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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A *TAQRİZ* FOR A NINETEENTH CENTURY INDONESIAN MANUSCRIPT  
*Nico J.G. Kaptein*  
1

QURANIC HERMENEUTICS AND SUFISM OF SYAYKH ABD AL-QADIR AL-JILANI  
*Irwan Masduqi*  
13

SANAD AND ULAMA NETWORK OF THE QURANIC STUDIES IN NUSANTARA  
*Zainul Milal Bizawie*  
23

THE APPLICATION OF ISLAMIC LAW IN INDONESIA: BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES  
*Djawahir Hejazziey*  
45

THE GEGER BANTEN OF 1888: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF 19TH CENTURY MILLENARIANISM IN INDONESIA  
*Dadi Darmadi*  
65

GENEALOGY OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: ROLES IN THE MODERNIZATION OF MUSLIM SOCIETY  
*Azyumardi Azra*  
85

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TAHFIZ QUR'AN MOVEMENT IN THE REFORM ERA IN INDONESIA  
*Muhammad Sofyan*  
115

SOUTHEAST ASIAN MUSLIM WAŞAȚIYYAH IN THE GLOBAL ERA  
*Syahrin Harahap*  
137
QURANIC HERMENEUTICS AND SUFISM OF SYAYKH ABD AL-QADIR AL-JILANI

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Abstract
Syaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani is the founder of Tariqah Qadiriyyah. His teaching is highly respected by the leaders of many Islamic traditional boarding schools in Indonesia. They have accepted his teachings from his works entitled Futûh al-Gayb, al-Fatâh al-Rabbani, al-Gunya li Ṭalibî Ṭariq al-Haqq, and Kitâb Sirr al-Asrâr wa Mažhâr al-Anwâr. Then, in 2009, there was a discovery of al-Jilani's commentary of Qur'an entitled al-Fawâtiḥ al-Ilâhiyyah wa al-Mafâtiḥ al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwâdîhah li al-Kalîm al-Qur’âniyyah wa al-Hikâm al-Furqânîyyah. As one of teachers traditional Islamic boarding school, I am interested in examining the authenticity of al-Fawâtiḥ al-Ilâhiyyah wa al-Mafâtiḥ al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwâdîhah li al-Kalîm al-Qur’âniyyah wa al-Hikâm al-Furqânîyyah. This research also discusses the interpretation of the Al-Qur’an in the view of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and his methods.

Keywords: pseudo, sufî circles, esoteric approach, epistemology, authenticity
Abstrak


Kata Kunci: karya tidak asli, tariqat sufi, pendekatan tasawuf, teori pengetahuan, keaslian

The Discovery of al-Jilani’s Work

The heritages of Quranic commentaries, lately, were enriched by the publication of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani’s commentary (Jilani, Jaylani, Gilani, Gaylani) in early 2009. The Center of al-Jilani Studies (Markaz al-Buhuts li al-Jilani) at Istanbul, Turkey, claimed that the publication was the first throughout history. Its manuscript which consists of six volumes, with a thickness of about 550 pages for each volume, was found by Muhammad Fadhil in Italy, Qadiriyya Library in Baghdad, and India. The editor of al-Jilani’s commentary is Dr. Jilani Mohammed Fadhil al-Hasani al-Jamazraqi al-Taylani from Jimzaraq, Eastern Turkey who analyzed the books of al-Jilani over twenty years ago and translated them into English and German languages. (al-Jamazraqi, 2009:23-24).

The Authenticity of al-Jilani’s Commentary

The authenticity of al-Jilani’s commentary is questionable and leads to polemic arguments among renowned Moslem scholars. Al-Jilani’s commentary, which entitles al-Fawūtīh al-Ilāhiyyah wa al-Mafātīḥ al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwādīhah li al-Kalīm al-Qurʿānīyyah wa al-Hikm al-Furqānīyyah is still being debated by the biographers of al-Jilani. Dr. Joseph Zaidan, an expert in the field of Sufism manuscripts from Alexandria, noted that the Rashid library at Tripoli and India was collecting the book of Quranic exegesis and claimed the work of as that of al-Jilani. Based on his opinion, this work, however, is "pseudo" (al-manḥūl) for the authors of al-Jilani’s Manāqib (the books of al-Jilani biography) never signaled that al-Jilani has a work in the field of
Quranic exegesis. Joseph Zaidan, additionally stated that al-Jilani himself, in some of his works, never declared a work in the field of Quranic exegesis. (Zaidan, 1999:103).

Joseph Zaidan’s conclusion was clarified by Khayr al-Din al-Zirkili, in *al-Takmilah* by stating explicitly that *al-Fawātīh al-Ilāhiyyah wa al-Mafātīh al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwādīhah li al-Kalīm al-Qur’āniyyah wa al-Hikām al-Furqāniyyah* is a work of Ni'matullah bin Mahmud al-Nakhjuwani (d. 920 AH) from Nakhichevan (Azeri language: Naxçıvan Müxtar), Azerbaijan. (Al-Zirkili, 38). Al-Zirkili’s opinion is affiliated with the catalog of Biblioteca Alexandrina that indicates al-Jilani’s commentary was written by al-Nakhjuwani. The Catalog of Biblioteca Alexandrina clarified that al-Jilani’s commentary was never printed in 1907/1325 AH in Istanbul, Turkey, which contains II volumes, not VI volumes as noted by the Center of al-Jilani Studies, Turkey.

Likewise, the digital program of *Maktabah Syamilah* included this commentary written by al-Nakhjuwani as author and was printed and published by Dar Rikabi, Cairo, Egypt, in 1999 in which the text of the Dar al-Rikabi version is the full version until *al-Nas*. The assumption that this commentary was the work of al-Nakhjuwani was not only confirmed by Shia sites or official sites of *Tariqah Dasukiyyah-Syaziliyyah*, but also by authoritative sources namely *Mu'jam Maḥbū'ah, Mu'jam Mu'allifīn, Kasyf al-Ḍunūn*, etc. As they said, *al-Fawātīh al-Ilāhiyyah* was written by al-Nakhjuwani in 902 AH. (Haji Khalifah, Vol. II, 1292; Al-Babani, Vol. II, 206; Sarkis, Vol. II, 1849; Kahalah, Vol. III, 111).

It is obvious that the first opinion concluded that al-Jilani’s commentary was the work of al-Nakhjuwani whereas the second opinion, represented by Dr. Abd al-Razaq al-Kaylani, stated that the work of al-Jilani was under the title *al-Misk al-Khitam* and its commentary is available at Library of Tripoli and India (manuscript 622 AH). (Al-Kaylani, 1994:320). Conversely, the third version, an opinion from the Center of al-Jilani Studies in Istanbul, Turkey in which Mohammed Fadhil is the researcher, reveals that al-Jilani’s commentary is the authentic work of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. His opinion is based on research conducted during his visits to 50 libraries, including the Vatican, where he found three manuscripts that identified specific information in the bottom corner; “This commentary had been completed from I until III volume by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani”.

The editor doubted the authenticity of this commentary, since the manuscript explicated that al-Jilani’s commentary had been written by
another and not by al-Jilani himself. The doubt, however, has been disregarded based on information from Sayid Abd al-Muttalib al-Kaylani from Nuri al-Haj (the manager of Qadiriyah library at Baghdad), and the family of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani at Watkiyya Islamic School and Syaykh Umar Rifa'i from Sayyid Yusuf (the owner of Mustafa al-Halbi library in Baghdad). These sources asserted that there was a Quranic exegesis book written by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani" collected in Qadiriyah Library, Baghdad. Sadly, the commentary was missing until the manuscript was found again in the Sham and then lost at a second time. Sayid Nuri advocated the authenticity of al-Jilani’s commentary through his statement, "One of the works of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, written with his hands, is al-Fawātih al-Ilāhiyyah". Thus, the editor said, "This information reinforces our efforts to publish this commentary on behalf of Syaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani". (Al-Jilani, 2009:1-21).

Although the majority of scholars said that al-Fawātih was the work of al-Nakhjuwani, but this statement did not rule out the emergence of assumption that al-Jilani’s commentary was written by al-Jilani around the year 521 until 561 AH in Baghdad, then copied and duplicated by several writers, including al-Nakhjuwani who died in 920 AH. The original manuscript, furthermore, was lost in Baghdad, information provided by the Library of Baghdad. The assumption that al-Nakhjuwani was just a copyist can be based on the discovery of Indian manuscript written in 622 AH in the name of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. This assumption arose in that al-Nakhjuwani at the end of each section said, "Commentary of my master, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, had finished".

Moreover, al-Nakhjuwani was scholar mystic from Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan (the border of Turkey, Armenia and Iran). This commentary, therefore, has been very popular among the followers of Shia sect in Iran and Turkey and can be claimed as the work of al-Nakhjuwani by the first publisher in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1999. This assumption is worth consideration and further investigation because the Tabaqat's al-Adnarawi gave information that the title of al-Nakhjuwani book’s is Fawātih al-Maqisat, not Fawātih al-Ilāhiyyah. (Al-Adnarawi, number473, 117).

**Biography of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani**

Orthodox Islamic scholars during the scholastic period left some valuable legacies of intellectual works, for instance explaining the biography of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the Buhjah al-Asrār wa Ma‘dān al-
Anwār by Syaṭnufi, Qalāʿid al-Jawāhir fī Manāqib al-Syaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir by al-Tadifi, Syamsy al-Mafākhir by Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Bahṣyi al-Halbi, and the Khulāṣah al-Mafākhir fī Ikhtīṣār Manāqib al-Syaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir by Abu Asʿad al-Yafiʿi. Yet, unfortunately, in general, these works were written on the basis of myths in Sufi circles, such as the myth that al-Jilani can revive a dead chicken. In my opinion, an irrational myth like this should be avoided.

In the perspective of applicative anthropology, however, myth is not always negative. Myth sometimes has a positive function for transforming the society toward something better. One example in relation to the myths of al-Jilani is the story that he had the strength to wring dirham or gold money (a prize from the corrupt government) until it shattered. However, from the perspective of applicative anthropology, the mythic narrative cannot be taken for granted. Anthropology is not applicable for investigating whether the myth is true or false. Anthropology applicative emphasizes that these myths have a positive function for shaping an anti-corrupt society.

Let us ignore the negative myths and then refer to the empirical data in the review of a biography. Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani was born in the year 470 AH/1077 AD in Jilan, Iran, and died in 561 AH in the Bab al-Azaj, Baghdad. Periods of al-Jilani’s life can be divided into three periods: the first is al-Jilani’s childhood in Kaylan, a region whose inhabitants faithfully followed the Shafiʿi and Hanbali school of thought. This period is counted from 470 AH for his intellectual expedition to Baghdad in 488 AH.

The second period started from 488 AH until 521 AH when al-Jilani studied hadith from Abu Ghalib Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Baqilani, Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Mazhar, Qasim Ali ibn Abu Bayan al-Razi, Abu Talib bin Yusuf, and others. Al-Jilani was also a student of Abu al-Wafa Ali Ibn Aqîl al-Hanbali and Abu al-Khiṭab Mahfuḍ bin Ahmad al-Kalwazani al-Hanbali in the field of fiqh. In the discipline of literature, he studied from Abu Zakariya Yahya al-Tibrizi. His spiritual masters included Abu Jaʿfar Muhammad ibn Ahmad Siraj and Syaykh Hamad ibn Muslim al-Dibas, as well as Qadi Abi Said al-Mubarak bin Ali al-Mukharrami. Meanwhile, those who taught al-Jilani in the discipline of Quranic exegesis were Wafa Ali bin Aqil, Abu al-Kalwadzani Khithab Mahfudh, Abu al-Ghanaim, Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad ibn Yusuf Abu al-Barakat al-Mubarak Hibatullah, and others; all of whom may have influenced his exegesis. According to some biographers, the sciences that interested al-Jilani enormously were
Islamic law of Syafi'i and Hanbali school of thought. Having mastered the fiqh, al-Jilani then completed it with mysticism.

In the third period, al-Jilani played a role as a sufi master by replacing his teacher, al-Mukharrami, who died on 521 AH. Subsequent to this period, al-Jilani was busy with teaching activities and writing several works. Well, it can be estimated that the al-Jilani's commentary was written in this period, between 521 AH until 561 AH.

Al-Jilani lived in a social condition that experienced a multi-dimensional crisis. In the political arena, al-Jilani recognized a theocratic system and government that supported the ambitions of those politicizing religion. It seemed that the government played an arbitrary role. In fact, when arriving in Baghdad for the first time, incisively in 488 AH, al-Jilani observed the despotism of Abd al-Malik, minister of Caliph al-Mustadzhir, who was ratifying the places of sinners, like place for gambling, prostitution, and cafes that sell alcohol. At the same time, al-Jilani felt deeply saddened; he realized that religion as a source of cultural value may be hijacked by certain groups in order to legitimize bad interests.

In the religious sphere, al-Jilani lived in the midst of the people who lost their spirit dimensions of religiosity. Religion was plainly a formality without a soul of which many elements of the community heard the speech and religious sermons at mosques, but ironically, after their ritual activities, they returned to corruption and peculation. Even though ritual prayer was implemented, it still could not protect the public from corruption. Similarly, fasting was also performed, but it was unable to cultivate a sense of solidarity and social sensitivity.

Simultaneously, there many clerics lost their charisma in the eyes of people, so their religious discourses were slightly different from the farce of Abu Nawas. This condition is called by the biographers of al-Jilani as the main factor for the deep disappointment al-Jilani felt. On the contrary, socio-cultural conditions were the motivation for him to build a vision and mission of dakwah oriented to a better moral future. During such socio-cultural conditions, al-Jilani wrote a commentary of al-Qur’an which was projected to reorganize his society. As a consequence, by understanding the socio-cultural background of emergence of al-Jilani’s commentary, we can conclude that the al-Jilani's commentary was written for the purposes of social critique. (Al-Kaylani, 1994:320).
Epistemology of al-Jilani’s Commentary

The al-Jilani’s commentary applies an esoteric approach to interpret the verses of the Quran which combines an inner feeling (zhouq) and an intuition (kasyf). Al-Jilani said, “Let us understand al-Qur’an with our hearts, contemplation, and knowledge from God (mukāsyafah) rather than solely using rational view and estimation”. Based on the sufi approach, the al-Jilani’s commentary was named al-Fawāthih al-Ilāhiyyah wa al-Mafātih al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwādhihah li al-Kalīm al-Qur’āniyyah wa al-Hikām al-Furqāniyyah (the Keys of Divine and Locks of Invisibility Explaining the Verses of Quran and the Difference between Right and Wrong), and became known as a book that describes a dimension of spirituality esoterically (ba‘tin). This dimension then integrated with an exoteric dimension (zāhir) which is reflected by a statement in al-Fatihah interpretation,

"O followers of the religion of Mohammed, should you contemplate the seven seas are included in al-Sab‘ al-Maṣānī. This contemplation is not easy unless your body has cleaned with Shari’a which is understood from Quranic verses, as well as your soul has cleaned with the ethics".

In consonance with al-Jilani, body and soul should be clean equally. It appears that the harmonious combination between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions is paralleled by a combination of Shari‘a and ḥaqīqat. The combination emphasizes that the mystic scholars should still cling to the rule of Islamic law. This is a constructive critique addressed to the sufis who often arbitrarily dismiss Islamic law and justify all things under the guise of Sufism. Al-Jilani’s critique is relevant to overcome the phenomenon of the emergence of new sects, rife in Indonesia as well, where the founders admitted getting mystical inspiration from God, but ironically, they continue to violate the fundamental principles of Islamic law. In contrast, the combination between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions is also a critique for the scripturalists and fundamentalists who claim to understand the rigid perspective of the Shari‘a and yet are trapped on the skin of Shari‘a without diving into the core of the Shari‘a.

The combination between esoteric and exoteric dimensions is a necessity because the al-Qur’an, in al-Jilani’s opinion, has various meaning possibilities. The al-Qur’an, according to him, is like an ocean where there is a variety of diamond jewelry; a metaphorical expression which suggests that the al-Qur’an, as the text, can have various interpretations (multi-interpretive). There are commentators who only understand the literal meaning of verses, such as jurists, as well as
commentators who dive into the inner layers of a substantial meaning, like sufi interpreters.

Nonetheless, Sufi interpreters express different interpretations, because there are variances within the levels obtained, based on intuitions from God. This reveals a relativism that cannot be denied and, therefore, God said, “Wallāţīna jahadū fīnā lanahdiyannahum subulana” (And people who are serious about taking my path, then I will show you various ways for them). The word "subul" is the plural form of “sabīl”. This exposes a “path diversity” (subul) toward God; God guides through the exoteric interpretation of Shari'a, as well as through the esoteric interpretation of Sufism. Seeing this diversity, the al-Jilani’s commentary combines both in order to create the balance between skin and core aspects of Shari'a. (Al-Jilani, 2009: 29-33, 472).

The spirit of relativism in al-Jilani's commentary is a positive value that should be implemented to realize a tolerance and harmony in the world. According to al-Jilani, understanding diversity is a necessary. Even though Islam is one, the understanding about Islam is very diverse. As a result, it would be nice if the diversity can be respected and combined, such as the combination between esoteric and exoteric dimensions. Texts of al-Qur’an have multi interpretations; therefore, Muslims must respect each other and avoid violence. This spiritual attitude suggests that it is not fair for some circles to claim that they have the only truth and that other opinions are false, because “diversity of interpretation is the road (subul) to God”, said al-Jilani.

Unfortunately, there is still a paradox within the conceptual framework of al-Jilani's sufism where he is trapped in exclusivism. The exclusivism is reflected by his antipathy toward rational philosophy and theology. At first al-Jilani appeared as a very pluralistic scholar with multi-interpretive ideas, then at another point, he claimed that the sufis are the owners of a truth authority. According to him, the mutasyābiḥat verses can only be understood by Sufis, not by philosophers and theologians. The Sufis are al-Rāsikhūn, the owners of laduni science, having been supported by the intuition of God. This is a side of al-Jilani's subjectivity that should be avoided.

Now we come to the discussion about a definition of the Quran. According to al-Jilani, the al-Qur’an is “a morality of God revealed to His Prophet”. This definition was constructed by hadith “Takhallaq bi akhlagillah” (let us to emulate the morality of God). Al-Jilani stated, if there is a person who has the morality of God, then he will go to heaven.2 This definition was clarified by “conception of text” of al-
Jilani that illustrated the trend of Sunni theology. When interpreted “Žālika al-Kitābu lā Rayba fihi”, al-Jilani said, “There is no doubt about al-Qur’an that sent from God, in its text or meaning. In the aspect of text, due to its miracle, it cannot be compared by poetry in the field of Balagah. In the aspect of meaning, owing to its information, it includes all the secrets of the unseen which cannot be seen except by Prophet and Sufis”. (Al-Jilani, 2009:44-45).

Al-Jilani's sect inclination is closer to the Sunni doctrine, especially in the concept that the Quran is both the text and its meaning. Nevertheless, theological views about the Quran are wrapped by sufism views, as reflected in the statement of al-Jilani above. The Sunni inclination can also be traced in some of his works that contain the critique toward followers of anthropomorphism (mujassimah) and Mu’tazilite. (Al-Kaylani, 1994:320). Then, in the reading version, al-Jilani goes along with Hafs version, while in the Islamic law al-Jilani adheres to Hanbali and Syafi’i school of thought. Besides that, Asbâb al-Nuzûl is also be concerned by al-Jilani. Unfortunately, the attention of al-Jilani against Asbâb al-Nuzûl, however, is very minimal. (Al-Jilani, 2009: 289,306).

Conclusion

al-Fawâtiḥ al-Ilâhiyyah wa al-Mafâtiḥ al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwâdiḥah li al-Kalîm al-Qur’âniyyah wa al-Hikâm al-Furqâniyyah is a book that is debated by researchers. Some researchers argue that the book is the work of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, while other researchers argue that the book is the work of al-Shaykh Nakhjuwani conducted in the name of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. al-Fawâtiḥ al-Ilâhiyyah wa al-Mafâtiḥ al-Gaybiyyah al-Muwâdiḥah li al-Kalîm al-Qur’âniyyah wa al-Hikâm al-Furqâniyyah is the book which contains the interpretation of the Al-Qur’ân that uses an esoteric approach. This book also combines the esoteric and exoteric approaches to describe the aspects of Islamic law and mysticism.

Endnotes


2 This hadith was suspected by the editors as a false hadith, because, according to Abu Nuaim, in Huliyah al-Awliya, the hadith is a statement of Dhu al-Nun al-Mishr. Yet, this hadith among the Sufis is already accepted widely. Well, if the hadith is a statement of Dhu al-Nun al-Mishr, then it can be assumed that al-Jilani
was indirectly influenced by the doctrine of neo-Platonism, because Dhu Nun al-Mishr known a Sufi from Egypt who is influenced by neo-Platonism.

References

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The board of the editors will treat all the articles fairly by disregarding the race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethical origin, citizenship or political philosophy of the author.

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Any relevant information concerning the data, authors and reviewers are kept confidentially to avoid bias in the process of selecting the articles. Furthermore, all the articles for review are treated as confidential documents and are not be shown or discussed with others except as authorized by the editors.

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To give a valuable comments on the articles to make it easy for the editors to select the appropriate articles for the journal. As for the peer reviewers, they help the editors to build communication with the author.

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The time for the reviewers to collect the articles is allocated by the editors. Under special circumstances, the reviewers need more time or cannot perform the duty, and have the objection or excuse concerning the time, they should notify the editors.

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