THE ARABS IN THE NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES
AND THE HOUSE OF ORANGE

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Introduction

In a recent book published in 2006, Gert Oostindie has dealt with the relationship between the Dutch Royal House and the colonies which once formed part of the Dutch Kingdom, both in the East and in the West Indies. He shows convincingly how the Royal House was used in the colonies as a symbol of the unity of the Dutch empire in order to foster loyalty among the colonized peoples towards Dutch rule. One of the ways to keep the symbolism alive and to strengthen it was through celebrations which focused on the Dutch monarch. For instance, the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina in 1898 was celebrated throughout the colonies with great pomp and circumstance; the marriage of Wilhelmina to Prince Hendrik in 1901 was a source of public joy; the birth of Crown Princess Juliana in 1908 likewise, and so on and so forth.

In the Netherlands East Indies, not only the original Dutch inhabitants (totok) participated in these celebrations, but often also the local nobility, as well as the common people. In his book, Oostindie wonders how deeply rooted the implicit and often explicit signs of affection for the Dutch monarch during these celebrations were. As far as the totoks, the Eurasian descendents of Dutch men and local women, and the indigenous Christian soldiers from the Moluccas and the Minahassa were concerned, their affection for the Royal House was genuine, but the position of the native population was less clear. The local nobility did participate in the celebrations, but primarily to stress their allegiance to the Dutch monarch in the far away Netherlands in

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1 I would like to thank Jan van der Putten (National University of Singapore) for his remarks on the translation of the poem in this essay and Huub de Jonge (Nijmegen) for his remarks on the final draft. Moreover, I thank Amir Aliyad (Leyden University/IAIN, Surabaya) for providing me with the photographs of the two documents studied here and which have been included by kind permission from the Leyden University Library.

2 Gert Oostindie, De pardo en de kroon. Het koninkshuis en de koloniën (Leyden-Amsterdam, 2006). See for the celebrations, pp. 72-87.
order to gain more maneuvering space for themselves vis-à-vis the local colonial administrators in their own territory. What the position of the indigenous population was in this issue is still under-explored, but in his book, Oostindie carefully suggests that the people’s loyalty to the Royal House was inconsiderable and in many cases might have been forced upon them.3

Like the native population, the Arab communities in the Dutch East Indies also participated in these celebrations and in the present essay I will look at two documents which originate from the circles of this Arab minority. Both documents relate to the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Queen Wilhelmina’s rule which took place in 1925. Next, I will use these texts as a starting point for a discussion on the loyalty of the Arabs towards the Dutch monarchy.

**Two texts in praise of Queen Wilhelmina**

The first document I would like to discuss here is a beautiful poster made for the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Wilhelmina’s ascension to the throne of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The original is kept in Leyden University Library, where under the supervision of the dedicatee, during his curatorship of the Oriental collections, it was stored impeccably in a big box with other documents in order to preserve it for future consultation (Plano F 53 no. 48).

As is indicated on the document in pencil, it comes from the Collection Schrieke, who must be identified with the former director of the Office of Native Affairs Prof. B. J. O. Schrieke (1890-1945). This person was interested in ‘grey literature’ and had also collected other rare materials which at the time of their collecting might have seemed rather trivial, but which are nowadays important, for they often give us unique information on how things worked on a day to day basis. Schrieke had a wide expertise in things Indonesian and amongst his interests was also the Arab community in the Netherlands East Indies.4 The document has the size of a small poster and measures 43 x 34 cm and was produced by ‘Steeendruckerij S. Jaha in Tanah Abang.

Weltevreden’, about whom I will give more information later in this essay. On the poster, it is indicated that its price was 15 cents (f.o.15). It is a lithograph which displays impressive craftsmanship because it skillfully renders a number of colours: not only are the three colours of the Dutch flag - red, white and blue - used, but also the colour of the House of Orange, orange, as well as brown, green and black. In the upper half of the poster a quite good drawing of Queen Wilhelmina is given, while the lower half of the poster consists of a Malay poem in honour of the queen. The poster has been included here in a reduced size as illustration 1.

The poem on the poster is a so-called syair which consists of ten lines which, as in all poems of this type, are split in two equal halves and which rhyme as as aa hb lb. The poem is an acrostichon and the first letters of the first ten half lines together read from top to bottom: DWPLHLMN, while the first letters of the second ten half lines read: WILHLMIN. Taken together, these letters make the words dua puluh lima, Wilhelmina, ‘Twenty-five [Years] Wilhelmina’. Indeed, a great poet was at work here! As said, the poem is in Malay in Arabic script, called Jawi, and in my transliteration as follows. I have put the two halves of each line next to each other, as in the original, in order to show the acrostichon:

\[
\begin{align*}
dua puluh lima tahun telah bersauda \\
wahai dawlatku seri baginda
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
waris dan subur kerajaan Hulanda \\
yang dipertuan sepenuhnya dada
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
peliharakanlah hai tubanku \\
wartiannya kerajaan dengan berlaku
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
luna dan selamat iah memangku \\
hakim yang adil menurut baku
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
lanjutkan tubanku iah pnya umur \\
Hindia Nederland brialah subur
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
lantaran penggawa yang bersetia \\
yang berhati baik dapat bahagia
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
lantakn aisyat badan sekuju \\
lagi takhta kerajaan bertambah makmur
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
lantar penggawa yang bersetia \\
yang berhati baik dapat bahagia
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
marloh robyat tua dan muda \\
alam penutup apa yang ada
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
namakan selamat bagi baginda \\
liduplah kekal kerajaan Hulanda
\end{align*}
\]
I translate this as follows:

Twenty five years have passed
For the inheritor and the developer of the Dutch kingdom
O, My Liege, Your Highness
Your Majesty whose heart is wide

May our God guard her
And may her rule be long and peaceful
The legacy of the kingdom successful
A just judge according to the book

May our God grant her a long life
And give in abundance health for her entire body
So that Hindia Nederland will flourish
And the throne of the kingdom will become more prosperous

By means of the loyal civil servants
Sweet and bitter are both served
Those who do good will receive joy
And be assured that those who do evil live in peril

Come now, people, old and young
Let us offer our best wishes to her Highness
As a sign of finishing of this:
Long live the Kingdom of Holland!

The second document I would like to discuss here is also preserved in Leyden University Library (Plano F 53 no. 52). It has the same size as the previous. This document is a prayer (du‘ā') in Arabic for the same occasion as the previous text and was also printed by Sayyid Yahyā ibn 'Umar in Tanah Abang, as is mentioned at the end of the text. It also comes from the Schrieke collection. This document has been included here in a reduced size as illustration 2.

Noteworthy is the Malay introductory remark to the document. In this, the Muslims are reminded of the fact that God has bestowed upon them protection of oneself, one's family and one's property and that God has done this “by means of the administration of the government of the Queen of the Netherlands.” In order to remunerate this, the Muslims should pray for Her Majesty the du‘ā’ which is printed in
the document and which is recommendable according to the Islamic Law (yang diharuskan oleh shari'ah). The introductory note ends in the statement that the prayer should be read in the mosques after the Friday service on August 31st 1923. Next, the Arabic prayer is printed and after this a Malay remark is inserted which states that the text was based on an idea of the late Syaid Utman. Finally, the document presents a Malay translation of the du'a:

After studying the content of this prayer, I found that it is identical to the one which the famous scholar of Islam and government adviser Syaid Utman (1822-1914) had made in 1898 when Wilhelmina had ascended the throne. Only in one place is there a difference: where Syaid Utman in 1898 wrote the word الجديدة, as in 'the new queen', in 1923 this word was replaced by the word المصحوبة, 'the virtuous queen'. In 1898, this prayer had let to a lot of commotion, which eventually caused Syaid Utman to issue a fatwa in which he declared it recommendable to utter this prayer. The 1898 version of the prayer was published and translated by me earlier, but for the sake of convenience I include this translation here again, with the difference mentioned. It reads as follows:

O God, O Kind of the Kindly Ones, O Treasure of the weak, O King of Earth and Heaven. You know what is visible from us, and what is hidden. O God, likewise You are kind to us in the regions of this kingdom, where no one opposes our religion, in our prayers, our fasting, our way of life, and our marriages. You Yourself have bestowed kindness on us, granting safety for our souls, our relatives, and our possessions, and You have made it easy for us to attain the means of our livelihood. You Yourself have granted us the mediator and the reason for these blessings, because You have ordered that the Dutch government keeps the country safe and just, taking into consideration the prescriptions of our religion, like the investiture of our judges, the care of their subsistence, the repairing of our mosques, and it does not oppose anything to do with our religious matters. You know that best from us. We therefore beseech You, O God, an abundance of blessings of kind acts from You towards us. O God, likewise You have


6 The opposition against the du'a' mainly came from Pan-Islamist oriented Arabs, see Nico J.G. Kapteijn, The Syaid and the Queen: Syaid Utman on Queen Wilhelmina's inauguration on the throne of the Netherlands in 1898, Journal of Islamic Studies 9 (1998), pp. 165-167. See for the translation pp. 160-161; for the Arabic original, p. 177.

ordered and You have granted these blessings through this reign. We ask You, O God, a reward for the beneficence just mentioned. May You grant well-being to the virtuous, honourable queen, and may You grant her a long life, endowed with bodily health, and [may You grant] her subjects earthly gains, and the hidden things of the earth from the mines and the plantations. May You make her reign glorious for those who fall under her protection in perfect justice, and [may You grant] her the beauty of being marked as a one of Your beloved. O Giver of Guidance, so that the star of her kingdom will rise brightly among the people, and grant her subjects prosperity in abundance and without fail, and [make prosperous] whoever falls under her protection with the goodness of all things and the perpetuity of these blessings for our well-being forever. Amen.

PROVENANCE OF THE DOCUMENTS

Both documents were printed by Yahya bin Utman, who was the son of the just mentioned Syaid Utman. The latter also managed a printing press to disseminate his writings on all kinds of Islamic issues. This press had been quite successful and the selling of the fruits of this press must have been quite lucrative. After the death of Syaid Utman, a quarrel arose within the family which also affected the printing business. These events are mentioned in an Arabic letter, dated Batavia August 25th 1917, which one of Syaid Utman's sons, Syaid Hasan, sent to C. Snouck Hurgronje. The letter mentions that after Syaid Utman's death there was no one to guide the family apart from the eldest son, Alwi. Yet, according to the letter, he did not deal well with the family's interests, and acted according to his personal whims without consulting the other sons. Hereupon, Hasan together with his youngest brother Hamed and an unnamed sister, moved to Kampung Melayu Besar, Meester Cornelis, taking with him the interior of the printing establishment and the inkwells. The first thing Hasan did, was reprint a number of his father's books and establishing the Bintang Bercahaya press. Despite the lack of experience and expertise ("I am not a graduate of the madrasa nor do I have the opportunity to ask the help of my father or someone else to be instructed"), Hasan had been able to keep the business going, be it

7 The Arabic reads which can mean one sister of a few sisters. Women were not important in these Arab communities.

Overleaf:
Illustration 2: Arabic du'a' for Queen Wilhelmina with Malay translation, 1923 (Leyden University Library, Pano F 53 no. 52).
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة المقدمة.

يرجى تقديم نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي.
with difficulty.\(^8\)

Although the issue is not altogether clear from this letter, it seems that these problems regarding the continuation of the printing business were even more complicated because another brother, Sayyid 'Abd Allāh, was also involved in printing in the decade after Sayyid 'Uṭmān’s death, as is testified by a number of publications which have survived and which bear his name. Moreover, yet another brother was active in the same field, namely Sayyid Yāḥyā who in 1916 published a sales catalogue of the writings of his deceased father under the imprint N.V. Handel-My. Said Osman, located in Petamburan, Weltevreden. In the Malay preface to this catalogue it is mentioned that the ‘director’ (Malay direktur) of this press was Sayyid Yāḥyā.\(^9\)

It thus appears that immediately after the death of Sayyid 'Uṭmān no less than four of his sons were active in the printing business: ‘Alwī, Ḥasan, ‘Abd Allāh and Yāḥyā. Of these four sons, it seems that Yāḥyā was the most serious and most successful of all in continuing the business of their renowned father and it was he who in 1923 published the documents mentioned above in a very skilful and – especially the first one – artistic way. Nothing else is known to me about Sayyid Yāḥyā, apart from the fact that he is mentioned as the co-copyist of an Arabic manuscript which was finished in Batavia at the end of Shawwal 1316 (\(=\) March 1899).\(^10\) Given the fact that Sayyid Yāḥyā continued the work of his father, we may assume that he also sympathised with his ideas and that he belonged to the traditionalist way of thinking which Sayyid 'Uṭmān had been spreading throughout his life.

**Significance of the documents**

The two documents presented here speak for themselves in that they demonstrate complete loyalty towards the Dutch Royal House and in the light of the introduction to this essay, I would like to go into the issue of what this loyalty actually meant.

First of all, we have to wonder for whom these texts were intended. As we have seen, the poem was in Malay and from this it may be gathered that it was not meant for an European audience, for which reason an entire literary genre of royalist verses existed in the Dutch language.\(^11\) Moreover, the use of Arabic script which from the beginning of the 20th century fell more and more into disuse, even further confines the intended audience to people who knew the Arabic script. Given this observation, we might wonder whether this poem was meant for the immediate surrounding of Sayyid Yāḥyā, that is the Arab community in the Netherlands East Indies. As far as the du‘ā’ is concerned, it is evident from the introductory note that it was meant for the Muslim population.

Hardly anything is known to me about how these two texts were received. The only thing I have come across is that the prayer for Wilhelmina evoked protests. In nationalist oriented circles a negative reaction against the panghulus was heard. These religious officials had been ordered by the husapats to organize the jubilee of the Queen and to pronounce this prayer in the mosques and these orders were perceived as coming from the Residents and ultimately from the Governor-General. And for this reason the panghulus were accused of using Islam “not to honour the Prophet Muhammad, but the kāfīr queen.”\(^12\) In fact Sayyid Yāḥyā had anticipated these protests because, as we have seen above, in his introduction to the prayer he had included the remark that the du‘ā’ was recommendable according to Islamic Law. More information is lacking and it is also unknown how widespread these texts were. All in all, it is not possible to use these texts to establish in how far the loyalty expressed in them was common among the native population. What we do know is that these documents originate from the circles of the Arab minority in the Netherlands East Indies and it is certain that at least Sayyid Yāḥyā himself was sincere in his loyalty towards the Queen. For this reason, in the remainder of this essay, I would like to go into their attitude towards the Dutch Royal House.

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The Arabs and the House of Orange

The Arabs in the Netherlands Indies formed part of a diaspora of emigrants from the region Ḥadramawt in South Yemen and their descendants who had settled in the area around the entire Indian Ocean from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. In 1920, the Arab community consisted of some 45,000 persons and, after the much bigger Chinese community, formed the second largest group within the legal administrative category of the so-called 'Foreign Orientals'. Falling under this category, the Arabs were subject to the regime of the wijk-en passenstelsel ('quarter and pass system') which implied that they needed to make a request for permission from the authorities when they wanted to travel outside of their place of residence and that they were obliged to live in specially designated town quarters. The community was divided in itself into three different social categories: on top the sayyids, the religious nobility originating from the family of the Prophet Muhammad, in the middle the so-called shaykhs and gabili and at the bottom the common people, the masākin ('the poor') and the ḍu‘a‘fā’i ('the weak'). Another feature of the Arab community which is important to note in the framework of this essay is that they had kept a deep feeling of attachment to the motherland in Ḥadramawt, which manifested itself, for instance, in a permanent exchange of visitors between the homeland and the different regions within the diaspora and, secondly, for a long time in the sending of young boys from the diaspora to the motherland for education. 13

This international orientation provoked distrust in government circles in the sense that there was fear that the Arabs with their international contacts might be a source of anti-government sympathies within the colony. This international orientation got a clear political dimension from the 1870's onwards, when the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul started to spread the ideology of Pan-Islamism which aimed to unite all Muslims in the world under his aegis and this ideology also spread to the Netherlands East Indies. The colonial authorities regarded this ideology as a potential danger because it rejected the colonial rule over Muslims in the world. However, it has been shown that this fear of the colonial authorities was exaggerated and that the Arab sympathy in the Dutch East Indies for Pan-Islamism was mainly an expression of their discontent with the Dutch discriminatory rules concerning the pass and quarter system, but that Pan-Islamism had never taken root in the Indies as a political ideology. Moreover, by 1923 Pan-Islamism had lost much of its appeal in the Indies and the pass and quarter system had since been abolished. 14

Another cosmopolitan centre towards which Muslims oriented themselves from the first decade of the 20th century onwards was Cairo. In this city, new ideas on the foundations of Islam were developed by Muhammad 'Abdul and Rāṣid Riḍā' and their call for return to the original sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and the Hadith, caused shockwaves throughout the entire Muslim world, including the Dutch East Indies. One of the pioneers in spreading these ideas of the Egypt-based modernists in the Indies was Muhammad ibn Hāšim, who had been engaged in a heavy conflict about this with his grandfather Sayyid 'Uṭmān, who adhered to the traditional way of thinking based on the Shi‘īte madhhab. From 1914 on, Ibn Hāšim published the journal al-Bashīr and for this he was watched by the Dutch authorities because he was under suspicion of sympathy for Pan-Islamist ideas. However, in 1915 the then Advisor for Native Affairs, D. A. Rinkes, reported that there was nothing wrong with the journal. 15 Interestingly, this Ibn Hāšim also wrote a poem for the 25th jubilee of the Queen. This poem was written in Arabic and was published, together with a Dutch translation by B. (– B. Th. Brondegeest), in a Dutch festive volume on the occasion of the jubilee. 16 His loyalty leaves nothing to desire and in a notable passage he writes:

She [sc. Queen Wilhelmina] has spread a gallery of safety (رواق الأمن)
over the islands
So that the people became flourishing in prosperity
And under her sponsorship a shield of justice (سياح العدل) was built
By sincere men who brought civilization.18

We thus see that the orientation of Ibn Hāsim towards Cairo did not prevent him from expressing his loyalty to the Queen. I think this is understandable because this orientation towards Cairo was primarily religious in nature. His adherence to these modernist ideas primarily inspired him to promote educational reforms, but did not affect his political loyalty towards his country of residence.19 This example shows that the loyalty towards the Queen was not only shown in traditionalist circles of Sayyid Yahyā, but apparently transcended the divide between traditionalist and modernist orientation within Islamic thinking.

Now that I have shown that the international orientation did not stop the Arabs from being loyal politically towards their country of residence, I want to point to a more positive factor which might explain this loyalty. In both documents studied here (and in the poem by Ibn Hāsim), much stress is laid on the legal security which the Arabs enjoyed in the Netherlands East Indies. In itself this is remarkable, because prior to the abolishment of the pass and quarter system the Arabs had enough reason to complain about the way they were treated. Nevertheless, it seemed that in general the Arabs were quite satisfied with the way the colony was managed. I think this should be understood against the background of the situation in their homeland Hadramawt which was notorious for its lack of central government and the arbitrary way of administration. Although many of the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies were not born in Hadramawt, apparently their feeling of attachment to this region was still so deep that they as it were still felt burdened by the lack of a just administration there. This idea was, for instance, expressed in a small article in 1923 on the Arabs in the Indies, written by Sayyid Ismā‘il Ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Attās, a member of the Volkraad; contrary to Hadramawt, in the

18 S. Mohammaddin Ḥāsim, Arabisch Hulgedicht, in: Van Gent et al., Gedenkboek, Plate 3. I have slightly adjusted the translation.

19 In a forthcoming publication, I will deal with Ibn Hāsim and his relationship with the Egyptian reformists and his polemics with his grandfather more in detail.

Netherlands East Indies there was legal security and freedom of religion and for this reason the Queen should be thanked.20

Conclusion

When we now return to the introduction of this essay and try to comment upon the loyalty towards the Royal Family which is expressed in these documents we can say the following. It is clear that the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies had multiple loyalties, but what counted for them most was the circumstance that the Dutch rule, as symbolized in the Queen, offered them legal security, which was absent in Ḥadramawt, their country of origin. Moreover, other feelings of attachments to cosmopolitan centres in the Muslim world at that time were more of a religious nature and did not obstruct a basic loyalty towards the country of residence, as symbolized by the Royal House, namely the Netherlands East Indies. For these reasons I want to conclude that the expression of loyalty in the documents presented here seems genuine. Further research is needed on this, but it might be the case that this loyalty towards the House of Orange was not only common in the immediate circles of Sayyid Yahyā, but also among the majority of the Arab community at large. For, it was the well-known contemporary observer, Ahmad Djajadiningrat, who remarked in his 1936 memoirs: "No group of foreigners in the Indies has so much respect for the established rule as the Arabs".21

20 S. Ismail bin Abdollah Alatas, De Arabieren, in: Van Gent et al., Gedenkboek, p. 50. In 1918, he wrote a prayer in praise of Wilhelmina to commemorate her twentieth jubilee. This prayer was read in the two Friday mosques of Pangeran and Malang. Amongst other things, in the prayer he begs God to protect the country from "the current, unfortunate war", see Leyden Cod. Or. 7935 A.

21 A. Djajadiningrat, Herinneringen van Pangeran Aria Ahmad Djajadiningrat (Batavia, 1936), p. 276.