

THE BACKGROUND OF MALAY *KALĀM* WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ISSUE OF THE *ṢIFĀT* OF ALLĀH

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Abstrak

Sifat-sifat Allah merupakan tajuk utama dalam perbincangan Ilmu Kalam yang dibahaskan oleh Mu'tazilah dan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Asy'arī yang kemudiannya telah membina mazhabnya yang tersendiri dalam akidah. Mazhab ini telah mendapat sokongan tokoh-tokoh akidah sepanjang kurun sehinggalah ke hari ini. Artikel ini cuba membincangkan bagaimana doktrin Sifat oleh al-Asy'arī telah diperkembangkan oleh al-Sanūsī melalui doktrin Sifat Dua Puluh yang begitu menarik perhatian ulama'-ulama' al-Azhar Mesir. Doktrin ini mula tersebar ke Alam Melayu apabila ia dipopularkan oleh sebilangan ulama' Melayu bermula dari kurun ke-18 melalui karangan-karangan ilmu kalam mereka.

Kalām is a Qur'anic term which is derived from the speech of Allah (*kalām Allāh*), one of the *ṣifāt* or attributes of Allah mentioned in the Qur'an as Allah addresses His speech to Mūsā (al-Nisā': 164). The rise of *kalām* was due to the problems facing the Islamic faith after the demise of the Prophet, peace be upon him. During the Prophetic era, any question on religious issues could be re-

ferred to the Prophet and his answers were fully accepted by the Muslims. This is to say that the Prophetic era was free from theological disputes because whatever was said by the Prophet was accepted. The issue of *al-qaḍā' wa al-qadar* (predestination), for instance, was not discussed further when the Prophet asked the Muslims not to do so. It was reported that the Prophet simply said that earlier people were destroyed because they debated the issue.

Even in the era of the Caliphs Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb theological differences were not widely discussed. However, *fitnah* (strife) began when the third Caliph Uthmān ibn al-'Affān, was opposed and assassinated. The resulting political and theological disagreements over who was to blame and who should punish them led to the earliest factions in Islam. Among the many groups whose theological ideas were known in the early centuries of Islam were the Mu'tazilites who seem to have been the pioneers of theological discussion. The issues explored by this group drew the attention of later scholars, and have continued to do so up to the present.

In this article we will describe the development of theological discussion, beginning with the Mu'tazilites and proceeding to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490) and then to the Egyptian scholars who developed the ideas of the latter through their commentaries. These commentaries became known in the Malay world through some Malay '*ulamā'* who employed them in their teaching that contributed to make Ash'arite *madhhab* remain dominant in this part of the Muslim world especially in Malaysia.

This article therefore will highlight the role of *kalām* works written by early Muslim scholars, and particularly their teachings about the *ṣifāt*, which became the sources of Malay '*ulamā'* in their writings on *kalām*. Systematic *kalām* discussion on this topic began with the Mu'tazilites, and to these we now turn.

1. Pre-Mu'tazilite *Kalām* and Early Discussion of the Attributes of God

The Divine attributes were the first issue discussed in the history of

kalām in Islam. Many agree that the Qur'anic terms attributed to God which are similar to human attributes such as speech, hand, face and sitting, needed to be interpreted in a way that presented the distinctions of God from created beings. This did not always happen. For example, early theologians such as Hishām ibn al-Hakam and Dāwud al-Juwaribī, were said to believe that God was a body (*jism*) with flesh and blood as well as hands, feet and a heart.¹ He could stand, sit, move and stop.² God also was said to be a diffusing light, shining like a chain of pure silver, and like a perfectly rounded pearl, its height being equal to its width and breadth.³

According to H.A. Wolfson, Islamic discussion on the attributes of God was influenced by the external elements of Judaism, Christianity and Greek philosophy.⁴ He also argues that such influences, especially Christianity, can be detected in the later Mu'tazilite discussion of the matter.⁵ As a result, many '*ulamā*' disagreed with *kalām*, and prohibited Muslims from adopting it on the grounds that it was not originally Islamic. Instead, they simply referred everything ambiguous to the Qur'an, without asking to know the precise meanings of similarities between God and hu-

¹ See 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Wakīl, vol. 1 (Cairo: Muassasah al-Ḥalabī, n.d.), p. 105. Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, trans. A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), pp. 89-90.

² Abū al-Ḥasan Ismā'il al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1963), p. 32. See al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah, 1969), p. 207.

³ Abū Maṣṣūr al-Baghdādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, Part 1, trans. Kate Chambers Seelye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), p. 67. See W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), p. 188.

⁴ Harry Austyn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 112.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112, see M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p. 50.

mans. However, discussions about the attributes became more specific as thinkers belonging to the Mu'tazilite school of thought developed their ideas. In many ways, this group were the founders of *kalām* in Islam.⁶ This applies to the fact that they were the first who employed Greek philosophy in arguing the ideas they held.⁷

2. Mu'tazilism

Kalām was a product of rationality or using intellect in Islam. Its early development owed everything to the Mu'tazilite scholars who dominated Islamic theological development, especially in the third century.⁸ In actuality, the ideas of the earlier Islamic theological schisms, such as the Jabarites, Qadarites and Karramites were the sources from which the Mu'tazilites took their new ideas. Thus, some scholars hold that the Mu'tazilites were Qadarites in new clothes, especially with regard to the idea that a man was the author of his acts.⁹

The advance of Mu'tazilism was due partly to the fact that many prominent scholars during the time subscribed to its principles. Even Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī himself (d. 324 /935) was educated under one of the famous Mu'tazilites, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915).

In fact, the Mu'tazilites built their doctrine on the five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsah*), and mainly *tawḥīd* (the unity of God)

⁶ See Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Tawḥīd li Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 1363/1944), p. 258. See Aḥmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1982), p. 299.

⁷ See al-Ash'arī, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

⁸ For suggested derivations of the name, see Aḥmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islām*, pp. 291-292. M. Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 109. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *I'tiqādāt Firaq al-Muslimīn wa al-Mushrikīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 1402/1982), p. 39.

⁹ A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed, Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1932), p. 60. See Ḥanān al-Fākhūrī and Khalīl al-Jarr, *Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-'Arabiyyah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1982), pp. 149-150.

and 'adl (justice of God).¹⁰ Like all other aspects of their teachings, the Mu'tazilite discussion about the *ṣifāt* can be understood through understanding their concepts of *tawḥīd* and 'adl. They even declared themselves to be the people of Unity and Justice (*ahl al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl*).¹¹

2.1 The Concepts of *Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl*

Of course, *tawḥīd* is the supreme principle of Islamic belief. Everything related to Islam lies under the concept of *tawḥīd* which is the ultimate goal towards which Muslims work in their lives: "*Tawḥīd* is central to Islam and everything Islamic".¹² It is very clear in the Qur'an that Allāh says to Muḥammad, "Say, He is God alone" (*qul huwa Allāh aḥad*) (al-Ikhlāṣ: 1). But the concern of the Mu'tazilites was to stress the unity between the essence of God (*al-dhāt al-ilāhiyyah*) and His attributes. What is the relation between God and His attributes? Or, are the attributes other than God Himself (*hiya ghayruh*)?

According to the Egyptian scholar, Yaḥyā al-Huwaydī the Mu'tazilites tried to purify Allah from having many attributes because, according to them, if Allah had many attributes there would be many gods.¹³ This would be impossible and contradict the concept of the Unity of God they proposed. So they insisted upon statements that made the attributes identical with God's essence, and criticised teachings of contemporaries that suggested anything different.

¹⁰ The other three principles are between two positions (*bayn al-manzilatayn*), Allah will do the best (*al-aṣḥaḥ*) and the commanding of the people to do the good and forbidding from evil (*al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*).

¹¹ See A.S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1947), p. 79.

¹² See for instance, Isma'īl al-Farūqī, *Al-Tawḥīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 1986).

¹³ Yaḥyā al-Huwaydī *Dirāsāt fī 'Ilm al-Kalām wa al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Dār at-Thaqāfah, 1979), p. 112.

In opposition to them, more traditional thinkers chose not to discuss anything about this issue, accepting instead that Allāh alone knows the real meanings of the words, as stated in the Qur'an, nobody knows its interpretation but Allah, *lā ya'lamu ta'wīlahu illā Allāh* (Ali 'Imrān: 7). They accepted the principle of *bilā kayf* "without knowing how".¹⁴ On the issue of God sitting on the throne (*al-istiwā' 'alā al-'arsh*), for instance, Malīk ibn Anas (d. 175/789) said, "The sitting is known, how it is unknown, believing in it is an obligation and questioning that is an innovation".¹⁵ To some extent, even some earlier scholars were reported to have said, "Whoever moves his hand when reading the verse, 'I created by my two hands' (Ṣād: 75), his moving hand should be cut off".¹⁶ They, namely *ahl al-Sunnah* and *aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth* (people of the Ḥadīth) completely disagreed with understanding the hand as a man's hand, etc.¹⁷

The most famous figure who stood against the reasoning championed by the Mu'tazilites was Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855). He is regarded as the leader of *aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth*, who opposed any kind of intellectual reasoning championed by his contemporary *aṣḥāb al-ra'y*. His thought and attitude can be understood from his famous statement that "We have to believe literally and we witness in our heart".¹⁸

On the other hand, the Mu'tazilites followed the principle that Allāh is not like anything, as clearly stated in the Qur'an, *laysa*

¹⁴ See Al-Ash'arī, ed. Ritter, *op.cit.*, p. 211, M.Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, p. 66.

¹⁵ Al-Shahrastānī, *op.cit.*, p. 93. See Ṣalāh 'Abd al-'Alīm, *al-'Aqīdah fi Daw' al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Azhar, 1402/1982), p. 82.

¹⁶ Al-Shahrastānī, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁷ Al-Ash'arī (ed. Ritter), *op.cit.*, pp. 211, 217 and 290.

¹⁸ See H. Laoust, "Ahmad B. Hanbal", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, n. edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), p. 275. The period of the famous tribulation which occurred on Ibn Hanbal was known as the year of *miḥnah*. He stood firmly in opposing the statement of the Mu'tazilites, with the support of al-Ma'mūn, that the Qu'ran was created (*makhlūq*), it was not eternal (*qadīm*).

kamithlihi shay', and argued the intellect should be fully exercised in order to maintain it. In doing so, they stressed that God is absolutely One and His attributes are identical with Him. To them, Allāh is living by His *Dhāt* not by a life which is superadded to it in the way the al-Ash'arites taught. Therefore, they denied the idea of God having the attributes because, again, many attributes mean that there are many gods which was absolutely impossible, religiously and intellectually.

To them, the divine attributes mentioned in the Qur'an are to be understood metaphorically (*al-isti'ārah*) arguing that hand means favour (*ni'mah*), face means His Being and so on.¹⁹ They fully exercised their intellect to understand such attributes. Thus, al-Fākhūrī and al-Jarr argued that the Mu'tazilites did not reject the idea of Divine attributes as far as their being mentioned in the Qur'an, but they somehow denied that they were eternal or superadded to Allah.²⁰ To say this is contradictory to their principal belief with regard to the nature of the oneness of God they hold.

The Mu'tazilites believed that another principle of *al-'adl* (Justice) did not mean anything other than that God gives freedom to humans to act and to be fully responsible for their own actions. This was in response to the idea championed by the Jabarites that man is forced into exercising his own actions. In other words, there is no choice for man to do what he wants to do. The Mu'tazilites argued that such a view would attribute the acts of wrongdoing to Allah which could not be so. It is stated clearly in the Qur'an, Allāh does not like any act of wrongdoing.²¹

We can see that the ideas raised by the Mu'tazilites became the subjects of theological discussions argued by al-Ash'arī and his

¹⁹ Al-Ash'arī, ed. Ritter, *op.cit.*, p. 195. Henry Corbin, *Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah*, trans. Nuṣayr Marwah and Ḥasan Qubays (Beirut and Paris: Manshūrāt Huwaydāt, 1983), p. 184.

²⁰ Al-Fākhūrī and al-Jarr, *op.cit.*, pp. 146-147.

²¹ In fact, the Rafidites had the idea that everything bad or evil must be coming from God. This idea also derived from understanding the verses such as "Say nothing shall even happen to us except what Allāh has ordained for us" (al-Tawbah: 51).

followers known as the Ash'arites (al-Ashā'irah). This is to say that the important role of the Mu'tazilites was in Islamic theological argumentation, to the extent that there would have been no *kalām* without Mu'tazilism. In other words, the later discussions on *kalām* were concerned with the issues especially raised by the Mu'tazilites. The Ash'arite scholars, in turn faced these theological challenges over centuries even until the present time.

The ideas of the Mu'tazilites were fully argued by Ash'arite scholars most of whom attacked the ideas classifying them as misleading and dangerous to the Islamic faith. Perhaps from this point of view they developed their own teaching on *kalām* as we can see it today. In fact, the ideas of the Mu'tazilites did not enjoy acceptance among the Malays at that time as their ideas were criticized by the later Malay '*ulamā*' especially Shaykh Dāwud al-Faṭānī (d. 1847), in their works on *kalām*.

3. Ash'arism

Ash'arite *kalām* emerged as a result of the reasoning of the Mu'tazilites and the strict interpretation of the Scriptures championed by the traditionalists led by the prominent Muslim scholar Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal whose *madhhab* known as Hanbalism was one of the four *madhāhib* which spread and developed in the Muslim world continuing even until today". "Credits go to al-Ash'arī who takes care about both intellect and faith without intermediate".²² This excellent approach tended to invite support from the great scholars through the centuries known as the Ash'arite theologians (al-'Ashā'irah).

Consequently, the influence of al-Ash'arī spread after his death to many parts of the Muslim world and by many ways, including the Muslim governments and the teaching '*ulamā*' and their students. In the Malay world Ash'arism became dominant where many works on Ash'arite *kalām* were available and spread in the region with the role of Malay '*ulamā*' through their traditional Islamic learning centres known as *pondoks*.

²² Corbin, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

3.1. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī who died in 324/935, should be considered the reviver (*al-mujaddid*) of Islam of his century, according to some commentators.²³ According to I. Goldziher, al-Ash‘arī’s works and ideas posed a wall stopping the ideas of the Mu‘tazilites from spreading widely in the Muslim world.²⁴ Goldziher says that “The Mu‘tazila held their heads high till God sent al-Ash‘arī and he made them withdraw into sesame shells”.²⁵ Unfortunately, little is known about al-Ash‘arī’s ideas other than those which were transmitted by his followers. Of the many works he wrote, only a few minor ones have survived.

3.2 Al-Ash‘arī’s Life and Works

Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Isma‘īl al-Ash‘arī was born in Baṣrah in 260/873 and died in Baghdād in 324/935. He was a grand child of Abū Musā al-Ash‘arī, one of the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Abū al-Ḥasan began his studies with the Mu‘tazilite scholars especially ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī under whom he studied until he was forty. His intellectual ability was recognized by the latter as he reportedly used his student al-Ash‘arī to represent him and debate on his behalf. It should be mentioned that al-Jubbā‘ī’s son, Abū Hāshim, was a friend of al-Ash‘arī also studying under al-Jubbā‘ī.

One day al-Ash‘arī went to the mosque and announced the following: “I am Abū al-Ḥasan who said that the Qur’an was created, that Allah will not be seen by the eyes, and that I myself am the doer of bad actions. Now I am repenting from holding the

²³ See M.Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 306. According to a sound Ḥadīth of the Prophet (peace be upon Him) Allah will send in every one hundred years a man who is going to renew the affair of His religion (*Inna Allāh yab‘athu ‘alā kulli mi‘ati sanatin man yujaddidu amra dīnih*). It had been named for every century after the death of the Prophet. Among them are ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, al-Shāfi‘ī, al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, who represented their own century they lived.

²⁴ Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andrew and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 106.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, see Tritton, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

Mu'tazilite faith and I will try to explain their mistakes as well as their falsehood".²⁶ After this announcement, al-Ash'arī distributed his book that was the first book written on the faith based on the Qur'an, Sunnah and the consensus of the Companions (*ijmā' al-Ṣahābah*).²⁷

With regard to the reasons he left the Mu'tazilites, many scholars seem to tell the story that Abū al-Ḥasan debated with his teacher 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī about the concept of *al-aṣḥaḥ* (Allah will do the best) and was not convinced by his teacher's explanation on the issue.²⁸ On the other hand, it was also said that Abū al-Ḥasan received the truth in his dream as Allāh inspired him to leave the Mu'tazilites due to their misguidance.²⁹

In fact, there were three main issues in which al-Ash'arī disagreed with the Mu'tazilites; the creation of the Qur'an (*khalq al-Qur'ān*), the vision of Allah (*ru'yat Allāh*) and the freedom of man's actions (*al-kasb*). These three issues were widely discussed at this time and continued to be the main subjects discussed by the Ash'arīte '*ulamā'* later. Among the Ash'arītes was the Maghrib scholar, 'Abd Allāh 'Umar al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1486), whose doctrine of the attributes of God was to have influenced many '*ulamā'* in the Malay world. He was considered by many researchers as the last scholar within the Ash'arī network after 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-'Ījī (d. 756/1355) and al-Jurjānī who died in 816/1413.³⁰

Al-Ash'arī wrote several books. Some reported that he wrote

²⁶ Dāwud bin 'Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī, *al-Durr al-Thamīn* (Per. al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), p. 3; Ḥamūdah Gharābah, *al-Ash'arī* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Risālah, n.d.), p. 61.

²⁷ Dāwud al-Faṭānī, *al-Durr al-Thamīn*, p. 4.

²⁸ See for instance, Nazlī Ismā'īl, the Egyptian professor, in her book, *al-Tamhīd li 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Wahbah, 1984), pp. 186-187, tells us that she knew the story when she was a student in Cairo. Even many *Jāwī kitābs* tell the story. See for examples, *al-Durr al-Thamīn*, *Ward al-Zawāhir* and *'Aqīdat al-Nāḥīn* the books that we refer to in this study.

²⁹ See M.Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 304-305. Gharābah, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-63.

³⁰ See Corbin, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

more than ninety books, or even more than three hundred books.³¹ But unfortunately, as we remarked earlier, only a few of his major works have survived. They are *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, *al-Ibānat ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* and *al-Luma’*. One of the most important issues he discussed was the attributes of God.

3.3 Al-Ash‘arī Ideas about the Attributes of God

Al-Ash‘arī’s ideas concerning the divine attributes or the *ṣifāt* of Allah are a reaction to those of the Mu‘tazilites. According to al-Ash‘arī, Allah is Powerful, Knowing, Living, Seeing and Speaking through attributes of Power, Knowledge, Life, Hearing, Sight and Speech. These attributes are superadded to His Essence (*Dhāt*). In this he completely differs from the Mu‘tazilites who said God’s attributes are completely identical with His Essence. It is impossible to distinguish Allāh from any of His attributes. For instance, Allāh is Knowing with His Knowledge and Allāh and His Knowledge are not the same thing unless we may say “O Knowledge of Allah” (*yā ‘ilm Allāh*) instead of “O Allah” (*ya Allāh*).³²

Al-Ash‘arī argued his ideas on the basis that everything relating to Allāh is uncreated. In arguing this, he referred his ideas to Qur’anic verses. This can be seen, for instance, when saying about the issue of the *kalām* of Allah. He simply referred to the Qur’an which is the real *kalām* of Allah arguing that it is uncreated or eternal, just as Allāh is. The verse of the Qur’an relevant to this context is:

“*Whatsoever is on it (the earth) will perish, and the Face of your Lord full of Majesty and Honour will remain forever*” (al-Raḥmān: 26-27).

On the possibility of seeing Allah on the day of judgement, al-Ash‘arī referred to the verse:

³¹ See al-Fākhūrī and al-Jarr, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

³² Aḥmad Maḥmūd Ṣubḥī, *fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām Dirāsāt Falsafiyah li Arā’ al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, vol. 2 (al-Ashā‘irah) (Beirut: Dār al-Naḥḍah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1985), pp. 62-63.

“Some faces, that day will beam looking towards their Lord” (al-Qiyamah: 22-23).

The Mu‘tazilites argued that it is impossible, rationally, to see Allah in this world or the hereafter. To them, if Allah is visible it means that He is bodily or in a place, which is absolutely impossible. With regard to the issue of man’s actions, good or bad, al-Ash‘arī held that everything happened within the Will and Power of God. It is wrong to say that the man is the real author of his bad actions as argued by the Mu‘tazilites. In the Qur’an Allah says,

“While Allah has created you and what you make!” (al-Şāffāt: 96).

In fact, al-Ash‘arī reacted to the growing theological issues of his time, claiming that the Mu‘tazilite ideas were nothing more than reasoning. In particular, he denied their ideas about the attributes of God, and said that they were not identical with his Essence.

3.4 Al-Ash‘arī’s Major Disciples

Of course, the continuation of any scholar’s ideas depends on his surviving works or his disciples, who teach what they have learnt. According to Muşţafā ‘Abd al-Rāziq, the growing importance of al-Ash‘arī’s teachings over the centuries was due to the influential works of such prominent *mutaqaddimīn* as Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and al-Imām al-Ĥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), and *muta‘akhhirīn* as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), al-Bayḍāwī (d. 691/1286) and ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-‘Ījī (d. 750/1405).³³ The teachings of al-Ash‘arī continued to develop in the later period through the works of these celebrated figures to whom most Sunnī theologians have referred.

Unfortunately, al-Ash‘arī’s immediate disciples are not well known. The first major theologian who is recognised as an Ash‘arite is al-Bāqillānī. After him well-known followers of al-Ash‘arī’s teachings include al-Juwaynī, his great pupil Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and al-Rāzī. All the theologians men-

³³ ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *op.cit.*, p. 294.

tioned have left their works and they are available up to the present time.

Through these and other scholars, the ideas of al-Ash'arī continued to be promoted through the centuries. The most important Ash'arite for Malay *kalām* is an intellectual descendent of these scholars, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sanūsī, who lived in the fifteenth century. He is regarded by the Egyptian scholar Ibrāhīm Madkūr as the most important North African Ash'arite after Ibn Tumart (524/1130).³⁴ Madkūr remarks that al-Sanūsī was influenced by al-Ash'arī as well as by al-Bāqillāni and al-Juwaynī.³⁵ So we can find the combination of the ideas of those great scholars in the works of al-Sanūsī.

4. The Sanūsīyyah

The teaching of al-Ash'arī as had been developed by the great scholars as stated above drew attention from the scholar al-Sanūsī living in al-Maghrib (now Algeria), who then proposed the doctrine of the twenty attributes of Allah through his treatise *Umm al-Barāhīn* or "the mother of the proofs". The doctrine then enjoyed special attention among al-Azhar scholars whom we shall discuss later as we consider them as al-Sanūsīyyin in Egypt. So, al-Sanūsī became a very important figure in the fifteenth century and through him al-Ash'arī's ideas developed and spread to Egypt, Mecca and then to the Malay world.

4.1 Al-Sanūsī's Life and Works

Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490) was born in Tlemcen (Tilimsān), now in western Algeria, in 832 or 838/1435-6. His name in full is Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. 'Umar b. Shu'ayb al-Sanūsī al-Ḥasanī. According to Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Ghimārī, al-Sanūsī was not only a theologian but also a jurist, *mufasssir*, *muhaddith*, and Sufi. This is evident from the titles of his

³⁴ Ibrāhīm Madkūr, *Fī al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah Manhaj wa Taṭbīqih*, vol. 2, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), p. 54.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

works, of which eighteen are known, through his commentators.³⁶ The Egyptian scholar, Aḥmad Muḥammad Al-Suḥaymī, whom we shall discuss below, told that he knew of forty-five works written by al-Sanūsī.³⁷

Among his most important theological works are *'Aqīdat ahl al-Tawḥīd al-Mukhrija min zulumāt al-Jahl wa Ribqat al-Taqlīd* or *'Aqīdat Tawḥīd al-Kubrā*, *'Umdat Ahl al-Tawfīq wa al-Tasdīd* and *'Aqīdat ahl al-Tawḥīd al-Suḡhrā* or *Umm al-Barāhīn*.³⁸ Regarding al-Sanūsī's personality and scholarly excellence, al-Suḥaymī describes him as follows: "His excellent scholarship in all the sciences made him to be acknowledged by his master. It happened that he was kept far away from the public to save him from envy until he was thirty. There is nothing comparable on the earth to his work in knowing Allah by sound proofs and on the basis of the Sunnah and Qur'an. His treatise was read by the masters every Friday".³⁹ In fact, this day is the head of the days (*sayyid al-ayyām*) in the Muslim calendar.

In addition, Majid Fakhry remarks that al-Sanūsī "was influenced by signs of the shaking-up of values in the society of his

³⁶ Muṣṭafa Muḥammad al-Ghimārī, *Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Algeria: al-Dirāsah al-Waṭaniyyah li al-Kitāb, 1989), pp. 14-15. Among his works are; *Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Sharḥ Muqaddimat al-Jibri wa al-Muqābalah li Ibn al-Yasmin*, *Sharḥ Jumal al-Khunfī fī al-Mantiq*, *Tafsīr Surat Sad wa ma ba'dahā min al-Ṣuwar*, *'Aqīdat ahl al-Tawḥīd wa tusammā al-'Aqīdah al-Kubrā*, *Mukammil Ikmal al-Ikmal fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Mujarrabat fī al-Ṭibb*, *al-'Aqīdah al-Wuṣṭā wa tusammā al-Sanūsiyyah al-Wuṣṭā*, *Nuṣrat al-Faqīr fī al-Rad 'alā Abī al-Hasan al-Ṣaḡhīr*, *Umm al-Barāhīn wa tusamma al-'Aqīdah al-Suḡhrā aw al-Sanūsiyyah al-Suḡhrā*, *Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn*, *Sharḥ Kalimatay al-Tawḥīd al-Muqaddimat fī al-'Aqā'id*, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, *Sharḥ al-Ujrumiyyah*, *Sharḥ li Ummayyah al-Jazā'ir*, *Sharḥ Suḡhrā al-Suḡhrā* and *al-Istīlāhāt al-Sūfiyyah*.

³⁷ Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Suḥaymī, *Kitāb al-Muqtadī bi Sharḥ al-Hudhūdī 'alā Umm al-Barāhīn* (Makkah: al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyyah, 1304/1886), p. 2.

³⁸ Majid Fakhry, "al-Sanūsī" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 9, n. edition, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 21.

³⁹ Al-Suḥaymī, *op.cit.*, pp. 2-3.

time vis-a-vis the state, religion and cultural traditions, with the faith confronted by new problems".⁴⁰ This was the situation that influenced al-Sanūsī to write about the issues he did, since the majority of thinkers of the time tended to keep the ideas of al-Ash'ari in their traditional form without changing them.⁴¹

As far as *kalām* being a means to defend the faith is concerned,⁴² Muslims during the time of al-Sanūsī, in the tenth/fifteenth century, remained open to the Mu'tazilite influences. This is why every time he mentioned the Mu'tazilites, al-Sanūsī attacked them and prayed for Allah to destroy them.⁴³ Even in *Jawharat al-Tawhīd*, the book that spread to the Malay world, its author, Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī, considered the Mu'tazilites as heretics and the curse of Allah is upon them.⁴⁴ This kind of harsh criticism of the Mu'tazilites seems to have influenced some Malay 'ulamā', in their works, as they repeated the same type of criticism. Shaykh Dawūd al-Faṭānī, for instance, once said that "all the Mu'tazilite people became humiliated".⁴⁵ The Mu'tazilites were branded as an innovating group dangerous to the Islamic faith. Because of this approach and harsh criticism perhaps the Mu'tazilite ideas ceased to spread and develop in the Malay region.

Al-Sanūsī explained the creed in a very simple way in *Umm al-Barāhīn*, in order to make it easily memorized and understood

⁴⁰ See Fakhry, "al-Sanūsī", p. 21.

⁴¹ Al-Ghimārī, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-8.

⁴² *Kalām* was defined by Muslim scholars as a means to defend the Islamic faith by using intellectual proof. See for instance, al-Ījī in his book, *al-Mawāqif fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*. Ibn Khaldūn says that the science of *kalām* consists of arguments to defend the articles of faith by using intellectual proofs against those innovators deviating from the faith of *al-Salaf* and *ahl al-Sunnah*. Cf. al-Jārr and al-Fakhūrī, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

⁴³ See al-Ghimārī, *op.cit.*, p. 13. According to al-Dasūqī, one of his commentators, al-Sanūsī had two opponents named al-Iqbānī, a Mu'tazilite, and Ibn Zikr.

⁴⁴ Al-Laqqānī, *Jawharat al-Tawhīd*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ *Al-Durr al-Thamīn*, p. 4.

by ordinary students.⁴⁶ However, Syed Dawilah says that “though the work of *Umm al-Barāhīn* is small in size, the arguments it presents before the reader are far-reaching and highly philosophical”.⁴⁷ Further, he argues that the lucidity and comprehensiveness of the work contributed to making it the official doctrine on the subject in the Malay Peninsular”.⁴⁸ The importance of the treatise lies in its simple discussion of the attributes of Allah, which he presents in a much more organised form than others before him. We will see below how al-Sanūsī introduced his book as a book providing the teaching of al-Ash‘arī’s *‘aqīdah*.

4.2 Al-Sanūsī’s Ideas About the Attributes of God

In *Umm al-Barāhīn*, before discussing the attributes of God, al-Sanūsī stresses the two important things that should be known: firstly, that there are three rules of reason (*al-ḥukm al-‘aqlī*), the necessary, the impossible and the permissible; secondly, that it is necessary for every single Muslim to know what is necessary, impossible and permissible for Allah.⁴⁹ Here, the notion of *al-ḥukm al-‘aqlī* is presented by al-Sanūsī as a guide-line in understanding issues relating to Allah. This means that every single Muslim or *al-mukallaf*, who reaches the age of puberty, must follow the traditional teachings as a religious obligation. Al-Sanūsī seems to have successfully influenced the Muslims about his teaching on the basis of an obligation to read and study even to memorize it.

Al-Sanūsī begins his discussion about *kalām* by talking about *taqlīd* (blind imitation) which is the opposite of *al-naẓar* (thinking or observing). He says that the first obligation is *al-naẓar* according to the group consisting of Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Syed Muḥammad Dawilah Syed Idrus, *The Role of Kitāb Jawi in the Development of Islamic Thought in the Malay Archipelago with special Reference to Umm al-Barāhīn and the Writings on the Twenty Attributes*, PhD Thesis (Edinburgh: the University of Edinburgh, 1992), p. 241.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁴⁹ Al-Sanūsī, *Matn al-Sanūsiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā‘ah al-Miriyyah, n.d.), pp. 1-2.

all the Sunnī scholars, such as al-Imām al-Ḥaramayn, who said that the first obligation is an intention to do *al-naẓar* and al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī, who said that the first obligation is to start *al-naẓar*. At the same time, al-Sanūsī disagrees with the Mu‘tazilites for saying that the first stage is to doubt (*al-shakk*) instead of to think or to observe. To him, this is wrong because it places Allāh in doubt.⁵⁰

But al-Imām al-Ghazālī also had the same statement that the *shakk* (doubt) can lead to the truth and reality (*al-shakk muwaṣṣil ilā al-ḥaqq wa al-ḥaqīqah*) on the ground that when someone was in doubt about something he or she would begin to see and think about that in order to know. But the case here is about the word *al-shakk* itself that sounds a doubtfulness in truth knowing that the word “thinking” or *tafkīr* was said repeatedly in the Qur’an and the Ḥadīth. Whatever is the case, Islam calls people all the time to think or *al-naẓar* and thus, al-Sanūsī, who actually based his ideas on the Qur’an and Sunnah, supports the idea of *al-naẓar* which is neither blind imitation nor doubt.

Even more than that, al-Sanūsī regards *al-naẓar* as an obligation, and argues against all the ideas that support blind *taqlīd* as a principle in Islamic ‘*aqīdah*. After establishing this clear understanding, al-Sanūsī says that one can proceed to know the twenty attributes of Allah. On this he says:

It is necessary for Our Lord the Exalted to have twenty attributes; they are Existence, Eternity, Permanence, Difference from all the created, Self-Subsistence as He has no need of any place or any specifier (*mukhaṣṣis*), Oneness meaning He has no need of any partner in His Being nor in His attributes, nor in His acts. The first of these six attributes is *nafsiyyah* (personal), which is Existence (*al-wujūd*), while the five others are *salbiyyah* (negative). Then, it is necessary for Allāh to have seven attributes which are known as *ṣifāt al-ma‘ānī* (the attributes of Ideal Realities); they are Power and Will which are associated with possibilities (*al-mumkināt*), Knowledge which is associated with all necessary, possible and impossible things, Life which is not associated with anything, Hear-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28

ing and Sight which are associated with all things existent (*al-mawjūdāt*), and Speech, which is associated with what is associated with whatever Knowledge connects (*muta'alliqātuhu*). Then they are seven attributes known as *ṣifāt ma'nawīyyah* (the attributes of Ideal Modalities) which are necessary (*mulāzimah*); these are that He is Powerful, Willing, Knowing, Living, Hearing, Seeing and Speaking. The twenty attributes which are opposite to these are impossible for Allāh.⁵¹

As this text shows, al-Sanūsī arranged the attributes in a very systematic and simple way. Firstly, he makes clear that there are twenty attributes of Allāh which should be known. This statement was new and very significant for the Muslims, since these twenty attributes had never been listed before. Muslims immediately accepted his text to the extent that they chose to make it something to be studied and memorised in their basic teaching of Islam.

Secondly, he divides the attributes into *naṣfiyyah*, *salbiyyah*, *ma'ānī* and *ma'nawīyyah*. According to Fakhry, al-Sanūsī was influenced in this by the works of al-Juwaynī, especially with regard to his ideas of *naṣfiyyah* (personal/consubstantial) attributes and *ma'nawīyyah* (ideal modalities/qualitative). Fakhry further says that the additional seven divine attributes (*kawnuhu Qādiran, Murīdan, 'Āliman, Ḥayyan, Samī'an, Baṣīran, Mutakalliman*) came originally from al-Ghazālī through *al-Iqtisād fī al-'itiqād*.⁵²

Mohd. Nor Ngah, the Malay scholar, however, says that of the twenty attributes presented by al-Sanūsī, thirteen were taken from al-Ash'arī and the remaining seven attributes were taken from al-Imām al-Juwaynī and al-Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī.⁵³ Whatever the case, the influence of both al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī on al-Sanūsī's doc-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. I have referred to the two English translations by Frederick J. Barny, "The Creed of al-Sanūsī", *The Muslim World* 23, January 1933, pp. 48-51, and Omar Awang, "The *Umm al-Barāhīn* of al-Sanūsī", *Nusantara* 2, July 1972 (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia), pp. 159-161.

⁵² Fakhry, "al-Sanūsī", p. 21.

⁵³ Mohd Nor Ngah, *Kitab Jawi: Islamic Thought of the Malay Muslim Scholars* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), p. 10.

trine is clear. Generally, al-Sanūsī's discussion about the attributes is very simple and brief. Fakhry notes that al-Sanūsī wanted the people to have a simplified access to God, leaving for an elite (*al-khāṣṣāh*) the possibility of a deeper study of the principles of religion, a theme which he often takes up with his pupils and in his works, notably in his division of knowledge into two branches, an external (*zāhir*) one and an esoteric (*bāṭin*) one, for him the truest and noblest knowledge.⁵⁴

Several important commentaries on the *Umm al-Barāhīn* were later made by prominent Azhar scholars in Egypt. Among them were Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī, Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Suḥaymī, Maṣūr al-Hudhudī, 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī, and Abū 'Arafah al-Dasūqī. Through them al-Sanūsī's influence remained strong since they presented al-Ash'arī's *aqīdah* in a very simple way as we can see in the following discussion. But first we have to examine how al-Sanūsī's work which had such strong influences locally reached Egypt and then spread to other parts of the Muslim world.

4.3 The Sanūsīyyah in the Muslim World

4.3.1 In the Maghrib

Al-Sanūsī was considered as the renewer of Islam (*al-mujaddid*) by the contemporary Maghrib scholars. This means that he was an influential figure especially in al-Maghrib. As we previously stated, he was a great scholar in the most important Islamic sciences such as *tafsīr*, *kalām*, *Ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and Sufism by which he was considered to be the renewer of Islam in his century. According to *Mu'jam al-A'lām al-Jazā'iri*, he had several students including Ibn al-Ḥajjaj al-Yabdari, Ibn 'Abbās al-Ṣaghīr, Ibn Sa'ad and Abū al-Qāsim al-Zawāwī.⁵⁵ Although these scholars were his immediate students, unfortunately, we do not know them except by name.

⁵⁴ Fakhry, "al-Sanūsī", p. 21.

⁵⁵ See *Mu'jam al-A'lām al-Jazā'iri min Ṣadr al-Islām Ḥatā Muntāṣif al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī, 1971), p. 290.

4.3.2 In Egypt

The works of al-Sanūsī quickly reached Cairo in Egypt. Perhaps we can assume that it was transmitted by pilgrims from al-Maghrib to Mecca. Under the subject of "Al-Azhar", J. Jomier tells us that many Maghribi pilgrims stopped over in Egypt on their way to Mecca.⁵⁶

Al-Sanūsī's doctrine on the twenty attributes based on al-Ash'arī *madhhab* attracted a group of al-Azhar scholars who wrote their commentaries on his *Umm al-Barāhīn* and *'Aqīdah al-Kubrā*. We can see the influence of al-Sanūsī in Egypt through these commentaries which eventually spread to Mecca inviting a Malay scholar living there in the eighteenth century to translate it into Malay for the first time. Significantly, it began then to influence the later Malay '*ulamā*' especially Shaykh Dāwud and the other Mecca educated '*ulamā*'.

The first al-Azhar scholar in this context is Ibrāhīm Burhān al-Dīn al-Laqqānī (d. 1041/1631), who contributed a commentary on al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn* entitled *Matn Jawharat al-Tawhīd*. Unfortunately, little about him has been written so far. Montgomery Watt writes that:

He was a professor at the university of al-Azhar in Cairo, and belonged to the Malikite legal school. He is remembered for a creed in verse called *al-Jawhara*, which has been the basis of some well-known commentaries, and is similar in form to the short creed of al-Sanūsī. He died in 1631 A.D. on his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca, and was succeeded as professor by his son 'Abd al-Salām al-Laqqānī (d. 1668 A.D.), who wrote a commentary on *al-Jawhara*.⁵⁷

The *matn* is a poem which paraphrases al-Sanūsī's writing about the attributes of Allah.⁵⁸ Ibrāhīm Madkūr comments,

⁵⁶ J.Jomier, "Al-Azhar", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, n. edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), p. 814.

⁵⁷ M.Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, p. 140.

⁵⁸ In the traditional Islamic learning system, memorization is compulsory.

“Ash‘arī’s dogma was presented in such ways in order to be easily memorised and remembered as was done by Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī (1040/1631)”.⁵⁹ Al-Laqqānī more or less repeats what al-Sanūsī says. His treatise became very popular, presumably because it was brief and could easily be memorised.

Ibrāhīm Al-Laqqānī’s son, ‘Abd Salām al-Laqqānī (d. 1079/1668) wrote his commentary on his father’s *Jawharah* entitled *Ithāf al-Murīd bi Jawharat al-Tawhīd*. He finished this on 20 Ramaḍān 1047 (1637 A.D.). The *Ithāf al-Murīd* is important for us because many Malay ‘*ulamā*’ such as Shaykh Dāwud seemingly referred to it in their works on *kalām*.

In *Ithāf al-Murīd*, ‘Abd al-Salām begins by discussing the issue of *taqlīd*, (imitation) mentioning the view of earlier scholars from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī onwards. Then he goes on to discuss the attributes of God. ‘Abd al-Salām lists the *ṣifāt* as follow: *ṣifah nafsiyyah* (*wujūd*), *ṣifāt salbiyyah* (*qidam, baqā’*, *mukhālafātuhu li al-ḥawādith* and *qiyāmuhu bi nafsih*), *ṣifāt thubūtiyyah* (‘*ilm*, *qudrah* and *irādah*), *salbiyyah* (*waḥdāniyyah*), *ṣifāt al-ma‘ānī* (*kawnuhu qādiran*, *kawnuhu murīdan*, *kawnuhu ‘āliman*). These three attributes are impossible without the two attributes of life (*al-ḥayāh*), so He is Living (*kawnuhu ḥayyān*), and He is Speaking (*kawnuhu mutakalliman*).⁶⁰ Further, Allāh is Hearing and Watching but not as humans do.⁶¹

The *Ithāf* was the subject of a commentary entitled *Sharḥ al-Jawharah* by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Amīr who said that he finished his work on 22 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1185/1771.⁶² This *Hāshiyah* of al-Amīr on ‘Abd al-Salām’s commentary (*Ithāf al-*

⁵⁹ Madkūr, *op.cit.*, pp. 54-55.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Salām, *Ithāf al-Murīd li Jawharat al-Tawhīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Tibā‘ah, n.d.), pp. 70-84.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶² See Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Amīr, *Hāshiyah ‘alā Sharḥ ‘Abd al-Salām bin Ibrāhīm al-Mālīkī li Jawharat al-Tawhīd li al-Imām al-Laqqānī* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.), p. 167.

Murīd) was very popular among Malay traditional 'ulamā', especially in the *pondoks*.

A further commentary on the *Ithāf* was made by Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī (d. 1277/1860), entitled *Hāshiyat al-Tuḥfah 'alā Kitāb Jawharat al-Tawḥīd*. A further well-known commentary, published in Egypt and influential in the Malay world, is by Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr al-Hudhudī. 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī (d. 1236/1820), who in turn wrote a commentary, says briefly as follows:

I, 'Abd Allāh ibn Hijāzī well-known as al-Sharqāwī, would like to tell you that some friends have asked me to write a commentary on al-Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr al-Hudhudī. He came from Arab al-Hadhadah, one of the Egyptian tribes centering in the province of al-Buḥayrah".⁶³

This commentary can be found in the margin of al-Sharqāwī's commentary entitled *al-Sharqāwī 'alā al-Hudhudī 'alā al-Sanūsīyyah* (al-Sharqāwī on al-Hudhudī on Sanūsīsm). Of course, al-Sanūsīyyah is *Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn* of al-Sanūsī. Nothing more than this information is known about him (al-Hudhudī). This commentary by al-Hudhudī is very brief compared with al-Sharqāwī's 140-page commentary. With regard to the twenty attributes of Allah, al-Hudhudī says:

The attributes of Allah are not only twenty because His Perfection is unlimited, but also because Allah will not command us (to know the attributes) except to the extent we are able to know (him) by proof (*dalīl*).” He further says: “The Existence (*al-wujūd*) is a *ṣifah thubūtiyyah* which cannot be characterised by existence (*wujūd*) or non-existence ('*adam*) because both are two kinds of states (*anwā' al-aḥwāl*). The *ṣifah thubūtiyyah* is a necessary state for the essence (*dhāt*) as long as the essence is not caused by a cause (*mu'allalah bi 'illah*). *Ma'ānī* and *salbiyyah* are not considered *thubūtiyyah* because they are not states. *Ma'nawiyyah* are not so because they are

⁶³ See 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī, *al-Sharqāwī 'alā al-Hudhudī* (Penang: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), p. 2.

caused by *ma'ānī*. For instance, his being Powerful (*Qadīr*) is caused by *al-ma'ānī*, i.e., Power (*qudrah*)".⁶⁴

Thus *ma'nawiyah* and *ma'ānī* are inseparable.

On the relationship between the Existent and the essence, he says that the *madhhab* of al-Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī hold that Existence is not an attribute (*lam yakun ṣifatan*), meaning that existence is the *dhāt* itself (*nafs dhāt al-mawjūd*).

However, al-Hudhudī argues that al-Ash'arī is tolerant (*tasāmaha*) in saying that existence is an attribute because the attribute is superadded to the *dhāt*, and is not the *dhāt* itself as argued by the Mu'tazilites as we know. His tolerance means that "To say that *Dhāt* Allāh is existent means to attribute existence to it (*Dhāt*) in a manner of speaking (*lafẓan*), not in reality. It may be said (*wa qīl*) that by saying that existence is superadded to *al-dhāt* there is no tolerance to say it (the existence) is an attribute".⁶⁵ It means that "existence is His *Dhāt* itself".

Obviously, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī had the view that existence (*al-wujūd*) is not an attribute in reality but in a manner of speaking (*lafẓan*) as stated. In fact, al-Ash'arī differs from al-Rāzī's view on the matter because the latter argued that existence is *al-māhiyah* meaning that it is not an attribute in reality and literally (*lafẓan*). Here al-Hudhudī tries to combine the ideas of al-Ash'arī and al-Rāzī, although he does not mention any work of al-Ash'arī or al-Rāzī.

For the rest of the twenty attributes, al-Hudhudī briefly explains the meaning of each on the basis of the four divisions introduced by al-Sanūsī in *Umm al-Barāhīn*.

Another figure who wrote a commentary on al-Sanūsī's work was Shaykh Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Suḥaymī al-Ḥasanī. This *laqab* 'al-Ḥasanī' indicates that he may have had the same lineage as al-Sanūsī, who was also a descendent of al-Ḥasanī. He wrote a 329-page treatise entitled, *Kitāb al-Muqtadī bi Sharḥ al-Hudhudī*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

'*alā Umm al-Barāhīn li al-'Allāmah Abī 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin al-Walī al-Ṣāliḥ Yūsuf al-Sanūsī.*⁶⁶ His importance here is due to the fact that many Malay '*ulamā'*' such as Shaykh Dāwud and the others frequently referred to him in their *kalām* works.⁶⁷

Unfortunately, despite this huge work not much is known about al-Suḥaymī except that he was an Egyptian Shāfī'ī jurist.⁶⁸ Unlike other scholars, al-Suḥaymī does not say when he finished writing his commentary. However, we may assume that he was a prominent scholar of al-Azhar too because almost all the other commentators on *Umm al-Barāhīn* came from this great Islamic university.

As stated, Shaykh Dāwud and the others frequently refer to al-Suḥaymī without explaining any of his work. As we noted al-Suḥaymī along with al-Sharqāwī had their own commentary works respectively on al-Hudhudī's commentary.

Shaykh 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī as mentioned earlier is another one who had a commentary on al-Hudhudī's commentary as stated. He was one of the prominent '*ulamā'*', who became Shaykh al-Azhar of Egypt. In *Dā'irah al-Ma'ārif Qarn al-'Ishrīn*, he is briefly introduced as "one of the Shaykhs of al-Azhar who wrote a commentary on *al-Sanūsīyyah al-Ṣuḡhrā*. He died in 1236/1820."⁶⁹ Again, al-Sharqāwī wrote a 140-page commentary on al-Hudhudī entitled "*al-Sharqāwī 'alā al-Hudhudī 'alā al-Sanūsīyyah*". Al-Sharqāwī, in this commentary, explains the grammatical terms in al-Hudhudī's sentences. For instance, he explains that *ṣifah*, *wasf* and *na't* had the same meaning as those given by grammarians (*al-nuḥāḥ*). He also warns about the philosophers saying that we should not take any view of this "ignorant" group concerning the

⁶⁶ Published by al-Mīriyah, Makkah, 1304 A.H./1886 A.D.

⁶⁷ See for instance, Dāwud al-Faṭānī, *al-Durr al-Thamīn* and *Ward al-Zawāhir*.

⁶⁸ See Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣāwī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣāwī 'alā Jawharat al-Tawḥīd* (Damasqus and Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1999), p. 16.

⁶⁹ Farīd Wajdī, *Dā'irah Ma'ārif Qarn al-'Ishrīn*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rīfah, 1971), p. 380.

creation of the world.⁷⁰ Clearly, he fully rejects the ideas of the philosophers.

On the statement of al-Hudhudī that God's existence is a *ṣifah thubūtiyyah*, al-Sharqāwī says that this is a weak statement from al-Rāzī who said that the existent is not existence (*al-wujūd ghayr al-mawjūd*).⁷¹ Al-Sharqāwī says at the end that he finished writing this commentary in 1194/1780.

So we can see that al-Hudhudī's commentary was commented upon by al-Suhaymī and al-Sharqāwī respectively. This means that al-Sanūsī's treatise continued to enjoy an influential position in later times, especially in the late twelfth/eighteenth century. -

The doctrine of al-Sanūsī also concerned another scholar of al-Azhar. He was Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Arafah al-Dasūqī (d. 1230/1814) who wrote a work entitled *Hāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn* in 1214/1799.⁷² Both al-Sharqāwī and al-Dasūqī say that they wrote their commentaries at the suggestion of their teacher, Abū al-Ḥasan ('Alā ibn Aḥmad al-Sa'di al-'Adawī). This teacher is quite unknown probably because of not leaving any surviving scholarly work.

On the twenty attributes, al-Dasūqī, like his predecessors, asserts that the attributes are not the *dhāt*, and proceeds on the basis of the four divisions of *nafsiyyah*, *salbiyyah*, *ma'ānī* and *ma'nawiyyah*. He is in favour of the idea that the existence of some of the attributes can be argued intellectually (*bi al-'aqlī*), though not Hearing, Sight, Speech, that God is Hearing, is Seeing and is Speaking, which must be argued scripturally (*bi al-naqlī*).⁷³ Evidently the attributes mentioned in the Qur'an are not to be argued about but must be accepted obediently in accordance with the Qur'an:

⁷⁰ Al-Sharqāwī, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷² Here we refer to its 240 pages of his *Hāshiyah 'alā Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn* published by Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 1358/1939.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

"We have believed in it and everything comes from our Lord" (Āli 'Imrān; 7).

In commenting upon the existence of God explained by al-Sanūsī, al-Dasūqī argues by referring to the ideas of the philosophers (*al-hukamā'*), the Karramites, the Mu'tazilites, al-Ash'arī, al-Rāzī, al-Juwaynī, al-Bāqillānī and all of whom have the same ideas about the issue. He notes that the differences between the scholars on the issue are due to different meanings of existence itself.⁷⁴ It seems here that al-Dasūqī is not certain about which idea he supports, rather emphasizing the fact of the ambiguous meaning of existence itself.

Al-Dasūqī concluded that there are three teachings about the existence of God. Firstly, al-Ash'arī says that existence is the existent in both the Uncreated and created (*al-wujūd 'ain al-mawjūd fī al-Qadīm wa al-ḥādīth*). Secondly, al-Rāzī says that existence is superadded to the being, Uncreated or created, since existence is a conceptual thing (*anna al-wujūd zā'id 'alā al-dhāt qadīmah kānat ḥādīthah bi ma'nā annahu amrun i'tibāriyy*).

Thirdly, the *madhhab* of philosophy holds that existence is the existent itself (*'ayn al-mawjūd*) in the Uncreated (*al-Qadīm*) and it is only superadded to the created,⁷⁵ not to the Uncreated, Who is Allah. He rejects the ideas of the philosophers and the Mu'tazilites as well. Instead, he supports al-Ash'arī and al-Rāzī's ideas in saying that existence is an attribute of Allāh, whether it is in a manner of speaking (*lafẓan*) or in reality, and to the created. It (existence) is a superadded attribute (*ṣifah zā'idah*) which is a conceptual thing (*amr i'tibāriyy*). In this case, however, the influence of al-Rāzī on al-Dasūqī is much clearer than al-Ash'arī's because the former acknowledged the idea of "a conceptual thing" promoted by al-Rāzī.

For the rest of the attributes, al-Dasūqī continues to discuss them in the same way as al-Sanūsī, from the attribute of *qidam* to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

the *ma'nawiyyah* attributes which are, "Allah is Powerful, Willing, Knowing, Living, Hearing, Watching and Speaking". He says, "All seven *ma'nawiyyah* attributes are necessary for Allah as is agreed by the consensus of the *ummah (al-ijmā')* according to the *madhhab* of the *ahl al-Sunnah* and the Mu'tazilite".⁷⁶

So we can see that al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn* eventually became an important work among Azhar scholars of Egypt in the early modern period, and that its teachings about the divine attributes were accepted by the majority of the commentators. We shall now show how this teaching spread from Egypt and the Arab world to the Malay world, through scholars who travelled to Mecca for their pilgrimage or *al-ḥajj* and continuing studies where the Mosque of al-Ḥaram became the centre for Islamic studies accepting some religious teachers from Egypt. Naturally, they brought with them the scholarly commentaries and books which were important to them.

4.3.3 In the Malay World

The beginning of *kalām* in the Malay world was largely concerned with *tawḥīd* teaching.⁷⁷ This was a result of the role played by the earlier Malay '*ulamā'* in transmitting later Arabic *kalām* to the region. Thus, al-Sanūsī's simple treatise of *Umm al-Barāhīn* proved popular from a very early period when the Malay scholars came to study in Mecca.⁷⁸ The following works had been systematized by the Malay '*ulamā'* in order to show the influence of al-Sanūsī's thoughts in the Malay world.

The *Umm al-Barāhīn* was first translated into Malay *Jāwī* by a Malay Indonesian scholar living in Mecca named Shaykh Muḥammad Zayn b. Faqīh Jalāl al-Dīn Aceh, who finished writing on 24 Sha'bān 1170 (1756 A.D.). The title of his treatise is

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119.

⁷⁷ See Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1973).

⁷⁸ Omar Awang, *op.cit.*, p. 157.

Bidāyat al-Hidāyah, first printed by Dār al-Ma'ārif, Pulau Pinang. This treatise is the oldest *Jāwī* book published.⁷⁹

Then, several works on *kalām* based on al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn* were produced by the later Malay scholars. Among them was 'Abd al-Šamad al-Falimbānī, who wrote *Zahrāt al-Murīd* in 1177/1764, Shaykh Dāwud al-Faṭānī, who wrote *al-Durr al-Thamīn* in 1232/1816 and *Ward al-Zawāhir* in 1245/1829. Both al-Falimbānī and Shaykh Dāwud in their books seemed to depend mainly on the commentaries of *Umm al-Barāhīn* written by al-Laqqānī, al-Hudhudī and al-Suḥaymī of Egypt.

A major work on *kalām* entitled *al-Muqaddimah al-Kubrā* written by Ismā'īl al-Khālidi al-Minangkabawī (d. 1260/1863) commenting on the twenty *ṣifāt* of al-Sanūsī was produced immediately after Shaykh Dāwud who died in 1847 A.D.. In 1292/1875, Nawawī al-Bantānī (d. 1896 A.D.) produced his work entitled *Zarī'at al-Yaqīn* commenting on al-Sanūsī's *Umm al-Barāhīn*. This was then commented on by Tok Shihab Palembang through his poem of the twenty *ṣifāt*.⁸⁰ In the same year, 1875, he also produced the work in Arabic entitled *Faṭḥ al-Majīd*, discussing the same twenty *ṣifāt* of *Umm al-Barāhīn*.

The following commentary of *Umm al-Barāhīn* was made by Shaykh Muḥammad Zayn al-Dīn bin Muḥammad Badawī al-Sumbāwī (from Sumbawa, Indonesia) in 1304/1886, with the title of *Sirāj al-Hudā*.⁸¹ In 1308/1890 there was a commentary (*sharḥ*) made by Zayn al-'Ābidīn bin Muhammad al-Faṭānī with the title '*Aqīdat al-Nājīn fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn*'.⁸² Very recently, in 1989 A.D.,

⁷⁹ W.M. Shaghīr Abdullah, *Farīdatul Farāid Syeikh Ahmad al-Fathani* (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1996), p. 2.

⁸⁰ Abdul Rahman Hāji Abdullah, *Pemikiran Umat Islam Di Nusantara Sejarah dan Perkembangannya Hingga Abad ke-19* (Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1990), p. 144.

⁸¹ According to Mohd Nor Ngah, in this year also the book of the twenty divine attributes (*Sifat Dua Puluh*) was written by 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Yahyā of Betawī. See his book, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁸² See Dawilah al-Edrus, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

this book was published in Kedah in Northern Malaysia with a commentary by Dato' Haji Zakaria bin Haji Ahmad (b. 1932), a Mecca-educated scholar. In 1313/1895, Shaykh Ahmad al-Faṭānī (d. 1908 A.D.) produced his book entitled *Farīdat al-Farā'id* discussing the same twenty divine attributes but in a much simpler form.

Significantly, several major works mentioned above on *kalām* were written by the later Malay '*ulamā*' in Mecca, after Shaykh Dāwud as among them were his direct and indirect students such as Ismā'īl al-Khālidī al-Minangkabawī, Nawawī al-Bantānī, Zayn al-Dīn al-Sumbāwī, Zayn al-Ābidīn al-Faṭānī and Aḥmad Muḥammad Zayn al-Faṭānī. The works of those '*ulamā*' seemed to be partly influenced by Shaykh Dāwud's work due to the fact that there were many aspects of similarities in topics, structure and language between them and Shaykh Dāwud's *al-Durr al-Thamīn*. Furthermore the book by Shaykh Dāwud was written in 1813 A.D. and was available later in Mecca. However, *kalām* works on the twenty divine *ṣifāt* by Malay '*ulamā*' continued to be produced starting from the early twentieth century until today. This means that al-Sanūsī's influence remains until now.

However, it has been discovered recently that an attempt to translate the *Umm al-Barāhīn* was already made before 1757 A.D. by an unknown figure, Aḥmad bin Amīn al-Dīn Qadhī, who noted that he wrote his treatise in 1032/1622. This is just 132 years after al-Sanūsī died in 1490 A.D. This author, Qadhī, is not known, although the *laqab* Qadhī probably derives from Kedah, now in northern Malaysia, which was originally "*Qadah*", an Arabic word. The book has no title. It talks about the *tawḥīd* of twenty attributes of Allah (*Sifat Dua Puluh*) translating from *Umm al-Barāhīn*,⁸³ though it is not well-arranged, and there is little indication of its influence on any Malay scholars. However, this work is an evidence that an attempt was made to introduce al-Sanūsī's important treatise in the Malay world as early as the seventeenth century.

⁸³ See manuscript, "Sifat Dua Puluh", MS 1112 (Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia (PNM)).

Due to its importance, the *Umm al-Barāhīn* was continually studied and translated by several 'ulamā', and very recently by 'Abd al-Qādir bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Faṭānī, published by al-Ahliyah, Kota Bharu Kelantan (there was no date of publication). It can be concluded that the *Umm al-Barāhīn* became the main source for *tawḥīd* learning in the area, and it must be accepted that it "has determined the structure of Islamic theological thought in Malaysia".⁸⁴

The *Umm al-Barāhīn* seems to "have been the most popular of those works explaining the Ash'arī doctrine on the divine and prophetal attributes. In the *pesantrens* (*pondoks* in Malaysia), the commentaries and glossaries are studied in the old, original texts (*matn*)."⁸⁵ The Malay historian Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munshi, who died in 1271/1854, says in his book, *Hikayat Abdullah*, that the first lecture on the *Umm al-Barāhīn* was given by a Shaykh coming from Yemen named Ibn 'Alawī from Bafakih (one of the villages in Yemen).⁸⁶ In fact, the *Umm al-Barāhīn* was previously used in Malacca and also in Penyengat on the Island of Riau as recognized by Raja Ali al-Haji (d. 1221/1806).⁸⁷

Apparently, al-Sanūsī's ideas spread in the Malay world, before Shaykh Dāwud, were through treatises such as *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* by Zayn al-Dīn Aceh and *Zahrāt al-Murīd fī Bayān Kalimat al-Tawḥīd* by 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Falimbānī. According to Shaghīr Abdullah, the book of al-Falimbānī was considered to be the major book of *tawḥīd* known written and published in the Malay world. In 1996 this book was reprinted and published with a commentary by Shaghīr Abdullah himself.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Omar Awang, *op.cit.*, pp. 157-68. See Md Nor Ngah, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Fakhry, "*al-Sanūsī*", p. 20.

⁸⁶ See Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah* (Jakarta, Penerbit Djambatan, 1953), p. 45. A.H. Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah - Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir* - (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford in Asia, 1970), pp. 54-56.

⁸⁷ Abdul Kadir Munshi, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

⁸⁸ Published by Khazanah al-Fathaniyah, 1416/1996.

Later, we find Shaykh Dāwud, who contributed greatly to making the *Umm al-Barāhīn* known through his major books, *Durr al-Thamīn* and *Ward al-Zawāhir*. So we can see that the *Umm al-Barāhīn* was introduced into the Malay world through a number of channels. It was made part of larger commentaries, as we have seen above. And it was published as a text and became the basis of theological studies in the existing *pondoks* in the Malay world. Ustadh Md Saleh bin Haji Ahmad, a lecturer in the University of Malaya, for instance, recalls how he studied the *Umm al-Barāhīn* with al-Dāsūqī's commentary during his *pondok* education.⁸⁹ The work continues to be popular, and copies are readily available in several book stores in Malaysia in the present time.

For the continuing influence of al-Sanūsī in the Malay world, we can see, for instance, al-Sanūsī's thoughts on *al-Tawhīd* published in 1994 by Asywadie Syukur.⁹⁰ This appears to be among the most recent works published on al-Sanūsīyah in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Concluding Remarks

The Maghrib scholar, al-Sanūsī, who regarded himself as an Ash'arīte, summed up early doctrines about the *ṣifāt* in his *Umm al-Barāhīn*. He proposed a new doctrine of the twenty attributes necessary to Allah, which every Muslim is obliged to know properly. In Egypt this treatise of al-Sanūsī was commented upon by

⁸⁹ He is an Associate Professor, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya. He said that he studied at Pondok Gajah Mati Pendang Kedah, for seven years. This *pondok* was considered among the earlier *pondoks* established in the state of Kedah.

⁹⁰ See Asywadie Syukur LC, *Pemikiran-Pemikiran Tauhid Syekh Muhammad Sanusi (al-Sanusi's Thoughts on Tawhīd)* (Surabaya, Indonesia: Pt Bina Ilmu, 1994). This book consists of the translations of *Kitāb Umm al-Barāhīn*, *Kitāb Taḥqīq al-Maqām 'alā Kifāyat al-'Awwām*, *Kitāb Sharḥ al-Hudhūdī 'ala Umm al-Barāhīn*, *Kitāb 'Aqīdat al-Nājīn* and *Kitāb Tanwīr al-Qulūb fī Mu'āmalāt 'alā-'Allām al-Ghuyyūb*.

several scholars of al-Azhar, such as al-Laqqānī, his son 'Abd al-Salām, al-Hudhudī, al-Suhaymī, al-Sharqāwī and al-Dasūqī.⁹¹

Students from the Malay world who travelled to Mecca studied al-Sanūsī's works and these later commentaries, and brought them back with them to their home region. The books or popularly known as *kitābs* became then the texts of theological studies used in the traditional Islamic learning centres that played the most important role in the spread of Islamic teachings among the *ummah* in the region.

⁹¹ See M.Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p. 140. It seems that al-Bayjūrī was the last commentator of related al-Sanūsī's treatise entitled *Kifāyat al-'Awwām* written by al-Faḍālī or al-Fuḍūlī. See Ibrāhīm al-Bayjūrī, *Tahqīq al-Maqām 'alā Kifāyat al-'Awwām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Pulau Pinang: Maktabah wa Matba'at Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).