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The importance to study and understand Aceh and Malay Archipelago Heritage from a socio-scientific perspective seems more relevant than ever. Currently, there is no specific journal that offers a platform for discussion on Aceh and Malay Archipelago Heritage. Nahrasiyah: Journal of Aceh and Malay Archipelago Heritage aims to fill this gap by providing an active forum for the discussion of new ideas, fieldwork experiences, challenging views, and methodological and theoretical approaches to Aceh and Malay Archipelago heritage. The journal is not only a forum for normative reflections in Aceh and Malay Archipelago heritage studies but approaches Aceh and Malay Archipelago Heritage as a lived tradition in today's global societies.

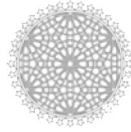
The journal focuses on Aceh and Malay Archipelago heritage studies. As the first socio-scientific journal to focus on Aceh and Malay Archipelago heritage, Nahrasiyah: Journal of Aceh and Malay Archipelago Heritage will be of interest to scholars and students in various academic fields related to the topics.

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Mandailing Ulama in the Early 20th Century: The Meaning and Typology

Asrul,^{1*} Mohammad Ajmal,² Harun Alrasyid³

Abstract: This article examines the meaning and typology of Mandailing ulama. This study follows a literature study with a historical approach. The Kuntowijoyo historical research model will be utilized to discover the meaning and typology of the Mandailing ulama. The research data were obtained from written sources, especially the works of the Mandailing ulama in the era discussed. This study shows that the Mandailing ulama are interpreted as people from the Mandailing ethnic group who have learned religious knowledge in depth. During the early 20th century, the Mandailing ulama were classified into lineage (*nasab*) ulama and non-lineage (*non-nasab*) ulama; *tarekat* ulama and non-*tarekat* ulama; madrasah ulama and ulama from Islamic boarding school; political ulama and non-political ulama. This study enriches the study of Islam and Mandailing which so far has received little attention from both national and international researchers.

Keywords: ulama, Mandailing, sufi orders, intellectual tradition

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Introduction

Ulama (‘*ulama*’) in the archipelago has made an important contribution to the development of Islam in Indonesia, especially at the beginning of the 20th century. They even initiated the emergence of the renewal movement in Indonesia. Some scholars have succeeded in establishing socio-religious organizations engaged in the fields of education, *da’wah* (Islamic preaching), and social charity such as Al Washliyah by Abdurrahman Sjihab and several of his colleagues,¹ Muhammadiyah by KH. Ahmad Dahlan,² Nahdlatul Ulama by KH. Hasyim Asy’ari,³ and Al-Ittihadiyah by KH. Ahmad Dahlan from Medan.⁴ The organizational efforts have been able to change the social, religious, and political face of Indonesia. Many studies have been carried out on the role of Nusantara ulama (ulama from Indonesian archipelago) in changing socio-religious and socio-political conditions. However, it has been realized that there are still many scholars and group of scholars are existing, they are hardly visible. In particular, this study examines the meaning and typology of the Mandailing ulama, a group of ulama who have received little attention from researchers.

Methods

This study is a literature study. The data were obtained from related documents about the Mandailing ulama in the 20th century. Primary sources are the main reference in this study. The approach used in this study is a historical approach. Methodologically, this study utilizes the historical research method of the Kuntowijoyo model.⁵ The study of the Mandailing ulama received relatively little attention from researchers, even though they were important figures driving socio-political and religious changes in the Residency of Tapanuli and the Residency of East Sumatra in the early 20th century. Several researchers have conducted research on scholars from the Mandailing ethnicity. They are Abbas Pulungan,⁶ Erawadi,⁷ Mhd. Syahnan, et al.,⁸ and Al Rasyidin.⁹ Their research does not talk about the meaning and typology of Mandailing ulama. A study of the meaning and typology of Mandailing ulama needs to be carried out to find out the types of Mandailing ulama, especially at the beginning of the 20th century.

Results and Discussion

1. The Meaning of Mandailing Ulama

The term '*ulamā*' is derived from Arabic however, it later became an Indonesian word. Meanwhile, in Arabic, it is the plural form of '*ālim*' which means "a knowledgeable person." Ulama refers to the scientists in virtually all disciplines. In this study, they are specifically referred to as those in the field of religious sciences. They are also called *fāqih* (fiqh experts), *mufassir* (interpretation experts), *muḥaddith* (hadith experts), or *mutakallim* (kalam experts). In the Sunni tradition, ulama are guardians, transmitters, and interpreters of religious sciences, especially Islamic doctrine and law.¹⁰ The *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* defines this vocabulary as "experts in religious knowledge matters." Etymologically, the meaning of ulama is quite broad because it also refers to those knowledgeable in various fields, not just religion. However, it was narrowed to people deeply involved in religious sciences, while Muslims are deeply involved in natural and social sciences, as well as humanities are referred to as scholars. In the generic sense, ulama does not only mean "those that possess a deep understanding of religion" rather, it is also used to describe those that have great knowledge of general sciences such as natural, social, and humanities.

Ulama are either interpreted in general or specific sense. Generally, it simply denotes "knowledgeable people," and in Arabic, such persons are called '*ālim*'. These individuals have deep knowledge of religious, natural, social, and humanitarian sciences and presently, ulama are described in a special sense. According to Musa,¹¹ "these are experts in Islamic science, they are characterized by their integrity, noble, and good character, and are also highly influential in the community." Azra¹² admitted that its meaning has been reduced from "knowledgeable people" to "experts in the field of fiqh."

Ulama executes certain functions and duties among Muslims, and according to Azra,¹³ they are heirs to the Prophets. They function as the successors, maintainers, and guardians of religious teachings. It was further stated that ulama are the guardians of the faith. Therefore, they prevent the enactment of certain religious deviations, distortions, and misunderstandings from both internal and external Islamic circles. Musa¹⁴ reported that according to the

Qur'an, ulama carry out four duties, namely to convey religious messages, tabligh, and explain related matters based on the holy book, tibyân, make wise and fair decisions, *tahkīm*, and set a good example or *uswah al-ḥasanah*. Based on these, it was implied that they have a profound understanding of religion.

Ulama is a term in the Qur'an and hadith for knowledgeable people. At the empirical level, Muslims refer to them in various terms such as *Teungku*, *Kiai*, *Buya*, *Syekh*, *Tuan Guru*, *Ajengan* and *Nun Bendera* in Aceh, Java, Minangkabau, Tapanuli, West Nusa Tenggara and Kalimantan, Sunda, and Madura.¹⁵

Azyumardi Azra stated that ulama simply denotes “knowledgeable people.” Generally, they do not possess specific knowledge, however, along with the maturation of Islamic sciences, the notion of ulama was narrowed to “people that are knowledgeable in the field of fiqh.”¹⁶ Abbas Pulungan¹⁷ stated that in the Mandailing community, those that studied in the Middle East, have a madrasa (Islamic school), as well as delivers teachings and lectures to the general public. The people of Angkola, one of the ethnic groups in North Sumatra, have a different interpretation of the ulama. They are described as “madrasa teachers or religious leaders that organize recitation classes for the elderly group.” In this context, Mandailing ulama are defined as people that understand Islamic religious sciences in-depth, especially in the fields of monotheism, fiqh, and Sufism, irrespective of the fact that they have never studied in the Middle East. This indicates that studying in this region is not a requirement for religious scholars to be addressed as ulama as long as they study intensely under the tutelage of their predecessors till they finally have a deep understanding of Islamic sciences. The data obtained show that some of the Mandailing ulama studied in the Middle East and the remaining in Nusantara.

Based on the information above, Mandailing Islamic scholars can be interpreted in general and in particular. In general, Mandailing Islamic scholars are people who have deep understanding of Islamic science and general science, and they are from Mandailing ethnicity. In particular, Mandailing Islamic scholars are those who have deep understanding of the Islamic teachings among people in Mandailing ethnicity. More specifically, according to Azra (2022), the meaning

of “ulama” has been reduced in that Mandailing Islamic scholars are those who have deep understanding in the field of jurisprudence among people in Mandailing ethnicity. Furthermore, according to Netton, Mandailing Islamic scholars also explain Islamic teachings related to aqidah and legal issues in the internal or external Mandailing muslims. According to Musa, Mandailing Islamic scholars also convey religious messages (*tablīgh*); explain religious issues based on the Qur’an (*tibyān*); decide matters wisely and fairly (*taḥkīm*); and as role models (*uswah al-ḥasanah*).

In terms of quantity, the number of scholars from Mandailing ethnic is very large. Some of them were born and domiciled in the Tapanuly Residency as the homeland of the Mandailing people. Some of them were born and domiciled outside Tapanuli, including the Residency of East Sumatra and even Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. The North Sumatra Ulema council published a book entitled *Sejarah Ulama-ulama Terkemuka di Sumatera Utara* in 1983. The book displays the profiles of 46 prominent ulama from North Sumatra province, and the majority of the Islamic scholars (ulama) in that book are of Mandailing ethnicity. When researchers conducted a fieldwork study in Mandailing Natal and South Tapanuli districts, the two districts from which the Mandailing people originated, written and spoken data were gained from local people. The data were the names of 86 Mandailing ulama. Some of these scholars produced written works and some others established educational institutions that are still actively carrying out learning activities. This indicates that Mandailing ethnic has many Islamic scholars who most of them have not been studied yet.

2. Typology of Mandailing Ulama

Several preliminary studies reportedly divided the ulama into several types. Darban¹⁸ categorized the Javanese ulama into four groups, such as 1) those that also serve as central rulers of government, 2) individuals that are of royal blood, 3) People used as tools of royal or traditional bureaucracy, and 4) those in rural areas, that do not have any relationship with the bureaucracy. In this study, ulama are divided into two, namely, those that are powerful bureaucrats as well as the non-powerful ones.

Imam Suprayogo¹⁹ divided Kiai based on various perspectives. From the descent aspect, it was categorized into two, such as lineage and non-lineage. Based on the perspective of being active in the tarekat (order), *Kiai* is divided into two, namely tarekat (inner *kiai*) and non-tarekat (*zahir kiai*). Referring to the activity orientation aspect, they are grouped into three types, including (1) spiritual *kiai* is responsible for taking care of Islamic boarding schools that emphasize worship activities to get closer to God, (2) the advocates that take care of and nurture Islamic boarding school students and also pay attention to the problems faced by the community, (3) the political ones also perceived as Islamic boarding school caregivers that are mostly concerned about politics and power issues. Sholichin²⁰ strengthened Suprayogo's findings after examining the typology of Madurese kiai, which are classified into 4 types, including (1) lineage and non-lineage, (2) spiritual ones found in Islamic and non-Islamic boarding schools, (3) tarekat and non-tarekat, as well as (4) the political ones. The various aforementioned classifications serve as tools used to analyze the typology of Mandailing ulama.

Based on the lineage and non-lineage aspect, some of them are indeed the children of ulama, and they follow in their parents' footsteps. However, the majority are not the children of the ulama. The ones that reside in Tapanuli Residency were the sons of Shaykh Abdul Halim Hasibuan, also referred to as Shaykh Bosar, bin H.M. Nurhakim (a *Tuan Kadi*), Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad Ad-Dary bin Shaykh Ahmad Zein, and Shaykh Ja'far Abdul Qadir bin Shabir al-Mandili (Nasution). Furthermore, one of the Shaykh Ahmad Zein (1846 to 1950), was the son of a nobleman Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary. Meanwhile, one of the Mandailing ulama Shaykh Abdul Hamid (1865 to 1928), was the son of a farmer in the Tapanuli Residency and bore the surname Lubis, while Shaykh Juneid Thola (1886 to 1948) bore the surname Rangkuti. Some were the sons of a merchant called Shaykh Musthafa Husein (1886 to 1937) and surnamed Nasution. Several Mandailing ulama in East Sumatra were from the lineage, of Abdurrahman Sjihab (1910 to 1955), the son of Kadi in the Serdang Kingdom. Meanwhile, Abdul Halim Hasan (1901 to 1969), surnamed Daulay, M. Arsjad Th. Lubis (1908 to 1972), and Adnan Lubis (1910 to 1966)

were non-lineage ulama. It is therefore, evident that some of them are categorized under lineage and non-lineage ulama.

In accordance with the tarekat and non-tarekat aspect, some Mandailing ulama that visited Mecca before 1900 adhered to the Naqshabandiah Order. On the contrary, some of them rejected and criticized the tarekat. For example, Shaykh Abdullah Pagaran Sigatal (1809 to 1900) adhered to the Naqshabandiah Order where a diploma was obtained in the tarekat. Shaykh Ahmad Zein, surnamed Hasibuan, initially adhered to this Order under the influence of Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi. Although Hasibuan later left and focused more on practicing the Sammaniyah Order, others include Shaykh Abdul Halim Hasibuan, known as Shaykh Bosar (1857 to 1920), and Shaykh Abd. Muttalib bin Japidondang Lubis (1874 to 1937) also adhered to the Naqshabandiah Order, where they acquired knowledge of tarekat while studying in Mecca. One of the Mandailing ulama known as an opponent of this order is Shaykh Abd. Hamid (1865 to 1928), surnamed Lubis.²¹

Meanwhile, some Mandailing ulama travelled to Mecca after 1900 to acquire knowledge of the tarekat (order). One of those that developed the Naqshabandiah Order was Shaykh Syihabuddin Aek Libung (1892 to 1967) that wrote 2 mystical works such as *Ādāb al-Murīdīn* and *Fatḥ al-Qalb*.²² The Mandailing ulama from Al Washliyah and Al Ittihadiyah were categorized as non-tarekat ulama. They focus more on the study of fiqh and monotheism and are not known as a murshid or caliph of a particular tarekat. The following figures Abdurrahman Sjihab, Adnan Lubis, Yusuf Ahmad Lubis, M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Abdul Halim Hasan are not affiliated with a particular tarekat. This is because they have never been taught a particular tarekat in the madrasas, where they work as teachers. The founded Al Washliyah²³ and Al Ittihadiyah organizations²⁴ failed to develop any tarekat at all, and they are more likely to be perceived as *fāqih* than sufis.

The Mandailing ulama consists of madrasa and pesantren, Islamic boarding school, from the educational aspect. In the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, they were more a product of madrasas and not pesantren alumni because of their tradition in Java, which was still unknown in Tapanuli and East Sumatra

Residencies.²⁵ Mandailing ulama in this era were madrasa alumni that studied religion under the tutelage of teachers using the yellow book, although, as students, they never stayed in the dormitory. Post-Independence led to the emergence of several Islamic boarding schools and some contemporary pesantren ulama. In the Tapanuli Residency, the Mandailing ulama are alumni of the Madrasa founded by Shaykh Mustafa Husein, although it was eventually converted to a Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School (or *Pesantren*) in the early 80s. Among the alumni that later became ulama were Shaykh Abdul Halim Khatib²⁶ and Shaykh Ali Hasan Ahmad ad-Dary.²⁷

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the 20th century, those in the East Sumatra Residency were madrasa alumni. In Medan City, two well-known madrasas, namely Madrasah al-Hasaniyah was founded by Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum,²⁸ a Malay ulama with several students²⁹ and Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli (MIT)³⁰ was Mandailing nomads, especially Shaykh Muhammad Ya'cub.³¹ MIT teachers and students tend to be of Mandailing ethnicity, and among the madrasa alumni are Adnan Lubis, Abdurrahman Sjihab (Rangkuti),³² M. Arsjad Th. Lubis,³³ and Yusuf Ahmad Lubis.³⁴ During their lifetime, they never founded a pesantren rather, they built hundreds of madrasas affiliated with Islamic organizations, such as Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah.³⁵ Several Mandailing ulamas affiliated with Al-Ittihadiyah such as Abdul Halim Hasan and Zainal Arifin Abbas.³⁶ As a reference for Islamic boarding school students in Java, teachers at madrasas in East Sumatra use the yellow book to teach the Sunni tradition. It was admitted that the tradition and system of pesantren as an Islamic educational institution was unknown in North Sumatra at least until the era of Indonesian independence. In North Sumatra, the ulama, especially those from the Mandailing ethnicity, tend to maintain the traditional system of the Madrasa.

The Mandailing ulama consists of the political and non-political aspects. Those that travelled to Mecca before 1900 tended not to engage in politics because there were no political parties in Indonesia. However, ulama that visited afterward were involved in practical politics. In the Tapanuli Residency, Shaykh Musthafa Husein, Shaykh Abdul Halim Khatib and Shaykh Ali Hasan Ad-Dary are affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Party. Meanwhile, in

East Sumatra Residency, Abdurrahman Sjihab (Rangkuti), Adnan Lubis, M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, Yusuf Ahmad Lubis and Bahrum Djamil from Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah, as well as Shaykh Zainal Arifin Abbas (Hasibuan) and Shaykh Abdul Halim Hasan (Daulay) from Al Ittihadiyah are affiliated with the Masjumi Party.³⁷ Several Mandailing ulama were elected as members of the Constituent Assembly in Jakarta, such as Shaykh Musthafa Husein from the NU Parties, as well as Adnan Lubis and M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, from the Masjumi Parties,³⁸ respectively. Unfortunately, Shaykh Mustafa Husein died before being appointed as a member of the Assembly.³⁹ In post-independence Indonesia, they played an active role in the political field and also supported Masjumi and Nahdlatul Ulama as well as the Indonesian Muslim Party (*Partai Muslimin Indonesia*, Parmusi) and the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP) in the Old Order era.

Conclusion

This study successfully provides an analysis of the meaning and typology of Mandailing ulama (Islamic scholars) in the early 20th century. Mandailing ulama in this study are understood as those from the Mandailing ethnic group who have a deep understanding of Islam, especially *'aqīdah* and jurisprudence. Several sources indicate that the number of prominent Islamic scholars of the Mandailing ethnicity in the early 20th century was very large. Based on a review of their biographies, Mandailing ulama (Islamic scholars) can be classified into Mandailing ulama as nasab ulama and non-nasab ulama; tarekat ulama and non-tarekat ulama; madrasa ulama and Islamic scholars at boarding schools; political ulama and non-political ulama. However, Mandailing ulama (Islamic scholars) can also be divided into two terms of intellectuality, namely ulama (Islamic scholars) who are productive in their work, and ulama who have not produced any works. The study of Mandailing ulama is interesting because many things have not been revealed. Mandailing Ulama (Islamic scholars) were affiliated to various socio-religious organizations throughout the early 20th century, for examples; Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Al-Ittihadiyah, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah, and Muhammadiyah. They also

produced many works in various fields of science. They also do not ignore actual events in the religious, educational, social, cultural, political, and economic fields. All of these are interesting to work on considering that there has been no study related to this.

Endnotes

¹ See: Ja'far Ja'far, "Peran Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah Dalam Merevitalisasi Madhhab Shafi'i Di Era Kontemporer," *Justicia Islamica: Jurnal Kajian Hukum dan Sosial* 13, no. 1 (2016); Ja'far Ja'far, "Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah Dan Pelestarian Akidah Ahl Sunnah Wa Al-Jama'ah Di Indonesia," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (2019).

² See: Hyung-Jun Kim, "Praxis and Religious Authority in Islam: The Case of Ahmad Dahlan, Founder of Muhammadiyah," *Studia Islamika* 17, no. 1 (2010).

³ Robin Bush, "Redefining 'Political Islam' in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama and Khittah '26," *Studia Islamika* 7, no. 2 (2000).

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¹⁰ Ian Richard Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam* (London: Routledge, 1997); R.C Repp, "Ulamâ," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹¹ Ali Masykur Musa, *Membumikan Islam Nusantara: Respons Islam Terhadap Isu-Isu Aktual* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2014).

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¹³ Azyumardi Azra, *Malam Scribu Bulan: Renungan-Renungan 30 Hari Ramadan* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2005).

¹⁴ Musa, *Membumikan Islam Nusantara: Respons Islam Terhadap Isu-Isu Aktual*.

¹⁵ Djohan Effendi, *A Renewal without Breaking Tradition: The Emergence of a New Discourse in Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama during the Abdurrahman Wahid Era* (Jakarta: Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia, 2008).

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¹⁷ Pulungan, *Perkembangan Islam Di Mandailing*.

¹⁸ Ahmad Adaby Darban, "Ulama Jawa Dalam Perspektif Sejarah," *Humaniora* 16, no. 1 (2004): 27–34.

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²¹ Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, *Sejarah Ulama-Ulama Terkemuka Di Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, 1983).

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³⁷ Ja'far Ja'far, "Pemikiran Politik Islamisme Moderat Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah," *Al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Filsafat* 16, no. 2 (2019).

³⁸ Mardian Idris Harahap, "Nationalism and Political Thoughts of Sheikh M. Arsjad Thalib Lubis (1908-1972)," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 45, no. 1 (2021).

³⁹ Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, "Riwayat Hidup Syekh Mustafa Husein Purba Baru (1886-1955)," in *Sejarah Ulama-Ulama Terkemuka Di Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, 1983).

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