

Seeking Arabs but Looking at Indonesians: Snouck Hurgronje's Arab Lens on the Dutch East Indies

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Abstract: *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) was at his core an Arabist, rather than a scholar of Southeast Asia or even Islam in the Dutch East Indies. An Arab lens is evident in his early work on the Hijaz and in his later scholarship for the Dutch colonial government. Snouck Hurgronje's work The Acehnese, in particular, evidenced a thoroughly comparative approach, verging at times on a focus outside of Southeast Asia, and throughout a preference for Arab orthodoxy. He found Indonesians to be inferior Muslims, and he saw their indigenous cultural practices as non-Islamic. It is important to remember Snouck Hurgronje's Arab lens when considering his work and his legacy.*

Key Words: *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje; Arabs and Indonesians; Islam and South-east Asia; Islamic History*

In the field of Indonesian studies, few names stand out so prominently as that of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936). In his own time, Snouck Hurgronje carried an impact through his

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policy-making power in the Indies, through his extensive writings on all aspects of Islam, and through his students, who included such prominent names as the sociologist of Indonesia B.J.O. Schrieke and even the army Lieutenant, and later Dutch Prime Minister, Hendrikus Colijn.^① Today, scholars both in Indonesia and around the world see him as the father of the study of Indonesian Islam, for better or for worse.

Despite this reputation as a scholar of Indonesia (or, more correctly, the Dutch East Indies, as the territory was known during his time), Snouck Hurgronje was not trained with a focus on the region. Instead, he received his doctorate on the subject of Islam with an Arab focus, and this Arab focus remained with him throughout his scholarly career. Snouck Hurgronje was not really an expert on the Indies, but rather an Arabist. This bias is important in and of itself when considering his conclusions about the archipelago.

Snouck Hurgronje's early study and experiences in the Arab world were the lens through which he saw the scholarly and colonial work in the Dutch East Indies. Far from moving beyond essentialism, as Albert Hourani argued about Snouck Hurgronje (Hourani, 1991: 57), and aside from his important interventions on the position of Sufism in the archipelago,^② his Arab-oriented essentialism can be witnessed in the standard by which he judged Southeast Asian Islam. Understanding local Islam on Sumatra and Java through the prism of the Middle East led him to view negatively the Muslims of the Indies.

^① Colijn was subordinate to General van Heutsz in the Aceh War and worked with Snouck Hurgronje there when the latter came for observation.

^② This is the key subject of the treatment of Snouck Hurgronje in recent treatments of his legacy (Laffan 2011). Interestingly, Laffan does not address head-on the impact of Snouck Hurgronje's Arabist training on his conclusions in Indonesia or his training of future Dutch East Indies bureaucrats or scholars; this appears to be a key oversight.

A few key works throughout his career demonstrate his Arab focus. His early work on the Hijaz set the tone for his later observations, both in methodology and in understandings of Islam. Once posted to the Dutch East Indies, he wrote his classic study of *The Acehnese*; in this book, showed his Arabist background and the concomitant belief that the Dutch colonial subjects in Southeast Asia were inferior to their Arab co-religionists. This bias, both in terms of scholarly attention and in the nature of his observations, continued throughout Snouck Hurgronje's later work on Islam writ large.

I. Snouck Hurgronje the Arab(ist)

Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje began his academic and professional career focused on the Arab world, and particularly its spiritual core: the Hijaz. This fascination began when he was a student in the Netherlands at Leiden, where he wrote and published his dissertation entitled *The Feast of Mecca*. It focused on the origins of the *hajj*, using textual sources, almost exclusively the religious canon (Snouck Hurgronje, 1880). The centrality of Mecca in this research as a location of conquest and celebration must have piqued his interest in the city, leading him to seek a more personal engagement.

This engagement came four years later, when he visited the Arabian Peninsula. He arrived at Jidda on August 24, 1884, to study the *hajj* and its political implications for Dutch citizens of the East Indies, specifically in the form of pan-Islamism. After five months in the port city of Jidda, Snouck Hurgronje donned Arab clothes and a new name, Abdul Ghaffâr—both of which he was to use for many years to come—and set out for the holy city of Mecca. The time that he spent there turned into the “greatest event of his scholarly life”

(Pedersen 1957, 21).

Like other Orientalists of the era, Snouck Hurgronje took on Muslim clothes and persona in order to enter more completely the Muslim world of Mecca.^① This allowed him to write in amazing detail about the city, from the nature of local toilets to the precise measure of wheat grain offerings to musical notation of slave songs (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 33, 77, and 12). Unlike other Orientalists, though, Snouck Hurgronje always inserted himself into the description as an observer rather than a participant (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 61 and 42). In the few instances where European agency became necessary for making a point, Snouck Hurgronje often managed to skirt his own participation; take for example his oblique note that “a European savant, physically well-equipped, will in favorable circumstances take a week to learn to recite tolerably the first Surah” (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 167). Despite his careful positioning, other sources testify to the active role that Snouck Hurgronje played during his time in the Holy Land. From evidence of his diary, it appears that he was circumcised while in Jidda, and he certainly joined in the educational activities of Masjid al-Haram (Laffan 2003, 62). Most generously, one could call this participant-observation in the best tradition of modern anthropology. On the other hand, the deception and non-disclosure has a more insidious aspect, described by Edward Said as an implicitly hierarchical “one-way exchange” (Said 1979, 160).

Regardless of how one interprets the nature of Snouck Hurgronje’s engagement in the Holy City, the experience clearly affected him very personally. To this day there are scholars who believe that he accepted Islam during this year, although he kept his

^① In particular, Snouck Hurgronje often compared and contrasted himself with Edward Lane, one of the most decried European observers of the Orient in Edward Said’s critique of the field (Said 1979).

faith a secret due to his professional obligations (van Koningsveld 1989, 253ff).^① The fact that he took religion very seriously during his time in Mecca shines through in his book; one can tell from his disdain that he was not “the skeptical European who has to some extent lost the understanding of religion” (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 25). Whether he converted at this point or not, his time in Mecca doubtless changed his conception of Islam entirely, as later scholars have agreed (Hourani 1991, 42).

Crucially, this formative experience happened not only while Snouck Hurgronje was in Arabia, but while he was pretending to be an Arab. Thus, Arab normativity was not only rampant in his early direct experiences of Islam (as it had been in his first scholarly engagement with Islam); Arab practice was also crucial for him to follow so as to continue undetected in his secret sojourn to Mecca.

Snouck Hurgronje's time in the Hijaz ended rather abruptly with an accusation of murder leveled at him just before the pilgrimage was to begin. Although he convinced the Turkish authorities of his innocence, he also had to leave quickly and quietly (Laffan 2003, 72). When he left the Hijaz in 1885, at the age of 28, Snouck Hurgronje's basic ideas about Islam had already been formulated, and they were formulated on an Arab model. His doctoral study using classical texts had set a course solidified by his time in Jidda and Mecca, creating an Arab lens that later colored his view of Muslims even outside the Arab world.

^① Van Koningsveld has also reconstructed from Snouck Hurgronje's diary the date on which he most likely said the *shahada* before two witnesses in Jidda: January 16, 1885. While the profession of the *shahada* makes one a Muslim from the standing of religious law, it remains unclear whether this was a conversion of the heart or all part of his elaborate ruse to gain entrance to Mecca. Rumors of his conversion, and occasional actions contravening this supposed conversion, were also important in his relations with bureaucrats and missionaries in the East Indies (Laffan 2011).

II. The Arab Lens in Snouck Hurgronje's Writing on Mecca

This does not mean that Snouck Hurgronje only interacted with Arabs while in the Holy Cities—far from it. He paid particular attention to Southeast Asians, called the *Jâwah*, especially the colonial subjects of the Netherlands, as was evidenced in his book on Mecca. However, his observations about this group reveal his Arab bias.

The first comments about Southeast Asians in the book *Mekka in the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century* highlight their admirable nature: "Only of the '*Jâwah*' (the peoples of the East Indian Archipelago and Malaya) can it be said that all who wish to become Meccans are free from any *arrière-pensée* of gain, though some even of these after years of residence become tainted with the Meccan cupidity" (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 6). This image of the simple Indonesian (with all of its positive and negative connotations) appears repeatedly throughout the work. The negative connotations seem to dominate, however, in the context of *Jâwah* inferiority to Arabs in religious and secular matters. For example, when describing the teaching in the Great Mosque of Mecca, Snouck Hurgronje writes that a professor

[f]rom the *Jâwah* is now very seldom found in the Haram [the Great Mosque]. When in our morning walk through the court of the mosque we ask a Meccan about the fewness of the professors from among the *Jâwah*, he at once shows us with his finger Professor Zain ad-Din from Sumbawa, and adds that no other professor of that race is to be found here. The reason is partly the modest, retiring nature of these people. Partly it is a natural consequence of the special needs of *Jâwah* students. (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 186)

This text highlights Snouck Hurgronje's implicit opinion that the archipelagic peoples are different from and inferior to the Arab core of Islam. First, and most obvious, there was merely one *Jâwah* professor among the sea of Egyptians, Hadramis, and even Dagestanis, making Southeast Asians less than 2% of the greatest scholars, despite being numerous as believers and pilgrims. Secondly, his reference to the "special needs of Jâwah students" seemingly referred to the lesser linguistic ability in Arabic but also widespread religious inexperience among those in the *Jâwah* community. Although one could forgive the former for non-native speakers, the latter was an indictment of their morality and devotion. Third, his use of the terms "modest" and "retiring" to describe the *Jâwah* brought not just moderate praise but also implicit critique. Contrast it, for example, with his repeated references to the initiative and ingenuity of the Hadrami population, which he clearly admired greatly (Snouck Hurgronje 1931, 5, 97, 186, and 219; Snouck Hurgronje 1916, 55; Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 275). "Retiring" showed the submissive nature of East Indies residents, and even modesty might also have been an astute recognition of the superiority of the other candidates.

This is not to say that Snouck Hurgronje was not fond of the *Jâwah* people, in Mecca or in their native archipelago. On the contrary, he was known to have very affable relations with the *Jâwah* in Mecca, including great camaraderie with his private tutor Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat^①, as well as in Batavia when he later arrived there (Laffan 2003, 59 and 91-92).^② Snouck Hurgronje's Arab bias, though,

^① Notwithstanding, van Koningsveld takes great exception to what he perceives as Snouck Hurgronje's mistreatment of Aboe Bakar, in particular the deception which was involved in using him as a guide and informant (van Koningsveld 1989, 131-142).

^② His jocular relationship with many natives of the Dutch East Indies also earns an insightful though fictionalized depiction in the fourth in the famous tetralogy

became clear during his time in the Indies through his close contacts: many of them, including his first contact in the Indies (Snouck Hurgronje 1985, 11), were not indigenous Muslims but rather diasporic Hadrami Arabs living in the archipelago (Algadri 1994). He was particularly close with Sayyid 'Uthman, the Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs from 1891, who was a more consistent and important source for him on Islamic orthodoxy and practice than any indigenous Muslim (Laffan 2011, 139ff).

In his writing on Mecca, Snouck Hurgronje repeatedly revealed a bias in favor of Arabs over Southeast Asians. This trend, although established in his book on Mecca, cropped up again in his later work on the East Indies, where he referred to the customs and practices of Mecca again and again (see below). These allusions point to the fact that he took the practice of Islam as he found it among the Arabs as his standard of evaluation, and the Islamic society of the Hijaz became normative in his later analysis. The Arab lens continued, even when his own scholarly focus turned to Southeast Asia.

III. Snouck Hurgronje in the Dutch East Indies

Despite the formative influence on his ideas about Islam, scholars of Indonesia today generally see that episode as unimportant compared with his later assignments. Although his later titles were more impressive, they did not necessarily have the same weight on his thinking. Snouck Hurgronje's post-Hijaz life began with a brief return to the Netherlands, at which point he was appointed lecturer at the University of Leiden (Snouck Hurgronje 1916, ix), and soon thereafter, in 1889, the Minister of the Colonies appointed him to the position for

of modern Indonesia's leading author, Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Toer 1988).

which he would become famous: Adviser for Native and Arab Affairs. This position had existed before Snouck Hurgronje held it, but was never as active in determining policy as it became under his tenure. He held this title for the rest of his life, although the "Arab Affairs" addendum was dropped when he left the Dutch East Indies in 1906 (Laffan 2003, 55).

Snouck Hurgronje came to the Dutch East Indies in 1889 and remained until 1906, traveling around the archipelago to observe the indigenous practice of Islam but basing himself at the colonial capital of Batavia (modern-day Jakarta). His office was charged with proposing policies which would facilitate or improve governance of the indigenous population by the Dutch, and in this capacity Snouck Hurgronje proved a very successful leader. The administration most likely intended, and Snouck Hurgronje certainly interpreted, his role as primarily focused on religious matters of the Muslim population and how this group might be brought more solidly under the Dutch.

One famous instance of his participation in the extension of colonial power also produced Snouck Hurgronje's greatest scholarly work on the archipelago. At the time of Snouck Hurgronje's arrival, the Dutch had already struggled for several decades to subdue the northernmost tip of the island of Sumatra, the Sultanate of Aceh, to colonial rule (van't Veer 1969). Various reasons were given for the failure of this effort, from the military or religious fervor of the Acehnese to the incompetence of the Dutch army and the underlying ambivalence of Dutch colonial policy towards this war effort. Into this context stepped Snouck Hurgronje, armed with a renowned knowledge of Islam, experience in observing Muslim societies, and

authority to make policy changes.^①

Between 1891-92 and 1898-1903, Snouck Hurgronje went to Aceh seven times, totaling at least forty months (van Koningsveld 1989, 251). Evidence suggests that these visits took a similar form to his time in Mecca as Abdul Ghaffâr; in the 1980's an Acehnese woman told Harvard anthropology student John Bowen that she remembered Snouck Hurgronje coming through her village in Arab clothes and a green turban, the type reserved for descendents of the Prophet (van Koningsveld 1989, 253). This persona again enabled him to travel widely and observe a broad swath of Acehnese society, leading to an understanding of the internal workings of the area, which in turn allowed him to critique and advise on the war effort.

He was highly critical of the policy which had been pursued by the Dutch colonial government up until his own intervention in the conflict. The war had not been continuous, but rather cropping up in fits and starts from the Dutch declaration of war in March 1873. From 1880 the Dutch government had unilaterally declared the war over and changed its policy from offense to the defense of areas already under its control. This led to heavy military spending by the Dutch but no increase in stability or territory for three years. After another instigation low-level open conflict began again, but it was not until 1898 when the Dutch, under Governor van Heutsz (who won Snouck Hurgronje's hearty approval), resumed all-out warfare to conquer the whole of the territory (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol I, xiv; van't Veer 1969). All in all, the Aceh War lasted thirty years and one hundred thousand people died (van Koningsveld 1989, 250).

The time in Aceh and the necessity of informing other colonial

^① The Dutch move to send Snouck Hurgronje into the field eerily resembles the current initiative by the United States Army to introduce anthropologists to its presence in Afghanistan and Iraq (Rohde 2007; Peacock et al. 2007).

policy makers both in Batavia and The Hague resulted in Snouck Hurgronje producing a book on the topic of *The Acehnese*, published in two volumes in 1893 and 1894 (Snouck Hurgronje 1906). This book is by far his largest work on the East Indies, and it goes well beyond its specific topic of the natives of the northern tip of Sumatra (Pedersen 1957, 27). The book is broken into seven chapters, ranging from demography to literature to games. The most interesting of these, however, is the final chapter on religion.

There are several reasons why the chapter on religion forms the most revealing part of this work. The first is because this topic is Snouck Hurgronje's specialty, and therefore it should be the most precise and insightful. Secondly, Snouck Hurgronje placed this chapter at the very end, making religion serve as the summary and conclusive point of Acehnese culture. Finally, in the introduction to the English edition, written more than a decade after the original publication of the work, Snouck Hurgronje himself highlighted the importance of this section: "Now no one any longer doubts that the dogmas of Islam on the subject of religious war, so fanatical in their terms, supplied the principal stimulus to this obstinate rebellion; that the teungkus, or religious leaders, came more and more during the war to be masters of the country and terrorized the hereditary chiefs as well as the populace wherever these last were disposed to peace" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. I, xvii). By according such importance to the religious aspects of the Aceh War and by extension the religious aspects of Acehnese culture, Snouck Hurgronje invited special attention to this chapter.

Three telltale characteristics of this chapter reveal Snouck Hurgronje's Arab lens when studying the East Indies: his comparative approach, his non-Indonesian focus, and his bias in favor of

Arabo-orthodoxy.

IV. Comparative Approach

Demonstrating his comparative approach, Snouck Hurgronje described his approach to the study of Acehnese religion thus: "We have rather to enquire wherein the thoughts and actions of the Mohammedan Indonesians differ from those of their co-religionists of other races, in order to arrive by comparison and discrimination at a better knowledge of the Mohammedanism which they profess" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 280). He believed this was appropriate, although the task of an expert, because most features of religion were "the same throughout the whole Muslim world, but [were] to a certain degree dependent on the ethnological characteristics and the political and social development of the different peoples who profess Islam" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 277). In practice, the comparison was disproportionately with their co-religionists in the Arab world, a natural comparison, perhaps, since that was the other region of the Muslim world where Snouck Hurgronje had spent time.

Perhaps because of the time he had spent there, or perhaps because of thought-patterns inherited from textual studies of classical times, Snouck Hurgronje wrote of the Arab world as the natural center and the natural standard for Islam. At one point when describing the theoretical structure of a caliphate system of governance, he referred unquestioningly to "the noblest branch (Quraish) of the noblest race of mankind (the Arabs)" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 322). It is unclear whether he intended this as the analysis of the classical doctors of the law or as his own conclusions, but further reading suggests that his own thoughts may have trended this way.

For example, he evaluated the orthodoxy of the Acehnese by judging them against the Arabs, finding them to be orthodox because "what the [Acehnese] student learns regarding the nature, the characteristics and the epithets of God, the prophets and the angels, as to predestination, the day of judgment and the next life is identical with what is regarded in Arabia, Egypt, etc. as the loftiest wisdom" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 281). Snouck Hurgronje at this point made no reference to the classical texts of Islam or other centers of great activity in the Muslim world. Rather, he defined orthodoxy as being that which the center taught, a definition which betrayed a belief in the infallibility, or near infallibility, of the modern theologians among the Arabs. If the Arabs were practically faultless in this arena, then the Acehnese must have been, by implication, inferior to them.

He went on to call the theologians (if there were any) among the Acehnese puerile or low-class in more direct language. During his discussion of the local concept of *jihad*, he wrote,

The ideas which prevail universally in Aceh as to the relation between Muslims and those of other faith are limited in more civilized countries to the lower classes and to some fanatics among the better educated. This chapter of their creed, from which the Acehnese have eliminated all milder elements that favor the infidel, owes its popularity with them to its harmonizing with their warlike and predatory pre-Mohammedan customs, just as prevalence of the worship of dead and living saints in this and other Moslim countries is due to its being grafted on pagan superstition. (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 337)

In this passage Snouck Hurgronje derided the Acehnese as both simplistic and syncretic. They were simplistic because their theological understanding was well-behind that of “more civilized countries” (the Arabs, the object of the majority of other comparisons, were implied). Syncretism was the clear accusation of the reference to pre-Mohammedan customs, made more insulting by the inclusion of the reference to saint worship and “pagan superstition.” Furthermore, the indigenous element of their syncretism was not a positive trait, but rather “warlike and predatory ... customs,” making Acehnese Islam inferior not only by virtue of its syncretism but also because of the very elements which they mixed in syncretically.

Due to his perception of Acehnese syncretism, Snouck Hurgronje believed that they were a less devout people. Throughout the chapter he equated devotion and Arab-ness, a trope for both scholars of Islam and many Arab scholars. One of the most interesting cases was a linguistic analysis that Snouck Hurgronje undertook with regard to the levels of permissibility of various actions.^① Noting that Arabic-derived terms were rarely used in Aceh (or throughout the archipelago) in favor of indigenous terms which were more likely to split actions along binary lines, he took this as “a speaking proof [pun seemingly intended] that the universally recognized moral standard of Islam is much less closely followed than that of everyday life” (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 275). The linguistic analysis did not include possible Acehnese alternatives for each level of permissibility, suggesting that his pre-conceived notion of Arab superiority might have begun to influence his gathering of facts to fuel this very conclusion.

^① In Islamic theology, actions are not subject to the Christian dyad of “sin” or not, but rather to a tiered system of required (*wajib*), suggested (*mustahabb*), neutral (*mubah*), unadvisable (*makruh*), and forbidden (*haram*).

In other ways, according to Snouck Hurgronje, the Acehnese showed an even more plain-faced lack of devotion. For example, he wrote, "the zeal for the *sembahyang* [ritual prayer] reaches the minimum in the East Indian Archipelago" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 305). He also called their general attention to the ritual requirements "lukewarm" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 306), although this indictment was not made in the context of a comparison with other regions. Though he noted that sexual deviance of all kinds appears in every Muslim country, he asserted that "To Aceh, however, alone belongs the unenviable distinction of interpreting the European maxim of practical morality as to the 'sowing of wild oats' in this sense, that a certain amount of unnatural vice forms a necessary stage in the development of every young man" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 318, n.2). Thus, Snouck Hurgronje's presentation of Aceh showed the territory to be generally immoral, above the level of the average Muslim country, and so also inferior to the Arabs.

For all of these ways that Snouck Hurgronje saw the Acehnese as inferior to the Arabs, there were a few areas in which the Acehnese stood out as religiously virtuous. These points earned, generally, one line of recognition in the text. For instance, "The Acehnese are just as strict in [fasting] as the Sundanese, and more so than the Javanese and Arabs of the desert" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 310). Fasting, as a whole, merited only five sentences of the text (compared with the two pages devoted to the linguistic analysis above), and only one of these was comparative.

V. Non-Indonesian Focus

There is another characteristic of this book on the Acehnese

revealing Snouck Hurgronje's constant attention to and preference for the Arabs: the amount of content that did not deal with the Acehnese. The chapter on religion begins with four pages on general concepts about religion, in order to "to take into account what this Islam is, and what are the demands that it makes, in practice as well as in theory, upon those who profess it" (Snouck Hurgronje, 1906, vol.II: 271). After the fourth page when Snouck Hurgronje first mentioned Aceh, the first several references to the region were merely to give the local terms for various features of Islamic law and practice which were described. By the end of the first tenth of this chapter, he had devoted very little time to Aceh, but had spent two and a half pages on the Hadramaut, a country he knew only through the accounts of émigrés living in Mecca or the East Indies and through the publications of emigrated Hadrami scholars (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 275-277).

Nor did this non-Acehnese focus end after the first ten pages of this chapter. After thirty-five pages, the chapter again deviated to a ten-page treatment of government without reference to the supposed geographic topic of his work. Beginning with the classical texts of Islam, Snouck Hurgronje examined the ideal Islamic system of governance and then traced the development of the caliphate through its various incarnations. To justify this digression of some 15% of the chapter, he wrote, "With the help of the above résumé and observations we may now proceed to apply the standard of Islam to government and administration of justice in Aceh" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 332).

The inclusion of so much non-Indonesian content betrays Snouck Hurgronje's greater interest in matters outside the Dutch East Indies. It also suggests that he felt, in many ways, that the East Indies and their people were a less worthy object of study for the Islamic

specialist than the Arab core of Islam. Over and above comparative references to the Arabs, Snouck Hurgronje displayed his inability to explain anything Islamic without significant knowledge of a particular region within the Islamic world: Arabia.

One must note that this same bias can be found in many of his other works, as well. The clearest example was perhaps the lectures Snouck Hurgronje delivered in 1914-15 as a speaker for the American Lectures on the History of Religions (Snouck Hurgronje 1916). Given free rein to introduce Islam to an American audience, Snouck Hurgronje spoke on four topics: "Some Points concerning the Origin of Islam," "The Religious Development of Islam," "The Political Development of Islam," and "Islam and Modern Thought." The essays focused almost exclusively on the Arab world, one could even say almost exclusively on the Arabian Peninsula. Throughout all of these essays, he mentioned the Dutch East Indies only three times, the first with reference to the Hadrami Arabs living therein and the second and third as part of a laundry list of countries to which Islamic influence has spread. This division of content may suit the treatment of the early history of Islam, but collection's title also included the religion's "Present State." When seen in the light of Snouck Hurgronje's lived observations, the dearth of Southeast Asian examples becomes most glaring: he spent only one year in the Hijaz compared with seventeen in the East Indies.

VI. Preference for Arab Orthodoxy

One of the most interesting questions to raise in the study of Snouck Hurgronje as an Orientalist or his work as an advisor to the Dutch colonial government was his opinion of Islam. As already noted

above, debate continues in Indonesian circles as to whether he truly converted in Jidda, but Western academics hold a stronger consensus about his opinion of the religion. Harry Benda stated it rather baldly: Snouck Hurgronje, he says, had a “basically low esteem for Islam” (Benda, 1972: 90). This opinion is echoed by Edward Said and Peter van Koningsveld (Said 1979, 209; van Koningsveld 1989, 105).

In the context of this negative opinion, though, Snouck Hurgronje evidenced a clear preference for Islamic (and Arabic-modeled) orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This preference was tempered by his lived observations; he recognized “the gulf that separates the real from the ideal,” (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 271) and the fact that the orthodox implementation of Islamic law ceased roughly three decades after the founder’s death (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 337). Nevertheless, he repeatedly expressed disapproval of deviations from the classical, Arabic norm, as he understood it.

Snouck Hurgronje made no attempts to cover over the reality of Islam as he observed it in practice. He recorded that those Muslims “who are in any sense exponents of the moral requirements of Islam, or who observe even a minimum of the ritual or other obligations of their religion, form but a small minority, whilst the great majority pursue their lives in their half-pagan and wholly superstitious thoughts and practices, only imperfectly clad in a few phrases and other outward and visible signs of Mohammedanism” (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 279-280). This did not stop his admiration for the rituals and guidelines which Muslims were, by his account, ignoring.

One can read his preference for orthodoxy first in the amount of the text he devoted to it. As noted above, Snouck Hurgronje made significant digressions to discuss classical or theoretical prescriptions

of Islam. He must have valued these both to include them in such detail and to note so continuously the failure of Muslims to meet these standards.

He also plainly stated his esteem for certain facets of Islamic orthodoxy. The most prominent aspect that he admired in the text was the classical system of governance, which he described as the epitome of a just constitutional monarchy or even republic (Snouck Hurgronje, 1906, vol.II: 322). For those who attempted to uphold these doctrines to the best of their ability, Snouck Hurgronje spelled out his attitude: "As to the serious upholders of the religious law, who perceive that they can play no part in affairs of state until the coming of the Mahdi, but who are anxious to adhere as closely as possible to the ideals of their sacred books, and to induce others to do the same, –for these we cannot but feel admiration and respect, in spite of all their narrow-mindedness" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 330-331). The observation of great orthodoxy in the areas of greatest colonial influence might also be read as an endorsement of orthodoxy as compatible with the best civilizing efforts of the Dutch colonials (Benda 1972, 87, n.12).

Unfortunately, the orthodoxy that Snouck Hurgronje admired was on the wane, especially in the Dutch East Indies. As he wrote, "The demands which the Islam of real life makes upon its adherents become steadily smaller, for the gigantic increase of the intercourse of nations is annihilating the discipline of Mohammedanism and impelling all who profess that creed to adopt cosmopolitan customs" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. II, 340). The ways that the populace diverged from orthodox Islamic teachings, and in many ways simultaneously also from general morality, earned Snouck Hurgronje's censure. Thus, because the East Indies diverged quite far

from his perception of the orthodox tradition, largely because it had not been a part of the Islamic community during the classical period, its people received greater disapproval from this scholar than the Arabs who maintained orthodoxy more faithfully.

VI. Conclusion

When Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje retired from his post at Leiden in 1927, invitations to contribute to a special commemorative volume went out to other European Orientalists (such as Louis Massignon in Paris and R. A. Nicholson in Cambridge) and to a host of prominent Arabs in Damascus, Cairo, Jeddah, Mecca, and, of course, in Southeast Asia. Compared to this long list of Arabs, though, only two native Indonesians were invited to contribute: Snouck Hurgronje's former students, the Djajadiningrats (Laffan 2011, 221). This telling mixture painted in pages, if not in words, the relative commitment Snouck Hurgronje had to the study of Arabs versus Southeast Asians.

Looking at Snouck Hurgronje's work, both on Mecca and on Aceh, brings one to the conclusion that his position as Advisor for Native Affairs in the Dutch East Indies was in reality a poor fit for his academic interests, however much it benefitted the colonial state. His true interest, as seen in these works, lay in Islam, rather than in a particular location. Because of his early experiences and opinions about the religious practice of the peoples of the archipelago, Snouck Hurgronje saw the religion of Islam as practiced most wholly in Arabia, and thus found Indonesian Islam to be a strong, but tainted, ersatz Islam. Therefore he brought an Arab lens to his study of the people of the Indonesian archipelago, and maintained an Arab focus

in his writings before and after his time in the East Indies.

The question intimately related to this, which falls outside the scope of this article, is the nature of the impact of Snouck Hurgronje's Arab lens on the Islamic policy that he crafted for the Dutch East Indies. On one hand, his admiration for Arabs and orthodoxy might have been positive, for example in facilitating his push to liberalize Dutch policy towards the Islamic pilgrimage (Benda 1972, 86). On the other hand, one wonders how the "watertight distinction" that Snouck Hurgronje perceived between Islam and *a'dat* (local customs) might have led to the growing divide between pious, Arab-inspired Muslims known as *santri* and the less pious general population (Azra 2006; Ricklefs 2007).

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