

Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan according to Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani

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Histori	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Diserahkan:</i> 13-07-2025</p> <p><i>Direvisi:</i> 26-07-2025</p> <p><i>Diterima:</i> 02-08-2025</p>	<p><i>This paper examines the thought of Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadan within the framework of Islamic legal methodology and classical astronomy. Ibn Hajar emphasized that moon sighting (rukyah) is the principal method based on the Prophet's traditions, while astronomical calculation (hisab) serves only as a supporting tool for verifying doubtful reports. He categorized the authority of hisab differently for experts and laypeople and reviewed the diverse opinions of scholars from various madhhabs regarding its use, the regional sighting differences (ikhtilaf al-mathali'), and the government's role in announcing the beginning of the month. Applying Fazlur Rahman's double movement approach, this study interprets Ibn Hajar's classical views in both normative and historical contexts, linking them to contemporary challenges such as the global unification of worship times. Ibn Hajar's approach illustrates a synthesis between textual devotion (ta'abbud) and scientific rationality (ta'aqqul), making it a valuable model in contemporary fiqh of astronomy. The relevance of this thought lies in the integration between religious authority and scientific development, which strengthens Islamic worship practices in a more systematic and directed manner.</i></p>
Keywords	: <i>Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Ramadan, moon sighting, hisab</i>
	ABSTRAK
	<p>Makalah ini mengkaji pemikiran Ibnu Hajar al-'Asqalānī mengenai penentuan awal bulan Ramadan dalam kerangka metodologi hukum Islam dan astronomi klasik. Ibnu Hajar menegaskan bahwa rukyat hilal merupakan metode utama yang bersumber dari sunnah Nabi, sementara hisab astronomi berfungsi sebagai alat pendukung, khususnya dalam memverifikasi laporan rukyat yang meragukan. Ia membedakan otoritas penggunaan hisab berdasarkan tingkat keahlian—membolehkannya bagi para ahli, namun tidak bagi masyarakat awam—dan mengulas perbedaan pendapat di kalangan ulama mazhab-mazhab Sunni tentang penggunaannya, isu perbedaan tempat terbit hilal (ikhtilāf al-maṭālī'), serta peran otoritatif pemerintah dalam menetapkan awal bulan kamariah. Dengan menerapkan pendekatan double movement dari Fazlur Rahman, studi ini menafsirkan pandangan klasik Ibnu Hajar secara normatif dan historis, serta merekontekstualisasikannya dengan persoalan kontemporer seperti sinkronisasi global waktu-waktu ibadah umat Islam. Kerangka berpikir Ibnu Hajar menunjukkan adanya sintesis antara ketaatan tekstual (ta'abbud) dan rasionalitas ilmiah (ta'aqqul), yang menawarkan model penting bagi pengembangan fiqh astronomi kontemporer. Relevansi pemikiran ini terletak pada potensi integratifnya—menjembatani otoritas keagamaan dengan kemajuan ilmu pengetahuan—sehingga memperkuat pelaksanaan ibadah secara lebih sistematis dan terarah di era modern.</p>
Kata Kunci	: <i>Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Ramadhan, rukyatul hilal, hisab</i>
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INTRODUCTION

The determination of the beginning of the lunar month is one of the crucial aspects of Muslim life, particularly in relation to certain acts of worship such as fasting during Ramadan, and the celebrations of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha (Hakim, 2023; Izzuddin dkk., 2007). In order to determine the start of a new month, two primary methods are employed: *rukyah* (moon sighting) and *hisab* (astronomical calculation) (Arifin, 2016). These two methods are not only technical in nature but also encompass complex legal and theological dimensions. The debate between the two has long persisted among Islamic scholars and communities, with each side presenting arguments in line with the *mazhab* of thought they follow.

The determination of the beginning of Ramadan has long been a subject of scholarly contention within Islamic jurisprudence, primarily due to differing interpretations of prophetic traditions regarding the sighting of the crescent moon (*hila*). While some scholars insist on the necessity of *ru'yah* (physical moon sighting), others advocate the validity of *hisab* (astronomical calculation) as a more precise and scientific method (Azhari, 2008). This divergence not only reflects methodological differences but also presents practical challenges for Muslim communities, particularly in countries like Indonesia, where disagreements between religious authorities often lead to multiple starting dates for Ramadan and Eid. Despite extensive classical discourse on the topic, there remains a need to revisit the positions of prominent scholars—such as Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani—whose nuanced perspectives may offer a more integrative and context-sensitive framework for resolving such disputes today.

Previous studies on the determination of the beginning of Ramadan have highlighted the ongoing debate between the *rukyah* (moon sighting) and *hisab* (astronomical calculation) methods. The study from Iskandar et al. (2024) finds that differences in the structure of religious authority and the implementation of *rukyat* and *hisab* methods lead to more unified Eid celebrations in Thailand, while Indonesia often experiences varied celebration times due to the involvement of multiple Islamic organizations in the decision-making process (Iskandar dkk., 2024). Similarly, Ridwan (2022) argued that *hisab* holds strong epistemological legitimacy and can be integrated into contemporary religious rulings, provided that it meets standards of accuracy and authority (Ridwan, 2022). Rofiuddin (2019), on the other hand, reveals that the dynamics of determining the beginning of the Hijri month in Indonesia represent a contest of capital among Islamic organizations, where social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capitals are at play, leading to polarization between the *hisab* and *rukyat* schools of thought, and resulting in symbolic violence within the religious social sphere, despite the government's adoption of the *imkan al-rukyat* criteria as a middle-ground solution (Rofiuddin, 2019). These studies collectively demonstrate that the issue is not merely astronomical or technical but is deeply embedded in questions of religious authority, methodology, and the pursuit of social cohesion.

This paper focuses on the views of a prominent scholar in the field of Islamic jurisprudence, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani. He is renowned for the depth of his thought on issues of Islamic law and jurisprudence. Ibn Hajar, a scholar of the Shafi'i *mazhab*, is best known for his monumental works in hadith and fiqh, such as *Fath al-Bari*. Furthermore, this study aims to explore the implications of his views in the context of how the beginning of the lunar month is determined in Indonesia, a country where differences often arise among Islamic organizations in making such decisions. For instance,

Muhammadiyah employs the *hisab* method based on the wujudul hilal principle, while Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) places greater emphasis on *rukyah*. Thus, through this study, it is hoped that the dynamics of lunar month determination can be better understood, particularly how the concept is applied according to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, and its relevance to the modern Islamic world, especially in the Indonesian context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is based on library research using a qualitative, descriptive-comparative approach. The data sources used are those relevant to the main topic of this study (Creswell, 2014), namely the determination of the beginning of the lunar month—specifically the months of Ramadan and Shawwal. The primary source is the fiqh work of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari 'ala Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*. Secondary data is drawn from various references such as classical texts, books, and journals that are relevant to the research theme. This study also includes the views of scholars from the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhhabs*) regarding the determination of the beginning of the lunar month, which are then compared with the opinion of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani. The data will be analyzed using the double movement method to assess the relevance of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's opinion when applied in the present context.

The analysis in this study follows the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three concurrent components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Abubakar, 2021; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, categorized, and organized relevant information from primary and secondary sources, focusing on themes related to the determination of the beginning of the lunar month in Islamic jurisprudence. During the data display stage, the extracted data were systematically arranged to compare Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani's views with those of scholars from the four major *madhhabs*. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification phase, the researcher interpreted the findings and assessed the relevance of Ibn Hajar's opinions in the contemporary context, particularly in addressing the ongoing debates between *rukyah* and *hisab*. This method ensures a structured and in-depth analysis of the text within both its classical framework and its applicability today.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography Of Ibn Hajar

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, whose full name was Ahmad bin 'Ali bin Muhammad bin Hajar al-Kinani al-Asqalani, was also known by his honorific titles Abu Fadhl and Shihabuddin. He was born in Egypt on 12 Sha'ban 773 AH / 18 February 1372 CE and passed away on 8 Dhu al-Hijjah 852 AH / 2 February 1449 CE in Cairo, Egypt. His ancestors came from 'Asqalan in Palestine, hence the name "al-Asqalani." (Az-Zirikli, 2002). Although he was linked to a region in Palestine, Ibn Hajar grew up and pursued his scholarly activities in Egypt (Sunnatullah, 2022).

Ibn Hajar received religious education from many scholars in Egypt and other cities such as Makkah, Madinah, Yemen, and the Levant. Orphaned at a young age, he was raised and educated by his uncle, who provided him with intensive instruction in Islamic sciences. He memorized the Qur'an by the age of nine and went on to study various disciplines including hadith, fiqh, tafsir, usul al-fiqh, and Islamic history. He studied under prominent scholars such as al-Hafiz Zainuddin al-'Iraqi (hadith) and al-Balqini (fiqh).

A prolific scholar, Ibn Hajar authored no fewer than 150 works. Some of his most influential contributions include:

- a) *Fath al-Bari fi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari* – widely regarded as the most comprehensive commentary on *Sahih al-Bukhari*, this work offers detailed explanations of hadith texts, analysis of transmission chains, scholarly disagreements, jurisprudential insights, and linguistic commentary.
- b) *Taqrib al-Tahdhib* – a biographical reference for hadith narrators, often used in hadith studies to assess transmission reliability.
- c) *Al-Isabah fi Tamyiz Asma' al-Sahabah* – an encyclopedic work identifying and documenting the biographies of the Prophet's companions.

Ibn Hajar served as Chief Judge (*Qadi al-Qudat*) three times, reflecting the broad recognition of his scholarly excellence. He was honored with the title *Shaykh al-Islam* and became a foremost authority in the *Shafi'i* school. However, his influence transcended *madhhab* boundaries, as scholars of other schools frequently referred to his analyses, especially in the fields of hadith validation and criticism. Known for his meticulous scholarly approach, he combined *ta'abbud* (devotional adherence to textual sources) with *ta'aqqul* (rational analysis). In hadith criticism, he applied the principles of *jarh wa ta'dil* (narrator evaluation) with precision and objectivity, avoiding sectarian bias. He bridged the methods of early scholars (*mutaqaddimin*) and later scholars (*muta'akhhirin*) through a balanced, systematic approach (Az-Zirikli, 2002).

Ibn Hajar lived in a time when astronomy and the science of timekeeping (*ilm al-miqat*) began to develop more systematically. Despite this, he remained firmly rooted in the textual traditions while also paying attention to empirical and rational developments in science. This combination of traditional and scientific approaches shaped his moderate and contextual legal reasoning.

His thoughts on the determination of the beginning of the lunar month, especially Ramadan, demonstrate a deep awareness of the limitations and capabilities of his era. He did not completely reject scientific methods such as *hisab*, but he also did not adopt them indiscriminately. This balanced approach reflects his commitment to the principles of Islamic jurisprudence while responding to the challenges of his time.

Ibn Hajar's Thought on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan

In determining the beginning of Ramadan, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani emphasized the importance of *rukyah* (moon sighting), based on prophetic traditions that state Muslims should begin fasting upon seeing the crescent moon. *Rukyah* serves as the principal basis for determining the start of the month, whereas *hisab* (astronomical calculation) is used only to verify doubtful sighting reports. While *hisab* may be considered under certain circumstances, it does not replace *rukyah* as the primary method ('Asqalānī, 2005).

Astronomical knowledge—referred to as *'ilm al-manzilah* in *Fath al-Bari*—may be used to determine the start of Ramadan by those well-versed in the field, but it is not applicable to the general public. Ibn Hajar outlined various scholarly opinions on the use of calculations and lunar positions in determining the new month ('Asqalānī, 2005):

- a. First, it is permissible, but not for *fardh* fasting (i.e., the month of Ramadan).
- b. Second, it is permissible also for *fardh* fasting.
- c. Third, it is permissible for experts in *hisab* but not permissible for astrologers (*'ilm al-nujūm*).
- b) Fourth, it is permissible for both of them, but not for the general public

c) Fifth, it is permissible for both and for the general public unconditionally.

These positions represent differing opinions among scholars from various madhhabs. The view that hisab cannot be used as a basis for Ramadan determination is supported by al-Shirazi and quoted by al-Nawawi, stating that the testimony of astronomers is not accepted because the religious obligation is based on *rukyat al-hilal* (an-Nawawi, t.t.). Conversely, Ibn Suraj argued that the opinion of an expert in hisab can be accepted due to their precise knowledge of lunar calculations, a view also held by some scholars of the Hanafi school. In cases where rukyah is not feasible, hisab may be used to determine the start of the month, based on an interpretation of the Qur'anic phrase *faqdurulah* as a directive to calculate the moon's phases (an-Nawawi, t.t.).

Some Shafi'i scholars such as al-Baghawi maintained that the conclusions of astronomers should not be applied to the general public, only to their peers (an-Nawawi, t.t.). Most Maliki scholars held that astronomical calculations, even when accurate, should not be used to determine the start of the month (al-Zuhaili, 2011).

The authority to confirm rukyah results lies with judges, muftis, or government authorities in each region. Ibn Hajar notes several scholarly opinions regarding the scope of rukyah decisions:

First, the sighting applies only to the region where it was observed. This view is supported by a hadith from Ibn 'Abbas in Sahih Muslim, as well as scholars like Ibn al-Mundhir, Ikrimah, al-Qasim, Salim, and Ishaq. Al-Tirmidhi also cited this as the predominant view among scholars, without noting any dissenting opinion. Al-Mawardi reported this view within the Shafi'i school.

Second, this view is contrary to the first opinion. If the new moon (hilal) is sighted in one country, then the people of all other countries are obliged to fast without exception. This is the well-known opinion (*masyhur*) of the Maliki school of thought. However, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr narrated the existence of an *ijma'* (consensus) that contradicts this. He stated: *"According to the consensus, the sighting (rukyah) in one country cannot be used as a basis for other countries that are far from it, such as Khurasan and Andalusia."* Al-Qurtubi said: *"Our scholars have stated that if the new moon is definitively sighted in one place, and that information is conveyed to others by the testimony of two upright (just) witnesses, then those who receive this information are obligated to fast."* Ibn al-Majishun said: *"If the new moon is sighted in one country, then fasting is only obligatory for those who reside in that country; except if the information reaches the Imam, and the Imam then decrees that the people begin fasting, because in relation to the position of the Imam, the lands are considered as a single entity in which his ruling applies to all regions."* (Asqalanī, 2005).

Madzhab Scholars have proposed several criteria for defining whether regions are considered "distant" or "nearby" with regard to moon sightings:

First, based on the difference in moonrise locations. This opinion was affirmed by scholars from Iraq and by Ash-Shaidalani, and it was validated by An-Nawawi in his works *al-Raudhah* and *Majmu' Syarah al-Muhadzdzab*. Regions with the same moonrise time, such as Baghdad, Kufah, al-Ray, and Quzwan, are considered to belong to the same *mathla'* (lunar visibility zone), whereas distant regions (with different moonrise times), such as Hijaz, Iraq, and Khurasan, are classified as different *mathla'* zones (an-Nawawi, t.t.).

Second, based on the permissible distance for performing *qashar* (shortening) of prayers. This opinion was adopted by Imam al-Baghawi and supported by al-Rafi'i in his book *Ash-Shaghir*. Imam al-Haramain claimed that there was a consensus among scholars

regarding this opinion, arguing that determining the time of moonrise requires calculations and determinations from experts in anthropology. However, al-Nawawi, in *Majmu'*, explained that this view is considered weak because the matter of the crescent moon's appearance has no connection with the distance that permits qashar in prayer (an-Nawawi, t.t.).

Third, based on the boundaries of different states. This was the opinion of al-Mawardi, as mentioned in *Majmu' Syarah al-Muhaddzab*. The obligation to fast is not binding on a region if the new moon is not sighted there, even if it has been sighted elsewhere.

Fourth, narrated by al-Sarakhsi, who said: "Each region is obliged according to its own observation, if the sighting in another region cannot reach them." This opinion is followed by some scholars from the Hanbali and Maliki schools. They believe that once the sighting has been confirmed and verified by a judge in a particular region, all residents of the country and surrounding regions must follow it (al-Zuhaili, 2011).

Fifth, the earlier opinion of Ibn al-Majishun, namely that it is based on the difference in Imams or regional authorities ('Asqalānī, 2005).

Reactualization of Ibnu Hajar's Thought

Ibnu Hajar al-Asqalani, in the matter of determining the beginning of Ramadan, emphasizes the importance of the hilal (crescent moon) based on the Prophet's hadith, "Fast when you see it (the hilal), and break your fast when you see it...". In the early Islamic context, this method was very relevant because society lacked adequate astronomical calculation (*hisab*) skills. The principles Ibnu Hajar adopts in determining legal rulings on this matter are:

- a. Acts of worship such as fasting and Eid prayers must be based on certainty derived from methods appropriate to the social context or conditions of the community.
- b. Ease (*taysir*) and public welfare (*maslahah*) for the general public are important considerations in implementing the *rukyat* method.
- c. The use of *hisab* (calculation) is acknowledged as permissible but its application is limited to those who are truly experts.

In the era in which Ibn Hajar lived, *rukyat* or direct observation was the most realistic and collective means whose validity could be verified by many people. However, Ibn Hajar did not close the door to the use of *hisab* as a basis for determining the beginning of the lunar month, provided that the calculations could be accounted for. In addition, Ibn Hajar was also cautious in categorizing how the results of astronomical calculations could be applied in determining the beginning of a lunar month. He presented five opinions that illustrate the stringent conditions for accepting *hisab*, ranging from the strictest (not valid for Ramadan fasting) to the most lenient (permissible for all people). This categorization reflects Ibn Hajar's awareness of the dynamics of scientific development, while still being bounded by the socio-religious structure of the society of his time. This statement also reflects a recognition of the rational value of *hisab*, but still within the framework of devotional requirements (*ta'abbudi*). Thus, Ibn Hajar's position can be categorized as moderate: not rejecting science, but still upholding the scriptural texts as the primary source of legal legitimacy.

In the context of contemporary society, where science and technology have advanced significantly and their validity can be clearly verified, the use of *hisab* as an aid

to rukyat becomes necessary. Highly precise *hisab* can be used to test the accuracy of doubtful rukyat reports. Although scholars from the four Sunni madhhabs agree that *hisab* cannot replace rukyat as the primary method for determining the beginning of the lunar month, *hisab* is increasingly recognized as an important complementary tool.

In the midst of this reality, it is important to present the thought of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, which offers a moderate view in this regard. He accepts the results of *hisab* as a supporting instrument in assessing the correctness or falsity of *ru'yah* claims. The opinions of astronomers cannot be ignored, although they cannot stand alone as a basis for determining the beginning of Ramadan. Ibn Hajar clearly states that *hisab* can be used by experts in the field and cannot be applied to the general public. This means that in his view, *hisab* is relevant and can be used to help ensure the validity of a sighting, especially when there is doubt about the sighting report.

The implementation of rukyatul hilal results, according to Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, depends on the location where the crescent is observed. Quoting the hadith of Ibn Abbas, rukyat in a distant region cannot be applied to another. The visibility of the crescent in one area does not automatically bind other regions that are far apart. This indicates that differences in moonrise zones (*ikhtilaf al-mathali'*) must be considered, especially if the distances between regions are significant and the crescent moon cannot realistically be seen simultaneously. However, if the regions are under the same authority or leadership, then the rukyat from one location can be applied uniformly across the entire jurisdiction. This shows that Ibn Hajar emphasized both geographical and authoritative considerations in determining the beginning of the lunar month.

From a normative standpoint grounded in Islamic legal maxims—such as *yaqīn* (certainty), *'adālah* (justice), and *maṣlaḥah* (public benefit)—the adoption of *hisab* as a primary method for determining the start of the lunar month is both justifiable and necessary in the contemporary context. The precision and consistency offered by astronomical calculations align with the principle of certainty, thereby minimizing confusion and conflict among Muslim communities, especially in pluralistic societies. While *rukayah* retains symbolic and spiritual value as part of Islamic identity and communal expression (*syi'ar*), its limitations in terms of visibility and verification should preclude it from being the sole authoritative method. Moreover, the concept of *ikhtilāf al-maṭāli'* (differences in moonrise zones) has been subject to varying scholarly interpretations, indicating a degree of flexibility that allows for contextual adaptation based on geographic realities and political cohesion. Thus, prioritizing *hisab* does not negate tradition but rather integrates scientific precision within a framework of legal and social harmony, ultimately serving the higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Sharia.

CONCLUSION

The debate regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadan is a classic issue that continues to this day. Differences in understanding the Prophet's hadith concerning the sighting of the crescent moon (hilal) have given rise to two main approaches: *ru'yah* (direct moon sighting) and *hisab* (astronomical calculation). In Indonesia, this difference often results in the commencement of Ramadan or Eid al-Fitr falling on different days among Muslim communities. Nevertheless, this should not be a cause of division; rather, it must be understood as part of the diversity in Islamic jurisprudence that deserves mutual respect.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani offers a balanced perspective in this matter. He emphasizes *ru'yah* as the primary reference, based on the text of the hadith, but also acknowledges

the role of *hisab* as a supporting tool, particularly in verifying doubtful sightings. According to him, *hisab* is valid when used by experts, though not necessarily for the general public. This view demonstrates a harmony between textual fidelity (*ta'abbudī*) and rational analysis (*ta'aqqulī*), offering a middle ground between rigid literalism and uncritical acceptance of modern science.

Ibn Hajar also explains various opinions regarding the applicability of moon sighting in one region to other regions, considering factors such as geographic distance, differences in moonrise (*ikhtilāf al-maṭāli'*), and political authority. These show that Islamic scholars have long thought critically and contextually about the implications of such sightings. Therefore, Ibn Hajar's thoughts are highly relevant to current challenges, especially in multi-mazhab societies like Indonesia. His approach can serve as a reference in efforts to unify the Muslim community in determining the beginning of Ramadan in a way that is inclusive, scholarly, and mindful of social harmony.

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