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Heritage of Nusantara specializes in religious studies in the field of literature either contemporarily or classically and heritage located in Southeast Asia. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines.

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WHY DID ACEH LOSE ITS NINETEENTH CENTURY INDEPENDENCE? COMPARISONS WITH SIAM AND OTHER STATES

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Abstract

By the middle of the 19th century fully independent states in Southeast Asia were few, and all felt threatened by the advance of competitive European imperialisms. By 1900 only Siam (Thailand) had retained its full formal independence, though arguably by yielding key levers of control to the British. Siam's success is often compared with the failure of Burma and Vietnam, conquered by Britain and France respectively in the late 19th century. Archipelago states have seldom entered this comparison, although Aceh had unique advantages in the ability to play off British and Dutch. The argument here is that the Aceh leadership did have vital agency, and made some crucial choices that could be considered mistakes from a Siam perspective. Dutch and British choices and mistakes have been better studied, but Acehnese ones also deserve to be.

Keywords : *Aceh, Siam, Archipelago, Dutchs, and British.*

Abstrak

Pertengahan abad ke-19th M. Negara-negara yang merdeka secara penuh di Asia Tenggara sangat sedikit. Semua mereka merasa takut dengan kompetisi imperialis Eropa. Tahun 1900, hanya Siam (Thailand) yang dapat mempertahankan kemerdekaannya secara formal dan penuh, meski harus bersikeras kepada Inggris. Kesuksesan Siam sering dibandingkan dengan kegagalan Burma dan Vietnam, yang dikuasai oleh Inggris dan Perancis pada akhir abad 19th M. Negara-negara Nusantara jarang masuk dalam bandingan ini, meski Aceh memiliki keuntungan-keuntungan yang unik dalam bertanding dengan Inggris dan Belanda. Argumen ini dianggap sebagai suatu kesalahan menurut perspektif Siam. Pilihan dan kesalahan Belanda, Inggris, termasuk Aceh juga dapat menjadi pelajaran yang baik.

Kata kunci : *Aceh, Siam, Nusantara, Belanda, dan Inggris.*

Introduction

We are accustomed to saying that in Southeast Asia only Siam (Thailand) survived the whole dangerous colonial period with its independence intact. This has given rise to a small industry among historians debating what Siam did right, or what special good fortune came its way. Siam's success is often compared with the failure of its neighbours to east and west, though seldom to the archipelago states. Burma and Vietnam, though seemingly stronger and more militarized than Siam, were conquered by Britain and France respectively, each in three successive bites during the 19th century.

The two standard explanations of Siam's success are the good luck of its location, or the skill of its kings Rama IV (Mongkut, r.1851-68) and V (Chulalongkorn, r. 1868-1910). Those who prefer the former explanation point to its buffer position between British and French colonial spheres. Both European powers preferred a vestige of Thai sovereignty to remain rather than allow their rival to absorb it. This is certainly a factor, but others might have played such a role. Could not Aceh, in particular, have played it between British and Dutch?

The two crucial Siamese kings themselves attributed their success to their greater wisdom in handling the Europeans, in contrast with the stubborn clinging to tradition on the part of their neighbours, notably the Nguyen of Vietnam. When Chulalongkorn in 1884 asked his ambassador in Paris (and half-brother) how to avoid the fate of Burma and Vietnam,

the answer came back signed by 11 different Thai aristocrat-intellectuals in Europe. The danger, they wrote, came from the European conviction that their version of justice and civilization was so superior that they had a right and duty to spread it to the rest of the world. The only escape, therefore, was that “Siam must be accepted and respected by the western powers as a civilized nation”, providing progress, justice, and for the foreigners free trade and protection (Baker & Pongpaichit 2009: 76; see also Hall 1968: 667; Wyatt 1982: 181-190).

In practice this often meant turning the state voluntarily into something like a European colony, with an absolute monarch rather than a colonial governor at its apex. The system of government was reshaped in the pattern of Europe, slavery abolished, peace and order established through a state monopoly on violence, modern education begun and foreign trade welcomed. Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn played their European card well, employing Europeans from different countries to modernize their finances, trade, communications and transport facilities, and even to build their palaces. They also played the Chinese card innovatively, putting official relations on hold until China caught up with modern ideas of sovereign equality, while encouraging Chinese immigration at a higher rate than most of colonial Southeast Asia (Koizumi 2009). This provided both a dynamic middle class and an urban working class, keeping the Thai economy roughly on par with that of its colonized neighbours. In retaining formal independence through a century of modernization Siam was the undoubted winner in Southeast Asia. Many have argued, however, that Siam’s solution was a kind of ‘semi-colonialism’ (Anderson 1978; Jackson 2007). If we were measuring the degree to which societies succeeded in resisting pressures for western-style modernization altogether, on the other hand, we would need to look harder at the relative success of Brunei, Laos, Kelantan or Bali.

Aceh has seldom entered this comparison explicitly, even though it arguably kept its sovereignty and territory intact for longer than any other Southeast Asian state up to 1873¹. I am one of those who have done it implicitly, notably in my recent general history (Reid 2015: 214-33; see also Lee 2006), but it is time to address the question directly. As an entirely

coast-centred polity in a very strategic location Aceh had been exposed to European naval intrusion since 1509, longer than any other Southeast Asian state, yet had yielded none of its freedom of action. This paper will make the comparison between Acehnese and Siamese monarchies in terms of local agency and vital choices, rather than assuming the inevitable rise of Dutch (and hence Indonesian) authority.

The First Challenge, 1620-90

Southeast Asia's 'gunpowder states' rose rapidly in the sixteenth century on trade wealth, new firearms and new ideologies. Aceh was a prime example, but Banten, Makassar, Mataram, Ternate were similar in Archipelago, and Pegu and Ayutthaya in Mainland (Reid 2015: 85-91). The maritime ones such as Aceh were the most exposed to the Dutch Company (VOC) in its quest for a monopoly of the spice trade. All except Aceh were defeated in what I call the 'seventeenth century crisis' by a tenacious VOC waiting patiently for its opportunity to exploit internal conflict to impose some degree of trade monopoly (Reid 2015: 142-56). Makassar (1669), Banten (1684), Palembang, Johor /Riau, and Banjarmasin were all obliged by some VOC treaty to accept no European traders in their ports except the Dutch, even if they evaded these terms as the VOC weakened its grip in the eighteenth century. Aceh was the only such trade-dependent maritime state to escape this fate and remain fully independent and open to all traders.

The Mainland states and Java survived this difficult period by withdrawing from the international trade system to varying degrees. In Java and Burma the core of the state moved from the coast to the rice-bowls of the interior. All became more self-sufficient, with rice eventually becoming their principal export. The long eighteenth century was a time of consolidation around vernacular identities, digesting the revolutionary global identities that had penetrated during the 'age of commerce' (Reid 2015:142-176).

The Second Challenge: Independent Southeast Asia's Last Stand, 1800-60

South Asia from the 1760s, and then Southeast Asia after 1800, was swept up into a kind of 'World War' between Britain and France.

Britain was the winner both in Asia and Europe, and in the peace of 1815 Britain defended a strong Netherlands (including modern Belgium) which could act as a British client and buffer state in both Europe and Asia. As a result of the wars European control of Java & Maluku became firmer, and Britain became the dominant Southeast Asian naval power, with strong naval bases in Penang (1786) and Singapore (1819). Burma and Siam felt British power, Burma losing its coast to British India in two wars, 1824-6 and 1852-3. The Nguyen were able to unify Vietnam for the first time from Saigon to Hanoi only with the help of French arms (1788-1802). All the major actors in this period knew the superiority of European arms and organization. All reached out for whatever European military assistance and knowhow might least endanger their freedom of action.

The most successful players of this game could be said to be those who correctly perceived the strength of the British in the region, and played that card strategically. As was concluded of Siam's relative success, "The keystone of Siamese Policy was the conciliation of Britain, since it was so much more powerful and active than other nations" (Wyatt 1982: 185).

In the Nusantara world the rulers who most opportunistically and successfully rode this British tiger were the Temenggongs, later Sultans, of Johor. This minor family was used by Raffles as part of the legitimization of his takeover of Singapore in 1819. The first such Temenggongs were largely dependent on British subsidies, but Abu Bakar, who ruled from 1862 until his death in 1895, became a very effective modernizing ruler of Johor, and the strongest Malay figure in the Peninsula. He gave licences strategically to Chinese entrepreneurs to open up gambier and pepper plantations that provided a viable financial basis for the state. He employed Englishmen to modernize his finances and administration. Most importantly, he passed the 'civilized' test that Europeans used as the measure for viable independent states. Governor Ord of Singapore declared him "in his habits and tastes... an English Gentleman... and the only Rajah ...who rules in accordance with the practice of civilized nations" (cited Trocki 2007, 155). Yet he balanced his visits to Queen Victoria (who knighted him Sir Abu Bakar) with those to the Ottoman sultan, and sought Islamic legitimacy by copying elements of the Turkish law code into his law-making.

How to Handle the Europeans

Aceh was well ahead of the more isolationist Mainland kingdoms in the business of using Europeans to try to modernize administration. Like many of his predecessors Sultan Ala'ud-din Mahmud Shah (1760-88) had a fragile hold on the throne, using what revenues he could draw from the foreign trade of the port to try to overawe or coerce his wealthy pepper-exporting vassals. His key military weapon was a force of a thousand south Indian soldiers introduced by the leading Tamil Muslim (Chulia) trader, Kassim, acting as a shahbandar in charge of trade and foreign relations. In the 1770s English 'country traders' offered what appeared for a time a more secure prospect of support, in return for levying the port duties on European ships on behalf of the sultan. The East India Company agent Desvoeux, however, pushed matters too far for the ever-critical Acehnese of the interior XXII Mukims, who began to threaten the English settlement in the capital when it appeared Desvoeux was building a defensible fort there. This private British establishment initiative had to be withdrawn in late 1772 (Lee 1995: 32- 55).

Mahmud's son and successor Muhammad Syah (1781-90) was more cosmopolitan. As a lad "of spirit and genius" he had talked his way into the armoury of French-controlled Mauritius while on his way to Mecca, and in consequence "spoke both Malay, French and Portuguese", as well as French techniques of casting shells (Forrest 1792: 51-2). He employed another Chulia Muslim, Poh Salleh, as shahbandar, but also brought the employment of Europeans to a new level. About a dozen served in the royal fleet, commanded by an adventurer named Huatt, evidently Flemish in origin. The task of this armed fleet was to patrol the small ports of the north and west coasts to try to compel either the foreign pepper-traders or the local rajas (ulèëbalang, in later parlance) to pay some share of their profits to the sultan. These Europeans were therefore often in conflict with the foreign traders, including some of the Penang-based ones who had the ear of local British authorities. Huatt was eventually caught out by the sultan making use of the royal name for his own purposes, and fled Aceh in 1792 with four of the ships and most of the Europeans (Lee 1995: 81-3).

Muhammad was in turn succeeded by his nine-year-old son Hussain, who attempted to rule in his own right from 1802 as Sultan Ala'ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Shah, perhaps the most westernized of Aceh's sultans. He also sought to modernise and professionalize his navy by buying European vessels and employing Europeans to command them. He had reportedly spent time on a British ship as a boy and had enough English to be comfortable with Europeans (Lee 1995:93-4).

He had adopted in a great measure the manners and ideas of the Europeans with whom he had been accustomed to associate...His table is served in the European style to which the Europeans resorting to his Dominions are constantly invited, and even his household is composed partly of Portuguese servants (Lawrence 1811, cited in Lee 1995: 146).

His key adviser initially was Francois L'Etoile, a Danish citizen of part-French origin, who aroused some unfounded fears in British Penang that France was gaining influence in Aceh. When he died in 1812, Jauhar Alam sought an English adviser in the hope of ensuring better relations with the dominant power. He chose Cuthbert Fenwick, who had been trading in the Straits area since the 1790s, first out of Calcutta and then from a base in Penang. The Sultan came to trust him to conduct his foreign relations, and write in his name to the governments in Penang and Bengal. He appeared to be a merchant with genuine sympathy for the Sultan's cause, and claimed to have put the finances of the sultanate in an acceptable modern order for the first time. Unlike the British later employed in key roles by King Chulalongkorn, however, he had not been recommended by the British government. On the contrary, he was regarded as a troublemaker by the Penang establishment. He had quarrelled with several of its leading figures to the point of taking them to court (Lee 1995: 156-63).

The three-cornered conflicts between the Sultan, Fenwick and Penang eventually became too much, and once again the Europeans left the sultan's service in January 1816. Jauhar Alam then turned to a prominent Penang Chinese, Koh Lay Huan (better known as Che Wan), who had been a revenue farmer and Capitan China of Penang in Francis Light's time, and controlled some smaller vessels (Lee 1995: 228-233).

One of Koh's partners in the pepper trade was the chief of Mangin, Chut Buntar, who had a fleet of smaller armed vessels moving pepper between growers and foreign buyers on the west coast. Jauhar attempted to gain some share of the profits by appointing Cut Buntar as a wakil, collecting pepper revenues for him on the West Coast (Lee 1995: 243- 4). This appears to be the 'Shewbuntar' honoured by Salem pepper- traders with the marble tombstone and English in scription still standing in Kuala Batèë (Qualla Battoo, in the English of the day), clearly a tribute to his success in translating skilful diplomacy into local power on the coast:

Active, persevering, energetic, success followed his efforts, & his dominion & reputation were widely extended. Personally brave, he was cautious & calculating. ... The traditions of his countrymen will preserve the memory of his abilities & his conquests. Strangers [the European pepper-traders] will recollect the kindness of his temper & the friendliness of his conduct.²

The British 'Guarantee' of Aceh Independence

The death of Cut Buntar in 1824 coincided with a major reversal of the pattern of ever-closer Acehese entanglement with European trade and ideas. Raffles' Treaty with Sultan Jauhar al-Alam in 1819 might be compared to Bowring's treaty with Siam in 1855. Both were theoretically equal alliances allowing for freedom of trade and for a British presence in the respective Asian capitals. But whereas Bowring's treaty with King Mongkut inaugurated a kind of partnership between British commercial interests and the Thai monarchy, Raffles' treaty sparked a local reaction in the opposite direction. Essentially it was forgotten because it contradicted the perceived interest of Penang traders to oppose every royal attempt to control trade. As the Penang Governor put it in 1824: 'The more ports are open, the greater competition among sellers...Any arrangement of the more powerful of the neighbouring states...[to] establish a monopoly for themselves, would be an event much to be deplored' (Fullerton, 1825, cited Reid 1969: 13).

This perceived conflict of interest became particularly acute in 1813, when a prominent Penang Aceh trader of Hadhrami sayyid descent, Sayyid Husain al-Aidid, persuaded the dissatisfied ulèëbalangs of Aceh Besar to

proclaim his son sultan of Aceh as Saif ul-Alam Shah. This prompted a low-level civil war between Jauhar and Saif, with each sultan garnering support from some of the crucial ports. Penang merchants and officials tended to favour one of their own, Saif ul-Alam. Stamford Raffles, on the other hand, saw Aceh as crucial to continuing British influence in the Melaka Straits and the Malay world more generally after the return of the Dutch possessions Britain had annexed during the Napoleonic wars. As Governor of Bencoolen (Bengkulu), Raffles overruled Penang objections and signed a Treaty with Jauhar Alam in 1819. This made Aceh a virtual British protectorate through a mutual defensive alliance. Aceh undertook to allow no European residents and agree to no further foreign entanglements without British consent. A British agent would be placed at Banda Aceh to cement the alliance and promote western-style modernization.

At this point Aceh was well ahead of Siam or any other Southeast Asian state on the path to a modernization acceptable to Europe. However Raffles proceeded directly to Singapore from Aceh, to sign another treaty with the Malay chiefs he could find there. This quickly made Singapore a far more attractive means of asserting British influence in the Straits. Penang reverted to its traditional policy of doing nothing to encourage the sultans of Aceh to control the small river-ports from which pepper and betelnut were exported. No agent was appointed, and the Penang government did no more to support the sultan than to withdraw support from his rival Saif (Reid 1969: 7-11; Anderson 1840; van der Kemp 1900).

The London Treaty of 1824 was intended to settle differences between English and Dutch after the upheavals of the Napoleonic wars. Britain was primarily concerned to secure freedom for British trade and a dominant position in the Melaka Straits route to China for which Singapore was deemed more critical than Aceh. Forced to yield over their claims to Singapore, the Dutch advanced the idea of making the Straits of Melaka and Singapore a boundary to keep out future British incursions (incidentally defining modern Indonesia). Britain agreed to Dutch demands that no British settlement be made in Sumatra, “nor any Treaty concluded by British authority with any Native Prince, Chief or State therein.” Britain,

anxious to prevent the monopolizing treaties the Dutch had always sought in the past, insisted that neither party's treaties could exclude the other.

The British acknowledged in a confidential exchange of notes that Raffles' Aceh Treaty was incompatible with these provisions and would be modified into an innocuous facilitation of British trade. The British side expressed the confidence that the Dutch would adopt "no measures hostile to the King of Acheen," while the Dutch agreed to this, promising that "without losing anything of its independence" Aceh would be encouraged in a path of free and secure trade. This was the basis of a British "guarantee" of Aceh independence that was to become critical in the era of Dutch expansion after 1858 (Reid 1969: 11-13; Marks 1959; Tarling 1962: 81-173).

Neither British nor Acehnese foresaw a 'Siamese', nor even a 'Johor', solution for the challenges that would assail the sultanate in that more dangerous era. Nothing was done to modify Raffles' treaty. Jauhar Alam's ineffective son and successor, Muhammad Shah (1823-38), did appeal to it in a letter to the Penang government in 1826, without any clarification from the British side about it. Although it seemed a dead letter, a later Penang governor when it suited him in 1844 reminded Muhammad's successor that the treaty "particularly grants the trade of all the Acehnese ports to the British (Tarling 1957: 136-7). Later still, a legal official at the British Foreign Office admitted that Raffles' treaty continued to be valid because no treaty could be unilaterally revoked without the knowledge of the other (Reid 1969: 13-14).

Ibrahim Opts for Turkey

Until mid-century the Dutch had almost nothing to do with Aceh, while the British in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Melaka and Singapore) handled an ever-increasing proportion of Aceh's trade. An 1825 estimate valued Aceh's total exports then at 1.9 million Spanish dollars, of which \$400,000 worth was shipped to Penang in small Chinese or Acehnese vessels, about a million worth was taken by the large American pepper-ships, and the remainder was shared between Indian, French and Arab vessels (Cowan 1950: 155). In the 1850s, however, the advent of steamships

and regular shipping routes from established entrepôts such as Penang and Singapore, caused the end of the long-distance American trade on Aceh. Aceh's exports shifted overwhelmingly to Penang, which was taking over a million Spanish dollars worth by 1858, and over two million in the 1860s (Reid 1969: 14-15, 23-4, 295).

The Straits Settlements authorities for the most part continued with the policy “not to recognise an authority which would tend only to interfere with the freedom of trade in the several ports and rivers along the coast of Sumatra” (Acting Resident Councillor of Penang 1862, cited Reid 1969: 41). Although Muhammad Shah, and more particularly his forceful brother Ibrahim, tried a few times their father's policy of directing trade to Banda Aceh where it could be taxed by the sultan, essentially that policy was abandoned after 1824. The sultanate instead sought to persuade the rich coastal ulèëbalangs to forward an annual hasil (tribute) to the sultan, through a mixture of carrots (royal offices and honours) and sticks (military and economic pressure through rival ulèëbalangs). Sultan Muhammad's brother Tuanku Ibrahim was already an effective war-leader during the former's reign, and took control at his death in 1838 as regent for the infant heir Sulaiman. Sulaiman tried to regain control when he came of age in 1850, but died in 1857 without having fully succeeded. Ibrahim took the royal title Ala'ad-din Mansur Shah to rule until his death in 1870, though still better known by his personal name. Ibrahim had been the most effective war leader in the contest with the Dutch for the west coast territories of Singkil and Barus in 1838-9. He had obtained no practical support from the British in the 1838 crisis. The involvement of Wahhabi inclined refugees from the Padri conflict in resisting the Dutch advance may have disposed him rather towards pan-Islam. The appeal of his rival Sulaiman to the British for help against him (albeit in vain) cannot have improved his confidence in that alliance.

Even more than his counterparts in Burma and Vietnam at the time, Ibrahim felt the need for powerful friends other than the British. He was most interested in Ottoman Turkey, to which he first wrote during the Singkil/Barus crisis of 1838. The attraction of Turkey was three fold: Aceh's submission to Ottoman sovereignty in the 1560s was well

remembered through the Turkish cannons sent out at that time and kept around the *dalam* (citadel); Turkey had recovered control of the holy cities of the Hejaz from Wahhabi rebels in 1812, and the fast-growing pilgrim traffic from Aceh to Mecca (rapidly expanded when the steamships of Mohammad Alsagoff in Singapore made Aceh their last stop before Jidda) strengthened the legitimacy of the Turkish sultan as universal Caliph, especially for the growing number of Arab traders from Hadhramaut in the region; and finally, in an age of seemingly irresistible imperialism, Ibrahim's argument was that Aceh was already part of a great European empire, that of Turkey.

Ibrahim's position on the Turkish option emerges most clearly in the Malay and Arabic letters he addressed to Ottoman Sultan Abdulmecid (r.1839-61) in February 1849 and March 1850, recently rediscovered in Ottoman archives. There he pointed out that he had already written appealing for Turkish assistance against the Dutch in the Islamic years 1253 (1837-8CE), 1257 (1841-2), and 1261 (1845). This hope of Turkish support, he wrote, arose from the crisis of 1838 when the Minangkabau (Padri) religious leaders (*ulama dan orang besar*) wrote to appeal for Aceh help against the Dutch conquest of their land, and direct war broke out between Dutch and Acehnese in Singkil. Aceh's war commanders and nobles (*hulubalang dan orang besar*) advised that "because the Dutch have warships while we have none, and furthermore because we are under the rule of the Sultan of Rum", it was essential to appeal first to Istanbul. Then and later, letters were sent in the form of tribute to a sovereign, accompanied by a tribute (*persembahan*) of several tons of pepper, benzoin and camphor. The letters and gifts were entrusted to French or American pepper-traders, and apparently never arrived. We know of them because described in detail in the letters delivered by the Aceh envoy Mohammad Ghauth, in 1850, sent at considerable expense when the earlier letters remained unanswered, and accompanied by a remarkable map displaying Aceh's dominance in Sumatra and beyond. There he repeated the insistence that Aceh had always been subject to the Ottoman sultans. "We in the land of Aceh have always been born slaves [*anak mas*] of Your Majesty from ancient times to the present, and we have never forgotten or neglected Your

Majesty at any time or moment.”Ibrahim therefore proposed that Turkey send to Aceh “twelve warships manned with an appropriate number of troops,” which would then spark a general revolt against the Dutch in all the surrounding lands. (Kadi, Peacock and Gallop 2011A and B).

The accompanying Arabic letter by Mohammad Ghauthis even more explicit about the sixteenth century subjection of Aceh to Turkey, well documented in Turkish and other sources (Casale2005; Reid 1969). Turkish documents have hitherto been taken to show that Sultan Selim II ordered a fleet to sail out of the Red Sea to aid Aceh against the Acehnese, but it failed to do so because diverted to help Sinan Pasha suppress a rebellion in Yemen. Mohammad Ghauth insisted that ‘the records of the Sultanate’ show that Sinan Pasha did go to Aceh with a fleet in the 1660s, found copper there with which to manufacture guns, and “took control of the whole island of Sumatra and its regions... and since that time the entire island has been subject to the jurisdiction of the Sublime Ottoman State” (Kadi, Peacock and Gallop 2011A: 167-8).

This remarkable initiative finally achieved some of its object. Between December 1851 and February 1852 various surviving official minutes reveal that Sultan Abdulmejid was favourably disposed to the mission and acknowledged Aceh’s ancient submission to his predecessors. Expenses were approved to send the Acehnese envoy home together with an Ottoman official who would travel incognito to report further on Aceh’s situation and needs, and on potentially difficult European claims in Sumatra. It is not known whether such an official, or a royal letter answering that of Ibrahim, ever reached Banda Aceh (Kadi, Peacock and Gallop 2011A: 177-9). We do know that Ibrahim was encouraged enough by the response to send 10,000 Spanish dollars to help Turkey in the Crimean war in 1853, and received in return an Ottoman sword and decoration he made a point of wearing when receiving Dutch envoys in 1855, no doubt hoping to make the point that he already had an imperial suzerain (Reid 2014). Perhaps it was the additional prestige the Turkish connection provided him that enabled him in 1854 to persuade his allies in Pidië and eastern Aceh to assemble a fleet of 200 small vessels, which asserted Aceh’s authority over the Malay rulers of East Sumatra for the first time in two centuries (Reid 1969: 16, 25).

Ibrahim was also interested in France as a possible ally, and had twice exchanged letters with its rulers King Louis-Philippe in 1840 and Emperor Louis-Napoleon in 1849. The second of these had been entrusted to the same Mohammad Ghauth destined for Turkey, who had sent his secretary on from Cairo to Paris in response to a French invitation. The replies to Ibrahim's appeals for very practical military assistance had in both cases been beautiful but empty letters of friendship, accompanied in the second case by a fine sword. Ibrahim was undoubtedly more interested in the Ottoman option, and did nothing to exploit the French one (Reid 2005: 168-75).

The Dutch finally became active in 1854 about implementing their 1824 obligation to encourage stable commerce in Aceh, primarily out of fear that some third party might take advantage of Aceh's independence. The chief Dutch fear was then France, and later Italy, but it had no thought of Turkey. The first Dutch ship sent to Aceh, in 1855, annoyed Ibrahim by visiting his dependencies before the capital, but an 1856 visit was friendlier, holding out the possibility of a treaty between equals. Still aware of the importance of Britain, Ibrahim wrote to ask the Governor of the Straits Settlements whether he should be friendly with the Dutch. The unspoken alternative was of course to hold the Dutch at bay and trust in British support and protection. Governor Blundell's answer, at a time of unusually smooth Anglo-Dutch relations over Sumatra, was that he should. By implication, again, Britain had no intention of helping him to resist Dutch advances. Ibrahim therefore signed a treaty of friendship with the Netherlands Indies Government in 1857 (Reid 1969: 21-2; Tarling 1957: 164-5).

A precious glimpse of Aceh's preference for Turkish over British support at this time comes from the later accounts of the anti-imperial Italian adventurer, Celso Cesar Moreno (1831-1901). He claimed to have arrived in Aceh on a Malay vessel in late 1859 in the guise of 'Mustafa Vizir', after spending the previous two years sympathising with the rebels who took arms against the British in 1857 (the 'Indian Mutiny'). In particular he advised, or even fought alongside, Nana Sahib, claimant to the throne of Kanpur, who led the rebellion against British forces there in June and July 1857 but disappeared after its failure, probably to Nepal. Although

reluctant to admit this explicitly to his later western audiences, Moreno probably presented in Aceh as a Muslim convert opposing the spread of European, especially British, imperialism. He claimed that Sultan Ibrahim was so close that he allowed Moreno to marry one of his many daughters, something impossible had he not been understood to be Muslim.

Moreno's later press interviews claimed he was one of many refugees from the conflict in India, who had chosen Aceh as a last holdout against the spreading imperial hegemony of Britain and its Netherlands client. As he told an American journalist in 1873,

[The Sultan] thinks he is invincible. He determined to expel the Dutch as early as 1859, when many of the chiefs of the Mussulman faith left East India after the war of the rebellion and went as political refugees to Acheen, which was regarded as a kind of political Mecca. I, coming from the Indian rebellion in 1859, was received with great consideration (Moreno 1873).

Moreno was well aware, as other European observers were not, of Ibrahim's strong interest in Ottoman Turkey, and the reviving of Aceh's 16th century acceptance of the suzerainty of the Ottoman Caliph. In his first search for foreign friends for Aceh, in Italy in 1865, he admitted the inconvenient truth that Aceh was "formally tributary" to Ottoman Turkey (Vecoli & Durante 2014: 64), something then unknown to other Europeans. Later he claimed the Aceh citadel (*dalam*) was:

built by Turkish officers, who were sent there by Sultan Makmoud³ of Turkey. ...The soldiers of Acheen are mostly Sidibays, from the coast of the Red Sea, especially from Aden. ... They are generally used as a body-guard of the Sultan, and all are armed with muskets. In times of war they are the recruiting officers for the natives, the Malays (Moreno 1873).⁴

If this group, probably hybridised Indian/Arab Muslims, replaced the South Indian Muslim guards (often referred to as Chulia) of his royal predecessors, it confirms Ibrahim's reorientation of Aceh's foreign policy towards the Middle East and global Islam. Moreno gave some names, which I have not been able to trace elsewhere, of such political refugees acting as military leaders for the Aceh Sultan.

When I was there they were Mohomet Ali, of Muscat; Sheike Abdallah, of Aden; Sheike Ali, of Madras, Malabar; Sharvardar Suttan, of Karical; Sheike Abou Baker, of Delhi, Patan Miteen, of Luck now. All these had held commissions in the British service in India as Zubahdars, the highest rank to which a native can aspire in the British service (Moreno 1873).⁵

The Government of British India sent the steamer Pluto to Banda Aceh in September 1859, carrying the first British Superintendent of the Andaman Islands, Captain Haughton. He brought a letter from the Viceroy to the Aceh sultan, asking his cooperation in the new British penal colony there (needed for Indian rebels), and particularly to search for Andamanese slaves in Aceh who could help as interpreters with the famously ‘savage’ indigenous hunter-gatherers of those islands. Although not primarily concerned with Britain’s Aceh relationship, this visit should have been an occasion to exploit Britain’s guarantee of Aceh independence. Haughton arrived on 28 September and left in a huff the next day. He had been “received with much discourtesy, and was not admitted to an interview with him [the Sultan]”. The reason he was given for this rudeness was that the Acehnese believed that “the English had suffered severe loss, if not complete defeat, in India during the Mutiny, and also that they were at war with the continental powers in Europe.” (Portman 1899: 291-2; also Reid 1969: 85). Moreno and the other Muslim refugees from India appear likely to have been the stimulus for this crucial turning away from Britain.

Third Stage: High Imperialism from 1860

Imperialism became much more threatening to remaining pockets of independence in the 1860s. France occupied the southern portion of Viet Nam and obtained a protectorate over Cambodia; Britain had already occupied Rangoon and Lower Burma in the 1850s. Dutch ambitions in Sumatra advanced suddenly in 1863 when Britain advised the Netherlands that it was about to send a gunboat to Tamiang, in eastern Aceh, to seek compensation for the murder of two Penang Chinese there. Britain believed that Tamiang was part of Aceh, whose independence was guaranteed by the 1824 London Treaty, so London was surprised when the Dutch claimed sovereignty over it under a treaty they had signed with Siak in

1858. This maximalist claim obliged Batavia to mount an expedition in 1865 to overawe the small east coast states up to Tamiang, thereby confronting Aceh directly at the border. Enthusiasm for the Suez Canal, built by de Lesseps between 1859 and 1869, galvanised European states such as France and Italy into scrambling for strategic colonies along the new route to Asia. It was a dangerous time that called for statesmanship of a high order, but Aceh's ageing sultan did not find it easy to change direction or to consider emulating the path being taken by Siam.

Moreno, in Aceh until 1862, had tried to convince Ibrahim to appeal through him to the newly unified Italian government. Since Italian *Risorgimento* nationalists like himself saw themselves as heroic fighters against imperialism, particularly that of Austria, Moreno readily convinced himself, if not perhaps Ibrahim, that Italy would be a more enlightened kind of protector than Britain or France. 'I always reminded him that the Dutch would conquer the remaining parts of Sumatra and that Sri Rajah would become the vassal of the white infidels...as had happened to the other rajahs' (Vecoli & Durante 2014: 64). Finally returning to Italy in 1865, he gained some support from the King and the *Risorgimento* hero Nino Bixio for a kind of Italian colony in Sabang with a protectorate over Aceh, but the powerless Italian government deferred to Dutch insistence they had some claims to all of Sumatra (Vecoli & Durante 2014: 65-71; Reid 1969: 85).

It is difficult to know how much influence Moreno really had with the Aceh leadership, but this last of the sultanate's European advisors certainly used what he had against a British alliance. The next influential foreigner to appear, the talented Hadhrami *sayyid*, Habib Abd'ur-Rahman az-Zahir, once again played to the Turkish and pan-Islamic sentiment.. He arrived in 1864 and rapidly accumulated influence as imam of Aceh's great mosque, the rebuilding of which he organised. Sultan Ibrahim appointed him also to head a religious court. Ibrahim however became suspicious of his growing power, making it necessary for the Habib depart for Mecca in 1868 (Reid 1969: 81-3). He carried yet more appeals for Turkish help, signed by a number of Aceh notables but not the sultan himself. These again insisted that Aceh had always been under Turkish suzerainty, as evidenced by the

“flying of the banners of the Sublime Ottoman state in our ports and ships” (cited Kadi 2015: 163).

At Ibrahim’s death in 1870, Az-Zahir hurried back to Aceh and engineered the succession of the young son of Sultan Sulaiman, Mahmud (r.1870-4) for whom he initially became regent. This was perhaps the last chance of appealing to Britain to honour its guarantee of Aceh independence, but it would have required exceptional skill and determination. Instead, the Habib was still oriented rather to Turkey, to which he departed again in 1872 after arousing further resentment from Mahmud. The sultan himself was too young and insecure to take a strong position, and faced a British official dom increasingly committed to the expansion of Dutch control.

In 1871 Britain agreed to an Anglo-Dutch Sumatra Treaty which removed the Britain’s guarantee of Acehnese independence. Thereafter the tragic developments followed in quick succession, as Holland blundered into war with a sultanate it neither knew nor understood. The war was disastrous for both sides, but particularly of course for Aceh. The defeat of the first Dutch expedition in 1873 produced a national crisis in Holland, with irresistible demands for the restoration of national ‘honour’. The Dutch commander compounded the tragedy after Sultan Mahmud’s death from cholera in early 1874 by declaring the sultanate abolished. Aceh was declared simply part of Netherlands India, which it would not become *de facto* for decades. Among the most remarkable of Aceh’s last-ditch attempts to avert this disaster was the final mission of Abd’ur-Rahman az-Zahir to Turkey, after the defeat of the first Dutch expedition in 1873. This did finally persuade Turkey to do something about its often-acknowledged suzerainty over Aceh. In August 1873 the Turkish foreign minister sent to his Netherlands counterpart a very diplomatically-worded letter spelling out the historic submission of Aceh to Turkish sovereignty over four centuries. The letter offered to use the Ottoman sultan’s great influence in Aceh to mediate for peace in Holland’s war with Aceh, though without disputing Holland’s right “to be sole judge of the measures imposed on her by the care of her dignity and the honour of her arms” (Woltring 1962: 612-14; Reid 1969: 119-128).

Conclusion

Aceh's "last stand" bears interesting comparison with those of the Mainland. Aceh was typical of Malay states in its high dependence on trade, but like Vietnam possessed an unwieldy long coastline of many potential ports. A common Acehnese culture had developed in the eighteenth century, but there was always tension between this and the cosmopolitanism of the ports. The great expansion of pepper-growing after 1790 had strengthened the minor rajas (later known as *uleebalang*) against the sultan. The status of Penang as a stapling port made it dangerously prominent as an economic centre for the prospering Aceh coast, rather than Banda Aceh itself. After the 1819 climax of British- Aceh unity, Penang's economic interest seemed to contradict that of the sultanate for control of trade.

Just as Vietnam looked to its ancient connection with China as protection against the modern threat of France, Aceh turned again to Turkey (Reid 2015: 227, 231-3). The idea of a universal Ottoman protectorate was exciting to endangered Muslims, and also to some idealistic Turkish nationalists. It was acutely embarrassing for the powerless Turkish government, concerned primarily to fend off Russian, British or French claims that it could not adequately govern its own crumbling empire. Turkey responded to successive Acehnese appeals with sweet words, while telling the Dutch that the appeals were rejected. Any non-Muslim potential "protector" evoked visceral hostilities that went back to Aceh's sixteenth-century anti-Portuguese origins, whereas *Rum* (Istanbul) was remembered as the protector that had sent the large cannon that still remained. Like its Vietnamese counterpart, the Acehnese elite looked for salvation to the remembered, idealized exemplar of a familiar civilization, however decadent, rather than to a bullying alien one.

In a sense, therefore, Aceh's situation was closer to that of Vietnam than of Siam. It was geographically much more exposed and fragmented than central Siam in the watershed of a single Menam River. It also had, like Vietnam, a proud past associated with a once-great cultural model and occasional protector in Istanbul. Like Vietnam, it turned inward and

neo-traditional in the face of the external danger of the 19th century, in contrast with an earlier period of modernising cosmopolitanism. The Aceh leadership did have choices; it had agency; but it also had severer constraints in the form of the economic interest of the Straits Settlements, which cooled British willingness to defend Aceh's independence.

Endnotes

- ¹ It is a close call even with Siam, if we accept the 1867 Franco-Siamese agreement to French protection of Cambodia as more substantial a loss than Aceh's loss of Singkil and Baros to the Dutch in 1838. But Siam's claims in Cambodia, always contested by Vietnam and often by Cambodia itself, might be considered as questionable as Aceh's in the Deli area (East Sumatra), of which the Dutch took control in 1865.
- ² I gratefully acknowledge the pioneering research enterprise of Michael Feener, a later son of Massachusetts who became expert in things Acehnese, in locating this tombstone, lost to scholarship for nearly two centuries, in 2007. Thanks to his guidance I was also able to visit and photograph the tombstone, now in the schoolyard of the sekolah dasar of Kampung Tuha Baru, kecamatan Kuala Batèë, Aceh Selatan, in May 2011. Thanks are due also to Ivan, invaluable Acehnese driver for both of us.
- ³ Moreno may well have heard such a story from the Sultan or others in Aceh, even though it was Sultan Selim II (1566-74) who is known to have sent effective military aid to Aceh, while Mahmud II (1808-39) was the first Ottoman sultan with whom Ibrahim sought renewed contact in 1838. The substantial walls of the citadel appear to originate from Aceh's sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-36), though much damaged by earthquakes and decay over the centuries, and quite possibly restored by Ibrahim with foreign help.
- ⁴ I have not been able to trace this Sidibay or Sidibuy community. It may be a clan or village name of a group of Muslims who opposed the British conquest of Aden in 1839, or were displaced by it.
- ⁵ I have not been able to trace any of these names elsewhere.

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مساعدة هيئة التحرير:

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كوسنانو

الصورة في الغلاف الأمامي مأخوذة من الصورة في المقالة

Enlivening Cultural Environments through Sharing and Gotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation)

محور هذه المجلة هو تزويد القراء بمعلومات حول خطة إندونيسية ودولية في تطوير المؤلفات والتراث الديني من خلال نشر المقالات والتقارير البحثية ومراجعات الكتب.

تركزت هريتيج اوف نوسانتارا للبحث في المؤلفات الدينية سواء كانت معاصرة أو قديمة، والتراث الديني الواقع في جنوب شرق آسيا، وترحب بمساهمات المثقفين والعلماء المتخصصين في هذا المجال.

مركز البحوث وتطوير المؤلفات والتراث الديني

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مجلة دولية لبحث المؤلفات والتراث الديني
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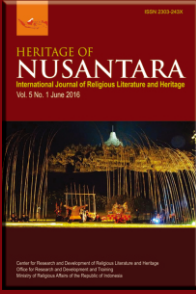
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(دراسة تحليلية على كتابه آداب المعلمين)

*At Tarbiyah bil 'Iqābil Badanī fīl Madrasah al Ibtidāiyyah
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