FROM ANATOLIA TO ACEH
OTTOMANS, TURKS AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

EDITED BY
A. C. S. PEACOCK & ANNABEL TEH GALLOP
FROM ANATOLIA TO ACEH
Ottomans, Turks and Southeast Asia

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(London, 2006) and co-edited Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s to 1960s (Leiden, 1997). He is currently researching the history of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa in Southeast Asia and beyond. He also researches the history of other diasporas, slavery, sexuality, transport, and tropical agriculture and livestock.

Isaac Donoso teaches at the University of Alicante in Spain. He was winner in 2004 and 2008 of the Ibn al-Abbar research prize—the most important Spanish award in Islamic Studies—and was awarded the Premio Juan Andrés de Ensayo e Investigación en Ciencias Humanas in 2010. His publications include the first critical edition of Noli me tangere (Quezon City, 2011) and a volume of the prose of José Rizal (Madrid, 2012), and as editor More Hispanic Than We Admit: Insights into Philippine Cultural History (Quezon City, 2008), Historia cultural de la lengua española en Filipinas: ayer y hoy (Madrid, 2012) and most recently Islamic Far East: Ethnogenesis of Philippine Islam (Quezon City, 2013).

Oman Fathurahman is Professor of Philology at the Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta. He is the President of the Indonesian Association for Nusantara Manuscripts, or Masyarakat Pernaskahan Nusantara (MANASSA), and editor of Studia Islamika, an Indonesian journal for Islamic Studies. His publications include ‘Ithaf al-Dhaki by Ibrahim al-Kurani: A Commentary of Wahdat al-Wujud for Jawi Audiences’, Archipel (2011), and, as co-author, The Library of an Islamic Scholar of Mindanao: The Shaykh Muhammad Said Collection at the Al-Imam As-Sadiq (AS) Library, Marawi City, Philippines: An Annotated Catalogue with Essays (Tokyo, forthcoming). He is currently working on a project to develop a database of Nusantara Southeast Asian Islamic Manuscripts.

Chiara Formichi is Assistant Professor in Southeast Asian Humanities (Islam) at Cornell University. Her research focuses on the relationship between Islam and the state, and the impact of this relationship on Asia’s diverse societies; her publications have approached the theme from three border-crossing perspectives: political Islam and nationalist ideologies, secularism as a marker of socio-political modernity, and issues of sectarianism, orthodoxy and religious pluralism. Her publications include the monograph Islam and the Making of the Nation: Kartosuwiryo and Political Islam in 20th Century Indonesia (Leiden, 2012), the edited volumes Shi‘ism in Southeast Asia (with R. Michael Feener) (London, 2014) and Religious Pluralism, State and Society in Asia (London, 2013), and a number of articles published in Indonesia, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies and Die Welt des Islams.
Introduction
Islam, Trade and Politics Across the Indian Ocean: Imagination and Reality

A. C. S. PEACOCK AND ANNABEL TEH GALLOP

Know that; we, the people of the region of Aceh, indeed all the inhabitants of the island of Sumatra, have all been considered subjects of the Sublime Ottoman State generation after generation, since the time of our late lord Sultan Selim Khan son of the late sultan Süleyman Khan son of the late sultan Selim Khan Abu l-Futuhat—may God’s mercy and favour be upon them. That is proved in the sultanic record-books. This great, long island contained a number of regions each of which had a governor subject to the Sublime Ottoman State, although every governor had the title of sultan and king according to their custom...

This petition, written by the Acehnese ruler Mansur Shah to the Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid in 1850, presents a picture of the Ottoman relationship with Southeast Asia, and Aceh in particular, that owes much to imagination as well as to the Acehnese desire to attract Ottoman support in their fight against the Dutch attempts to add northern Sumatra to their burgeoning colonial empire. Yet it was also rooted in reality, however much embroidered. Sixteenth-century Aceh had received Ottoman help in its battle against the Portuguese, with the reign of the Ottoman sultan Selim II (1566–74) marking the high point of the relationship. Moreover, Mansur Shah’s attempt to turn this historical relationship to his advantage was far from being a one-off: from the early nineteenth century to the fall of Aceh to the Dutch in 1903, Muslim rulers in Southeast Asia repeatedly sought Ottoman intervention in their predicament to ward off the encroachment of non-Muslim powers. We have documentary evidence of embassies reaching Istanbul from not just Aceh, but also other Malay sultanates such as Jambi on Sumatra, from Johor and Kedah on the Malay peninsula, and from the Riau islands to the south. Indeed, on


various occasions even the Muslims of the distant Philippines sought Ottoman aid and protection.²

The Ottoman–Southeast Asian relationship was not, however, purely political. Indeed, much of the Ottomans’ prestige derived not just from their status as the greatest Muslim power (however frayed these pretensions may have looked to non-Muslims by the nineteenth century), but also from the sultans’ religious role as Caliph. In particular, an especial prestige accrued to the empire and its Sultan-Caliphs through their possession of the Muslim holy places of Mecca and Medina, and the hajj seems to have exercised a particular fascination for Southeast Asians (even compared to Muslims elsewhere).³

Ottoman interest in Southeast Asia, on the other hand, derived from two main factors. Like Europeans, the Ottomans were attracted by economic opportunities, above all the spices of which Southeast Asia was the main, and in some cases the sole, producer. Furthermore, the sixteenth-century Ottomans perceived themselves as a universal empire, and supporting their Acehnese allies offered the opportunity to deliver a blow against their own Portuguese rivals, who sought to monopolise the spice trade and to dominate the Indian Ocean. By the nineteenth century, the spice trade had lost its importance, and although Ottoman pretensions to world power status had been abandoned as the empire struggled to cope with European economic dominance, internal unrest and the loss of territories, especially in the Balkans, we nonetheless see renewed Ottoman engagement in Southeast Asia. Moreover, with the Ottoman collapse after the First World War, Turkey became an inspiration for a new generation of anti-colonial leaders in Southeast Asia thanks to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s defeat of western intervention in Anatolia and his establishment of a rapidly modernising, centralised, secular republic. Since the year 2000 Turkish groups have increasingly forged new connections in Southeast Asia, especially in intellectual, humanitarian and educational circles. After the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, Turkish agencies were prominent in rehabilitation efforts,⁴ and the historical links between these far-flung regions of the Muslim world still resonate today. The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) uses a red and white crescent flag strikingly reminiscent of the Turkish flag, consciously seeking to evoke Aceh’s longstanding relationship with this distant but friendly Muslim power as a sign of Aceh’s long independent history. Attempts to make the

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² See further Chapters 6, 7 and 9 by Isaac Donoso, İ. Hakkı Kadi, and William G. Clarence-Smith respectively.
⁴ An impression of the Turkish Red Crescent’s post-tsunami activities in the region is given by a booklet published by the Türkiye Kızılay Derneği in 2006: Aclara çarpışma için bir uyuşun duyarlıdın ve bir yardım kuruluşunun çabalarının hikayesi: Tsunami Bölgesi acil müdahale dönemi Endonezya Aceh programları (Ankara, 2006).
Turkish-inspired banner the official insignia of Aceh continue to provoke political crises within Indonesia today.⁵

Apart from its intrinsic interest, the Ottoman/Turkish–Southeast Asian relationship is significant from the standpoint of several other areas. It is, of course, especially relevant to studies of colonialism and the responses it provoked. The idea as much as the reality of the Ottoman Empire as a universal defender of Muslims remained a potent tool in the hands of resistance movements, but at the same time colonial powers might seek to harness Ottoman influence for their own purposes. Studies in this volume show the changing and complex Ottoman role in Asian communities’ encounters with colonialists as varied as the Portuguese, Spanish, British, Dutch and Americans. The economic aspects of the Ottoman–Southeast Asian relationship can also speak to debates about the rise and nature of European economic dominance.⁶

Indeed, more generally, the relationship sheds light on trajectories of interaction across the Muslim world and the Indian Ocean. While the importance of the relationship between the Middle East and Southeast Asia—the latter today comprising in Indonesia the world’s largest Muslim country—has often been acknowledged, it has been the subject of surprisingly little research.⁷ Such studies that do exist tend to concentrate either on the religious links, in particular the spread of Islam, or the culturally and commercially significant diaspora of Hadhrami Arabs in Southeast Asia.⁸ In both cases research prioritises Southeast Asia’s links with the Arab world, with little acknowledgement that for much of the period of this relationship’s

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⁶ For the Portuguese and Spanish, see Chapters 3 and 6 by Jorge Santos Alves and Isaac Donoso respectively; for the Dutch, see Chapters 5, 7, 8 and 11 by Jeyamalar Kathirithambiy-Wells, Ismail Hakki Kadi, Ismail Hakki Göksoy and Chiara Formichi respectively; for the British see Chapter 10 by Amrita Malhi, and for the Americans see Chapter 9 by William G. Clarence-Smith. For the economic aspects see Chapters 3 and 4 (Alves and Peacock respectively).

⁷ As noted by Eric Tagliacozzo in his introduction to a valuable collection of essays which represents a rare attempt to fill this historiographical lacuna. See E. Tagliacozzo, ‘Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Charting Directions’, in idem (ed.), Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam, Movement and the Longue Durée (Stanford, 2009), p. 1.

⁸ On religion, see for example, Peter Riddell, Islam and the Malay–Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses (Honolulu, 2001); Azyumardi Azra, The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia (Crows Nest, NSW, Australia and Honolulu, 2004). For the extensive literature on the Hadhramis see U. Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith (eds), Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750–1960s (Leiden, 1997); Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein (eds), Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia (Leiden, 2002); and see further the bibliography to Chapter 5 by J. Kathirithambiy-Wells in this volume.
greatest intensity, the Arab Middle East was subject to the Ottoman Empire (1517–1918). Examining the Ottoman context for the Middle Eastern–Southeast Asian relationship adds new dimensions to understanding its characteristics in the fields of politics, commerce, intellectual exchange, cultural influences and even literature, as demonstrated by the chapters in this volume. Even in the aforementioned fields which have previously received scholarly attention, religion and the Hadhrami diaspora, understanding the Ottoman context — and evidence — allows a more sophisticated appreciation. As contributors to this volume show, in particular Oman Fathurahman, Chiara Formichi and Ali Akbar, Southeast Asian Islam is not an exclusively Arab import, nor a Southeast Asian–Arab synthesis: distinctively Ottoman influences can also be observed in its intellectual formation and practices, while debates on the relationship between Islam and the state in Republican Turkey resonated in Southeast Asia.

The Ottoman/Turkish–Southeast Asian relationship is also relevant to broader scholarship on the Indian Ocean. Work in recent years—inspired by Braudel’s magisterial work on the Mediterranean—has seen maritime-based, transoceanic studies as offering far more than just a new perspective on cross-cultural exchange, but rather a new ‘configuration of history’.9 Whether or not this so-called ‘new thalassology’ can deliver all it promises, for studies of the Indian Ocean which take seriously that region’s relationship with adjacent areas, as well as the connected nature of the Indian Ocean world itself,10 the Ottoman–Southeast Asian relationship is of undoubted interest, both in its practical aspects and in its extraordinary emotional appeal to Southeast Asians.

The Ottoman–Southeast Asian relationship first came to the attention of modern western scholars through the pioneering articles by Anthony Reid, who, followed by İsmail Hakkı Göksoy using a wider range of Turkish sources, first sketched the political relationship.11 The historiography is examined in more detail by Anthony Reid in his chapter in this volume, but such studies have remained relatively few and far between. While scholars of

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Southeast Asia have appreciated the significance of the Ottoman connection. Practical, linguistic obstacles have stood in the way of research and Southeast Asianists have generally been unable to exploit archival resources located in Turkey and largely written in Ottoman and Arabic. Scholars of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, on the other hand, have concentrated almost entirely on Istanbul’s relations with Europe and neighbouring Muslim states, while those who have studied the Arab provinces of the empire have rarely considered their links with the broader world.  

Although the Ottoman Empire included substantial Indian Ocean littoral territories in Arabia and north-east Africa, the relatively few existing studies of them — of which the most important are those of Salih Özbarn — tend to concentrate on their place in the Ottoman administrative system rather than these provinces’ relationship to the Indian Ocean world they adjoined. Indeed, till recently few scholars devoted much attention to the Ottomans’ role in the Indian Ocean, the study of which in the early modern and modern eras was dominated by the theme of the impact of Europeans and colonialism. The emphasis on the European role in the Indian Ocean was at least in part a consequence of the lack of surviving indigenous archival sources as much as the predilections of researchers.

This picture has now begun to change somewhat, and Giancarlo Casale in particular has investigated sixteenth-century Ottoman engagement in the Indian Ocean in greater depth. Nonetheless, such researches remain in their infancy, in part because of the extremely scattered and disparate nature of the sources. In addition to the Ottoman and Arabic language materials in the Istanbul archives, evidence can be found in a host of widely dispersed archival collections, in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA to name but a few. However, while these sources are valuable for shedding light on the formal aspects of the relationship, the exchange of embassies and requests for military aid, they present only a partial picture. Many documents and embassies never reached their destination, and are only

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12 See for example, B. Masters, The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516–1918: A Social and Cultural History (Cambridge, 2013), where the Indian Ocean features scarcely at all; for another example see S. Faroqui, The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It (London, 2004), where relations with European powers dominate, albeit with a brief excursion to India on pp. 183–4. It is telling that the two principal studies of Ottoman relations with India, apparently too outré for most Ottomanists’ tastes, have been undertaken by a Pakistani and an Indian respectively: Muhammad Yakub Mughul, Kamuni Divri Osmanilardar Hint Oyanusu Politikasi ve Osmans-Hint Mislimanlari Müşahheleri, 1517–38 (Istanbul, 1974); Naimur Rehman Farooqi, Mughal–Ottoman Relations (Delhi, 1989).


14 G. Casale, The Ottoman Age of Exploration (New York, 2010).
known from passing references elsewhere, while much of the relationship between the two sides was conducted at an unofficial level, by merchants, scholars and adventurers who made their way across the Indian Ocean. Thus literary texts and travel accounts in Arabic, Dutch, Malay, Persian, Portuguese and Spanish shed light on aspects of the picture, as do Arabic, Malay and Ottoman manuscripts. To master such a range of materials would be beyond the capabilities of most scholars. This volume seeks to bridge the gap by bringing together studies by scholars from a range of different backgrounds, both disciplinary and linguistic, to paint a more complex and wide-ranging picture of the Ottoman and early Republican Turkish relationship with Southeast Asia than has been possible to date.

Islam, Trade and Politics Across the Indian Ocean

This volume derives from a conference under the same title which was held in Aceh in January 2012; the conference was itself part of a broader research project sponsored by the British Academy, called *Islam, Trade and Politics Across the Indian Ocean*, which ran between 2009 and 2013. The project, administered by the Association for South-East Asian Studies in the UK (ASEASUK) and the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara (BIAA) in collaboration with local partners in both Indonesia and Turkey, aimed to investigate the development of the Ottoman-Turkish–Southeast Asian connection and its significance. Much of the work of the project centred on studying materials held in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi) in Istanbul. The project’s research fellow, Dr İsmail Hakki Kadi, was responsible for identifying and documenting materials held there relating to Southeast Asia. His discoveries, which included rare examples of Southeast Asian correspondence in Arabic, Malay, Tausug and Burmese, along with extensive documentation in Ottoman of Istanbul’s deliberations on Southeast Asian affairs, underpin several of the contributions to this volume. A separate volume edited by İsmail Hakki Kadi and Andrew Peacock will make available the full original texts and English translations of the most significant documents. In addition, the project was able to support the research of a number of scholars working in the field, enabling them to visit archives and libraries. Research for the contributions to this volume by Ali Akbar, Vladimir Braginsky, William Clarence-Smith and Chiara Formichi was supported by small grants awarded by the *Islam, Trade and Politics Across the Indian Ocean* research project.

The pioneering studies of the 1960s which investigated the Ottoman relationship with Southeast Asia identified two key periods of activity: contacts with Aceh in the sixteenth century, and the renewed Southeast
Asian appeals to the Caliph in the second half of the nineteenth century. The outcomes of the research project presented in this book confirm that the formal political and diplomatic relationship was essentially contained within these two discrete phases. In the first, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Ottoman interest focused on the Sultanate of Aceh which was emerging as a major regional power, and certainly the most significant Muslim state in Southeast Asia. Archival research in Istanbul did not yield any new sixteenth-century official documents (for which a more likely home may be the Topkapı palace archives, which were inaccessible during the period of the research project, rather than the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives), but Portuguese and Spanish sources appear to cast new light on internal alignments within the Ottoman elite regarding policy in the Indian Ocean.

In contrast, the project brought to light a wealth of previously unknown archival material, greatly enhancing our understanding of the second period of intense activity, from the mid-nineteenth century until the First World War. In this period the Ottomans' political interest in Southeast Asia revived, at the prompting of local sultanates, and extended more widely than just Aceh, the earlier focal point of the relationship. In addition to attempts by Muslim sultanates in the Malay world to solicit Ottoman aid, the two Buddhist monarchies of Siam and Burma sent their own delegations to Istanbul. Even if they did not seek military or diplomatic assistance in the same way as the Muslim sultanates did, they shared the aim of fending off European colonial encroachment by learning from the Ottoman experience.

And what of the period in between? The absence of direct political links in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has necessitated searching for evidence of the Ottoman–Southeast Asia relationship in sources other than official government archives, including economic and trade data, travel accounts, and literary and religious manuscripts. This activity may be set against the omnipresent backdrop of the pilgrimage to Mecca from the Malay world, with prolonged sojourns by Jawi scholars in the holy cities, the written materials arising from these activities bearing witness to the intellectual and cultural links forged. The evidence is stronger for the seventeenth century, but the results in themselves point the way to the types of source materials which could potentially be exploited for the elusive eighteenth century, as will be elaborated below.

15 The relevant documents will be published in the forthcoming volume, İ. H. Kadi and A. C. S. Peacock (eds), Ottoman–Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives (Leiden, forthcoming).
in other Muslim countries. Although the Ottoman era has drawn to a close, Ottoman influence continues to be felt in Qur’ans, and is likely to continue.

Note. This article has been a long time in gestation, and I would like to record my thanks to many who have helped the research. Firstly to Dr Annabel Teh Gallop, for her support and comments, and also for her help in translating this article; the Islam, Trade and Politics Across the Indian Ocean research project funded by the British Academy, and Dr Andrew Peacock, for enabling me to visit Istanbul from 26 July to 6 August 2011 and for his valuable comments which have helped to improve this article; Dr İsmail Hakkı Kadi for his help in Istanbul, for reading colophons in Turkish, and for information on Ottoman documents on the sending of Qur’ans to Southeast Asia; Professor M. Ügur Derman, who agreed to meet me and to be interviewed in Istanbul; Professor Dr Henri Chambert-Loir for reading an earlier draft of this article and for his valuable comments; Professor Dr Jan Just Witkam for his helpful critical comments; the Barakat Foundation, London, and James Bennett, for his support and for facilitating my visit to Adelaide to study a number of Qur’ans from Java; Seasrep Foundation, Quezon City, which in 2008–9 supported my visits to a number of centres in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei to see collections of Qur’an manuscripts; H. Abd Azim Amin for kindly allowing me access to his exceptionally early printed Qur’an; Dr Bunyamin Yusuf for allowing access to a printed Ottoman Qur’an in his family’s collection; Imam Muttaqin, Mustofa, Ahmad Jaeni, Abdul Hakim and Zainal Arifin Madzkur (all hāfīẕes from the Board for Checking Copies of the Qur’an, Lajnah Pentashihian Mushaf Al-Quran, Jakarta), for information about the Kudus Qur’an, an Ottoman Qur’an manuscript from Pontianak, and a printed Saudi Qur’an; and Bambang Priyadi for the information and photos of an early printed Qur’an from Egypt. Lastly I would like to record my thanks to H. Muhammad Shohib, Head of Lajnah, for allowing me to carry out this research and to attend the Workshop in Banda Aceh. To all of these I would like to record my sincere thanks, while affirming that of course responsibility for this article rests with me.

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