‘Alī Khālī Qasam b. ‘Alawī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alawī b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Muhājir b. ‘Īsā b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-‘Urayḍī b. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn the son of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. [‘Alī al-Saqqāf 1352 A.H.]

The chart shows that ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin was a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, a cousin of the Prophet and the fourth orthodox caliph. Descendants of the Prophet can be found in almost every part of the Muslim world. The common ancestor of all Ḥaḍramī *sāda* is one Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā (see above) who left Baṣra in Iraq and settled in Ḥaḍramawt in the tenth century. In the course of history, the Ḥaḍramī *sāda* came to be divided into various kinship groups bearing different family names, for example al-Saqqāf, al-‘Aydārūs, al-Ḥabshī, Bin Shihāb, ‘Aydīd, and others.<sup>6</sup> The al-‘Aṭṭās family is one of the main families.

The founding of the al-‘Aṭṭās family dates back to the seventeenth century when its eponymous founder ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1661) moved from the village of al-Lisk to Ḥurayḍa in wādī ‘Amd<sup>7</sup> and established himself as a

<sup>6</sup> For the genealogy and families of Ḥaḍramī *sāda*, see al-Mashhūr [1984].

religious and political leader.<sup>8</sup> His descendants came to be known as “al-‘Aṭṭās,” the agnomen originally given to ‘Umar’s grandfather ‘Aqīl b. Sālīm. Since ‘Umar’s time, Ḥurayḍa has been the center of the al-‘Aṭṭās family. Its members have been influential in politics, religious matters, and society in general in Ḥurayḍa and nearby areas. Members of the al-‘Aṭṭās family can also be found in al-Mashhad, Naḥḥūn, ‘Amd, and other places in the western part of inland Ḥaḍramawt. On the other hand, they are rarely found in Say’ūn and Tarīm, or in political, commercial, and learning centers in the eastern part of the region. When going abroad, al-‘Aṭṭās family members preferred Southeast Asia as their destination, rather than India or East Africa.<sup>9</sup> In any case, they have developed into one of the largest families of Ḥaḍramī *sāda*.

As far as genealogy is concerned, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin belonged to the mainstream of the al-‘Aṭṭās family. The family is subdivided into several branches, and ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin belonged to the Muḥsin b. Ḥusayn branch, from which the heads of the family (*manṣab*) in Ḥurayḍa were traditionally elected.<sup>10</sup> In fact, ‘Abd Allāh’s great grandfather ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad was a *manṣab* in Ḥurayḍa. After ‘Abd Allāh, however, it was not Muḥammad (the grandfather of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin), but his brother ‘Alī who became the next *manṣab*. Since then, successive *manṣabs* of Ḥurayḍa have been descendants of this ‘Alī. After all, the Muḥsin b. Ḥusayn branch is the second largest branch of the al-‘Aṭṭās family, and only a small percentage became *manṣabs*. We can find little information on ‘Abd Allāh’s grandfather Muḥammad: neither the year nor the place of his death is known. Considering the fact that ‘Abd Allāh’s father Muḥsin (d. 1863/4) died in Ḥawra, it is certain that ‘Abd Allāh’s family moved from Ḥurayḍa to Ḥawra either in the time of his father or grandfather.

The village of Ḥawra (‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s birthplace) is in an area called al-Kasr in the western part of inland Ḥaḍramawt. Famous for good soil suitable for agriculture, the village is surrounded by date palm trees. Many of the villagers are Bā Wazīr<sup>11</sup> and those who trace their ancestry to Kinda, a well-known tribal group

<sup>7</sup> Wādī is a valley or river bed that is dry except for the time of rain. Most people living in inland Ḥaḍramawt live in wādīs.

<sup>8</sup> For the history of the al-‘Aṭṭās family, see Arai [2004].

<sup>9</sup> India was the second most important destination for them, but not many of them migrated to East Africa.

<sup>10</sup> There have been two *manṣabs* of the al-‘Aṭṭās family in Ḥurayḍa after the *manṣab*ship was shared by Muḥammad and ‘Alī, the sons Muḥsin b. Ḥusayn al-‘Aṭṭās, after whom the “Muḥsin b. Ḥusayn branch” was named. Also, there are al-‘Aṭṭās *manṣabs* in other places such as al-Mashhad and ‘Amd. In principle, the two *manṣabs* of Ḥurayḍa are supposed to act as if they were one person, and al-‘Aṭṭās *manṣabs* outside Ḥurayḍa are under the authority of Ḥurayḍa *manṣabs*. For the genealogy of the al-‘Aṭṭās *manṣabs*, see Arai [2004:100].

<sup>11</sup> One of major non-*sāda* families in Ḥaḍramawt.

in South Arabia [‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saqqāf 2005:437–43]. Although not a minor village, Ḥawra was distant from the political, economic, and learning centers of the region. For example, Say’ūn, the residence of the al-Kathīrī sultan and a center of commerce in inland Ḥaḍramawt was further east. The town of Tarīm, a traditional center of learning in South Arabia and densely populated by the *sāda*, was even further east than Say’ūn. Nor was Ḥawra a place where many al-‘Aṭṭās family members lived, unlike Ḥurayḍa and al-Mashhad. In sum, the birth place of ‘Abd Allāh was not particularly special in terms of politics, commerce, or learning.

The *manāqib* of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin begins with his education since childhood.<sup>12</sup> He is said to have been raised by his father, Muḥsin. Not much is known about the father: he was not famous as was his son. One certain fact was his concern for his son’s education. ‘Abd Allāh first studied the al-Qur’ān under the teacher ‘Umar b. Faraj b. Sabbāh. After finishing his study of al-Qur’ān, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s father took him to important figures in Ḥaḍramawt under whom he studied religious subjects. These included Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās of Ḥurayḍa and Šālīḥ b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās of ‘Amd,<sup>13</sup> two famous scholars from the al-‘Aṭṭās family. Other scholars ‘Abd Allāh visited were Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh Bā Sawdān in al-Khurayba, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alawī al-‘Aydārūs in Bōr, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Miḥḍār in al-Quwayra, and Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bār in al-Qurayn. What was the content of the education? Judging from the books he read, such as *Risāla* by Aḥmad b. Zayn al-Ḥabshī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* by al-Ghazzālī, and works by Ḥaḍramī *sāda*, it can be said that he received an education typical of the region (which can be characterized by keywords such as Sunnī, Šāfi’ī, and ‘Alawī Ṭarīqa). ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s travel in the region must have helped him get a general picture of Ḥaḍramawt. Having been born in a relatively minor place did not prevent him from receiving an education.

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s education continued when he made a pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time in 1866 (1282 A.H.). There, he met various scholars. After returning to Ḥaḍramawt, he went to Tarīm, the center of the Ḥaḍramī *sāda*. He visited scholars, both dead and alive, at their graves and houses. The names of those he visited are not given in his *manāqibs*, but he surely visited the tombs of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād (d. 1719/20), a famous *ṣūfī* and scholar, and the above-mentioned Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam (d. 1255), the man who initiated organized *ṣūfism* in Ḥaḍramawt, at the Zanbal graveyard. These journeys not only aided his education, but also allowed him to receive a blessing (*baraka*).

<sup>12</sup> The biography of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās is based mainly on ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā [n.d.] and al-‘Aṭṭās [1979, 2:41–61].

<sup>13</sup> A village in wādī ‘Amd.

### 3. Migration to Southeast Asia

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin made a second pilgrimage to Mecca in 1867 (1283 A.H.).<sup>14</sup> After that, he immigrated to Java. The details of why he left his homeland are unknown. He was looking for a job suitable for his education and experience. It may have been that he had difficulty finding a position in Ḥaḍramawt, as did many others, and sought an opportunity abroad. It is worth mentioning that his father Muḥsin died in 1863/4 (1280 A.H.) when ‘Abd Allāh was around fourteen years old. ‘Abd Allāh, who was around eighteen years old at the time he went to Java, must have been expected to sustain himself. Like other Ḥaḍramīs in general and al-‘Aṭṭās family members in particular, ‘Abd Allāh headed for Southeast Asia.

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin spent the early days of his life in Java in Pekalongan, a town on the north coast of Central Java. He was engaged in trade and moved from town to town, as was customary in that profession. In terms of religious life, he became associated with Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Bin Ḥamza al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1886) in Jakarta, and studied under him. The two men had much in common—both were first-generation immigrants from Ḥaḍramawt and, as their names indicate, they belonged to the same family. In addition to a family connection, they had both studied under the same teacher, Šāliḥ b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās, in Ḥaḍramawt. Furthermore, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad left his homeland because of a difficult financial situation, which may have been why ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin left [Arai 2004:153–54]. Aḥmad cared about ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin and when he visited Pekalongan, he stayed with ‘Abd Allāh. It was Aḥmad al-‘Aṭṭās who encouraged ‘Abd Allāh’s spiritual growth. They frequently visited each other until Aḥmad b. Muḥammad returned to Ḥaḍramawt.<sup>15</sup>

A significant incident in ‘Abd Allāh’s life in Java was his imprisonment, the reason for which is unclear. The *manāqib* of ‘Abd Allāh merely states he did not do anything wrong and compares ‘Abd Allāh’s case to that of Yūsuf, a figure who

<sup>14</sup> The sources I consulted do not agree about the years of his pilgrimages. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā’s *Ghanīmat al-Akyās* (manuscript) erroneously give the date of his first and second pilgrimages as 1282 A.H. Baraja [2007] (a partial translation of *Ghanīmat al-Akyās* into Indonesian), ‘Umar Bā Rajā’s *Tarjamat* (manuscript), and Al-Attas [1999] state the first pilgrimage was in 1282 A.H., and the second was in 1283 A.H. The matter is further complicated by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saqqāf [2005:187 n. 2] that states the pilgrimages occurred in 1281 A.H. and 1283 A.H. Although it is necessary to check other sources, I use 1282 and 1283 A.H. as of the years of ‘Abd Allāh’s pilgrimages, as agreed upon in most available sources.

<sup>15</sup> Even after that, the two continued to exchange letters. In his last letter to Aḥmad, ‘Abd Allāh predicted Aḥmad’s death. The letter was sent through Aḥmad b. Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭās, then *manṣab* of Ḥurayḍa, but he decided the content should be kept secret and did not deliver it to Aḥmad [‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā n.d.:9–10].

appears in the Old Testaments and the al-Qur'ān who is said to have been unjustifiably accused and sent to prison in Egypt [‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā n.d.:6; Baraja 2007:21]. However, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s relatives stated that he became a guarantor of loans, that an original debtor disappeared, and that ‘Abd Allāh could not repay the loan [Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sālim al-‘Aṭṭās, pers. comm., 26 Aug. 2008, Singapore]. In any case, he remained in prison for several few years. The imprisonment did not shut him off from people, though, and he received an endless stream of visitors. He was also married more than once while in prison.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the prison became as if it were his house. Although Dutch officials offered to release him before his sentence expired, he insisted on serving his full term. One night, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin had a vision in which the door of the prison opened, and ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭās, the eponymous founder of the al-‘Aṭṭās family, appeared. He said to ‘Abd Allāh, “If you want to get out of the prison, just do it. But if you want to stay, just be patient.” ‘Abd Allāh chose the latter option [‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā n.d.:6–9]. This vision suggests that ‘Abd Allāh’s time in prison contributed to his spiritual development.

After his release, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin moved to Jakarta where he stayed for several years. Finally, he settled in Bogor. The rest of ‘Abd Allāh’s life is described as typical for a *walī* of Ḥaḍramī origin—he received many guests, solved difficult problems, explaining deep meanings of Qur’ānic verses, and taught. In other words, no detail of his life in this period is given. Also, many studied under him. The examples of his students included Shaykh b. Sālim b. ‘Umar al-‘Aṭṭās (1893/4–1978) of Sukabumi, Sālim Bin Jindān (1901–79) of Jakarta, and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥasan Balfaqīh [al-Mashhūr 1984:253, 297, 394]. ‘Abd Allāh built a mosque named Maṣjid al-Nūr in Bogor, which his descendants still maintain.

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās died on April 25, 1933, and was buried on the following day in a location west of the Maṣjid al-Nūr.

#### 4. Development after the death of ‘Abd Allāh

Even after his death, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin made his presence felt. It was because not only of the influence of ‘Abd Allāh in life on the people but also of the activities of those around him and his descendants. Soon after his death, a domed shrine (*qubba*) was built over his tomb under the leadership of ‘Alawī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād. Thus, there was a constant reminder of the prominent Muslim leader.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās married one hundred and three times during his life. Most of these marriages were symbolic—people tried to receive a blessing (*baraka*) by establishing a relationship with a descendant of the Prophet through marriage. Naturally, these marriages were not registered, which is the reason he could marry while in prison. Only a few of his wives bore children [Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sālim al-‘Aṭṭās, pers. comm.].

The eldest son of ‘Abd Allāh, Muḥsin (named after his grandfather), succeeded his father’s position (*maqām*). Muḥsin was born in Tegal, Java, but also experienced life in Ḥaḍramawt, having stayed in Ḥurayḍa for some time. Succeeding the position of a *walī* like ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin can mean various things, but it usually includes maintaining his tomb and mosque, receiving and treating guests, taking care of his descendants, and other duties. After Muḥsin, the position was inherited by his brothers Zayn, Ḥusayn, and Abū Bakr (‘Abd Allāh’s youngest son). After Abū Bakr, the position was held by ‘Abd al-Qādir b. Muḥsin b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās, or a grandson of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin. Currently, ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayn b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin, another grandson of ‘Abd Allāh’s, holds the position [al-‘Aṭṭās 1979, 2:52–53; Sayyed Ja’far Ahmad Al-Kaaff, pers. comm., 26 Aug. 2008, Singapore].

In addition to the above-mentioned duties, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s successors are expected to organize a *ḥawl*. A *ḥawl* is a yearly celebration during which people commemorate a deceased *walī*. In Java, *ḥawls* are held in various locations, including Pekalongan, Tegal, and Bogor. The *ḥawl* commemorating ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin was begun by Muḥsin, ‘Abd Allāh’s first successor. On the day of the *ḥawl*, ‘Abd Allāh’s descendants, their families, and Muslims in the surrounding area gather around ‘Abd Allāh’s domed tomb. The event usually consists of a visit to his tomb, chanting verses of al-Qur’ān, and various speeches. One theme of the speeches is ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s life story—one of his *manāqib*s is read to the audience [Sayyed Ja’far Ahmad Al-Kaaff, pers. comm.]. Thus the deed and character of the departed *walī* is reminded every year. The *ḥawl* is an occasion for ‘Abd Allāh’s descendants to meet each other, some of whom would otherwise not have the chance. The celebration thus also serves to help maintain family ties between the descendants. Attendance is around 15,000, according to the descendants of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin; but this figure needs to be confirmed by other sources. At the very least, the domed tomb, mosque, and the street in front of the mosque are filled with people on the day of the *ḥawl*. The event is also attended by people outside the family circle, connecting ‘Abd Allāh’s descendants with others.

The life, thought, words, and literary works of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin were compiled by his disciples and those close to him. The most widely known *manāqib* of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin, *Ghanīmat al-Akyās fī Manāqib al-‘Ilm al-Nibrās...‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin b. Muḥammad al-‘Aṭṭās*, was compiled by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad ‘Irfān Bā Rajā, a member of a Ḥaḍramī family of Bā Rajā. He also collected the words of ‘Abd Allāh. ‘Alawī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād also compiled information about ‘Abd Allāh. Other than the monographs, the life of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin is mentioned in ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn al-‘Aṭṭās’ *Tāj al-A’rās*, a two volume *manāqib* of Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās, another *‘ālim* from the al-‘Aṭṭās family. All of these works are written in Arabic. Although most of them are still in manuscript form, one can find copies of them at the houses of Ḥaḍramī notables

both in Southeast Asia and Ḥaḍramawt. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās is fairly well known even in Ḥaḍramawt.

Literary works about ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin have recently been published in the Indonesian language. In 2007, two small books on the life, thought, words (*kalām*), letters, and poems (*qaṣīda*) of ‘Abd Allāh were published by Hayat Publishing in Indonesia [Baraja 2007; al-Haddad 2007]. They are abridged translations of the above-mentioned Arabic works intended for those interested in ‘Abd Allāh who cannot read Arabic. The audience includes non-Arab Indonesians as well as those of Arab descent. The books are usually found at street stalls during *hawls* or small bookshops run by *sāda*. Circulation of these works is not limited to the “inner circle”: Gramedia, a major chain bookstore in Indonesia, also sells the books.<sup>17</sup> These publications are part of a recent activities of publishing *sāda* works in Indonesian. It is remarkable when one knows that the Arabic originals remain handwritten manuscripts. The life story of ‘Abd Allāh is not forgotten, but rather is being retold in a different language.

### 5. Presentation of ‘Abd Allāh’s Network in *Manāqib*

The life of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās reconstructed above is based mainly on *manāqib* literature. On one hand, it provides us with information on his deep knowledge of religious matters, his pious activities, spiritual development, and the miracles (*karāmāt*) he performed. On the other hand, it does not answer questions that historians usually ask about immigrants, such as the reason for migration, means of subsistence, level of assimilation into the host society, identity, and connection with the homeland. The literature is embellished by descriptions of miracles and visions, as has already been shown in the account of his imprisonment. *Manāqib* is, after all, a biography of a laudatory nature and not a factual record of one’s life.

In spite of these drawbacks, the way ‘Abd Allāh’s life is presented in the *manāqib* is worth discussing. What are the characteristics of the network around ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin? First, the Ḥaḍramī connection is obviously emphasized. For example, letters sent to ‘Abd Allāh are quoted in the *manāqib*. The senders are ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Ḥabshī of Say’ūn, ‘Aḥmad b. Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭās of Ḥurayḍa, Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād of Tegal, Muḥammad b. ‘Aydārūs al-Ḥabshī, Sālim b. Aḥmad al-‘Aṭṭās of Johor, Abū Bakr b. ‘Umar Bin Yahyā, ‘Alawī b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭālib al-‘Aṭṭās, Sālim b. ‘Alawī b. Saqqāf al-Jufri, Hāshim b. ‘Abd

<sup>17</sup> I saw them being sold at the *hawl* of al-Shaykh Abū Bakr b. Sālim at Cidodol, Jakarta, on January 20, 2008. I also purchased copies of the books at Gramedia Matraman in Jakarta. To what extent these books circulate in major bookstores remains to be investigated. The main point is that they are available outside the circle of Ḥaḍramī *sāda*.

Allāh b. ‘Aqīl Bin Yaḥyā, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Miḥḍār, Muḥammad b. Šāliḥ b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās, ‘Umar b. Šāliḥ b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās, Aḥmad b. Ṭāhā b. ‘Alawī al-Saqqāf, and Aḥmad b. Muḥsin al-Haddār [‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā n.d.:19–42]. These people were scholars and contemporaries of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin. Whether they were in Ḥaḍramawt or Southeast Asia, all were of Ḥaḍramī origin and moreover were *sāda*. Although the author of the *manāqib* makes it clear that they did not constitute all the people with whom ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin exchanged letters, the lack of correspondence from non-*sāda* and people of the host society is striking.

Furthermore, one notices that many of the key figures in ‘Abd Allāh’s life were from the al-‘Aṭṭās family. After completing his studies of the al-Qur’ān, for example, he studied under Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh and Šāliḥ b. ‘Abd Allāh, two prominent scholars from the al-‘Aṭṭās family. Even after going to Java, ‘Abd Allāh was close to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Bin Ḥamza al-‘Aṭṭās, a member of the same family. This tendency was not confined to the real world alone—those who appeared in his visions had familial connections too, such as ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and Ḥusayn b. ‘Umar al-‘Aṭṭās, the eponymous founder of the al-‘Aṭṭās family and his son. In both the spiritual and real worlds, the core of his religious network consisted of Ḥaḍramīs, *sāda*, and, above all, members of the al-‘Aṭṭās family.

## 6. One of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās’ Marriages and Its Connection with Johor

As far as the literary works on the life of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-‘Aṭṭās are concerned, the absence of Southeast Asian context is clear. Reading the *manāqib*s, one must have the impression that ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin spent his whole life as if he were in Ḥaḍramawt. Does this indicate that ‘Abd Allāh separated himself from non-Ḥaḍramīs? The answer to this question is clearly “no” because the *manāqib* itself says that non-Arabs supported ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin. However, non-Arabs are treated as faceless masses—their names do not appear in the writings. Outside the world of writing, though, an interesting story about ‘Abd Allāh’s connection with the notables of the host societies is orally transmitted. Most descendants of ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin stayed in Indonesia, but some moved to Malaysia and became prominent academics. Examples of such figures are Syed Hussein Alatas, a sociologist and former vice-chancellor of the University of Malaya, and Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the founder-director of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC). Both are ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin’s grandsons. They differ from other descendants in terms of education, career, and country of residence. They are the products of the marriage between ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin

and a woman in Johor. In this section, I discuss that particular marriage and its significance.

The marriage took place in Johor, but the woman was not of local origin. Her name was Rogayah Hanim and she was said to have come from the Caucasus region.<sup>18</sup> She was probably born between 1860–64, and worked at the Ottoman court when Abu Bakar b. Ibrahim, the ruler of Johor (r. 1862–86 as Maharaja, 1886–95 as Sultan), visited the sultan in Istanbul. No information about her life at court is available. In any case, Rogayah and her sister Khadija accompanied Abu Bakar to Johor. She married three times during her life. Her first husband was Ungku ‘Abdul Majid, the brother of Abu Bakar, to whom she was married around 1887. Her sister Khadija was married to Abu Bakar [Wan Daud 1998:2]. However, Ungku ‘Abdul Majid soon died, leaving Rogayah a widow.

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin was Rogayah’s second husband. This marriage took place around 1889–90 when ‘Abd Allāh paid a short visit to Johor. He had been in Southeast Asia for more than twenty years at that point, and likely was already well known as a religious figure in Java; but in Johor, he was a nameless figure, particularly at court. The only way why a Ḥaḍramī man could meet a woman at court was through Ḥaḍramī connections. At that time, Ḥaḍramī *sāda* held important posts in the religious administration of Johor.<sup>19</sup> Sālim b. Aḥmad al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1899) was one such person from the al-‘Aṭṭās family. Sālim was born in Ḥurayḍa, Ḥaḍramawt and, after studying in the Hijaz and Egypt, became a teacher in Mecca. Later in his life, he went to Johor and held the position of grand *mufṭī* during the reign of Abu Bakar b. Ibrahim. Indeed, there was a friendship between Sālim and ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin.<sup>20</sup> Here again, the connection of the al-‘Aṭṭās family is observed. According to one version of the story, ‘Abd Allāh came to know about Rogayah Hanim, and asked Sālim to arrange a marriage with her. At first, Sālim was reluctant because he thought ‘Abd Allāh and Rogayah were not at all compatible. However, ‘Abd Allāh insisted on proposing. To Sālim’s surprise, she accepted [Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sālim al-‘Aṭṭās, pers. comm.].

The marriage between ‘Abd Allāh and Rogayah only lasted a short while. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin soon returned to Bogor, but his wife refused to leave the country. However, Rogayah gave birth to ‘Abd Allāh’s son ‘Alī in 1891/2 (1309 A.H.).<sup>21</sup> It is said that the Sultan Abu Bakar, being outside the country at the time of the marriage, was not happy with the sequence of events. Soon after the second

<sup>18</sup> Rogayah Hanim’s story is based on Ungku Shafik [1996], Zayd b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Aṭṭās [pers. comm., 13 Feb. 2000, Kuala Lumpur], and Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sālim al-‘Aṭṭās [pers. comm.], unless stated otherwise.

<sup>19</sup> For the role of Ḥaḍramīs in Johor, see Othman [1997:89–90].

<sup>20</sup> Sālim b. Aḥmad al-‘Aṭṭās and ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin exchanged letters [‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā n.d.:35–36].

<sup>21</sup> His year of birth is based on ‘Alī al-Saqqāf [1352 A.H.].

marriage, Rogayah was married to her third husband, Datuk Ja'afar Haji Mohamed, the first *Menteri Besar* (chief minister) of the Johor Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim b. Abu Bakar. Rogayah had ten children altogether, two from the first marriage, one from the second, and seven from the third. She died in 1904.

The three marriages of Rogayah Hanim meant that a Ḥaḍramī *sāda* family, the Malay royal house, and the Malay political elite became related by blood. Is this a true story or a typical embellishment of the life of a departed *walī*? There is some outside evidence of this marriage in a British document of the era. W. H. Ingrams, who served as a resident advisor in the Eastern Aden Protectorate after 1937, wrote in his report of a tour to Malaya and Java that he was on the same ship with 'Alī al-'Aṭṭās who was the "stepbrother of Ungku 'Abdul 'Aziz, the prime minister of Johore" when traveling to Batavia from Singapore [Ingrams 1939:108]. Ungku Abdul Aziz was Rogayah Hanim's son from her first marriage, and 'Alī was the son of Rogayah and 'Abd Allāh. The account indicates that there was a blood relationship between 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-'Aṭṭās and Ungku Abdul Aziz, who was well known among the upper class at that time.

To what extent Rogayah Hanim's marriages influenced the careers of her descendants has not yet been investigated, but those most affected by the relationship seem to be her descendants from the al-'Aṭṭās line. As stated above, the lives of 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-'Aṭṭās and Rogayah Hanim's descendants differ from other descendants of 'Abd Allāh's in that they received higher education in Western countries and became prominent academics. Before discussing their careers, let us examine the life of 'Alī, the son of 'Abd Allāh and Rogayah. He was born in Johor and stayed there while his father was in Bogor. There is no information on how 'Alī was raised in Johor, but he probably received a modern education. When 'Alī was around seventeen years old, he went to Bogor to live with his father. 'Alī's connection to Johor did not end with his migration to Java. His children were sent to Johor to be educated. Let us examine the case of Muhammad-Naquib al-Attas, 'Alī's second son.<sup>22</sup> He was born in 1931 in Bogor, the residence of his grandfather, but was sent to Johor to receive his primary education. Muhammad-Naquib stayed in the house of his uncle Ahmad, a son of Datuk Ja'afar and Rogayah Hanim. His study in Johor was interrupted by the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia (1941–45), during which time he stayed with his father who owned a tea plantation in Sukabumi, Java. After the war, he continued his studies in Johor and stayed in the house of Ungku Abdul Aziz, another uncle and son of Ungku Abdul Majid, Rogayah Hanim's first husband. There, he had access to his uncle's private library and read Malay manuscripts and Western classics in English. After Ungku Abdul Aziz's retirement, Muhammad-Naquib moved to the house of another uncle, Datuk Onn (1895–1962), the chief minister of the Johor Sultanate and the founder of the

<sup>22</sup> The life of Muhammad-Naquib al-Attas in Johor is based on Wan Daud [1998:2–5].

United Malay National Organization (UMNO). Datuk Onn was impressed with Muhammad-Naquib's artistic ability and requested him to design the official flag of UMNO. Later, Muhammad-Naquib continued his education at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. In 1965, he obtained a Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, by submitting a two-volume dissertation on Hamza Fansuri, one of the most famous *ṣūfī* scholars in the Malay world. In 1987, he founded the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur.

Syed Hussein Alatas, the elder brother of Syed Muhammad-Naquib al-Attas, also studied in Johor while living with Datuk Onn. Alatas continued his studies in the Netherlands where he obtained a Ph.D. from the University of Amsterdam. After teaching at the National University of Singapore, he moved to Kuala Lumpur where he eventually became the vice-chancellor of the University of Malaya. In addition to being an academic, Alatas was also active in Malaysian politics. In 1968, he founded the political party *Gerakan*, along with other notables [Syed Hussein Alatas, pers. comm., 7 Feb. 2000, Kuala Lumpur]. The tradition of receiving a Western education did not stop with that generation—their children also studied at Western universities. The scholarly tradition of this branch of the al-ʿAṭṭās family continues today.

The careers and education of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-ʿAṭṭās descendants through Rogayah Hanim are in clear contrast to those of his other descendants. His other sons, namely Muḥsin, Zayn, Ḥusayn, and Aḥmad, studied in Ḥurayḍa, Ḥaḍramawt, in accordance with their father's will. The first three sons took up the duties of maintaining their father's tomb and organizing the *ḥawl*. Another son, Aḥmad, was a trader who moved back and forth between Semarang and Bogor until his death [al-ʿAṭṭās 1979, 2:52–55]. The career pattern of these four sons is typical of the descendants of Ḥaḍramī immigrants. On the other hand, Syed Hussein Alatas and Syed Muhammad-Naquib al-Attas are the only ones among the descendants of the al-ʿAṭṭās *walīs* in Southeast Asia who acquired international reputation as scholars.<sup>23</sup> There is no question that the learning environment provided by their uncles in Johor had a decisive impact on their careers. They are currently based not in their birthplace of Indonesia, but in Malaysia, where they received their primary and secondary education. This shows how important the blood relationship through Rogayah Hanim was for the descendants of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-ʿAṭṭās, in terms of their careers.

What should be discussed here is the reason why this story, famous among people who know of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥsin, is not written down. The absence of

<sup>23</sup> Another son of ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-ʿAṭṭās, Zayn b. ʿAlī, is a chemical engineer and a former lecturer at the MARA Institute of Technology [Wan Daud 1998:2]. This son now lives in Kuala Lumpur.

this story in the *manāqibs* can be partially explained by the time in which they were written. The most detailed *manāqib*, *Ghanīmat al-Akyās* was written before the impact of the above marriage became well-known. People in Bogor probably did not know the situation in Johor at that time. However, *Tāj al-A'rās*, a *manāqib* written as late as 1979, does not mention 'Alī, the son of 'Abd Allāh and Rogayah, although it mentions other sons who stayed in Indonesia [al-'Aṭṭās 1979].<sup>24</sup> The reason for this can be found in the characteristic of his *manāqibs*. They were written in Arabic, and potential readers were Ḥaḍramīs. The authors of these *manāqibs*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bā Rajā and 'Alī b. Ḥusayn al-'Aṭṭās were religious scholars born in Ḥaḍramawt. Their main interest must have been 'Abd Allāh's life related to Ḥaḍramawt and/or his spiritual path. On the other hand, no biography of 'Abd Allāh has been written with a Southeast Asian context. Those available in Indonesian are abridged translations of Arabic originals. As far as the world presented in these literary works is concerned, 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin remained in Ḥaḍramawt or at least in Ḥaḍramī community.

### Concluding Remarks

It is remarkable that an immigrant established himself as a religious figure in his host society, and that both his achievements and those of his descendants are remembered today. In addition to his character and knowledge, what contributed to his prominence was the network of important figures surrounding him and his descendants. Based on what was learned from the *manāqibs*, however, the key people in the network were in most cases Ḥaḍramīs, especially the members of the al-'Aṭṭās family. It is generally accepted that the family network played a very important role in the migration of Ḥaḍramīs and their activities in host societies. The discussion in this chapter shows that, even in a religious figure's spiritual path, Ḥaḍramī ties in general and family ties in particular are highly visible.

On the other hand, the lack of a Southeast Asian context in the literature is striking, even though interesting stories are orally transmitted. As has already been discussed, it can be explained by the authors' interests, prospective readers and the time the literary works were written. However, it is true that an attempt to write from new perspectives has not yet been made—recently published works on 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin al-'Aṭṭās in Indonesian are translations of old Arabic works. The way 'Abd Allāh is portrayed in existing biographical works and the absence of his biographical details relating to Southeast Asia show that writing about the life of a *walī* or a prominent religious figure remains a Ḥaḍramī phenomenon.

<sup>24</sup> It should be remembered that *Tāj al-A'rās* is dedicated not to 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥsin, but to another Ḥaḍramī *walī*, and 'Abd Allāh's life story constitutes just a part of that work.

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