Sufi networks have been seen as constituting one of the prime means through which cosmopolitanism in a variety of senses was articulated in the pre-modern Islamic world. In emulation of the Prophetic *hadith*, ‘seek knowledge though it be in China’, travel was one of the key duties of the Sufi, both in theory and in practice, and Sufi literature was permeated with the vocabulary of voyaging.¹ Through shared texts, holy men and genealogies both spiritual and blood, ṭariqas bound together the Islamic world in a way that political and commercial links never rivalled. Itinerant holy men criss-crossed the *dār al-Islām*, and from an early date some specifically sought out contested zones on the border with non-Muslims, far from the urban centres of Islamic civilisation, to devote themselves to contemplation and holy war.

As a type of religiosity that thrived on these contested peripheries, Sufism has often been characterised as especially receptive to non-Muslim influences,² which for some modern scholars constitutes a form of cosmopolitanism.³ This presumed aspect of Sufism is often seen as underlying its alleged role in converting non-Muslim populations, by providing a sort of common ground whereby pre-Islamic practices could be incorporated into a Muslim society.⁴ One scholar has written that analysis of Sufism in the Indian Ocean is ‘more
apt to speak of an acceptance of Islamic practices into pre-Islamic cosmology and customs rather than conversion to a new orthodoxy. However, as Nile Green has put it, ‘to a very large extent, Sufism was Islam in its medieval form’ and it cannot easily be detached from other forms of Islamic piety. Sufi Islam encompassed a wide variety of practices, the distinctive unifying component being a belief in the efficacy of the blessing power (baraka) of holy men. Thus, whatever the reasons for the widespread appeal of Sufism to Muslims and converts throughout post-classical Islamic history, it would be wrong to assume that it was in any uniform sense especially (or at all) accommodating to pre-Islamic practices.

If claims that Sufism is cosmopolitan by virtue of openness to other religions are questionable, so is the idea that travel necessarily engenders cosmopolitanism, except perhaps in a very limited sense where it becomes little more than a synonym for itinerancy. The early modern Indian Ocean, for instance, is characterised by an intensification of links between its various parts, with ever greater numbers of itinerant scholars and Sufis. Yet these links, far from promoting openness to diversity, in fact brought an unsettling realisation of the variety of Muslim practices – often merely local variants rather than true survivals of pre-Islamic tradition – which in turn have been linked to a prevailing trend over the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries that sought to criticise and eradicate bid‘a (innovation), or diversity in religious practice. Some recent scholarship has sought to identify these competing interpretations of Islam as rival forms of cosmopolitanism, in the sense of cosmopolitanism as the challenge of ‘how to create or envisage wider unity when faced with social diversity’. In this sense, cosmopolitanism could thus constitute a religious or even a political project, and one far removed from the utopian ideas of open-mindedness and mobility that characterise many discussions of the phenomenon. Indeed, like many universalist religious and political projects, such a cosmopolitanism might overlap with, and indeed require, coercion. Although Sufis are characterised in some scholarship as other-worldly ‘Muslim mystics’, recent work has drawn attention to the intense political connections of Sufis in diverse areas of the Muslim world, such as, for instance, on the peripheries of the dār al-Islām where Sufis played an important role in turning frontier regions such as Bengal, the Deccan and the Balkans into Muslim space, receiving in return support and patron-
age from political elites, and thus participating in and facilitating imperial expansion.\textsuperscript{11}

In at least some times and places Sufism supported imperial political power by offering through its philosophical theology a legitimation of sultanic authority. This is associated, in particular, with various developments of the thought of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240). In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire claimed its very foundation had been predicted by this great Sufi thinker,\textsuperscript{12} while in newly Islamising territories like Southeast Asia the doctrine of the perfect man (\textit{al-insān al-kāmil}) associated with Ibn ʿArabi has been interpreted as offering a means of perpetuating the pre-Islamic, divine status of the ruler and justifying it in Islamic terms.\textsuperscript{13} Studies of Southeast Asia have often seen this political function of Sufism as linked to an elite court culture. Martin Van Bruinessen argues that in Southeast Asia until the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century, Sufism had no wider appeal. For him, Sufism is intimately bound up with efforts to support the ruler’s legitimacy, or as he puts it, ‘The tarékat [i.e., ṭariqa] was perceived as a source of spiritual power, at once legitimating and supporting the ruler’s position. It was obviously not in the rulers’ interest to make the same supernatural power available to all their subjects.’\textsuperscript{14}

However, during the seventeenth century, a critical phase in the spread of Islam in the Indian Ocean region, a certain \textit{shariʿa}-minded Sufi piety was disseminated that had little connection with the speculations of the school of Ibn ʿArabi. This phenomenon, sometimes called ‘neo-Sufism’, has been attributed to the efforts of scholars from the Ḥaramayn, the two great Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina which in the seventeenth century were major intellectual centres,\textsuperscript{15} and is often seen as associated with a more popular rather than courtly religiosity. As Michael Laffan puts it, ‘Sufism was formally restricted to the regal elite, while adherence to the \textit{shariʿa} was commended to their subjects.’\textsuperscript{16} Yet beyond constituting a reaction to the perception of \textit{bidʿa} mentioned above, this \textit{shariʿa}-minded piety had profound political consequences, seeking to shape societies in accordance with the norms of an idealised Islamic Middle East and sweep away existing dynasties. Here cosmopolitanism, in the sense of an attempt to impose unity over diversity, appears as both a disruptive and a coercive force. Yet the political consequences of the rise of this \textit{shariʿa}-minded piety in the Indian
Ocean have received little attention. In this chapter, I focus on the sultanates of Banten in Java, Aceh in Sumatra and the Maldivie Islands in the Indian Ocean. All fell outside the compass of the great imperial projects of the Asian mainland – the Mughal, Ottoman and Safavid empires; all were societies still undergoing a process of Islamisation (culturally, if not demographically); and all were, from the perspective of the Middle East, remote frontiers of Islam, even if their self-image was otherwise. Furthermore, although geographically disparate, cultural and commercial ties – especially but not exclusively the spice trade – bound Banten closely to Aceh, and Aceh to the Maldives. These lands thus shared a relationship with one another, as well as with the Middle East.

I will draw on some neglected Arabic texts to argue that promoting the universalist project of sharīʿa-minded Sufism was a prime concern not just of Ḥaramayn ʿulamāʾ but more importantly local actors, including royal courts. Promotion of sharīʿa was a component of efforts to promote themselves as Islamic, and sometimes more specifically as Middle Eastern-style, monarchies, and in this sense can itself be seen as a cosmopolitan venture in the sense outlined in the previous paragraph. First, I will look at the evidence of the Arabic texts composed in the Hijaz for the royal library of the Banten sultanate, which can help us to understand better the Sufi interests of at least some Southeast Asian rulers, which are suggestive of the intimate relationship between the sharīʿa, Sufism and the court. I will then in the second part of this chapter develop the argument by turning to a practical example of a Sufi in action in late seventeenth-century Aceh and the Maldives, the Syrian Qādirī shaykh Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, a descendant of the famed Baghdadi saint ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166). While in both locations our Syrian Qādirī received the support of the political elite for a programme that aimed at enforcing a more rigorous interpretation of the sharīʿa, and rejection of local customs, he also played a part in destabilising royal power. Here another component of Sufism, genealogical links as embodied in a holy man, play a crucial role, as will be discussed in further detail below.

**God’s Law at the Royal Court of Banten: the Evidence of Texts**

One of the early Islamic monarchies of Southeast Asia was Banten, a rich trading city on the island of Java whose commercial links stretched as far
west as Mecca and as far east as Manila. From the sixteenth century onwards, the sultans of Banten sponsored the development of Islamic institutions in northeast Java. For instance, as van Bruinessen notes, the position of qādi was especially politically important in Banten compared with other Javanese sultanates where it had a more limited role. Moreover, as the Javanese chronicle the Sejarah Banten relates, two sultans visited Mecca in person, receiving recognition from the Sharīf of Mecca; one, indeed, was subsequently known as Sultan Hajji. The Sejarah Banten also recounts how in 1638 a Bantenese embassy, after passing through the Maldives, the Coromandel Coast, Surat, Mocha and Jeddah, reached Mecca to ask the Sharīf to explain for them certain tracts. This report has attracted attention from scholarship because these tracts have been identified with the debates over the doctrine of wahdat al-wujūd attributed to Ibn ʿArabī that rocked Southeast Asian learned circles. This has often been taken as further evidence for the association of courts, and that of Banten in particular, with a high-flown philosophical mysticism, evidence of Sufism’s ‘elite’ nature and its appeal to royal legitimation strategies.

An examination of the texts themselves, however, suggests rather different conclusions. The royal library of Banten, preserved in the National Library in Jakarta, contains copies of the works commissioned by the Sharīf from the leading Meccan scholar Ibn ʿAlān (d. 1647 or 1648) for the Bantenese embassy. The Bantenese had tried to persuade Ibn ʿAlān to make the long journey to Java with them but he declined. Although Ibn ʿAlān was a well-known Hijazi scholar, some of whose works remain in print today, his compositions written at the behest of the sultan of Banten, Abū l-Mafākhir, apparently only circulated in Southeast Asia, for their titles never feature in biographical notices of Ibn ʿAlān from the Middle East, such as the detailed one given by the seventeenth-century biographer al-Muḥībī in his Khulāṣat al-Athār. Perhaps most importantly for the Bantenese purposes, Ibn ʿAlān was not just a well-known scholar, known as the muhyi al-sunna, or ‘reviver of the Prophet’s custom’, but possessed a distinguished lineage as a direct descendant of Caliph Abū Bakr.

In an unpublished commentary on a work on eschatology attributed to al-Ghazālī, al-Durra al-Fākhira, Ibn ʿAlān provides a detailed account of how the work’s composition came about, confirming the reality of the sultans’
contacts with the Sharifs. He starts by describing how Ghazâlî’s reputation reached Southeast Asia (Jakarta, MS A32, p. 3):

And the ‘ulamā’ of distant regions (‘ulamā’ al-aṭrâf) became aware of the precious fine pearls [of his writings] and wanted to copy these lights [of knowledge], and these delightful gems. The righteous, noble ‘ulamā’ of Java, highly respected, raised a petition to their king, the noble sultan who defends Islam and Muslims, whose task it is to spread noble justice over the succession of the years; the glorious, fortunate Abu l-Mafâkhir ‘Abd al-Qâdir [sultan of Banten]. The king contemplated and examined then cogitated and considered; he knew that light had not been granted to [al-Ghazâlî] nor had he reached this knowledge except by the guidance of the Prophet Muḥâammad, born in the Holy Land; and he realised that this [knowledge] could not be acquired except from the family of the Prophet . . .

The king therefore sought to acquire his desire, and ‘the finest man of his age urged him to realise his desire’ – this was, Ibn ‘Alân tells us, the Sharif of Mecca, Zayd b. Muḥsin. The sultan wrote Zayd ‘a letter which asked him, of his good grace, requesting what he wanted. His request was well-received, that the book entitled al-Durra al-Fâkhira fī Ulûm al-Ākhira should be explained to him, along with the book Naṣihat al-Mulûk (“Advice for Kings”).’

Ibn ‘Alân then relates how the Sharif Zayd b. Muḥsin chose him to undertake this task, being qualified by virtue both of caliphal descent and his learning. The commentary on al-Durra al-Fâkhira survives only in this one manuscript, with occasional annotations in Arabic-script Javanese (pegon). The Naṣihat al-Mulûk, also by al-Ghazâlî, was copied in Banten, and two manuscripts of the Arabic text survive in Jakarta.25 In addition, Ibn ‘Alân supplied another work of his own composition, titled al-Mawâhib al-Rabbâniyya ‘alâ l-As’ila al-Jâwiyya (‘The divine gifts in response to Javanese questions’).26 These questions, posed by Sultan Abû l-Mafâkhir, all arise from the Naṣihat al-Mulûk, and al-Mawâhib al-Rabbâniyya in many ways reads like a commentary on the Naṣihat al-Mulûk.

The Naṣihat al-Mulûk is designed as a practical primer on how to govern in accordance with Islamic precepts. Many examples of this type of ‘mirror for princes’ are known, although some place much more emphasis on Persian
courtly traditions. The central idea of the text is that ‘the tree of faith has ten roots and ten branches, its roots being the beliefs of the heart and its branches actions of the body’. Al-Ghazālī outlines these ten roots of faith but devotes most attention to the ten ‘branches’ – that is, actions, which he illustrates with anecdotes usually drawn from early Islamic history. The *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* thus aims to show the sultan how to behave, above all how to act with justice. Through its anecdotes, it offers something of a manual for relatively recent converts to Islam, and its popularity in Mamluk times suggests that its appeal for new Muslims was enduring. It is easy to see then why it might have appealed to the rulers of Banten, at a time when it was still a peripheral area of the Muslim world.

The questions that Ibn ‘Alān addresses in his *al-Mawāhib al-Rabbāniyya* also revolve around justice and, in particular, the implementation of the *ḥudūd*, divinely prescribed punishments. Just like al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Alān draws on *ḥadīth* and anecdotes of early Islamic history to illustrate his points, although he occasionally also relates anecdotes concerning the behaviour of recent Sharīfs of the Hijaz. Both the *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* and *al-Mawāhib al-Rabbāniyya* are thus designed as practical guides on how to behave, and in particular how to rule as a Muslim. The very lack of mystical content in *al-Durra al-Fākhira* has been noted and the texts described by its English translator as ‘presenting a series of ethical teachings that are intended less as descriptions of the future life than as injunctions for the living of this life in order to be ready for the Day and the Hour’. In a Southeast Asian context, it has also been noted that the works of al-Ghazālī are sometimes invoked precisely in opposition to Ibn ‘Arabī and the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd.*

In other words, the evidence of these texts is that, for the court of Banten, Sufism was not a source of legitimacy through esoteric doctrines. On the contrary, the texts show a preoccupation with the *shari‘a*, with the *ḥudūd* and with obedience to the external forms of Islam, not with metaphysical speculation. Moreover, Ibn ‘Alān’s testimony suggests that the mission to Mecca was prompted ultimately by the ‘ulamā’ of Banten rather than by their court. Nonetheless, the preservation of these texts in the palace library, sometimes in fine presentation copies, with careful Arabic vocalisation alongside *pegon* translations, indicates their enduring importance for the royal
court of Banten and suggests that they had ritual as well as purely functional uses, perhaps for public declamation.

The key point, though, as Ibn ʿAlān underlines in his introduction to his commentary on al-Durra al-Fākhira, is that these texts, and their transmission from Mecca via the agency of the Sharīf and Ibn ʿAlān, served to link them, and the dynasty of Banten, to the Prophet himself. In this context, it is worth recalling that, as one scholar has put it, ‘Sufi Islam was a religiosity of embodied holy men who re-presented the blessing power that via genealogical memory believers traced through space and time back to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca.’ When a physical holy man was lacking – or could not be persuaded to move, as in the case of Ibn ʿAlān – texts stood in for him and served to ‘re-present the blessing power’, hence the emphasis Ibn ʿAlān gives to both his and the Sharifs’ lineage. In this sense, the example of Banten suggests that a simple disjunction between sharīʿa for masses and Sufism for the court is untenable, nor can we see these missions as simply an attempt to raise the standards of Southeast Asian Islam by Hijazi scholars and their sympathisers, as has been suggested. Rather, embracing and supporting the sharīʿa and the hudūd as promoted by texts such as al-Mawāhib al-Rabbāniyya was a source of legitimacy, reinforcing the link to the sacred land of the Hijaz and to the family of the Prophet that was provided by the association with the Sharīf and Ibn ʿAlān. This is a point that we will see more clearly in our second case, that of the itinerant Qādirī preacher Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn.

Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Late Seventeenth-century Aceh and the Maldives

The Qādirī Sufis tariqa, taking its name from the Prophet’s descendant ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), is often credited with a major role in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. As early as the fourteenth century, the Arabic author al-Yāfiʿī recalls being initiated into the Qādiriyya in Aden by a certain Masʿūd al-Jāwī, a Southeast Asian, and al-Yāfiʿī’s Qādirī hagiographic texts such as the Khulāṣat al-Mafākhir obtained a widespread currency in the archipelago. The poems of the sixteenth-century Acehnese mystic Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī in several places mention ʿAbd al-Qādir, suggesting Ḥamzah’s affiliation to the Qādirī order. By the mid-eighteenth century saraka (investiture
documents issued by the sultan) from Aceh were invoking ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī directly after God, the Prophet and his four companions, while allusions to ‘Abd al-Qādir may also be found in documents from the Minangkabau sultanate of south Sumatra. The Qādiriyya may also have had an important place in the sultanate of Banten – van Bruinessen has suggested that the name of Sultan ‘Abd al-Qādir indicates an affiliation with the order. Similarly affiliated to the Qādiriyya (in addition to other tariqas such as the Rifāʿiyya) were two of the leading figures in seventeenth-century Southeast Asian Islam, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1658) and Shaykh Yūsuf al-Maqassārī (1629–99).

The careers of both al-Rānīrī and al-Maqassārī are emblematic of the interconnected nature of the Indian Ocean world in this period, the close association of leading ‘ulama’ with royal power and the growing influence of shariʿa-minded piety. Al-Rānīrī, born in Gujarat to a Hadrami family, made his career at the sultanate of Aceh, for whose ruler, Iskandar Thānī (r. 1636–1641), he composed a vast compilation of Arabic texts in Malay translation, the Bustān al-Salāṭīn, which aimed at promoting acculturation to a Middle Eastern Islamic cultural ideal. Al-Rānīrī is notorious for launching a campaign against the teachings of two earlier Acehnese Sufis, Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrānī, condemning them as unbelievers (kāfir) and burning their books. Al-Maqassārī, meanwhile, was born into the royal family of the kingdom of Goa in Sulawesi, and was educated in the palace. He travelled to Banten and then Aceh, before continuing to Arabia to complete his education and to undertake the pilgrimage. One of his teachers was al-Rānīrī, who inducted him into the Qādirī order. On al-Maqassārī’s return to Southeast Asia, he was employed at the court of Banten and married into the royal family. After the revolution in 1682 in which Sultan Ageng was overthrown by the Dutch, al-Maqassārī himself was also captured. Regarding him as a grave security risk, the Dutch exiled him, first to Ceylon then to the Cape of Good Hope. Although al-Maqassārī’s travels in his later life were thus coerced, he nonetheless remained part of Muslim networks. Indeed, the development of the Qādiriyya and Rifāʿiyya Sufi orders in the Cape has been attributed to his exile there.

Both al-Rānīrī and al-Maqassārī emphasised a shariʿa-minded piety, yet the Qādiriyya tariqa to which they adhered is often considered by modern
scholarship to be in some sense opposed to shari‘a-minded Islam. Anthony Reid remarks that ‘An orthodox Muslim code of ethics from sixteenth-century Java warns its readers against the most popular of all the [Sufi] orders, the Kadiriyya’, while van Bruinessen, for instance, has noted the association between the reading of ’Abd al-Qādir’s manāqib and the debus cult of invulnerability involving the adept striking himself with metal spikes. The Encyclopaedia of Islam entry on the Qādiriyya is also devoted almost exclusively to discussing such exotic practices. In this sense, the Qādiriyya may be said to embody the tendency to view Sufism as in some sense opposed to shari‘a. Such a view though, hardly does justice to the historical practice of the Qādirī ṭariqa, which, following ’Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī’s own custom, emphasised adherence to the Qur’ān and shari‘a, as is suggested by the activities of the seventeenth-century Qādirī Sufi Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, who forms the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s career underlines the intricate relationship between Sufis and royal power. To my knowledge, the sole source to discuss him is the eighteenth-century Arabic chronicle of the Maldive Islands by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, himself a disciple of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn. Although an edition of the Arabic text was published in Tokyo in 1982, the chronicle seems to have attracted very little attention subsequently.

Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn relates that Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn was originally from Hama in Syria, where a famous branch of the descendants of ’Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī had settled. We are told that he had studied at the al-Azhar in Cairo, the premier institution of learning in the Arabic-speaking world, and then travelled with his brother Ṭāhā to Mocha in Yemen. From there they went to the Coromandel coast of India and on to Sumatra. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn recounts the circumstances of his arrival in Aceh:

He sailed from Muḥammad Bandar [Parangipettai on the Coromandel coast] to Banda Aceh. When he arrived there the people of Aceh received him with the highest honours. As long as he was in Aceh, he used to command what is right and forbid what is wrong [ya’muru bi l-ma’rūf wa-yunhibi l-munkar]. Many of its notables [akābiruhu] were his disciples [muridin labu], and they gave him slaves and much money. He was brave and feared no one in abolishing things that are forbidden and
destroying innovation [bid’a] and in reviving the sublime practice [sunna] of the Prophet. He used to progress in the land, he and his brother carried on two thrones, accompanied by a great green flag on the middle of which was written the name of their ancestor Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. Sayyid Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn would only go out under a great green parasol like a king of great rank. He continued to order what is right and forbid what is wrong, to abolish shameful innovation and detestable wrongdoing until he heard that the Maldives were worse than Aceh in terms of wrongdoing, innovation, corruption and promiscuous behaviour. So he sailed from Banda Aceh making haste with his army of slaves and disciples, and reached the Maldives . . . [Rabīʿi 1097/1686 CE].

Hasan Tāj al-Dīn’s account of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s activities in Aceh draws our attention to several elements that will resurface in his more detailed account of the Maldives. First, his account explicitly compares this Sufi’s conduct to that of a ‘king of great rank’, accompanied by his parasol and banner with the name of his illustrious ancestor; it underlines how Shams al-Dīn derived prestige from his lineage and suggests his potential to destabilise existing structures of rulership. In addition, the account suggests that Shams al-Dīn’s shariʿa-minded agenda of rooting out ‘innovation’ had an appeal both to the elite and the wider population. We are not told anything more of the direct consequences of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s visit, but it does serve to provide a context to the events that would follow shortly in Aceh, when sixty years of female rule was brought to an end and a Hadrami sayyid dynasty was brought to power.46 Although in the early seventeenth century, Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1606–36) had attempted to create an autocratic monarchy in Aceh, albeit one in which the ʿulamāʾ had significant influence,47 royal power there was rather weak in the second half of the century.48 Doubts about the legitimacy of female rule under the four queens who reigned between 1641 and 1699 may have contributed both to this weakness and to the subsequent Hadrami coup, and the immigration to Aceh of Arabs with different ideas of political legitimacy may also have undermined the queens’ position.49

The Hadrami coup was orchestrated by the Acehnese noble elites; doubtless, practical considerations may have played a part, but Tāj al-Dīn’s account
Map 3.1 The travels of Sayyid Muhammad Shams al-Din, 1686–92.
also points to a thirst for *shari’a*-minded piety and leadership by a foreigner of noble, Prophetic lineage among this same constituency – the *akābir* (i.e., notables or *orangkaya*) who became Shams al-Dīn’s *murīds*. Yet Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s greatest effect was in the Maldives, where, in contrast, a strong monarchy under Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar portrayed itself as a vigorous defender of Islam. However, royal power was decisively undermined by Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn and the appeal of his *shari’a*-minded agenda and his prestigious lineage, as we shall see. Before examining Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn’s account in more detail, however, it is worth briefly reviewing the historical situation in the archipelago.

The Maldives have long served as an intermediary stop on routes linking Southeast Asia and the Middle East, although their importance seems to have developed especially from the sixteenth century as a consequence of the Portuguese disruption of established routes via India. The Maldivans themselves claim Islam was brought by a twelfth-century Sufi saint from Iran, Shams al-Dīn of Tabriz; the name points to connections both east and west, for Shams al-Dīn is also claimed by Javanese legend as one of the forerunners of Islam in Java. The French traveller Pyrard de Laval visited in the early seventeenth century, leaving an account that attests the importance of Sufis in court and society. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn’s chronicle points to the late sixteenth century as a turning point in the Islamisation of the Maldives, with Jamal al-Dīn, a scholar from the main Maldivan town of Malé, returning after studies in Hadramawt in 1573, and founding a *khānqāh* (Sufi lodge) of his own at Vadu, which played a crucial role in the promotion of Islam in the archipelago. Another factor in the increasing Islamisation of the Maldives was doubtless the bitter struggle with the Portuguese in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, led by the prayer leader (*khatib*) Muḥammad Takurufānu who founded a new ruling dynasty. The struggle also intensified the Maldives’ links across the Indian Ocean, for Aceh was an important point from which the fort of Malé was supplied with munitions to defend itself against the Portuguese, and there were important commercial connections too between the two regions.

These developments laid the ground for the reign of Sultan Iskandar Ibrāhīm I (1648–1687), who styled himself *ghāzi* (holy warrior) and sponsored the building of mosques and the endowment of *waqfs*. A *waqf* deed for
the mosque of Gan Fat-Kolu island dated 1652/3 describes the sultan in traditional Indian terms as a *kshatriya*, the name given to members of the warrior elite, but its content is thoroughly Islamic, praising the destruction of pagan/Buddhist temples and relating the glorious conversion of the Maldives under Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī. Indeed, in the view of the local Maldives chronicle, Islam and military values seem to have been intertwined. Ibrāhīm studied in his youth with a shaykh who ‘taught him the Qurʾān, the conditions of the obligatory rituals and pillars of Islam, and then the wisdom of cannon guns, arrows, the sword, shield and spear’. During his reign, Ibrāhīm continued the marriage of Islamic and military values, as according to the chronicle: ‘he was a teacher to the people of his time; from him people learned the wisdom of the sword, shield, arrows, cannon, guns and fighting, and he used to make the *ʿulamāʾ* happy to teach the people knowledge [al-ʿilm], so that the land should not be empty of *ʿulamāʾ* out of fear of God’s revenge’. As well as piety, practical politics may have encouraged Ibrāhīm’s attempts to deepen the Islamic character of the Maldives, for his relatives, the descendants of the apostate Sultan Ḥasan IX who converted to Christianity and fled to Goa, had sought to topple him with Portuguese support.

The Maldives also became ever more closely linked to the Middle East over the course of the seventeenth century. It was also a time of growing cosmopolitanism: ‘the port of Malé in his times was a blessed port, a harbour to which ships from India, Aceh and other ports brought money, foodstuffs and other products’. Sultan Ibrāhīm himself undertook the *hājj* in 1666, and his visit to the Hijaz may have inspired the import of Arabian architectural styles, for the chronicler notes that on his return he built a madrasa and a minaret ‘in the style of Meccan minarets’. He undertook a further visit to the Hijaz a few years later, in 1093/1683, the thirty-fifth year of his reign, visiting the tomb of the Prophet at Medina as well as Mecca for a second time. Perhaps copying Middle Eastern rulers’ practice, on the death of his wife Ibrāhīm resolved not to re-marry but instead adopted a series of concubines for his harem.

With his cosmopolitan Islamic horizons, it is thus natural that Sultan Ibrāhīm should welcome the Syrian Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, with his prestigious descent from ‘Abd al-Qādir Al-Jīlānī, when he arrived in Malé from Aceh in Rabī’ I 1097/1686, as Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn describes:
The sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar lodged him in a blessed lodging, and honoured him as much as possible . . . When the sultan sat on his throne in the court of the palace [dār al-saltana] he sent his ministers and soldiers with weapons and drums of honour to the sayyid, asking him to embrace him and kiss his hand. And sayyid Muḥammad came to him carried on his throne/litter [sarīr] with his green Qādirī flag before him and the parasol above his head, with his murids praising his ancestors the Prophet and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī before him, until they put the sayyid’s throne opposite that of the sultan.61

It was thus with the encouragement and support of the sultan that Muhammad Shams al-Dīn started his campaign of ‘commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong, reviving the sunna, and destroying innovation, and abolishing customs contrary to Muhammadan shari’a in deed and word by force and strength’.62 These included forbidding the shaving of beards and the wearing of silver belts, both of which were local customs. The latter prohibition was enforced by the sayyid’s brother Ṭāhā, who with his assistants 'would break the belt from the middle of any man they saw wearing it, whether he liked it or not. They did this as the sayyid ordered, not distinguishing between great and little people.'63 Women were also ordered to cover their heads and stay at home. Despite this enforcement of a fairly rigorous interpretation of the shari’a, we are told Sayyid Muḥammad’s popularity increased, and numerous Maldivans joined the Qādirī tariqa. Next, Sayyid Muḥammad directly challenged Sultan Ibrāhīm, writing to him that:

God created you, raised you, gave you kingship and entrusted you with the affairs of the Muslims. You were preoccupied, however, with other affairs, and were concerned with seizing their money by plunder and expropriation, and you have appointed corrupt viziers and adopted oppressive assistants, and have strengthened them in oppressing God’s servants. You did not listen to the complaint of the oppressed but you prevented them from entering into your presence, and you veiled those in need from yourself. You rendered the mosques inactive with your seizure of their endowments of land and date palms, and prevented free women from marriage, and did not marry them but demanded they become your prostitutes . . . 64
The sultan, unsurprisingly, reacted with fury (ishtaddat ḥamiyyatuhu al-jābiliyya), attempting to ban the populace from frequenting the sayyid. This was, however, to no effect for, we are told, ‘they listened to [Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s] advice and entered his tariqa and loved him very much, and they continued to attend the sayyid every Friday and Monday for Qādirī rituals’.65 One of his adepts was the sultan’s nephew, with whom he was staying, and whom the sayyid proclaimed to be the true sultan. Evidently, however, the Maldives became sufficiently uncomfortable that Muḥammad decided to leave for Hoogly (Calcutta) – other branches of the al-Jīlānīs were already established in India,66 which may have made it an attractive location for him to continue his work.

Upon the holy man’s departure, the sultan instituted the persecution of the Qādirīyya. However, shortly afterwards the sultan died of poisoning at the hands of his senior concubine (umm walad), Mariyam.67 A period of turbulence followed, as his son, Sultan Muḥammad, was only six years old, and power ended up in the hands of the umm walad Mariyam – who was vehemently denounced by Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn as a pleasure-loving fornicator who sought to corrupt the morals of the people and royal family. Sultan Ibrāhīm’s nephew (also called Muḥammad) nevertheless remained faithful to the teachings of his murshid, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, and was imprisoned for resisting her. A number of ʿulamāʾ fled to India or Arabia, including the historian Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn himself, while his shaykh, al-Khaṭīb Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn, was grievously persecuted by the umm walad’s regime.68 Eventually, the umm walad and her son Sultan Muḥammad died in a fire in 1102/1691. The nobility then bestowed the throne on Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s disciple, Sultan Ibrāhīm’s nephew Muḥammad, with the regnal title Muḥyī al-Dīn. On gaining power, the latter immediately summoned his murshid from Hoogly, writing to him that ‘The kingdom of the Maldives is mine, just as you predicted when you sat in my house; now I desire to see your blessed face, come in the next sailing season.’69

In his brief reign, Muḥyī al-Dīn sought to follow the example of his mentor by imposing Islamic law and trying to abolish local habits that were contrary to it. However, he died after only a year. Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn recounts what happened next:
When Sultan Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn was buried next to his uncle Sultan Muḥammad son of Sultan Iskandar [Ībrāhīm] by the congregational mosque, Sayyid Muḥammad [Shams al-Dīn] proclaimed to them that, ‘I am entitled to the succession/caliphate [mustahiqq al-khilāfa], you should not give oaths of obedience to anyone but me. For I am at your head in accordance with the Prophetic hadith, “Let the Quraysh lead [do not lead them] (qaddimū qurayshan al-hadith).”’ Then they sought out the sayyid and gave oaths of obedience to him and seated him on the throne of kingship, and he took the title Sultan Muḥammad al-Sayyid Shams al-Dīn, and the oaths were given to him at the beginning of Jumada II 1103 [February 1692]. And he undertook the duties of the khilāfa perfectly, and was a generous, prudent king, and a noble, great, knowledgeable, virtuous, just, pious, and ascetic sultan. He ordered what is right and forbade what is wrong, and abolished customs contrary to shari‘a. . . He preached to the people every night between ‘ishā and maghrib prayers, and after ‘ishā he taught Qādī Muḥammad, the Khaṭīb Muḥammad Sirāj al-Dīn and Ḫasan Tāj al-Dīn fiqh, grammar and other sciences.\(^\text{70}\)

Even in the sympathetic account of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s pupil Ḫasan Tāj al-Dīn, it is clear that adherence to Islamic law had to be imposed by force. Ḫasan describes how his teacher:

sent him out every Friday with the qadi’s assistants and a troop of soldiers to go around the streets of the town to command what is right and forbid what is wrong and to command the people to gather together to undertake the prescribed prayers at the first opportunity, and to reprimand anyone who opposed him. [He ordered him] to bring him anyone who failed to perform the prescribed prayers so that he could kill him with the shining sword of shari‘a.\(^\text{71}\)

As under Sultan Ibrāhīm, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s efforts to enforce the shari‘a had to be accompanied by force. Coercion was a vital element in propagating shari‘a-minded piety in the Maldives, as elsewhere in the expanding Muslim world of the seventeenth century.

Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn did not rule for long, dying after only six months. On his death he was afforded the signal honour of burial next to
the tomb of the apostle to the Maldives, Shams al-Dīn of Tabriz. As he did not leave any descendants, only marrying Muḥyī al-Dīn’s widow on his deathbed, he did not found a dynasty. Nonetheless, his prestige is reflected in the fact that his regnal title was adopted by two subsequent sultans, and that on his death the nobles of Malé again sought to appoint a religious leader, the Khaṭīb Muḥammad, as sultan. Although the Khaṭīb refused, eventually a qādi, Muḥammad, was appointed as ruler, the first of the new Isdu dynasty. Muḥammad did have some distant royal ancestry as a descendant of Muḥammad Takurufanu (r. 1573–85), the leader of the sixteenth-century struggle against the Portuguese, who had also been a khaṭīb – another indication of the extent to which the religious and royal establishments were intertwined.

Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn’s account of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn’s activities clearly must be treated with a certain degree of circumspection: the author was a student of, and clearly sympathetic to, the sayyid. Nonetheless, it does suggest several features to which we have alluded in the first part of the chapter. First, the sort of Sufism being espoused by this Qādirī was clearly shariʿa-orientated, and appealed both to and beyond the royal court. Although the universal adoption of this rigorous piety was evidently secured only by force, the chronicle repeatedly emphasises the popular appeal of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, while his conversion of the youthful future Sultan Muḥyī al-Dīn and the fact of his own apparently unchallenged rise to power suggests that he also won over the elite. Secondly, the chronicler underlines the importance of genealogy, in particular Prophetic descent, in providing a new form of legitimacy that could trump existing political structures: note how Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn even included his title of sayyid in his regnal laqab, underlining this point, as well as drawing on the authority of hadīth in his speech claiming the right to rule.

Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar’s reign featured an attempt to turn the Maldives into an Islamic monarchy based on Middle Eastern patterns, suggested by a variety of reforms and innovations: the endowment of waqfs; the building of Meccan-style minarets; the abolition of sultanic marriage and the introduction of concubinage (polygyny being almost unknown in the Maldives); and the consequent institution of umm walad. Yet far from securing the ruler’s position as an autocrat (if that was the intention), bringing the Maldives
closer in line with the Middle East had precisely the opposite effect, under-
mining the legitimacy of royal power and reminding the inhabitants that
the thing they really lacked was a ruler of Qurayshi descent. Muḥammad
Shams al-Dīn’s challenge to Ibrāhīm seems to have been rooted not in any
fundamental difference of approach, but rather in the fact that the holy man,
with his distinguished lineage, more precisely embodied the Islamic values
that the sultan had spent his reign promoting than the sultan himself did.

Conclusion

The story of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn and his coup reminds us of the
figure of the ‘stranger-king’, well known to the historiography of Southeast
Asia. However, studies have tended to emphasise the ability of such strangers
to seize power as resting in their ability to form marriage alliances with
local elites and to impress the populace by performing impressive feats of
magic. In common with many of these stranger-kings Muḥammad Shams
al-Dīn boasts his own prestigious sayyid lineage. However, his ancestor ʿAbd
al-Qādir al-Jīlānī seems to have played an almost equally important role as
his sayyid status. In both Aceh and the Maldives, Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn
is paraded around under the great green banner with ʿAbd al-Qādir’s name
inscribed on it. His reception indicates that the name was already known and
prestigious in both locations, suggesting perhaps a rather broader diffusion
of the Qādirī ṭarīqa in the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century than
is sometimes admitted, and indeed the popular appeal of the cosmopolitan
networks of Sufis that linked the Indian Ocean world to the Middle East.

This Sufi and shariʿa-minded religiosity appealed to the elite, but also
more widely, and rather than Sufism offering a way of combining pre-Islamic
and Islamic practices and legitimising traditional royal power in Islamic
terms, this chapter has suggested that on occasion we can see it achieving
almost the opposite. Through shariʿa-orientated Sufi texts and holy men,
Indian Ocean courts sought to link themselves to the Hijaz and to the
Prophetic sunna. In Banten, the texts stood in for the absent holy man, Ibn
ʿAlān, but by virtue of being composed by a scholar of Caliphal descent,
served to bestow some measure of their baraka on the royal court, as is
indicated by the careful copies made of them in the eighteenth century. Yet,
as Ibn ʿAlān states, this was ultimately a project of local, Bantenese origin,
not the initiative of Ḥaramayn scholars. It was by emulating the practices of
kings as laid down by al-Ghazālī, as implemented by the Sharifs of Mecca
and as interpreted and explained by Ibn ʿAlān that the sultans of Banten
aspired to assert their legitimacy. In our second case, the holy man in person
is embraced and honoured by Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar, doubtless seeking to
harness him for his own purposes of building a Middle Eastern-style monar-
chy in the Maldives. Yet this project rebounded against the sultan, suggesting
that this emergent shariʿa-orientated piety had a popular purchase that in fact
allowed it to undermine traditional power structures, as is also suggested by
the sayyid coups in both the Maldives and Aceh at the close of the seventeenth
century. (The case of Banten is rather different as royal power was sapped by
effectively being made into a Dutch protectorate in the same period).76

Finally, it is worth noting that this phenomenon of a rising shariʿa-
orientated piety is of broader currency in the seventeenth-century Muslim
world, often with similar consequences. The Ottoman Empire was convulsed
for much of the seventeenth century by the partisans of the shariʿa-minded
Kadızadeli movement, whose leaders achieved great influence in the palace –
and the period is noted for the dissipation of sultanic power.77 In Safavid
Iran, the late seventeenth century sees the growth of an increasingly power-
ful clerical movement led by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1699), which
dominated the court and politics; this clerical dominance has often been
attributed with a decisive role in the fall of the dynasty.78 In India, too, the
last great ruler of the Mughal dynasty, Aurangzeb, is generally thought to
have espoused a much more shariʿa-orientated piety than his predecessors.79
Whether the occurrence of these comparable phenomena in these disparate
places is not coincidental or needs further research, Sufi networks certainly
seem to have ensured that Islam’s frontier in the Indian Ocean world was
increasingly integrated into the broader Muslim world and its political and
religious trends.

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Notes


2. See, for instance, Ricklefs, M. C., Mystic Synthesis in Java: a History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries (Norwalk, CT: Eastbridge, 2006), esp. pp. 21–2.


6. Green, Sufism, p. 126. For this reason, in this chapter I deliberately do not make the distinction between ‘ulamā’ and Sufis that we find in some scholarship; if certainly not all Sufis were ‘ulamā’, yet in one sense or another almost all ‘ulamā’ were Sufis. See also note 77 below.

7. See, for instance, the comments in Simpson, Edward and Kai Kresse, ‘Cosmopolitanism Contested: Anthropology and History in the Western Indian


17. The description of Aceh by the secretary to the seventeenth-century Iranian embassy to Siam starts off by praising the wealth of the place but soon moves on to describe it as an alien and remarkable land, remarking how ‘the king and people have a very strange sense of morals and proper behaviour . . . On the island of Aceh stealing is most common and this basic flaw of character has infected all the inhabitants, young and old.’ Moreover Aceh is described as equipped with wonders such as a booming mountain. Likewise, while the Maldives is reported to have a Muslim king who seats his Qur’ān on an amber throne, the author remarks that ‘they do their trading with various bits of broken sherds’ (*The Ship of Sulaiman*, trans. J. O’Kane (London: Routledge, 1972), pp. 177, 178, 225).


19. This is not, of course, to suggest that contemporaries thought specifically of a Middle East; yet disparate influences such as the prestige of Ottoman royal power, of the holy cities of Arabia, of descent from the Prophet, and of Persian culture and even literature, which were to make themselves felt in Southeast Asia and other parts of the Indian Ocean world in this period are most conveniently summed up under this neologism.


24. Al-Muhibbi, *Khulāsat al-Āthār*, vol. 1, pp. 185–6; vol. 4, p. 183. His uncle was also a well-known Naqshbandi, known as the ‘imām al-taṣawwuf fī zamānihi’ (ibid., vol. 1, p. 186), and this may have provided a further link to the Banten court, where the Naqshbandi *tariqa* was much in vogue (on this point, see van Bruinessen, ‘Shari’a Court’, pp. 178–80).


27. Also on the *ḥudūd* in Banten, see Yakin, ‘Undhang-Undhang Bantèn’, pp. 382–83.


31. Azra writes that Sultan Abū l-Mafākhir ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘had a special interest in religious matters; he sent inquiries about religious matters not only to al-Raniri but also to scholars in the Ḥaramayn, which resulted in special works being written by those scholars, answering his questions. As a result, Banten became known as one of the most important Islamic centres on Java’, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, p. 89. Of his son Sultan Ageng, Azra writes that ‘he had a special interest in religion’ (ibid., p. 98).


35. Van Bruinessen, Martin, ‘Shaykh Ḥabd al-Qādir al-Jilāni and the Qādiriyya in Indonesia’, *Journal of the History of Sufism* 1/2 (2000): 362–5, 367; also Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority*, pp. 55, 60–3. The Leiden collection of manuscripts from Banten, many of which also have a royal connection, contains the following manuscripts that deal with the Qādiriyya in some form: Or 5601, Or 5658, Or 5660, Or 5669, Or 5701.


38. On this point, see Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, pp. 66, 89; also see Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, p. 248, n. 61.


44. Yajima, Hikoichi (ed.), *Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn’s The Islamic History of the Maldive Islands* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1982), (hereafter Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn, *History*). The *History* was summarised in English by Bell in his classic study: Bell, H. C. P., *The Maldive Islands: Monograph on the History, Archaeology and Epigraphy* (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 2002; originally Colombo: Ceylon Government Press, 1940), pp. 18–43. However, the activities of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn are
treated only very scantly in this summary. Unfortunately, the chronicle is the sole narrative source for many aspects of Maldivian history, including the activities of Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn, so it is not possible to compare its information against other sources.

45. Although both the earlier and later history of the Hama Jīlānīs is well known, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represent something of a black hole. See Khenchelaoui, Zaïm and Thierry Zarcone, ‘La famille Jīlānī de Hamâ (Syrie): Bayt al-Jīlānī’, *Journal of the History of Sufism* 1/2 (2000): 53–77.


48. Takeshi, ‘The World of the *Adat Aceh*’, pp. 31–2, 66–8. For a different interpretation see Khan, *Sovereign Women*, p. 226, who argues that the consensual style of rulership practised by Aceh’s queens accorded with Malay tradition and was a sign of exemplary behaviour. Nonetheless, Khan does agree that the exercise of power by the queens was qualitatively different that that practised by rulers such as Iskandar Muda; cf. Khan, *Sovereign Women*, pp. 247, 255–6.


50. Djajadiningrat, *Critische Beschouwing*, pp. 188–97; see also Kalus, Luvik and Claude Gilliot, ‘Inscriptions islamiques en arabe de l’archipel des Maldives’, *Archipel* 70 (2005): 15–52, at pp. 39–40. A conflation with Shams al-Dīn al-Tabrīzī, the great companion of Rūmī, has prompted suggestions that Sufism in the Maldives was Mevlevi in orientation (see also n. 51 below). It seems unlikely, however, that this aristocratic Ottoman order, which had a limited presence outside Anatolia, would have spread to the Maldives.


54. Bell, *The Maldivian Islands*, pp. 190–3. Formulas praising the ruler as a *kshatriya* (an Indic term denoting a warrior) continued to be used in Maldivan *waqf* documents into the twentieth century. See Ahmed Nazim Sattar, *King Kalaafaaan*
Manuscripts (Malé: National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, 2009), pp. 67, 68, 70. I am very grateful to Michael Feener for providing me with a copy of this publication. Cf. the discussion of the term ghāzi by Simon Kemper in Chapter 4, this volume.

56. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 30.
57. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 30–1.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 35.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 36.
65. Ibid.
69. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 44.
70. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 45.
71. Ibid.
73. Bell, The Maldives, pp. 27, 33.
74. Maloney, People of the Maldives, pp. 336, 342.
76. Cf. Kemper’s discussion of the power of karamat at the court of Mataram, Chapter 4, this volume.
77. On the Kadızadelis and their Sufi links, see Le Gall, Diana, ‘Kadızadelis, Naksbendis and Intra-Sufi Diatribe in Seventeenth-century Istanbul’, Turkish Studies Association Journal 27 (2004): 1–28. For the circulation of texts by the proto-Kadızadeli Ottoman author Birgevi in Southeast Asia (Sumatra), see
