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An Ottoman Journey to Johor: Mustafa bin Mustafa's *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* (1894)

TAYFUN AKGUN

Humanities Courses Coordination Unit, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Türkiye

E-mail: tayfun.akgun@bogazici.edu.tr

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Abstract. This study examines how the Ottoman traveller, Mustafa bin Mustafa, portrayed and perceived Johor and its people in his travelogue *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* (*A Tour in the Far East*, 1894). The study partially compares his observations with those found in contemporaneous travelogues, such as Florence Caddy's *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht* (1889) and Süleyman Şükrü's *Seyahat-i Kübra* (*The Great Travel*, 1907). After his dismissal as district governor of Qa'tabah in Yemen, Mustafa began his journey to the Far East in April 1892. He spent nearly one year in Johor (1892–1893), a significant contact zone in the Malay world. There, he observed the political, cultural and socio-economic life and met Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor (1833–1895) and Syed Muhammad Alsagoff (1836–1906), two central figures in Ottoman-Johor relations. However, his travelogue did not cover Ottoman-Johor relations due to his disinterest in the politics of his time. Instead, he focused on Johor's geography, culture, religious customs and tropical fruits. Briefly, Mustafa's *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* represents a unique and rare non-Western and Ottoman/Muslim travel narrative that documents the Ottoman exploration of Johor and Ottoman-Johor encounters in the late 19th century.

Keywords and phrases: Mustafa bin Mustafa, Sultan Abu Bakar, Syed Mohamed Alsagoff, Johor, Ottoman-Johor relations, travelogue

Introduction

Ahmed Mithad Efendi (1844–1912) is a prominent Ottoman intellectual who bemoaned the Ottomans' disinterest in travelling and travel literature and encouraged his contemporaries to explore their own lands and beyond. He viewed the Ottoman exploration of European and Islamic worlds as "the greatest and even sacred duty" (Herzog and Motika 2000, 142). Mustafa bin Mustafa, in

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his *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* (A *Tour in the Far East*, 1894), emphasised his status as one of the very few Ottoman travellers to reach the major cities of the Far East, presenting this rarity as a point of personal pride. He framed his journey to the Far East as a fulfilment of a "greatest and sacred duty" of travel and further noted that numerous non-Ottoman travellers he encountered during his journey remarked on the general absence of Ottoman visitors in the region and expressed particular interest and even enthusiasm in meeting an Ottoman traveller (Mustafa 2010, 15). These encounters underscored his self-perception as undertaking a rare journey and his awareness of how the Ottomans were perceived within the broader transregional travel networks of the period.

Mustafa was an Ottoman statesman who held various administrative roles in Yemen between the 1880s and 1892. After being removed as district governor of Qa'tabah, he embarked on a transregional journey in April 1892, passing through India, Indochina, Johor, Java, China and Japan. Upon returning to Istanbul in 1894, he wrote down his experiences and observations in *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*, dedicating it to Abdülhamid II (1842–1918). The autograph manuscript is kept in the Turkish Manuscripts collection of the Rare Works Library at Istanbul University with call number NEKTY04456 and lacks a publication date or publisher's imprint. A simplified version of the travelogue was published in 2010, making the work accessible to a wider audience.

One of the important destinations of Mustafa's travel to the Far East was Johor, where he sojourned for nearly a year and was exposed to local culture. Johor was a significant stopover for travellers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sultan Abu Bakar's (1833–1895) hospitality and Johor's strategic location made it a significant contact zone, which "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt 1992, 4). The contact zone also served as "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict" (Pratt 1992, 6). Meanwhile, the relations between travellers and travelees were not only coercive, unequal and intractable but were cordial and amicable. Furthermore, contact zones were read "not just between peoples and peoples or cultures and cultures... but between bodies and weather, bodies and plants, bodies and landscape" (Howell 2014, 4).

Mustafa's experiences in Johor were the epitome of amicable interactions between Ottomans and Johorians who were geographically separated but tried to establish relations in the late 19th century. In a contact zone like Johor, he developed cordial relations with Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor and Syed Mohamed

Alsagoff, two key figures in Ottoman-Johor relations. More importantly, he perceived himself as in negotiation with the people, culture, plants, landscape and tropical environment of Johor. A clear example of negotiating with the plants is found in his description of the durian:

> The flesh of durian is white and soft like clotted cream. Yet, the inside of most durians is yellowish… the seeds resemble the size and shape of a lamb's kidney. Its flavour may not be found in any other fruit… Strangely, the smell of the durian is overwhelmingly strong to someone who has never eaten it, but if it is eaten even once, that pungent odour will never be felt. (Mustafa 2010, 84–85)

He not only described the durian but also negotiated with it through some affinities, such as clotted cream and the lamb's kidney, which were recognisable to him and his Ottoman readers.

Mustafa's *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* is one of the unique Ottoman accounts of Johor and its people in the closing years of the 19th century, yet it has not been discussed in depth and in its own terms. Veyselgil (2011) briefly analysed Mustafa's visit to Johor in the context of the Ottoman engagement with colonial knowledge and Eurocentrism. The study comprehensively discusses Mustafa's description and perception of Johor and non-Ottoman Muslims' religious practices and customs. It employs a close, interpretative and comparative reading of *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* and its contemporary travelogues. It argued that Mustafa's work documents the Ottoman exploration of Johor and the Ottoman traveller's positive and amicable relations with the people, culture and tropical environment rather than coercive and inequal encounters.

The Historiographical Significance of *Aksa-yı Şark'da bir Cevelân*

Studies on *Aksa-yı Şark'da bir Cevelân* are necessary for several reasons. Firstly, while numerous Western travellers, such as Florence Caddy's *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht* (1889), produced descriptions of the region, Ottoman or other non-Western narratives remain comparatively scarce. Mustafa's travelogue, therefore, provided a unique perspective, shedding light on religious and cultural encounters between Ottomans and Johorians and offering insight into how a 19th-century Muslim observer perceived Johorian Muslims. Secondly, Mustafa's stay in Johor coincided with the development of Ottoman-Johor relations and Sultan Abu Bakar's royal visit to Istanbul in 1893. Even though he met Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor (1833–1895) and Syed

Muhammad Alsagoff (1836–1906), his travelogue did not discuss Ottoman–Johor relations or Abu Bakar's visit to Istanbul. This omission is noteworthy, particularly given his encounters with prominent figures connected to the Malay world. Whether the omission was deliberate and what it might reveal about his priorities, interests, or worldview remain questions that warrant further investigation. Finally, although *Aksa-yı Şark'da bir Cevelân* did not explicitly discuss Ottoman-Johor relations, it nevertheless constituted a significant non-state, first-person source for examining relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay world. Recent scholarship has revealed the multifaceted dimensions of these connections (Kadı, 2015; Göksoy, 2015; Formichi, 2015; Alatas, 2024). However, the human dimension and non-state perspectives of these relations have received comparatively limited attention. A more comprehensive understanding, therefore, required the inclusion of such first-person and non-state accounts. In this respect, Mustafa's travelogue offers valuable insights into Ottoman engagement with Johor's socio-economic, cultural, religious and agricultural life, dimensions that were often less visible in Ottoman archival sources.

Mustafa bin Mustafa: A Biographical Sketch

The details of Mustafa's life, such as his birth date, birthplace, family background or education, are not available. In the foreword to his travel account, he described himself as el-Hac Mustafa bin Mustafa, a former district governor (*kaymakam*) of Ta'izz in Yemen. This brief introduction indicated that his father's name was Mustafa and that he performed the pilgrimage. He stated that he performed the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1877/78, though his religious journey was not recounted in his travelogue. The date of his pilgrimage suggested that he was born in the first half of the 19th century.

Mustafa first served as an assistant investigator in the Ministry of War (Seraskerlik) for seven years before undertaking the pilgrimage. His religious duty appears to have aroused his interest in travel. After his pilgrimage, he visited Yemen for the sake of travel itself, a decision that opened important opportunities for him. In Yemen, he met Mustafa Asım Paşa (1825/26–1891), the Ottoman governor of Yemen between 1875 and 1880 and began working as a customs official in Māwiyya through this connection. He subsequently held various posts, including a customs director of Ta'izz, a district governor of Qa'tabah and mayor of Ta'izz and San'a, serving in these capacities for nearly 15 years. The Ministry of Interior dismissed him from his post as a district governor of Qa'tabah in 1892. This event prompted him to embark on a journey to India, Indochina, Johor, China and Japan. His visit to the Far East lasted nearly two

years, from 1892 to 1894. Upon returning to Istanbul, he settled at Aksaray and wrote down his travelogue (Mustafa 2010, 7–8). Nothing is known about his life after 1894. He may have passed away in Istanbul in the first half of the 20th century.

Structure and Aims of *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*

Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân is a first-person narrative that includes Mustafa's experiences and observations during his journey to the Far East. He wrote his travelogue with two main aims. First, he sought to present what he witnessed and experienced in the Far East to the Ottoman audience, particularly to Abdülhamid II and Ottoman elites. He dedicated the work to the sultan and praised his reign as one of felicity, marked by notable advancement, especially in education. Given his dismissal from the district governorship of Qa'tabah in Yemen, he might have hoped the dedication would secure a new appointment or a royal gift. Alternatively, he might have wished to draw the sultan's attention to the Far East through his travelogue. His second purpose was the desire for lasting remembrance (Mustafa 2010, 19).

Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân is divided into five chapters. Every chapter focuses on one of his visits to Yemen, India, Johor, China and Japan. The first chapter provides a comprehensive description of Yemen, which was both the point of departure for his Far Eastern journey and a constant reference for comparison throughout the narrative. More significantly, his treatment of Yemen provided a structural and thematic model for how he narrated the rest of his travels. To understand Mustafa's motivations for travelling to the Far East, it is useful to consider the roots of his interest in travel. His pilgrimage to Hejaz likely sparked his curiosity about the world beyond the central lands of Islam. During his long service in Yemen, he travelled extensively to make productive use of his time and learn about local conditions (Mustafa 2010, 19). His official responsibilities also prompted exploration; for example, his clandestine observation of British military activities in 1880, which he reported to Istanbul (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi 1880). Through such experiences, he became familiar with the Yemeni customs, morality and agricultural production (Mustafa 2010, 19). Apparently, Yemen served as a significant locus of his intellectual curiosity and his engagement with travel. Hence, he travelled the Far East to discover new places, engage in new cultures and record interesting events he experienced, observed and learnt. It directly affected the content and style of his travelogue, which included the culture, customs, religious beliefs and agriculture of the places he visited.

Mustafa's most significant and authoritative sources of information were from his observations, sensory experiences and conversations with the locals. He mostly narrated what he saw and experienced in his travel account. His interactions with the rulers, merchants and elites allowed him to obtain local information. For example, Sultan Abu Bakar and Syed Muhammad Alsagoff were his main and reliable sources of information about Johor. Similarly, Mustafa acquired important information from Omar Efendi, who accompanied his trip to Java. The former described the latter as a reliable person. Furthermore, he easily communicated with the people he encountered through Arabic and Malay. He claimed that he learned the Malay language during his long sojourn in Johor. After leaving Johor, Malay became his main medium of communication. For instance, he visited a temple in Canton and obtained basic information on the idols in the temple from its guard, who was able to communicate in Malay (Mustafa 2010, 100–101). The local translators also became his main informants. He hired a Malay translator in Yokohama and Kobe and discovered famous places in these two Japanese cities (Mustafa 2010, 123). There is no evidence about whether he benefited from European travel accounts, travel guides and handbooks. Possibly, he could have read these books before travelling to the new places. However, his witnessing, experiences and encounters with the locals were his most central and authoritative sources of information.

Mustafa's voyage to the Far East was neither as an emissary nor as a military official with travel allowance, daily stipends and salary. He used his private wealth and savings to travel to the Far East. Also, he enormously benefitted from the Muslim network of hospitality during his visits to India, Johor, Java and Hong Kong. Hacı Abdü'l Hüseyin, a wealthy Muslim trader in Bombay, was a key sponsor who provided lodging and meals to Mustafa and helped him travel many places in India, like Calcutta (Mustafa 2010, 55). Furthermore, Hacı Abdü'l Hüseyin's representative also assisted the Ottoman traveller during his trip to Hong Kong (Mustafa 2010, 94). Another example of how he benefited from the hospitality network of the Islamic world is that he met three Muslim traders in Rangoon, quickly befriended and conversed with them and visited the places where the Burmese had performed their rituals (Mustafa 2010, 68). In this regard, his Muslim identity and affable personality facilitated receiving material and non-material support from Muslim traders.

On the other hand, he did not benefit from the Muslim network hospitality during his visits to Yokohama, Tokyo and Kobe. He stayed in hotels rather than in the houses of the hospitable Muslims and the translators served as his guides in Japan instead of the generous and hospitable Muslims (Mustafa 2010, 68). It is not an exaggeration to state that he was like a modern tourist there. In brief, Mustafa travelled to the Far East on his own initiative and money without state sponsorship. The Muslim network's hospitality also made his arduous journey easier and inexpensive.

Mustafa's Encounters with Johor Elites: Generosity and Hospitality

Mustafa arrived at the port of Singapore after visiting the island he called Filiklam, which he described as predominantly populated by the Klings and Zoroastrians. Based on this description, Kadı (2025, 8) identifies Filiklam as Pulau Pinang. From Pulau Pinang, he travelled to Singapore aboard the express steamer S.S. *Jeddah* after a three-day voyage. He did not record the exact date of his arrival and, as in the rest of his travelogue, provided almost no chronological details beyond his departure from Aden in April 1892. Moreover, although he claimed to have stayed in Johor for nearly a year (1892–1893), he made no reference to Sultan Abu Bakar's royal visit to Istanbul in 1893. For this reason, Kadı (2025, 22–23) expresses scepticism regarding the accuracy of Mustafa's stated dates.

On the other hand, a few clues in Mustafa's travelogue allow us to approximate the timeline of his movements. After leaving Aden in April 1892, he travelled to Bombay, Surat, Calcutta and Rangoon until July 1892, suggesting that he likely arrived at Singapore in August of that year. He further claimed to have stayed in Johor for roughly a year and stated that Sultan Abu Bakar and Syed Mohamad Alsagoff tried to persuade him to extend his stay (Mustafa bin Mustafa 2010, 89). After visiting Istanbul and many cities in Europe, Sultan Abu Bakar returned to Johor in the middle of October and Alsagoff returned sometime thereafter (*The Straits Times Weekly Issue* 1893, 1). Taken together, these details suggested that Mustafa likely sojourned in Johor from August 1892 to October 1893.

In Singapore, Mustafa first met Syed Mohamed Alsagoff, the owner of S.S. *Jeddah*. It was a golden opportunity for the Ottoman traveller because the prominent Hadrami trader Alsagoff invited the Ottoman traveller to stay in his mansion. Again, his Muslim identity and Muslim network hospitality helped him to find accommodation and a local companion in Singapore. Mustafa did not describe the city and people of Singapore. His sole reference was to the mansion where he stayed. According to him, the mansion was magnificent and set in the middle of a very beautiful and large garden. He did not share information on its architecture with his readers. Rather, he positively depicted his host, Alsagoff, as a cheerful, expansive, generous and affluent man (Mustafa 2010, 77–78). His focus, thus, was on the positive social character of his host rather than his physical appearance. His positive portrayal of Alsagoff is not different from that of some Ottoman visitors to Singapore in the late 19th century. Alsagoff entertained a few Ottomans who sojourned and visited Singapore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, when the Ertuğrul frigate anchored in Singapore between 15th November 1889 and 22nd March 1890, Alsagoff was

very generous and hospitable to its Ottoman crews. He was generally described as a generous and hospitable Hadrami resident of Singapore in the memoirs of the Ottoman crew (Öndeş 1998, 62; Sürmeli 2023, 178–179).

On the other hand, Süleyman Şükrü, the Ottoman visitor of Singapore in 1905, had a contrasting perception of Alsagoff. Şükrü accused him of the "assassination" of Ahmed Atâullah Efendi (1865–1903), the Ottoman consul general in Singapore between 1901 and 1903. He further claimed that Alsagoff cooperated with the British to kill the Ottoman consul who made anti-colonial attempts detrimental to British rule (Şükrü 2013, 473–474). It is known that Atâullah passed away in a traffic accident in Singapore and he was highly esteemed by the local Muslims in Singapore. A rumour about the "assassination" of Atâullah spread after his demise and Süleyman Şükrü uncritically recorded the rumour. Alsagoff was also mentioned as the nephew of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor in *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* (Mustafa 2010, 77–78). Similarly, there is the same information in relevant Ottoman sources concerning Abu Bakar's visit to Istanbul between 11th April and 1893 (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi 1893; Kadı and Peacock 2020, 364–365).

However, Alatas (2024, 216) argues that Alsagoff was wrongly referred to as Sultan Abu Bakar's nephew in the Ottoman records. Kadı (2024, 164) states that it is ambiguous whether the Johorians intentionally portrayed Alsagoff as Abu Bakar's nephew or the issue might be misunderstood by the Ottomans. In his recent study, Kadı (2025, 21) rightly points out that the reference to Alsagoff as the nephew of Abu Bakar is related to their Bugis background. The Johorians intentionally introduced and depicted him to the Ottoman elites in Istanbul to emphasise the close linkage between Abu Bakar and Alsagoff. In a similar way, Alsagoff was portrayed as the "amiable cousin of Sultan Abu Bakar", "Prince" and "the Eastern Potentate" in newspapers published in colonial Singapore (*The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* 1893, 2). Again, the emphasis is on the close relations between Abu Bakar and Alsagoff and the latter's wealth. The mixture of praise, rumour and retrospective interpretation frames Alsagoff as a multifaceted person in Ottoman history: a generous and wealthy host, a leading mediator and a controversial figure. Mustafa's influential host, Alsagoff, introduced his guest to Sultan Abu Bakar, who watched horse racing in Singapore. This encounter was very friendly and the Ottoman traveller became the royal guest of the sultan. They moved from Singapore to Johor on the royal ship of Abu Bakar. He established strong and cordial relations with the sultan and Alsagoff. The sultan insisted that he could stay longer in Johor, yet he politely declined the offer because he intended to travel to China and Japan (Mustafa 2010, 88–89).

Like his portrayal of Alsagoff, Mustafa described Sultan Abu Bakar as "high-minded, scholarly, cautious, brave and well-mannered" (Mustafa 2010, 78). Mustafa's depiction of Abu Bakar is similar to that of the two female Western observers of Johor, Florence Caddy (1837–1923) and Lady Randolph Churchill (1854–1921). The sultan was "a stout, pleasant-looking man of middle age, with olive complexion", unpunctual but easy-going and hospitable in the eyes of Caddy (1889, 233). Similarly, Churchill described him as "a charming and courteous old man" (Cornwallis-West 1908, 350). They emphasised both the social persona and physical appearance of Sultan Abu Bakar. However, all recorded the great hospitality, generosity and politeness of Abu Bakar. Caddy also offered a detailed, unique and vivid account of the sultan's display, style and ornaments.

> The sultan appeared elegantly dressed for dinner, in a monkey-jacket, with the order of the Star of India and a black velvet fez, with an aigrette of large diamonds in the front; half-a-dozen large gipsy-rings on each hand, almost covering his dark, fat little fingers; the rings all rubies and diamonds on one hand, all emeralds and diamonds on the other. (Caddy 1889, 235)

This was more visually and theatrically than how Mustafa and Churchill portrayed their imperial host. More significantly, Caddy's account suggested her colonial and orientalist gaze, mentioning the " gipsy-rings" and "dark, fat little finger" of the sultan in an exoticising manner.

Mustafa also mentioned Abu Bakar's wealth and power:

> He [Abu Bakar] has great wealth. He owns many trains and steamships, large and small. No one has any rights or partnerships in them. They are all his property. There are crescent and star symbols on everything that belongs to him. It is unthinkable that something should be his property and not have this symbol. (Mustafa 2010, 78–79)

Similarly, Caddy also depicted Abu Bakar as powerful, enlightened and influential by stressing his attempts to modernise Johor and develop its economy (Caddy 1889, 248).

In his *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*, Mustafa preferred to use the title of Khan instead of Sultan for Abu Bakar. Is it his conscious or unconscious preference? It is known that Abu Bakar began to use the title of sultan after a treaty signed between England and Johor on 11th December 1885 (Abdul Rahman 2011, 187–188). During his royal visit to Istanbul in 1893, he sought recognition and prestige from the Ottoman Empire to enhance his standing in British Malaya (Gullick

1992, 246). However, the Ottomans were very cautious about recognising him as sultan. The Ottomans' unwillingness to recognise Abu Bakar as sultan is apparent in the relevant Ottoman archival documents and newspaper coverage of the Istanbul press. All of them consciously and exclusively mention him as the Cohor Hâkimi Ebu Bekir Han (Johor's ruler Abu Bakar Khan) "We should take into consideration that for the Ottomans, using the title for Sultan Abu Bakar would insinuate a status equal to the Ottoman Sultan, while [it] was far from the case for the British" (Kadı 2024, 165).

By the same token, it may be argued that Mustafa consciously employed the term Khan for Abu Bakar and the Ottoman Sultan was definitely the most powerful sultan of the Muslim world in his eyes, even if he was disinterested in political issues of his time.

Ordinary Communities and Religious Life in Mustafa's Johor

Mustafa not only interacted with the highest echelons of Johor but also with ordinary people. However, his description of the ordinary people was neither comprehensive nor systematic. According to him, the population of Johor numbered almost two million, of whom more than 40,000 were Chinese during the reign of Sultan Abu Bakar. By contrast, Şükrü (2013, 470) estimated Johor's total population at fewer than 20,000 in the early 20th century. These figures contradicted one another and both were likely based on hearsay rather than reliable demographic data.

Mustafa portrayed the Chinese of Johor as traders and artists, yet his portrayal was limited in scope (Mustafa bin Mustafa 2010, 78–79). He did not provide details on their social characteristics, religious beliefs, or daily practices. Several factors could explain this omission. First, he might have faced difficulties in establishing communication or recognition when encountering the Chinese community in Johor. This possibility was somewhat paradoxical, given that he had emphasised the great curiosity shown by the Chinese in China toward him and their interest in his dress. Second, he appeared to have deliberately focused on the Muslims of Johor, whom he might have considered more relevant to his Ottoman readership. Ottoman elites and intellectuals had followed developments concerning Muslim communities in the Malay world under Western colonial rule through periodicals such as Basiret (1870–1908), Servet (1898–1903) and Ma'lûmât (1895–1903). Reflecting this broader intellectual interest, Mustafa consistently paid particular attention to the condition of Islam in the places he visited during his Far Eastern journey. Consequently, the religious life and customs of Johorian Muslims received the bulk of his attention.

Mustafa expressed that the majority of Muslims in Johor adhered to the Shāfiʿī legal school, while the followers of the Ḥanafī legal school were comparatively few. He described the Muslim community as devout, gathering in mosques day and night to worship and recite either the Quran or *Dala'il al-Khayrat* (Proofs of Good Deeds), a book of prayers for the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. He added that "those who cannot read listen to those who read" (Mustafa 2010, 80–81). Among the religious customs that particularly impressed him was the ethical practice of confirming the halal status of goods after purchase.

> When the people of Johor buy something from a shopkeeper, they ask the shopkeeper after paying the money: "Is it halal?" If the shopkeeper does not answer "Yes", he leaves the thing he bought and goes to another shopkeeper. This continues until he finds a shopkeeper who says that what he is selling is halal. What a beautiful custom! (Mustafa 2010, 81)

For Mustafa, this practice reflected a moral economy shaped by Islamic ethics. Overall, he viewed Johor's Muslims as exemplary in their piety and religious conduct.

In addition to describing the Muslims in Johor, Mustafa also recounted a story. The story related to him by Sultan Abu Bakar was about a group he termed "savage" and "immoral" residing outside Johor. According to this account, the group practised a form of ritual senicide and cannibalism involving elderly family members, a custom described in detail in *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*. Upon hearing this story, Mustafa reported that he burst into tears and prayed for Abu Bakar to bring these "immoral savages" under control (Mustafa 2010, 88). Mustafa neither identified the group nor specified their location. He merely portrayed them as "savage" and "immoral". Whether this reflects an internalisation of colonial discourse is uncertain. Racist or derogatory language was otherwise absent from his travelogue, and, as noted earlier, he generally avoided political commentary and racial categorisation. His purpose appears not to have been the reproduction of colonial tropes but rather to highlight Abu Bakar's role in spreading Islam beyond Johor's borders. Additionally, he may have believed that such a dramatic, morally charged anecdote, especially involving cannibalism, would capture the attention of Ottoman readers. The episode also serves a didactic function, underscoring an ethical contrast between the devout Muslims of Johor and the "immoral" practices attributed to these unnamed outsiders.

Dietary Habits and Betel Chewing in Johor

Mustafa focused on the dietary habits of the people of Johor and their common but hazardous practice of chewing betel nut. He stated that Johorians "do not eat bread and salt from the cradle to the grave" (Mustafa 2010, 83). According to him, they always ate unsalted, oil-free rice and had a strong preference for desserts. He further mentioned that their daily diet often included sweets, chicken, meat, fish and vegetables. However, what amazed him most was their extensive consumption of red pepper: All of their meals are full of pepper, to the extent that a person who eats the spiciest and most peppery food in our country cannot eat it. They do not solely add pepper to rice and desserts (Mustafa 2010, 83).

Although he underlined the centrality of rice and chilies in Johorian cuisine, he did not refer to which dishes he tasted or preferred. His silence was considerable, particularly when contrasted with Florance Caddy, who vividly recorded her experience of Malay food:

> Sometimes we had a Malay breakfast, beginning with a capital mayonnaise of fish and capers and then a ponderous Malay curry, twenty courses in one, of about twenty-six dishes and sambals. [...] It (the yellow glutinous rice) is really not so good as the ordinary rice. (Caddy 1889, 241–243)

Betel nut chewing, a common psychoactive practice in 19th century Johor, also drew Mustafa's interest. He provided comprehensive information on its ingredients, preparation, perceived benefits and harmful effects. According to him, betel leaves were abundant in Johor and after meeting their own needs, people sold the surplus to merchants from Java, Indochina and India (Mustafa 2010, 83). In this way, betel leaves served both domestic and commercial purposes. Mustafa observed that betel leaves resembled the poplar leaves. The people of Johor kept a betel box containing betel pepper leaves (Piper betel), betel nuts (the seeds of the areca), slaked lime (calcium hydroxide) and aromatic ingredients such as cardamom, cloves and turmeric. Mustafa expressed that the practice of betel nut chewing was prevalent in Johor, Java and India:

> After eating, they take one or two betel leaves, apply some slaked lime on them with their fingers, then put some cardamom and cloves on it. Then they wrap it up and chew it. After swallowing the water for half an hour, they throw away the pulp. (Mustafa 2010, 83–84)

Mustafa stated the benefits and harms of chewing betel and the harms outweighed the benefits. While betel aided digestion, its most detrimental effect was the permanent blackening and discolouration of teeth due to slaked lime. He mentioned the extreme case of betel addiction:

> Those who have no teeth left in their mouths from chewing betel crush it with lime and cardamom in a wooden mortar and put it in their mouths to get the flavour of the betel. They chew it with great difficulty and swallow its water. (Mustafa 2010, 84)

The City of Johor: Beauty, Tranquillity and Fertility

Mustafa was deeply impressed by Johor's landscape, climate and tranquillity, offering a vivid and emotional description:

> The landscape, water and air of the city of Johor are indescribably beautiful. When a person enters this city, he/she think that Allah the Almighty gathered all the beauty of spring in one place and scattered the most abundant light of the sun here. There are such beautiful waterfalls in its mountains that when a person sees them, he/she is overwhelmed with great joy and peace and his/her soul finds purity. This dazzling city is almost in perpetual spring. Because the evergreen leaves and colourful flowers on the trees inside and outside the city always smile at people. (Mustafa 2010, 79).

Mustafa portrayed Johor as a place of beauty, serenity and fertility, particularly a city where the soul "finds purity" amid "evergreen leaves and colourful flowers". In this way, he was in negotiation with the tropical environment and climate. Other Ottoman visitors shared his admiration and negotiation. Süleyman Şükrü described Johor as possessing wonderfully pleasant water and fresh air, noting that, owing to its equatorial location, "it is always spring all year around and merely the name of winter is heard here". As a result, "the leaves never wither" and the land remains perpetually lush and full of blossoms (Şükrü 2013, 470). Similarly, Abdürreşid İbrahim (1857–1944) praised Johor's remarkable cleanliness, asserting that "Johor is ahead of Japan in terms of cleanliness" and that its sheer orderliness was "truly enviable" (İbrahim 2003, 245). Together, all these Ottoman accounts presented Johor as an advanced, prosperous and well-ordered Muslim city.

Mustafa was also amazed by Johor's fertile land, where an abundance of plants and crops grew naturally. He listed and mentioned various crops, such as rice, arrowroot, indigo, aspen and aloe, and offered detailed observations on indigo, coffee and tea plantations in Johor. His professional background as a tax collector in Yemen shaped his agricultural interest. In Yemen, he acquired extensive knowledge of agriculture and even conducted experiments to produce silk with his Italian friend (Mustafa 2010, 26). Therefore, his observations included practical and experimental expertise. Johor was a suitable and invaluable site for Mustafa's agricultural interest and curiosity. He

stated that indigo production in Johor was the outcome of Sultan Abu Bakar's importation and distribution of indigo seeds. Although initially cheaper than Indian indigo, production improved and increased after the arrival of many experienced Indian indigo masters in Johor. As a curious agriculturalist, Mustafa claimed to have conducted an experiment on Johorian indigo and found it the same as the Yemeni ones. Furthermore, he shared his expertise with both Abu Bakar and Alsagoff and suggested that the Ottoman lands were well-suited for indigo cultivation. He claimed that if adopted, it could reduce the Ottomans' dependence on European indigo and yield economic benefits (Mustafa 2010, 22–23).

Mustafa highly praised Sultan Abu Bakar's enterprise in introducing new crops, especially coffee and tea. The sultan distributed their seeds to local farmers, achieving significant success. Mustafa also noted that Johorian coffee had a similar taste to Yemeni coffee, but it was not widely preferred by the local people. Nonetheless, he regarded Abu Bakar's agricultural initiatives as exemplary and encouraged Ottomans to emulate them (Mustafa 2010, 27–29). In reality, however, Abu Bakar's attempts to diversify Johor's agriculture in the 1880s were to reduce economic dependence on Chinese-controlled pepper and gambier, yet he faced serious challenges, including disease, labour shortages and failing coffee prices. Consequently, these proved largely unproductive (Trocki 2007, 195–196). In addition to his focus on crops, Mustafa briefly mentioned some of Johor's rainforest fauna, such as colourful birds, silly monkeys and trained birds of prey (Mustafa bin Mustafa 2010, 79). His depictions of animals are considerably less detailed than those of tropical plants and fruits, reflecting his stronger interest in agriculture.

Johor: The Kingdom of Tropical Fruits

Ottoman travellers pay attention to "unknown" fruits in non-Ottoman geographies. Their travel narratives include the vivid descriptions intended to introduce "exotic" and "novel" fruits to the Ottoman audience. For example, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Baghdadi, the Ottoman observer of 19th century Brazil, depicted various fruits such as jackfruit, cashew, pitomba and buriti in his *Musalliyat al-Gharib bi-kull Amr 'Ajib* (The Foreigners' Amusement by Wonderful Things) (Bercito 2022, 114). Ottoman travellers frequently attempted to make unfamiliar fruits understandable by drawing parallels between the "unknown" and the "known". Süleyman Şükrü's interesting description of the pineapple was a striking instance of this strategy: [T]he pineapple leaf resembles a leek, its fruit is similar to an artichoke, its sourness is like that of lemonade, [and] its fragrance is not different from that of the grape (Şükrü 2013, 470). His description included a deliberate utilisation of familiar references that allowed the Ottoman audience to imagine the unfamiliar fruit.

As an amateur agriculturalist, Mustafa was particularly eager to record and describe the tropical fruits of Johor. He noted that although he had tasted different fruits, he had forgotten some of their names. Therefore, he described in detail the taste, smell and shape of the tropical fruits he remembered best (Mustafa 2010, 84). Durian was one of the tropical fruits he depicted extensively. He mentioned two different kinds of durian in Johor. There were differences between the two in terms of taste, shape and weight. He stated that the first type tasted better than the other. The second type of durian weighed an average of four to five kilogrammes and he explained how people made it ripe: When it starts to grow, it is put in a net or bag without picking it and hung on the tree … hanging it on the tree like this causes it to grow effortlessly (Mustafa 2010, 84).

Mustafa described the durian as having "a thorny shell like a cocklebur". Its interior was white and soft like cream, while its seeds resembled a lamb's kidney in shape and size. He noted that no other fruit had the same taste as durian. In his view, the fruit had a pungent odour to those who had never eaten it before. However, "if it is eaten once, that pungent odour is never felt" (Mustafa 2010, 84–85). Similarly, the British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) quoted the experience of Dr. Paladanus: "To those not used to it, it seems at first to smell like rotten onions, but immediately after they have tasted it, they prefer it to all other food" (Wallace 1897, 74). Wallace first tried durian in Malacca, but he did not like it. After eating the ripe one in Borneo, he became "a confirmed durian eater". For him, "to eat durians is a new sensation, worth a voyage to the East to experience" (Wallace 1897, 74–75).

Apart from his comprehensive depiction of durian, Mustafa described a variety of tropical fruits. He stated that the mangosteen had a very pleasant taste and that eating it produced a cooling sensation. Fresh pineapple was very sweet, but its sharp thorns and clustered appearance struck him as unusual. The mango appeared to have been his favourite tropical fruit in Johor. He stated that both the taste and fragrance of mangoes were extraordinary: when someone smelled them, the fragrance seemed better than the taste, while tasting them made the taste seem better than the fragrance (Mustafa 2010, 86). In describing the fruits of Johor, he sought to draw comparisons that would make them more familiar and accessible to his Ottoman readers. For instance, he likened the size of a mangosteen to that of a large apple and described its interior as resembling cloves of garlic. Similarly, the shape of a mango resembles a pepper. Thus, his readers could visualise tropical fruits through familiar analogies.

The health benefits and risks associated with tropical fruits were also mentioned in *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*. According to Mustafa, those who ate durian had to take a cold shower; otherwise, they might experience overheating and

itchiness between the fingers. He also stated that durian contributed to weight gain (Mustafa 2010, 85). He further described the medicinal use of mangosteen peel:

> They [people in Johor] do not throw away the peel; they dry and store it. If they fall ill, they pound some of it, put it in a cup of water and drink it. They immediately recover. Since the Chinese know that the mangosteen peel is beneficial to their health, they buy a lot of it and take it to their homeland. (Mustafa 2010, 85 –86)

Last but not least, Mustafa compared the tropical fruits of Johor with those he encountered during his Far Eastern journey. He stated that the mangoes in Johor were larger and more beautiful than those in India. Furthermore, mangoes in Yemen differed from both Indian and Johorian varieties because the former contained many fibres that became stuck between the teeth when eaten (Mustafa 2010, 87). In sum, Mustafa's description of tropical fruits in Johor indicated both his agricultural curiosity and his keen interest in the medicinal uses of fruits such as mangosteen.

Silence on Politics: Ottoman-Johor Relations in *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*

One who reads *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* may expect to discuss the impact of the Ottomans on Johor and Ottoman-Johor relations. However, the travelogue is surprisingly silent on these matters. His sole reference to the Ottomans in Johor is that "they [Muslims in Johor] worship Allah day and night, pray to the Caliph of Muslims and obey their sultan" (Mustafa 2010, 80). The "Caliph of Muslims" mentioned here is surely the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II, to whom Mustafa dedicated his travelogue. Notably, he did refer to Ottoman-related stories and objects during his visits to China and Japan. For example, he vividly and proudly described Ottoman vessels and prayer mats he saw at an exhibition in Tokyo and remarked that many Japanese travellers visited the Ottoman Empire (Mustafa 2010, 125–126). Yet, despite these observations elsewhere, neither the Ottomans nor Ottoman-related events appear in the Johor section of *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân*. As an agricultural enthusiast, Mustafa was mostly impressed by Johor's fertile landscape, crops and tropical vegetation, thereby devoting considerable space to these topics in that part of his narrative.

Moreover, the travelogue contains no reference to either the role of Syed Muhammad Alsagoff in Ottoman-Johor relations or Sultan Abu Bakar's 1893 visit to Istanbul. As noted earlier, Mustafa was the guest of Abu Bakar and

Alsagoff and he was in Johor in 1893 when Abu Bakar travelled to Istanbul. Why did he omit Ottoman-Johor relations? He appeared to have been a largely non-political traveller. He showed little interest in the local and international politics of his time, including European imperialism, Pan-Islamism and modernity. His disinterest in politics could have stemmed from his dismissal from office in Yemen. Following this difficult experience, he embarked on his journey to the Far East with the main intention of discovering new cultures. In this sense, his journey may be read as a form of personal consolation or even therapy. As an amateur agriculturalist, he offered his readers detailed observations on the crops, fruit and vegetables throughout his travelogue. Thus, *Aksa-yı Şark'da Bir Cevelân* stands as a significant instance of non-political Ottoman travel literature in the Hamidian era and as a cultural, religious and agricultural account of the 19th century Johor written by one Ottoman bureaucrat.

Conclusion

Mustafa bin Mustafa may be regarded as a relatively long-term Ottoman-Muslim visitor to Johor and his impressions of the region and its people are notably positive. He depicted his two prominent hosts, Alsagoff and Abu Bakar, as generous and hospitable. In his eyes, the Muslims of Johor were devout, faithful and exemplary in their religious practices.

Mustafa bin Mustafa was deeply impressed by Johor's fertile landscape and tranquil climate. He expressed no complaints about the equatorial climate, which was characterised by consistent temperatures and high humidity. Instead, as an interested agriculturalist, he discussed the production of indigo, coffee and tea in Johor, sharing his agricultural knowledge and experience with his hosts. His vivid descriptions of tropical fruits further reflected his curiosity and powers of observation. Overall, Mustafa stood out not only as an attentive and insightful traveller but also as an important figure who conveyed information about Johor to the Ottoman public, particularly Ottoman elites, through his travelogue.

He also touched upon Johor's dietary habits and the widespread practice of betel chewing but did not elaborate on local cuisine or his own culinary experiences. He also appeared to have omitted various topics that Ottoman readers might have expected, such as Ottoman–Johor relations, the impact of British colonial rule, the lives of Johorian women and the architecture of houses and mosques. His silence on Ottoman–Johor relations might have reflected his disinterest in politics following his dismissal from his post in Yemen and his focus instead on cultural exploration.

Aksa-yı Şark'da bir Cevelan enriches the historiography of Ottoman-Southeast Asian relations by providing a non-state, first-person perspective on a region rarely visited by Ottoman travellers. It complements official documents by highlighting social, cultural and agricultural observations that are often outside the realm of state archives. As such, *Aksa-yı Şark'da bir Cevelan* is a significantly non-political Ottoman travelogue that consists mainly of cordial and positive cross-cultural interactions between Ottomans and Johorians, presenting Johor as an important contact zone in the Malay world. This study underlines the need to integrate non-state narratives into the broader study of Ottoman–Southeast Asian relations, demonstrating how such texts can reveal the human and cultural aspects of imperial connections often overlooked in traditional diplomatic histories.

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