



**THE POPULARIZING OF SUNNI DOCTRINE  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:  
*Sifat Dua Puluh* in Malay *Kitab Jawi* of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Jajat Burhanudin**

Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

Email: [j.burhanudin@uinjkt.ac.id](mailto:j.burhanudin@uinjkt.ac.id)

**Abstract:** *Sifat dua puluh* (twenty attributes of God) is a specific Malay term to convey the doctrine of Sunni tradition in Southeast Asia. Formulated to digest the substance of a renowned book of Yūsūf al-Sanūsī, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, this term began to appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a leading Islamic theme in the *kitab jawi* of Malay scholars in Mecca. The scholars translated the book into Malay and expounded its contents in the form of commentaries (*sharḥ*), a rising style of writing *kitab jawi* on the doctrine of the period. Malay scholars' use of the term in Mecca was transmitted and then reproduced alongside the printing of *kitab jawi* in Southeast Asia. This process led the Sunni theology to constitute an Islamic orthodoxy in the region. This article presents a historical analysis of how *sifat dua puluh* became an established concept of Sunni theology in the Southeast Asian context, putting the mentioned work of al-Sanūsī as the source of the production of Sunni creeds in a popularly vernacular expression of the Muslims in the region.

**Keywords:** *Kitab Jawi*, Malay, *Sifat Dua puluh*, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, Mecca, Southeast Asia.

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## Introduction

EXCEPT for some tiny and insignificant groups, Muslims of the region hold the principles of Sunni belief, called *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* (adherents to the Prophetic tradition and the community). Certainly, Sunni is the school of doctrine the vast majority of Southeast Asian Muslims adhere. The question of when and how this Sunni belief came to dominate Southeast Asia remains unexplored. In the scholarly studies, they are superseded by the acclaimed studies which pay much attention to Sufism as the first Islamic facet to appear in the early process of

Islamization.<sup>1</sup> Even though, the issue of doctrine can be gleaned from the agents who introduced Islam to the people of the Malay-archipelago. The classical works of Arnold<sup>2</sup> and Morrison<sup>3</sup> attribute the Islamizing agency to the Muslim traders from the coast of Coromandel in the Indian Ocean, arguing that they shared the same Shafi'ite school of law (*madhhab*) as the Muslims of Southeast Asia. If it is the case, it can be said that the Muslims who initiated the Islamization were Sunnis, with the reason that the Shafi'ite *madhhab* belongs to *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*.

With due regard to the importance of historical origin, this article is, however, directed to discuss the advance of the Sunni in 19<sup>th</sup> century Southeast Asia, when it was already established as one of the pillars of Islamic orthodoxy, next to Shafi'ite school in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and the ethical Sufism of al-Ghazali (d. 1111). Special attention will be given to the Malay concept of *sifat dua puluh* (twenty attributes of God), which appears to be a popular formula of Sunni doctrine in the region. In reference to the work of Muhammad Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 1490), *Umm al-Barāhin* (The Mother of Proofs), *sifat dua puluh* evolved to be a mainstream subject of doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Zayn (Shaykh Muhammad Zayn bin Fāqih Jalāl al-Dīn al-'Āshi), a Malay 'ālim of Aceh of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was the first scholar ever known who introduced the concept to Malay with his book *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* (The Beginning of Guidance), a commentary (*sharh*) to the work of al-Sanūsī. Afterwards, the subject gained its prominence with the coming of Malay commentaries and *kitab jawi* on the same subject, leading *sifat dua puluh* to appear as the most notable feature of the creeds in the *kitab jawi* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In this discussion, the rise of Malay commentaries to *Umm al-Barāhin* is a crucial point in the development of *sifat dua puluh*. It

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<sup>1</sup> See A.H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 2 (1961): 143-160.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of Muslim Faith*, (London: Constable, 1913), 364-365.

<sup>3</sup> G.E. Morrison, "The Coming of Islam to the East Indies", *Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 1 (1951): 31-37.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Laffan, *The Making of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of Sufi Past*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 33-34.

marks the intellectual endeavours of Malay '*ulamā*' in Mecca and Southeast Asia to create an easily-digested formula of Sunni doctrines. To be noted at this point are the roles of Da'ud al-Fatani (Shaykh Dā'ūd 'Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī, 1769-1847), and other Malay '*ulamā*' of Patani origin in the augmentation of the prevailing discourse concerning *sifat dua puluh*. As will be apparent below, the works of Patani '*ulamā*' on the subject will be examined, with the reason that the '*ulamā*' originated from southern Thailand today formed the leading writers of *kitab jawi* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they simultaneously made a significant contribution to the advance of *sifat dua puluh*. This transmitted subject of doctrine was then reproduced by the Malay '*ulamā*' of later generations, as will be discussed in the last part of this article. As a result, *sifat dua puluh* grew, forming the core substance of Sunni doctrine in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Taking *kitab jawi* as the primary source, this article presents a historical analysis of the way *sifat dua puluh* came to exist as such. They significantly contributed to making the term alive within the religious knowledge of Southeast Asian Muslims through the centuries. In so doing, the crucial role of Malay '*ulamā*' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in popularizing the Malay term of Sunni theology will be discussed.<sup>5</sup> The term popularizing is used to depict how the Sunni doctrines were understood, elaborated, and articulated in the Malay language of Southeast Asia, which served the local context of Islamic expression, where the term familiar with the local Muslims constituted what was regarded as being essential in Islam.<sup>6</sup> As can be seen in the *kitab jawi* of doctrine, *sifat dua puluh* was taken as the core subject the Malay '*ulamā*' voiced to engage in the strengthening of Sunni school and, in turn, in the consolidating of its Islamic orthodoxy in the region.

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<sup>5</sup> My childhood experiences from the late 1970s until the early 1980s confirm this. Having lived in a small Muslim village, I used to memorize the attributes of God, based on the knowledge I received from the transmitted oral tradition. And, following the practices of fellow Muslims, I used to recite them in the afternoon before praying (*ṣalāt*) in a mosque.

<sup>6</sup> Dale F. Eickelman, "The Study of Islam in Local Context", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 1, no. 17 (1983): 1-16.

To the above point, another essential thing should be added, related to the Meccan background of the rise of Malay '*ulamā*' with their *kitab jawi* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is because almost all the *kitab jawi* of the period were written by the '*ulamā*' of *Jawa* (Southeast Asians), who established their careers in Mecca in the field of Islamic scholarship. The Meccan experiences helped to enhance the '*ulamā*'s religious authority. the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Meccan circumstance provided the *Jawa* with a changing mode of instruction that began to be based on printed copies of the texts, not merely the oral lectures of their masters. This occurred following the intellectual trend of Meccan scholars who started publishing materials they lectured, to which the *Jawa* "noted down only a few oral remarks (*taqārīr*)".<sup>7</sup> All these facts, with the support of the establishment of printing presses, might have led especially the Malay intellectual leaders of the *Jawa* to engage in authoring Malay *kitab jawi*.

As a result, the intellectual network between Mecca and Southeast Asia intensified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century more than the one that had in the previous centuries.<sup>8</sup> This was because the network under this discussion proceeded in the printing era, where the transmission and reproduction of knowledge occurred through the *kitab jawi*, which were printed in the Middle East and then in Southeast Asia. Appeared in book format, *kitab jawi* provided the '*ulamā*'s voices with effective channels to reach the heart of Muslims' religiosity and constitute the substantial capacity for their revival in early modern Southeast Asia.

In this article, network with Mecca is taken in such importance as a way that it created the opportunity for the *Jawa* to reach the intellectual achievement as the Malay '*ulamā*' in the Holy City; the knowledge they produced were printed in the Middle East, in the form of Malay *kitab jawi*, and then reprinted and reproduced in Southeast Asia. In this respect, the concept of the

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<sup>7</sup> C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 208.

<sup>8</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century*, (Australia & Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

discursive tradition of Talal Asad is relevant to refer to here because it denotes the tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses their relation with foundational texts of Islam, which is interpretative. Hence, the point to emphasize is the socio-historical formation through which what is regarded as essential in Islam is produced. With this perspective, Mecca and the Middle East, in general, of the period to be viewed as having created the necessary condition for building knowledge, the acknowledged essential in Islam, which was then reproduced and reformulated in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> *Sifat dua puluh* was formulated through such mentioned processes of knowledge production across the two Muslim regions (Mecca and the Malay world in Southeast Asia).

This article sheds light on the crucial aspect of Sunni doctrine in Malay, which is still unexplored in scholarly studies, including the recent work of Bruckmayr, which pays attention much to the linguistic issue.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the Islamic knowledge that was produced and was (and is still) believed to be essential is not well studied. As well, this article is to revise the previous work of al-Edrus, which fails, albeit important, to conceive *sifat dua puluh* as an explicit formulation of Sunni doctrine in the Southeast Asian context.<sup>11</sup>

As such, after explaining the intellectual origin of *sifat dua puluh*, in reference in part to the work al-Sanūsī, the discussions continue with the rise of Malay commentaries. Written to expound the core of al-Sanūsī's idea of Islamic doctrines, the commentaries marked the rise of *kitab jawi* by Southeast Asian 'ulamā' in Mecca in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which popularized the Sunni school in the local term of *sifat dua puluh*. This process strengthened with the coming of the books on the subject by Malay 'ulamā' of later generations that were printed in Southeast Asia, serving the reproduction of

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<sup>9</sup> Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam", *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 20-24.

<sup>10</sup> Philipp Bruckmayr, "The Sharh/Hāshiya Phenomenon in Southeast Asia", *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 32 (2017): 27-52.

<sup>11</sup> Syed Muhammad Dawilah al-Edrus, "The Role of *Kitab Jawi* in the Development of Islamic Thought in the Malay Archipelago with special Reference to *Umm al-Barāhīn* and the Writings on the Twenty Attributes" (Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 1993).

knowledge on this theological school to develop into a widely accepted creed of Muslims in the region.

### The Attributes of God: Brief Intellectual Origin

As already noted, the idea of twenty attributes of God has firm ground in the classical history of Islamic thought, which can be traced back to the debates on the doctrines of God's attributes within the Mu'tazilites. This debate appeared to have led Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī to abandon the Mu'tazilah circle and form a Sunni school (*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*). One debated point was concerned with the question of the attribute of knowledge, on which the Mu'tazilites, including al-Ash'arī's teacher (Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, d. 915), affirmed it, next to the attribute of power (*qudrah*). For al-Ash'arī, while he accepted the opinion of Mu'tazilah that God has attributes, notably knowledge, it is however by the attribute of knowledge that God knows, not by His essence; for the Mu'tazilites, God is knowing by His essence, not by knowledge, and therefore they were objected to the term "knowledge". About the Qur'anic verse (11: 14), al-Ash'arī argued that God has knowledge as an attribute, and with which He is knowing; this attribute is inherent in God, although it is not the same as His essence.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Ash'arī's concept of God's attributes becomes one of the central creeds of the Sunni theological school and is elaborated by the Sunni 'ulamā'. And one 'ālim who had significant influence in Malay-archipelago, and in the Muslim countries at large, was Shaykh Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (1435/839-1490/895). With his work on this subject, *Umm al-Barāhīn* (The Mother of Proofs), also known as *al-Sanusiyyah*, Yūsuf al-Sanūsī concluded the discussions on the attributes of Allah into what came to be popularly known as Twenty Attributes (*Sifat Dua Puluh*). He formulated the Twenty Attributes as a way to determine the issue into religious guidance for the Muslims, freed from unending philosophical debates. As such, Muslims are obliged to know the attributes, although they

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<sup>12</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 245-6, 299.

are also urged to recognize other attributes of God which are unlimited in number.<sup>13</sup> Al-Sanūsī wrote in *Umm al-Barāhīn*:

“It is obligatory on every *mukallaf* (a person who has reached the age of puberty) in the eyes of the divine ordinance (*shar'*) to know what is [the attributes of] necessary [*wājib*], inadmissible [*mustahīl*], and admissible [*jā'iz*] in respect of Allah, the Magnificent, the Mighty. And likewise, it is an obligation on him to know the same in respect of the Messenger, may blessing and peace be upon them”.<sup>14</sup>

No need to present al-Sanūsī's intellectual biography here. The work of this 'ālim of western Algeria today, the mentioned *Umm al-Barāhīn*, has been widely used in Muslims' socio-religious life and has intellectually been appreciated by scholars in the Muslim world. Many commentaries on this work appeared, the leading of which are as follows: *Hāshiyah al-Hudhudī 'alā Umm al-Barāhīn* by Maṣṣūr al-Hudhudī; Hijāzī al-Sharqāwī then commented on this commentary in his work *Hāshiyah 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī 'ala Sharḥ al-Imām al-Hudhudī 'alā al-Sanūsiyyah*; Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī is another 'ālim who made commentary on *Umm al-Barāhīn*, entitled *Hāshiyah al-Bayjūrī 'ala Matn al-Sanūsiyyah*; and the work of Muḥammad bin 'Abd Allāh bin 'Arafa al-Dasūkī, *Hāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn*.<sup>15</sup> As Messick asserts, these commentaries function not only as an interpretive elaboration of a primary text (*matn*), but also yield its transformation into becoming the heart of Islamic intellectual discourse and, finally, the formation of Muslim religious life.<sup>16</sup> Due in part to these commentaries, *Umm al-Barāhīn* came to the knowledge of *Jawa* of Mecca, which led the scholars of Southeast Asian diasporas to make its Malay translations and commentaries for their Muslim fellows in the region.

### The Coming of Malay Commentaries

As is noted above, the first 'ālim who introduced al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn* to Malay audiences in Southeast Asia was

<sup>13</sup> al-Edrūs, “The Role of *Kitab Jawi*”, 153-4.

<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Sanūsī, *Umm al-Barāhīn*, the annotated translation prepared by al-Edrūs, “The Role of *Kitab Jawi*”, 158.

<sup>15</sup> al-Edrūs, “The Role of *Kitab Jawi*”, 156; see also C. Brockelman, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* vol. 2, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), 324.

<sup>16</sup> Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual domination and history in a Muslim society*, (Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1996), 31.

Muhammad Zayn bin Faqih Jalal al-Din al-'Ashi. He was the first Malay scholar of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who wrote the commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn* with his *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* (The Beginning of Guidance).<sup>17</sup> No much is known about his life, except that he was noted with the title "al-Āshī" (the Acehnese) in his last name, which is translated into "the land of Aceh" (*daripada bangsa Aceh*), as is found in the title page of his work just mentioned. Completed in Mecca in 1756/1170 and printed in Constantinople in 1885,<sup>18</sup> this book was dedicated to being a learning material for *Jawi* students of beginners (*segala orang yang baru belajar*), whom he described to have been inadequate in the studying of Arabic sources. For this reason, the author stated that he translated the mentioned book by Yūsuf al-Sanūsī into Malay; he explained its contents in the form of commentary.<sup>19</sup>

In this discussion, the work of Muhammad Zayn of Aceh is of specific significance. Not only did it appear as the first *kitab jawi* ever made to commence introducing *Umm al-Barāhīn* to Southeast Asia, but it was also the pioneer of the rise of commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn*, which grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, in terms of writing style at least, his *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* seems to have been much more influential, compared, for instance, to "independent work"-styled *al-Durr al-Thamīn* by Da'ud al-Fatani, as will be discussed later, in which the book of al-Sanūsī is only one of many sources referred to. More than five *jawi* books appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which deal with the same subject of doctrine and are in the same writing style, the commentaries. These books explain every point of the primary text in Malay, which constitutes the essence of what became popular in Southeast Asia as *sifat dua puluh*.

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<sup>17</sup> The manuscript of *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* is preserved at Leiden University, the Netherlands (CodOr. 5741A), together with another work, *Talkhis al-Falāh fī Bayān Ahkām al-Ṭalaq wa al-Nikāḥ*, also known as *Bāb al-Nikāḥ* (CodOr 5741F). See Teuku Iskandar, *Kesusasteraan Klasik Melayu Sepanjang Abad*, (Brunei: Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 1995), 433. See also Ahmad Fauzi Ilyas, *Warisan Intelektual Ulama Nusantara*, (Medan: Rawda Publishing, 2018), 3-7.

<sup>18</sup> Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 287.

<sup>19</sup> Shaykh Muhammad Zayn ibn Faqih Jalal al-Din al-'Ashi, *Bidayat al-Hidayah*, (Patani: Matba'at bin Halābī, n.d.), 2.



Shaykh Muhammad Tayyib bin Mas'ud al-Banjari is the first 'ālim to mention. In 1858/1274, he wrote *Miftāḥ al-Jannah fī Bayān al-'Aqīdah* (Key to Paradise in Clarifying the Creeds), which was based on *Umm al-Barāhīn*. Like Muhammad Zayn of Aceh, the lack of Arabic proficiency among the *Jawa* of Mecca was the reason for Muhammad Tayyib of Banjar to write this book. "So I collect for them [the *Jawa*]", the author wrote, "the principles of faith (*segala simpulan iman*) from the book of *Umm al-Barāhīn* in their language [Malay]; I present it with the sign of its meaning; and I explain the meaning of every point of creeds about what I have studied in the commentaries and glosses in a way which makes it [the explanation] short to be easier for the *Jawa*".<sup>20</sup>

The next 'ālim of 19<sup>th</sup> century *Jawa* in Mecca was Shaykh Muhammad Zayn al-Dīn bin Muhammad al-Badawi al-Sumbawi. Almost thirty years later, in 1885-6/1304, his work which was written based on the book of al-Sanūsī, entitled *Sirāj al-Hudā fī 'Aqīdah Ahl al-Taqwā* (Light of the Guidance concerning the Creeds of Those who are Pious), was printed in Mecca, adding the considerable number of Malay books circulated there, and as such pointing to the increasing importance of the intellectual role of *Jawa* in the Holy City.<sup>21</sup> In the introductory pages, Muhammad Zayn of Sumbawa, an island in West Nusa Tenggara, shares the same experiences of *Jawi* scholars already discussed; he was persistently asked to write a beautiful treatise in Malay as commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn*.<sup>22</sup>

Included in the list of Malay commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn* is 'Aṭīyah al-Raḥman fī Bayāni Qawā'id al-Īmān (The Benevolent Present in the Explanation on the Foundation of Faith) by Shaykh Muhammad Azhari bin 'Abd Allah al-Falimbani. Muhammad Azhari of Palembang wrote 'Aṭīyah al-Raḥman in 1843/1259 after he joined the learning circle to study the cited work of Yūsuf al-Sanūsī in Mecca and the gloss of Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī. Since it was completed, it seems that this work never appeared as an

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<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Tayyib ibn Mas'ūd al-Banjārī, *Miftāḥ al-Jannah fī Bayān al-'Aqīdah* (Patani: Matba'at bin Halābī, n.d.), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 286.

<sup>22</sup> Shaykh Muhammad Zayn al-Dīn bin Muhammad al-Badawi al-Sumbawi, *Sirāj al-Hudā fī 'Aqīdah Ahl al-Taqwā* (Patani: Matba'at bin Halābī, n.d.), 2.

independent book. Today's version is an attachment inserted in the margin of *Sirāj al-Hudā*.<sup>23</sup> Like Muhammad Zayn of Sumbawa, the request of *Jawi* students to deliver the teachings of Sanusiyyah in Malay was the reason behind his writing of '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥman*'.<sup>24</sup>

Concerning the backdrop of the rising commentaries, the religious ideas of *Umm al-Barāhīn*, next to the language issue, appear to be another essential reason. It points to the fact that the book was accepted as an authoritative source of Islamic theological doctrine to be transmitted to Southeast Asia. Muhammad Zayn of Aceh, for instance, held the opinion that the contents of the book have "followed the noble Qur'an and implemented the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad",<sup>25</sup> leading it to be recognized as to have presented by the Sunni theological school. Similarly, Muhammad Zayn of Sumbawa stated in his *Sirāj al-Hudā* that the Malay translation and commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn* was also due to the reason that the *kitab* conveyed the foundation of Islamic faith and therefore was of great avail for both the *Jawa* in Mecca and the Muslims in Southeast Asia.<sup>26</sup>

Notable for the latter-mentioned region, the Malay translations provided the Muslims with accessible sources, in their language, concerning the attributes of God, to which the Muslims of *mukallaf* (who have reached the age of puberty) is necessitated (*wājib*) to have sufficient knowledge. For this reason, the *Jawi* scholar not merely translated the book of al-Sanūsī in the literal sense of meaning, but also expounded and elaborated its contents in reference to the Qur'an, Hadith, and the opinions of '*ulamā*'. As a result, the commentaries contributed to enhancing the explanatory mission of *Umm al-Barāhīn* as a Sunni text and to make it easier to be digested by Southeast Asian people. The Malay commentaries affirm the critical role of *Jawi* scholars as what

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<sup>23</sup> Shaykh Muhammad Azhari bin 'Abd Allah al-Falimbani, '*Aṭīyah al-Raḥman fī Bayānī Qawā'id al-Īmān*' inserted in the margin of *Sirāj al-Hudā* (Patani: Maṭba'at bin Halābī, n.d.), 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibi.*, 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> al-Ashi, *Bidayat al-Hidayah*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> al-Sumbawi, *Sirāj al-Hudā*, 2.

Snouck Hurgronje calls “the heart of religious life of the East-Indian Archipelago”.<sup>27</sup>

Added to the reason for the rise of commentaries is the fact that *Umm al-Barāhīn* was already popular in the Muslim world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. About *Sirāj al-Hudā*, it is said that the little book of al-Sanūsī was famed among the Arabs, the *Jawa* (Southeast Asian), the Turkish, the Indians, and those of other Muslim countries; they studied the book and followed its instructions.<sup>28</sup>

In the Southeast Asian context, this popularity is testified by the fact that the commentary is not limited to the circle of Malay scholars. A leading *Jawi* ‘*ālim* of Java and the leader of the Javanese community in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mecca, Shaykh Muhammad Nawawi al-Jawi al-Bantani (1813-1897), wrote a commentary to *Umm al-Barāhīn* with the title *Ḍari’at al-Yaqīn ‘alā Sharh Umm al-Barāhīn*, also known as *Durrat al-Nadrā ‘alā ‘Aqīdah al-Sughrā*.<sup>29</sup> This work contributed to making the book of al-Sanusi circulated in the *pesantren* learning in Java of the period, which came to be known in Indonesia as *kitab kuning*.<sup>30</sup> No less important to mention here is the work of a Hadrami ‘*ālim* of Batavia, Sayyid Uthman bin ‘Abd Allah bin ‘Aqil bin Yahya al-‘Alawi al-Batawi (1822-1914). He produced a booklet entitled *Kitab Sifat Dua Puluh* in 1886/1304, even before. It was printed several times and is still available in bookshops throughout Indonesia.<sup>31</sup> Although needs further research, it can be said that the booklet of this ‘*ālim* has had a significant impact in Batavia and the western part of Java.

As such, the Malay commentaries to *Umm al-Barāhīn* held a major role in the development of *sifat dua puluh* to evolve into a celebrated topic of Sunni creeds in Southeast Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All the above-mentioned commentaries were dedicated to

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<sup>27</sup> Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 291.

<sup>28</sup> al-Sumbawi, *Sirāj al-Hudā*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Abd Rahman, “Nawawi al-Batani: An Intellectual Master of the *Pesantren* Tradition, *Studia Islamika*, (3, 3, 1996), 81-114.

<sup>30</sup> L.W.C. van den Berg, “Het Mohammedaansche godsdienstonderwijs op Java en Madoera en de daarbij gebruikte Arabische boeken”, *TBG* (31, 1886), 539-41; see also Martin van Bruinessen, “‘Kitab kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the *Pesantren* Milieu’, *BKI* (146-2, 1990), 251-2.

<sup>31</sup> Nico J.G. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A Biography of Sayyid Uthman (1822-1914)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89-90.

expounding the contents of the book, which constitute the core substance of God's attributes. In line with this fact, the trend of consolidating *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* strengthened to the extent that this theological concept came to be widely accepted as a leading pillar of an established Islamic orthodoxy in the region.

### Enhancing the Discourse: *al-Durr al-Thamīn of Da'ud al-Fatani*

Alongside the rise of the commentaries, appreciation of *Umm al-Barāhīn* can also be gleaned from a sort of "independent book" of *kitab jawi*, of which *al-Durr al-Thamīn* is essential to explain here. It was written by a leading and venerated Malay 'ālim of Patani origin, Da'ud al-Fatani (Shaykh Dā'ūd 'Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī, 1769-1847).<sup>32</sup> This work cites al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn* as an important source of reference, besides *Jawhar al-Tawhīd* by Shaykh Ibrahim al-Laḡānī. Completed in 1816/1232 and first printed in Mecca in the 1880s, this book circulated in the bookshops in the Holy City in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was therefore included in the list of *kitab jawi* Snouck Hurgronje provides.<sup>33</sup> This work was reprinted several times in Southeast Asia and continues to circulate among Muslims in the countries of the region nowadays, alongside its being used as a learning material in the *pondok* of Patani and the Malay peninsula.<sup>34</sup>

This book has its complete title *al-Durr al-Thamīn pada menyatakan i'tiqād orang Mu'minīn* (Precious pearl in Explaining the Creeds of the Believers). Daud al-Fatani begins the discussion with introductory notes, stating that this book is to compile the thought of 'ulamā' as the truth seekers (*muhaqqiqīn*) concerning the

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<sup>32</sup> For a biography of Da'ud al-Fatani, see Francis R. Bradley, *Forging Islamic Power and Place: The Legacy of Shaykh Dā'ūd 'Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī in Mecca and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016); H.Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Syeikh Daud bin Abdullah Al-Fathani: Ulama dan Pengarang Terulung Asia Tenggara*, (Kuala Lumpur: Hizbi, 1999); Virginia Matheson and M. B. Hooker, "Jawi literature in Patani: The maintenance of an Islamic Tradition", *Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (61, 1, 1988), pp. 20-1; Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani, *Ulama Besar dari Patani* (Kota Bharu: Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu, 2009), 40-45.

<sup>33</sup> Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 287.

<sup>34</sup> Hasan Madmarn, *The Pondok and Madrasah in Patani* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1999), 25.

foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and the creeds of those who upheld the principles of God's Unity (*ahl al-tawhīd*). In the writing of this book, Da'ud al-Fatani narrates in an illustration that he collected the pearls and threw away the casing to encourage those who searched for knowledge. As in the cases of *kitab jawi* in general, Daud al-Fatani also notes that he rendered the contents of *al-Durr al-Thamīn* in Malay with the intention that it could be comprehended by the people who do not understand Arabic.<sup>35</sup>

From the introductory notes, the book continues with the discussions on the creeds of Sunni theological school (*i'tiqād ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'ah*) as laid down by Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936), the father of the school. Besides describing the history of its founding, Da'ud al-Fatani strongly emphasizes the belief that the Sunni school has the right creeds because it is based on the Qur'an, Hadith, the consensus of the Companions and the *salaf* generation; further, he argues the urgency of Muslims to have sufficient knowledge of the Sunni doctrine to be able to distinguish, among the schools of theology, the correct creed to follow and to uphold in their religious belief.<sup>36</sup>

The book goes to the issue of knowing God (*mengenal Tuhan*), which is said as "more significant" in the field of doctrine. In this respect, Daud al-Fatani states that this knowledge of God is obligatory for the Muslims as they have already reached the age of puberty (*'āqil bāligh*), provided that it is based on the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet, so they could achieve the right principles of faith. He notes that the universe provides us with the ways to know God; it indicates the condition that God, as the creator (*khāliq*), must be absolutely in existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), non-origination (*qidam*) and permanence (*baqā'*), demonstrating that God must have the attributes of absolute perfection and all the things in the universe are created (*makh'lūq*).<sup>37</sup> To strengthen the argument, references to al-Sanūsī, besides al-Laḳānī, are made. While recognizing the variety of intellectual capability among Muslims, the book stresses that knowing God (*ma'rifat*) is

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<sup>35</sup> Shaykh Da'ud al-Fatani, *al-Durr al-Thamīn pada menyatakan I'tiqād Segala Orang Mu'minīn*, (Patani: Matba'at bin Ḥalābī, n.d.), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

compulsory for every Muslim. Therefore, Da'ud al-Fatani notes that Muslims must observe the universe, which is obligatory, to come to know God as the creator and firmly believe that God has absolute power to create the universe.<sup>38</sup>

The book then underlines the difference between the creator (*khāliq*) and the created (*makhlūq*). It will be discovered in the universe, so the book notifies the magnificent creation, which features God, who created it with the attributes of perfection in His power and of encompassing in His knowledge. Nonetheless, this universe is created and therefore has the qualities of incidence and happening (*hudūth*) and non-existence (*'adam*); and everything with these qualities (*hudūth* and *'adam*) have an origin (*awāl*) and transience (*akhīr*). It means that the universe depends on God, who has the attributes of absolute existence (*wujūd*) and permanence (*baqā'*). God has absolute power to determine the universe's beginning and end. All these facts, with the support of Qur'anic verses and Hadith, are proofs of God's perfect qualities the Muslims should believe, which are elaborated in this book in the well-known concept of twenty attributes of God, termed in Malay as *sifat dua puluh*.<sup>39</sup>

The next subject of the book's discussion concerns the twenty attributes of God. This subject is elaborated on in great detail, where almost all attributes (*ṣifāt*) are taken into a specific discussion. Reference to many sources is made to strengthen the author's explanation and argument, including al-Sanūsī and al-Laḡānī, as well as the verses of the Qur'an, the Hadith. The discussion of this subject starts with the attribute of *wujūd* (existence), *qidam* (non-beginning), *baqā'* (permanence), *mukhālāfat li al-ḥawādith* (no-resemblance to all that have qualities of happening or the created), *qiyāmu bi nafsīhi* (self-existence),

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 16-17. It should be said that reference to al-Sanūsī (see also pages 9-10) is made without mentioning his work *Umm al-Barāhīn*. The book writes: "according to Shaykh al-Sanūsī" or Shaykh al-Sanusi said". Most probably, *Umm al-Barāhīn* was well-known already among the Jawa, and it was the only work of al-Sanūsī circulated, so citing this work was deemed unnecessary.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

*waḥdāniyyah* (absolute oneness), until *kaḥnuhu mutaqallim* (being attributed with speech) as the last one.<sup>40</sup>

The twenty attributes will be dealt with later in a specific section. For now, it is clear that *al-Durr al-Thamīn* presents all the attributes of God in such a way as to demonstrate that the idea follows the Sunni dogma. In reference to the mentioned *Jawhar al-Tawḥīd*, Da'ud al-Fatani states that the majority of 'ulamā', who hold the Sunni school, are of the opinion that all the names of Allah are determined on the basis of *shari'ah*, as is found in the Qur'an and Hadith.<sup>41</sup> Equally important is that Da'ud al-Fatani refers to *Umm al-Barāhīn* as his main source.<sup>42</sup> Hence, he enhances the growing public discourse of *sifat dua puluh* in Southeast Asia.<sup>43</sup>

### **'Aqīdah al-Nājīn and Farīdat al-Farā'id: Two Examples of Commentaries**

To all those outlined, two commentaries by two Malay 'ulamā' of Patani origin are of special importance to be taken into particular discussion. They are *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Creeds of the Firm Believers Concerning the Science of the Foundation of Religion) by Shaykh Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani (popularly known as Tuan Minal, 1820-1910) and *Farīdat al-Farā'id fī 'Ilm al-'Aqā'id* (The Precious Gem of Gems in the Science of 'Aqīdah) by Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani (1856-1906). As will be apparent below, these commentaries had a great impact on to further development of *sifat dua puluh* in the Malay world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, a closer look is made to see how the two Malay 'ulamā' formulated the arguments which emphasize the significance of *sifat dua puluh*, besides the popularity the two commentaries enjoyed, alongside the impact they yielded, in the Malay world, which reached the mainland areas of Southeast Asia.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 20-37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 19 and 41.

<sup>43</sup> Laffan, *Sejarah Islam*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> See Philipp Bruckmayr, *Cambodia's Muslims and the Malay World*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 165-171.

Let me begin with *‘Aqīdah al-Nājīn*. It was completed in Mecca, first printed by Dār Ihyā al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyah in Cairo in 1890/1308 and then reprinted several times in Southeast Asia.<sup>45</sup> Written in the form of commentary, this book presented a relatively new trend in the Patani intellectual tradition. Most *kitab jawi* by Patani *‘ulamā’* became independent books. Of all the works of Da‘ud al-Fatani, to mention only the leading figure, only two that are in the form of commentaries.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, this book of Tuan Minal should be seen as part of the rising trend of writing *kitab jawi* on the subject of doctrine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where appreciation of *Umm al-Barāhīn* became a dominant feature. And all the works are, as already shown, commentaries.

As the title suggests, this 140-page book was written to expound and disseminate the Sunni theological thought in al-Sanūsī’s *Umm al-Barāhīn*. The author explains the meaning of the book’s title as “the creeds of those who are freed from being perverted and heresy”, pointing to the strong belief of Muslims in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*). The author also mentions the objective of this book, which is “to discuss (*pada bicara*) the science of the foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) according to the *madhhab* of orthodox Muslims of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā‘ah*”,<sup>47</sup> which was in line with the rising Islamic discourse of the time. And, like other *kitab jawi* as already noted, Zayn al-‘Abidin, in writing this book, consulted the commentaries and glosses to *Umm al-Barāhīn* that had been made to enrich the discussions and to make its messages

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<sup>45</sup> Matheson and Hooker, “Jawi Literature”, 34. These two scholars mention the undated version circulated in Patani and Malaysia in the 1980s by al-Ma‘arif in Pulau Penang as the fourth reprinting. This Penang edition appears to be the basis of the recent edition by Matba‘at bin Halabi in Patani. It is stated on the last page that this book was reprinted with the permission of the author’s son, Shaykh Hasan, and revised by al-Hajj Ilyas Yaqub al-Azhari.

<sup>46</sup> The two books of Shaykh Da‘ud al-Fatani are *al-Bahjat al-Saniyah fī al-‘Aqā‘id al-Sunniyah* (a commentary to *‘Aqīdat al-‘Awām* by his teacher, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Marzūkī) and *War al-Zawāhir li Ḥill Alfāz ‘Aqd al-Jawāhir* (to *Jawhārat al-Tawḥīd* by Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī). These two books are *‘aqīdah*.

<sup>47</sup> Shaykh Zayn al-‘Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani, *‘Aqīdah al-Nājīn fī ‘Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Patani: Matba‘ah bin Halabi, n.d.), 3.



easy to be comprehended.<sup>48</sup> Considering the number of pages, the discussions of *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* are much elaborated.

After the opening, which consists of explaining the words *bismi Allāh* (in the name of Allah) and *al-ḥamdu Allāh* (praising God) and praying for the Prophet Muhammad, the book begins the discussions with the significance of knowing (*'ilm*) of *tawḥīd*. It is defined as the way to affirm the basic tenet of religion based on reliable sources concerning the essence and the attributes of God and His Messenger, as was formulated by Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī and those who followed these two scholars. As such, the *'ilm* of *tawḥīd* is expected and is believed to liberate the people from what is said as the lack of knowing (*jahl*), doubt (*shakk*), uncertainty (*ẓann*), and illusion (*wahm*). In the specific field of *'itiqād*, none of the four points mentioned is tolerated, with the argument that it would lead the Muslims to the condition of unbelievers (*kāfir*).<sup>49</sup>

The book, therefore, emphasizes the necessity of the Muslims to have the knowledge of *usūl al-dīn*, which is, in fact compulsory from the perspective of *shar'ī*, on the basis of which they hold their *'aqīdah*. The Muslims' belief in God, especially among those of *mukallaf*, is guided by the knowledge of doctrine, not by blindly following what others say and do (*taqlīd*) without knowing both the argument and proof.<sup>50</sup> To this point, the book expounds on the responsibilities of the Muslims in the field of *'aqīdah* by elucidating two kinds of duties that are well-known in Islamic tradition, the individual (*farḍ al-'ayn*) and the collective duties (*farḍ al-kifāyah*).

The first one (*farḍ al-'ayn*) points to the condition that the Muslims of *mukallaf*, each of them, knows in detail, based on reliable argument, all the attributes of God, which consists of those necessary (*wājib*), inadmissible (*mustahīl*), and admissible (*al-jā'iz*). Nevertheless, the book also recognizes the situation in which the knowledge of God's attributes is based on a general argument (*dalīl ijmālī*), that is, it is based on the recognition that the universe

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> In this respect, the book notes that the *'ulamā'* had different opinions on the status of *muqallid* (those who do *taqlīd*); some said that they were still believers, while others fell under the category of unbelievers. See Ibid., 13.

is created and, as such, the proof of God's existence.<sup>51</sup> While noting the importance of knowing the verses of the Qur'an, which state the nature of createdness of the universe,<sup>52</sup> The book also illustrates how individual Muslims found the earth as clear evidence of its being God's creature, affirming what has been stated in the Qur'an that "on the earth are signs of those of assured faith (*al-mūqinīn*)".<sup>53</sup>

The second duty (*farḍ al-kifāyah*), which is collective, refers to the fact that the responsibility to know the attributes of God in detail is in the hands of Muslim leaders, the '*ulamā*' and the *qāḍī* (the judge). With their Islamic knowledge, these leaders have the authority to solve disputed religious problems, especially those concerning the issue of the createdness of the universe—"that it (the universe) is created (*ḥudūth*) and everything which is created necessitates the creator. ...and (the obligation) to comprehend this issue is collective, that every country is requested to have someone who could determine and explain its argument".<sup>54</sup> If it is the case, the country's residents who do not know the subject are freed from being committed to sin. It is mentioned here that the Muslim leaders are also tasked to protect the residents from the dissemination of deviated ideas that potentially jeopardise the Muslims' belief in God (*'aqīdah*).<sup>55</sup>

In line with the above argument, the book adds to knowledge (*'ilm*) the concept of *ma'rifat* (knowing Allah); both are side-by-side and point to the importance of knowledge in '*aqīdah*'. Knowing Allah is His attributes, not His essence, which could be achieved using knowledge-based reasoning. Knowledge will leads the

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> One of the verses of the Qur'an that states the createdness of the universe is verse 164 of al-Baqarah (2): "in the creation of heavens and earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives in addition to that... (here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise".

<sup>53</sup> The Qur'an, al-Dhāriyāt (51): 20. To be added here the verse 23, which says, "Then, by the Lord of heavens and earth, this is the very Truth, as much as the fact that you can speak intelligently to each other".

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

process of understanding the attributes of Allah towards *ma'rifat*. To this point, the book explains the obligation of Muslims of *mukallaf*, about the opinion of '*ulamā'*', to have a deep look at the universe to the extent that they recognize that God creates it and then to confirm it. In this process, knowledge allows the Muslims to distinguish what is valid from what is wrong, as well as between the prophet and not prophet in the case of *ma'rifat* of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>56</sup> From this point, '*Aqīdah al-Nājīn*' discusses the so-called *sifat dua puluh*, which will be dealt with later.

In the history of Patani scholars, Ahmad al-Fatani was one of the most prolific writers after Da'ud al-Fatani. From his hands, several works on this subject appeared in Patani and Malay archipelago. Now, attention will be given to *Farīdat al-Farā'id* of Ahmad al-Fatani. This small book, with 24 pages, had a special position among Malay people, primarily the '*ulamā'*' of *pondok* (Tok Guru), who were (and perhaps are) familiar with this book, along with the author, next to his major work on *fatāwā* (religious opinions) concerning various aspects of Southeast Asian Islam and Muslims' affairs, *al-Fatāwa al-Faṭāniyyah*.<sup>57</sup>

It should be stated that *Farīdat al-Farā'id* differs from other commentaries already discussed. In this work, the author makes no specific statement that this book is a translation and commentary on *Umm al-Barāhīn*. However, as will be shown, both the contents and the line of thought of the book are substantially similar to those of *Umm al-Barāhīn* and its Malay commentaries. The twenty attributes of God, the main subject of al-Sanūsī's book, appears to be the major discussion of *Farīdat al-Farā'id*. As well the book is aimed, as stated in its title pages, to present the subjects of *tauhīd* and *uṣūl al-dīn* of the school of Imām al-Ash'arī. Therefore, the book belongs to the Malay commentaries of Patani '*ulamā'*' to *Umm al-Barāhīn*, next to the '*Aqīdah al-Nājīn*'.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Zayn al-'Abidin, '*Aqīdah al-Nājīn*', 12-3.

<sup>57</sup> Perayot Rahimmulla, "The Patani Fatāwā: A Case Study of the Kitāb al-Fatāwa al-Faṭāniyyah" (Ph.D. Thesis at the University Kent at Canterbury, 1992), 359, 337. Rahimmulla also states that *Farīdat al-Farā'id* is widely used as a learning material in *pondok* and mosques in Patani, Yalal, Narathiwat, and some areas of Malaysia today.

As the title suggests, *Farīdat al-Farā'id* is devoted to discussing the subject of 'aqīdah and tawhīd in general. In the introductory pages, the author states that this work (*risālah*) is written based on authoritative books, where the author compiled the essential elements of the science of tawhīd, like “picking up fruits in a garden or precious jewels in an ocean”; herewith the book presents, in the Malay language with Patani dialect, the true and beautifully illuminating creeds according to the foundation of faith outlined by the Ash'arite *madhhab*.<sup>58</sup>

*Farīdat al-Farā'id* begins the discussions with an explanation of the principles of tawhīd (the unity of God), the principles of faith ('itiqād) which are based on sound argument and are concerned with the attributes of God—those of necessary, inadmissible, and admissible—and of the Prophet. The tawhīd is strongly emphasized as a leading pillar of religion, besides performing devotion to God ('ibadah) and practising what is religiously prescribed. The book enumerates the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith, and *ihsān* (the religious moralities) that are concerned with having a close relationship with God to gain the perfection of the two pillars mentioned.<sup>59</sup>

Like 'Aqīdah al-Nājīn, *Farīdat al-Farā'id* also deals with the *ma'rifat* of Allah, which is said as an essential aspect of tawhīd. Yet, the latter-mentioned *kitab* emphasises the necessity of the Muslims to know His attributes, not His essence, with the argument of their createdness. At the same time, the knowledge dimension of *ma'rifat*, extensively discussed in 'Aqīdah al-Nājīn, is mentioned only in passing. In this respect, *Farīdat al-Farā'id* explains the general point of tawhīd, which can be found in all commentaries, that Allah has the attributes of perfection, which are necessary (*wājib*). It is, therefore, inadmissible for Allah to have the attributes of deficiency.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Shaykh Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id fī 'Ilm al-'Aqā'id* (Patani: Maṭba'at bin Halābī, n.d.), 2-3.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 3-4.

<sup>60</sup> Ahmad al-Fatani, *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, 5.

### Other Malay Books on *Sifat Dua Puluh*

In addition to *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn* and *Farīdat al-Farā'id*, there emerged other works by other authors of Malay *'ulamā'* which paid attention to the subject of *sifat dua puluh*. The first work to mention is *Miftāḥ al-Murīd fī 'Ilm al-Tawḥīd* (Keys for the Students in the Science of *Tawḥīd*) by Shaykh Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani. This treatise was written most likely as an abridgement of *'Aqīdah al-Nājīn*, to have the Malay Muslims acquainted with the teaching on the attributes of God and, in general, the *'ilm al-tawḥīd*. Based on the updated version of al-Ma'arif in Penang, this 16-page treatise is compiled with other essays by two other writers, one of whom is the author's son Umar, who wrote the cause that leads to the apostasy (*murtad*). The other is Haji Ahmad bin Abd al-Ra'uf of Melaka, who composed his essay on *tawḥīd* in a Malay rhyme. In the book's margin is inserted a work of Da'ud al-Fatani, *Muta'allim*.<sup>61</sup>

In the 1960s, there appeared two commentaries to *Farīdat al-Farā'id* of Ahmad al-Fatani: *'Umdat al-Ṭālib al-Mujtahid fī Sharḥ Farīdat al-Farā'id* (The Leading Knowledge Seeker in the Commentary to *Farīdat al-Farā'id*) by Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah bin Haji Ibrahim al-Fatani al-Jabi, and *Pati Farīdat al-Farā'id* (The Substance of *Farīdat al-Farā'id*) by Tuan Guru Haji Nik Abdullah Ahmad al-Jambuwi al-Fatani. The first mentioned work, *'Umdat al-Ṭālib*, was completed in 1960 (1380) in Malay. It was written to expound the mentioned work of Ahmad al-Fatani, which is described "as to have been beneficial and useful in the science of *'aqā'id*", to make it easy to be digested for those who search for Islamic knowledge.<sup>62</sup> The second work, *Pati Farīdat al-Farā'id*, was written with the same objective as *'Umdat al-Ṭālib*. This work has received high appreciation by mainly the Malay of the peninsula, as it was later published in Kuala Lumpur with the modern style

<sup>61</sup> Shaykh Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani, *Miftāḥ al-Murīd fī 'Ilm al-Tawḥīd* (Pulau Penang: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.); see also Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 33, 35; Madmarn, *The Pondok*, 31.

<sup>62</sup> Tuan Guru Haji Abdullah bin Haji Ibrahim al-Fatani al-Jabi, *'Umdat al-Ṭālib al-Mujtahid fī Sharḥ Farīdat al-Farā'id*, (Patani: Bin Halabi, n.d.), 3. There was also a reprinted version of this book by Taman Pustaka Press in Patani, which was a run of 2,000 copies. See Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 27.

of Malay language expression.<sup>63</sup> These two commentaries sign the popularity of *Farīdat al-Farā'id* in Patani and the Malay-archipelago and the primacy of the teaching of *sifat dua puluh* as an established formulation of the principles of belief (*aqidah*) among the Muslim in Southeast Asia.

Another *'ālim* to mention here is Shaykh Ismail bin Abdul Kadir al-Fatani, also known as Pakda El al-Fatani. No much is known about this *'ālim*, unless he is said as the cousin of Ahmad al-Fatani and had a career as a teacher in Mecca. He wrote two works that discuss the subject of *sifat dua puluh*, *Sharḥ Bākūrat al-Amānī* (Commentary to *Bākūrat al-Amānī* [The Beginning of Peace]) and *Idāh al-Marān lī Taḥqīq Ṣubul al-Salām* (The Beginning of Season for the Actualisation of Peace Process). The first work is a commentary to his small work (8 pages) he had completed in 1912, *Bākūrat al-Amānī*, four years before he began writing this 30-page *sharḥ* in 1916. Shaykh Ismail has called his commentary *Tabṣīrat al-Adāni bi al-Hāni Bākūrat al-Amānī* (The Enlightenment Appropriate to Understand *Bākūrat al-Amānī*). The second work was written in 1917 and appeared as a brief and simple booklet (12 pages). It explains the same subject of *sifat dua puluh* for beginners.<sup>64</sup>

To be added here is the work by Haji Muhammad Daud bin Haji Muhammad Yusuf, *al-Risālah al-Tawḥīdiyyah*. Written in 1958/9 (1378), this 58-page book is to explain the *sifat dua puluh*, next to the subjects of the *hajj* and *'umrah*.<sup>65</sup> Another scholar is Tuan Guru Abdul Qadir bin Wangah from kampong (village) Sekam, Waratan in Patani. He wrote a book on the *ṣifāt ma'ānī* entitled *Mabḥath al-Kalām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (The Subject of *Kalām* in the Science of

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<sup>63</sup> Che' Razi Jusoh, "Preliminary Study on the Accounts of Some of the Malay-Jawi Aqidah Texts and Commentaries", *Afkar* (12, 2011), 33. Che' Razi Jusoh notes that Professor Ibrahim Abu Bakar edited and annotated *Farīdat al-Farā'id* and published it in Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 30-1. These two scholars found in the 1980s the edition of *Sharḥ Bakūrat al-Amānī* 7<sup>th</sup> reprinted by al-Patani Press in 1382 (1962-3). See also Che' Razi Jusoh, "Preliminary Study", 34, in which this scholar notes that the most recent version of the work was printed by Khazanah Fathaniyah in 1421/2000.

<sup>65</sup> Matheson & Hooker, "Jawi Literature", 31.

*Kalām*), completed in 13 Rabi' al-Thani 1374/ 9 December 1954.<sup>66</sup> So important was the subject of *sifat dua puluh* that it attracted a female scholar to write a small *risālah* entitled *Sifat Dua Puluh pada Ilmu Tawhid* (The Twenty Attributes in the Science of *Tawhīd*). She was Hajjah Wan Yah binti Tuan Kadi Haji Wan Abdul Rahman from Patani.<sup>67</sup> Completed in 1962/1382, this *risālah* was written for beginners. "Some friends of mine requested me", so she stated in introductory pages, "to compose a small *risālah* in explaining the foundation of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) which is delivered for the beginners, and [therefore] I made it easy to be comprehended".<sup>68</sup>

As can be gleaned from its title, the *risālah* explains each of the twenty attributes in brief and straightforward manners, emphasizing the essential points of the meaning of every attribute. In the last part, the author discusses the attributes necessary for the Messenger with a brief story of the Prophet Muhammad, and the belief in angels, then elaborates on the meaning and significance of the pillars of Islam and faith. The *risālah* concludes its discussions with an explanation of the prayer (*ṣalāt*) and the advice to stay on the right path.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

Certainly, *sifat dua puluh*, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has become an acclaimed Malay term to convey the Sunni tradition in Southeast Asia. The *kitab jawi* held a major role in the production and development of this conceptual term, which was adopted from Yusūf al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn*. The *Jawi* scholars of Mecca translated the book into Malay and, more importantly, expounded

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<sup>66</sup> This work was printed, but undated, by Percetakan Saudara Press in Patani. See Che' Jusoh, "Preliminary Study", 34.

<sup>67</sup> Not much is known about this female 'ālim of Patani. Yet, the Malaysian-based website has made a news report recently (5 July 2019) on the female Muslim leaders in the Malay world, in which Hajjah Wan Yah is acknowledged as one of three Malaysian female 'ulamā' who contributed to the Islamic development, together with Hajjah Khadijah Tok Selehor and Syeikhah Fatimah Syekh Abdul Wahab Bugis. See [orangkata.my/agama](http://orangkata.my/agama). Accessed on 28 June 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Hajjah Wan Yah binti Tuan Kadi Haji Wan Abdul Rahman, *Sifat Dua Puluh pada Ilmu Tawhid*, (the publisher and the date of its publication are not identified), 2.

<sup>69</sup> See Hajjah Wan Yah, *Sifat Dua Puluh*.

its contents in the form commentaries, leading *sifat dua puluh* to emerge as a popular formulation of the theological school of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*. This trend of scholarly development was intensified as the students and cohorts of *Jawi* scholars continued writing treaties on the subject in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. To be added to this advance of *sifat dua puluh* was the role of local '*ulamā'*', who disseminated it through oral sermons and lectures.

As such, *sifat dua puluh* is an example of the ways in how Islamic belief was produced and reproduced in Southeast Asian history, which greatly contributes to its emergence as Islamic orthodoxy in the field of theology in the region.

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