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Timeline of the Malay Jawi Works: A Revisit to the Oldest Known Malay Manuscript

Che' Razi Jusoh*
Aliza Elias @ Mayah**

Abstract

The paper examines the dating of writings on Islam originating in the Malay world in the form of either treatise (*risālah*) or book (*kitāb*) as there are disagreements on the date of the advent of Islam in the region. The researchers revisit the polemic of the topic of the oldest known Malay manuscript between the 'Aqā'id al-Nasafī by anonymous author dated 1590 A.D and the *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* of Shaykh 'Abdullah 'Arif which was said to have been written in 12th century A.D., is 400 years older than the former. In order to lit light on this issue, the researchers employ the qualitative methodology in which the linguistic, textual and comparative analysis are applied on the manuscripts and material related to both treatises. Finding reveals that there are some methodological issues that need to be resolved in comparing both treatises.

Keywords: Literature, manuscript, 'Aqā'id al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Lāhūt*, Islam, Malay Civilization.

Introduction

A definite answer to the question as to when exactly the writing activities in Malay-Jawi literature commenced has yet to be obtained because there is no sufficient data to unveil the real situation with regard to writing activities between 11th to the end of the 15th century A.D. The discovery of oldest Arab inscriptions in various places such as in Champa (431/1039),¹ Brunei (440/1048),² Leran, Jawa Timur (495/1082),³ Aceh

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¹ Hashim Musa, *Sejarah Perkembangan Tulisan Jawi*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1999, p.82.

² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

(696/1297),¹ did not confirm the usage of Jawi until the discovery of Terengganu inscription² which was dated on Friday, the 4th Rajab of 702/22nd February 1303. The Terengganu inscription has marked a very important discovery in finding the earliest proof pertaining to the usage of Malay-Jawi script.³ It indicates that the Malay-Jawi script had been used at that time or perhaps even earlier. Thus, it is a strong indication that Malay-Jawi script had played a very important role in the field of da‘wah in conveying the message to the people at that time.

Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas maintained that prior to the coming of Islam in this region there was no script or alphabet that capable to unite and to bind firmly a language that covers a group of people which could be given a title as Malay (*Melayu*).⁴ Hence, the Arab script which came along had been accepted as Malay script (*tulisan Melayu*) but with some additional special alphabets i.e. *cha*; *nga*; *pa* and *ga*⁵ known later on as Jawi Script. Moreover, the new script introduced with the coming of Islam has binding the unity of one language covers all Malay people. As a result, the term Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*) never appeared in any writings between 16th and 17th centuries compared to Malay people (*Orang Melayu*) and Malay states (*Negeri Melayu*), because the accepted term for it was *Jawi language (Bahasa Jawi)*⁶ and not the Malay language.

With regard to the term “*Jawi*,” it originally comes from the word ‘*Jawa*’ and in some Arabic books on jurisprudence in Shāfi‘ī *madhhab* the word ‘*jawa*’, ‘*jawah*’, ‘*jawi*’ or ‘*ahli jawah*’ are all referred to the people who lived in the Malay region that include Malay as well.⁷ Meccan people are still using the term ‘*jawah*’ which signifies Malay and Indonesian even today. Thus, the term ‘*jawi*’ is an attribution which

¹ *Ibid.*

² Please refer to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Correct Date of the Terengganu Inscription*. Kuala Lumpur: Museum Department States of Malaya. Al-Attas outrightly mentioned Jawi (Malay-Arabic) script in which he is expert and familiar with not only in reading but also in writing, 1984, p.7.

³ Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*. (Fourth reprint), Petaling Jaya: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), 1990, p.43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ Haji Abdul ‘Aziz bin Haji Ismail “Ke Arah Memantapkan Semula Kitab-Kitab Jawi dan Peranan Masyarakat Islam Masa Kini” a paper presentation at *Seminar Warisan Kitab-Kitab Melayu Lama*, 28th Safr 1412/ 7th September 1991 organized by Bahagian Hal Ehwal Islam Pusat Islam Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1991, p.8,

connotes the people of Jawa whom originally from the soil of Jawa. But, in general sense especially in the Shafi‘ite fiqh books it also referred to Malay people and *Jawah* altogether because they originally one nation whom lived in the Malay Archipelago.¹ It is understood from the term ‘*Jawa*’ and ‘*Jawi*’ are referred to Tanah Melayu (Malaya) and Malay people, and its writing script is also known as Malay-Jawi language (*bahasa Melayu Jawi*) or Jawi books (*kitab Jawi*).² Nevertheless, Al-Attas asserted even though that term ‘*Jawi*’ commonly accepted as a name given by the Arab to attribute to all populations and nations that inhabit in the Malay Archipelago as discussed above, but most probably that the Malay themselves who gave the title.³ In short, the Jawi script as we have given a note as above emerged as a significant tool in conveying the message via *risālah*, treatises or *kitāb* as early as the arrival of Islam in this part of the world. It is believed there were number of works had been written since then but most of them were ceased to be used and no longer available anywhere except a few.

The Emergence and Development of Malay *Jawi* Works

The early Muslim propagators (*da‘i*, pl. *du‘a*) who first disseminated their teachings via writings in the Malay world which depended on written works which were originally written in Arabic and later had them translated into the native language for the local people to understand the teachings. This led to flourishing of the Malay-Jawi literature.⁴ *Kitab* literature (*sastera kitab*) is under the religious literature.⁵ It is of two parts; the first one refers to any piece of writings which are translated from Arabic into Malay by the medium of Jawi script. Second; any piece of writing in Malay language pertaining to Islam that is written in Jawi script.⁶ It then further divided into prose (*karangan nasyar*) and poem (*puisi/ karangan bersajak*) which include *sha‘ir*, *nazam*, *pantun* etc.⁷ As far as the research is concerned; the number of prose works in *kitab* Jawi literature supersedes the number of

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid*, p.11.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mahayuddin Haji Yahaya, *Karya Klasik Melayu-Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2000, p. 7. Henceforth will be referred as *Karya Klasik*.

⁵ The religious literature in Islam is based on the integrated framework whereby there is no total segregation between literary genre and religious genre.

⁶ Ibrahim Abu Bakar (ed.), *Faridat al-Fara‘id fi ‘Ilm al-Aqa‘id*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2007, p.ix.

⁷ *Ibid.*

poetic literary works. In light to that some people argued that *kitab literature* should not be placed under the roof of literature (*sastera*) because the nature of *kitab* is not a kind of poetic literary work in the real sense, moreover its writings only focusing on the religious teachings.¹ On the one hand the idea is rather rational because the purpose of the content in each *kitab* is to teach people about the religion and not to emulate the content as a literary work *per se*. On the other hand, since the writing of *kitab* depends on the knowledge, skills and peculiar approach taken by the author, thus some works probably written with amicable poetic literary style which people could acknowledge them as a highly regarded composition of religious work that is full of poetic literary approach. Amongst the poetic treatise written in Malay-Jawi literature are Shaykh Dawud’s *Iqd al-Jawahir* and Raja Haji Muhammad Sa’id bin Raja Haji Muhammad Tahir Riau’s *Sha’ir Nazam Tajwid al-Qur’an*,² etc.

The writings of Malay-Jawi *kitab* which started long time ago could be divided into three important main fields; tawhid (*Usul al-Din*), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence or *Shari’ah*) and mysticism (*tasawwuf*). They have become the prime subject of study since the spreading of Islam in this region at the very beginning and continually being studied until today. As for other disciplines like commentary of al-Qur’an (*tafsir al-Qur’an*), Hadith literature, *tajwid al-Qur’an*, Islamic history and etc. they are not so extensively being studied and their numbers in Malay-Jawi corpus are rather very small. Since the emergence of Jawi script and its outcome that yields in the form of treatises, pamphlets and books which became unending polemic among researchers and scholars, thus the exact turning point in claiming the early works is quite complicated. However, the initial development of the Malay-Jawi writings probably envisaged with the small number of writings before the 18th century due to lack of instrument to multiply it except those of which transcribe them in a very small scale compared to the printing machine which only existed by the middle of the 18th century.

The Legacy of Malay Jawi Works

Knowing the importance of Malay-Jawi literature as part of the Malay heritage, thus it is pertinent that Malay Jawi works need to be reintroduced

¹ Siti Hawa, Siti Hawa Haji Salleh, *Kesusasteraan Melayu Abad Kesembilan Belas*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1997, p. 236.

² Wan Mohd Saghir 2000, *Wawasan Pemikiran Islam Ulama Asia Tenggara Jilid 1*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Pengkajian Khazanah Klasik Nusantara & Khazanah Fathaniah, 2000, 41.

to the contemporary generation and to familiarize them with the legacy of the past. Literally, Jawi here specifically refers to the Arabic loan scripts which have been officially used for writing in Malay language.¹ Malay Jawi works refer specifically to those works which were written in Malay language, using the Jawi script and in the form of book or treatise. The combination of three words “Malay-Jawi works” is meant to differentiate the Malay literature as it refers to all types of literature in Malay language, be it written in Jawi or Roman scripts, Islamic or non-Islamic genres. They are also not Jawi literature *per-se* since the Jawi script is also subscribed by other types of languages such Sunda, Old Javanese, Bugis, etc. Thus, Malay-Jawi Literature here signifies literature which only uses Jawi script that subsumes its ‘Islamic’ nature and is written in Malay language². There are thousands of works were written by the eminent scholars, writers in almost all fields of knowledge that available during their times such as *‘aqidah, fiqh, tasawwuf, tafsir, hadith, Arabic syntac, life of the Prophet SAW* etc.

Arabic Work Being As a Source of Malay-Jawi Works

The largest Muslim community in the Malay Archipelago are the follower of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah* long time ago since Islam firstly reached this part of the world. In view to that fact it is not a probable assumption that in every field of study especially in the field of ‘*aqidah, fiqh and tasawwuf*’ including the two stipulated works that we are dealing with are originated from the Arabic work, after all the very nature of both works are called as Malay underlinear texts. As for other texts they could be varies. There are several ways to trace the original works of Arabic by looking at the Malay-Jawi works in which the authors usually mentioned the sources or references of earlier works that they have referred to, or by looking at the biography of the Malay

¹ For further readings on the history and the development of Jawi script please refer to Hashim Musa, *Epigrafi Sejarah Sistem Tulisan dalam Bahasa Melayu*, 2nd Edition. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Gang Giong Suk, 2006. *Perkembangan Tulisan Jawi dalam Masyarakat Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993.

² There are many terms have been employed to refer to the similar nature of literature. Among the common terms used such as *Kitab Melayu, Kitab Jawi, Kitab Kuning, Kitab Tulisan Huruf Arab Bahasa Indonesia, Kitab Bahasa Jawi-Melayu* and *Kitab Gundul*. The term Malay-Jawi Literature which we used here is more comprehensive compared to those terms and the same spirit and understanding as held by Wan Mohd Saghir ‘Abdullah, (1997), “Tulisan Melayu/Jawi dalam Manuskrip dan Kitab Bercetak: Suatu Analisis Perbandingan”, in *Tradisi Penulisan Manuskrip Melayu*, , Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 1997, pp. 87-89.

scholars with whom they have studied with and which lineage of study network they have undergone etc. It is important to note here that the purpose to get acquainted with the sources or references is to investigate the connection of Malay-Jawi sharh tradition with the mother of the tradition itself which have begun in the Arab world.

The first field in which the Arabic works became the main sources for Malay-Jawi works could be traced in *fiqh*. No doubt, there have been hundreds of Arabic works in this field since the 17th century. Many Arabic sources which are familiar to the Malay authors like Shaykh Nur al-Dīn al-Raniri in his *Şirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, Shaykh Dawud in his *Kifāyat al-Muhtadī*, *Idah al-Bab* etc.. Among those works and authors are *Sharḥ al-Minhāj* of Imām Taqiy al-Dīn al-Subkī (d.1355), *Fath al-Wahhāb* of Shaykh al-Islam Abū Yaḥyā Zakariyā al-Anṣārī al-Shāfi‘ī (d.1520), *Mughnī al-Muhtāj* of Imām al-Khaṭīb al-Sharbinī (d.977/1569), *Nihāyat al-Muhtāj* of al-Imām Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Hamzah al-Ramlī (d.1595), *Tuhfat al-Muhtāj* of Imām Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī al-Makkī (d.1566) *Rawḍat al-Ṭālibīn* of al-Imām Muhy al-Dīn Abī Zakariyā Yaḥyā bin Sharf al-Nawawī (d.1277), *al-Majmū‘ Sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab* also by al-Imām al-Nawawī etc.

With regard to the field of Uṣūl al-Dīn, prominent Malay authors like Al-Raniri, Dawud al-Fatani, Zayn al-‘Abidin al-Fatani, Muhammad Zayn al-Ashi, Tayyib al-Mas‘udi etc. have composed their works based on some authoritative main Arabic sources such as *‘Aqā’id al-Nasafī* of ‘Umar Najm al-Dī al-Nasafī (d.537/1142), *Sharḥ al-Taftazānī ‘alā al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyyah* of Imām al-Taftazānī (d.1390), *Umm al-Barāhīn* of Yūsuf al-Sanūsī, *Ḥāshiyah al-Dusūqī ‘alā Umm al-Barāhīn* by Imām al-Dusūqī (d.1823), *al-Sharqawi ‘alā al-Hudhudi* of Imām Ḥijāzī al-Sharqawī (d.1815) *Tuhfat al-Murīd ‘alā Jawharat, Ḥāshiyah al-Bayjūrī ‘alā Sharḥ Matn Umm al-Barāhīn* of Imām Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī (d.1871) *Kifāyat al-‘Awwām* of Imām al-Fudali (d.) *‘Aqīdat al-Ṭahāwiyyah* of Imām al-Ṭahāwī (d.942) etc.

Similarly with regard to the field of tasawwuf, renowned Malay authors like Shaykh ‘Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani (d.1831), Dawud al-Fatani (d.1847), Shaykh Arshad al-Banjari (d.1812) etc., have referred their works to the authoritative Arabic works in tasawwuf. Among the main references in Arabic are *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* and other works of Ḥujjat al-Islām Imām al-Ghazzālī (d.1111), *Al-Ḥikam* of Abū al-Faḍl ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī (d.1079), *Ḥikam* of Shu‘ayb Abū Madyan al-Ghawth (d.1197), *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* and *Al-Fath al-Rabbānī* of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī (d.1166). Hence for the works that we are dealing with are coming

from the original work of ‘*Aqā'id al-Nasafī* by ‘Umar al-Nasafī (d. 1142) and *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* or *Dāhūt* by ‘Abdullāh ‘Arif (d. c.12th A.D.).

In short, it can be concluded that the main texts composed by the leading scholars in respective fields together with commentaries benefitted all savants of knowledge. Thus, there are many other important works which have been referred and studied by the local scholars as their sources in their endeavor to further enhance the teachings so that many more people will benefit from them.

Polemic Revolving the Earliest Malay-Jawi Work

In relation to what we have mentioned earlier on that the writings on Islam originating in the Malay world in the form of either treatise (*risālah*) or book (*kitāb*) must have begun with the advent of Islam in the region however to date there is no clue as the exact dates of the earliest works and their writers have been definitely determined.¹ Nevertheless, based on the research thus far, in order to be fair with the endeavor taken by our contemporary scholars about the early development in Malay-Jawi commentary works in the Malay Archipelago, we would abide with the strongest view of which any earliest writing materials that were discovered hitherto.

With regard to the first *kitāb* which was produced in Malay language, a group of researchers like Hawash ‘Abdullah and Mahayudin Yahaya opined that the translation work of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt*² was the first Malay-Jawi work since it had already used in the 6th/12th century.³ The author was known as Shaykh ‘Abdullah ‘Arif,⁴ and believed to have spent some time in Aceh

¹ Wan Mohd, *Wawasan*, vol. III, p.1 and Mahayudin, *Karya Klasik* p. 6.

² The original title is “*Baḥr al-Lāhūt, al-Kitāb fī al-Bayān al-Alīf*. See Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, *Naskah Jawi Sejarah dan Teks*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Volume 1, pp. 78-89. Hereinafter cited as *Naskah Jawi*. Mahayudin of the opinion that the correct title is *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* instead of *Baḥr al-Lahut*, since the later has no meaning, nothing but corrupted word. *Ibid*, 1994, p.85.

³ Mahayuddin raised doubt to al-Attas’ discovery by proposing such a wild assumption “that there could be other works earlier than the one found by al-Attas”, and at the same time he claimed that “...this research proved that kitāb ‘*Aqā'id by al-Nasafī* which was elaborated by al-Taftazānī is not an oldest or the earliest arrived and spread in the Malay Archipelago, there were other works which have been taught and spread to the Malay society including the *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* by ‘Abdullāh ‘Arif (on the 6th/12), kitab *Durr al-Manzūm* by Abū Ishāq (9th /15th century), Kitab *Umm al-Barāhin* by al-Sanusi (d.895/1490)”, *ibid*, p.3.

⁴ Scholars have different opinion as to when he resided in the Malay World. According to Wan Mohd, ‘Abdullah ‘Arif sojourned in Aceh ca. 560/1165 and died in 1177, while Azyumardi Azra on the other hand said that ‘Abdullah Arif might arrived a bit earlier ca 506/1111 but no date cited for his death. Moreover, T. W. Arnold in his work

around 1165 and most probably he had written it around 560/1165 to 573/1177. In relation to that a renowned historian T.W. Arnold had verified the existence of ‘Abdullah ‘Arif as he said;

The Malay chronicles ascribe the honour of being the first missionary to Aceh in the North-West of Sumatera, to an Arab named ‘Abd Allah ‘Arif, who is said to have visited the island about the middle of the twelfth century; one of his disciples Burhan al-Dīn, is said to have carried the knowledge of the faith down the west coast as far as Priaman.¹

So, the account of which designates the arrival of ‘Abdullah ‘Arif as the first Muslim missionary in Aceh is due to the discovery of his work entitled *Baḥr al-Lāhūt*.² However, there are few issues on the claim which somehow need to be verified.

First, with regard to the original Arabic work of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt*, because what has been found was the Malay translation of it,³ but not found in any academic writings thus far the original work in Arabic. What available and produced by Mahayuddin in his work is in Malay language except few sentences in Arabic. This type of work can be categorized as direct translation from Arabic into Malay which most probably not being carried out by Abdullah Arif himself but by someone else. The reason being a writer shall not report what he had written rather he will straightforward say what he wanted to say. But in this manuscript what we found is that the author is reporting what the shaykh has said by saying “*wa amma ba’du, qāla al-Syeikh ‘Abdullah dan kemudian daripada itu telah meriwayatkan Syeikh ‘Abdullah yang arif ...*” Inferentially this work is written by an author who

“*The Preaching of Islam*” cited that ‘Abdullah Arif reached this land about the middle of the twelfth century. To get more details on this figure, see Wan Muhammad Saghir Wan ‘Abdullah, *Pengenalan Siri ke-2*, p.14. Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama*, pp, 29-30 and T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, T.W. Arnold, (Second Edition) *The Preaching of Islam*. Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors. 1997, p. 366. Hereinafter referred as *preaching*.

¹ Arnold, *Preaching.*, p.366.

² Mahayuddin, *Naskah Jawi*, p. 36

³ Mahayuddin asserted that the original script is written in Arabic, then it was translated into Malay by anonymous author, with no clue when and where it was made, see *ibid*. Furthermore, Hawash Abdullah disclosed that he had obtained the Arabic version of the *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* from the descendent of Shaykh Yūsuf Tāj al-Khalawati. See Hawash Abdullah, *Perkembangan Ilmu Tasawuf dan Tokoh Tokohnya di Nusantara*. Surabaya: al-Ikhlās, 1980, pp. 12-14.

reported what the Shayh has said somewhere untraceable. We need to be aware that the translation could have been done much later than the above mentioned date, after all there is no clue when and where it was composed.

Second, even though Mahayudin asserted that the Arabic version of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* was in possession of Hawash Abdullah, there is no solid and sound research carried out to support the argument thus far. The existence of the original Arabic work of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* is a primary importance to be established, failing which the argument that the Malay translation of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* as the earliest Malay text becomes irrelevant.

Third, assuming that the Malay translation of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* was truly written before 573/1177 - about 413 years earlier than the Malay-translation of *'Aqā'id al-Nasafī* (written in 998/1590) but the Malay language used in the text could only possibly be written after the 14th century. This is simply because, the Terengganu inscription which dated 702/1303 was so difficult to understand even the experts in the field including Major H.S. Peterson and Dr. C.O. Blagden also failed to come out with the correct reading as well as to resolve the dating of the inscription¹ of the text. Thus, how would it be possible for a 126 years old text than Terengganu inscription is easier to read and understood?

For the sake of comparing this work with the 16th century Malay underlinear translation of *'Aqā'id al-Nasafī* by anonymous author and one noted 13th century the Terengganu inscription which was regarded as the oldest artifact to prove the presence and influence of Islam in the land of Terengganu² as the language used in *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* having more similarities with the former rather than the latter. Here take for instance what is written in the first page of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt*;

“Bermula segala puji pujian bagi Allah Tuhan Yang Amat Murah pada menjadikan nur Muhammad Sallallahu’alayhiwasallam itu dijadikan dengan QudratNya Dan salawat dan salamnya atas Nabi Muhammad itu iaitu kekasihnya yang terlebih hampirnya dan atas keluarganya dan sahabatnya dan

¹ Please see Muhammad Zaini Uthman and Azlan Hashim (2010), “The Correct Date of Terengganu Inscription: Reconfirmed using Astronomical Computer Programs”, in Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud and Muhammad Zainiy Uthman (eds.), *Knowledge, Language, Thought and Civilization of Islam Essays in Honor of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*. Skudai: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2010, pp. 461-462.

² Muhammad Zainiy Uthman (ed.), *Batu Bersurat Teerengganu Its Correct Date, Religio-Cultural and Scientific Dimensions*, Kuala Lumpur: Department of National Heritage, 2012, p. xxi.

sekalian umatnya laki laki dan perempuan, [wa amma ba'dahu Qala al shaykhu]'Abdullah dan adapun kemudian daripada itu telah meriwayatkan Syeikh Abdullah yang arif[Ta'ala Qaddasallahu ruhahu al'aziz fi bayan al magha'ib wa alshahadah fatanzuru fi bayan al haqq wataktubu kitab wasammaitahu Bahr al Dahut]..bahawa inilah suatu risalat pada menyatakan barang yang gha'ib gha'ib dan yang yang nyata-nyatanya daripada ini maka maka ketahui olehmu daripada kenyataan haq Ta'ala itu dan aku karangkan kitab ini dan aku namai akan dia Bahr al Dahut ertinya Bahr al Dahut itu yang tiada terhingga akan dia dan tiada berkesudahan akan dia dan barang siapa”¹

Now, let us compare with the 16th century of ‘Aqā’id al Nasafi;
“Kumulai kitab ini dengan Nama Allah yang Mahamurah, Yang Mengasihani hambaNya dalam akhirat. Segala puji akan Tuhan segala ‘alam dan pahala akhirat bagi segala yang takut akan Allah, dan rahmat Allah atas Pesuruhnya Muhammad dan Keluarganya sekalian”.²

Both works are using lucid Malay language, straight forward and having not much different. But, try to look at the language in the Terengganu inscription as reformulated by al-Attas improvising what had Peterson deciphered prior to it;

[8} ...Maka titah Seri Paduka[9} Tuhan menundukkan tamra ini dibenua Trengganu adi pertama ada [10] juma'at dibulan Rajab ditahun Sharatan disasanakala [11] Baginda Rasul Allah telah lalu tujuh ratus dua.³

Obviously, the language of the 14th century A.D was so different from the 17th century A.D. The syntax is different; terms used such as *tamra*, *adi*, *disasanakala* etc. are also so much different. Thus, it is absurd to regard the Malay translation of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* is older than the Malay underlinear translation of ‘Aqā’id al Nasafi simply because the Terengganu inscription

¹ Mahayuddin, *Karya Klasik*, p. 89.

² Al-Attas, S.M.N., (1988), op cit. p. 53.

³ Al-Attas, S.M.N., *The Correct Date of the Terengganu Inscription*. Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara Malaysia, 1984, p. 22.

which dated 1303 A.D. is almost impossible to be understood by the common people and what more the work that came earlier than the epoch.

Fourth, the argument that the teaching of *Baḥr al-Lāḥūt* had influenced the society in the 11th century seems unjustifiable, simply because there is no written document found so far to expose, to further discuss, to comment, to elaborate the teaching of the work like other important works which spread in this part of the world like *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafī* and *Umm al-Barāhīn* which have become the object of commentary by many later scholars. If a piece of work were neither being mentioned nor being referred to any piece of writing most probably the idea which germinated or discussed in them will not be well received and finally remain unnoticed.

In contrasting with the above scenario, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas who maintained that the finding of the Malay translation of '*Aqā'id al-Nasafī*' was a great achievement and he has proved it based on a thorough research upon the original source of the manuscript that finally led him to proclaim it as the oldest known Malay manuscript as he clearly says:

As far as I know, then, there is no 16th century dated Malay text in manuscript form that has ever discovered and noticed. The text here presented, it will be shown, is the only one that has a date earlier than any of the Malay manuscripts so far considered by scholars to be among the oldest, which make it the oldest Malay manuscript text now extant. This momentous discovery is undoubtedly of great significance for the study of Malay language and literature as well as for the study of the religious and intellectual history of the Malays, seeing that it deals, not with the legends nor with the mundane affairs of state, but with the fundamental beliefs and faith of the Muslims based upon the essential of the religion of Islam.¹

It is very clear that the claimants of *Baḥr al-Lāḥūt* fall short in proving of what they had asserted. One may vividly notice that al-Attas who had published his important findings in 1988 produced a meticulous research and one can see the way he put forward all sorts of arguments and methodology in order to prove that the work was really an oldest compared with the arguments put forward by the opposite party which

¹ Al-Attas, *The Oldest Known*, p. 5.

only published his work in 1994¹ and 2000² respectively. Al-Attas’ work also deliberately marked that the Malay language could also comprehend the original meaning of Arabic. It is a known fact that al-Nasafi’s work is a remarkable treatise that had attracted Muslims people all over. And the Malay interlinear translation is not but a piece of work that really represents the idea of the author as held by Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd Nor;

*“Sayogialah para pengkaji dan ulama memperbanyakkan kajian tentang teks penting dan awal ini bukan sahaja sebagai bahan sejarah tetapi sebagai bahan akidah dan falsafah yang masih boleh terus membantu kita menghadapi zaman yang mencabar ini. Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas telah melakukan sumbangan besar dan telah meletakkan asas kukuh mengenai dua segi ini”*³

In view of this issue, the date as to when a piece of work is written is undoubtedly very important, nevertheless, the content, the influence and the contribution to lit the light of intellectual milieu to the Malay people is more significant and abiding. For instance, we could see clearly that ‘*Aqā’id al-Nasafi*’ is very much referred in most of the aqidah works such as *Aqīdat al-Nājīn*, *Durr al-Thamīn* and even al-Raniri who commented the work as al-Attas cited in his work;

Durrat al-Fara’id bi sharh al-‘Aqā’id,... a Malay translation, most probably of selected parts adapted to the spiritual and intellectual requirements of the people at the time, of Sa’d al-Din Mas’ud ibn ‘Umar al-Taftazani’s commentary of the ‘*Aqā’id*’ of Najm al-Din ‘Umar al-Nasafi.⁴

In sum, the polemic of which one is prior than the other should not happen if we acknowledge the proper method in verifying the truth. Thus, in general principle any claim made by an accuser must be attached by proof, which means those who reject al-Attas’ Malay interlinear translation of ‘*Aqā’id*’ being the oldest known Malay manuscript shall

¹ Mahayuddin published his work in 1994.

² Wan Mohd, published his work in 2000.

³ See Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, (2005), “Beberapa Aspek Pandangan Alam Orang Melayu dalam Manuskrip Melayu Tertua al-‘Aqa’id al-Nasafi”, *AFKAR*, No. 6, Rabi‘al-Awwal 1426/ May 2005, p. 13.

⁴ Al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nur al-Din al-Raniri*. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture, Malaysia, 1986, p. 25.

burden the proof of counter argument. The one that indispensable for them to do is to check the paper of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* whether it is truly coming from the 12th century, failing which no further argument is duly to pursue. As this research is carried out there is no published and published article indicated the process had been carried out.¹

Conclusion

This research attempts to discuss on one specific area in Malay literature which is on the *Sastera Kitab* or kitab literature which emerged after the coming of Islam in this region. The polemic on the issue of the earliest Malay manuscript found in the region was attempted to be resolved in this research. Ultimately, the result of which has shown that Al-Attas who maintained that the Malay translation of *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafī* of 'Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī by an anonymous author being the oldest known Malay manuscript found hitherto stands firm cannot be challenged by the claimants of some biographers who criticized it. Moreover, from the Terengganu inscription the inferential has been made that it is impossible that the Malay language prior to the Terengganu inscription had a better and understandable as the claimant argued. Moreover, as clearly shown from the language used - as we have tried to compare as above- that it is most probable that the Malay translation of *Baḥr al-Lāhūt* was written latest in the 17th or the 18th century A.D.

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¹ The recent article by Ahmad Sahidah on *Baḥr al Lahut* was not so much focus on the issue of the status of the manuscript either it originated from 12th century or otherwise, as much so it seems not answering the issue of authenticity of the Malay text of *Baḥr al Lahut* and suitness of the main theme discussed in that work with the epoch of the 12 the century. Please see Ahmad Sahidah (2012), Finding Malay Islamic Identity through Manuscripts: A Textual Criticism of *Baḥr Al-Lahut* the *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* ISSN: 2046-9578, Vol.11 No.I (2012) ©BritishJournal Publishing, Inc. 2012. <http://www.bjournal.co.uk/BJASS.aspx>

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