

## Scholarly Exchange and Trade: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf and His Letters to Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje

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The impressive collection of books, manuscripts, letters, and photographs assembled by the famous Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) and housed in Leiden University Library contains a small collection of eight letters by a certain Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf. In these letters, the young Naṣīf (1881–1971) expresses his high esteem for the older Dutch scholar. They date from 1920 to 1933 and are an interesting reflection of an apparently vivid exchange between and/or trade in books between the two learned men. Snouck Hurgronje is famous among Western scholars as a towering figure in Dutch Orientalism who linked Islamic learning and anthropology, in addition to writing about both the Middle East and South-East Asia. In contrast, Naṣīf was well known among contemporary Muslim scholars and is today remembered as a great collector and benefactor, but he has not drawn the attention of Western scholars. In this contribution, I will analyze their exchange of letters, which were apparently sometimes accompanied by books, as another piece in the puzzle of joint scholarly interests and cooperation across regional, religious, and generational divides, divides which are often foregrounded in historical analysis.

Who, then, were the two men and what can the letters tell us about their shared interests and relationship? Do the letters contribute to a deeper understanding of Orientalism, which is so often regarded primarily in the context of its rootedness in its Western cultural, religious, and of course political context? Can they tell us anything about an early Saudi Arabian notable known locally for his Salafi leanings and who, in the general order of things, might not necessarily be suspected of holding particular sympathies for Orientalists? To what extent do such classifications as “Orientalist”, “Salafi”, “Western” or “Arabian” obscure more inclusive practices of knowledge circulation and production? This modest contribution does not lay claim to answer such questions in any definite sense, but it does intend to at least complicate obvious answers that could be assumed if the aforementioned categories of origin, religion etc. were

applied. At the same time, the article introduces a relatively rare group of documents. Thus, it is quite interesting that the most comprehensive extant biography of Muḥammad Naṣīf, by Aḥmad and ‘Alawī, contains many letters to and from Muḥammad Naṣīf, none of them written by Westerners.<sup>1</sup> At the moment, I have no way of telling whether Naṣīf’s letters to Snouck Hurgronje constitute an exception or whether he might have also corresponded with other Orientalists. However, the letters clearly indicated close relations with members of the Dutch consulate in Jeddah, and it would hence be quite probable that Naṣīf also corresponded with other Westerners.

### Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: Arabist, Anthropologist and Colonial Adviser (Feb. 8, 1857–June 26, 1936)

The son of a reformed pastor, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje was born in 1857 in the Dutch village of Oosterhout. After graduating in theology from Leiden University in 1878, he took up the study of Arabic and Islam. In 1879, he passed his doctoral examination and wrote a Ph.D. thesis on the *ḥajj*.<sup>2</sup> He then took up a post at the institute in Leiden that trained officials who were designated to

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- 1 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Sayyid Aḥmad and Abdūh b. Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf. Ḥayātuḥ wa-āthāruḥ* (Beirut/Damascus/Amman: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1994). It is unclear whether Naṣīf’s papers, at least parts of which are held by King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Library in Jeddah, do contain any writings by Westerners. I am grateful to my Leiden colleagues Léon Buskens and Jan Just Witkam for informing me about these letters, and to Arnoud Vrolijk for referring me to electronic copies of many of them. I thank him for commenting thoroughly on an early draft of this article and for providing me with much needed bibliographical advice. On behalf of Leiden University Library, he also gave permission to reproduce the image. I am also grateful to the editors of this volume for their comments, and to my colleagues Nora Lafi and Feras Krimsti for their help with the translation.
  - 2 While a number of works on Snouck Hurgronje are currently being written, the best presently available biographical accounts, on which the following is based are Jean-Jacques Waardenburg, *L’Islam dans le miroir de l’occident. Comment quelques orientalistes occidentaux se sont penchés sur l’Islam et se sont formé une image de cette religion*; I. Goldziher, C. Snouck Hurgronje, C.H. Becker, D.B. MacDonald, Louis Massignon. 3rd ed. (Paris: Mouton, 1962), 18–27; Georges-Henri Bousquet, “Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936)”, *Selected Works of C. Snouck Hurgronje* (Leiden: Brill, 1957), XI–XXI; P. Sj. van Koningsveld, *Snouck Hurgronje en de Islam. Acht artikelen over leven en werk van een oriëntalist uit het koloniale tijdperk* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Richard van Leeuwen and A. Vrolijk, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, tr. A. Hamilton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 117–50.

work in the Dutch East Indies (*Indische Inrichting*).<sup>3</sup> While working on Islamic law, he continued to be fascinated by the Hijāz and the pilgrimage, and sought the means to make a journey to Arabia. At that time, the Dutch authorities were alarmed by the high numbers of pilgrims to Mecca from the Dutch East Indies, and all over Europe observers were concerned about pan-Islamic and potentially anti-colonial activities emanating from the Muslim holy land. Against this background, Snouck Hurgronje received support for his plan and was sponsored by the Dutch government to travel to Arabia.

From August 1884 to February 1885, Snouck Hurgronje resided in Jeddah. After converting to Islam, he moved to Mecca until early August 1885. Quite unusual for the time, his sojourn in Mecca meant complete immersion into local society or, rather, into the South-East Asian community living and teaching in Mecca, as this was Snouck Hurgronje's natural entry point through the contacts established via the Dutch consulate.<sup>4</sup> His work there is not only documented in his famous two-volume *Mekka* and the two accompanying pictorial atlases but also in numerous smaller and longer articles (later re-published in his *Verspreide Geschriften*). These works reflect his observations, encounters, and material collected in the city.<sup>5</sup>

When Snouck Hurgronje's presence became publicized in the Egyptian press, the Ottoman authorities ordered him to leave the Hijāz instantly as they feared that even the presence of a converted European might become an embarrassment. Consequently, Snouck Hurgronje returned to his post as teacher at the *Indische Inrichting* and published his Meccan findings. These works are ample evidence of his classical training as well as his (at the time, for many of his colleagues) rather unusual engagement with contemporary issues. They also demonstrate his talents as an anthropologist observing religion and daily life.<sup>6</sup> In March 1887, Leiden University appointed him to teach "Institutions of Islam". He also continued to teach at the *Indische Inrichting*.

3 Enno Littmann, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje 1857–1936", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 90 (vol. 15 of new series) (1936), 445–58, p. 447, Van Leeuwen and Vrolijk, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands*, 119.

4 The debate on the quality of Snouck Hurgronje's conversion seems irrelevant here, as well as impossible to judge from the outside.

5 Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka. Aus dem heutigen Leben*, 2 vols (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1888–89); Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Bilder aus Mekka. Mit kurzem erläuterndem Texte* (Leiden: Brill, 1889); Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, "Geschriften betreffende Arabie en Turkije", *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, Verspreide Geschriften*, vol. 3 (Bonn-Leipzig: Schroeder 1924).

6 Bousquet, "Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936)".

Only two years later, Snouck Hurgronje left Leiden to join the Dutch colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies. He served as Adviser in Religious Matters, partly in Batavia, partly in Aceh. Snouck Hurgronje's access to local Muslim circles was facilitated by the contacts with pilgrims and teachers from the region that he had made in the Ḥijāz, as well as by his conversion and marriage into local society. In 1906, he finally returned to Leiden as professor, a post he retained up to 1927. Until his death on June 26, 1936, he remained in contact with Dutch officials in the Ḥijāz as well as with officials and scholars in the Dutch East Indies. While his papers, books, photographs, and recordings laid the basis for the important Leiden collection on the Ḥijāz and beyond, his role in colonial policies has possibly made him the most controversial Dutch Orientalist.<sup>7</sup>

**Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf, “Man of Letters” and “Lord of Books”  
(June 15, 1885–July 30, 1971)<sup>8</sup>**

The above attributes of an ideal scholar were ascribed to Muḥammad Naṣīf by the Arab-American writer Amīn al-Riḥānī after the two men had met during Riḥānī's visit to the Ḥijāz. Naṣīf was born the grandson of the Jeddah notable 'Umar Naṣīf (1822–1908) shortly before Snouck Hurgronje was asked to leave the Ḥijāz.<sup>9</sup> Orphaned in early life, he was raised by his grandfather. 'Umar Naṣīf was not just one of the two leading notables of Jeddah in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century but also a major owner of land inside and outside the walled town and a merchant engaged in inland trade. In addition, he acted as representative of the Sharīf of Mecca and, at times, of the Ottoman governor of the Ḥijāz. Both used his house as part-time government offices when they stayed in Jeddah.

<sup>7</sup> Van Leeuwen and Vrolijk, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands*, 117.

<sup>8</sup> Amīn al-Riḥānī, *Mulūk al-'Arab* (Beirut: Maṭābi' Ṣādir Riḥānī, 1951), vol. 1, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, this and the following is based on Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*. This biography not only gathers the many letters to and from Muḥammad Naṣīf, but also much of what has been written. I have checked the original texts by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Maghribī, *A'lām al-Ḥijāz* (Jeddah: Maṭābi' Dār al-Bilād, vol. 1 [second ed. 1985]; vol. 3 [second ed. 1994]; vol. 4 [first ed. 1414/ 1993–4]); vol. 1, 232–39; and Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-'Alām. Qāmūs tarājīm li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā' min al-'arab wa-l-musta'ribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn*, 15th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 2002), vol. 6, 107–8. The dates for 'Umar Naṣīf come from W. Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman Control, 1840–1908* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1984), 109.

Muḥammad Naṣīf inherited these relations, as well as (parts of) his grandfather's wealth. This enabled him to provide hospitality to high-ranking scholars and politicians. He housed, among others, the last Ottoman sultan, Meḥmed VI, when he was forced to leave Istanbul in 1922. Ironically, he did so at the request of King Ḥusayn, who had led the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans but now may have been attempting to widen his international reputation by hosting his former adversary. Naṣīf also welcomed the sultan of Najd, 'Abd al-'Azīz Āl al-Sa'ūd after its last Sharifian ruler, 'Alī b. Ḥussayn, had left for exile.

Naṣīf's house, the largest and most lavish in Jeddah at the time, was open not only to royalty, but to scholars and other dignitaries from across the Muslim world. Given that Jeddah was considered to be the *dihlīz* (or "reception hall") of Mecca for those arriving by boat, it is not surprising that many famous scholars from different parts of the Muslim world passed through, many of whom were invited to Naṣīf's home. Among them was the famous Syrian reformer Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), with whom Naṣīf remained in touch through regular letters.<sup>10</sup> Naṣīf also seems to have been in fairly close contact with the Moroccan writer and politician 'Allāl al-Fāsī (1910–74), as well as with the Imāms of Yemen and Indian intellectuals, and with learned men from Shinqīṭ in present-day Mauretania, from Timbuktu (now Mali), Tindūf (now Algeria), and from Eastern Europe.<sup>11</sup> However, as a host for pilgrims, his grandson is quoted as remembering how the family also accommodated poor pilgrims who did not have a place to stay, or those who had failed to meet their assigned guides.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, a number of the biographical accounts compiled in Aḥmad and 'Alawī report that Naṣīf at times hosted so many people that, in order to cover the expenses, he had to sell some of his property. When, in the 1930s, property prices fell, the governor of Jeddah approached King 'Abd al-'Azīz with the request to extend a stipend to Muḥammad Naṣīf in order to enable him to maintain his customary hospitality. The king obliged.

The contacts resulting from such hospitality developed into a veritable network of men of letters as a result of Naṣīf's own scholarly interests and pursuits. Initially, it seems that he was only taught the Qur'ān by his grandfather, and did not receive much more education, either in the local Qur'ānic schools

10 Yūsuf Ībish (ed.), *Riḥlat al-Imām Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā*, ed. Yūsuf Ībish (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya lil-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1971), 86–87; for a vivid description of this hospitality, see Muḥammad Sa'ūd al-'Ūrī, *al-Riḥla al-sa'ūdiyya al-ḥijāziyya al-majdiyya* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-salafiyya, 1349/1930–31), 47–50. I owe the information about Naṣīf's correspondence with Riḍā to Umar Ryad.

11 Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 273–90. On al-Fāsī, see al-Zirikli, vol. 4, 236–37.

12 Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 397.

or in the emerging Ottoman system.<sup>13</sup> An oft-reported anecdote relates how the young Naṣīf had been sent to the slave market with an attendant in order to purchase a female slave in 1901–2. Ownership of female slaves, *jawārī*, was quite common and possibly his grandfather considered Muḥammad as too young to marry. Naṣīf, appalled to see the treatment of slaves in the market, decided against this. He asked his companion to hand him the gold coins with which he was meant to buy the slave, and sent him home. Then Naṣīf proceeded to buy a library from the estate of a scholar on his way back. His grandfather was delighted and thereafter took it upon himself to further Muḥammad's education by introducing him to various local shaykhs, with whom he studied *tawhīd*, *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *maqāsid al-sharī'a*, and grammar. Among these teachers were the Salafī 'ulamā' Aḥmad Ibrāhīm b. 'Īsā and the Najdī scholar Abū Bakr Khuḡayr, both of whom seem to have exerted a major influence on Naṣīf.<sup>14</sup> According to his grandson, Naṣīf's Salafī leanings were tied to a rejection of traditions linked to the visits to and celebrations surrounding the seven tombs of saints in Jeddah.<sup>15</sup> As will be discussed below with regard to Naṣīf's first letter to Snouck Hurgronje, it seems that the early teachings were quite clearly oriented towards a very strict interpretation of Islam.

According to the well-known historian of the Arabian Peninsula Muḥammad al-Jāsir, Naṣīf corresponded with the Egyptian reformist journal *al-Manār*, which was edited by Rashīd Riḏā from 1907. In his letters, he asked about different aspects of *ḥadīth* and their transmission, as well as matters of Islamic doctrine. In the 1920s, he tried to convince other readers to support the journal by publicly announcing his own payments.<sup>16</sup> His Salafī leanings at times seem to have manifested themselves in a not so gentlemanly fashion: Sometime during the rule of the Hashemites (1916 and 1925), members of Naṣīf's circle of friends (*majlis*), including himself, reportedly attacked passing processions of loudly singing Sufis by throwing stones at them.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the anecdote does not specify whether it was the general practice of singing or particularly

13 For a survey of education in the late Ottoman Empire in Jeddah, see Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta'lim fī Makka wa-l-Madīna ākhīr al-'ahd al-'uthmānī*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh, 1402/1982), 81–91.

14 Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 140. For Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Īsā (1837–1911), see al-Zirikī, vol. 1, 89.

15 Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 399.

16 *Ibid.*, 20–22 and 24–27.

17 Maghribī 1985, vol. 1, 237, basing his claim on oral information from Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Ṣabbān, a member of Naṣīf's circle. On Sufi practices in the mid-19th century, including the use of singing and instruments, see Charles Didier, *Séjour chez le grand-chérif de la Mekke* (Paris: L. Hachette et C.ie, 1857), 136.

offensive lyrics that sparked the reaction. At any rate, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that Muḥammad Naṣīf was at times accused of Wahhābī leanings. As a member of the National Party (*al-ḥizb al-waṭani*), he took part in the activities that eventually forced King Ḥusayn from power and convinced his son and successor King ‘Alī to abdicate. In this context, he was accused by Hashemite loyalists of early contact with Sultan ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of the Najd, and thus as a traitor to the Hashemite cause. Interestingly, his grandson points out that nowadays, in Saudi Arabia, Naṣīf would no longer be called a Salafī. For example, he did not hesitate to host in his *majlis* people of Sufi leanings (presumably of the less noisy type), and, in general, showed much flexibility (*murūna*).<sup>18</sup> Here we see a major difference between a Ḥijāzī Salafī like Naṣīf, who maintained a basic openness towards different interpretations of Islam in spite of apparently holding strong opinions (and being accused of Wahhābī tendencies by his compatriots)—and the Najdī Wahhābiyya, nowadays often termed *salafīyya*, which, until very recently, had very little tolerance of other interpretations and practices of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

Naṣīf’s main passion was books, which he bought, collected, traded in, had printed and distributed. In his house in Jeddah, he eventually assembled a library with over 6,000 printed books and 400 manuscripts covering, besides different branches of religious learning, a variety of other fields of knowledge, as well as literature. Thus, his library contained many cultural and literary works, as well as historical books printed in Egypt in the 19th and early 20th century.<sup>20</sup> Shaykh ‘Alī Ṭaṅṭāwī, who stayed with Naṣīf during his pilgrimage in 1934, reportedly said that Naṣīf’s library surpassed those of the perhaps better-known Arab intellectuals and collectors Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī in Damascus, As‘af al-Nashāshībī in Jerusalem, Aḥmad Taymūr in Cairo, and the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ in Lucknow.<sup>21</sup> Although the veracity of this statement raises certain doubts,

18 Aḥmad and al-‘Alawī, 399.

19 In spite of Sedgwick’s argument regarding a kind of “reformed” Wahhābism emerging in the generation before ‘Abd al-Aziz b. Sa‘ūd and the first Saudi king’s undisputed pragmatism when it came to weighing religious doctrine against national integration, Sufism was hardly acknowledged as a legitimate practice until King ‘Abdallāh (d. 2015) instituted the National Dialogue in 2003. Mark J.R. Sedgwick, “Saudi Sufis: Compromise in the Hijaz, 1925–40”, *Die Welt des Islams* 37 (1997), 349–68; Frauke Drewes, “Das nationale Dialogforum: Ausdruck politischer Reformen oder Stagnation”, in *Saudi-Arabien. Ein Königreich im Wandel?*, ed. by Ulrike Freitag (Paderborn et al.: Schöningh, 2010), 29–60.

20 Observation made during a visit to King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz library in 2010. As the Naṣīf library is housed in the men’s library and not easily identifiable in the catalogue, I only had a short time in the half day during which women are allowed access to that part of the library.

21 Aḥmad and al-‘Alawī (as fn.18), 147; his stay with Naṣīf is mentioned by Aḥmad Muḥammad Maḥmūd, *Riḥlāt al-ḥajj* 3 vols (Jeddah: al-Maṭba‘a al-maḥmūdiyya, 1430/2009), vol. 2, 176.

given that Taymūr Pasha's library is said to have contained around 17,000 volumes, half of them manuscripts, it certainly expresses Shaykh Ṭanṭāwī's amazement at Naṣīf's collection.<sup>22</sup> There exist long lists of manuscripts that Naṣīf reportedly had printed at his own expense or to which he contributed the costs of printing. Among them, a few stand out as clear testimonies to his intellectual leanings: *Kitāb al-tawhīd* and *Mukhtaṣar zād al-mu'ād fi hady khayr al-i'bād* by Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *al-Radd al-wāfir fi man za'am anna shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya kāfir* by Ibn Naṣīr al-Dīn, *al-Qaṣīda al-nūniyya al-musammā "bi-l-kāfiyya al-shāfiyya"* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, plus an explanation (*sharḥ*) of that poem by Shaykh Muḥammad Khalīl Harrās and four others. Among the twelve co-sponsored works listed in the biography are more texts by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, as well as by one of the leading scholars of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn<sup>23</sup> and the well-known Arabist and Salafī author, journalist, and activist Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (1886–1969). The latter he might well have known personally from al-Khaṭīb's time as editor of the semi-official Hashemite newspaper *al-Qibla* (1916–18). Subsequently, al-Khaṭīb edited a number of Egyptian journals and founded the famous publishing house al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya.<sup>24</sup> Naṣīf had books printed in Egypt, Bombay, Beirut, and possibly other places as well. A letter from the Kuwaiti Ministry of *Awqāf* and Islamic Affairs from 1965, asking Naṣīf for support in the choice and editing of the most important works in the Islamic tradition, testifies to the wide recognition of his expertise.<sup>25</sup>

Local sources tell us that an Indian who, like Naṣīf, traded books, sent his daughter on pilgrimage. Naṣīf duly hosted her in Jeddah and was so impressed by her high degree of learning that he arranged for her to marry his son 'Umar.<sup>26</sup> After Naṣīf's death, King Fayṣal suggested building a modern library for his

22 On Aḥmad Taymūr's library, see Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb's obituary in Taymūr's *al-Yazīdiyya wa-mansha' niḥlatihim* (Cairo 1352/1933), 4–21, p. 18. I thank Arnoud Vrolijk for this reference.

23 Muḥammad b. 'Uthaymīn was a prominent member of the Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā': Muhammad al-Atawneh, *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity. Dar al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), xx and n. 4.

24 Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 204–5 and 216–17; on al-Khaṭīb, see al-Ziriklī, vol. 5, 282. There seems to have existed a Meccan precursor to the Cairene Maṭba'a Salafiyya in which a relative of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Naṣīf was involved. It is unclear, though, whether or not al-Khaṭīb was involved in the Meccan enterprise or whether either of the Naṣīfs had a share in the Cairene publishing house. On Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Naṣīf, see al-Maghribī vol. 1, 2nd ed., 276–86.

25 Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 153.

26 Muḥammad Yūsuf Muḥammad Ḥasan Ṭrābulṣī, *Jidda. Hikāyat madīna*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh, 1429/2008; 1st ed. 2006), 441, and interview with Ṭrābulṣī, March 13, 2010.

collection. Since this has not been realized, the bulk of the library was transferred to King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz University Library in Jeddah, where it is housed to this day. As Naṣīf’s grandsons also hold considerable libraries, a part of which was housed in the old city of Jeddah and was destroyed by fire in 2010, it is difficult to say without further investigation how complete the university holdings are.<sup>27</sup>

Muḥammad Naṣīf was not only a bibliophile, but also an avid reader who summarized books for his own use. He also commented on new publications when he felt that these contained mistakes or lacked certain information.<sup>28</sup> Once he read an article in the journal of the Damascus Academy (*Majallat al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī*) that claimed that, until recently, the books by Ibn Taymiyya had been unavailable to scholars and that it was only the Saudi state that had made them available. Naṣīf wrote to Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb pointing out that Ḥanbalī scholars had used these writings regularly, and that they were available in libraries in Najd, Syria, Palestine, as well as in Istanbul, India, the Ḥijāz, and Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The Netherlands are only mentioned twice in the Arabic biography by Aḥmad and al-‘Alawī: Among the excerpts that Naṣīf took are some on the origin of the Ḥarb tribe, from whom his family hailed. These were taken from Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Fārisī al-Iṣṭakhrī’s *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, printed in Leiden in 1937, and again in Cairo in 1961.<sup>30</sup> It is not entirely clear to which edition Naṣīf’s (reprinted) comments refer, and the excerpt in Aḥmad and Alawī does not contain the name of any author. One of Naṣīf’s contemporaries further reports that Naṣīf bought a copy of *al-Mu‘jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-ḥadīth al-nabawī* from the Netherlands for the impressive sum of 4000 *riyals*. This is most likely a reference to the first volume of A.J. Wensinck’s *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (published in Leiden in 1936).<sup>31</sup> As both snippets of information are undated, it is not possible to establish a clear link to the correspondence between Snouck Hurgronje

27 Observations and conversations in Jedda, 2008–15.

28 Aḥmad and al-‘Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 172–91, 539–41.

29 Ibid., 174.

30 Ibid., 190–91. These are the dates given in Aḥmad and al-‘Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 191. It is possible that there is a mistake by either Naṣīf or the authors, as there are editions of the aforementioned work by de Goeje published by Brill in Leiden in 1870, and again in 1927 as vol. 1 of *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* (but not 1937). I have not been able to trace the Cairo edition, but there is a Tehran edition from 1961. There is also an edition by M. Qazwini, but it is of ‘Aṭā-Malik Juwaynī, *Ta’riḫ-i-jahān-gushā* (Leiden/London, 1912–37), to which Ralf Elger alerted me.

31 Aḥmad and ‘Alawī, 149.

and Naşif discussed below, but it is not unlikely that Naşif used either Snouck Hurgronje or one of the members of the Dutch consulate in order to obtain these copies.

### The Correspondence between Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and Muḥammad Naşif

As mentioned above, the Leiden letters provide only one side of the correspondence between the two learned men. Furthermore, we do not know about those aspects in Snouck Hurgronje's letters to which Naşif might not refer in his own writings, nor can we be certain that the letters preserved in Leiden are the only ones that Naşif wrote to Snouck Hurgronje.

The oldest of Naşif's the letters dates from April 8, 1920, and is a reply to a letter by Snouck Hurgronje. If this is indeed the first letter that Naşif sent to the Dutch scholar, we can conclude that the correspondence was initiated by Snouck Hurgronje.<sup>32</sup> Snouck seems to have sent Muḥammad Naşif a photograph that he had taken of Naşif's father via the-then Dutch consul in Jeddah, Emile Gobée.<sup>33</sup> Had Snouck Hurgronje been aware of the fact that Naşif had been searching for such a photograph, contacting friends of his father in India and Istanbul? Perhaps Naşif had been in touch with the Dutch consulate about this matter, given that Snouck Hurgronje must have been known locally among the literati as a collector of all sorts of written, photographic, and indeed registered information on the Ḥijāz since the mid-1880s. Naşif wrote to *ḥaḍrat muḥtaram al-'allāma al-faḍḍāl al-ustādh al-sayyid al-misyū 'Abd al-Ghaffār Hūrghrūnja*, "the respected and eminent scholar professor mister monsieur 'Abd al-Ghaffār Hurgronje", combining the Muslim and Christian names in an interesting manner and embellishing the address in a quite extraordinary manner. In the letter, Naşif expressed his warmest thanks for the picture and then seems to imply that, as a young man, he had destroyed another image of his father due to a misunderstanding regarding the teachings of Islam (see translation below). Now, he continues, he understood why the Prophet had initially forbidden images, basing his arguments on the teachings of Muḥammad 'Abduh and the modern quest for science. He concludes his letter by asking whether Snouck Hurgronje was in need of anything from the Ḥijāz.

32 University Library Leiden, OR 8952 A:743, Naşif, M. April 8, 1920. After the first mention, the letters are referred to by their classmark and date only.

33 On Gobée's life, see <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwm1880-2000/lemmata/bwn5/gobee> (accessed July 21, 2015).

Interestingly, the arguments put forward by Naṣīf about photography confirm his grandson's above-quoted position about the distinction between a Salafī in the earlier Ḥijāzī context and the later use of the term by the Saudi state. In spite of Ibn Sa'ūd's use of photographs from ca. 1910, most *'ulamā'* were not convinced of this technology until much later. Indeed, it would seem from the first letter that Naṣīf himself had, in his youth and under the influence of his Salafī (or possibly Wahhābī) teachers, taken a rather radical stance. Daniel van der Meulen, arriving in Jeddah shortly after Ibn Sa'ūd's takeover, describes how "no pictures of human beings were permitted".<sup>34</sup> Indeed, about forty years later and shortly after Ibn Sa'ūd's death in 1953, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh published a *fatwā* arguing extensively why photography was forbidden in Islam.<sup>35</sup> Hence, a "good" Salafī according to Wahhābī standards would presumably have rejected photography.

The next letter, where the omission of the word *muhtaram* in the address might indicate a certain familiarity, again consists of a round of thanks for papers sent through the good services of Emile Gobée.<sup>36</sup> It remains somewhat unclear whether this refers to a second, additional set of papers or is merely a somewhat more prosaic repetition of the thanks extended eleven months earlier. It is certainly possible that Naṣīf feared that his letter had been lost, or that perhaps Snouck Hurgronje, as a famous and busy professor, had not felt an urge to reply. In November 1921, Muḥammad Naṣīf was once again in contact with the Dutch consul, correcting for him some verses that Gobée seems to have collected for Snouck Hurgronje.<sup>37</sup> Curiously, this must have occurred just after the end of Gobée's term at the consulate (November 1, 1921), and possibly after his departure from Jeddah.

Did the two men remain in contact? The next letter we have from Naṣīf dates from April 29, 1925. In it, he thanks Snouck Hurgronje for a letter from August 22, 1924.<sup>38</sup> Apparently, an American journal by the title of *al-Hudā* had

34 D. van der Meulen, *Don't You Hear the Thunder? A Dutchman's Life Story* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 82.

35 Guido Steinberg, *Religion und Staat in Saudi-Arabien. Die wahhabitischen Gelehrten 1902–1953* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), 385.

36 University Library Leiden, OR 8952 A:743, Naṣīf, M. March 6, 1921.

37 University Library Leiden, OR 8952 D:108, Naṣīf, MUH to Gharbī, Emile, November 4, 1921. Although I have not been able to verify the name after discovering the earlier contact with Gobée (this letter not being available online), it is highly likely that it was to him, and not an obscure Mr. Gharbī, that the letter was sent.

38 University Library Leiden, OR 8952, A:743, Naṣīf, M. April 29, 1925.

written derogatorily about Snouck Hurgronje, and Naṣīf emphasized that this was unjustified in the light of Snouck Hurgronje's high moral standing.<sup>39</sup> Naṣīf reports that the-then Dutch consul van der Plas, his "eminent friend" (*sadiqī al-fāḍil*) had informed him that two copies of "the photograph" had been sent to Java—although the context remains unclear. He suggests that Snouck Hurgronje might already have heard of a newly-published Egyptian Ph.D. thesis by a certain Zakī Mubārak, entitled *al-Akhlāq 'ind al-Ghazālī*. This book had been criticized because it highlighted a number of mistakes by al-Ghazālī. Naṣīf had been positively impressed by this critique and had ordered a copy for Snouck Hurgronje, as he was aware of Snouck's acquaintance with al-Ghazālī's work. Had Snouck Hurgronje perhaps sent Naṣīf his book *De Islam*, published in Dutch in 1912 and republished in German in 1924, or his earlier articles in which he discusses al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*?<sup>40</sup> Did they perhaps correspond about al-Ghazālī, or had Naṣīf been told about Snouck Hurgronje's studies by his former students, the later Dutch consuls with whom Naṣīf was in touch?

We do not know of Snouck Hurgronje's reaction to this letter, or indeed the book. Half a year later, Naṣīf wrote again, not indicating that he had received any letter from Snouck Hurgronje. He announced that he had ordered a copy of the first volume of *Ilāl al-ḥadīth* by ('Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Muḥammad) Ibn (Abī) Ḥāṭim al-Rāzī, which he had printed with some friends at the Cairene Maṭba'a Salafiyya.<sup>41</sup>

Another five years lapsed without a further trace of contact. However, on November 25, 1930, the last set of letters starts. Snouck Hurgronje had sent a picture of Naṣīf as a child. In exchange, the esteemed "Shaykh of the Orientalists in the Netherlands and elsewhere" (*shaykh al-mustashriqīn al-hūlandiyyīn wa-ghayrihim*) was informed about another parcel of books that was en route to Leiden through the good services of the new Dutch consul, Daniel van

39 I have been unable to identify the periodical, or, indeed, the article mentioned in the article.

40 Snouck Hurgronje, *De Islam* (Baarn, 1912), *Der Islam* (Tübingen, 1924). While these works were not available to me at the time of writing, articles with the same title, published in the journal *De Gids* in 1866 by Snouck Hurgronje, also bear testimony to his reading of al-Ghazālī; see *Verspreide Geschriften* 1 (Bonn/Leipzig, 1923), 276–79.

41 Cairo, al-Maṭba'a al-salafiyya 1343–44/1924–26. University Library Leiden, OR 8952, A:743, Naṣīf, M. October 9, 1925. al-Rāzī's work is not mentioned in the lists of books that he had printed and which is provided in Aḥmad and al-'Alawī, *Muḥammad Naṣīf*, 204–5 and 216–7.

der Meulen.<sup>42</sup> These were a book by a young Meccan scholar, Shaykh Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Mashshāṭ, entitled *Rafʿ al-sitār fī uṣūl ʿilm al-ḥadīth*,<sup>43</sup> two volumes of *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawāʿiq (al-mursala ʿalā l-Jahmiyya wa-l-Muʿaṭṭila)* by (Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr) Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (al-Ḥanbalī, as the letter adds),<sup>44</sup> *Unwān al-majd fī taʾriḫ Najd* by (ʿUthmān b. ʿAbdallāh) Ibn Bishr al-Najdī, and finally *al-Durūs al-tawḥīdiyya wa-l-fiqhiyya* by Ibn Muṭṭlaq, a Najdī scholar who had graduated from scholars in the Ḥijāz, as Naṣīf added.<sup>45</sup>

Favors were to be reciprocated. In early February 1931, Muḥammad Naṣīf asked the “most magnificent leader of the Orientalists” (*raʾīs al-mustashriqīn al-afkham*) to buy for him some rare books in Holland or elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> As rare books, they might well be somewhat more expensive, he added. Would Snouck please send them via the Dutch consulate or else via other Dutch merchant establishments in Jeddah? The titles were *Kitāb al-jibāl wa-l-amkina wa-l-miyā* by Zamakhsharī, *Kitāb al-mushtarik* by Yāqūt, *Kitāb juḡhrāfiyyat al-Idrīsī ḥaqqat jazīrat al-ʿArab wa-l-andalus wa-l-sūdān wa-l-gharb*, *Kitāb al-aḍḍād* by Ibn al-Anbārī, *Kitāb muʿjam mā istaʿjam* by al-Bakrī, and al-Dhahabī’s *Kitāb al-mushtabih fī ahl rijāl al-ḥadīth*.<sup>47</sup> In a postscript, Naṣīf adds that he had also asked A.J. Wensinck for these books, possibly when the latter was visiting Saudi Arabia. He added that the two Dutchmen should coordinate so that the books

42 University Library Leiden, OR 8952, A:743, Naṣīf, M. November 25, 1930. Van der Meulen served as Dutch consul in Jeddah in the periods 1926–31 and 1941–45.

43 This seems to be Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Mashshāṭ, *Rafʿ al-astār ʿan muḥayyā mukhaddarāt taʿat al-anwār* (Mecca 1348/1929).

44 Printed in Mecca, al-Maṭbaʿa al-salafiyya 1329/1911.

45 Printed in Mecca and Cairo 1930, it seems that Naṣīf sent both editions. None of these are listed among the books that Naṣīf had printed, but this does not necessarily mean that he was not involved.

46 University Library Leiden, OR 8952, A:744, Naṣīf, M. February 5, 1931.

47 According to Arnoud Vrolijk (email communication August 12, 2015), the requested editions might be the following: T.G.J. Juynboll and M. Salverda de Grave (eds), *Specimen e literis orientalibus exhibens az-Zamaksari Lexicon geographicum cui titulus est Kitāb al-jibāl wa-l-amkina wa-l-miyāh* (Leiden: Brill, 1856); F. Wüstenfeld (ed.), *Yāqūt b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥamawī, Shihāb al-Dīn, Kitāb al-mushtarik waḍʿan wa-l-muftariq suqʿan* (Göttingen, 1846); R.P.A. Dozy and M.J. de Goeje (eds), *ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī, Description de l’Afrique et de l’Espagne* (Leiden: Brill, 1866); M. Th. Houtsma (ed.) *Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim Ibn al-Anbārī, Kitābo-l-Adhdād sive Liber de vocabulis Arabicis quae plures habent significationes inter se oppositas ...* (Leiden: Brill, 1881); F. Wüstenfeld (ed.), *Das geographische Wörterbuch des Abu ʿObeid ʿAbdallah ben ʿAbd el-ʿAziz el-Bekri ... 2 vols* (Göttingen/Paris, 1876–77); Pieter de Jong (ed.), *al-Moshtabih auctore Schamsoʿd-dīn Abu Abdallah Mohammad Ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1864–81).

were not sent twice.<sup>48</sup> In exchange, Naṣīf promised to send a Meccan-printed copy of *Sharḥ 'aqīdat al-imām al-Taḥāwī (al-Hanaḥī)*.

The last letter of March 14, 1931 does not indicate that Snouck Hurgronje had responded to these requests.<sup>49</sup> Naṣīf writes that he had sent Ibn Ḥanbal's *Kitāb al-sunna* (Mecca 1349/1930) as well as the book promised in the last letter, *Matn 'aqīdat al-Taḥāwī wa-sharḥihā*. The copy in Leiden library contains a handwritten dedication from Naṣīf to Snouck Hurgronje.<sup>50</sup> But did Snouck ever send an answer to Naṣīf's letter to thank him for the books, and, if so, did Naṣīf ever receive it? Until a closer investigation of Naṣīf's library in Jeddah, as well as of his unpublished personal papers, is carried out, these questions will have to remain unanswered.

### Concluding Observations

It is difficult to draw conclusions on the relationship between the Dutch Orientalist Snouck-Hurgronje and the Jeddah notable and man of letters Muḥammad Naṣīf from just eight letters to which we do not have the answers. However, they allow a number of insights regarding Naṣīf's relation with Snouck Hurgronje, as well as that with other Dutch scholars and consuls. They also cast some light on the intellectual universe of a Ḥijāzī scholar with Salafi leanings.

First of all, we can note that the contact, while hampered by distance, was one of scholarly exchange. Snouck Hurgronje had no qualms regarding his own immersion into Muslim societies, and Naṣīf does not seem to have had reservations about maintaining friendly relations with foreigners, whether Muslims or not. That these were, without exception, Arabists (and had studied with Snouck Hurgronje), was probably helpful. However, it is noteworthy that neither the religious divide (lacking in Snouck Hurgronje's case, but not in that of the other consuls) nor the Dutch colonial enterprise in the Dutch East Indies proved to be a problem for Naṣīf's relation with Snouck Hurgronje. Given that the Ḥijāz had often been seen as a hotbed of pan-Islamism, seen as

48 This information is based on the description of Wensinck's travelogue in Leiden University Library (OR 25.686). I have not yet had the chance to consult it for any traces of an encounter with Muḥammad Naṣīf in early 1930.

49 University Library Leiden, OR 8952, A:744, Naṣīf, M. March 14, 1931.

50 I would like to thank Arnoud Vrolijk for this information, as well as for the full title of al-Taḥāwī's book, *al-Sharḥ al-Taḥāwīyya fi l-'aqīda al-salafīyya* (Mecca, 1349/1930).

a code-word for anti-colonialism, in the late 19th and early 20th century, this seems at least noteworthy.<sup>51</sup>

As far as Snouck Hurgronje is concerned, Naṣīf's way of addressing him seems to go beyond the normal honorifics found in other letters by Naṣīf and other Ḥijāzīs from the time. It is certainly imaginable that this was in recognition of Snouck Hurgronje's scholarly achievements. After all, his works on Mecca constituted an important scholarly achievement which might well have been recognized by local men of letters even if anthropology and photography were not widely-accepted scholarly pursuits at the time even in Europe. In the Ḥijāz, they were hardly known: When Snouck Hurgronje collected the material for his photographic documentation of the region, he was still among the pioneers of photography, and the later Wahhābī rejection of the practice has already been discussed.<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, the apparently cordial relations of this leading notable with the other consuls, mentioned in the letters, might also have been quite typical of a more general Ḥijāzī openness towards strangers, as long as these were not considered to be pursuing antagonistic aims. While Western visitors and consuls varied greatly in their evaluation of religious tolerance or fanaticism in the Ḥijāz, Naṣīf's letters show clearly that a leading notable of Jeddah, even if he held Salafī convictions, was at ease communicating and cooperating with friendly foreigners, Muslims or otherwise.<sup>53</sup> This clearly would have distinguished him from the majority of Najdī (Wahhābī) scholars at the time.

Finally, and linked to the above point, the letters and an investigation of Naṣīf's biography show clearly how the reading of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya as well as other Ḥanbali authors did not necessarily conflict with openness towards others, as is nowadays sometimes assumed in anti-Salafī (anti-Wahhābī) polemics. In the case of Naṣīf's contact with Snouck Hurgronje and some of the Dutch consuls, this seems to have gone beyond mere tolerance and have consisted of a real friendship and/or admiration.

51 William Roff, "Sanitation and Security: The Imperial Powers and the Nineteenth Century Hajj", *Arabian Studies* 6 (1982), 143–60.

52 For the history of photography in the region, see Gillian Grant, "A Century of Images in a Century of Change", *Saudi Arabia by the First Photographers*, ed. by William Facey (with Gillian Grant), (London 1996, repr. 2002), 18–23.

53 I have made the argument of Ḥijāzī cosmopolitanism, linked to both the pilgrimage and international commerce, more extensively elsewhere; see Ulrike Freitag, "The City and the Stranger: Jeddah in the 19th Century", *The City in the Ottoman Empire. Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity*, ed. Ulrike Freitag, Malte Fuhrmann, Nora Lafi, Florian Riedler (London: Routledge, 2011), 218–27.

Hence, I would conclude that this correspondence is another case in which academic curiosity and cooperation transcended boundaries of religion and culture, and created important links in a world divided by sectarian and political strife. This, I would argue, has connected cosmopolitan scholars in different periods and from widely differing backgrounds, and continues to do so.

**Translation of the First Letter from the Leiden Collection,  
OR. 8952 A 743\_1**

Muḥammad Naṣīf, Jeddah (Ḥijāz)

From Jeddah, 19 Rajab 1338/April 8, 1920 to Leiden, the country of Holland

The respected and eminent scholar professor mister monsieur ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Hurgronje, the eminent,

greetings, and respect, and longing and thanks, may the nights and days last.

And now: I was honored by your generous letter that told of your health which will hopefully last, and I praised God and thanked [him] for it. I received with your aforementioned letter a picture of my deceased father Ḥusayn Naṣīf by way of my eminent friend Monsieur Emile Gobée. I was grateful for your kindness and your messenger, and wished you all the best. That you sent me the aforementioned picture implanted in my heart a deep attachment to you and I thank you for its preservation for such a long time. I do not doubt that you kept it [i.e. the picture, U.F.] because of affection for the bond between you and the deceased father, and I am grateful for your fidelity to him. I wore myself out searching for it [the photograph] among the friends of my father in Istanbul and India, and I had been unable to obtain it. The aforementioned Monsieur Gobée must have alerted you to what I did to the photograph which was with me when I first started to study science before understanding the underlying reason for which the Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation) ordered the destruction of pictures. Because the reason for his order to destroy pictures relates to the days of paganism. At that time, there were two reasons, the first entertainment and the second the request of blessings from statues created from the pictures of the rightly-guided. The first to protect the religion and the second was among the issues that Islam wanted to eradicate. And these two objections disappeared. The real benefit was found because photography became in this age one of the best tools of science. The Islamic *sharī‘a* stepped back from outlawing one of the most useful tools

of science. May God have mercy on the deceased Imām Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *mufti* of all of Egypt. He served the Easterners with his [rational] mind and knowledge. Had the Easterners been lucky, God would have extended his life by twenty years.<sup>54</sup> I hope that in case you need something you will let me know. I will try to settle it. Stay in good health, Amen.

1920-04-08

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

MOHAMED NASSIF  
DJEDDAH (Hedjaz)

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صفحة محمد بن عبد الوهاب الفاضل الميرزا السيد عبد الغفار صوري غريزي الياقوت  
 ستم واحتم لم واسوانه وشكره لا ينفد في العبادي والدينام. وبعد فقد شرفت بكتابه الكريم النبي عبد محمد الرحمن  
 ودان محمدتاه وشكره على ذلان وقد استمتحت كتابكم التاليم صورة والدي الرجوم حسين نصيف محمد صديقي  
 الفاضل السيد اسير كوني وعددت ساكر الفطيم وانسألكم واعيا لكم لكل خير وانه الصديق في الصورة المذكورة  
 عرس لكم في قبيحة عظيمه فاشترى لكم هذه الصورة المذكورة وادركت عندي انه جعلكم لاه حواكيد الصورة التي صورتم  
 دين والدي الرجوم وانما اشترى لكم له. وقد كتبت لعا شديدا بالفتنسية عظيم لدي اصدقاء، والدي في الصورة المذكورة  
 ولم اشترى من الصور عظيمه وادركت من الصورة المذكورة في التاليم اخذكم مما صنعت في الصورة التي كانت عندي في اول المطبعي العلم  
 قبل معرفتي الفاضل التي منها اصل امره بنيا صلي الله عليه وسلم بمحو الصور. فانه السبب في امره بمحو الصور المذكورة كانت في ايام  
 الوتيمه وكانت تحذف في ذلان العرب والسبان الودي الهوي والناز السديك بسبب من صورته من الهالين والودي ينفذ  
 المديه والنافي مما جاءه الودوم لمحوه وقد ان هذا له العارضه ووجدت الفاضله المحققه له الصورة مما صنعها  
 العصر من اذن وسائق العلم وانه لتريه الودوميه بعد من ان تحرم بسبب من اذن وسائق العلم وجم له الودوم  
 الرجوم الشيخ محمد عبده مفتي الديار المصريه تقدمه له برحمته فانه نفع الشريطين بعقد عشره ولولا ان شريطين تحت  
 طاه اطلال ان تعالي عمره عشره سنه واجواز الودوم لكم حاجه وخدمه فبذره عنظر اخذت بقصاها وودكم في خصا،  
 وعاضد اذني سا

54 It seems that Naşif first is speaking about Easterners in general, but *de facto* talks of himself, who only benefited from Riḍā's knowledge when he was older than twenty.