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# QUR'ANIC FOOTPRINTS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE TURKIC WORLD: A MYSTERY SOLVED

Osman Nuri Solak\* and Peter G. Riddell\*\*

**Abstract:** This article links Southeast Asian *tafsir* and the Ottoman State by focusing on the first printed edition of the *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* in Istanbul in 1884. The island of Sumatra and the Sultanate of Aceh played a crucial role in the spread of Islam and Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) throughout the Malay world. A foundational name is that of 'Abd al-Rā'ūf al-Fansūrī (ca. 1615–1693), one of the earliest Qur'anic commentators in the Malay world. His work, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, represents the first – and for several centuries the only – complete interpretation of the Qur'an in the Malay language.<sup>1</sup> The *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, which was written in Aceh in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, was completed with the help of 'Abd al-Rā'ūf's student and co-author, Bābā Dāwūd al-Rūmī (d. first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century). The *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was first printed in Istanbul in 1884, from a manuscript brought to Istanbul and presented to Sultan Abdülhamid II by Ahmad al-Fatānī (d. 1908), supervisor of the Malay printing press in Mecca.<sup>2</sup> This recently discovered manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is held in the Faculty of Theology of Uludag University, Bursa.<sup>3</sup>

**Keywords:** *Ottoman, Aceh, tafsir, manuscript, Malay, printing*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter G. Riddell, *Transferring a Tradition: 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī's Rendering into Malay of the Jalālayn Commentary* (University of California, Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Osman Nuri Solak, "The Discovery of a Manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, the First Complete Qur'an Interpretation in Malay," Southeast Asia Library Group, June 30, 2023, accessed December 30, 2024, <https://southeastasianlibrarygroup.wordpress.com/2023/06/30/the-discovery-of-a-manuscript-of-tarjuman-al-mustafid-the-first-complete-quran-interpretation-in-malay/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## INTRODUCTION: ‘ABD AL-RA’ŪF AL-FANŞŪRĪ

Each region of the majority-Islamic world has produced pioneering individuals who were foundational to the spread of the Islamic faith. For Muslim Southeast Asia, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf ibn ‘Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanşūrī al-Singkilī (ca. 1615–93), spiritual head of the Sultanate of Aceh in the 1660s–90s, was such a pioneering figure.

‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s influence on his region is comparable to the impact on Arab Islam of the historian and exegete Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), as well as the profound influence on Persian-speaking communities of Abū al-Qasem Maṅşūr Ferdowsī (d. 1020 or 1025) and Musharrif al-Dīn ibn Muşlih al-Dīn Sa‘dī (d. c. 1291).<sup>4</sup>

With regard to Turkish Islam, a statement by M. Hakan Yavuz is pertinent: “The story of Turkish Islam is an example of the localization of a universal teaching through the works of the Sufi orders.”<sup>5</sup> This statement, which emphasises the essential role of Sufism in the process of Islamisation of a region, also applies to Muslim Southeast Asia, with ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf playing a similar foundational role to some of the great names of early Turkish Sufism, such as Ahmet Yesevi (d. 1166), Sarı Saltuk (d. 1297/98), Hacı Bektaş Veli (d. 1271), and Bahattin Nakşbend (d. 1389).

‘Abd al-Ra’ūf spent 19 years studying at diverse locations and with prominent scholars in the Arabian peninsula. Though not the first Malay scholar to travel to Arabia for the purpose of studying the Islamic sciences, he is the first to have left a detailed record of such study visits by Malay scholars, in the form of a travelog, or a written account of his visit to the various centres of Islamic learning in the Arabian Peninsula from 1642–1661, which are listed in the following table. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s travelog takes the form of an autobiographical codicil to his Sufi work *Umdat al-Muḥtājīn*. His account begins with a discussion of the two Sufi orders that were his focus of study, the Shaṭṭāriyya and Qādiriyya orders, detailing the chain of scholarly generations between his Sufi teachers and the ultimate authority of all, Muḥammad, Messenger of Islam. After detailing these chains of authority, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf then lists the many teachers and scholars at whose feet he sat during his lengthy study visit to Arabia. The following table<sup>6</sup> identifies these figures and provides testimony to the rigour of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s educational formation.

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<sup>4</sup> Majid Daneshgar and Ervan Nurtawab, “Introduction: Peter G. Riddell’s Contribution to Malay-Indonesian Islamic Studies,” in *Malay-Indonesian Islamic Studies: A Festschrift in Honor of Peter G. Riddell*, ed. Majid Daneshgar and Ervan Nurtawab (Brill, 2022), 2.

<sup>5</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “Is there a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2004): 218.

<sup>6</sup> Douwe Adolf Rinkes, *Abdoerraoef van Singkel* [‘Abd al-Ra’ūf of Singkel] (Heerenveen, 1909), 27–28; Peter G. Riddell, “The Sufi Path: Travelling in Search of Learning,” in *Insights into Sufism: Voices from the Heart*, ed. R. Nicholls and P. Riddell (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 166–67.

	Name	Dates	Location	Notes
1	ʿAbd al-Qādir Mawrīr		Mukhā, Yemen	
2	Qāḍī Muḥammad		(al)-Luḥayya	
3	Qāḍī ʿUmar Muḥī al-Dīn		Mauza ʿ	
4	ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Khushayrī		Bayt al-Faqīh, Yemen	
5	Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd Allāh Jaʿmān	d. 1672	Bayt al-Faqīh [b. ʿUjayl]	He was a prolific issuer of fatwas and was close to his students (yuḥibbu'l-ṭalabah). ʿAbd al-Raʿūf stayed with him for a lengthy period, studying the exoteric sciences (law, dogma etc.) and then received a recommendation for further study with Aḥmad al-Qushāshī in Medina.
6	Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Jaʿmān		Bayt al-Faqīh [b. ʿUjayl]	The Jaʿmān family were prominent Sufis and scholars in Yemen, many of whom also studied under Aḥmad al-Qushāshī and Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan al-Kūrānī.
7	Aḥmad Jannah		Bayt al-Faqīh [b. ʿUjayl]	
8	Qāḍī Ishaq b. Muḥammad Jaʿmān	1605-1685	Zabīd, Yemen	He gave instructions in the traditions to, among others, Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan.
9	Muḥammad Thābanī		Zabīd, Yemen	
10	ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (al-)Khaṣṣ		Zabīd, Yemen	He was also the teacher of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī .
11	Amīn b. Al-Ṣiddiq al-Mizjājī		Zabīd, Yemen	Amīn b. Al-Ṣiddiq al-Mizjājī was a teacher of Aḥmad al-Qushāshī.
12	ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Diba ʿ		Zabīd, Yemen	Known as a Qurʿanic reciter and expert on the traditions.
13	ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-ʿAdanī		Zabīd, Yemen	The foremost Qurʿanic reciter of his time in Yemen.
14	ʿAbd al-Qādir Barkhalī		Jeddah	Mufti of Jeddah
15	Badr al-Dīn Lahūrī		Mecca	Originated from India; based in Mecca
16	ʿAbd Allāh Lahūrī		Mecca	Originated from India; based in Mecca
17	Imām ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ṭabarī	d. 1659	Mecca	A leading Meccah faqīh (Islamic jurist). He wrote, among other things, a chronicle of Mecca, with a description of its religious buildings.
18	Aḥmad al-Qushāshī	d. 1660	Medina	He initiated ʿAbd al-Raʿūf into the mystical path and instructed him in the esoteric sciences.
19	Burhān al-Dīn Maulā Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan al-Kūrānī	d. 1690	Medina	He completed ʿAbd al-Raʿūf's instruction after the death of Aḥmad al-Qushāshī and awarded him the licence allowing him to be independent in his mystical pursuits. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan is regularly mentioned with great reverence in biographical writings where he is cited.

‘Abd al-Ra’ūf returned home to the Sultanate of Aceh in 1661. He was commissioned by successive Sultans to write on the full breadth of the Islamic sciences: exegesis, prophetic traditions, theology, jurisprudence and mysticism. He composed the earliest commentary on the entire Qur’an written in the Malay language. Bearing the title *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, it was written during the reign of Acehnese Sultāna Tāj al-‘Ālam Safiyyat al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1641–1675) and was probably commissioned by her. It has played a profound role in educating countless Southeast Asian Muslims, directly or indirectly, since its completion around 1675 CE. It is to this work that we dedicate our attention in this article.

## THE OTTOMANS AND ACEH

The Ottoman Empire’s conquest of Egypt in 1517 resulted in the caliphate passing under Ottoman control. As a result, they assumed responsibility for the protection of the holy places in Mecca and Medina. The Ottomans also established relations with various Muslim sultanates in Asia and Africa by opening to the Indian Ocean via the Persian Gulf, Yemen and Red Sea coasts. This process resulted in political, diplomatic, military and commercial relations with Muslim sultanates in Southeast Asia, the easternmost part of the Islamic world. The most important of these relations was established with the Sultanate of Aceh in the north of the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

The Ottoman Empire showed interest in Aceh for centuries, sometimes sending weapons and military experts, but the distance between the two regions prevented the desired aid from being regularly provided. Nevertheless, Aceh remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire, periodically sending gifts of natural riches such as pearls, diamonds and rubies, and by reading the names of Ottoman rulers in sermons.<sup>7</sup>

For various reasons, including ongoing Ottoman conflict with European states and territorial losses, challenges in competing against powerful naval states such as Portugal, and the rebellions that broke out in Yemen, the presence of the Ottomans in the Far East, and therefore their contact with Aceh, decreased over time and eventually virtually disappeared.

One piece of evidence of shared history, culture, belief and brotherhood between the Ottoman Empire and Sultanate of Aceh relates to the story surrounding the discovery of a manuscript of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s commentary *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> İsmail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew Peacock, *Ottoman–Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives* (Brill, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Osman Nuri Solak, *Sultan II. Abdulhamid’e Takdim Edilen Malay Dünyasının İlk Kur’an Tefsiri Tercümanı’l Müstefidin Keşif Hikayesi (Açe–Mekke–İstanbul–Bursa)* [The Discovery Story of Tarjumān al-Mustafid: The First Malay Qur’anic Commentary Presented to Sultan Abdülhamid II (Aceh–Mecca–Istanbul–Bursa)] (Book World, 2024).

## THE TWO LIVES OF *TARJUMĀN AL-MUSTAĪD*

In studying a work of literature, one focus of interest is its composition, or in effect, its “birth.” For *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, we can identify two birth events, and therefore two lives. The first birth is associated with the Sultanate of Aceh and represented by the original composition by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf while serving as the spiritual head of the Sultanate.

In fact, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is composite in authorship, as is clearly indicated in colophons to two of the surviving manuscripts of the work, which carry the statement:

This is the end of the exalted commentary on the Qur’ān called *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* which was rendered into Jāwī by our shaykh... Amīn al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf son of ‘Alī Jāwī Faṣūri... His student and servant Bābā Dā’ūd Jāwī son of Isma’īl son of Aghā Muṣṭafā son of Aghā ‘Alī Rūmī (may God’s mercy be upon them all) added to some parts of it stories the greater part of which were taken from Khāzin, and some of the narratives relating to the qirā’āt on his orders...<sup>9</sup>

This crucial statement, when combined with careful examination of the text, launches us on a series of conclusions. First, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf composed the core commentary on the Qur’anic verses, drawing largely on the famous Arabic commentary by the Jalālayn, composed almost 200 years earlier in the Arab world. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf had undoubtedly encountered *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* during his study sojourn in Arabia from 1642–1661. Second, following the preparation of the core commentary by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf, one of his students of Turkish ancestry, Bābā Dā’ūd Rūmī,<sup>10</sup> added paragraphs termed *fāidah* throughout the work, drawing especially on the famous commentaries by the Shāfi’ī jurist and theologian ‘Abd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1286) and the Shāfi’ī traditionist and exegete ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Khāzin (d. 1340). These additions consisted of narrative anecdotes about events mentioned in the Qur’an as well as information on *qirā’āt al-Qur’ān*.

Once complete, the work was copied by scribes to produce a large number of handwritten manuscripts over subsequent centuries, beginning around 1675. Many of these manuscripts survive in collections across the world.<sup>11</sup> So the first “life” of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* relates to its original composition and subsequent dissemination in the form of handwritten manuscripts.

### ***The Ottoman Connection: The Second Birth***

The second birth is associated with the Ottoman Sultanate in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and took place when *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* evolved from handwritten manuscripts to print. A manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, copied in Mecca in 1884, was presented to Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) by Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Zayn al-Faṭānī (1856–

<sup>9</sup> Riddell, *Transferring a Tradition*.

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Özey, “‘Rumi’ Networks of al-Sinkili: A Biography of Baba Dawud,” *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 24, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>11</sup> The oldest surviving hand-copied manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, likely produced in the last years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is studied in Riddell, *Transferring a Tradition*.

1908), head of the Jawi printing press in Mecca in the 1880s.<sup>12</sup> This manuscript provided the basis of the first printed edition of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, which appeared in Istanbul in 1884 and was printed under the authority of Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Zayn al-Faṭānī.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that preparation of the printed edition in Istanbul in 1884, representing its second birth and initiating the second life, has had a huge impact in multiplying the production and dissemination of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* many times more than was possible with handwritten manuscripts. This Istanbul edition provided the basis of many subsequent editions, including a second printing in Istanbul in 1906, as well as later printings in Egypt, Mecca, Cairo, and Singapore.<sup>14</sup>

Publisher	Location	Year
Matba'a-i Osmaniyye	Istanbul	1884
Matba'atü'l- Miriyye, Bulaq	Bulaq, Egypt	1885
Matba'atü'l-Miriyye	Mecca	1905
Matba'a-i Osmaniyye	Istanbul	1906
Mohammed al-Marbawi publishers	Cairo	1951
Sulayman Maraghi publishers	Singapore	1951

It can be said the Ottoman initiative in printing *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* has ensured this work continues to play a significant role in *tafsīr al-Qur'ān* in Southeast Asia.

## FINDING THE MISSING LINK

Until recently, the link between the two lives of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was missing; namely, the manuscript that was used to convert the work from handwritten to printed form, which launched the work on its far greater distribution. However, the missing link has now been identified due to the recent discovery<sup>15</sup> of the manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* from which the first edition was printed in Istanbul in 1884. The manuscript is held in the Faculty of Theology of Uludag University<sup>16</sup> and consists of three volumes bound in cherry-coloured leather blind-stamped with designs of sunbursts, chrysanthemums, and miklep. In total, there are 866 folios or 1,732 pages of Italian paper, watermarked “Andrea Galvani Pordenone.”

<sup>12</sup> Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff and Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah, “*Tarjuman al-Mustafid*: Satu Analisa terhadap Karya Terjemahan” [Tarjumān al-Mustafīd: An Analysis of Its Translation Methodology], *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu* 16 (2005): 157.

<sup>13</sup> Solak, “The Discovery of a Manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*.”

<sup>14</sup> Solak, *Sultan II*.

<sup>15</sup> By Osman Nuri Solak, Archivist and Manuscript Specialist in the Faculty of Theology of Uludag University, Bursa.

<sup>16</sup> Tercümanü'l-Müstefid, Eminüddin ‘Abdürraûf b. Ali el-Câvî Tsumal Fansûrî; Republic of Turkey, Uludağ University, Faculty of Theology, İsmail Hakkı Bursevî Manuscript and Rare Books Library, Inventory No: Volume 1: 58002, Volume 2: 58003, Volume 3: 58004.

Each folio measures 234 x 160 mm, with a text block of 168 x 108 mm, containing 21 lines of text written in Arabic and Malay in Jawi script.



**Figure 1. The three volumes of the manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884, bound in cherry-red leather**

The first volume lacks the beginning, but the two other volumes are intact. According to the colophon, the second volume of the manuscript was completed on 14 Dhul Qadah 1301 (i.e. 5 September 1884), and the third volume was completed in Mecca on 5 Muharram 1302 (i.e. 25 October 1884) by a scribe named Jādullāh ibn al-Marḥūm Muḥammad Badawī al-Miṣrī.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Solak, *Sultan II*.



Figure 2. Pages of the first volume of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884



Figure 3. Opening pages of the second volume of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884

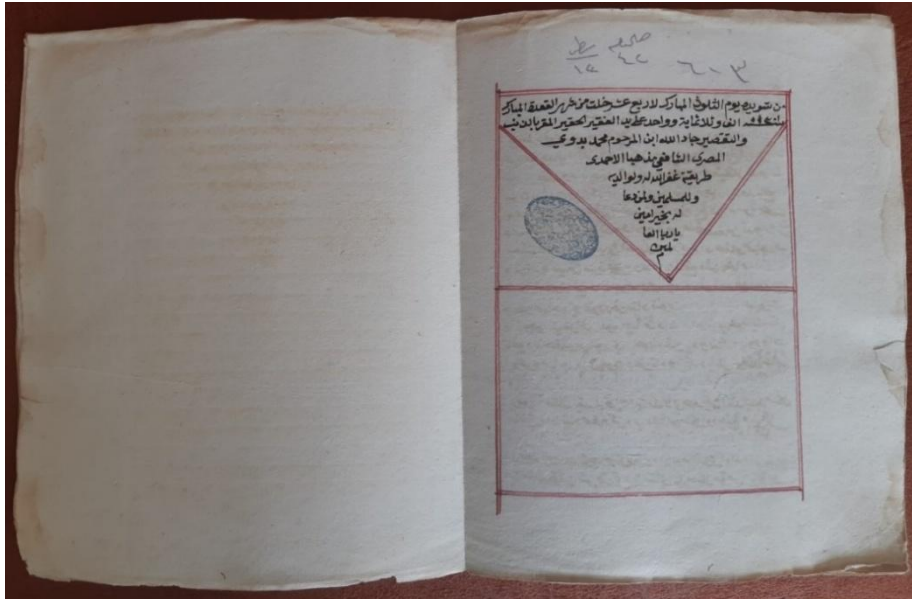


Figure 4. Colophon of the second volume of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884



Figure 5. Opening pages of the third volume of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884



Figure 6. Final pages with colophon of the third volume of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884



Figure 7. Watermark of the Italian paper used in the manuscript of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1884

**The Discovery of the Long-lost Manuscript**

The story of the discovery of this manuscript is intriguing. The Manuscripts Research Center at Uludag University was informed by the Dean that there was a Malay Qur’anic commentary in the faculty manuscript collection that had not been classified in detail for 50 years. After initial fruitless searching, manuscript specialist Osman Nuri Solak connected the language of the manuscript with Malay, which uses an adapted form of the Arabic alphabet (known as Jawi), and identified the name of the work as *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* and its author as ‘Abd al-Rā’ūf al-Fansūrī al-Jāwī.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The path of this commentary reaching Anatolia and Bursa was unveiled by Prof. Dr. Mikail Bayram,<sup>19</sup> one of the first professors of the faculty who lived in Konya. Prof. Bayram recalled that a “Tafsir-i Cāvī” or “Jawi Tafsir” (Qur’anic commentary in Jawi script) had been donated to the faculty by an elderly woman in 1974 along with many other books. A process of classification of the books followed, with Prof. Bayram relating:

In 1974, an old woman came to the faculty with many books. “I want to donate these to your school,” she said. While classifying these works, I came across a manuscript in three volumes. I realized that the work is a translation of the Qur’an. I could read the verses comfortably, but I could not read the tafsir, nor could I decipher the language. I was very excited about the fact that this work was in a language that I had never encountered before and that I did not know. It was unlike any of the languages I knew. We had the work examined by experts in all languages spoken in the Ottoman domains, but no one could understand which language it was.<sup>20</sup>

Prof. Bayram seemed to have encountered an impasse. However, a subsequent scholarly event was successful in moving forward the enquiry. His account continues:

I reached out to the old woman who donated the work. However, the only information she knew about the tafsir was that she inherited it from her grandfathers. I was assigned to Konya from Bursa, but my mind was always on this book. Years later, an International Symposium was held in Bursa. Many scholars from foreign countries also participated. In a backstage environment, I gave information about this interpretation to foreign academics. The work was of great interest to them and they wanted to see it.

We went to the college together. I put the work in front of the academics. One by one, they examined the work. However, every scholar who looked at the work stepped aside, saying, “It doesn’t speak to me,” in frustration. Among them was a scholar from Bangladesh. After examining the work, this scholar said, “This work is in Malay!” Thus, we realized that the tafsir is in Malay. The issue of who, where and why the work was brought to Bursa was a separate issue. I was most happy when the secret of the Malay tafsir was solved.<sup>21</sup>

Solak then began searching for archival evidence concerning the printing of this commentary in Istanbul, assuming the work copied in 1884 must have been brought to Istanbul to support the pan-Islamic policies of Sultan Abdulhamid II within the scope of Ottoman-Malay relations.<sup>22</sup> He managed to find some documents dated 1905 relating to the reprint of the *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* in Istanbul in 1906. An article by Dr. Filiz Dıġıroġlu mentions a Malay-language commentary:

It is interesting that the only application made to the Tedkīk-i Müellefāt Committee from the province of Hijaz is related to the translation of Kadı Beyzāvī’s Tafsir into the Jawi

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<sup>19</sup> “Prof. Dr. Mikail BAYRAM,” Susem, accessed November 12, 2025, <https://www.susem.org/egitimci/prof-dr-mikail-bayram/>.

<sup>20</sup> Solak, *Sultan II*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Alyson M. Chouinard, “A Response to Tanzimat: Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Pan-Islamism,” *Inquiries Journal* 2, no. 5 (2010), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/252/a-response-to-tanzimat-sultan-abdul-hamid-ii-and-pan-islamism>.

language. The request relates to the approval of the reprint of the translation of the tafsir published in Meccah.<sup>23</sup>

Solak obtained the documents mentioned in Dıġıroġlu’s article from the Meşihat Archive in Istanbul and translated them from Ottoman Turkish.

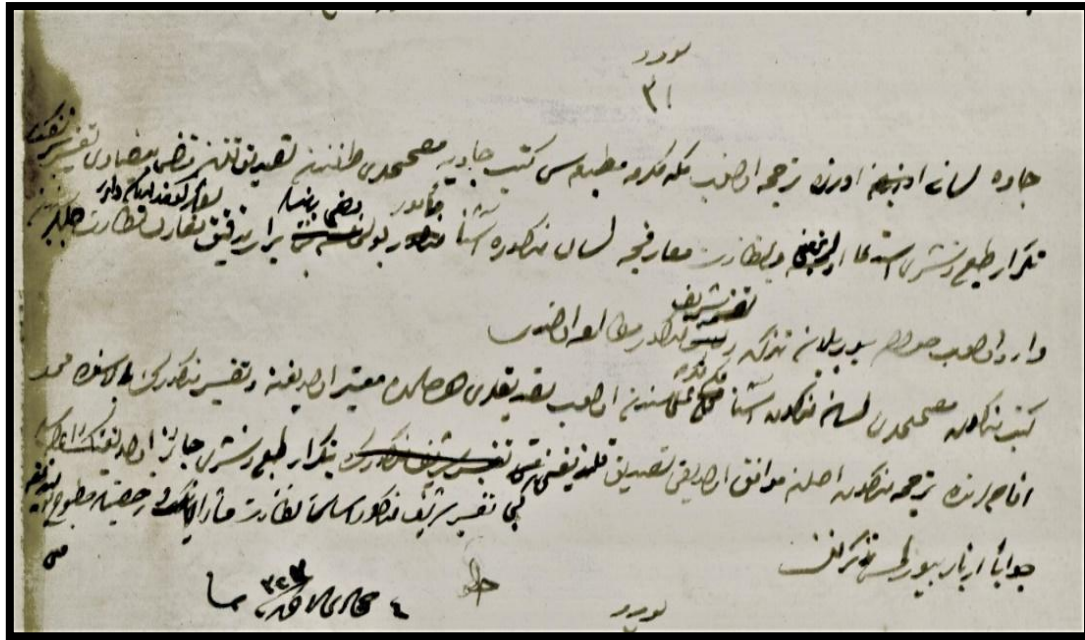


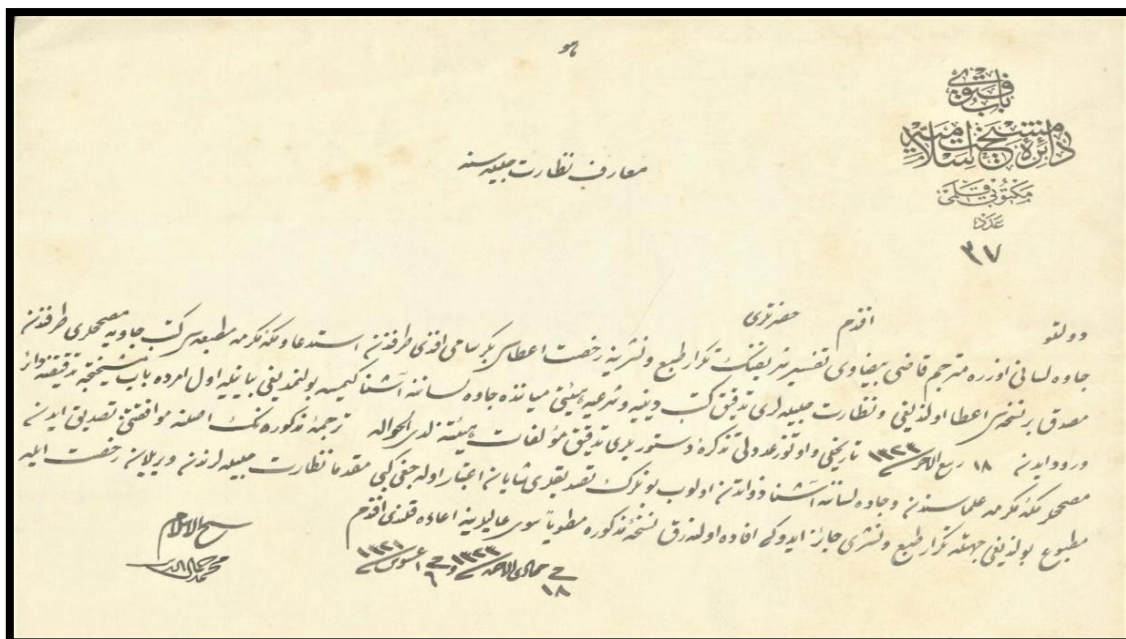
Figure 8. Document in Ottoman Turkish reporting the request to print the *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* [4 Cemaziyelahir 1323. Meşihat Archive, IST\_MFT\_MSH\_DFT02\_01785 S.133, NR. 31]

On request for the review of *Qazi Beyzāvī Tafsir*, which was translated into Jawi and printed with approval of the editorial board of the Makkah printing house, since there was no officer who knew the Jawi language, the Makkah scholars who knew this language gave the approval for the printed edition of the tafsir. It has been reported it is appropriate to reprint it.

Identification of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* with the famous commentary by al-Baydawi (Beyzāvī) was erroneous, but this error found its way into the printed edition, being repeated in subsequent editions as well.<sup>24</sup>

Solak then searched in the Ottoman Archives and located the official approval issued by the Sheikhu-l-Islam for printing.

<sup>23</sup> Filiz Dıġıroġlu, “Religious Publishing in Abdulhamid II Era: Who Produces the Islamic Texts?” *Journal of Marmara University Faculty of Theology*, no. 54 (2018).  
<sup>24</sup> Riddell, *Transferring a Tradition*.



**Figure 9. Official approval document issued by the Sheikhul-Islam to print *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 18 Cemaziyelahir 1323 (i.e. 20 August 1905) [Ottoman Archives, Istanbul, BOA, MF.MKT./865-52-3]**

The petition for the reprint of Kadı Beyzāvī’s *tafsir* and the Jawi books of the Mecca printing house were checked by the inspection committee. Deciding that the translation is true to the original, it was reported there was no obstacle for printing.

This is the story of the printing of the *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* manuscript. As is clear from the ministry seals on the manuscript, it was brought to Istanbul for the printing press by Ahmad al-Fatānī and presented to Abdülhamid II, then was the source of the first printed edition in 1884, which was reprinted in Istanbul in 1906. The manuscript, which was gifted to Sultan Abdulhamid II, was probably brought to Bursa by third parties as a result of the looting of the Yıldız Palace library during the dethronement of Abdulhamid II,<sup>25</sup> and a century later in 1974, it was donated to the Faculty of Theology at Uludağ University in Bursa.

Over the next 50 years, as a result of the inability to unravel the exact nature of this work in the Faculty of Theology, it remained under preservation then was discovered and unearthed during the formation process of the İsmail Hakkı Bursevî Manuscript and Rare Books Library, which was established in the Faculty of Theology in 2022.

It is of interest that no copies of the Istanbul printed editions from 1884 and 1906 were found in Turkish libraries during Solak’s search. The only library holding a copy of the 1884 Istanbul edition is the library of Leiden University in the Netherlands. Copies of the 1905 Mecca and 1906 Istanbul editions were accessed via the Wan Mohd Abdullah Shaghir

<sup>25</sup> Ekrem Buğra Ekinçi, “How Was the Yıldız Palace Looted?,” June 29, 2023, <https://www.ekrembugraekinci.com/article/?ID=1343&how-was-the-yildiz-palace-looted->.

collection from Malaysia, while the 1885 edition made in Bulaq, Egypt, was accessed via Miftah Wibowo Bey from Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Our research has presented three key findings. First, it has identified that ‘Abd al-Rā’ūf al-Fansūrī’s famous early Malay tafsir, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, experienced two “lives”: initial circulation for two centuries as handwritten Jawi manuscripts, followed by a transformative second life through Ottoman-sponsored print beginning in Istanbul in 1884. Second, the long-missing manuscript used for the first Istanbul printing was finally identified at Uludağ University (Bursa), thereby clarifying how the Malay *tafsir* entered the Ottoman intellectual and publishing sphere. Finally, Ottoman printing and patronage, linked to pan-Islamic policy under Sultan Abdülhamid II, ensured the wide and enduring dissemination of the work across Southeast Asia and beyond.

The historical relationship between the Ottomans and Aceh has left links that endure today. A clear indicator of Turkish influence in Aceh was the flag used by the Sultanate of Aceh until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was modelled on the Ottoman flag and consisted of a white crescent and star embroidered on a red pattern, resembling the Ottoman flag, also carrying a white sword underneath the crescent and star.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the graves of Ottoman soldiers in the Turkish cemetery in Banda Aceh are preserved and maintained by Acehnese Muslims who are descendants of the Ottomans.<sup>28</sup>

When Aceh was devastated by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, documents containing the records of Ottoman, Palestinian, and other Muslim soldiers sent to help the Sultanate of Aceh were lost, and the Turkish cemetery was heavily damaged, with tombstones carrying the names and information of the Ottoman soldiers swept away in the waters. With approximately 250,000 people killed, the Turkish Red Crescent moved quickly to provide much needed relief to the traumatised surviving Acehnese people. The government of the Republic of Turkey, through the Turkish Red Crescent, established secure homes for the many of the devastated Acehnese community, with more than 300 houses built in the region. Moreover, damage to the cemeteries was repaired and renovations were carried out.

Acehnese-Turkish relations have deep roots and the story of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* told in this article is one important piece of the evidence of that relationship.

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<sup>26</sup> The authors express their gratitude to the Wan Mohd Abdullah Shaghir collection and Miftah Wibowo Bey. A full account of this journey of discovery is presented in detail in Osman Nuri Solak’s recent monograph.

<sup>27</sup> “File:Flag of Aceh Sultanate.svg,” Wikimedia Commons, accessed November 12, 2025, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_Aceh\\_Sultanate.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Aceh_Sultanate.svg).

<sup>28</sup> Safari Wisata, “Turkish Graveyard, A Historical Turkish Cemetery in Aceh Indonesia,” Safari Wisata International, July 11, 2024, accessed November 12, 2025, <https://en.safariwisata.co.id/turkish-graveyard/>.

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