

Evaluation of the Articles about the Malay World in Selected Ottoman Periodicals Published in the Early 20th Century*

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Abstract

In this study, articles about the Malay world in selected Ottoman periodicals were evaluated. The articles were published between 1909 and 1924 in *Beynullhak* Magazine, *Hikmet* newspaper, *Islam Mecmuasi* Magazine, *Mahfil* Magazine, *Sirat-i Mustakim* Magazine, *Sebilurresad* Magazine, *Truf-i Muslimn* Magazine, and *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni* Magazine. The articles are important in terms of reflecting both the political and cultural atmosphere of the period. Also, the articles are important in

* This article was supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK).

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terms of showing how the press of the Ottoman Empire, the centre of the caliphate, reacted to the problems in the Islamic world. By examining the articles in these periodicals, the then-current issues of the Islamic world can be understood. Especially considering the importance of the Malay world for Islamic civilisation, the articles were determined as the subject of study. As a result of the study, it is seen that the articles in Ottoman periodicals mostly contained information about the social, economic, cultural, and political situation of the Muslims living in the Malay world.

Keywords

Ottoman Empire, Malay world, Islamic world, Ottoman periodicals, cultural history.

Introduction

The Malay world refers to countries that include many regions of the Southeast Asian archipelago. According to the early records, between the seventh and the 14th century, many parts of the Malay world were ruled by the Srivijaya kingdom, which practised Hindu-Buddhist traditions. It is accepted that the Malay world met Islam through Arab traders and missionaries who came to Sumatra in the 12th century.¹ The spread of the religion of Islam in the region caused an interaction with the Islamic countries. The relationship of the Ottoman Empire with the Malay world began when the Kingdom of Aceh established relations with the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century and developed until the 19th century. The Ottoman Empire² which

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1. Mohd Shuhaimi Bin Haji Ishak and Osman Chuah Abdullah, "Islam and the Malay World: An Insight into the Assimilation of Islamic Values," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 2, no. 2 (2012): 58–65.
 2. The Ottoman Empire was founded in 1299 by Osman Gazi (1258–1326), who gave his name to the state. Sultan Yavuz Sultan Selim took the caliphate authority from the Mamluks in 1517 and the Ottoman sultans were referred as the caliph. In 1922, the Ottoman Empire collapsed. After the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the caliphate continued until 1924

was the centre of the caliphate responded to the problems in the Islamic world although the Malay world was geographically distant from the Ottoman state. In the 19th century, the kingdom of Aceh sent a delegation to Istanbul to ask for support from the Ottoman Empire to fight against the European colonisation. This became the news in the newspapers of the time like *Basiret* and *La Turquie*.³ The European states continued with the constant push for dominance over the Malay world through colonisation of this region, while the gradual weakening of the Ottoman state adversely affected the relations of the Ottoman Empire with this region. However, since the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, interest in this region has increased. The increase in the publications about the Malay world in the Ottoman press at the beginning of the 20th century might be the result of Sultan Abdulhamid II's Islamist policy. Sultan Abdulhamid II used the adjective of caliph against European states effectively. The Sultan advocated Islam not only as a belief but also as an ideology of political unity. In this respect, Sultan Abdulhamid II's Islamist policy can be influential in fostering better relations among Muslim countries. The support given to the Ottoman state with the news in the Malay press during the First World War can be evaluated as a manifestation of this policy. Figure 1. shows this support of the a local newspaper in the Malay language about victories of Çanakkale and Gallipoli.

when the caliphate authority was abolished. Kemal Beydilli, "Ottomans," *TDV Encyclopedia of Islam* (Istanbul: TDV Encyclopedia of Islam Press, 2007), 497.

3. Baiquni Baiquni, "Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Aceh Darus-Salam Kingdom," (master's thesis, Ankara University, 2012), 39.

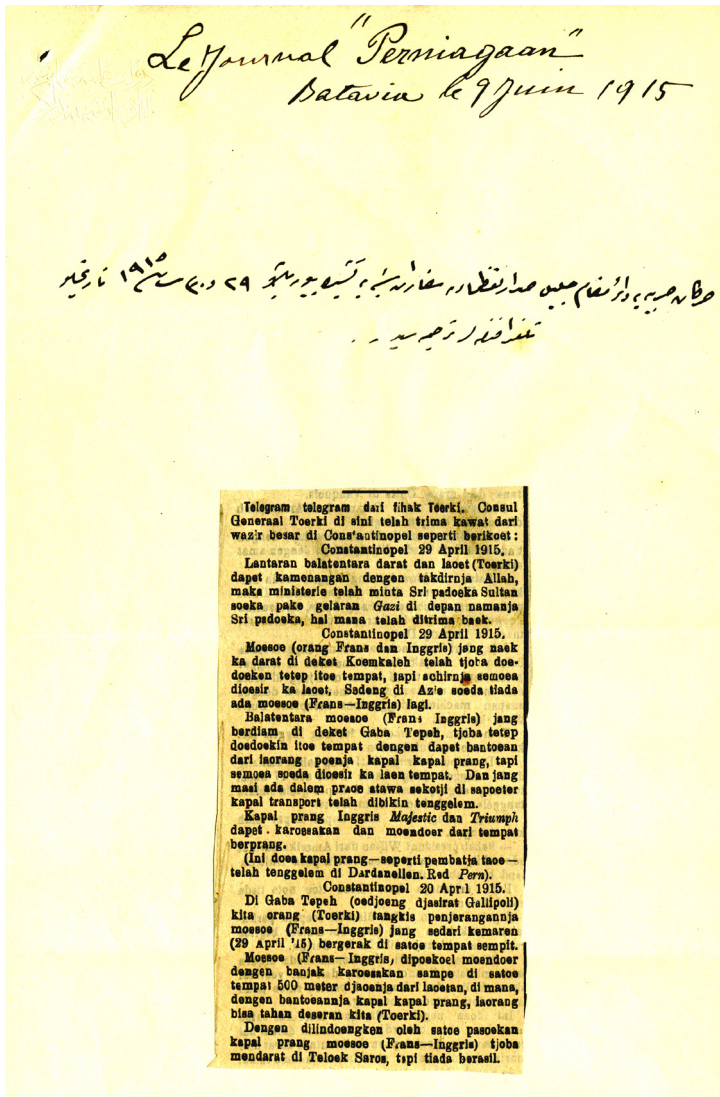


Figure 1. A newsprint sample of the local newspapers in the Malay language about victories of Çanakkale and Gallipoli. (Presidential State Archive, Istanbul, BOA, HR.SYS. 2323/15-04, 1915.)

Sultan Abdulhamid II's Islamist policy had various reflections in the Ottoman Empire as well as in other Islamic countries. One of these reflections was the periodicals published in the Ottoman press to ensure Islamic unity. Most articles selected for our study were published in Magazines advocating the Islamic union. Except for the *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni* Magazine, whose articles are included in our study, other Magazines had adopted a publication policy advocating the Islamic union.⁴

In this study, the historical method was used as a research method. The historical method is the method applied to examine the relationship of a problem with the past or to investigate the past state of social events and phenomena. Up-to-date information may not contain all the answers to the questions. These data should be added to the data obtained as a result of examining the development of the event or situation in the past. The documents obtained were evaluated using the document analysis technique. Any textual analysis can be considered as part of content analysis, whereby the process involves an objective analysis of paragraphs, sentences, themes, concepts, and words contained in printed and audiovisual materials. In this study, the analysis and inferences made on the text from selected Ottoman Magazines as historical sources contribute to the emergence of information that will shed light on our study.

Not all of the Ottoman periodicals were examined. Only open access publications classified and selected from the open access archive of the library of ISAM (TDV Center for Islamic Studies Library) and the Ataturk library were used in this study. The study shows that the articles in the Ottoman periodicals mostly contained information about the Muslims in the Malay world. As a result of the study, it is revealed that the articles on the Malay world in Ottoman periodicals contained information about the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the Malay Muslims.

4. Azmi Ozcan, "Islamism," *TDV Encyclopedia of Islam* (Istanbul: TDV Encyclopedia of Islam Press, 2001), 62.

The fourth article published under the title “The Situation of Javanese Muslims 4” in the *Sirat-i Mustakim* Magazine provided information about the book entitled *The History of Aceh*, written by Mehmet Ziya.²⁰ In addition, two articles about the relationship between Aceh and the Ottoman state were mentioned. One of these articles was written by Semseddin Sami, one of the famous Ottoman writers, and the other, by Hodja Husameddin Efendi.

The other publication about which information is given in alphabetical order is *Sebilurresad* Magazine. *Sebilurresad* Magazine was a continuation of the *Sirat-i Mustakim* Magazine. *Sirat-i Mustakim* Magazine changed its name after its 182nd issue, published in 1912 under the name *Sebilurresad* Magazine. The Magazine was published weekly and adopted an Islamist policy that aimed to work for the development of the Islamic world. It contained information on religion, philosophy, literature, law, politics, and Islamic news. Among the authors of the Magazine were important intellectuals of the period.²¹ Four articles were published in *Sebilurresad* Magazine about the Malay world. These articles were published under the general title “Muslim Peoples Life”.

The first article title is “Muslims of Malaya.”²² This article explained the origin of the Malay name, and how Islam reached the Malay Peninsula. In addition, explanations of the characteristics of Malaysians and their livelihoods were given. It is stated that the Malayan Muslims left their country’s important sources of income to the Chinese and the Indians because they were modest people and therefore remained strange. Among other information given were the languages of Malaysians, the geographical situation of the country, the distribution of the population, the way of administration, and the situation of the Muslims.

20. “The Situation of Javanese Muslims 4,” *Sirat-i Mustakim* 6, no. 134 (1911): 57–59.

21. Duman, *Union Catalogue*, 350.

22. “Muslim Peoples Life: Muslims of Malaya,” *Sebilurresad* 1, no. 23 (1912): 444–445.

The second article published under the title “Muslim Peoples Life: Java Muslims” documented the work of the organisation called Cemiyet-i Hayriye, which was active in Java.²³ It was stated that there were many *madrasah* operating under the Cemiyet-i Hayriye administration. In these *madrasah*, the article stated that Arabic and positive sciences were taught. In addition, the activities of a company called Sirket-i Islam were mentioned.

The third article featured under the title “Awakening of Islam: The Struggle of Javanese Muslims against the Missionary Organisation” provided information about the monthly Magazine *Ellezi Hayratu’l-Islamiyye*, which began to be published in Java.²⁴ In a letter written by the chief author of the Magazine mentioned in the article, the activities of the missionaries operating in Java and the purpose of publication of the Magazine named *Ellezi Hayratu’l-Islamiyye* were mentioned.

The last article published under the title “Islamic Press in Java” (1924) provided information about two Islamic journals published in Java.²⁵ One of them was *el-vifak* Magazine and the other *Ellezi hayratu’l-islamiyye* Magazine. The article presented the information about the publication policies and content of these Magazines. In addition, the importance of these Magazines for the Islamic community in Java was expressed.

The other publication about which information is given in alphabetical order is *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* Magazine. *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* Magazine was a weekly Magazine about Islamic news, as well as political, historical, and philosophical issues. It was published in Istanbul in 1910 by Abdurresid Ibrahim.²⁶ Three articles were published in *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* Magazine about the Malay world.

23. “Muslim Peoples Life: Java Muslims,” *Sebilurresad* 11, no. 281 (1914): 330.

24. “Awakening of Islam: The Struggle of Javanese Muslims against the Missionary Organisation,” *Sebilurresad* 23, no. 579 (1923): 111–112.

25. “Islamic Press in Java,” *Sebilurresad* 23, no. 590 (1924): 288.

26. Duman, *Union Catalogue*, 395.

The first article was published under the title “The Letter from Java.”²⁷ In the article, a letter from Muhammed bin Muhammed Ali of the Java scholars was evaluated as he described his feelings about *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* Magazine. Muhammed bin Muhammed Ali sent this letter to Abdurreşid Efendi in Istanbul. In his letter, Muhammed bin Muhammed Ali expressed his feelings about *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* Magazine which arrived in Java from the caliphate centre in a very impressive way. He expressed the respect and expectation of Java Muslims for the caliphate.

The second article published in the *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* Magazine was a continuation of the first article. The second article was also published under the title of “The Letter from Java.”²⁸ The article provided information about one of the Java scholars, Muhammed bin Muhammed Ali. In addition, as a continuation of the first article, his letter was evaluated and his views on Muslims were explained. According to the letter, he wanted to develop Muslim’s loyalty to the caliphate. In this respect, Muslims should build a *madrasah* in Mecca. Every year, many Muslims would learn from this *madrasah* and when graduated from this *madrasah*, they would teach Islam to people everywhere in the world. This situation would enhance the Islamic brotherhood. So, this *madrasah* should be built as soon as possible.

The last article was published under the title “Java Territory and Japan.”²⁹ The article stated that the Japanese had been making a lot of effort to capture the island of Sumatra politically and economically. It was stated that approximately 30 million people were living in Sumatra and most of them were Muslims. It was stated that the Japanese commercial relations

27. Muhammed bin Muhammed Ali, “The Letter From Java,” *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* 1, no. 5 (1910): 84–85.

28. Idem, “The Letter From Java,” *Teâruf-i Muslimîn*, 1, no. 18 (1910): 296–297.

29. Osman Cudi, “Java Territory and Japan,” *Teâruf-i Muslimîn* 1, no. 21 (1910): 345–346.

with Java alone had reached 375 million kuruş annually and around 100 thousand Japanese families had settled in Java. With this trend, it was stated that Java was expected to become a Japanese colony in about 10 years. This article offered an idea indicating Japanese imperialism's plan to dominate the Southeast Asia region by trade and migration in the early 1900s.

The other publication about which information is given in alphabetical order is *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni* Magazine. It was published every two months between 1910 and 1925 by Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni. The intent of the publication was to write an Ottoman history following scientific standards and to give historical awareness to the public. It contained articles of the most important Ottoman historians of the period.³⁰ Two articles were published in *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni* Magazine about the Malay world.

The first article was published under the title “Sumatra Expedition of an Ottoman Fleet.”³¹ In this article, detailed information about the beginning of relations between the Ottoman and Sumatra's sultanate was outlined. The letter sent by the Ottoman Sultan Selim II to Alauddin, the Sultan of Aceh, in 1567 was mentioned. Besides, information about the first military fleet sent by the Ottoman Empire to the region was supplied.

The second article featured in the *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni* Magazine was under the title “Sumatra Expedition of an Ottoman Fleet,” which was a continuation of the first article.³² In this article, the course of Ottoman-Sumatra relations and the development of political relations, the ambassadors who came to pay a visit to the Ottomans from Sumatra, and the Turks who went to Sumatra were mentioned.

30. Duman, *Union Catalogue*, 390.

31. Safvet, “Sumatra Expedition of an Ottoman Fleet,” *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni Magazine*, no. 10 (1911): 604–614.

32. *Ibid.*, 678–683.

Conclusion

The study focused on articles on the Malay World in selected Ottoman periodicals. In this context, twenty articles were examined although they were not fully translated. Only the information in the content was summarised. The language of the selected articles in the Ottoman periodicals was Ottoman Turkish.

This study examined three articles from *Beyânulhak* Magazine, two from *Hikmet* newspaper, one from *Islam Mecmuasi* Magazine, one from *Mahfil* Magazine, four from *Sirat-i Mustakim* Magazine, four from *Sebilurresad* Magazine, three from *Teâruf-i Muslim* Magazine, and two from *Tarih-i Osmani Encumeni* Magazine. Fifteen article titles in total were directly related to Java and Muslims in Java. The title of three articles dealt with Muslims in Sumatra and the island of Sumatra itself. Two articles were directly related to Malayan Muslims and one article was about Islamic news but additionally provided information about Java. Looking at the content of the articles in general, we understand that they offered information about the geographical regions' social life, commercial relations, colonisation by the Western powers, historical relations, Islamic press, and other relevant topics. In these articles, mainly Islamic religion was considered as a unifying subject. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the caliphate was a unifying factor between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay world. The freedom of language and belief of local people in places ruled by the Ottoman Empire can be regarded as proof that the Ottoman Empire did not show imperialist tendencies. In this respect, it is possible to characterise the relationship between the Ottoman and the Malay world as a relationship based on faith. Relations between the Malay world and the Ottoman State began in the 16th century. It is shown that all phases of the relationship, which were shaped by military and administrative aids in the historical process, were deliberated in the Ottoman periodicals.

The Ottoman Empire's effectiveness in the region declined as it began to weaken, while at the same time, the Western colonial powers dominated the region. However, in the late 19th century and early 20th century, it is shown that publications about the Malay world started to increase in Ottoman publications. The first reason for this may be that publication of newspapers and Magazines in the Ottoman Empire started to proliferate in the 19th century. The second reason may be that Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was the sultan between 1876 and 1909, and his Islamist policy had played a major role in this regard. It can be said that the Islamist policy implemented by Sultan Abdulhamid II caused rapprochement among Islamic countries. Previously, it is also shown that the Ottoman Empire was supported by the news in the local press in Malaya during the First World War.³³ It is known that similar support was shown by Muslims in different geographies like India. Indian Muslims donated money to the *Kızılay* (a humanitarian aid service organisation in Turkey and around the world) during the Balkan Wars in 1912. The lists showing the amount of this money were found among the Ottoman Archive documents.³⁴

Today, the Islamic countries lack unity. The absence of a unifying and integrating structure among Islamic countries worsens and deepens their own weaknesses. It may be possible for the Islamic countries to change this negative condition through rigorous studies on their common shared cultural elements.

This study is important in terms of showing the cultural ties among Islamic countries as depicted in important articles published in the Ottoman periodicals of the past. This study indicates the necessity for new studies in the field so as to develop cultural relations among the Islamic countries. From the articles, despite sheer geographical distance separating the two worlds, a common belief and cultural affinity stand out as the elements that unite the Ottoman state and the Malay world.

33. Presidential State Archive, Istanbul, BOA, HR.SYS. 2323/15–04, 1915.

34. Ibid.

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Furthermore, considering the common cultural background, the importance of maintaining cultural ties with the Malay world and the necessity of strong cooperation are clearly imminent.

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