

Asia Research Institute

Working Paper Series

No. 36

The Ottomans in Southeast Asia

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February 2005



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The Ottomans in Southeast Asia¹

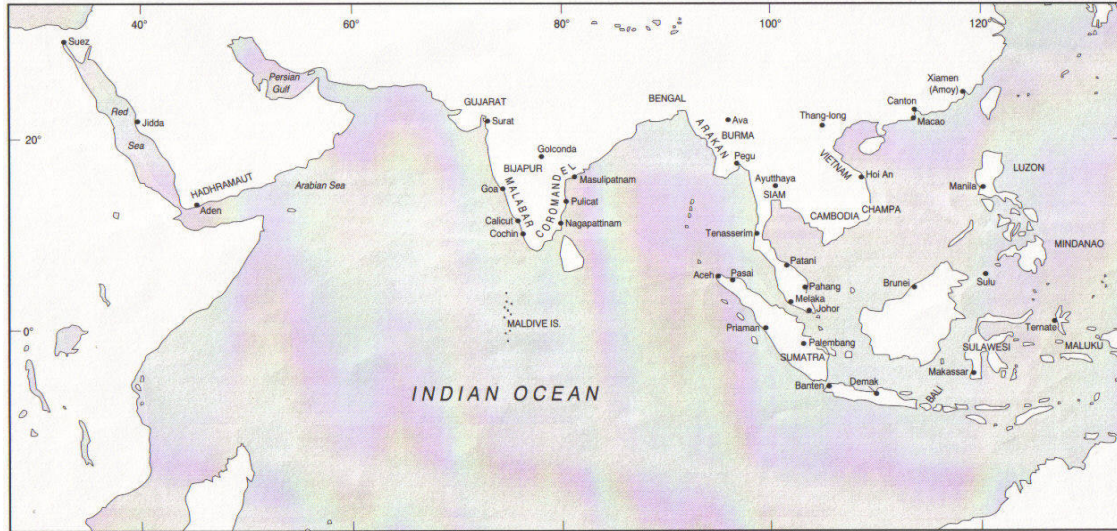
For Southeast Asian Muslims the faraway Ottoman dynasty in Turkey represented a dream; a longing for Islamic power at a time of Islamic political decline. But there were important moments when that dream had immediate political effects.

When the last fully independent Muslim state in SE Asia, Aceh, was attacked by the Dutch in 1873, it appealed to all the great powers of the time to come to its aid—Britain, France, United States, Italy. As fellow-colonial powers, all refused to break ranks with Holland. Only Ottoman Turkey took up the cause with the capitals of the world, going so far as to issue a formal offer of mediation to bring about peace in Sumatra, which was of course rejected by the Dutch. The most striking feature of this mediation offer was the grounds on which Turkey presumed to intrude into an area where the big powers were desperately discouraging intervention. Turkey claimed to be the suzerain, the overlord of Aceh, ever since the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman sultans accepted the tribute offered by Aceh in return for offering military protection. This overlordship had been renewed on both sides as recently as 1850, the letter pointed out in its highly diplomatic language. Wrangled over between diplomatic chanceries for months before it was finally issued, the letter hearkened back to the time when the Ottomans conquered the Red Sea area in the 1520s:

The Acehnese sent a deputation to the feet of the conqueror, recognized the supremacy of the powers inherent in his title of Caliph, made an act of submission into the hands of the famous Sinan Pasha, raised the Ottoman flag in their ports and on their vessels, declared themselves vassals of Sultan Selim and asked in return for his high protection. Sultan Selim received these offers favourably. By his orders the Vezir Sinan Pasha sent to the vassal Sultan the cannons and swords of honour which are still to be seen in Aceh.²

¹ This paper was first composed as a lecture for the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore, 3 November 2004, in connection with its exhibition, 'The Ottomans'.

² Rashid (Turkish Foreign Minister) to Musurus (Ambassador to Britain and the Netherlands), 11 Aug. 1873, Woltring (ed.), *Bescheiden Betreffende de Buitenlandse Politiek van Nederland, 2de Periode* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962.), 1, p.612.



Indian Ocean

Raja Rum

In many Southeast Asian traditions of the fifteenth to centuries, ‘Rum’ features as a mysterious amalgam of powers in the west – conflating Rome, Constantinople, and Alexander the Great. Traditions of the Peninsula and Sumatra associate *Raja Rum*, the great king of the West, with *Raja Cina* (China), the great king of the East. According to one origin myth of Johor, Iskandar Dzulkarnain (Alexander the Great) had three sons by the daughter of the King of the Ocean. After a contest between the three brothers in the Singapore Straits, the eldest went to the West to become *Raja Rum*, the second East to become *Raja Cina*, while the third remained at Johor, to begin the later Minangkabau dynasty.³ In the eighteenth century, rulers of Minangkabau styled themselves younger brothers of the rulers of Rum and China.⁴

One Gayo origin myth also goes back to a shipwrecked child of *Raja Rum*. Among Bataks, his name was still so powerful was still so mythically powerful in 1890 that the Italian traveller Elio Modigliani, having admitted he came from Rome, found himself acquiring followers as the word spread that he was an envoy, or perhaps incarnation of the magically powerful *Raja Rum*.⁵

³ William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra* 3rd ed., (London, 1811).

⁴ *Ibid.* pp.338-41.

⁵ A translation of the relevant section of Elio Modigliani’s *Fra I Battachi Indipendenti* (1892) is in *Witnesses to Sumatra: A Travellers’ Anthology*, ed. Anthony Reid (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.199-209.

But in the sixteenth century it became clear to Muslim Southeast Asian leaders, at least, that the Ottoman Sultans were this *Raja Rum* of shadowy memory. Paradoxically it was the Portuguese invasion of the Indian Ocean in 1498 that put Aceh directly into contact with Turkey. In the fifteenth century Sumatra's pepper had mostly gone to China, and what westward trade there was from Southeast Asia to the Mediterranean, in cloves, nutmeg and other luxury tropical products, was broken up into separate stages. Sumatrans had then been in direct contact only with South India, while the onward stage to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports was in the hands of Arabs and Gujaratis.

Pepper

The Portuguese disrupted Islamic shipping in the years after 1500, and especially attacked ships travelling from India to the Red Sea (Mecca, Cairo). They also conquered Melaka (1511), and greatly interfered with the pepper-producing sultanates on the north coast of Sumatra.



Ottoman Expansion

The Muslim traders regrouped around states strong and willing enough to protect them, notably Aceh in Southeast Asia; Calicut in South India; and Turkey, which expanded its control to the Red Sea ports in the reign of Selim I (1512-20). It became

dangerous even for Muslim shippers of the Indian pepper from Kerala to defy the Portuguese predators to reach the Red Sea and hence Cairo, Alexandria and Venice. Hence an alternative Muslim pepper supply route developed, whereby Gujarati, Arab, Turkish and Acehnese shippers shipped Southeast Asian pepper and other spices directly from Aceh to the Red Sea, without going near areas of Portuguese naval strength in India. The earliest European reports of such shipments reaching the Red Sea date from around 1530. By the 1560s as much pepper was being shipped that way to Europe as was hauled by the Portuguese around the Cape to Lisbon. Aceh and Turkey shared an economic as well as a religious motive to resist and if possible crush their Portuguese rivals in the pepper trade.

The strongest of the Ottomans, Sultan Suleiman “the Magnificent” (1520-66), was the first to extend Ottoman power into the Indian Ocean. In 1537 he instructed his Governor of Egypt, Suleiman Pasha, to equip a powerful fleet to demolish Portuguese naval power in the Indian Ocean. This fleet reach Gujarat, and besieged the Portuguese in Diu for a few months of 1538, but achieved nothing militarily. Nevertheless there seem to have been soldiers of this fleet who reached Southeast Asia, since Mendez Pinto refers to them as greatly strengthening Aceh in its wars against Bataks and Portuguese, and also helping Demak in similar wars in Java.⁶



*Sultan Suleiman
the Magnificent*

In the 1560s the pepper link was at its peak, and we have Venetian, Turkish, and Acehnese sources all mentioning the envoys who travelled from Aceh to the Red Sea with the pepper ships. The first well-documented Acehnese mission to Istanbul occurred round 1561-2. In response to this appeal Turkish gunners were sent to Aceh at least by 1564, and were gratefully acknowledged by the Acehnese in a letter recently rediscovered in the Ottoman archives.

⁶ Anthony Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese and other Histories of Sumatra* (Singapore: University of Singapore Press, 2004). Pp.74-78.

Another embassy, led by an envoy called Husain, which probably covered the years 1566-8, came close to achieving a more spectacular success. The letter he carried, an appeal of January 1566 from the Acehnese Sultan Ala'ud-din al-Kahar to the Caliph, protector of all Muslims, is also preserved in the Ottoman archives. The Aceh ruler acknowledged the safe arrival of eight Turkish gunners sent in response to an earlier request. He appealed repeatedly to the Turkish Sultan to come to the aid of Muslim pilgrims and merchants being attacked by the infidel Portuguese as they traveled to the holy land. "If Your Majesty's aid is not forthcoming, the wretched unbelievers will continue to massacre the innocent Muslims."⁷

After a delay caused by the death of Suleiman the Magnificent in 1566, his successor Selim II energetically took up the project of extending Turkish power into the Indian Ocean. In a series of decrees in 1567 he not only ordered a fleet of 15 galleys and 2 barques to be sent to assist Aceh, but also instructed the Governor of Egypt to construct a canal at Suez so that his warships could go back and forth to the Indian Ocean on a regular basis. In the event a serious revolt in Yemen interrupted these plans, the designated fleet was diverted to suppressing it, and only a few guns and gunsmiths appear to have reached Aceh.⁸

Nevertheless these contacts made a big impression in Southeast Asia, and especially in Aceh. In the years following this initiative, a pan-Islamic sense of solidarity against the infidels was probably stronger than at any time before George Bush. Aceh used its Turkish equipment to attack Portuguese Melaka in 1568 and again in 1570 and 1573, the second time apparently coordinating with the four southern Indian Muslim sultans—Bijapur, Golconda, Bidar and Ahmadnagar—who briefly buried their differences to attack Portuguese Goa.⁹ In Maluku at the same time, Sultan Baab Ullah of Ternate (r.1570-83) threw out the Portuguese and launched a crusade against them through the spice islands.

7 Naimur Rahman Farooqi, 'Mughal-Ottoman Relations: A Study of Political and Diplomatic Relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, 1556-1748,' Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1986, pp.267-8.

8 Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier*, pp.79-87. Also Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* Vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 146-7.

9 Vincent Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (3rd ed., Oxford:1958), pp.298-99; Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: 1978), pp.83-5.

Memory

The strong direct connection between Turkey and Aceh lasted less than a century. The Dutch and English ships that began making the journey around Africa in 1600 were far more numerous and efficient than the Portuguese, and by 1630 the Muslim-Venetian pepper route, from Aceh to the Mediterranean, was no more. Even Istanbul needed to get its pepper from the Dutch and English after that. The most prominent pilgrims to Mecca in the rest of the seventeenth century went on Dutch or British ships as far as Surat (Gujarat), and then took Indian ships to the Red Sea.

Nevertheless the memory remained, especially in Aceh, where it was kept alive by the Turkish flag, adopted as Aceh's (see illustration), by the enormous cannons which remained at the capital, and by the popular traditions that formed around these items. The chroniclers of Aceh, including the famous Nurud-din ar-Raniry, did write down exactly what happened:

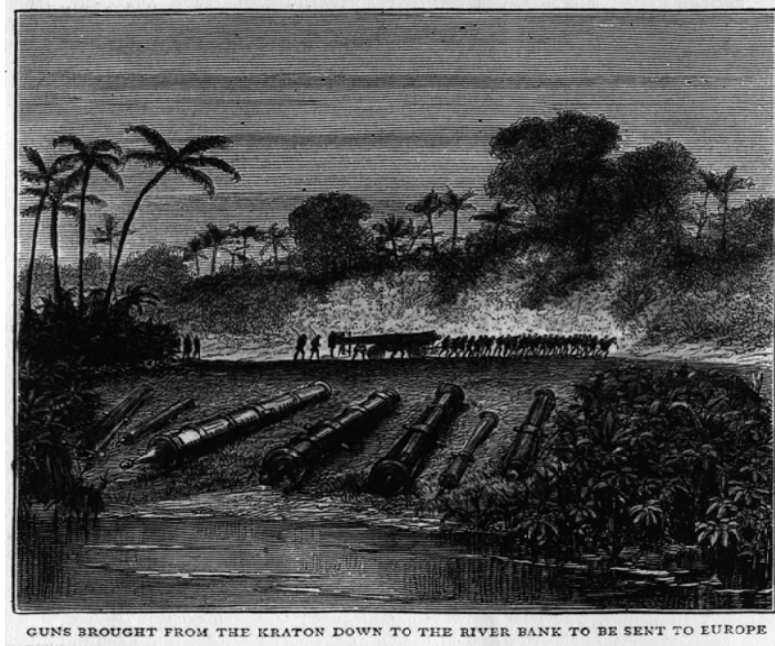


Turkish flag (left) and Aceh flag (above), as carried by guerrillas

He [Sultan Alau'd-Din Ri'ayat Shah

al-Kahar] it was who created the system of government of Aceh Daru's-Salam and sent a mission to Sultan Rum, to the state of Istanbul, in order to strengthen the Muslim religion. The Sultan Rum sent various craftsmen and experts who knew how to make guns. It was at that time that the large guns were cast. It was also he who first built a fort at Aceh Daru's-Salam, and he who first fought all unbelievers, to the extent of going to attack Melaka in person.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ia-lah yang meng'adahan segala isti'adat kerajaan Aceh Daru's-Salam dan menyuruh utusan kepada Sultan Rum, ka-negeri Istanbul, kerana meneguhkan ugama Islam. Maka di-kirim Sultan Rum daripada jenis utus dan pandai yang tahu menuang bedil. Maka pada zaman itu-lah di-tuang orang meriam yang besar. Dan ia-lah yang pertama2 berbuat kota di-negeri Aceh Daru's-Salam, dan ia-lah yang pertama2 ghazi dengan segala kafir, hingga sendiri-nya berangkat menyerang Melaka. T. Iskandar (ed.), *Bustanu's-Salatan Bab II, Fasal 13* (Kuala Lumpur, 1966), pp.31-2.



Trophies of war: Turkish and other Acehnese guns on their way to Dutch museums after the Dutch conquest of the Aceh capital in 1874 (Illustrated London News)

But more colourful stories were more popular. The largest of the cannons was popularly known as *lada secupak* (a measure of pepper), because of a story that the Aceh envoys took shiploads of pepper as their tribute to the Caliph, but that the journey was so arduous that only one (bamboo) measure remained to be offered as tribute.

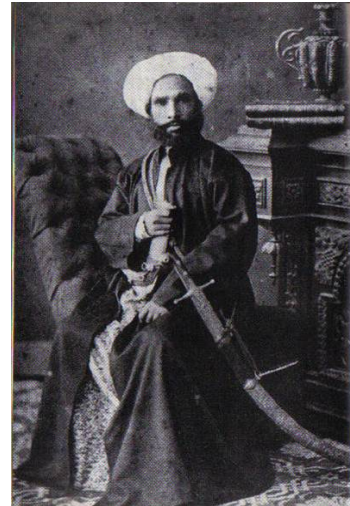
Nineteenth Century

Contacts between Aceh and the Ottoman empire were revived in the 1840s, as both felt the winds of modernization and nationalism and the common threat from the ever more powerful West. The emigration of thousands of Arabs from Hadhramaut to Southeast Asia provided a further link, for these could consider themselves Turkish subjects when it suited them. In the 1840s the pepper-trade of Aceh was again flourishing, though increasingly it was shipped to the world via the entrepot of Penang. Sultan Ibrahim took advantage of the pilgrimage to Mecca of a wealthy Acehnese pepper-trader, Muhammad Ghauth, in 1849, to entrust him with royal letters both to France, which had just sent an impressive state letter to Aceh, and more importantly to Turkey. Once in Cairo, Ghauth obtained surprising encouragement from the local representatives of both powers. He was able to send one of his followers to Paris as the

guest of the French government for a few months, while he himself was feted in Istanbul as a symbol of Turkey's lost greatness.¹¹

Sultan Abdul Mejid issued two decrees (*firman*) in 1850, one renewing Turkish protection over Aceh, the other confirming Ibrahim as a vassal ruler.¹² Ghauth was sent back to Aceh in style, with a recommendation to the Viceroy (*Khedive*) in Egypt, and instructions to the Turkish Governor of Yemen to send the envoy safely home. The Turkish connection returned to the centre of Acehnese thinking. When the Crimean war began in 1853, Ibrahim sent a contribution of 10,000 Spanish dollars to his Ottoman counterpart to show his loyalty and solidarity against the Russians. He received in return confirmation of the right to fly the Turkish flag, and an imperial decoration (the *Mejidie*), which he made a point of wearing when receiving Dutch envoys in 1855.¹³ The Crimean war, generously covered in the Straits press, aroused considerable pro-Turkish enthusiasm in Aceh and the Malay world, as evidenced by a number of surviving poetic celebrations.¹⁴

This brings us back to Aceh's most desperate appeal to its erstwhile overlord, when the Dutch threat became real in 1873. An extremely persuasive Hadhrami Sayyid, Habib Aburrahman az-Zahir, prime minister of Aceh before the war, made Istanbul his chief target once it became clear the British would do nothing to help Aceh, despite much support in Penang. For most of 1873 the Habib was in the Turkish capital, arousing support among reformists and pan-Islamists alike. He and his Turkish sympathisers



*Habib Aburrahman,
in Istanbul, 1873*

located in the Turkish archives the evidence of Ottoman suzerainty over Aceh from both the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. The Dutch pulled out all the stops to

¹¹ Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier*, pp.171-4.

¹² Heldewier to Gericke, June 19 and 26, 1873, Buitenlandse Zaken Dossier Atjeh.

¹³ Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur, 1969), p.84. Woltring, *Buitenlandse Politiek van Nederland I* pp. 612-3. E.S. de Klerck, *De Atjeh-oorlog* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1912), pp.216-17.

¹⁴ P. Voorhoeve (ed.), *Catalogue of Acehnese Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden University and other Collections outside Aceh* (Leiden: Leiden University Library, 1994), pp.54-59.

prevent a painfully weak Turkey from doing anything that would stir up Acehnese and SE Asian resistance, and in the end only a polite diplomatic offer of mediation was forthcoming--equally politely declined by the Dutch. Rumours circulated of Turkish help for the Acehnese, or for other potential rebels in restive parts of Indonesia, but nothing as frightening as the Dutch had feared.

Palembang and Jambi were also sites of resistance to Dutch advances in the mid-nineteenth century, a resistance which became more religious as it became more desperate. A new Sultan of Jambi, Taha Safi'ud-din, neglected to declare his allegiance when he ascended the throne in 1855, and resisted Dutch attempts two years later to negotiate a more binding treaty with him. While envoys from Batavia were trying to win him round, Taha appealed to the Ottoman Sultan for a document declaring Jambi to be Turkish territory in which foreigners had no right to interfere. Taha entrusted this letter to his connections in Singapore, one of whom was provided with 30,000 Spanish dollars to undertake the journey to Constantinople. The emissary, Sharif Ali, apparently travelled only as far as Mecca, where he acquired forged letters from the Caliph authorizing the expulsion of the Dutch from Southeast Asia. Taha's letter did, however, reach its destination. The Turkish Grand Vezir asked the Netherlands Ambassador whether Jambi was independent, and when assured it was part of Netherlands India he promised to give no reply.

In November 1858 a Dutch expedition occupied Taha's capital and installed a new Sultan. Taha escaped, and after the withdrawal of Dutch troops he remained de facto ruler of Jambi for almost a half-century. For several years he continued his attempts to have Jambi recognized as Turkish, backed by his agents in Singapore who were reported to be raising money and arms for him there. One Arab who had been active in his cause in Singapore went to Mecca in 1861, possibly with another appeal to the Caliph.¹⁵

¹⁵ Note by Bureau A: "Turksche bemoeijing in den N.I. Archipel," n.d. (1864), Algemene Rijksarchief [henceforth ARA] Kol.Kab.H 10, Dossier 5970. Rochussen to Van Goltstein, Sept- 4, 1858; Van Zuylen van Nyeveltdt to Goltstein, Sept. 30, 1858; ARA, Buitenlandse Zaken [henceforth B.Z.] Dossier 3076. J. Tideman, *Djambi* (Amsterdam, 1938), pp. 31-3.

Pan-Islam, jihadism and the Ottomans

A mind-set which we might today call jihadist or Islamist, and attribute to the global projection of struggles in Palestine and Iraq, do in fact have a long history in Southeast Asia. The twentieth century rise of nationalism not only marginalized such thinking, which colonial writers labelled “pan-Islamic”, but made it seem quixotic, its importance exaggerated by colonial paranoia. A century later, with nationalism again vigorously challenged by concepts of solidarity with a global *umma*, the situation looks very different. This current must be seen as a continuing one within the Islamic world, emerging with far greater salience at some periods, such as the present, than at others.

The period between 1870 and 1918 was another such period when the solidarity of the *umma* loomed particularly large in the region at another time of Muslim frustration, with some very specific consequences. At the point of their terminal decline, paradoxically, the Ottoman sultans were a central part of this mind-set. Especially during the reign of the last Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II (1876-1908), the movement for a universal and effective Caliphate received consistent encouragement from the top. After the disastrous Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, Abdul Hamid turned his back on the West and suspended the liberal constitution of 1876.



Sultan Abdul Hamid II

Encouraged by the sympathy he received from all over the Muslim World, including Southeast Asia, he hoped to make up in Asia for the influence he had lost in Europe. The Sultan made clear that he wished to be regarded as a sort of Pope and protector for Sunni Muslims everywhere, and the Turkish press reflected this changed mood.¹⁶

Pan-Islamic hopes were more than ever focussed on Turkey in this period, as the only Islamic power, the claimant to the Caliphate, and also the nominal overlord of Mecca and of most Arabs. Southeast Asian Arabs would readily claim the status of Turkish subjects when it seemed likely to benefit them. The Arabs of Singapore, in particular the most prominent Alsagoff and al-Junied families, as well as their close

¹⁶ T.W. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 173-7. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Holy War "Made in Germany,"* trans. J. E. Gillet (New York, 1915), pp. 23-7.

confidant Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor, not only travelled to the Middle East and made the pilgrimage to Mecca but also visited Istanbul, and took a substantial interest in Turkish affairs. They also sympathised with the Acehnese and other Indonesian Muslims they thought to be oppressed by the Dutch. The actions of Turkey in Asia, however symbolic, assumed greater importance through the mediation of such men, and their counterparts throughout the Archipelago.



Syed Muhammad Alsagoff (1836-1906) and Maharaja (later Sultan) Abu Bakar of Johor (r.1862-95)

Turkish consulates

Neither Britain nor the Netherlands liked the idea of Turkish consuls in their colonies, because of their fear that they would become the focus for pan-Islamic agitations. But since both London and The Hague wanted rights to appoint consuls in places like Alexandria, Tunis, Aleppo and Damascus, they had to make some concessions in their own empires.

When Britain allowed Turkey its first Consul in Singapore in 1864, the Dutch were particularly alarmed. This was the wealthy Hadhrami merchant, Sayyid Abdallah al Junied. As they feared, the Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca who flocked through Singapore, as well as other prominent Muslims, tended to regard him as the spiritual and political representative of the Caliph. At his death in 1865, therefore, Holland requested that the appointment of another Muslim as consul be forbidden from London, because British and Dutch had a common interest, they argued, to guard against “the smouldering and easily inflammable element of fanaticism” among Southeast Asian Muslims.¹⁷

Istanbul had apparently intended to appoint Abdallah's brother, Sayyid Junied al Junied, to the vacant office, but when Britain deferred to Dutch pressure Turkey agreed to

¹⁷ Van de Putte to Cremers, Jan. 4, 1866; also Read to Cremers, July 31, 1865; ARA, B.Z. Dossier 3076.

leave the position vacant. Nevertheless Sayyid Junied was regarded locally as honorary consul, or as the Dutch complained as “a sort of acting consul for Turkey” for several years thereafter.¹⁸ In other words, Britain supported the Dutch to the extent of not officially recognising Junied’s consular status, but not to the point of preventing him acting in Turkey’s interest. Sayyid Muhammad Alsagoff, the most influential of Singapore Muslims in the 1880s and ‘90s, assumed the same role at that time.¹⁹

Dutch agents and spies in Singapore reported a great deal of Turkish meddling in Southeast Asia in this period, perhaps partly because they were paid by the Dutch consulate for doing so. In 1881 two prominent Imams from Mecca sailed to Singapore with what the British and Dutch thought was some kind of political missions to Java and Palembang. It may have been intended mostly to gain support for Turkish causes, but undoubtedly had the effect of raising the hopes of Muslims in Sumatra for help for their own struggles.²⁰ The Imams were prevented from sailing to Palembang, but two Turkish ex-army officers did apparently get there, and allegedly inspired a group of thirty Palembang conspirators, including several members of the former royal dynasty, to plan the murder of all the Europeans in the town. All were rounded up by the Dutch before anything of the sort happened.²¹ Under interrogation, some of them revealed their understanding that Javanese Muslims were being aroused for the same cause, and that visits to Java by Muhammad Alsagoff and the Sultan of Johor in 1881 were meant to have similar incendiary effects. Dutch Consul-General W.H. Read also harboured deep suspicions of Mohammad Alsagoff, whom he claimed had offered hospitality to several of those involved in the Palembang conspiracy.²²

In 1890, a Turkish warship on a visit to Japan created great excitement in Singapore, and the local Muslim community passed the news to Sumatra. The hopes of the Acehnese of help from that quarter revived, and an Aceh envoy was sent to Singapore with letters requesting both the Turkish warship’s commander and Sayyid Muhammad Alsagoff to bring Aceh's plight to the attention of the Caliph. The Turkish warship had

¹⁸ Read to Loudon, June 23, 1873, copy Koloniën to B.Z., Sept. 6, 1873, Buitenlandse Zaken Dossier Atjeh.

¹⁹ Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier*, pp.232-33, 267-72.

²⁰ Weld to Kimberley, May 18 and 28, 1881, C.O. 273/108.

²¹ Weld to Kimberley, Aug. 27, 1881, C.O. 273/109.

²² Weld to 's-Jacob, Oct. 4, 1881 (most confidential), private Singapore letterbook III, Singapore Museum.

long since departed, but Alsagoff received the letters, and raised Acehnese expectations by leaving soon after on a tour of Europe. On his return to Singapore in 1892, Alsagoff sent a personal envoy to Aceh, after attempting to quieten Dutch alarm by telling their consul that he was simply passing on Turkish advice that Aceh should submit to Dutch rule. The mission apparently had the opposite effect, however, and indeed the web-site of the current Singapore Alsagoff family remembers with pride that their famous forebear “helped the Acheh people to fight against the Dutch”. At any event an Acehnese embassy to Constantinople was soon organized. The envoy, Teuku Laota, was equipped with a Turkish sword and decoration as tokens of Turkey's earlier recognition of its protectorate over the country.²³

Laota appears to have travelled no further than Singapore, where he may have been discouraged by more realistic Muslims.²⁴ Instead the Acehnese Sultan wrote directly to Constantinople at the end of 1893. His letter fell into Dutch instead of Turkish hands,²⁵ and there is no record of further attempts in this direction.

Britain's patience with Dutch sensitivity about allowing an official Turkish consul to Singapore had worn particularly thin once they saw a Turkish consul in Batavia (see below). In July 1901, therefore, they allowed a Turkish official, Haji Attaullah Effendi, to take up the job. In 1903 this consul received an appeal from Sultan Taha of Jambi, who had been defying the Dutch in the interior for nearly 50 years. He must have forwarded it to his government, since Turkey made representations on Taha's behalf to The Hague shortly thereafter.²⁶ The Dutch were sufficiently aroused by the dangers such involvement represented to pursue and kill Taha the following year. A few months thereafter most of the Jambi nobility was again in revolt, apparently stimulated by a Hungarian officer in the Turkish army, who claimed to have a special commission from the Caliph to assist in the defence of Jambi. He was quickly arrested, nineteen chiefs

²³ Sultan Daud to Alsagoff, 18 Ragab 1307H (Mar.10, 1890), trans. Governor-General to Koloniën, Sept. 12, 1890; Van Assen to Van Teijn, Sept. 13, 1890, copy G-G. to Koloniën, Sept. 26, 1890; A.R.A., Kol.Kab. H16, Dossier 6198.

²⁴ Deijkerhoff to Pijnacker Hordijk, Mar. 17, 1893, copy G-G. to Koloniën, Mar- 30, 1893, A.R.A., Kol.Kab. N8, Dossier 6219. Enclosures in Smith to Meade, May 30, 1892 (private), and Smith to Ripon, Oct. 19, 1892, C.O. 273/180 and 273/183.

²⁵ *Ambtelijke Adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronie*, ed. E. Gobée and C. Adriaanse (The Hague, 1957-9), I, pp. 153-7.

²⁶ *Ambtelijke Adviezen*, II, 1662. Smit, II, pp.271-4, 328-9, 364-6, 443-5.

were captured and exiled, and Jambi was again gradually subdued during the following two years.²⁷ Britain did not again allow an Ottoman consul in Singapore.

Meanwhile the Netherlands Indian Government had allowed a Turkish Consul-General in Batavia since the 1880's, on the grounds that they could better control any pan-Islamic activity on their own territory than that which operated out of Singapore.

This assumption went somewhat awry however with Muhammad Kiamil Bey, Consul-General in Batavia from 1897 to 1899. He was far more zealous than his predecessors, notably in encouraging Arabs in the Indies to regard themselves as Turkish subjects and bring their grievances to him. He sent eleven young Arabs for schooling in Constantinople between 1898 and 1904, and they came back with Turkish passports which they claimed entitled them to European status (which had been given to Japanese a few years earlier).²⁸ Holland finally threw him out when they caught him offering assistance to Indonesian rulers, including the Acehese Sultan who had just submitted to the Dutch.²⁹ Turkey transferred him to Singapore, but Britain refused to give him an exequator. Besides his excessive enthusiasm in colonial eyes, he was said to have offended some of the Johor royal family by marrying Abu Bakar's widow.

The most important result of Kiamil Bey's sojourn in Batavia was to foster closer links between Southeast Asian Arabs and the Middle Eastern press. Towards the end of 1897 the Arabic *al-Malumat* of Constantinople, the *Thamarat al-funun* of Beirut, and several Egyptian newspapers acquired correspondents in Batavia or Singapore who regularly complained about the injustices to which Muslims in general but Arabs in particular were subjected by the Dutch. This press campaign aroused high hopes that Turkey would intervene to push the Dutch to give European status to Netherlands Indian Arabs. The campaign alarmed Batavia for a time, but faded somewhat when The Hague mobilised diplomatic pressure on Istanbul.³⁰

²⁷ *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1905, p.43. *Encyclopedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1, p.612. At the same period four Turkish instructors were reported to be assisting in the defence of Boni (Celebes) against the Dutch. *Ambtelijke Adviezen*, II, p.1743.

²⁸ *Ambtelijke Adviezen*, II, 1617, 1619-20, 1737-8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1662.

³⁰ Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier*, pp.243-5.

The Caliph and the Great War

The First World War, which pitted Turkey for the first time against the colonial powers, Britain, France and Russia, was potentially the most dangerous moment for European colonial rule over Asia's Muslims. But although there were some, largely German-inspired, attempts to use the idea of a holy war on behalf of the Caliph, it was not pursued with much commitment or imagination by the Turks themselves. The Young Turks were in process of redefining themselves as the most secular of nationalists, and would succeed in ending the absolute monarchy in 1918. Many of their erstwhile Arab subjects, meanwhile, turned nationalist and anti-Turkish at British urging.

Nevertheless the idea of the Ottomans as the hope of Muslims had enormous and often fatal attraction. In the Singapore mutiny of February 1915, the most sanguinary anti-colonial act in Singapore history, there was again a Turkish theme. On 15 February 1915, only three months after Turkey entered the war, 815 Indian troops and 100 Malays of the Malay States Guides rebelled, tried to release 300 imprisoned Germans, largely from the capture of the *Emden*, and killed 33 British military and 18 European civilians before reinforcements arrived in the city to combat them. The Governor's letter analysing the events noted that unruliness within largely Muslim units, "at a time when Great Britain was at war with Turkey, whose ruler is looked up to as the spiritual head of the Mohammedan religion, was without doubt the principal cause of the mutiny."³¹ A Singapore Gujarati merchant, Kassim Ali Mansoor, one of the few Singapore civilians executed over the mutiny, had sought to provide a link between Turkey and the Malay States Guides, who in December 1914 refused orders to proceed to East Africa. His letter to his son in Rangoon had been intercepted the same December. It proved to be forwarding an appeal to the man thought to be Turkish consul there (though the consulate had ceased with Turkey's entry into the war) to send a warship to Singapore, to take the Malay soldiers to somewhere they could fight for the Turks instead of against them.³²

³¹ Governor of Straits Settlements to Secretary of State for Colonies, 19 August 1915, in T.R. Sareen (ed.), *Secret Documents on the Singapore Mutiny 1915* (New Delhi: Mouto Publishing House, 1995), p.709.

³² Sho Kuwajima, *First World War and Asia: Indian Mutiny in Singapore (1915)* (Osaka: Osaka University of Foreign Studies, 1988), p.33; R.W.E. Harper and Harry Miller, *Singapore Mutiny* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.204-06; Sareen, *Secret Documents*, p.11.

Needless to say the dream of a strong, progressive Muslim power has continued to inspire Muslims everywhere who felt themselves weak and dominated. The Ottomans were at the heart of that dream for 400 years.

Appendix: Schematic list of known appeals for Ottoman help

From Aceh: 1849, 1853, 1868, 1873, 1890, 1893

From Jambi: 1856, 1861?, 1903.

From Asahan? 1865

Straits-based campaign: 1873

Palembang contacts: 1881