Based on my recently published book, *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (PUP, 2021), this talk asks how a world religion like Islam moves from one region to another. It does so by tracing the emergence of a highly influential Islamic paradigm that developed between the Hadramawt valley of South Arabia and the port cities of Malaya and Java. Pioneered by a Hadrami Sufi scholar, ‘Abdallah b. ‘Alawi al-Haddad (d. 1720), this paradigm began as a project of educating tribal communities in the Hadramawt. Al-Haddad attempted to assert the consistency of Islamic norms by codifying Islamic teachings into uniform and accessible theological, legal/ethical, and devotional text, thereby creating an objectified Islam posited to be consistent, autonomous, and purified from the particularities of local cultures. This objectification of Islam invented a new but enduring pathway to constituting religious authority, one that can replicate elsewhere and reproduce itself for generations. The talk traces the processes through which the Haddadian project became paradigmatic by following the itineraries of traveling merchants and scholars through the port cities of Southeast Asia. Although not as well known in the Middle East or elsewhere in the Islamic world, the Haddadian paradigm has become widespread and has struck deep roots across the Indian Ocean, where it continues to define what Islam is for people in East Africa, Southwest India, and Southeast Asia.

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