

JAMBI: AN UNKNOWN PLACE OR LOST MEMORY IN OTTOMAN POLITICAL MIND?

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Abstract

The period commencing from 1850s onwards witnessed drastic changes caused by internal and external factors both in the Ottoman state and the Sultanate of Jambi, a Malay political entity in the eastern part of Sumatra Island. Furthermore, the latter's demands of political recognition and collaboration failed to see significant fruit as reflected by the entrenching colonial invasion, while on the other hand, the Ottoman decline contributed to the failure of relevant recognition of Jambi's sovereignty and geographical reality. This paper analyses Ottoman conception of the geographical identification and definition of, in particular, Jambi and in general northern and eastern Sumatra Island in the second part of the 19th century. And it seeks some insight to elaborate some documents talking about a political issue between the Ottoman State and the Sultanate of Jambi. The striking point is that though the regional polities had earlier corresponded with the Ottoman court, the officials of the latter referred inconsistently to some particular places in Sumatra Island in the documents with names distinct from each other. The question is whether the Ottoman political mind devoted time and energy to critically examine the authenticity of the mentioned documents. Based on the relevant archival documents, the paper comparatively examines the geographical references distinctively mentioned in correspondences in both Arabic texts and translated forms in the Ottoman language. The confusing geographical definitions can be observed as a reflection of how the Ottoman bureaucracy unsustainably handled diplomatic issues which might have potentially been misleading representations of Malay geography. Relying on correspondences between the Sultanate of Jambi and the Ottoman State, for a period of 40 years commencing from 1860s to 1903, kept in the Ottoman archive, it is expected that this paper will draw attention, though an alternative view point on the Ottoman bureaucratic knowledge on Islamic geography in the Island of Sumatra.

Keywords: Jambi, Aceh, Ottoman, Malay world, Southeast Asia

Introduction

This article focuses on particular correspondences dealing with geographical references and their connotations for both the Ottomans and at least some Malay rulers from the Island of Sumatra.¹ For that purpose, this paper shall take into consideration a series of correspondences between the Sultanate of Jambi and the Ottoman court in the late decades of the 19th century. When I came across a manuscript with the help of a friend, related to the correspondences between Sultan Taha (1855-1904) the ruler of Jambi and the Constantinople government, an interest occurred in me about the authentic information supplied in the text.² The mentioned manuscript is kept under the code number İ.HR.173.9431, classified under *Hariciyye Nezareti* (Foreign Affairs Department) relations in Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA).

A concern rises about the content of the document which is relevant to geographical descriptions and sovereignty of different polities such as, Jambi, and the Eastern part of Aceh in northern tip of Sumatra Island. It appears that the document is potentially misleading regarding the geographical facts and political relations between distinct Malay polities in the relevant decades in the 19th century in Sumatra Island. And since a clarification is needed, this paper intends to briefly scrutinize the relevant documents in a comparative way. It is important, because the geographical names of the places in Sumatra Island are written differently from each other in a series of texts, where it might be argued that it is not just a technical mistake by the staff in *Hariciyye Nezareti* of the Ottoman government.

Although the Ottoman State had relatively less direct political interactions with the Malay polities in Sumatra Island, this region was known to the European capital cities, and became visible enough owing to the colonialization process, which was highlighted in various publications such as newspapers, books, travelogues

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¹ The ruling families in the polities in this island were interconnected through marriages commencing from the early centuries. This relation is known to have expanded across the Straits of Malacca as well. See: Langenberg M. Van. (1977), "North Sumatra Under Dutch Colonial Rule: Aspects of Structural Change," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*, Vol. 11, p. 83.

² Zainuddin, R; Yuhadi, M; As, Bachtiar. (1981). *Sejarah Kebangkitan Nasional Daerah Jambi 1900-1942*, Jakarta: Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah, Pusat Penelitian Sejarah dan Budaya, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, p. 29.

etc. Besides, since the Malay Muslims gave importance to religious rituals they paid regular visits to the Sacred Lands of Islam both for the purpose of hajj and attaining religious studies in an increasing number, in particular, throughout the 19th century. There is also a probability that the written mistakes might have occurred because of the origin of sources. Hence, it encountered a similar inaccuracy in some other texts referring to a place called 'zambik' in Sumatra. Though there is no other reference in the text to 'zambik' or Sumatra,³ an almost similar name, say, *zhanbi* is used to refer to Jambi according to the envoys sent by the ruler to the Chinese court earlier.⁴

It is assumed that the Ottoman Hariciyye should have had familiarity with the mentioned geography. As such, the direct correspondences and envoys from the Sultanate of Aceh starting from the second part of the 16th century (1567) and in the middle of the 19th century (1849-50) to *Bab-ı Ali*, the Ottoman foreign affairs bureaucracy seem to have not standardized usages and geographical definitions for the various names referring to the places in Sumatra Island. And it is understood that this basic failure appears in the correspondences with the Sultanate of Jambi as well.

Gaining Recognition Through the Ottoman Power

Jambi is located in eastern Sumatra facing the Straits of Malacca and is adjacent to Palembang Sultanate, down the southern border. It was regarded as the "remnant of the former Kingdom of Minangkabau" which was annihilated by the Dutch colonial forces in early stages of the colonialism.⁵ In fact, Jambi and Minangkabau had a strong alliance during the second part of the 17th century when the Dutch colonial forces pushed forward for territorial subjugation of the region.⁶ Here I ought to emphasize in brief the importance of the correspondence. Otherwise, the spelling mistakes and geographical references may be presumed to be dismissible by some.

In particular, regional Malay polities tried to acquire political legitimacy through the Ottoman power by sending envoys to demand *nişan* and *sancak*. Since these items were not considered as mere souvereign from a palace to the other. Instead these items exchanged between hegemonic and vassal states connote that the latter's requiring some symbolic items from the former, which are the signs later on believed to be evolved as semi-magical and supernatural definition. This was a common practice in the Archipelago, and it had happened throughout the centuries between Malay polities and Chinese courts, and later again Malay polities and Siam palace. Another sample based on the practice of Jambi can be mentioned in the context of acquiring of an Orang Kaya Hitam "a magic keris, two spears and a sword".⁷

The sending of envoys in the second part of the 19th century was regarded as a compulsory attempt owing to the gradually increasing political power and territorial expansion of the Dutch colonial rule which was considered as a total collision of the traditional Malay ruling courts. As is explained briefly above, the correspondence was done at the request of the Jambi ruler from the Ottoman State in order to endow a *nişan* and a *sancak* which were credited symbolically as proof of a political alliance between two polities. It is not known whether these two symbols were finally gifted to the envoys.

It is observed that this was quite a regular demands from the regional polities and it was realized by the Jambi court in the second part of the 1850s for the very first time in the aspect of its attempt to politically be aligned with the Ottoman. But it is known that the delegation failed to return with legitimate protectorate status. On the other hand, the Ottoman symbolic presents were deemed crucial as legitimation of the Malay rulers such as Minangkabau.⁸

Though the name of sultanate and the political elite of the dynasty could not survive unless they attempted to physically challenge the Dutch rule, the new and/or renewed treaties would no doubt cause more negative consequences on the native rulers. Since these disadvantageous treaties caused not only tangible but also intangible losses to the native rulers in their sovereign lands and their relations with the elite circles and folks as well. And this situation happened once Taha, the son of Sultan Facharuddin wished to be appointed and

³ BOA, Y.EE.58.11. (6 Rabi'ul Akhir 1327 / 27 April 1909).

⁴ Miksic, John. (2015). "Kerinci and the Ancient History of Jambi", *A 14th Century Malay Code of Laws: The Nitisarasamuccaya*, (ed.), Uli Kozok, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, pp. 25, 26.

⁵ "Netherlands Indian News", *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 28 December 1878, p. 4.

⁶ Well, J. Kathirithamby. (1993). "Hulu-hilir Unity and Conflict: Malay Statecraft in East Sumatra before the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Archipel* 45, Paris, p. 84.

⁷ Kukushkin, Sergei. (2004). "Hikayat Negeri Jambi: The Structure and Sources of A Nineteenth Century Malay Historical Work", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 32, No. 92, (March), p. 54; Miksic, Ibid, p. 29.

⁸ Hamka. (1997). *Sejarah Umat Islam*, (Edisi Baru), Cetakan Kedua, Singapura: Pustaka Nasional Pte. Ltd., p. 551.

recognized by the Dutch rule in 1855. And in a few years, 1858/1859,⁹ the new impositions of the colonial rule upon the young Taha caused armed invasion into the territory of Jambi. And this process forced Sultan Taha to send As-Sayyid Syarif Ali bin Alawi bin Hasan al Jufri al Alawi as his envoy to Constantinople in 1860 to gain a political alliance by requesting a 'nişan' and a 'flag' from the Ottoman court.¹⁰

As seen above, although the Dutch expansion started from 1830, the political elite of the Sultanate of Jambi were able to initiate a strategic move to seek a 'strong' political alliance only after almost three decades. And it is also important to ask why the Jambi court approached Constantinople at this specific time. The reason behind it is related to the territorial penetration of the Dutch colonial rule which had increased over time, especially after London Treaty (1824) signed between the Dutch and the British. This treaty served as a point to separate larger Malay territories as northern and southern geographical spheres taking the Malacca Straits as the center between the British and the Dutch colonial rules. Following this treaty, the Dutch forces initiated military aggression from South to North in Sumatra Island including Jambi region.¹¹

Taha Sayfuddin: Deposed but Still Ambitious

Jambi attracted interests of both the British and the Dutch, because of its geo-strategic location, in particular, lower Jambi adjacent to the Straits of Malacca. When there occurred conflicts of interest with the British in Malaya in terms of commercial activities through the Straits of Malacca, the Dutch intended to have an increased control upon this Sultanate, not allowing it to be an independent political entity.¹² And this Sultanate inescapably became a target for the Dutch colonial government in the middle of the 19th century on the basis of the 'reluctant' expansion policies which emerged either incidentally or were targeted by the Dutch officers working in the region.¹³ Once the colonial rulers in Batavia, the capital city of the Dutch colonial rule in the Archipelago, took initiatives to establish political and territorial expansion for various reasons, such as the individual ambitions of local Dutch rulers or some movements emerged in the form of religious awareness to be against the foreign rule, the Dutch did not hesitate to try its political and even military hegemony against the potential rival polities.¹⁴

This expansion design was conducted in parallel with the increasing trade opportunities with native states, and rivalries with other European colonial attempts to control free trade in the region. Such is witnessed in the documents in order of the correspondences exchanged between the Jambi ruler and the Ottoman government around 1860s during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid.¹⁵ It is observed that the process started with the intentional approach of Johannes Van den Bosch, the Governor General of the Dutch rule in Batavia. As a common practice, the relevant trade treaties were penned down majorily in favor of the colonial state. And of course, the grievences could instigate and aggravate the tension between the local ruler circles and the colonialists. As a result of this structure, Sultan Facharudin, then the sultan of Jambi, had no choice beyond signing a contract with the Dutch rule in 1833.¹⁶

Just a few years after the turn of the half of the century, the Dutch forces worked their influences in the area of Jambi Sultanate and deposed young Sultan Taha Sayfuddin Ibn Muhammed Facharuddin in 1858. As observed in some other parts of the Archipelago, the Sultan still exercised his control upon his people, that is to say, the Jambi folk mostly remained obedient to their ruler, though foreign rule was established in the political center. Hence, this mutual relationship between the ruler and the ruled put the Dutch influence in limited territory of the major ruling town of Jambi, in the lower part of the territory, at least till the beginning of the new century, when

⁹ "Local and General", *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 17 April 1886, p. 2; Zainuddin, et. al, *ibid*, p. 273.

¹⁰ BOA, I.HR.173.9431.6.1. (H. 4 Jamazi' al Akhir 1276 / 29 December 1859).

¹¹ "Local and General", *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 17 April 1886, p. 2; Basri, Fawzi; Haron, Hasrom. (1978). *Sejarah Johor Moden: 1855-1940: Satu Perbincangan Dari Pelbagai Aspek*, Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Museum Semenanjung Malaysia, p. 1.

¹² After Sri Vijaya Kingdom (7th-11th centuries) gained the territorial hegemony in the lands of Jambi, it was able to control both sides of the Malacca Straits and of course trade opportunities became under its influence. See: Cowan, C. D. (1968). "Continuity and Change in the International History of Maritime South East Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Mar.), p. 2.

¹³ In particular, Van den Bosch as general commissioner initiated territorial expansion in both east and West directions of Sumatra Island, which were in the subject of active trade between materially rich interior and coastal area connected various riverine system. See: Rachman, Lukman; Hajar, Zaituni; Munawir, M. Nazir. (1992-1993). *Sejarah Perlawanan Terhadap Kolonialisme dan Imperialisme di Jambi*, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, p. 22.

¹⁴ Lochter-Scholten, Elsbeth. (1994). "Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate"; *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March), p. 96.

¹⁵ This correspondence happened in 1857.

¹⁶ Lochter-Scholten, Elsbeth. (1993). "Rivals and Rituals in Jambi, South Sumatra (1859-1901)", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (July), p. 575.

the discovery of oil mostly encouraged the Dutch to invest significantly through various investors' settlements in the region.¹⁷

It is rightly assumed that Jambi Sultanate was the initial target of the Dutch colonial expansion in Sumatra Island commencing from the early decades of the 19th century. However, it is understood that the Sultanate or Taha, the strong ruler of the sultanate, did not admit to the surrender, but instead challenged the Dutch hegemony to using various approaches.¹⁸ The last Jambi envoy was forced to return back after receiving the news from Sumatra that Sultan Taha was killed in 1904 during a Dutch attack due to the ambitious intention for whole subjugation of the region where the oil was found.¹⁹

As observed in various sultanates in the Archipelago, the Dutch intervened in the affairs of legitimate rulers of the native states forcefully or by converting the power house into a weak political entity. In both ways, the political establishments could not continue their authority either in their own specific legitimate territory or in their relations with adjacent regions.²⁰ I cannot say that Jambi envoy's visit to Constantinople was the result of an instinctive deed of Taha, the Sultan of Jambi, thinking about the relation between the founder of his own state and the related Turkic background on the basis of *Hikayat Negeri Jambi*.²¹ Hence, it is known that Taha is recognized as the last sovereign sultan of Jambi Sultanate, just before the military invasion of the Dutch colonial rule in his territory.

He was seeking for political sovereignty by sending a sayyid to the Ottoman court to recognize him. What Taha did at that period can be seen as a last attempt from among the various Islamic polities, some of which had already surrendered to the Dutch and some of them waiting soon to be invaded in the adjacent territories to colonial rule. The political intention of the Jambi ruler was to address the Ottoman government on his and his land's condition in order to attain backup of his political power.²²

One can ask rightfully why Sultan Taha attempted to send an envoy to Constantinople. This is a quite interesting and crucial issue, since neither his father Facharuddin nor his uncle, who ruled before him, initiated any move to find a political alliance against the Dutch. One can discuss about his action to seek an international alliance against the colonial invasion. One of these is relevant to his family relations. In this context, he seems to have been well informed about the Ottoman State through his mother being an Arab and her family circles. One reflection of this relation to Arab communities or sayyid families in the region is that Sultan Taha ordered a sayyid named Sayyid Ali bin Sayyid Ali al Jufri as his envoy, as mentioned clearly in the archive documents. On the other hand, one can assert that Taha was encouraged by the significant support of his own people which no doubt made him politically powerful enough to send an envoy to Constantinople.²³

We may assert another argument that Sultan Taha knew about the attempts of the Aceh sultans, since it is noticeable that the regional Muslim polities had communication through various agencies to some extent, for instance, the latest one among whom was Mansur Syah, sending envoys to Constantinople for the purpose of engaging politically to save their lands against the Dutch incursion.

A Bureaucracy between Literal and Political Alineations

The relevant document under observation talks about about 'Canbi' (كانبي)²⁴ or 'Cambi' (جامبي),²⁵ a sultanate in the eastern coast of Sumatra Island, as implied in the text. Notwithstanding, the document mentions the word *Aşya*

¹⁷ "From the Daily Times", -21st December. Netherlands Indian News-, *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 28 December 1878, p. 4; Touwen, Jeroen. (2001). *Extremes in the Archipelago: Trade and Economic Development in the Outer Islands of Indonesia, 1900-1942*, Leiden: KITLV, p. 148; I.H.R.173.9431.2.1. (Note: Facharuddin, the father of Taha ruled the Sultanate the years between 1826-1833. (Rachman, et al., 1982/1983, p. 22.)

¹⁸ For the continuous war led by Sultan Taha caused grave disturbances both the Dutch rule and the European residents. See: "Netherlands Indian News", *The Straits Times*, Weekly Issue Vol XLI, Saturday, 14 November 1885, No. 3340, p. 11; "Netherlands Indian News", *The Straits Times*, Weekly Issue Vol XLI, Saturday, 21 November 1885, No. 3341, p. 12; Lochter-Scholten, Elsbeth. 1994, *ibid*, 102; Lochter-Scholten, 1993, *ibid*, 574.

¹⁹ Touwen, *ibid*, p. 148.

²⁰ Lee, Edwin. (1991). *The British As Rulers: Governin Multiracial Singapore: 1867-1914*, Singapore: Singapore National University Press.

²¹ "Local and General", *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 17 April 1886, pp. 3-4.

²² This issue is also highlighted in different aspect in particular referring to Turks during the early Islamization process in 15th century in some dissertations conducted at Jambi Province, arguing that the late 15th century Islamization process initiated by a Turkic trader who is asserted to be descendant of a Turkish ruler. See: Rachman. et al., 1982/1983, pp. 7, 20).

²³ It is assumed that Sultan Taha Saifuddin was among the wealthy elite, since Highland Jambi where he became self-exiled, was known as a important source of gold until the end of the 19th century. See: Znoj, Heinzpeter. (1998). "Sons versus Nephews: A Highland Jambi Alliance at War with the British East India Company, ca. 1800", *Indonesia*, No. 65, April, p. 102; Braginsky, Vladimir. (2015). *The Turkic-Turkish Theme in Traditional Malay Literature: Imagining the Other to Empower the Self*, Leiden: Brill, p. 207.

²⁴ "Local and General", *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 17 April 1886, p. 2.

²⁵ BOA, I.H.R.173.9431.2.1; BEO.2478.185828.1.1. (H. I. Zilkada 1322 / 7 January 1905).

²⁶ BOA, BEO.2478.185828.3.1.

as well. The latter word is assumed to refer to the Sultanate of Aceh, a quite well-known polity at the northern tip of the Island. And as stated above, this sultanate had corresponded through sending envoys to Constantinople. The information supplied briefly in BOA's open access page mentions in summary as follows, "paying a sort of remuneration to the envoy sent by the ruler of *Aşya* from Java region to the Constantinople". And the same quotation is seen in the text while accounting about the envoy, sent by not Sultanate of Jambi, but the Sultanate of Aceh which is as follows, "... *Cava memalikinde Aşiyeye (أشييه)*²⁶, *Aşya (أشيه)*²⁷ *ceziresi hakiminin Arabi el ibare bir kit'a arzasiyla bunun isaline me'muren gelmiş olan Seyyid Ali bin Seyyid Alawi el Jufri Efendi...*"²⁸

Instead of jumping to quick conclusions, I did not dismiss that there could be a place called 'Aşya', somewhere in Sumatra or Java Island. I had encountered the word 'Aşya' for the first time. Trying to find out any similarities with any known place in the 'Java region', I remembered that 'Aceh' is commonly referred as 'Aşi', 'Açi', 'Açin', 'Açe' in Ottoman documentations.²⁹ Notwithstanding, careful inspection of the six subsequent pages revealed that the vocabulary refers, at the same time, to the 'geography', the ruler and the sultanate, which caused a bit more confusion. The confusion increases when it is disclosed that the geographical definition includes interestingly the continent of 'Africa' in the introductory lines of the third page.³⁰ This situation forces us to think more critically about the correspondences between the Muslim rulers from the Archipelago and the Ottoman state and the relevant documentation kept in the BOA.

To prove how these mistakes are grave there is another crucial example of emerging in the usage of the name of Sumatra. The document which briefly informs about the news that the Dutch colonial regime which was known by its mismanagement or arbitrary rule would reinitiate the invasion process in Aceh refers to the Island as *Samandra*, rather than Sumatra.³¹

From 'Aşya' to 'Jambie'

It is understood from the archival documents that the envoy came from *Canbi* which is read as *Jambi*, *Jambie*, *Djambie* as seen in Dutch and also British sources.³² In addition, the Jambi ruler send envoys to Constantinople three times. The first one was around 1858/59, the second one in 1903 and the last one in 1904. During the second visit, the three-member delegation of the envoy was honoured by a medal from the Ottoman court, but not received personally by the Sultan himself. And the last envoy did not go farther after Mecca. The reason behind the disruption of this travel is yet to be discovered.³³

Beyond the distinct forms of spelling of the word Jambi into *Canbi* in Ottoman pronunciation and writing system, some other significant terminological differentiation is observed in the writing of the word Aceh. In regard to this, the vocabulary referred to Aceh in the documents shows variations such as "*Aşiyeye/Aşya (أشييه)*³⁴, *Aşi (أشي)*³⁵ or *أشي*³⁶". This can be alluded to political alienation of the Ottoman bureaucracy to the farther regions in the Indian Ocean.

²⁶ BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.2.1.

²⁷ BOA, İ.HR. 173.9431.1.1. (H. 16 Muharram 1276 / 5 August 1859); BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.2.1.

²⁸ "Sayyid Ali bin Sayyid Alawi al Jufri, who was sent by the ruler of Aceh from Cava land, brought a short petition in Arabic of the latter a member of Aceh brought a short petition..." BOA, İ.HR.173.9431. The summary originally in Turkish is as follows: "*Cava memleketlerinden Aşya hakimi tarafından name getirilen memurine yevmiye ve yirmibin kuruş atıyye verilmesiyle isteklerine cevap verilmesti.*" (Note: A similar geographical misrepresentation happens about *Riau* which is mentioned as a place in Java region or an island among Java Islands. See: BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.6.1. And the writing of *Riau* in consecutive documents occurs as *Riyev* and *Riyo* BOA, İ.DH.407.26941 (8 Zilkada 1274 / 20 June 1858); BOA, İ.DH.368.24377 (16 Jamazi'al Akhir 1273 / 11 February 1857).

²⁹ Some references to this word in the textes from the 16th century are mentioned as follows: for *Aşi* BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.1.1; BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.26.1; BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.27.1. For 'Açi', BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.17.1; BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.18.1; BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.19.1; BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.30.1. The same writing form is observed in stamps of Acehnese nobilities. See: BOA, A.MKT.MHM. 457.55.20.1; Ziya, Mehmed. (1899). (H. 1316). *Alem-i İslamiyet: Tarih-i Açi*, Konstantinople.

For instance, the word of 'Aşi' in Ottoman is written on the basis of the form penned down as 'a-ş-y' in the Arabic text presented by the Acehnese to the Ottoman government. See: BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.3.1. There are some usages such as *ahli aşi* in various lines in the same document. The word of *Açi* in another Arabic text in the same colophone is penned down in the form of 'a-ç-y'. BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.5.1; BOA, A.MKT.MHM.457.55.25.1.

³⁰ BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.3.1.

³¹ BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK.55.41. (H. 13 Sha'ban 1315 / 7 January 1898).

³²"Local and General", *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 17 April 1886, p. 2; *Sinar*, 1980, p. 32; *Nieuw Bataviaasch Handelsblad*, Woensdag 17 Juli 1872, No. 27, p. 529.

³³ Schmidt, Jan. (1992). *Through the Legation Window 1876-1926: Four Essays on Dutch, Dutch-Indian and Ottoman History*, İstanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, p. 62.

³⁴ BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.2.1. (1859); BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.2.1. İ.HR.173.9431.1. (H. 4 Jamazi'al akhir 1276 / 15 August 1859).

³⁵ BOA, İ.HR.67.3270.1.1. (H. 24 Safar 1267 / 29 December 1850).

³⁶ BOA, İ.HR. 66.3208.1.1. (H. 7 Safar 1266 / 23 December 1849).

Considering the early political relations, the Ottoman court and bureaucracy is assumed to have known and become familiar with the name of Aceh and have established a certain writing code. Beyond the manifest correspondences between the Aceh State and the Ottomans in the 16th century, there were also some ventures in the mid of and the last quarter of the 19th century. In particular, since Aceh territory had been under direct intimidation from the Dutch colonial rule from the time of London Treaty (1824), the Aceh government during the reign of Sultan Mansur Syah (1850) sent envoys to Constantinople which can be also found in the BOA. After just a decade difference between these two events, the Ottoman bueraucracy misread or misinterpreted the name of Aceh in the relevant documentation during the correspondences with the Sultanate of Jambi.

Though *Aṣi* is the most used written form among these three types of words in Ottoman documents, it is understood that the classifier in the archive chose ‘*Aṣya*’ to give brief information about it. There might be a reasonable approach beyond his or her random choosing of a word. For instance, ‘*Aṣya*’ is mentioned in the second line in the very first document. And the classifier might have been led to prefer this ‘*Aṣya*’ not ‘*Aṣi*’ in the brief note.

However, there are also a few interesting points in this mentioned line which might mislead or confuse the reader. The first one, ‘*Aṣya*,’ or if one wishes to read properly and correctly, ‘*Aceh*,’ is shown in ‘*Java region*’ by saying “*Cava memalikinden...*”. It can be justified by arguing that all of the Archipelago was known as ‘*Cava*’. This reference issue can be discussed briefly on the basis of the common usages in early centuries. While some travellers call Java, they mean Sumatra Island. For instance, Ibn Battuta wrote about Jawa-Sumatra. Hence the name applies to North Sumatra, and exactly the Aceh region.³⁷ But the names of the islands in the region were quite commonly known and written separately in various publications by Western nations such as Sumatra, Java etc. from the 19th century itself. And the second one is related to -from which Malay court the envoys came. As seen in the relevant documents, the latter was from Aceh. This is quite incoherence with the rest of the documents. And it is assumed that the classifier just had a look at these initial passages of the document and made a reference copying the same ‘mistakenly written’ information by referring to the Aceh ruler.

Another confusing correlation is related to the usages of ‘*Aṣiye*’ and ‘*Canbi*’, ‘*Aṣya*’ and ‘*Canbi*’ in few documents. And here it is understood that *Aṣiye* and *Canbi* were interchangeably used and refer to the same place. And this confusion is seen in the reference to Sultan Taha to be the ruler of either ‘*Aṣi*’ or ‘*Canbi*’ in the relevant text.³⁸ On the other hand, in the letter sent by the Jambi ruler, the word Jambi is classified as a mighty state compared with “*Malacca, Johor and Mataram*” and is told to have been ruled by a ruling dynasty holding the title of Sultan in the 17th century.³⁹

When the Jambi envoy’s message was transmitted into a written form which is assumed to have been presented to the Ottoman sultan or any high level authority in *Hariciyye* bureaucracy, there seems to have been a misleading information to the political status and entity of Jambi by referring it as an ‘independent government’ (*müstakil hükümet*) on the basis of the original text written in Arabic,⁴⁰ since Taha, the Sultan of Jambi was forced to leave the capital city of Jambi and was replaced by a relative who became a puppet ruler under the hegemony of the Dutch colonial government in Jambi region.⁴¹

In this context, it can be argued that when the Jambi envoy arrived in Constantinople, the Sultanate at least technically lost its political sovereignty in the center, though the Jambi ruler survived in the interior region of his sultanate which is also known as upper Jambi.⁴² In regard to this, the political legitimacy of Sultan Taha should also be considered accordingly, if his sovereignty still existed in “the more northern” part of Jambi region, due to which it seems that the Jambi region was divided into two distinct parts after the Dutch expansion.⁴³

³⁷ Gibb, H. A. R. (1953). *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, 3rd Impression, London: Roudledge&Kegan Paul Ltd., p. 274; Braginsky, Vladimir I.; Diakonova, Elena M. (1999). *Images of Nusantara in Russian Literature*, (ed.), Leiden: KITLV, pp. 45, 47.

³⁸ BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.2.1; İ.HR.173.9431.3.1. This appears in the form of as follow: “... *Afrika kıt'asının sahil şarkisinde beş arz cenubiyesinde vak'î Aṣi veyahut Canbi nam ceziresinin hakimi bulunan Sultan Taha Seyfeddin...*”; “... *Canbi beldesi ismiyle müsemma Aṣi ceziresi hakimi bir zat Taha Sayf'ad-din bin Muhammad Farh'ad-din nam hakim tarafından...*” See: BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.5.1. The same expression is repeated in Arabic translation of the text. See: BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.6.1.

³⁹ Kukushkin, *ibid*, pp. 55-56.

⁴⁰ BOA, İ.HR.173.9431.2.1; İ.HR.173.9431.3.1.

⁴¹ Kukushkin, *ibid*, p. 53.

⁴² Well, J. Kathirithamby. (1993). “Hulu-hilir Unity and Conflict: Malay Statecraft in East Sumatra before the Mid-Nineteenth Century, *Archipel* 45, Paris, p. 84; Touwen, *ibid*, p. 148;

⁴³ “From the Daily Times, -21st December. Netherlands Indian News-, *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 28 December 1878, p. 4.

While the archival document informs about Java Island, and at the same time indirectly Sumatra Island as well, it mentions south of eastern Africa so as to give the geographical description for the location of 'Aşi' and 'Canbi'. Hence, there is no doubt is this a very unusual and irrelevant geographical definition and at the same time it shows that the staff at the translation office or anyone among the authorities at Foreign Affairs who penned down these documents were not familiar about the Archipelago, the eastern part of the Indian Ocean.

In fact, trying to define the geographical location of the Island of Sumatra, which is the very first land as the entry point to the Archipelago through a sort of irrelevant connection such as, Africa remind us that the Ottoman bureaucracy might have remained in its own confined and comfort border zone in western part of the Ocean. On the other hand, one can assert no doubt that the correspondences and more significantly personal visits of the envoys from the eastern Sumatra prove that the boundaries of the connectivity of the Ottoman foreign affairs were expanding.

Conclusion

Though the Malay Archipelago was considered as a long distance Muslim geography during the time of Ottoman State, the regional rulers' initiation towards a certain degree of diplomatic relationships were considered an important attempt to gain recognition of the pertinent Malay polities, in particular, the Sultanate of Jambi. These correspondences are thought to have probably caused the Ottoman political bureaucracy to get familiar to this relatively much less known geography. But some certain correspondences cause implicitly the readers to be suspicious about whether the Ottoman political minds were trained and served accordingly with the geo-political realities in mind in the Archipelago. For that purpose, I wished to highlight some confusing geographical definitions in the article. In regard to this, an envoy's letter sent by the Jambi ruler includes some geographical anomalies such as Canbi, Aşya, Aşye, Java, Afrika. The archival documents kept in Ottoman archive seem to have referred implicitly or explicitly to the places which are not correctly related with each other.

As argued in the main body of the article, though Jambi correspondences in the second part of the 19th century especially during the reign of Sultan Taha and the struggle period against the Dutch aggression gave some more insights about the Sumatra Island, the staff in the relevant department of the Ottoman bureaucracy do not appear to have searched for the authenticity of and critically examined the mentioned geographical places. In addition, the increasing number of publications, such as newspapers, journals in Europe which were quite informative about the colonized lands in the Archipelago, supply enough proofs about the globalization of Sumatra Island. Hence, the Ottoman bureaucracy and political elite were assumed to have become sensitive and knowledgeable about the developments in the mentioned region.

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