

THE *FATWAS* OF AHMAD KHATIB MINANGKABAU (1860-1916) AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN INDONESIA

Nico J.G. Kaptein

*Leiden University, The Netherlands*¹

Corresponding Author: Nico J.G. Kaptein

Article history: Received: November 22, 2024 Revised: December 10, 2024 Published: December 22, 2024.

Abstract

Ahmad Khatib originated from Minangkabau, West Sumatra and after his settlement in the Holy City of Mecca in 1877, he grew into a scholar in Islamic sciences of great repute and eventually died there in 1916. His written works, educational and other activities have played a vital part in the exchange of religious ideas between Mecca and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago and make him an important person in the history of Islam in Southeast Asia. In my paper I will go in detail into a fatwa he gave on the question of whether or not it was allowed to sell chickens to Chinese. The paper aims to shed light on the mufti-ship of Ahmad Khatib and will look into the wider implications of the issue as far as religious authority is concerned, in particular into its locus.

[Ahmad Khatib adalah seorang tokoh agama yang berasal dari Minangkabau, Sumatera Barat. Setelah hijrah dan menetap di Mekah pada tahun 1877, dia menjadi seorang ulama terkemuka dalam ilmu-ilmu keislaman hingga akhirnya

¹ Nico J.G. Kaptein (PhD 1989) is Professor Emeritus of Islam in Southeast Asia at Leiden University. He is interested in the religious relations between the Middle East and Southeast Asia in the past and in the present. This paper was delivered at my farewell symposium “From the Past to the Future: Islam and Religious Authority in Indonesia”, *Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia* (UIII), Jakarta 29-30 August 2023. I am deeply thankful to Noorhaidi Hasan and Yanwar Pribadi for taking the initiative to organize this very honorable event.



wafat di sana pada tahun 1916. Melalui karya tulisnya, kegiatan pendidikan, dan aktivitas lainnya, Khatib berperan penting dalam pertukaran gagasan keagamaan antara Mekah dan kepulauan Melayu-Indonesia. Dengan perannya tersebut, Khatib menjadi sosok yang penting dalam sejarah Islam di Asia Tenggara. Dalam artikel ini, saya akan mengkaji secara rinci salah satu fatwa yang dikeluarkan oleh Ahmad Khatib terkait hukum menjual ayam kepada orang Tionghoa. Dengan demikian, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap aspek kemuftian Ahmad Khatib serta meneliti implikasi yang lebih luas dari isu tersebut, khususnya terkait aspek otoritas keagamaan.]

Keywords: *Fatwa, Religious Authority, Minangkabau, Ahmad Khatib*

Introduction

The concept of Islamic religious authority in Indonesia is complex and has changed over time in various domains. Against this background, a number of questions can be raised here, like who are the bearers of religious authority; and what sources and what centers of religious authority do we have?² In this paper I would like to contribute to the issue of the locus of religious authority in order to get more insight into the place of the Middle East in the Indonesian concept of religious authority. For this purpose, I will go here into the work of Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1860-1916), who played a vital part in the exchange of religious ideas between Mecca and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, and whose biography I am currently writing.

The Biography of Ahmad Khatib

Shortly before Ahmad Khatib died in 1916, he finalized his last book in 1915, entitled *al-Qawl al-Tahif fi Tarjamat Ta'rikh Hayat Ahmad Khatib ibn `Abd al-Latif* (*The Given Word on the Description of the Life of Shaykh Ahmad Khatib ibn `Abd al-Latif*) which, as the title shows, is his

² Nico J.G. Kaptein, "The Voice of the 'Ulama': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 125, no. 1 (2004): 115–130.

autobiography.³ In this paragraph I will limit myself to the basic facts of the autobiography, leaving aside all kinds of interesting data and issues.⁴

Ahmad Khatib was born in mother's village Kota Tuo in Minangkabau in 1860. In 1870 he departed with a number of male relatives to Mecca for the *haji*. As a young boy, Ahmad Khatib remained for a number of years in the Holy City, but in 1875 he returned to Kota Tuo in Minangkabau at the request of his mother. In 1877 he departed again for Mecca by steamer, never to return to his native Minangkabau. In Mecca he was taught amongst others by Sayyid `Uthman Shatta (d. 1878), Sayyid `Umar Shatta (d. 1913) and his brother Sayyid Bakri Shatta (d. 1893) as well as by the great Shafi`ite *mufti* of the era Ahmad ibn Zayni Dahlan (d. 1886). In 1879 he married to Khadija, the daughter of Muhammad Salih al-Kurdi, who was a rich businessman and a member of the Meccan elite, and as a result Ahmad Khatib also became a member of the upper class of Meccan society. After the untimely death of Khadija in 1884, he married again with the older sister of his deceased wife, called Fatima, who was the first daughter of Muhammad Salih al-Kurdi. During his marriages he fathered a number of sons and daughters. Eventually Ahmad Khatib died in 1916 during the First World War in Mecca where he was buried in the Mu`alla cemetery (Jannatul Mu`alla).

During his lifetime Ahmad Khatib developed into a Muslim scholar of great standing with a variety of professional activities. During the

³ In Gudrun Krämer (a.o.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam Thre*e, Vol. 1 part 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 102–103, I was the first to draw attention to the unique manuscript of this text, which is kept in the library of Mecca under the call number Ta`rikh 116. In 2016 Muhammad Husni, Zulhamdi Malin Mudo and Afdhil Fadli published a rather weak translation, entitled, Syeikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi, *Dari Minangkabau untuk Dunia Islam: Otobiografi Syeikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi (1860-1916M)* (Yogyakarta: Gre Publishing, 2016). Likewise, in 2016 an Arabic edition of the manuscript appeared by a person called Ibn Jurju al-Jawi, and apart from the publisher, *Maktabat Ibn Jurju al-Jawi*, no further bibliographical details are given. In this paragraph, I use the original manuscript. In my forthcoming book on Ahmad Khatib I will include a full English translation of this manuscript.

⁴ In the autobiography all dates are given according to the Hijri calendar, which I have converted here.

era of Ahmad Dahlan (d. 1886) when he held the position of head of all scholars in the Masjid al-Haram and in this capacity was the highest responsible for teaching activities, Ahmad Khatib got the licence to teach in the Holy Mosque, and in this capacity he taught many students from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago who would play major roles upon their return to Indonesia, like Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah alias Haji Rasul (1879–1945) and Haji Abdullah Ahmad (1878–1933), both reformist leaders in West Sumatra; Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923), the founder of the Muhammadiyah in Java in 1912; Hasyim Asyari (1875–1947), one of the founders of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926; and Agus Salim (1884–1954), the early nationalist leader. Moreover, Ahmad Khatib was appointed as one of the permanent Shafi'ite prayer leaders (*imams*) in the Masjid al-Haram as well as a preacher to deliver sermons from the pulpit in the Masjid al-Haram⁵ and although these were relatively modest positions within the religious bureaucracy with only a moderate stipend, for a person from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, it was indeed a great honour.

Next to these activities, Ahmad Khatib was also a prolific writer, who from 1888 – 1915 wrote 47 books, both in Arabic and Malay, his autobiography being the last. Most of his writings were printed, while some have been preserved in manuscript and some are lost. His writings can be roughly categorized as follows: text books and traditional contributions, both often for educational purposes; books and pamphlets on current affairs and polemics; and *fatwas*. Today Ahmad Khatib is probably best known for his fierce attacks on the matrilineal inheritance customs of his native region of Minangkabau. In these writings Ahmad Khatib pointed out that these customs were contrary to the rules of Islamic inheritance law. Other well-known examples of his works are, for instance, his attacks on the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood because it had

⁵ Ahmad Khatib, *al-Qawl al-Tabi' fi Tarjamat Ta'rikh Hayat Ahmad Khatib ibn 'Abd al-Latif*, fol. 23 (Mecca: Maktabah Mecca, 1915).

included innovations unknown to the Prophet, and his book from 1914 in defence of the newly established mass movement in the Netherlands East Indies, the Sarekat Islam (SI), directed against his former pupil, Hasyim Asyari, who initially disapproved of the movement.

The *Fatwas* of Ahmad Khatib

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, in 1915 Ahmad Khatib finalized his last book, his autobiography. In this work he comments on all of his own 47 writings and mentions when and why he wrote them, in what language and whether they had been printed or not. This is a very interesting list, but for the current paper I will limit myself to his prefinal item, nr. 46, namely his *fatwas*. On this he comments in his autobiography:

“Moreover, during the writing of those works, I had written *fatwas* about all questions which reached me. I wrote the answers to that and I registered them in a register regardless of whether the question was in Arabic or in Malay and the answer likewise. I did not arrange them according to the chapters of *fiqh*. This amounted to more than one volume of what I had registered, while many questions I did not register at all”.⁶

This quotation shows that Ahmad Khatib has been active in the field of *fatwa* giving throughout his entire career, but unfortunately no *fatwa* collections prepared by himself have been preserved. As we know, a complete *fatwa* consists of a question by a petitioner, the *mustafti*, who can be identified through his name; the circumstances under which the issue became of topical interest, including the place and the date; the answer by the *mufti* and his considerations and his legal argumentation and sources to reach his judgement. Of course, a number of his books can be regarded as a kind of extensive *fatwa*, because they were given at the request of one or more believers, but Ahmad Khatib himself did not compile his *fatwas* in the narrow and conventional sense of the word into a published book.

⁶ *Ibid.*, fol.49.

However, from the numerous *fatwas* Ahmad Khatib must have given throughout his long career, a large number of *fatwas* in Malay have been gathered in a book, entitled *Kitab Masa'il dan Qawa'id* (*The Book on Issues and Principles*), which was published in *Jawi* script at The United Press in Pulau Pinang (Malaysia) on 17 Muharram 1393/21 February 1973.⁷ In his brief introduction the compiler of the book, called Ishaq Adam Tualang Kedah mentions that he gathered 158 *fatwas* “from the most important *ulama*, mentioned in the book” in Mecca on 2 Ramadan 1358/27 August 1937, and for a second time on 23 Sha'ban 1388/14 November 1967.⁸ This person was born in the 1930s in the village of Tualang, district of Pokok Sena, Kedah. After his initial schooling in Pondok Tualang with Tuan Guru Haji Awang Tualang and in Pondok Bunut Payong in Kelantan, he went to Mecca for several years to perform the *hajj* and to continue his education. After his return to Malaysia, not much is known of his career except that he was active in teaching and writing, but apart from his *fatwa* compilation no other works produced by him are known. It is said that that he died between 2012-2014 at the age of 80 and was buried nearby Masjid Kampung Tualang, Pokok Sena, Kedah, in Malaysia.

In addition to the *fatwas* of Ahmad Khatib which form the largest part of the book, also *fatwas* from other *muftis* are included, namely Ahmad ibn Zayn al-Patani (1856-1908), `Abd al-Qadir al-Mandiling (1910-1965), Mukhtar `Utarid (1862-1930)⁹ and from Ishaq Adam himself. In passing it should be noted that it is remarkable that so long after the death of

⁷ I thank my colleague Muhammad Mustaqim bin Mohd Zarif, PhD, Professor of Islamic and Malay Manuscript Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) for sending me a copy of this book and for providing me with the details on the biography on Ishaq Adam. *Jawi* script consists of the Arabic alphabet with a few modifications to cater for the Malay language.

⁸ The book gives the dates according to both the CE calendar and the Hijri calendar, p. 2.

⁹ See for these scholars Ahmad Fauzi Ilyas, *Warisan Intelektual Ulama Nusantara: Tokoh, Karya, dan Pemikiran* (Medan: Rawda Publishing, 2018).

Ahmad Khatib his prestige and authority apparently had continued to exist, so that as late as 1973 there was still an interest in publishing his *fatwas*. Unfortunately, the compiler does not mention how he made the collection and how he selected the *fatwas* from an apparently much larger corpus, apart from the fact that the collection only includes Malay *fatwas* from Ahmad Khatib, and not Arabic ones. Sometimes *fatwas* on comparable issues are grouped together, but we do not know whether this was done by Ishaq Adam, or whether he followed the corpus of *fatwas* as Ahmad Khatib had filed them away during his career. As we just saw in the quote from his autobiography, Ahmad Khatib mentioned that he had filed his *fatwas* in Arabic and Malay more or less at random and not thematically according to the chapters of the *fiqh* books.¹⁰

Perhaps Ahmad Khatib had done this chronologically, but he does not say this. Moreover, we do not know how the *fatwas* which Ahmad Khatib had preserved, looked like. Moreover, it is not known whether Ishaq Adam edited the *fatwas* at all; fortunately, the names of the *muftis* are given, but we do not know how he dealt with the spelling, nor whether he might have stripped the *fatwas* of the conventional introductions, the dates, the places, the petitioners of the *fatwas*, the references to the textual sources for the *fatwas* and the conventional endings. Perhaps we can assume that in selecting the *fatwas* for his book, Ishaq Adam aimed at serving his own Malay speaking community in Kedah. This assumption gains probability, because Ishaq Adam also included some *fatwas* of his own in the collection.

All that having said it is important to note that there can be no doubt about the authenticity of the *fatwas*, because there is at times overlap with the content of other writings of Ahmad Khatib,¹¹ while in some *fatwas* a clarification is asked on a particular passage from Ahmad Khatib's

¹⁰ This conventional order can be seen for instance in the *fiqh* work *Iʿanat al-Talibin* by Ahmad Khatib's teacher Bakri Shatta, which starts with prayer, followed by *ṣakat*, fasting, *hajj*, etc.

¹¹ See my forthcoming book.

work *al-Riyad al-Wardiyyah*, which he wrote in 1893.¹² Therefore we can consider this collection a most welcome addition to the other works of Ahmad Khatib. In fact, the variety of issues discussed is so wide that the collection deserves a separate study in itself, but in this paper, I will limit myself to one issue.

The Chicken *Fatwa*

The *fatwa* I will to study more in detail deals with the selling of chickens to Chinese people. My translation from the Malay reads as follows:

Issue. A Muslim person sells chickens to a Chinese unbeliever, who resells them to another Chinese unbeliever. Is it permitted to us to sell those chickens to him? The answer. The answer to this is that this is permitted if we do not know whether the buyer kills the chickens in another way than by ritual slaughtering (*sembelih*), for instance by smashing the heads of the chickens to a stone. If we know that it happens like this, it is absolutely not permitted to sell the chickens to them, because in this way the unbelievers commit a sin. But God knows best. The end. Ahmad Khatib.¹³

We see that in this *fatwa* the context is completely lacking: there is no mentioning of a date, nor who petitioned the *fatwa* from where, and there is no legal substantiation given for the *fatwa*. Although sometimes the *fatwas* in the collection differ in size, being longer or shorter, I think this *fatwa* is a good illustration of the rudimentary nature of the *fatwas* in this collection.

I have not chosen this example at random, because the same issue is also discussed in a brief handwritten booklet, which contains the background information on the issue and, moreover, elaborates on Ahmad Khatib's role in this. This text is kept in Leiden University Library under call number Or. 7088 and entered the collection of the library as part of the legacy of the Dutch scholar and colonial administrator Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), who had added a note that he

¹² *Kitab Masa'il dan Qawa'id*, p. 49 (no. 96).

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 14 (no. 22).

had obtained the copy from his successor in Indonesia Dr. G.A.J. Hazeu (1870-1929) in December 1906. The booklet is a handwritten copy of an originally printed work which was produced by one of the leading publishers in Singapore at the time, Haji Muhammad Amin ibn Haji Abd on 27 Dhu l-Qa`da 1323 [22 January 1906].¹⁴ The booklet does not have a title, but the title page mentions in a mixture of Malay and Arabic that the text contains a *fatwa* from the Shafi`ite *mufti* in Mecca and head of the scholars in the Masjid al-Haram, Muhammad Sa`id Babasil (d. 1912), as well as *fatwas* from a number of reputed and trustworthy scholars from the Holy Land, who are in agreement with him.

The handwritten booklet is a compilation of various documents in Arabic and Malay, which was compiled by `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq ibn Muhammad `Afif al- Banjari (1857- 1939),¹⁵ who finished it on 10 Shawwal 1323 [6 December 1905] in Muntok, Bangka, Indonesia.¹⁶ This person originated from Martapura in South Kalimantan and spent from 1889-1898 in Mecca and Medina. In the Holy City he studied under Nawawi Bantani (d. 1897), Muhammad Babasil and Sayyid Bakri. Among his fellow students was also Ahmad Khatib and it is said that he also studied under Ahmad Khatib at the same time. He remained in Mecca until 1895, continued his studies in Medina for two years; then taught for a year in the Masjid al-Haram and in 1898 returned to Indonesia. In Indonesia, he first spent a few months in his native place Martapura, after which he went via Batavia to Bangka. He started teaching in Bangka, where he would live for a period of twelve years, and the chicken issue arose in this period in Bangka. Relevant to the current *fatwa* is to mention that according to the 1905 census out of the total population of 115.000

¹⁴ The dates in the text are given according to the Hijri calendar and I have added the converted dates between square brackets.

¹⁵ I have taken the information on him from Zulkifli Harmi (ed.), *Transliterasi dan Kandungan Fath al-`Alim fi Tartib al-Ta`lim Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik* (Bangka: Shiddiq Press, 2006), 1–35; Syafei Abdullah, *Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan Ulama Syekh H.A. Rahman Shiddik Mufti Inderagiri* (Jakarta: Serajaya, 1982).

¹⁶ Or. 7088, pp. 22-3.

persons living in Bangka at the time, 43.700 (so more than one out of three) were Chinese, most of whom were working in the mining industry.¹⁷

From the booklet it is clear that the chicken issue had actually started already at the beginning of the career of `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq in “Belinyu, afdeling Muntok” Bangka in 1317 [1899], when he had given a *fatwa* which forbade the selling of chicken to the Chinese. The *fatwa* raised protests among certain persons, who started to mobilize their acquaintances in Mecca. A person by the name of Haji Abd al- Hasan Palembang, who further mobilized two other friends, issued a *fatwa* that this commercial transaction was permitted, whereupon he sent his *fatwa* to his contact in Bangka. Moreover, he claimed that he possessed *fatwas* to confirm this permission from the previous Shafi`ite *mufiti* Ahmad ibn Zayni Dahlan (d. 1886) and the current *mufiti* Babasil. These documents, together with some other supporting documents, were sent to the Chief *Penghulu* of Muntok, called Haji Marzuqi ibn Haji Isma`il, so that he could communicate to the people that according to the *ulama* in Mecca it was permitted to sell chickens to the Chinese.

Similar to his opponents, `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq had also involved his network in Mecca by contacting his former fellow student and teacher Ahmad Khatib, whom he had written a letter on the issue on 20 Jumada al-Ula 1323 [22 July 1905]. On 20 Rajab 1323 [19 September 1905] Ahmad Khatib replied to this letter (in Malay), in which he gave his support to the opinion of `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq, namely that the selling of chicken to the Chinese was prohibited (pp. 2-3). This letter is included in the booklet which `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq compiled, as number 1, and the booklet continues by giving more relevant documents on the issue.

The second appended document is Ahmad Khatib's formal request on the issue to Muhammad Sa`id Babasil as well as the *mufiti's* answer, and both the request and the answer are quoted. As a matter of course,

¹⁷ *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië. Tweede druk.* 4 vols. and 4 supplement vols. 's-Gravenhage, 1917-1939, s.v. Banka, Vol. I, pp. 159-163.

Ahmad Khatib's request to Muhammad Sa'id Babasil is in Arabic but in the published compilation of the relevant documents there is an interlinear translation in Malay. The formal request to the *mufti* starts as follows: "What is your opinion—may your excellence endure—on the selling of animals like chicken to the infidel Chinese, while it is part of their custom that they do not ritually slaughter animals like the Muslims do?" For, as Ahmad Khatib continues in his request, the Chinese wring the neck of small animals and beat big animals to death with a heavy instrument and he asks whether it is permitted for Muslims to sell chickens to the Chinese when they know that they eat meat which had not been ritually slaughtered. Ahmad Khatib adds that to his understanding based on the *fiqh* books this is forbidden and he asks the *mufti* how he would interpret the passage from the *Fath al-Mu'in*¹⁸ which forbids the selling of various goods to the unbelievers, in case he would allow the selling of chickens to the Chinese. Moreover, Ahmad Khatib asks what the opinion of the *mufti* is on those who consider the selling permitted, based on a *fatwa* by the *mufti* himself and by one from his predecessor Ahmad ibn Zayni Dahlan (pp. 3-9). In his answer—also in Arabic with an interlinear Malay translation—Babasil confirms the statement of the *Fath al-Mu'in* and that it is forbidden to sell animals to unbelievers when one knows or suspects that they will not slaughter them according to the Sharia. Finally, Babasil states that "nor myself, nor my teacher have ever given an answer that that it is permitted, as is mentioned in the question, and he who bases his *fatwa* on me or my teacher to permit this, is telling a lie about me and about my late teacher Ahmad ibn Zayni Dahlan." As is conventional the *fatwa* ends in the signature of the *mufti*, while it is added that he had confirmed it with his seal (*mahr*) (pp. 9-11).¹⁹

After this clear statement of the Shafi'ite *mufti* that the selling of chickens to the Chinese is forbidden, the booklet continues with

¹⁸ Standard Shafi'ite *fiqh* manual by Zayn al-Din al-Malaybari (d. 1574).

¹⁹ The date of the seal given 1303 [1886] is the year when he became a *mufti* after his predecessor Dahlan.

a number of other relevant documents in Arabic, to which interlinear Malay translations in Malay are added. The next document contains the confirmation of the *fatwa* by Shaykh `Umar Rashidi Sumbawa (pp. 11-12), followed by the fourth documents which contains a confirmation of the *mufti's fatwa* by Shaykh `Umar ibn Abi Bakr Bajunayd (pp. 12-13).²⁰ The fifth document is a withdrawal (*ruju`*) of the earlier approval to sell chicken to the Chinese, made by `Umar Bali Ampenan (pp. 13-14), followed by a similar statement by another dissident Abu l-Hasan ibn Husayn Palembang who also had declared earlier that it was allowed to sell chickens to the Chinese, but now revoked his initial opinion (p. 14).²¹ The seventh document is a statement in Malay, in which Ahmad Khatib confirms that he was able to convince Abu l-Hasan and `Umar Bali to revise their previous opinions by showing them the *fatwa* of Babasil. This is also the last document which Ahmad Khatib sent to `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq (pp. 14-15).²²

After this file was compiled by Ahmad Khatib in Mecca, `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq included two more documents, which are both in Malay. Number eight is another confirmation of the correctness of the *mufti's fatwa*, this time by the Chief *Pengbulu* of Muntok, called Haji Marzuqi ibn Haji Isma`il al-Bankawi (pp. 15-6). The booklet ends with document nine, in which `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq summarizes the entire issue (pp. 16-23).

In sum, we can say that the booklet studied here is most interesting, because it contextualizes the chicken issue which we came across in the rudimentary Malay *fatwa* of Ahmad Khatib and it shows how much was going on in terms of exchange and activities, and how many persons

²⁰ I have no information on these two scholars, although the name of the first shows he originated from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.

²¹ Both persons are called *Shaykh al-Tariqa* by `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq (see p. 21). I have no further information on these two scholars apart from their origin in the Netherlands East Indies. Ampenan is a city in the West of the island of Lombok, from where more scholars originated.

²² It is interesting to note that Ahmad Khatib corresponded with his former fellow student and pupil in Bangka in Malay and not in Arabic.

were involved in the issue, both in Mecca as well as in Indonesia, while we have also seen how little remained of all this in the Malay *fatwa* by Ahmad Khatib translated at the beginning of in this paper. Against this backdrop it is definitely worthwhile to study the entire Ishaq Adam edition of Ahmad Khatib's *fatwas*, but for the purpose of this paper I think the above issue suffices to draw some conclusions which I will give in the next and final paragraph.

Conclusion

Although the chicken issue studied here is small, it shows a number of very important issues which are relevant to the history of Islam in Southeast Asia in the period involved, so around the year 1900.

In the first place it confirms how intense the contacts between Mecca and the Netherlands East Indies were, so that people in Mecca knew precisely what was going on in the Netherlands East Indies, and the other way around. A central role in this was played by scholars from the archipelago who resided in Mecca or who had studied there, as intermediaries in facilitating the exchange of questions and answers between the archipelago and Mecca. We have seen how `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq who had been a student in Mecca himself, as well as his opponents in Bangka thought to end the chicken controversy by invoking the help of their fellow countrymen in Mecca, who had a certain religious authority in the Holy City.

In the case of `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq he invoked the help of Ahmad Khatib, who thanks to his standing as a scholar in Mecca, had easy access to the highest *mufti*, his former teacher Babasil, and was also able to mobilize him for his opinion and almost lay him the words wished for into his mouth. Moreover, was Ahmad Khatib able to convince former adversaries that they had been wrong in the first place and to withdraw their initial opinion. In his correspondence with `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq, Ahmad Khatib made the relevant Arabic documents accessible to `Abd

al-Rahman Siddiq and his constituency in Bangka in the Arabic language, but he also added Malay renderings and comments to cater for the Muslims in the Netherlands East Indies who did not have Arabic; so, we see that in addition to his religious convincing power, his intermediate role also had a linguistic component. The entire issue thus also sheds interesting light on the standing and *mufti*-ship of Ahmad Khatib in the Meccan scholarly environment as well as on his position in the Middle Eastern–Southeast Asian network.

The final point I would like to make has to do with the locus of religious authority. As we have seen above, when Muslims in Indonesia were not able to solve a protracted problem in the religious domain, they involved higher religious authorities who were living and working in Mecca; in this case both `Abd al-Rahman Siddiq and his adversaries involved their contacts in Mecca, where the supreme religious authority was embodied in the great Shafi`ite *mufti* of the Holy City. We have seen in the chicken issue that people were apparently so keen to attribute a particular opinion to the great Meccan *muftis*, that they were even ready to bring forged *fatwas* into circulation, which were falsely attributed to the great Meccan *muftis*. In an earlier book²³ I have published a great number of *fatwas* from the end of the nineteenth century which were given by – in most cases – the great Meccan *mufti* Ahmad Dahlan for Indonesian Muslims, which also revealed the same mechanism: when believers in the archipelago could not come to an agreement on a particular the issue, it was finally submitted to the great Shafi`ite *mufti* in Mecca, who was regarded as the highest religious authority. In this way people expected to finally end often protracted issues.²⁴

²³ Nico Kaptein, *The Muhimmat al-Nafa'is: A Bilingual Meccan Fatwa Collection for Indonesian Muslims from the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Jakarta: Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), 1997).

²⁴ We see that in spite of the *fatwa* of Babasil, the chicken issue popped up slightly later in June 1906, dealing with some other questions on the issue, e.g. whether it was allowed to sell chickens to the Chinese if one knew that a Muslim would slaughter them. However, these discussions did not deviate from the *fatwa* of Babasil, see Nico J.G. Kaptein, *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A Biography of Sayyid `Uthman*

We thus see that until the beginning of the 20th century, in which the chicken issue took place, the ultimate center of religious authority in Indonesia was located in Mecca (and to a lesser extent in Medina). Since then, the current religious landscape in Indonesia has become much more diverse and the exclusive orientation towards Mecca for ultimate religious guidance has severely decreased. Although Mecca still is an important locus of religious authority for Indonesian Muslims, as well as a place for advanced religious studies,²⁵ also other places have gained prominence, not in the last place in Indonesia itself with robust religious institutions, like the Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) and high class Islamic universities, like the nationwide network of Indonesian Islamic Universities (*Universitas Islam Negeri*) and the recently established Islamic International Indonesian University (*Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia*) in Jakarta. Given these and other developments the least we can say is that Mecca no longer has the monopoly as far as religious authority in Indonesia is concerned.²⁶

(1822-1914) (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 212–13. In 1936 Abd al-Rahman Siddiq published a book on the issue in which he opined that the selling of chicken to the Chinese was allowed when no Muslim buyers could be found, see Abdullah, *Rivayat Hidup dan Perjuangan Ulama Syekh H.A. Rahman Shiddik Mufti Inderagiri*, p. 42.

²⁵ See Sumanto Al Qurtuby, *Saudi Arabia and Indonesian Networks: Migration, Education, and Islam* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020). Interestingly, the book shows that today Indonesians also go to Saudi Arabia to study other subjects than Islam.

²⁶ See for a somewhat sweeping account of these changes my inaugural lecture in 2019, Nico J.G. Kaptein, *Het Arabische Midden-Oosten En Religieus Gezag in Indonesië* (Leiden, n.d.), <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/algemeen/oraties/oratie-kaptein-def.pdf>. An English translation appeared as, Nico J.G. Kaptein, “The Arab Middle East and Religious Authority in Indonesia,” *Tebuireng: Journal of Islamic Studies and Society* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–18. See for an interesting anthropological study on Indonesians who stayed in Mecca as pilgrims or labor migrants, Mirjam Lücking, *Indonesians and Their Arab World: Guided Mobility among Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims* (Ithaca: SEAP, Cornell University Press, 2020).

References

- Abdullah, Syafei. *Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan Ulama Syekh H.A. Rahman Shiddik Mufti Inderagiri*. Jakarta: Serajaya, 1982.
- Adam, Ishaq (ed.). *Kitab Masa'il dan Qawa'id*. Pulau Penang: The United Press in Pulau Pinang, 1393 [1973].
- Babasil, Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id, *Fatwa* ... Manuscript Leiden University Library. Or. 7088 (online available <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/2682329#page/1/mode/1up>).
- Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië. Tweede druk*. 4 vols. and 4 supplement vols. 's-Gravenhage, 1917-1939, s.v. Banka, Vol. I: 159-163.
- Harmi, Zulkifli (ed.). *Transliterasi dan Kandungan Fath al-'Alim fi Tartib al-Ta'lim Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik*. Bangka: Shiddiq Press, 2006.
- Ilyas, Ahmad Fauzi. *Warisan Intelektual Ulama Nusantara: Tokoh, Karya, dan Pemikiran*. Medan: Rawda Publishing, 2018.
- Kaptein, Nico J.G. *The Muhimmat al-Nafa'is: A Bilingual Meccan Fatwa Collection for Indonesian Muslims from the End of the Nineteenth Century*. Jakarta: Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), 1997.
- . *Het Arabische Midden-Oosten En Religieus Gezag in Indonesië*. Leiden, n.d. <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/algemeen/oraties/oratie-kaptein-def.pdf>.
- . *Islam, Colonialism and the Modern Age in the Netherlands East Indies: A Biography of Sayyid 'Uthman (1822-1914)*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- . "The Arab Middle East and Religious Authority in Indonesia." *Tebuireng: Journal of Islamic Studies and Society* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–18.
- . "The Voice of the 'Ulama': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia." *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 125, no. 1 (2004): 115–130.
- Khatib, Ahmad. *al-Qawl al-Tahif fi Tarjamat Ta'rikh Hayat Ahmad Khatib ibn 'Abd al-Latif*. Mecca: Maktabah Mecca, Manuscript Ta'rikh 116.

- . *Dari Minangkabau Untuk Dunia Islam: Otobiografi Syeikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi (1860-1916M)*. Translated by Muhammad Husni, Zulhamdi Malin Mudo and Afdhil Fadli, Yogyakarta: Gre Publishing, 2016.
- Krämer, Gudrun (a.o.). *Encyclopaedia of Islam Thre*e. Vol. 1 part 3, pp. 102-3, Leiden: Brill, 2007, s.v. Ahmad Khatib.
- Lücking, Mirjam. *Indonesians and Their Arab World: Guided Mobility among Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims*. Ithaca: SEAP, Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Qurtuby, Sumanto Al. *Saudi Arabia and Indonesian Networks: Migration, Education, and Islam*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020.