

MUHAMMAD AS`AD BUGIS

[Wajo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, 1907-1953]

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Muhammad As`ad was one of the greatest `ulamâ of South Sulawesi (Celebes) in the twentieth century, an educationalist and moderate reformer. His family hailed from the Buginese kingdom of Wajo, and he established South Sulawesi's first modern *madrasa* in Wajo's capital, Sengkang. He is also the author of numerous simple religious texts in the Buginese language, and probably the first Islamic author to use the Buginese rather than the Arabic script for this sort of literature.

As`ad was born in Mecca, into a family of Buginese `ulamâ resident in Mecca. His father Abdur Rasyid and grandfather Abdur Rahman, and his maternal grandfather Guru Terru were well-known `ulamâ originating from Wajo. Guru Terru had left Wajo because of an internal war (Walinga 1980:27-9).

In Mecca As`ad studied with his father, knowing the entire Qur`ân by heart when he was fourteen, and he became *imâm tarâwih* in the Masjid al-Harâm. He continued his studies at the *madrasa* Dâr al-Falâh, where he studied not only religious subjects but also geography, biology, physics, chemistry etc. (Walinga 1980:30, after Ismail 1956). He also attended lectures in the Masjid al-Harâm, "without choosing the teachers for their madhhab or nationality, only looking for their knowledge": `Umar b. Hamdân, Sa`îd al-Yamânî, Hâshim Nâzirîn, Jamâl al-Mâlikî, Hasan al-Yamânî, `Abbâs `Abd al-Jabbâr, Ambo Wellang al-Bûqisî, etc. His biographer Walinga claims that As`ad was given the authority to issue *fatwâs* in Mecca, but it is not entirely clear what this means; he clearly did not become Mecca's Shâfi`î *muftî*.

In 1927 As`ad met with the famous shaykh and political leader of the Sanûsiyya, Ahmad al-Sharîf al-Sanûsî, in Medina and even became his secretary. After a few months, Ahmad al-Sharîf sent him back to Celebes to spread his knowledge there. (A West Javanese kiai who was initiated into the Sanûsiyya by Ahmad al-Sharîf a few years later, was told that Ahmad had earlier despatched a *khalîfa* to South Celebes; there are no indications, however, that As`ad ever taught this *tarîqa*.)

In 1347/1928 As`ad left Mecca for Wajo. He established a good relationship with the ruler of Wajo, La Oddang Datu La Rompong, Arung Peneki (1926-1933), who had a mosque built near As`ad's house. Next to the mosque, another notable, Petta Ennengge,

built him a school, which was named al-Madrasa Wajo al-`Arabiyya al-Islamiyya (M.A.I.). As`ad also established regular communication with the leading `ulamâ throughout South Celebes: Sayyid Mahmud Abdul Jawad in Bone (a former *mufî* of Medina), Abdullah Dahlan (the consul of Muhammadiyah in Makassar), Abdullah Dahlan from Garut, and Ahmad of Bone. At a meeting of leading `ulamâ, convened by the ruler of Bone, As`ad made proposals for coordination of religious education that were unanimously agreed upon.

His own *madrasa* was established in 1930. In the first years only education of the lowest grades was offered (Tahdiriyah, which is roughly equivalent with a kindergarten and the first grade of primary school). In 1932 Ibtidaiyah was added, and in 1935 Tsanawiyah, followed in 1936 by I'dadiyah, higher secondary school. The curriculum was a combination of those of the Dâr al-Falâh and the (Indonesian) Dâr al-`Ulûm al-Dîniyya of Mecca and that of al-Azhar, as followed by As`ad himself and his friends Abdullah Dahlan Garut and Sayyid Ahmad `Afîfî. The subjects taught thus included *tafsîr*, *hadîth*, *fiqh* and *ilmu alat* (Arabic grammar), as well as *akhlâq* (morality), *farâ'id* (inheritance law) and *`arûd* (prosody), besides general subjects such as geography, biology, physics, geometry.

After As`ad's death in 1953, the institution was transformed into a foundation, led by As`ad's disciples Daud Ismail (until 1961) and Yunus Maratan. In 1980 it had 76 branches, with 174 ibtida'iyah madrasas and a number of schools of higher levels (Mattulada 1983:284).

As`ad also wrote numerous books, in Buginese as well as in Arabic. His first works, *Sullam al-diyâna* (in Arabic) and *Izhâr al-haqîqa* (in Buginese) were printed in Makassar (Ujung Pandang) in 1930 and 1931; later books were also printed in Cairo and Mecca. In 1941 he also started a trilingual journal (in Buginese, Malay and Arabic) titled *Al-maw`idat al-hasana*, which however had to suspend publication during the Japanese occupation. This journal published among other things various *fatwâ* issued by As`ad or his disciple M. Yunus Maratan (see Walinga 1980: 49-58). As`ad emerges from it as a moderate reformist, correcting traditional practices and referring more often to the Qur`ân and *hadîth* than to scripture from the classical period. In the debates concerning traditional beliefs and practices, he adopted a moderate standpoint, differentiating between *bid`a mahmûda* ('laudable innovation') and *bid`a dalâla* ('erring innovation'). The speculative mystical doctrine of *wahdat al-wujûd*, as taught in the *tarîqa* Khalwatiyya Sammân (which had and still has numerous adherents in South Sulawesi), constituted in his view *bid`a dalâla*. Not in all respects, however, did he belong to the reformist camp. In 1938 he wrote a brochure in defense of the traditional position that the *khutba* should be read in Arabic, not in the vernacular. This led to a

lively polemic between As`ad and various more reformist `ulamâ, among whom the Minangkabau Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (the father of the famous reformist leader Hamka).

Bibliography:

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