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A preliminary note on the Dayah Tanoh Abee¹

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Abstract

This paper describes the famous Dayah Tanoh Abee³ *zāwiyah* (DTA) located in Seulimum, a subdistrict of Banda Aceh. Its importance is considered to be based on its founding fathers' origin, the connection between the Aceh Darussalam sultanate and the Ottoman empire, and its contribution to the Islamization of Southeast Asia.⁴ This article also analyses the role of the Ottoman empire's geography in this regard. The argument contained herein is grounded on my interview of the DTA's last leader.

Al-Firus al-Baghdadi, the DTA's founder, and six other Islamic scholars migrated from Baghdad, the seat of the former 'Abbāsīd empire and site of great symbolic value, to Aceh in 1627. This fact is important, because Baghdad at that time was an Ottoman province. He and his three brothers settled near Banda Aceh and began teaching. The Aceh Darussalam sultanate⁵ was ruled by Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636), who was doing his best to build relationships with other Islamic countries, especially those in the Middle East, to bolster economic and military ties and make progress in developing the religious sciences. He therefore encouraged scholars to come to Aceh, visit other Islamic regions, write on Islamic jurisprudence and other subjects, and implement

Islamic law in his sultanate. As a distinguished example of his approach, he appointed Shamsuddin Sumatranî as Syaikh ul-Islam.

Ever since its establishment, the DTA has been a leading centre of such distinctive Sūfî orders as Naqshbandiyyah and Shattariyya. Moreover, the invaluable manuscripts held in its library have given it a distinguished status in Southeast Asia. After finishing their education in the *zāwiyah*, many of the local and regional students embarked upon their own travels to proselytize other Southeast Asian peoples by founding their own religious education centres. During this nearly four-hundred-year process, the DTA became known as one of Southeast Asia's leading religious teaching centres and possessor of its oldest manuscript library.

Introduction

For at least 2,000 years, Aceh has been one of Southeast Asia's busiest entrepôts as regards trading activities among Arabia, Iran, India, and China due to its geo-strategic position at the western entrance of the Malacca Straits.⁶ This geographical advantage and the ensuing commercial interactions birthed a new direction for the region, especially in Aceh, after Islam appeared in Arabia.

Historically Acehnese Islam, as accepted for the region's other parts, has included Muslim migrants coming from different lands.⁷ Religious scholars, who either came to Aceh or were born and raised there as natives, made significant contributions to the region's Islamization, not only by personally teaching but also by writing theological and philosophical works. Given this context, one can say that Aceh's sphere of influence includes all of Southeast Asia. Beyond the personal contribution of each religious scholar, the DTA is more than worthy as the subject matter of a research paper. Therefore, I focus upon the family of

al-Firus al-Baghdadi, who came from Baghdad with several other 'ulamā', settled down, and established a *zāwiyah* (*dayah*) in Aceh.

The importance of Aceh as the pioneer of Islamic educational centres can be seen in its scholarly output in jurisprudence, philosophy, and Qur'anic exegeses by both indigenous and foreign-born 'ulamā',⁸ as well as the presence of Sufism long before the coming of the European colonialists. The Acehnese, the first Southeast Asian people to be introduced to Islam, have served as its regional representatives for hundreds of years by initiating Islamic education centres and sending religious scholars throughout the Malay Archipelago. In addition, religious scholars came and stayed for a certain period, or actually settled down, especially during the initial phase of Islamization between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. It might be argued that institutionalization took place after this first step.

The DTA appears to be a unique example of the second phase, which started with the seventeenth century. This phase is also important due to its distinguished administration during Iskandar Muda's reign. Commencing from the sultanate of Samudra-Pasai, Aceh enjoyed its golden era under this devout sultan's patronage not only in Indonesia, but also throughout all of Southeast Asia in general. As a result, Aceh was known as Serambi Mekah (the gateway to Makkah).⁹ Even today the Acehnese take great pride in this title, for it has given them a unique identity among Indonesia's thirty-three provinces.

During Muda's reign, religious scholars are known to have held such distinguished roles as Shaykh al-Islām and head of the religious court; moreover, they were appointed as statesmen responsible for receiving foreign envoys.¹⁰ A notable point, however, is whether the institutionalization of Islamic education centres and Muda's administration was deliberate or coincidental.

Given the reasons for writing this paper, I will focus on some of the DTA's aspects. From the outset, the DTA assumed its role

as one of Aceh's most distinguished *zāwiyahs* and retained this status for nine successive generations, almost 380 years, until its last head passed away in October 2006. Some other mentionable factors are the founding fathers' origins, the uninterrupted continuity of their descendants' leadership, the creation and maintenance of a centuries-old library of authentic Islamic literature, and its function during the anti-Dutch holy war that began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Based on my September-October 2005 interviews in Aceh with Teungku Muhammad Dahlan Al-Fairus al-Baghdadi, the DTA's last leader, the founding fathers arrived from Baghdad in 1627. His predecessors are easily traced back to the above-mentioned year. The importance of Baghdad lies in the fact that this ancient city of Islamic civilization was at that time a provincial capital city of the Ottoman empire. His arrival and subsequent proselytization in Aceh is not the only such example of a Turkish presence in Aceh's history, for it is known that, over time, scholars from other Islamic lands also came.¹¹

Even so, this is not exceptional in the case of Aceh for, according to Martin van Bruinessen, more influential Southeast Asian Islamic scholars and other Muslims have remained in the shadows. Although no written documents could be obtained to elucidate the family's origins and "how and what they studied, and what were their relations with the courts"¹² due to some understandable reasons (e.g., many manuscripts the *zāwiyah's* library were damaged and/or destroyed during and after the Dutch invasion), the succession of the DTA's leadership is a strong proof for the authenticity of the family's origin. It is also impossible to prove whether the family originated in Baghdad or moved there from Anatolia, the empire's central part.

In accordance with the common practices of each religious scholar, the family members doubtlessly administered the *zāwiyah*

and contributed to spreading Islam and compiling Islamic literature. This succession enabled the *zāwiyah*'s leaders to create a well-stocked library consisting of old Arabic and Jawi-Melayu works that were both translated and written by various religious scholars. In addition to educating the people, they also played a significant socio-political role, especially after the Dutch declared war on Aceh on 26 March 1873.¹³

Regarding the above-mentioned aspects, this present paper might be regarded as an effort to reconstruct the historical Turkish-Acehnese connection and generate a broader basis for the accumulation of information.

Aceh during the spread of Islam

Both Muslim traders and scholars introduced Islam at various levels, beginning with Sumatra and then throughout Southeast Asia, during the first Islamic century.¹⁴ Many Arab, Persian, and Indian Muslim traders chose the western Indian region of Gujarat as their commercial centre for conducting businesses with the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra.¹⁵ As a result, Islam's spread has been linked directly to these trade relations, which became the "catalyst for conversion."¹⁶ In Pasai, an old gravestone bearing the name of Abdullah b. Muhammad b. Abdulkadir b. Abdul' Aziz b. al-Mansur Abu Jafer al-Abbasi al-Muntasir (d. 1407) from Delhi is just one authentic proof of the presence of a foreign-born Muslim scholar.¹⁷

The Islamic expansion outward from India can be read as a repetition of the spread of that country's religions and cultures to the Malay Archipelago that had taken place centuries before the appearance of Islam.¹⁸ On the other hand, the Turks' role in this subsequent expansion is worth thinking about. Having entered their own Islamization process in the ninth century, they inevitably ushered in a new direction in Islamic history due to

their military power.¹⁹ As a result, Turkish traders appeared around the Indian Ocean in the dying years of the ‘Abbāsīd empire, especially in Khurmuz. Under the Seljuk empire they reached Oman’s shores and began sailing eastward to conduct large-scale trading missions.²⁰ This realistic time frame has led researchers to posit that the Turks could have been participants in the region with the Arab, Persian, and Indian traders in the region, although their share did not reach the level enjoyed by the latter groups. Based on this, there is also a probability that both Turkish-origin traders and religious scholars contributed to the region’s Islamization.

Due to this, there is a great interest in determining the origins of the *zāwiyah*’s founders. While it cannot be confidently stated that the family is of Turkish origin, it should be emphasized that they came from Baghdad, a major Islamic city that had been under the influence of Turkish Islamic civilization for some time, first during the end of the ‘Abbāsīd empire and then during the Ottoman era. Based on this fact, the question of which aspects of this tradition did the family transmit to Aceh should be asked. Presumably, its members brought a distinctive Islamic cultural heritage, which contained a body of tradition that was not of Southeast Asian origin, with them to Aceh as well.

Islam’s expansion has caused the relationships among the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia to differ over time. During all these processes, religious scholars from the Middle East and parts of India migrated to Aceh. This migration can be divided into three distinct phases: (1) the eighth to twelfth centuries, when the Arabs and Persians dominated trade with the Far East; (2) the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, a period of increased commercial activity and cultural relationships during which Sūfis and religious scholars accompanied traders; and (3) the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, when European colonialists appeared in the region. As soon as they started their invasions of the lands located around the Indian Ocean,

the Southeast Asian-Middle Eastern commercial and political relationships reached very significant levels. One reason for this was the involvement of the Ottoman empire.²¹

Trade activities allowed Aceh to embrace religious movements earlier than other Southeast Asian regions. On the other hand, the spread of Islam led to Southeast Asians travelling to Arabia to perform the hajj and a gradual increase in trade activities.²² Some 'ulamā' also accompanied the voyages of traders to Southeast Asia to win converts. Especially from 1571 till 1586, 'ulamā' from various parts of the Islamic world came to Aceh, as can be seen in the arrival of Muhammad Azhari from Makkah, who taught some Islamic sciences in Aceh, as well as Shaikh Abul Khair b. Shaikh Hajar and Shaikh Muhammad Yamani from Makkah as well. Another example is Shaikh Muhammad Jailani b. Hasan b. Muhammad from Gujarat, who helped develop Islamic culture and science by penning significant works of metaphysics and Sufism and teaching Islamic sciences in the region.²³

Aceh: A place of Islamic education after Malacca

Prior to the Portuguese invasion, northern Sumatra boasted several city states or petty kingdoms. The first city states, such as Perlak and Samudra-Pasai, played a pioneering role in introducing Islam.²⁴ With the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese on 10 August 1511, Aceh gradually became both a regional trading centre for Muslims as well as for Islamic education and culture.²⁵ In addition, it was also a gathering place for Islamic scholars who wanted to accompany the traders to new lands.²⁶ The seizure of Malacca represented Portugal's opening campaign to establish a sea-borne empire by asserting its superior power in the Indian Ocean region. Since Malacca had been a hub of the sea-borne trade among Arabia, Persia, and China for centuries, this invasion was hardly accidental.

After Malacca fell, Muslim traders and scholars moved to other port cities in the region. As a result Aceh, located in northern Sumatra, became a flourishing commercial centre for all groups of traders, especially for Muslims, since it was close to Malacca and geographically suitable for interacting with the lands along the Red Sea, western India's shores, and western Sumatra. Over time, this reality transformed Aceh into the region's most powerful Islamic state.²⁷ The Portuguese naturally tried to capture Aceh's port cities, which were located on the opposite side of the Straits. Ali Mughayat Syah, the Aceh Darussalam sultanate's first ruler, was fully aware of their intent and sought to foil it by uniting some nearby petty sultanates (1511) to establish his sultanate; later on, he subjugating the city states of Pedir (1521) and Pasai (1524) for the same reason.²⁸ During the ensuing decades, the sultanate developed large-scale trade with Middle Eastern ports.

Interactions with the Middle East

The above development caused the sultanate to develop as a pioneer entity as regards the economic, political, and military affairs in the Malay world. Along with the contribution of '*ulamā*' migrating from Malacca and other parts of the Muslim world, Aceh gradually became a significant centre of Islamic education and culture.²⁹ Due to this process, as well as those mentioned above, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw it develop in the cultural and scientific areas as well.³⁰

Some references state that religious scholars were in the forefront of introducing and spreading Islam in Aceh. Prominent among them were the prolific Sūfī authors Hamzah Fansurī (Qādiriyyah), Shamsuddin Sumatranī (1575-1630; Naqshbandiyyah), Nuruddin Muhammad b. Ali b. Hasan al-Hamid ar-Raniri (d. 1658;³¹ Rifā'iyyah), and Abdurrauf b. Ali al-Cavī al-Fansurī al-Singkilī

(1615-1693; Shattariyya).³² Although Fansurî and his disciple Sumatranî were representatives of both Ibn al-‘Arabî’s *wahdah al-wujūd* (existential monism) and the Qādiriyyah order, they could not establish a school of thought due to ar-Ranirî’s reaction.³³ These four distinguished scholars were the chief forces behind improving Islamic thought and practice not only in Aceh, but throughout the Malay Archipelago.³⁴ Their efforts doubtlessly led to the emergence of a region-wide Malay Islamic civilisation.

Before taking a position in the sultanate, Fansurî furthered his knowledge of the Islamic sciences by visiting Pahang, Banten, Pattani, Jerusalem, Makkah, and Baghdad. While in Baghdad, he encountered Sūfî movements, studied, and became an expert especially on the Qādiriyyah.³⁵ His disciple Sumatranî eventually became the sultanate’s *shaikh’ul Islam* and was entrusted with foreign affairs due to his expertise in politics. In this capacity, he met with James Lancaster, the leading British envoy at that time, who presented a letter for the sultan of Aceh from Queen Elizabeth I in the palace in 1602.³⁶

The socio-political structure under Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)

According to Muhammad Dahlan, a member of the family’s ninth generation, al-Firus al-Baghdadi came to Aceh in 1627.³⁷ It is important to look briefly at socio-political circumstances that existed when he laid the foundation of a religious educational centre in order to better understand the nature of the sultanate, which, it must be remembered, was highly developed in social terms before Muda ascended the throne.³⁸ In addition, further developments regarding the *‘ulamā’s* activities also occurred during these years.

Reigning from 1607 until 1636, Muda earned a distinguished place in Aceh’s history not only because under his rule the

sultanate achieved its highest level of economic and political development, but also because his political priorities consisted of establishing religious education centres and improving the Islamic sciences. It should be emphasized that during his reign, the Islamic worldview encompassed the entire social, legal and moral order. His efforts to develop the sultanate in every field proved that it could be a leading Islamic power and representative of Islamic civilization at the international level at that time. Thus, it had every incentive to pursue close relationships with other Islamic entities.³⁹

Muda sought to expand the sultanate's borders by successive conquests of land and especially maritime powers in both Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. He subsequently mobilized the army to conquer Deli, Kedah, Perak, Johor, and Pahang.⁴⁰ This period became known as the "golden era," a time of power and glory, due to these conquests and the sultanate's ensuing control of Sumatra's spice trade.⁴¹

Although our knowledge of the historical background of Aceh's Islamic educational institutions remains uncertain, it is said that such institutions were established from Muda's reign onward. Among them, the *meunasah*, *rangkang*, and *dayah* deserve to be mentioned.⁴² Muda, swathed in glory, contributed a great deal to helping Aceh become a distinguished Southeast Asian centre of religious education by encouraging non-Acehnese religious scholars to come to Aceh.⁴³ One of the important reasons behind the development of Islamic education in the sultanate was the undertaking by some local scholars to visit Makkah and Madinah in the seventeenth century, especially during Muda's reign, to improve their knowledge of the Islamic sciences. Some of them stayed in Arabia for years. Some Arab and Indian scholars settled in Aceh and did their best to improve the local level of Islamic education and sciences. In addition, these contacts

allowed the Islamic world's intellectual treasure relevant to be transmitted to Aceh.⁴⁴ These above-mentioned developments illustrate the close cultural contact between the Muslim world's periphery and centre.

Religious scholars were instrumental in developing the Malay language by penning their own works in that language. Beyond Islam's role as a uniting factor in politics, language also did much to unite the region's people against European colonialism, especially at the end of the sixteenth century.⁴⁵

Iskandar Muda's efforts to develop and implement Islamic law are clear. In this context he is known as a reformer, for he established a system of jurisprudence, the *Adat Meukota Alam* (a combination of traditional Malay [*adat*] and Islamic law),⁴⁶ and the Baiturrahman Mosque. This latter institution is a very charming example of historical and religious structures not only in Aceh, but also in Indonesia today.⁴⁷

Other than works about God's nature and the relation between God and human beings, the Sūfis underwent a developing phase at this time, similar to those occurring in other parts of the Islamic world.⁴⁸ A noted example is the *wahdah al-wujūd* thought, which was strongly supported by Iskandar Muda. On another note, the philosophical arguments started by Fansurī were continued by his disciple Sumatranī; the sultan showed his support for the latter by appointing him *Syaikh ul-Islam*,⁴⁹ a position second to that of the sultan.⁵⁰

The al-Firus al-Baghdadi family

One of this essay's main goals is to look into the origin of the *zāwiyah*'s founding fathers. Although this institution's existence, continuity, and function are known, only a small amount of the detailed data deals with its origin. My 2005 interviews with its leader revealed that the family originally came from Baghdad in

1627. According to their family tree in the first page of a book on the Shattariyya in the DTA library, Shaikh Nayan al-Firus al-Baghdadi belonged to its first generation.⁵¹

Leaving Baghdad with three of his brothers and some others, he and his brothers eventually settled in a village called Tanoh Abee, Sagou XXII Mukim. Al-Firus, the eldest brother, established a *zāwiyah* and became its first leader. Now it is called by the same name in *Seulimum*, where is about 50 km from the capital city, Bandar Aceh. The others went to the northern Aceh village of Tiro.⁵² It is assumed that these religious scholars accompanied a group of traders travelling from western India to Southeast Asia, as this was quite common between the two regions. In addition, it is generally accepted that foreign-born religious scholars who settled in Aceh disseminated Islamic teachings and practices by marrying the daughters of distinguished individuals families, thereby quickly becoming members of Aceh's society.⁵³ Al-Firus al-Baghdadi must have followed this custom by marrying into a ruling family.

As soon as the *zāwiyah* was established, the family members dedicated their lives to developing the people's spiritual welfare. In regards to this, the family is assumed to have specialized in reproducing itself in each generation. One of its contributions to Aceh's religious life and history was the institutionalisation of the *zāwiyah*, which probably increased the speed and intensification of Islamization, and a Sūfī *ṭarīqah* (order). In addition, its leaders gradually assumed the position of *qāḍī* (judge) in the region. Given these assumptions, it might be argued that these were 'twin processes' of the family's existence. Moreover, Acehnese society was possibly encouraged to become closely linked to international Islam, as seen in the other Southeast Asian lands. There is a high probability that this relation caused the Islamic structure of Aceh to integrate into the global Islamic community.⁵⁴

A *zāwiyah* has the sole function of serving as a centre of Higher Islamic Education. Mustafa ar-Rumi, a *murīd* (student) and *khalīfah* (successor) of Abdurrauf as-Singkili, gave *ijāzah* (scholarly permission) to teach the Shattariyya *ṭarīqah*'s practices to a member of the family. This subsequently allowed the order to be established in the DTA. As Mustafa ar-Rumi had a Turkish father, this connection has evoked the present writer's interest.

The leaders' spiritual exercise and intellectual outlook, both of which were focused on following the Shattariyya order and establishing a library, gradually distinguished them from Aceh's other religious scholars. Hence the *zāwiyah* seemed to provide a unique example of the intellectual transmission of Islamic values into the indigenous society by creating a literate tradition. Based on this, the role of this *zāwiyah* in Acehnese history should be emphasised. As for the family's origins, it is assumed that its members played the role, as defined by Geertz, of a *cultural broker*.

The institution's chosen site raises a question about its relationship with Bandar Aceh's palace circles. It is not known whether its leaders made themselves independent of these circles or became affiliated with them and benefitted from their protection. The sultans almost always served as patrons for the '*ulamā*' not only for being pious Muslims, but also for political advantages. Starting from the reign of Queen Nur Alam Naqiyatuddin (1675-1678), the establishment of Sagou XXII Mukim as an administrative body like the other two Sagous gave the sultanate a new direction.⁵⁵ The impact that this administrative change had on the DTA's existence is also interesting. As mentioned earlier, its successive leaders also served as judges in the region. From this, it is assumed that there must have been some cooperation between the two bodies.

On the other hand, though, the reaction of the *dayah* leaders to the Dutch invasion of Aceh must be studied separately and in

detail, for it may give some indication as to how the significant tendency for social disorder during this period thrust the *zāwiyah*'s leaders into a leadership role.

The genealogy

This part details the genealogy of the al-Firus al-Baghdadi family from its arrival in Aceh in 1627 till recent times. The people mentioned here have served, in succession, as the leader of the DTA *zāwiyah*. It should also be stressed that locating information about the family members in any documentary works was not possible until very recently for several reasons: the absence of any works written by family members or others and the destructive impact of the Dutch invasion, which caused many sources to be lost and/or destroyed. It is estimated that the DTA library once held some 10.000 books; today, it contains only 1000 books.⁵⁶ Among them could have been some works that included biographies of the Dayah's leaders. As a result, it has not been possible to list the birth and death dates of some of the *zāwiyah*'s leaders.

Al-Firus al-Baghdadi

Al-Firus al-Baghdadi came to Aceh with six other people, three of whom were his brothers, in 1627.⁵⁷ He and his brothers settled in Tanoh Abee village, which is 50 kms outside of Banda Aceh. He might be regarded as the harbinger of the religious institution's glorious future, for he established a *dayah* that played a significant role in many aspects of Acehnese society till recently. He married an Acehnese lady and sired eight children, three of whom (viz., Nayan, Molek, and Hana Purba) also became religious scholars. After he passed away, his son Nayan assumed responsibility for the DTA.⁵⁸

Shaikh Nayan al-Firus al-Baghdadi

Nayan received his early education from his father in the *dayah*, after which he studied under Syiah Davud b. Ismail b. Mustafa ar-Rumi⁵⁹ (a.k.a Teungku Chik Di Leupue) at Dayah Leupue di Kampung Mulia, Bandar Aceh, one of the distinguished *dayahs* of that period. He also received lessons from Shaikh Burhaneddin Ulakan (d. 1704), the *khalifah* of Mustafa ar-Rumi.⁶⁰ Since this shaikh was a representative of the Shattariyya *ṭarīqah*,⁶¹ it is highly possible that the long-term relationship between the *ṭarīqah* and the DTA leader began during this time. This was confirmed during the present writer's 2005 interview with Muhammad Dahlan, who stressed that the *zāwiyah* had been one of the headquarters for the Naqshbandiyyah and Shattariyya *ṭarīqahs*.

After his education at this *dayah*, Nayan al-Firus received his *ijāzah* and returned to Seulimum to run the DTA. In addition to teaching at the *zāwiyah*, he also became the *qāḍī* in Sagou XXII Mukim and thus inaugurated the tradition of the *zāwiyah* leader being both a religious leader and a leader in the local administration. Shaikh Nayan personally educated his successor.⁶²

Shaikh Abdulhafiz al-Baghdadi

Under Shaikh Nayan, the *zāwiyah* made significant progress in educating the people about *fiqh*, Sufism, ethics, theology, *tafsīr*, and Ḥadīth. But it did not limit its curriculum to the Islamic sciences, for history, logic, mathematics, and philosophy were also included. These subjects might be taken as evidence that even from its first days, the *zāwiyah* sought to spread both Islamic and scientific knowledge. After this complete education, qualified students were able to assume positions in both educational and administrative bodies.

His marriage resulted in four children, one of whom was Abdulhafiz. This son, whose education he personally monitored,

succeeded his father and continued the *zāwiyah*'s function as an educational centre. After Abdulhafiz moved the *zāwiyah* to Tuwi Ketapunang, near the Aceh River, the original structure became educational centre for women. Like his father, Shaikh Abdulhafiz led the *dayah* and became a *qāḍī*.⁶³ Even though it is not known whether any educational centre had existed before this, it should still be regarded as an important step in the *zāwiyah*'s development.

Shaikh Abdurrahim Hafiz al-Baghdadi

As was the case in each period, Hafiz al-Baghdadi also introduced some new elements into the *dayah*. For example, he rendered a great service by obtaining books from various Ottoman cities that were then placed in the library founded by his grandfather. Besides enriching the library, this contribution also helped to meet the demands for written materials. It is assumed that this new literature allowed students to access study materials and improve their skills in Arabic calligraphy. This may have been planned in order to improve calligraphy both as an artistic work and as a teaching method. Like his father, Hafiz al-Baghdadi also assumed the position of *qāḍī* in the region. Of his five children, Muhammad Salih was the one who led the *dayah* after his father died.⁶⁴ It should be argued that due to the above-mentioned transfer of Islamic literature, there was a close relationship between the Ottoman empire and Aceh. In addition to being an art form, calligraphy is also understood to have been accorded a degree of importance and subsequently developed.

Shaikh Muhammad Salih al-Baghdadi (d. 1855)

Not much information is available on this figure; however, there is no doubt that the familial link was continued. As the previous leaders had done, he assumed the positions of both DTA leader and *qāḍī*. Of his five daughters and nine sons, only one son

became a religious scholar. His term was relatively short, and he passed away in 1855.⁶⁵

Shaikh Abdulwahab al-Baghdadi (d. 1894)

Given his features, Abdulwahab looked like his grandfather Shaikh al-Firus al Baghdādi. As his biography shows, however, he apparently achieved more than his grandfather did. While residing in Makkah and Madīnah to further his Islamic education, he developed his skill at calligraphy and brought his works back to Aceh, thereby doing much to enrich the library. It is said that during his period the library held nearly 10,000 books and the *zāwiyah* became a leading centre for Islamic studies. In his capacity as the *zāwiyah*'s and as an appointed *qāḍī*, he did what he could to help Tunku Panglima Polen Sri Muda Perkasa Banda Muda in implementing Islamic law in *Sagou XXII*.⁶⁶

The Chik Tanoh Abee's main importance was seen in the prominent role he assumed in the anti-Dutch struggle, the most difficult period for the sultanate. The Dutch navy, intent upon occupying Aceh, appeared in front of Bandar Aceh's port after a long struggle that had begun in the early nineteenth century. This invasion was seen as significant not only for Aceh but, and more importantly, for the entire colonial period. The Dutch, who invaded, colonized, and ruled Java for several centuries, wanted to seize Aceh and make it another colony. To realize this goal, its navy attacked Aceh on 26 March 1873⁶⁷ and seized control of the sultan's palace (the Kraton) and its circles. The Acehnese army dispersed after the sultan died. At this critical moment, the *zāwiyah* assumed leadership. After seizing the city centre, the Dutch advanced to Seulimum and took control of this area in 1879.

The nobility (*uleebalang*) was largely ineffective as regards assuming leadership in order to continue the struggle. Therefore

the warriors' leader, Panglima Polem Muhammad Saman Di Tiro, and several nobles visited Abdulwahab, the Teungku Chik Tanoh Abee, to ask for his suggestions and support.⁶⁸ This is assumed to be a turning point in the struggle. The mere fact that they approached him shows just how important the *zāwiyah* had become in Acehnese society. Abdulwahab, who had given priority to acquiring a pure heart before obtaining material things, pointed out the society's social and political disintegration and disturbances and reminded the people, especially the nobility, that all of them, without exception, should give back whatever they had unfairly seized from the common people. In other words, they were to undertake a moral war of self-purification to cleanse their hearts from their non-Islamic attitudes and actions before conducting a concrete and material war (*jihād*) against the Dutch invaders.⁶⁹ This approach should be understood not as a simple threat, but as a reminder to the Acehnese Muslims of the Islamic understanding that they had lost and therefore needed to embrace purity.

The leaders of various *dayahs* agreed ally themselves with the *uleebalangs* and the common people. Abdulwahab, who was about to leave for hajj, cancelled his trip in order to launch the struggle; other Muslims in Aceh took his approach as a model.⁷⁰ The region's other leaders decided to establish a military base in Sagou XXII. Like other religious scholars, Abdulwahab took an active part in this war, as did some of his sons and daughters. His contribution could be regarded, according to a mystic way of action, as a miracle. The last leader of the *zāwiyah* and his relatives mentioned this during the present writer's interviews.

Abdulwahab passed away in 1894, leaving behind thirty-three children by his four wives. Only one of his sons, Muhammad Said, had the capacity to lead the *dayah*.⁷¹

Shaikh Muhammad Said al-Baghdadi

Muhammad Said managed the *zāwiyah* during a most difficult period; the Dutch were still active in the region. In addition to leading the *jihād* to protect the realms, he also taught in the *zāwiyah*. Unfortunately, the Dutch army eventually raided this institution and caught and imprisoned Said in Kedah's jail (*bengis*). He remained there for roughly two years and three months, after which he died—still a prisoner. The Acehnese, who had great respect for this man, forbade the Dutch to conduct the funeral rites; rather, they carried his coffin on their shoulders while walking the 50 kms to Seulimum in order to bury him on the site of Tanoh Abee. He had three sons and two daughters.⁷²

Shaikh Muhammad Ali al-Baghdadi (1861-1969)

Muhammad Ali assumed his father's position. Although the existing socio-political circumstances are assumed to have prevented him from attaining more prominence, his strong character and challenging struggle against the Dutch earned him a distinguished place in the *zāwiyah*'s history. Due to his mastery of the Jawi language, he was called as "expert of Jawi". After the Dutch took control of the palace, Muhammad Ali guessed (correctly, as it turned out) that they would soon attack Seulimum because the *zāwiyah* had by now become a significant headquarters for such institutions as the Dayah Lambirah, Dayah Rumpet, Dayah Indrapuri, and Dayah Lam Diran. He thus decided to move about 10,000 of the library's books to a safer place.⁷³ After concealing some of them in village houses around the *zāwiyah*, he accompanied the sultan's military groups who were carrying on their struggle in Keumala. During his voyage he placed some of the books in a cave located in Tereubeh village, in Jantho, Aceh Besar.

On 12 December 1900, the Dutch caught him and subsequently imprisoned him in Banda Aceh and imprisoned, just as they had

done to his father and his brother Teungku Yahya in Kedah. Later on he was exiled, first to Betawi (Surabaya) and then to Manado. As he had foreseen, the Dutch did eventually attack and burn down the *zāwiyah*, just as they had done to the Beiturrahman mosque before. After five years of exile he was sent back to Aceh on 17 October 1905. Upon his return he began to reestablish the library by collecting the concealed books. But the humidity and some animals had already destroyed many of them. In the end he could only collect around 2,000 books. Muhammad Ali passed away in 1969, aged 108 years.⁷⁴

Here it should be mentioned that burning down the *zāwiyah* was symbolically a very important event in the eyes of the Dutch, for they must have understood both its function and its role. There were also similarities between it and the Baiturrahman mosque, which they burned down during their first invasion.

Muhammad Dahlan al-Firus al-Baghdadi (1943-2006)

Muhammad Dahlan, a ninth-generation member of the family, continued the *dayah*'s educational services. He also worked zealously to protect the library, which had suffered such enormous losses during the Dutch war (26 March 1873-20 January 1903). He subsequently prepared a catalogue of the collection's approximately 1,000 books: *Katalog Manuskrip Perpustakaan Dayah Tanoh Abee*.⁷⁵ During this time, many foreign researchers visited the library; their names and titles can be perused in the visitors' book. Dahlan welcomed international researchers and helped them complete their studies.

Of his ten children, only three boys and two girls have survived. Before his death on 18 November 2006 in his home in Seulimum after some operations in Banda Aceh, he had stated during an interview that he had not yet decided upon his successor. Nevertheless, he did make it clear that he wanted the library to be protected so that it would benefit future generations.⁷⁶

After his death, the family decided to pass place this responsibility upon Abdulhafiz, his eldest son.

Conclusion

The foreign-born Muslim scholars who came to Aceh helped to spread Islam from the Islamic heartland to the Malay Archipelago. The existence of al-Firus al-Baghdadi and his descendants has been accepted as a proof of this assertion.

Given the nine generations of uninterrupted leadership supplied by this family, the *zāwiyah* presents a long-lived dynasty of religious scholars in the Malay world. The centre's existence concretely proves the institutionalization of Islamic education in Aceh. Since this family originally came from Baghdad, a leading centre of Islamic knowledge and civilization that had been under the political and social control of various Turkic states for long periods of time, the present writer argues that scholars from that region likely participated in transmitting the Middle East's knowledge to Aceh. Since a detailed documentation about how much and in which way the al-Baghdadi represented this tradition in Aceh has yet to be uncovered, more research should be conducted.

To further conclude, the main aspects regarding the *zāwiyah's* importance are as follows: (1) its presence proves that an institutional Islamic educational centre has been well-established in Aceh for a long time; (2) its leaders transmitted Islamic knowledge to the local people. In addition, calligraphy as an art form could be followed and taught as an academic subject; (3) an international link existed between Aceh and the larger Islamic world; (4) its leaders, who combined Sufism and the implementation of orthodox Sunnī Islamic jurisprudence, formed an elite Sūfi class and served as *qāḍīs* in the region; and (5) the *zāwiyah's* leader, upon the request of an alliance among other distinguished *dayah*

leaders and the nobles, was asked to lead the anti-Dutch struggle. The fact that members of the ‘*ulama*’ and the nobility sought his advice on how to defeat this enemy underlined the importance of his position in society.

It is hoped that this preliminary paper might open an avenue of further inquiry about the history of the *zāwiyah* Tanoh Abee. Further research is needed to determine how and in which aspects it was dominant during the course of history.

Notes

1. Nia Deliana contributed to this paper by translating it and the comments from Bahasa Indonesia into English.
2. Dr Mehmet Özay is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Islamic Civilization and Thought, the University Technology Malaysia.
3. Hereafter “DTA” and “*zāwiyah*”.
4. Hereafter “SEA.”
5. Hereafter “ADS.”
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7. Roy F. Ellen, “Practical Islam in Southeast Asia” (ed.), H.B. Hooker, *Islam in Southeast Asia*, p. 72.
8. Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001), p. 103, 139.
9. Mohd Taib Osman (ed.), *Islamic Civilization in the Malay World* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1997), p. xxvii; Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 7th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 474; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 3rd ed. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976), p. 219.
10. A.H. Johns, “Islam in the Malay World: An Exploratory Survey with Some Reference to Quranic Exegesis,” ed. Raphael Israeli and Anthony H. Johns, *Islam in Asia*, vol II: *Southeast and East Asia* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1984), p. 121.
11. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, tr. A.W.S. O’Sullivan, vol. I

- (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1906), p. 18, 209.
- 12 See Martin van Bruneissen, "A Note on Source Materials for the Biographies of Southeast Asian Ulama."
 - 13 Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the Pople: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 5; See Ismail Jakub, *Teungku Chik Di Tiro (Muhammad Saman) Palawan Besar Dalam Perang Aceh (1881-1891)* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1960).
 - 14 J.A.E. Morley, "The Arabs and the Eastern Trade," *JMBRAS*, vol. XXII, 1949, p. 150; Raymond LeRoy Archer, *Muhammadan Mysticism in Sumatra* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1935), p. 90; S. Soebardi and C.P. Woodcroft Lee, "Islam in Indonesia," *The Crescent in the East: Islam in Asia Major*, ed. Raphael Israeli (London: Curzon Press, 1982), p. 180-181; M. Yunus Djamil, "Wajah Rakjat Atjeh Dalam Lintasan Sedjarah," *Seminar Kebudayaan Dalam Rangka Pekan Kebudayaan Atjeh Ke-II* (The Second Atjeh Cultural Festival, 20 August-2 September 1972) Dan Dies Natalis Ke XI Universitas Sjah Kuala, Panitia Pusat Pekan Kebudayaan Atjeh Ke-II, Banda Aceh, 1972, p. 5.
 - 15 G.E. Marrison, "Persian Influences in Malay Life: 1280-1650," *JMBRAS*, vol. 28, Part I, No. 169, 1955, p. 52-53, 55.
 - 16 Roy F. Ellen, "Practical Islam in Southeast Asia," ed. H.B. Hooker, *Islam in Southeast Asia*, p. 72.
 - 17 R. Winstedt, "Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and History," *JMBRAS*, vol. XXX. Part 3, 1961, p. 112.
 - 18 Moshe Yegar, *Islam and Islamic Institutions in British Malaya* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), p. 5.
 - 19 Francis E. Peters, "The Early Empires: Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids," ed. Marjorie Kelley, *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. 89.
 - 20 Affan Seljuq, "Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim Kingdoms in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago," *Der Islam*, 57, 1980, p. 302-303; V.D. Divekar, ed., "Maritime Trading Settlements in the Arabian Sea Region up to 1500 AD," *The Indian Ocean in Focus' International Conference on Indian Ocean Studies*, Section III: The History of Commercial Exchange & Maritime

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22. Moshe Yegar, *Islam and Islamic Institutions in British Malaya*, p. 7.
23. Nuruddin ar-Raniri, *Bustan'us Salatin*, p. 339; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969), p. 5, 16.
24. Henry Yule; Henri Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo The Venetian: Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, vol. 2, 3rd edition (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1920), p. 284; A.H. Hill, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai," *JMBRAS*, vol. 33, Part 2, No. 190, June 1960, p. 32; R.O. Winstedt, ed., *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu* (London: School of Oriental Studies, 1938), p. 71.
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 30. S. Soebardi; C.P. Woodcroft Lee, "Islam in Indonesia", p. 182.
 31. Peter G. Riddell, "Aceh in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Serambi Mekkah and Identity," ed. Anthony Reid, *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), p. 45.
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 34. Oman Fathurahman, "The Cultural Emergency Relief Action: The Rebuilding Manuscript Library in Dayah Tanoh Abee," Aceh, <http://naskahkuno.blogspot.com/2006/09/cultural-emergency-relief-action.html>.
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- p. 10; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*, vol. I: *The Lands below the Winds* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 232; William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra*, p. 436; Arun Das Gupta, *Acheh in Indonesian Trade and Politics: 1600-1641* (New York: Cornell University, 1962), p. 57; A.H. Johns, "Islam in the Malay World: An Exploratory Survey with Some Reference to Quranic Exegesis," p. 121.
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 41. James Minahan, *Nations without States A Historical Dictionary of Contemporary National Movements* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 5; Ito Takeshi, *The World of the Adat Aceh: A Historical Study of the Sultanate of Aceh*, p. 97.
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 43. Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 103.

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46. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat Al-Siddiq of Nur al-Din Al-Raniri*, p. 7.
47. Teuku Iskandar, *Hikayat Aceh*, trans. Abu Bakar (Aceh: Departemen Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Museum Negeri Aceh), 1986, p. 49-50; Ali Hasjmy, "Banda Aceh Darussalam Pusat Kegiatan Ilmu dan Kebudayaan," p. 9.
48. Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, p. 103-104.
49. Ibid., p. 111-132.
50. Ahmed Daudy, *Syeikh Nuruddin Ar-Raniry: Sejarah Hidup, Karya dan Pemikiran* (Banda Aceh: Diterbitkan Oleh Pusat Penelitian Dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Islam (P3KI), IAIN Ar-Raniry, 2006), p. 37.
51. Oman Fathurahman, "The Cultural Emergency Relief Action: The Rebuilding Manuscript Library in Dayah Tanoh Abee," Aceh, <http://naskahkuno.blogspot.com/2006/09/cultural-emergency-relief-action.html>. (Note: Even though Baghdad was ruled by the Shiah Safavids from 1623-1638, from 1638 until 1916 it was an Ottoman province.
52. Ali Hasjmy, ed., *Ulama Aceh* (Aceh: Mujahid Pejuang Kemerdekaan dan Pembangun Tamadun Bangsa, 1997), p. 3, 4.
53. Nakamura Mitsuo, "Introduction," *Islam & Civil Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001), p. 8.
54. Roy F. Ellen, "Practical Islam in Southeast Asia," ed., H.B. Hooker, *Islam in Southeast Asia*, p. 73, 76.
55. Ito Takeshi, *The World of the Adat Aceh: A Historical Study of the Sultanate of Aceh*, p. 69-70.
56. Different sources on the number of the books in the DTA library of DTA mention around 1000, 2000, and 3500 books. I prefer the first figure, based upon my interview with Mr Muhammad Dahlan in

2005 and his observations on the library.

57. Ali Hāsġmy, *Ulama Aceh*, p. 3.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
59. The religious scholar's full name is Shaikh Davud b. Ismail b. Mustafa Rumi. He is also known by the title Teungku Chik di Leupue (Leupue is a district in Banda Aceh, the capital city of Aceh Province), Baba Davud, and Mustafa Rumi. It is believed that his ancestor came from Ottoman lands and that he became a leading student and a *khalīfah* of the well-known religious scholar Abdurrauf as-Singkilī (Syiah Kuala). It is presumed that Baba Davud lived in Banda Aceh sometime during 1650-1750).

As for his importance in Aceh's history, he was a co-founder of the *Dayah Manyang Leupue* (along with Syah Kuala) and became a scholar in this institution. His *Risalah Masailal Muhtadi li Ikhwanil Muhtadi* has been taught at Islamic institutions in Aceh and around the Malay world. It is still taught in Aceh's religious schools. See Ali Hāsġmy, *Bunga Rampai Revolusi dari Tanah Aceh* [Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1978], p. 81). The word Rūm/Rumi refers to the Roma and Byzantine empires in Arab and Persian references. After it became the leading Islamic country in the second half of the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire was also called 'Rum.' This empire's political and cultural power was influential throughout the Malay-Indonesian archipelagos and in other regions of the Islamic world. Malay-Indonesian Islamic communities called the Ottoman Empire 'Raja Rum,' after it conquered Constantinople. See Azyumardi Azra, *The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian 'Ulama' In The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 103.

60. Ali Hāsġmy, *Ulama Aceh*, p. 4.
61. The first Shattariyya *khalīfah* in the Indonesian Archipelago was Abdurrauf as-Singkilī. Later, some ulama also went to Arabia to study the Qur'an. This *ṭarīqah* gradually expanded in the archipelago. Thus, some branches of this school can be found in both Sumatra and Java. This expansion also shows that it could hold its own with the other *ṭarīqahs*. See Bruneissen, "Tarikatların

- Güneydoğu Asya'daki Kökleri ve Gelişimi,” p. 76; İsmail Hakkı Göksoy, “Endonezya'da Tasavvufi Hareketler ve Bazı Özellikleri,” *Tasavvuf*, vol. 4, No. 11 (Istanbul: Temmuz-Aralık, 2003), p. 82-84.
62. Hâsjmy, *Ulama Aceh*, p. 5.
 63. Ibid., p. 5.
 64. Hâsjmy, *Ulama Aceh*, p. 6.
 65. Ibid., p. 6, 7.
 66. Hâsjmy, *Ulama Aceh*, p. 7.
 67. Paul Van't Veer, *Perang Aceh: Kisah Kegagalan Snouck Hurgronje* (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1985), p. 34; Hasan Di Tiro, “The Legal Status of Aceh-Sumatra Under International Law,” www.asfnl.org.
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 69. Ismail Jakub, *Teungku Chik Di Tiro (Muhammad Saman) Palawan Besar Dalam Perang Aceh (1881-1891)*, p. 40; Anthony Reid, “Colonial Transformation: A Bitter Legacy,” ed. Anthony Reid, *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), p. 100; Ismail Jakub, *Teungku Chik Di Tiro (Muhammad Saman) Pahlawan Besar Dalam Perang Aceh (1881-1891)*, p. 39-40, 71; M. Hasbi Amiruddin, *The Response of the Ulama Dayah to the Modernization of Islamic Law in Aceh* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2005), p. 39.
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 71. Hâsjmy, *Ulama Aceh*, p. 8-9.
 72. Ibid., p. 9, 12.
 73. Ibid., p. 10.
 74. Ibid., p. 11-12.
 75. Tgk. M. Dahlan al-Fairusy, and Dra Zunaimar, *Katalog Manuskrip Perpustakaan Dayah Tanoh Abee* (Banda Aceh: Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Aceh, 1993).
 76. Oman Fathurahman, “The Cultural Emergency Relief Action: The Rebuilding Manuscript Library in Dayah Tanoh Abee,” Aceh, <http://naskahkuno.blogspot.com/2006/09/cultural-emergency-relief-action.html>.

