

# **The Problem of ‘Historical Epistimology’ in Ottoman Malay-World Relations**

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# Few sources

## • **Münşeât (16th century)**

- "Taht-El Raja Hakimi Alaaddin Tarafından isdar Buyurulan Name-i Humayunun Sureti," p. 550, *Mecmua-i Münşeât Feridun Bey*, (991/1583), Cild-i Sani, Reprint, Rabi'ul Akhir 1274, İSAM (İslamic Research Center Library, İstanbul).
- Ziya, Mehmed. (1312 / 1893/1894). *Alem-i İslamiyet: Açe Tarihçesi*, (Tr.), Konstantiniyye: Malumat Kütüphanesi.

## • **Sebilürreşad (20th century)**

- Tefkik Fikret. (1330 / 1912). "Hint Yolunda" (13). Hıta-i Irakiyye Umur-u Zaraiyesi Nasıl İhya ve İslah olunur?, *Sebilürreşad*, Mekatib, (Hindistan Muhabir-i Mahsusamızdan) -1-, Adedi: 213-34. s. 154.

# Difficult task: *Diskusi- Mau atau tidak mau?*

- The subject matter we will deal today is not an easy one. There are multiple dichotomies, contradictions about the presence of the Ottomans in the Indian Ocean and their relationships with the general Malay nations/states in the region.
- While we are talking about the Ottomans, mostly the writers lost the orientation and are prone to lean on the aura of the superiority narration of the Ottomans. But there is also the reality that once the Ottomans were present in the adjunct regions of the Indian Ocean, they were also closing to the era of stagnation as well.

# Today's mistake or unfinished job of the historians

- **March Bloch:**

- “Misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past.» (Macfarlane, 1).

«... It is **human consciousness** which is the subject matter of history.»

# Content

- The subject is between historical research and philosophy of science (Açıkgenç, 2018)
- ‘Foundation’ problem in study of history
  - In the case of the Ottoman and the general Malay World
- Uzunçarşılı-İnalçık-Özbaran-Gökyay-Kafesoğlu
- The theme of ‘Ottoman maritime power’
- General books of history of Islam (general or detailed information about the Archipelago (Indian Ocean))
- Domestic ideological disputes (National/Institutional)
- Defending «safety zones» (Individual)
- Need integration with novel/alternative thoughts (Özbaran&Others)

# knowledge production via study of history

- **Concepts «borrowed» from the discussion of *history of philosophical epistemology***
- «object of knowledge based on historical conditions»
- historical research
- i) on socio-historical phenomena
- ii) philosophy of science
- Epistemology (historical epistemology)
- Geographical consciousness; political (economic) awareness; foundation of knowledge; knowledge activities etc. (Açıkgenç, 2018)

# Fundamental problem

(need for sound epistemology in history studies)

- «consistency problem»
- «...center-periphery perspective that still persists among scholars working on this topic...»
- «Superiority/inferiority...» (Özay, 2022)
- Universal sovereignty

## Fundamental problem: *narration & fictionalization*

- The only point where this type of historiography, called the *narration* going back to Herodotus (d. 425 BC), differed from the *fairy tale*, was the mention of **time and place** in the events described...
- “... The lack of narrative historiography has created the method called **Instructive** (*Pragmatic*) historiography.



# History studies: An overview

- Chronologic & narrative forms (back to *Heredot* d. 425 BC)
- ... Taberi (d. 932), İbnü'l Kathir (d. 1231) etc. are the representatives / members of this school.
- ... Mesudi (d. 997) and İbn Miskeveyh (d. 1029) tried to attempt to overcome the obstacles of this method.
- Philosopher of history/sociologist (or probably better to call him a philosopher of history (d. 1406) could not be escaped from this trap of narrative style (Kutlu, 2004: 53).
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- Reactions of some Turkish social scientists to the study of history

# History studies in Turkey

- «... In the first 15-20 years of the Republic, many works were written within the framework of **didactic historiography**.
- However, it is certain that the didactic method has some disadvantages in terms of *historiography*.
- It leads to an unnecessary contemplation, especially to a *certain chauvinism* in national history bets.» (Kafesoğlu, 2014: 238).

# Understanding of history and historiography

- «... in history writings there have been no consistent efforts to arrive truth and consciousness in the historical stages/periods...
- ... '*imagination*' is encountered rather than '**truth**', and a kind of 'literature' emerges.” (Kadri, 2018: 77)

# Continues...

- «... why our histories are often written incorrectly or incompletely and we are compelled to **refer to foreign sources** even about the most recent events...»
- «... It is because our individuals, who have witnessed historical developments, even themselves have been actors of these events, are **not** in the habit of keeping their memories day by day, **noting** the cases and then **collecting** them and **publishing** them.“ (Güventürk, 1962: 3)

## Continues...

- «... no significant university department or *research center* within present-day Turkey has been established to look into regions where the Ottomans had had enduring relationships in the past.» (Özbaran, 2001: 65).

# Traps in knowledge production

- «Until recently, Ottoman–Malay relations have been viewed by Turkish historians as an *insignificant topic* and approached from the lenses of a *domestic ideological fight* between the *laic/secular and conservative factions* (Faruqi, 1992, 3, 12).

## «Safety Zone»

- «... an indelible enduring intrinsic peculiarity of these academic circles must be present for them not to leave their safety zones...»
- -serving for political purposes & gaining a short-term fame in the eyes of the latter.
- -having a popularity in mainstream media (*Gönül Coğrafyası*)



- **How did the Ottomans perceive the Malay world & produce knowledge?**

# The issue of «Universal sovereignty»

- “... Ottoman claims to **universal sovereignty** and the simultaneous rise of geographical consciousness among the 16th century Ottoman literati, politicians, and image makers...»
- The practical reason of this issue emerged aligned with the power competition in the Mediterranean»
- The Ottoman navy won the war against the Venice (allied with the Spanish monarchy) in 1538 which was the result of rivalry for universal hegemony» (Libby, 1978: 103).

# Universalization issue

- Ali Ekber Khitayi's work... (1516)
- This statement is related to the work of Khitayi's work upon China produced in 1516. The same year (1517) the Ottomans expanded its territory in the Southern region till Hijaz, had a border to the Indian Ocean. Although the China entered in the radar of the Ottoman bureuracratic elite, we could not see any crucial works upon the Indian Ocean.

# The issue of the Ottomans and ‘geographical consciousness’

- The question is what place the Indian Ocean occupied in the Ottoman political mind.
- «... no established sustainable institutionalized networks on an eco-political basis.»

# Geographical Consciousness

- A crucial question needs to be asked whether it is possible or not without any *consciousness* of the wider seaways such as the **Indian Ocean** during the 16th century onwards (at least aligned with the *expansioning period* of the Western European maritime nations)
- Any action in the form of «geographical society»

# Geographical borders & consciousness

- «... Geographical works redefined the boundaries of the inhabited world in the early modern period... (Emiralioglu, 2012: 163).
- This is related to geographical consciousness. With the relevancy of the **Acehnese envoys** send by the Aceh court to Istanbul (1562?-1567?) (Azra, 1999: 53) is no doubt an implicit venture to open a new geographical vision for the Ottoman bureaucracy.

# Political consciousness and preparedness

- **Bloch**: «... It is **human consciousness** which is the subject matter of history.»
- For states, consciousness is inevitable phenomenon. **Geographical consciousness** is the initial stage of the network/connectivity/relationship.

# Classical works and enrichment of Ottoman geography knowledge!

- What the Ottoman bureaucratic elite and/or intellectuals knew about the following works before initiation of their maritime engagement to the Indian Ocean:
- Marco Polo, (1295)
- Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Batuta (1344-45)
- Ludovico di Varthema (1503-08)
- Odoric of Pardonone (1320-30)
- Athanasius Nikitin (1466-1472)



# Dichotomy: military power and/or commercial interest

- “While the **inadequacy of commercial activities** in the shadow of the navy constitutes an issue that historians mostly accept and agree on, it casts doubt on the idea that the Ottomans created a naval empire.” (Özbaran 2007: 49).

## General books of history of Islam and the Archipelago & Indian Ocean

- **A fundamental statement:**
- «The Ottoman State's engagement with littoral states in the Indian Ocean has been a subject of lesser discussion in general Ottoman history»
- **Dynamic relations but 'Dissonance':**
- «... the *dynamic* relationship between the Ottoman state and Malay polities while noting the *dissonance* that occurred in the process.»

- “.... We have very limited information on the number of the Ottoman Empire's naval power in the Indian Ocean and the salaries they received. The *mevacib* (*stipends*) and accounting books preserved both in Topkapı Palace and in the BOA in Istanbul contain some illuminating information about the permanent naval power of the Ottomans on the ocean line (Özbaran, 2013: 274).

# The year 1600 and Ottoman maritime power in *Basra*

- ... the number of troops in Basra in 1600.
- 734 volunteers (not experienced in shipping)
- 610 merdans,
- 429 azeb and other officials in the castles.
- These numbers reflect how weak the Ottomans were when compared to actual naval forces on the Persian Gulf. A comparison with land forces or, for example, naval power in the Red Sea will show the Ottomans' deficit in Ocean navigation.

## Continues...

- The second table, which reflects the salaries of permanent naval forces, includes annual expenditures, it is clear (Özbaran, 2013: 274-5). *how limited they are compared to ground troops*

# Problem:

- The established Ottoman maritime in the Mediterranean is suggested as a measure to resonate its presence in the Red Sea (say, Indian Ocean). / **Not reflecting much of the reality**
- The maritime issues including human resources, material infrastructure, climate and sea characteristics (*moonsoon* etc.) are totally distinct between these two seaways.

# Imbalances

- «... to redress this imbalance by re-evaluating the time period»
  - Imbalance occurs in searching the sources / political mindedness / religious attachment etc. in the context of Malay polities (societies)
- Historians who have utilized these sources have been observed to tend to evaluate these *superficially*.
- They aggrandize the mighty power of the Ottomans and *downplay the agency* of the Malay polities

# A new way of study (but old concerns!)

- epistemological perspective:
- «normative questions to do with the nature of knowledge»
- Problem:
- «‘historical epistemology’, has begun to explore the means by which, and the historical conditions under which, structures of knowledge emerge and take shape over time.»



# Critique

- Critique of reasonability of Turkish academia in their knowledge production
- What we mean by critique: the word "*critique*." Instead of referring to the practice of passing harsh judgment, "critique" here relates to the practice of evaluating, understanding and explaining complex problems (Arkoun)

# Some Suggestions or Principals:

- **i) Comparison**
- **ii) Multidisciplinary** (“Working on the borders of the disciplines”)
- **iii) Assemble** materials then **iv) generalize** and **v) organize**
  - -each historical problem there is a unique type of document with a specific sort of use.
  - -the deeper the research, the more the light of the evidence must converge from sources of many different kinds,
  - -to neglect to organize rationally raw material is only to **deny history itself’ (Bloch) (Macfarlane, 2)**

Thank You!

