

Book Reviews

From Anatolia to Aceh: Ottomans, Turks, and Southeast Asia

*A. C. S. Peacock & Annabel Teh Gallop, eds.
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Scholars of Islam in Southeast Asia and the history of the Malay-Indonesian world have long been aware of periods of intense contacts between the Ottoman Empire and the region. Most widely known in this context are the political exchanges between the Sultanate of Aceh and the Ottoman Empire of the sixteenth century in the face of Portuguese maritime domination in Southeast Asia. Regional calls for Ottoman aid against the expanding European powers by Muslim rulers were voiced in the nineteenth century. Despite this lapse in documented political contacts, however, connections between the two regions were also sustained and developed further throughout the intervening centuries on a variety of levels, most prominently in the economic, religious, and intellectual spheres.

Despite the pioneering work of scholars such as Anthony Reid since the 1960s, these connections, including *inter alia* the holy cities and Yemen's Hadhramaut region, both important centers of Islamic learning for Southeast Asian Muslims and the source of strong migrant communities settling in the Malay-Indonesian world, have received scant scholarly attention. It is against this background that the British Academy-funded research project "Islam, Trade, and Politics across the Indian Ocean" and the volume at hand, which represents one of its major fruits, brings together new innovative research on all of the various aspects of this particular relationship. Hereby it must be noted that its scope extends at times well beyond the Ottoman era also into the Republican era, and that, importantly, much of the documentary evidence relied upon derives from newly discovered archival sources.

The volume is divided into three thematic parts, preceded by two introductory chapters by the editors and Anthony Reid, respectively, which set the stage for the remainder of the book by reviewing the relationship's general

historical development, critically assessing local as well as scholarly imaginations of it, and discussing known as well as until recently unknown sources and types of documentary evidence testifying to it. Part 1 then embarks mapping “The Political and Economic Relationship from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century.” Jorge Santos Alves’ contribution on rumors, conspiracies, and commercial competition in Aceh-Ottoman-Portuguese relations during the second half of the sixteenth century sheds light on hitherto largely overlooked aspects of the contest over control of the pepper trade and Melaka. Among these are the collaboration of Asia-based Portuguese Jewish and New Christian traders and the Sinhalese king with the Ottomans against the Portuguese, as well as Aceh’s use of Ottoman military aid not only against the latter but also against rival sultanates.

Andrew Peacock elucidates the economic relationship between the two regions during the seventeenth century by focusing on the empire’s imports from and exports to Southeast Asia, Ottoman knowledge of the region as preserved in works of descriptive geography, and selected cases of Ottoman subjects active in the region. Subsequently Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells presents the local Hadhramis as both mediators of Ottoman influence in Southeast Asia and bidders for Ottoman patronage. Finally, Isaac Donoso brings the complex relationship of the Ottoman caliphate and the Muslims of the Philippines into focus, a relationship that unfolded against Spanish colonial attempts to either subjugate or forge alliances with local Muslim rulers.

Part 2 is concerned with “Interactions in the Colonial Era.” Ismail Hakkı Kadı uses a number of nineteenth-century pleas from various Malay sultanates for Ottoman aid, all of them predating the reign of Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909), as well as the contemporary historical roles and activities of Ottoman honorary consuls in Southeast Asia, to deconstruct accepted western notions of the emergence of so-called Pan-Islamism and Abdülhamid’s perceived role in it. He concludes that “Ottoman interest in the wider Islamic world in general and in Southeast Asia in particular pre-dated the Hamidian era and developed ‘from the periphery to the centre’” (pp. 172-73). In the following contribution, Ismail Hakkı Göksoy deals specifically with Acehnese appeals for Ottoman protection during the Aceh war against the Dutch during the late nineteenth century.

William G. Clarence-Smith shifts the geographical focus to the Philippines through his treatment of Washington’s changing attitudes toward the involvement of Middle Eastern states and individuals of Middle Eastern origin in Philippine, and particularly Moro, affairs. Of great interest is the mission

to Istanbul of a colonial officer, convinced of the need to purify Moro Islam, in order to ensure peace in the southern Philippines, which resulted *inter alia* in the dispatch of the Palestinian Shaykh Wajib al-Nabulsi, officially appointed as teacher of the Philippines' Muslim population by the Ottoman sultan, to the region in 1913. Amrita Malhi, in contrast, discusses how British colonial authorities as well as later western and nationalist Malaysian historiography failed to grasp, and have therefore misconstrued, the implications of the deployment of Ottoman caliphal symbology in anti-colonial uprisings on the Malay Peninsula. For the author, the Ottoman Empire's symbolic relevance in the struggle against the British in Malaya represented neither religious fanaticism nor pious proto-nationalism, but rather resulted from the fact that during the first decades of the twentieth century, "nationalism had not yet established itself as the primary mode in which Malay Muslims expressed their counter-colonial desires" (p. 224).

Chiara Formichi's contribution tackles the divergent Indonesian readings of Ottoman/Turkish history in the turbulent period between the 1890s and 1940s and identifies how local key debates on politics, religion, and progress impacted on, and were *inter alia* framed through, Indonesian portrayals of the late caliphate, Turkey, and Mustafa Kemal's reforms. Resting on a survey of hitherto rarely studied Indonesian periodicals, and therefore built on a far more expansive source basis than the efforts of her precursors in the field, her study shows that the attitudes within the different currents of the Indonesian nationalist and religious movements toward Atatürk's abolition of the caliphate and implementation of other anti-religious policies were more complex and ambivalent than commonly expected.

The third part of the volume is devoted to "Cultural and Intellectual Influences" on different levels. First, Vladimir Braginsky reviews representations of the Turkic-Turkish theme in traditional Malay literature, in which translations and adaptations from texts arising out of Persianate contexts have played a prominent role. He concludes that despite the frequently mythical or fictitious nature of material on Turkic-Turkish people(s) transmitted through these texts, it "made up a series of 'images of events' that eventually merged into a totality of knowledge concerning the Turks and the Turkish" (p. 288).

Oman Fathurahman then discusses new textual evidence for intellectual and religious connections between the Ottomans and Aceh. To that end, he assesses *waqf* seals of manuscript copies of Ibrahim al-Kurani's *Ithaf al-Dhaki*, a work produced by the Madinah-based seventeenth-century Kurdish scholar at the request of some of his Southeast Asian students, held in Turkish collections, and Acehese *khutbah* manuscripts invoking Ottoman sultans. Fi-

nally, Ali Akbar's contribution traces the influence of Ottoman Qur'ans in Southeast Asia in a long-term perspective, stretching from the manuscript era into that of lithography and contemporary book printing in the twenty-first century.

The book undoubtedly represents a major advance in our understanding of trans-regional connections within the Muslim world in general, and between the Ottoman Empire and Southeast Asia in particular. As such projects are, despite the "global turn" in Islamic studies, still comparably lacking for other regions, it is hoped that it will inspire similar endeavors with respect to other trans-regional relationships in the Muslim world. What is more, notwithstanding its already exceptional regional focus, the volume additionally highlights certain rarely appreciated examples of global Muslim interconnectedness, such as Ottoman and Chinese cooperation in the face of the perceived maltreatment of their subjects in Dutch colonies; the Southeast Asian Hadrami diplomatic network; the global connections of a figure such as Shaykh Wajib al-Nabulsi, the appointed teacher of the Filipino Muslims; or the various trans-regional relationships giving rise to European fears of an alleged global Islamic conspiracy against colonial interests. The extensive reliance on new documentary and manuscript materials is naturally worthy of praise and testifies to the pioneering and painstakingly research underpinning most of the contributions.

At times, however, the strong drive toward identifying connections between the Ottoman Empire and Southeast Asia appears to have led certain individual authors to oversimplifications and reductionist approaches in order to hammer their point home. This is perhaps most visible in Kathirithamby-Wells' contribution, which is – despite the overall convincing nature of its main arguments and soundness of the presented evidence – surprisingly one-sided in its presentation of Hadramis based in Southeast Asia and of other perceived Ottoman actors. First, as Clarence-Smith also notes in the volume, the Hadramis hardly "had an indubitable claim to be Ottoman subjects" (p. 200), in comparison to, for instance, the Syro-Lebanese settlers in the Philippines. This perhaps partly explains why some of the former developed such a pronounced interest in being officially recognized as just that or in serving as mediators between Ottoman and Malay powers.

Second, reducing Nur al-Din al-Raniri's educational and intellectual background to its Hadrami components (both in his native Gujarat and in his ancestors' homeland) does little justice to a scholar whose oeuvre exhibits, despite his attachment to Shafi'ism, strong influences of a Persianate Hanafi scholarly culture to which he must have been exposed in North India. Simi-

larly, the constant presentation of the Makkan Sharifs as first and foremost representatives of Ottoman power is quite reductive and serves to obscure the actually at times highly ambivalent relationship among the Sharifs, their overlords in Istanbul, and the governors, which the latter appointed in the Hijaz.

Finally, the claim that the *Syair Perang Siak* (*Poem of the Siak War*, c. 1764) was “in a similar vein” as al-Palimbani’s (d. 1789) call for jihad against the Dutch and the nineteenth-century Acehnese *Hikayat Perang Sabil* (*Story of the Holy War*, i.e., against the Dutch) seems odd. *Syair Perang Siak* indeed reiterates the by then locally customary dynastic claims to *rumi* heritage (i.e., descent from Alexander the Great/Iskandar Zulkarnain). Yet its agenda was a distinctly local one, centered on legitimizing Minangkabau claims to rule in general, and those of one particular claimant to the Siak throne in particular (i.e., Raja Ismail), as well as on rationalizing the latter’s alliances with other warring Malay sultans.

Some contributions to the volume tend to build their arguments on a highly centrist and idealized view of caliphal authority, which appears somewhat outdated when projected back into the seventeenth-century and – with reference to A. K. S. Lambton’s work of the early 1980s – further into medieval times (pp. 130-31). Particularly, Richard Bulliet’s *Islam: The View from the Edge* (1994) has convincingly highlighted the fallacies and distortions of such an approach to the study of the historical evolution of Islamic societies. On the other hand, Fathurahman’s suggestion that the endowment on behalf of the then Ottoman Grand Vizier of a manuscript of *Ithaf al-Dhaki* shortly after its composition “indicates that the issues relating to the *Jawi* [i.e. Southeast Asian] Muslim community immediately attracted Ottoman elites at the time” (p. 300) seems comparably improbable. It was assumingly the treatise’s subject matter – or, in other words, theological content – rather than its connection to Southeast Asia that drew the Ottoman elite’s interest in Istanbul. Two other theological writings by al-Kurani, for instance, prompted his younger contemporary, the famous Damascene scholar Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731), to send him a refutation in the form of a long letter to Madinah.

Such minor points of critique and individual objections should, however, in no way distract from the tremendous scholarly value of the volume at hand.

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