

The Problem in Historical Epistemology of Ottoman-Malay World Relations

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Abstract:

This paper challenges the historical epistemology of the relations between Ottoman and the Malay World, which were initiated in the 16th century. A significant intensity of academic studies triggered by the calamitous event of the tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean in 2004. That ‘natural’ disaster drew both the humanitarian initiatives of the Turkish government/semi-government and civil organisations, and also academia to rediscover the earlier historical interactions. It is quite interesting that the aforementioned ventures to revive the past relations were coincidental, with the initiation of the Ottomanist worldview by some circles in Turkey. Besides that, this approach, which can be named ‘renewalism’, is somewhat related, in a reactionary way, to the early Republican epistemological stance of history as well. Instead of developing the historical epistemology through rational and critical approaches, which would lay emphasis on diverse scopes of the relationships by taking into consideration multiple actors in order to understand the past relations, the recent (Turkish) academic stance has implicitly shown a certain tendency to narrate the relations with the limitation of a superiority-inferiority dichotomy, and a one-sided power-based domination. However, the latter issue is viewed as problematic. Because studies in the field of history have certain explicit methodological weaknesses, the ventures to understand past relations with the Malay world have not produced robust results. The argument is that weaknesses in the contemporary attempts to understand and restructure the past relations could be rooted in the past itself. Therefore, the question of whether the Ottomans had even developed epistemological-based policies to engage with the general Malay world, which began in the early 16th century, should be scrutinised. Although this paper was intended to be a continuation of a book chapter written by the present author, it is still considered a preliminary discussion. It attempts to apply an analytical perspective so as to reach the core of the problem. This endeavour is believed to provide suggestions for better comprehension of the already established epistemological and methodological weaknesses in academic circles that have ventured into the reconstruction of the Ottoman and Malay world relations.

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I. Introduction

The relationships between the Ottomans and the Malay world have been more closely scrutinised in the last few decades. Based on the developments at the beginning of this century, the socio-political inclination in Turkey, and some natural disasters in the Archipelago were the triggering points for the re-orientation of the relationships in a contemporary socio-political environment. In particular, as observed for the purpose of enhancing the relationships, there have been newly emerging areas, such as humanitarian assistance, educational facilities, and various programmes led by governmental and non-governmental organisations from Turkey. These recent preliminary engagements between the two geographical and societal segments of the two nations, say, Turkish and Malay in a general sense, are felt to have been based, to some extent, on early modern historical correspondences commencing from the Sultanate of Aceh, and its direct and somewhat constant intentional engagement to establish a sound political alliance with the Ottomans. On the other hand, the latest stages of the relationships can be evaluated on the basis of the geo-political changes of the late 19th century, and early 20th century.

Presumably, because of the nature of the above-mentioned humanitarian engagements during the first decade of this century, initiated because of the tsunami in 2004, a significant number of individuals—such as historians and institutions, and governmental and non-governmental agencies—have had inclinations to intentionally or unintentionally remember the past relations, but mostly from emotional and pragmatic perspectives, and in less analytical ways. At first glance, there might be the perception that there are no problems with this approach because of the nature of the human-human relationships that occurred during and just after the natural disasters had happened and affected all of the Indian Ocean littoral, especially Northern Sumatra in 2004.

Here, two major issues are concerned. The first is whether the Ottomans had developed and sustained their relationships with the Malay Archipelagic peoples with a certain epistemology or not. The second is the scope of approaches of some contemporary Turkish historians and researchers, and the extent to which they have collected data from both the Ottoman and Malay sources and developed logical interpretations. Because of certain limitations, the present writer only focuses briefly on whether the pioneer bureaucratic elites at

the Ottoman court and intellectual circles had any certain epistemological basis² and preparedness once they had encountered the political reality in the Indian Ocean littoral, which might have contributed to the bond with the larger Malay world over time.³ With this approach, the significance of whether epistemological stances in historical phenomena had been taken, or what is known as historical epistemology. The possibility of discovering a certain epistemological stance would also help in conceptualising the actions of the Ottomans during its long engagement with the polities in the Malay Archipelago.

In this context, this treatise, which is a preliminary work, should be viewed as a critical approach towards two phenomena: The first is the Ottoman State's foreign affairs policy towards the Archipelago Muslim nations. The second is the contemporary efforts of the academic circles in Turkey to evaluate its past relationships in this context. It is arguable that, without thoroughly examining the cultural, religious, military and political engagements

² This utilisation of 'epistemology' is intentionally initiated here for the first time. Arguably, epistemology provides us "the nature" and "justification" of certain human knowledge (Hofer, Pintrich, 1997: 88). I am inclined to name this concept as 'historical epistemology' or 'epistemology of historical relationships'. On the other hand, some philosophers have already been utilising this concept, but in a totally different context. By this reference, I would like to question the Ottomans' engagement with the general Malay World, whether it is based on definite and sustained sources of knowledge, the Ottomans' intentional accumulation and production of scholarly writing in the course of time, and some other similar issues. It is believed that the *longue durée* approach helps to observe certain dynamics. For that purpose, a few sources from the earliest and latest periods of the Ottoman State are given as examples, and some references are utilised—not in detail—in the main body of the text. These sources, some of which are considered as "representatives of universal Ottoman history-writers," are intentionally selected since they represent the relevant eras (Erginbaş, 2013: iii). The first of these sources is the *Münşeât* (Munsha'at-i-Salatin), written by Feridun Bey in the late decades of the 16th century (991 H / 1583 CE), which is considered a reliable and authentic source. It was published as two volumes in Hijri 1274 (1858 CE) in İstanbul (Brown, 1930: 8). (Note: There are some copies of *Münşeât* in the Turkish Grand National Assembly Library Version Volume I; Feridun Bey Münşeâtı (991/1583), Reprint, Rabi'ul Akhir 1274/November 1857, İSAM (İslamic Research Centre Library, İstanbul; Münşeâtü's-Selâtin, I-II, Takvimhâne-i Amire, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, (Pertevniyal 0866). Another is *Alem-i İslamiyyet: Açe Tarihçesi* (1312/1893/1894), which is the work of Mehmed Ziya that was published in İstanbul. A constellation of articles have been published in *Sırat-i Mustakim (Sebilürreşad)* since 1908, a popular Islamist journal in the early decades of the 20th century. In addition, *Beyan 'ul Hak*, another vernacular newspaper containing articles on the Islamic communities, including the Malay world, or the Archipelago under a section titled as Islamic world (*Alemi İslamiyye*). An example would be the serial article about "Cava", providing descriptive information about the island (See: Abdül Hadi Davud. "Cava", *Beyan 'ul Hak*, 15 Safer 1327, Sayı 23, Birinci Sene, Dersaadet, Bekir Efendi Matbaası-Vezir Hanı). In addition to these invaluable sources, BOA documents, Macar Reisi Atlası, and Katip Çelebi's narration were also observed.

³ Two prominent individuals are believed to have representative importance for the two opposing orientations in the Ottoman political elites. One of them is Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (Mehmed Sokolovic), the grandvizier during the late era of both Süleyman the Lawgiver (18 months), and Selim II (1566-1574). Sokollu is known as an able statesman, and the leader of the faction which prioritised eastern policies. During this period, although some other factions were against him, Sokollu's leadership observedly played a certain role in the shaping of the eastern policy, in particular, preparing a total of 17 vessels between the years 1567-68/69. However, this influence was shortlived because of the uprising in Yemen in 1570 that diverted the attention of the Ottoman policymakers towards domestic policies instead (Mühimme Defteri, 1995: 118-119; Şere, 2014: 65; Durant, 1961: 522). As a result, the prepared flotilla could not set off to Sumatra Island. Sokollu's influence ended with the dismissal of Feridun Bey in 984 H/576 CE, who seemed to be a close assistant of the former (Uzunçarşılı, (n.d) Vol. 6: 53). Nevertheless, the Yemen uprising was not the only obstacle that prevented the Ottomans from engaging with the developments in the Indian Ocean; during the early years of the reign of Süleyman the Lawgiver, a similar political uprising occurred in Egypt in 1523-34 (Hess, 1970: 1912).

between the Ottoman State and the general Malay world in the past, only a superficial or chauvinistic understanding of it would be reached. At the same time, this critical approach is accompanied by an interpretative method so as to analyse the historical relationships on a *longue durée* basis in the relevant geographical and historical contexts. These methods are assumed to help determine whether the Ottoman State, and its bureaucratic mechanisms and intellectual circles had constant and sustained policies towards Eastern issues, such as developments in the Indian Ocean and the larger Malay Archipelago.

II. The Ottomans and the problem of knowledge-based ‘oceanic’ maritime

Territorial expansion is a phenomenon whose importance cannot be denied, particularly during the ascension of the Ottoman State. This engagement in non-Muslim geographies was based on Islamic *da‘wah* ideology, or *ghazwa* as stated by İnalcık (1978: 119, 122; 1973: 6; Özbaran, 2006: 483).⁴ Another aspect of this engagement is related to the geographical relevance of the Ottoman State, which was founded in a land-locked region, but over the course of time, the Ottomans were forced to invest in maritime activities during its expansion period in the borders of the Marmor, Aegean, Mediterranean and Black Seas (Özbaran, 2013: 51; İlgürel, 2001: 637, 640, 642-643). The Ottoman State had a definite interest in expanding to the West, from Asia Minor to the Balkans and Eastern Europe.⁵ Although the Ottomans attempted to get accustomed to maritime relations, in the early stage of development they were mostly inclined to recruit local Greek seamen, and other Turkic *Beylik* experts with expertise in maritime affairs (İlgürel, 2001: 640).⁶

There is no doubt that the Anatolian Saljuqi State’s maritime ventures in the coastal areas of the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas were acknowledged by the Ottomans. In addition,

⁴ At an early stage around the turn of the 13th century, the Ottoman State leaders were called *Ghazi*, e.g., Osman Ghazi (Power, Standen, 2002: 228), who actively engaged in invasions into non-Muslim areas, which were called frontiers. In fact, there were some critical approaches to the concepts of *ghazi* and *ghaza*, which seemed to be based on the conceptualisation of *frontier* that was initiated in the 9th century (Power, Standen, 2002: 232, 234).

⁵ This might be considered a historical tendency, which was witnessed in the migration and mobilisation of the Turkic nations from Central Asia since the early centuries. Again, as observed, though it was a relatively small number, some groups from these Turkic nations aimed to settle in the southern regions, such as north and north-west India, and the Ottomans during their long period ruling also had engagements with the eastern and southern regions, such as Iran and Egypt.

⁶ Some Turkish *Bey*s such as Çaka Bey (1081/1097 CE), and the leaders of Aydınoğulları, Menteşe, Saruhan and Karesi *Beylikleri* in Western Anatolia in the first part of the 14th century initiated the navy in their respective areas especially in and around İzmir. Çaka Bey developed the navy in the Aegean Sea, and won the war against the Byzantium in 1090 CE. On the other hand, the *beyliks*’ fundamental purpose was to protect their land-based *Beylik* from the corsairs, or Byzantium attacks through the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas (İlgürel, 2001: 639; Bayat, 1988: 14).

the relatively long term of engagement with the Byzantium no doubt triggered the intention of the Ottomans to establish a strong naval force so as to advance their battle power in the relevant seas surrounding Byzantium. Based on this geographical positioning, the Ottomans had to seek human and material resources for the fundamental infrastructure of the navy. When the Ottomans initiated their early naval infrastructure during the *beylik* era, they built a navy power with 350 vessels in just half a century of their being a city state under the command of Baltaoğlu Süleyman Bey.⁷

Before proceeding further with the narrative about maritime issues in the Indian Ocean context, it would be better to look at the historical changes that appeared in the very initial years of the 15th century, when the Mongols invaded the whole of Western Asia, including Asia Minor, Syria and Iraq territories. During this critical moment of history, the Ottoman political elites were forced to reorient the historical consciousness of the state to be able to overcome the trauma and threat caused by the Timurids. Certainly, the Timurids' expansion was a test of the Ottomans' supremacy (Kastritsis, 2013: 4). The question here was whether the Ottomans had any inclination to revise their political ontology in order to reinitiate their global supremacy.

The premise of this inquiry is to clarify that, if the Ottomans had intentionally developed any interest in the Malay Archipelago, they would have had policies to sustain their maritime infrastructure in the form of maps, reports, travellers' notes, dockyards, and so on.⁸ This is crucial because the Ottoman State first indirectly encountered the Portuguese by assisting the Mamluk State's defensive policies in the late 15th and early 16th centuries against the interventions of the Portuguese in the Red Sea.⁹ The territorial expansion policy of Selim I (1512-20) led the Ottomans to have the natural border of the Indian Ocean. Actually, this period was the beginning of change in the nature of warfare for the Ottomans. In other words, it was the historical moment in which the Ottomans encountered the open and direct threat of the

⁷ This information was collected from the archival library in Beşiktaş Navy Museum, İstanbul. Engaging with the closed seas was the main policy of the Ottomans during the second part of the 15th century, just after conquering Constantinople in 857/1453 (Allouche, 1983: 7).

⁸ Pertaining to navy building, *Suez Kapudanlığı* was established during the era of Selim I. Massive contributions were sent from Western Anatolian forest areas, such as Köyceğiz. Similar assistance was given from Maraş, a province in the southeast of Anatolia, to *Basra Kapudanlığı* in the 18th century (Tezel, 1973: 611). The most important information about the Ottomans' military engagements were in the official documents. However, those related to the presence of the Ottoman navy in the Indian Ocean are quite limited (Özbaran, 2013: 274).

⁹ Feridun Bey states that the Ottomans' engagement with the Portuguese involved almost 60 years (*See: "Taht-El Raja Hakimi Alaaddin Tarafından İsdar Buyurulan Name-i Humayunun Sureti": 549*). There was a setback for the Ottomans in this struggle for territorial hegemony in the Western part of the Indian Ocean in the mid-16th century (1552) while the latter was defeated by the Portuguese in front of Hurmuz (Power, Standen, 2002: 230-1, 240).

Portuguese. This direct engagement of the Ottoman navy lasted almost thirty years for a short period of the maritime wars in 1537-1538, and continued to a lesser degree from the 1550s onwards (Coles, 1968: 78).¹⁰ This period was no doubt a unique historical opportunity for multiple nations, in particular the Ottomans, the Portuguese, the Sultanate of Delhi, and the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam in terms of their future political presence in regional and global history.

Through the centuries, the corsairs in the Mediterranean became allied with the Ottomans, and later on became a systematically professional navy structure since the time of Mehmed II (*the Conquerer*) (855-86 H/1451-81 CE). This brief discourse on the maritime affairs of the Ottomans proves that it was also their interest to be recognised as a maritime power as well. On the other hand, without taking into consideration the conjectural alliances with some autonomous bodies such as the corsairs, it cannot be argued that the Ottomans had established a holistic hegemony in the whole Mediterranean, although they did also hold a certain degree of “aggressive sea power”. In this context, it has been observed that, during the reign of Süleyman I (926-74 H / 1520-66 CE), the golden era, the Ottoman State collaborated closely with the North African corsairs “to sweep central Mediterranean free of Christian commerce and shipping” (Coles, 1968: 124-5, 131).¹¹ Beyond this, it is worth mentioning the Ottoman’s naval presence in the Indian Ocean. When one traces the related correspondences between the Ottomans and the Malay Archipelago along the *longue durée*, borrowing from K. N. Chaudhuri (Risso, 1995: 23, 24), it can be said that it was the result of “fortunate coincidence” for the Ottomans. On the other hand, there is no doubt as such that the most successful period of the Ottomans were during the reigns of Selim I and Süleyman I, the Lawgiver. Both rulers had direct engagements with rival states in the eastern and southern limits of the Ottoman State, and had successfully expanded the state’s borders up til the western portion of the Indian Ocean.¹²

¹⁰ In the ensuing centuries, in particular, during the 16th century, the Ottomans received the maritime assistance of the corsairs through an alliance with them, and with the latter’s constant engagement, they could build larger dockyards in Haliç (*The Golden Horn*) (Coles, 1968: 93).¹⁰ This navy infrastructure was definitely bound to the exchequer of the state. However, the dilemma is that, once the Ottomans faced economic stagnation in their frontier wars in Eastern and Central Europe in the mid-16th century (Power, Standen, 2002: 230, 231), both the military and the treasurer faced the difficulty of accumulating human and material/financial resources which were crucial to the central organisational structure of the state. In fact, this is related to the nature of the Ottoman State as mentioned elsewhere in this treaty.

¹¹ In addition to the corsairs, there was renegade from different nations, such as the Genoese Mocak Ağa, Mustafa Reis, and Ferhat Bey who served the Ottomans in the seas (Coles, 1968: 155).

¹² The major reason for Selim I’s military engagement with the Safavid was based on the refusing of the Persians’ caliphal status, and also the rejection of “the whole theory of the Caliphate” (Brown, 1930: 24). Selim I had

This seemed to encourage some researchers to claim that the Ottomans had already become a maritime nation because of certain engagements in the Indian Ocean littorals, such as the Red Sea, and the Western Arabian Sea. In fact, there is nothing wrong in stating that the Ottomans had successfully reached the southern limits and had become well established in the coastal area of the Arabian Peninsula, including Basra, through the annexation of Baghdad in 1534 (Power, Standen, 2002: 230). However, the expected continuity of the Ottoman presence in those waters while gaining dominance through its maritime presence—especially when compared with the European maritime nations—and having certain allied groupings with some city states and sultanates in India and Sumatra Island, did not reflect the reality (Özbaran 2007: 53, 56).¹³

It appears that the problem here is the way in which the Ottoman scholars and bureaucrats who worked in various state departments observed any scholarly, religious or logical concerns with regard to Eastern Muslim nations, and their geographies, including the Archipelago. Indeed, Ottoman officials and scholars had penned down reports, travellers' notes, and the histories of cities and provinces from the early centuries, and had at least accumulated original or translated Arabic and Western sources about the region. Despite all this, there is still need for further inquiry. Besides, it seems that it was not common practice to write about subjects outside of Islamic geography, such as the Malay communities in the Archipelago.¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, the Ottomans' regard to oceanic affairs was lacking in strong intention, and far from being well prepared.

It is worth sharing a few examples pertaining to the above-mentioned issue, one of which, for instance, is the Macar Reis Atlas, one of the distinguished maps and manuscripts based on the recent developments in the field of cartography in the West. However, this work did not successfully include drawings of regions such as Arabia, India, and Indo-China

already witnessed Safavid propaganda among the Turcoman communities (*Akkoyunlular*) in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia during his early governorship in Trabzon (Kunt, Yurdaydın, Ödekan, 1988: 110).

¹³ The Ottoman maritime engagement in Diu in 1538 was at the request of Bahadır Shah of Gujarat. Although the navy that was commanded by Hadım Süleyman Paşa arrived in Diu, Mahmud Shah III who replaced Bahadır Shah, and his late father, did not have any collaboration with the Ottomans. Instead, he preferred to be closer to the Portuguese (Köseoğlu, 1991: 237; von Hammer, 1990: 502; Demir, Kılıç, 1999: 358; *Osmanlı Tarihi Ansiklopedisi*: 215; Uzunçarşılı, n.d.: 392, 393).

¹⁴ For instance, one of the earliest documents about the trade and maritime affairs in the Indian Ocean littoral was recorded by Al-Mas'udi in the 10th CE century (*See.*: Ahmad, 1960: 97-114). Besides that, Ibn Battuta, just a few centuries later (mid of 14th CE century), provides quite useful information about the geography, state structure, social life, and climate of the Archipelago, particularly Sumatra and Java Islands, in his celebrated book in Arabic (Battuta, 1983: 267, 274). Details for some other travellers (*See.*: Spies, 1936).

(Soucek, 1971: 17; Demir, Kılıç, 1999: 358). Another crucial reference is Katip Çelebi (1609-1657), who lived at the beginning of the 17th century. He referred to the Moluka Islands and their spice wealth in the Archipelago. Although it is called Moluka Islands in this study, it has also been referred to as Malaka Islands, which clearly indicates some conceptual confusion. Katip Çelebi also mentions names such as Maluka, Muluk, Muluka, Muluke, Maluke. It is noted that *cewz-i bevva*, *mastaka*, *gall*, sandalwood, and cinnamon are grown in this region while also mentioning Ternate and Motir, and other states where clove trees grow. This situation reveals that Katip Çelebi must have written something about the Archipelago, and its rich spices based on the works he had read about the geography from the book of *Kitab-ı Atlas*. It is also possible that the spelling difference possibly arose from the work, or his own interpretation of it (*Katip Çelebi'den Seçmeler*, 1968: 122).

III. Dilemma in political intention?

An obvious issue for discussion is the early stages of the advancement of the Ottoman State, where they intended to expand their presence to the East, especially in the Indian Ocean littoral. In this context, although some researchers argue the opposite, the exact policies of the Ottoman State do not prove that the rulers, in particular, Selim I and Süleyman I, had an ambition to conquer India. This is because, for the most part, the Ottomans abandoned their intentions to set off for adventures in the Indian Ocean due to some regional obstacles (Braudel, 1992: 387-388).¹⁵ Indeed, certain attempts exposed challenges to the conventional Ottoman military structure, which was made up of land forces that did self-preservation through gaining new territories. On the other hand, the Ottoman navy had no constant oceanic or open-sea experiences and activities. Since the oceanic demands were too challenging to be encountered at full scale, the task of conquering the Indian Ocean was left to the Rumis (Temple, 1928: xlv).¹⁶ One can assert that the long-term presence of the Rumis in the Indian Ocean littoral must have been based on their habituation.

¹⁵ Katip Çelebi, who is also known as Haji Khalifa, criticised the idea of the Ottomans' gaining sovereignty in India, and argued that it would be disastrous as experienced during the Girit War in the Mediterranean Sea (Demir, Kılıç: 1999: 365).

¹⁶ There were some Turkic elements, such as Rumis, that played a role in the Indian Ocean littorals since they were autonomous in their actions. In this context, there were certain references to the presence of Turkic elements in the Malacca Straits, as observed during the Portugese invasion into Malacca city in 1511 (Risso, 1995: 127-8 (f.n.14); İnalçık, Quataert, 2005: 321).

In addition, there might have been significant obstacles for sustaining naval power in the region. One of the crucial ones seems to be revenue sources. In this context, traditionally, the Ottoman land-based army was structured well in line with the *Timar* System (*fief*) (Pamuk, 2018: 84).¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is a salient question whether the Ottoman State was able to acquire sustainable revenue beyond *Timar* while it faced the novel geographical and social hurdles in the southern provinces to support the navy establishment and its costly engagements. Indeed, the navy establishment in the Red Sea, and later on, in Basra must have been considered an extra expenditure for the central treasury.

One might assert that the civil, autonomous merchants' involvements among the Ottoman citizens would have contributed to the accumulation of knowledge and information in terms of geographical, social and political facts and figures about the societies in the regions adjacent to the Indian Ocean. However, the fact is that it seems that there was either no such merchant presence in trade affairs in the Indian Ocean, or they did not develop any sort of knowledge-based activities.¹⁸ Here, it has been argued that the Ottomans did not have any direct business-oriented engagements in the maritime trade route(s) in the Indian Ocean as they had enough revenues acquired from taxes. However, this explanation neither satisfies nor clarifies the whole process. In fact, it was not the first time that the Ottomans coincided their trade routes bound for the Indian Ocean in the southern borders. Rather, the Ottomans, since the 14th century, had gained territorial sovereignty by “intercepting all the great trade routes” from north to south, and east to west (Lyber, 1915: 577).¹⁹

¹⁷ The Ottoman State's economic productivity was largely based on agriculture. In line with it, its major revenue came from the *tithe*, and the *cizye*, until the mid-19th century (Zürcher, 2010: 62).

¹⁸ There are a few written documents about the Indian Ocean and its littoral, namely *Mir'atü'l-Memalik* and *Muhit* by Seydi Ali Reis. The former is a kind of memoir about the long voyage of Seydi Ali, his most-referred work, after he lost his navy in the Western Indian Ocean. Adıvar (1991: 85, 86) critically analyses this work emphasising that Seydi Ali did not have any context about the Indian non-Muslim societies and geographies, but only conveyed information about some communities. On the other hand, he narrated the reign of Süleyman I in his conversations with the others. Katip Çelebi also refers to *Muhit* for climatic conditions in the Indian Ocean in his book (Hagen, 2015: 219). Some accounts in this book offers a reminder on how the accumulation could be valuable. However, it is difficult to argue that there was a sustainable and institutionalised approach in the life of the Ottomans towards the Archipelagic nations.

¹⁹ The Ottomans invited the Western European trade associations and individual traders, such as the Venetian and Genoese, and later on, the French (1536), to operate at the state borders through gaining some privileges since the mid-15th century (Şişman, 1999: 511; Gürçey, (n.d): 1) whereby “the Ottomans closely observed the maritime affairs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean” (Akar, 2003: 430). However, contrary to this, the Ottomans did not actively engage in global trade interactions. At this point, the statement of Özbaran (2007: 49) is quite crucial, who stressed that the commercial activities were not given as much importance as navy construction. This, in fact, implicitly clarifies that the Ottomans could not comprehend the intention of the Acehnese political elites, who not only emphasised military powers, but also economic relationships.

There are some similarities in the Ottoman State's disinvolvement from trade affairs during the expansion period in the Balkans, for instance, Ragusan in the Balkanian region, which was well known for its expanding to some other important towns, such as Nis, Skopje etc., a small but crucial in their trade with Western Europe near the Adriatic. However, the Ottomans did gain control over the trade activities in these towns, for which the Turks had neither the competence nor interest in (Coles, 1968: 111; Pinson, 2002: 31).²⁰ Besides, being directly involved in commercial activities either through state agencies or private companies is different from having certain control of trade routes.

Pertaining to the Indian Ocean context, Piri Reis explains in his book very briefly how the Portuguese obtained the rich commercial materials in the East (Piri Reis, 1988: 107). Based on the relevant data, it can be safely argued that the Ottomans did not have an effective entry into the Indian Ocean with the exception of their limited presence in the coastal areas of the Arabian Peninsula, and the Red Sea. This triggers the issue of whether the Ottomans had attempted to acquire information and knowledge about the Muslim or non-Muslim nations here, which were known to have cosmopolitan social structures through the voluntary commercial-based engagement of multiple nations from Eastern Africa up til the Archipelago.

On the other hand, the Europeans started to collect information about the eastern societies living in the regions bordering the Indian Ocean in the early centuries through various channels, such as translation works, travellers' notes, accounts of hajjis from various religious backgrounds, and so on.²¹ Further information was acquired through their own seamen, warriors/mercenaries, envoys, religious scholars, administrative staff, and others visiting distinct port cities in the late decades of the 15th century onwards.²² Nevertheless, the Ottoman

²⁰ Ragusan trade vessels replaced the ones belonging to the Venetian and Genoese because of the significant changes to the Mediterranean structure. These traders developed their activities and engagement even with the Constantinople and Levant port cities. For instance, the Ragusan owned "250 registered masters, and 5000 seamen in the port during the early 1580s, and 200 merchant vessels in operation" (Ibid.).

²¹ For detailed information (*See*: Yusuf, 1970, 148-161).

²² Although Immanuel Wallerstein asserts that the scholarly works in the field of history rose significantly in the 19th century, a determinative way to understand world history is the accumulation of information and knowledge about those colonised societies and regions, initiated by the initial travellers and missionary volunteers in the earlier centuries. This information and acknowledgement about those societies were gathered through various channels, such as translation works, travellers' notes, accounts of haj travellers, critical assessment from those of various religious backgrounds. The Europeans collected information about the eastern societies living adjacent to the Indian Ocean in the early centuries (Yusuf, 1970, 148-161). Further information was acquired through their own seamen, warriors, envoys, religious scholars, administrative staff, etc. visiting port cities from the late 15th century onwards. Since then, the Europeans set off for the seas of the world to reach various previously unknown geographies (Wallerstein, 1974, 325). In support of this, there was development in Europe where the "interest in maps was piqued by the copies of Ptolemy's Geography", which is the proof of the trigger for discoveries of distinct oceans (Pinto, 2016: 220).

naval force was responsible for general security of its borders, and protecting certain geo-strategic zones, including trade emporiums, and surrounding islands as well as regional and international trade activities.

However, the Indian Ocean engagement did not serve the territorial expansion as what had happened in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, or the islands in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. This seems to have caused an enormous portion of the military budget to be diverted to the navy in the East and Southern borders of the Ottoman State. Although there were relatively few significant war engagements, it can be safely argued that, in the course of time, financing the navy in the Indian Ocean would not have been sustainable for the Ottoman central administration.

Another comparison—for the purpose of seeing the reality of the navy structure—is related to the military engagement with the Safavids on the Eastern frontier.²³ The Ottomans' investment in these military expeditions was based on certain projections, such as i) the territorial domination in the East; ii) the productivity of the agrarian system in that geography; and iii) acquiring control of the established trade routes.²⁴ On the other hand, the Ottomans attempting to engage with the Portuguese in the Western part of the Indian Ocean was basically due to different novel reasons, and could not sustainably provide human and material support to the state's military and navy infrastructure.²⁵ For this reason, it is right to assert that the strong presence of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean caused a certain diversion in the official foreign policy of the Ottomans in terms of territorial expansion and the nature of war affairs.²⁶ Indeed, the Ottomans applied a fragmentary policy between the east and the west during this process. Nevertheless, the Ottomans' creative response to this challenge was very important to

²³ The profound claim for Khalifahship and their political propaganda resonated positively among the semi-nomadic Turkic tribes in East and Southeast Anatolia. Since 1501, the Safavids emerged as an ideological threat and political rival against the Ottomans under the reign of Syah Ismail (1502-1524) of the 16th century for the most part. However, the hostility between the states continued till mid-17th century (1639) (Power, Standen, 2002: 230; Coles, 1968: 66; Allouche, 1983: 3).

²⁴ The Ottomans' territorial hegemony was in the lands and seas, such as Suez and the Red Sea, containing crucial trade routes (Orhonlu, 1962: 3). The Eastern policy of the Ottomans reached a balance while the Ottomans and the Safavids had an agreement on the border issues in 1555 in Amasya (Allouche, 1983: 4).

²⁵ Although the Ottomans had provided human resource to the Mamluks to establish a navy (or to support the existing navy) since the late 15th century during the time of Bayezid II (1481-1512), the soldiers came from the inner parts of Anatolia that did not have any maritime experience. These human resources were basically for the purpose of direct engagement during expeditions. On the other hand, as elsewhere emphasised, the Ottoman land army was a major component of the state apparatus, who provided its own sources, and awarded various cadre of the army members through constant engagement with the enemies in Western frontiers, such as Bosnia in Balkania (Pinson, 2002: 36).

²⁶ The eastern policy of Selim I in terms of the territorial expansion via the wars with the Safavids was diverted to the southern part because of the alliance between the Safavids and the Mamluks. However, the presence of the Portuguese, and their growing threat, in the whole region must have been a contributing factor as well.

comprehend the dimensions of the ensuing centuries as well, since the Portuguese significantly disrupted the income gained from the constant and stable spice trade between the east and west.

IV. Inviting the Ottomans to the Indian Ocean theatre

The initiation of the Ottoman navy in the Western portion of the Indian Ocean was because of the submission of a letter via an envoy of Aceh from the Archipelago, which is considered the earliest document informing about the Malay world to the Ottoman court. This letter by Alaaddin Riayat Syah Al-Kahhar (1537-1571), third ruler of Aceh, discussed not only the potential military assistance from the Ottomans, but also beyond it—he emphasised the importance of having a political alliance through economic collaboration.²⁷ One can assert that the mentioned letter seems to have been written, or rewritten, by someone who certainly knew the diplomatic discourse at the Ottoman court. According to this rather dubious translation, Selim II had decided to bestow his assistance in a determined manner. On the other hand, the Ottoman navy, with a total of 17 vessels, which is the most quoted and referred to event by historians, was not directed to Sumatra Island. This narration is based on historical fact, which is reflected in the exact BOA sources in 1567, the Ottoman court received the Acehnese envoys who were sent by Alaaddin Riayat Syah Al-Kahhar in 1564 well, though the envoy spent nearly one-and-a-half years in İstanbul waiting to be accepted by the palace bureaucracy, and responded to the direct order of Sultan Selim II to send the navy in a short time (İnalçık, 1948: 350; Mühimme Defteri, 1995: 119, 120).²⁸ Although this preparation attempt for the navy was successful during the early years of Selim II (1567-1574), its voyage was not realised owing to the Zaidi Imam's riot in Yemen in the late 1560s (İnalçık, 1948: 350).²⁹

²⁷ This letter emerged by chance when Yakup Mughul, a Pakistani researcher, came across it when conducting his research activity in the Topkapı Palace library, which he then introduced to the larger audience. Even this simple story encourages us to have a critical approach towards the geographical conciousness of the court library staff, and contemporary Turkish librarians in the classification of manuscript sources.

²⁸ BOA, A.DVNSMHM.d.7.244. (15.Ra.975/17 September 1567). In fact, during the reign of Sultan II, the role of Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, the grandvizier, was very dominating. He is known as the mastermind behind the Ottoman eastern policy since the late years of Süleyman I the Lawgiver.

²⁹ Mühimme Defteri, 1995: 119, 120. BOA, A.DVNSMHM.7.233.975.Ra.13 (17 September 1567); BOA, A.DVNSMHM.d.7.616.975.C.29 (31 December 1567). (Note: If the response of Selim II was considered to be written sometime in 1569/1570, there must have been another ruler, say, Husain Syah (1571-1575/79) in Aceh court. However, there is no document proving that the correspondence continued between both courts during the reign of Hussain Syah. After a while, Selim II (1566-1574) lost his life, and was replaced by Murat III (1574-1595) in İstanbul.

Contrary to the idea of some researchers who refer to the war between the Ottoman State and the Portuguese in the Western Indian Ocean as ‘spice wars’, this competition over resources actually took place in the Eastern Indian Ocean, and the Archipelago.³⁰ However, the naval engagement between the two powers in the Western part of the ocean was quite crucial to protect enormous shipments of spice merchandise from various nations being transferred through the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean port cities, or to prevent the other state from doing so. In this context, the Ottomans took a lesser role in the international spice trade due to not being a bigger player in trade affairs. On the other hand, the main theatre of war was around the Straits of Malacca and beyond. Furthermore, the tendency of first, the Portuguese, then other newly emerging European trading and maritime nations, to reach the exact regions where the various types of spices were grown or largely traded proves this argument. Clearly, the war strategies of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam, with the contributions of the other Malay states or groups in the region, to a lesser or larger degree, was to challenge the territorial interference of the Portuguese in Malacca (Collis, 1949, 232; Dasgupta, 1962, 45-6; Tate, 1971, 234; Borschberg, 2004, 58). As mentioned above, among these efforts, was an envoy sent to Asia Minor, the farthest region in the West of the Muslim geography, mentioned by Braudel (1992, 389). At this point, it can be questioned what historical and contemporary developments caused Aceh to be able to become one of the greater sovereign states in the adjacent regions of the Indian Ocean just during the period of the second ruler.

The Ottoman State’s meddling in the developments in the Indian Ocean appears to be due to state policy during the reign of Selim I, and expansion of its territories up to Southern Arabia in 1517.³¹ On the other hand, there were some earlier references to the Ottoman military

³⁰ After a brief stagnation in 1515-1530s, the land spice route again recovered, and the Ottoman treasure had sustained revenue from these commercial transactions. This, and some other factors, prevented the Ottomans from developing a certain volition for direct engagement with the Muslim polities in the Archipelago, and from supporting any merchant groups working between the two geographies.

³¹ This silence is also valid for the voyages of two vessels from the Red Sea to Sumatra Island. When I was in Singapore in 2005, I paid a very short visit to Prof. Anthony Reid in NUS, Singapore and asked about the source(s) of these two vessels since he mentions them in one of his books. On the other hand, it can be inferred from İnalçık (2017: 108), pertaining to the letter(s) dictated by Sultan Selim II, that some Ottoman experts were sent to Aceh, and later on, a number of vessels were promised to be sent to North Sumatra, as asserted by Salih Özbaran, a prominent Turkish historian. Some years later, while I was visiting Özbaran in the autumn of 2018 in İzmir, I repeated this question to him, but did not get a satisfying answer.

presence, or their individual soldiers in Goa as argued by the Portuguese during the attack by Albuquerque on Goa on 28th February, 1510 (Danvers, 1966: 187-188).

This process, about which the Ottoman sources are still silent on till today, was considerably followed by the Northern Sumatran rulers for the purpose of religious and commercial relations. As argued by some sources, and the Acehnese themselves, referring to the reign of Selim I, the Aceh political leaders acknowledged the developments in Arabia, and were ready to accept the Ottoman khalifahship from early 1520 onwards (Azra, 1999: 53).³²

Although this early awareness of the Acehnese political elite is quite considerable, the response of the Ottoman court to the Acehnese suggestion of building an alliance bloc was quite suspicious. As observed in some sources, Aceh was pictured as having become “the natural easternmost partner of Ottoman Turkey” (Takeshi, Reid, 2015: 1), but it was quite difficult to incorporate this partnership into the Ottoman foreign affairs policies from the early 16th century onwards. However, although it has been argued that relations between the Ottomans and the Acehnese were initiated in the fourth decade of the 16th century, it has still yet to be corroborated by Ottoman sources themselves.³³ These references of Takeshi and Reid need to be revisited and evaluated critically.

Although the Ottomans invested in building their navy in the Red Sea and attempted to encounter the Portuguese maritime in the Western seas of the Indian Ocean, with the latter seas considered just a frontier to the larger scope of the Indian Ocean,³⁴ the Portuguese

³² The references of the Acehnese sources can also be found among the documents in the Ottoman archival library in İstanbul, which are in fact the letters sent by the Acehnese rulers in both the 16th and 19th centuries. On the other hand, it is right to state the presence of the Ottoman-bound seamen and captains playing certain roles independently in the Straits of Malacca. Among them is Murat Reis, who was mentioned by the Portuguese to be participating in an expedition against Johor in 1539 (Djajadiningrat, 1982/83: 32). Another reference to the presence of the Turks as mercenaries in 1539 is related to the Alaaddin Riayat Syah al-Kahhar’s expedition to Aru, which was “a fief of the Malaca house” (n.n., 1935: 77). In addition, the Portuguese sources reveal crucial information about the Ottoman and Aceh relations, stating that the Ottomans, during the reign of Süleyman I, sent military staff and equipment in the years 1538, 1548, and 1564 (Danvers, 1894: 380-381).

³³ A few sources mentioned by Takeshi and Reid (2015: 1, fn.1) were from Ottoman archived documents. However, the issue is that these documents were sent by the Acehnese political elite, and were repeated in the letter sent by Ibrahim Mansur Syah in the mid-19th century as well.

³⁴ The earlier Ottoman military presence happened indirectly, when the Mamluks requested armed groups from the Ottomans in 1515/1516 to face the formidable threat of the Portuguese. There were almost 2000 Ottoman soldiers mainly from Karaman in the Mamluk navy (Orhonlu, 1962: 5). Hadım Süleyman Pasha, who held the governorship of Egypt twice in the years 1525-1535, and 1537-1538, led the Ottoman navy against the Portuguese in Diu in June 1538. The earliest crucial military engagement between the Mamluks and the Portuguese happened in 1509. This engagement was inevitable since the presence of the Portuguese caused a disruption in the spice trade, in which the Mamluks were playing the intermediary role between the Indian Ocean traders, and the European buyers. While the Mamluks were preparing a navy in the Red Sea, they also received a high level of assistance from the Ottomans in the form of both human and material resources. Although the ambition of the Mamluks was high, the battle in front of Diu in 1509 was a total failure (“The Estado da India on the Subcontinent: Portuguese as Players on a South Asian Stage”: 194). Perhaps, the most important process in the Mamluk-

had already established their own ship-building factory in Cochin using long-standing wooden materials (Duncan 1997: 8).

In contrast to the above-mentioned narration, there were few vessels that seemed to have successfully reached Northern Sumatra, and that is celebrated by the metaphorical *lada secupak*. While some historians are ready to jump on this fact to prove the engagement of the Ottoman court in Indian Ocean policies, when and how these vessels set off from the Ottoman ports in the Red Sea has yet to be proven (İnalçık, 1948: 350; Uzunçarşılı, 1995: 400).³⁵ Although the voyage of these vessels is not known in detail, there was a hint in Münşeât mentioning that the Ottoman ruler had ordered that 5 cannon experts, and some relevant materials to be sent. However, the ensuing sentences in the same text expressed this deficiency, referring to the long distance (“Taht-El Raja Hakimi Alaaddin Tarafından İsdar Buyurulan Name-i Humayunun Sureti”: 550). From this discourse, it is understood that the Ottomans had sent some experts with the Acehese envoy to North Sumatra.

Around the turn of the 16th century, the Portuguese implemented a policy of trade with Indian and Arab seamen and traders having commercial activities in Indian ports, such as Goa, and others. According to this, unless the mentioned traders had an agreement with the Portuguese, they would face certain impositions and sanctions, including banning their licenses. During this period, although Süleyman the Magnificent intervened, and prevented the Portuguese from entering the Red Sea, the Ottomans’ engagement did not result in any success (Uzunçarşılı, n.d.: 31; Faroqhi, 1994: 488). This failure left the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam to struggle with the Portuguese alone in the Straits of Malacca (Faroqhi, 1994: 488).

Portuguese naval struggle took place in 1515. The Mamluk navy, consisting of 8 galleys, 3 galleys and 2 small ships called the register, under the command of Selman Reis, and his assistant Yeşbek, first went to Jeddah, and then to Kamaran. After Sultan Amir’s negative response to the Yemeni ruler’s call for support, the Mamluks decided to invade Yemen. He recognised Luhayya Sultan al-Gavri (1516), one of the emirates in the region. It is noteworthy that Emir Hüseyin participated in this expedition. In addition, 1000 soldiers of the Ottoman sultan (*Sultan al-Rum*, a term used by the Yemeni historian Abu Mahreme) were also in the navy (Orhonlu, 1962: 5; Mughul, 1967: 40).

³⁵ The issue of these vessels occupied my inquiry significantly. For that purpose, in addition to the aforementioned brief conversation with Reid and Özbaran, I found an opportunity to talk with the head of the Maritime Library in Beşiktaş sometime in 2006. When I questioned him on whether the mentioned two vessels had really been sent out, and about the conditions that the Ottoman authorities had initiated this expedition, the head of this navy archival library responded that, when the Ottoman navy used to set off on any expedition there were at least six vessels. This response from a professional navy commander who was familiar enough with the history of the Ottoman navy shows that the idea developed on the two-vessel discourse needs to be critically approached. Besides, it also implicitly proves that the researchers have to find out the real conditions of this expedition.

V. Partaking in a new epistemology

The disinterest among academics to research historical relationships was noticed in the mid-20th century in Turkey. Turkish academia did not have any institutional engagements to comprehend the Malay world. Some circles would probably highlight socio-political realities then, which were considered as crucial problems in domestic politics, and the changing geopolitical structure regionally and globally. A part of this disinterest is believed to be the epistemological basis of the founding fathers of the Republic from the historical past to provide fundamental sources to the new state. However, the interests of the new Republican authorities, and the policies for the past relations, which are assumed to have been selectively determined, do not seem to have any relevance to the Southeast Asian communities, and the Malay Archipelago.³⁶ The Association of Turkish History, founded by Mustafa Kemal in 1931, was given a certain direction in research activities, which was to revive the pre-Islamic Turkish past. This inclination is defined by the author as ‘the Republican orthodoxy’, which has resonated in the works of the historians in the ensuing decades.

Mustafa Kemal’s very first decision was to translate the book by H. G. Wells to the Turkish language. It is quite interesting that this book by Wells, who was professionally a biologist, was written in line with the Darwinian evolutionary theory (İnan, 1974: 12; Toprak, 2017), which no doubt resonates with the fundamental thought of the new state.³⁷ What the founding fathers assumed from the publication of this book was that it disseminated the idea of evolutionary changes in a nation’s life, and Mustafa Kemal probably personally attempted to apply the socio-political changes initiated by the Ottomans to the young Republic. The relationship between the nation-state’s policy of history and academia seems to be well-connected. While the teaching and understanding of history has an affirmative bias to European culture and Enlightenment thoughts, academia has a so-called natural inclination to search for historical relations with that particular geography and those nations. This early attempt to frame the direction of historical studies is, in fact, a turning point to determine the scope of research activities for the coming decades. Obviously, the ideological assumptions have been very strong, causing a certain divisions to emerge as observed in the form of an ideological fight

³⁶ There seems to be a contradiction between the Ottomans’ and the Republicans’ stance on having an epistemology. This is because, in the context of the engagement process in the developments in the Indian Ocean, the Ottomans did not put forth an epistemological perspective, while on the other hand, the Republicans determinatively developed an epistemological stance.

³⁷ Kafesoğlu (2014: 238) argues that many historical works written in the first quarter of the Republican era were aligned to the ‘didactic method’ which “led to a certain chauvanism in national history.”

among the members and sympathisers of laic/secular, and conservative factions (Suraiya, 1992: 3, 12). The very basis of this policy points to a statement by Immanuel Wallerstein (2004: 7) about how the historians in Western European countries focus only on studying their own respective nations in the 19th century because of the emerging awareness of belonging to a nation. One can assert that, from their policy of history, the Republican leadership was following the ideological steps of the European countries.

As another venture for the reinvention of the past during the 1950s, Eberhard's book, entitled '*A History of The Far East*' was translated into the Turkish language³⁸, and published by the *Association of Turkish History* in 1957. It can be argued that this institution considered this publication to be valuable because of its relation to the Far East. It might have been assumed that the book would contribute to understanding the early presence of the Turkic nations in Central Asia, and their engagements with Far Eastern nations such as the Chinese. This policy of engagement with Central Asia is no doubt based on the determination of Mustafa Kemal for the cosmological root of the newly established republican state.³⁹ Although he was not a pan-Turkist, Ziya Gökalp, who was Mustafa Kemal's policy advisor in socio-cultural affairs, seems to have formatively contributed to the establishment of a nationalist cosmology (Yıldırım, 2013: 146).

VI. Conclusion

The growing interest in the relationships between the Ottoman and the general Malay world relationship in the last four centuries deserves to be critically evaluated. At the beginning of this century, in particular, the natural disaster in the Indian Ocean was a triggering point for Turkish academicians, civil organisations, and state departments along with the renewal of Ottomanism, to revisit the so-called well established historical relationships. It is suggested that this process be called 'renewalism'. Indeed, this process has gained pace, and seems largely functional in reacting to the domestic political differentiation in Turkey.

In this context, this treatise is a preliminary work that in principle scrutinises two distinct but related areas. The first is the epistemological perspectives that were adopted and sustained

³⁸ This book was published originally in 1941.

³⁹ Nonetheless, the book includes some information about Southeast Asian nations, such as Burma, and the Malay world. For instance, the passages which summarised the narration on the Malay world emphasises the Sultanate of Malacca, and the establishments of city states such as Perak and Aceh in the late period. The original publication of this book was in just the beginning of the 1940s (Eberhard, 1957: 313, 316). The Malay Archipelago was taken into consideration very summarily. As such, this huge geography was explained only in pages 313-346 with the subtitles of Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Philippines (Eberhard, 1957: ix).

by the Ottoman bureaucratic circles and intellectuals along the engagements with the Archipelago throughout the centuries. The second is the contemporary research that has developed logical epistemological lenses with which to look at past relations between the Ottomans and the general Malay world. Beyond some other technical issues, as argued by Faroqhi (1992: 3, 12), this certain domestic political polarisation is reflected onto the academic world. However, because of obvious limitations, this paper is unable to address all relevant aspects. Nevertheless, the general perspective here already exists for further discussion. Since it is fundamentally important, certain primary data is focused on analytically, which resonates significantly with the historiography of the Ottomans. These sources contain the works of those such as Feridun Bey Münşeati, Mühimme Defteri, Piri Reis, as well as BOA documents, and others.

Since the beginning of the current century, the existing relationships between the Ottomans and the Malay polities have been documented significantly. However, single events have been considered as subjects by some researchers, mostly historians, who do not seem to have developed any paradigmatic stance in reinterpreting the past relationships. This is, in fact, the central problem of dealing with the relationships between the Ottomans, and the Malay world. The suggestion here is that studies on the Ottomans and general Malay world must focus on a *longue durée* perspective to enhance clear epistemological points of view. In addition, interdisciplinary and methodological renewal is a must to arrive at an accurate, comprehensive, and critical historical understanding.

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