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Manuscript Studies

The Islamization of the Malay Archipelago in Ottoman Manuscripts

Alaeddin Tekin¹

Abstract

The Ottoman archives possess one of the most extensive collections globally. With its repository of 95 million documents, it stands out as a rare archive that not only illuminates the Ottoman Empire but also contributes to the broader scope of world history. Within the Ottoman archives, numerous documents pertain to the Malay World, predominantly encompassing the colonial occupations within the region and diplomatic endeavours undertaken by the Ottoman Caliphate. Each of these documents has been meticulously examined, unearthing original insights into the propagation of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. Among these insights are correspondences dispatched by regional sultans to Istanbul, while a significant portion emerges from research conducted by Ottoman-appointed consuls in the archipelago. This study's central aim revolves around assessing the progression of Islam into the Malay Archipelago—a region populated housing world's most denselv community—using resources within the Ottoman archives.

Keywords: Islamization, the Malay Archipelago, Ottoman Archives, Ottoman Caliphate.

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¹ Lecturer (PhD), Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Türkiye. Email: alaeddin.tekin@asbu.edu.tr

Introduction

The manuscripts analyzed in this study encompass writings from the mid-sixteenth century to those from the early years of the twentieth century in the Ottoman archives. ² These manuscripts have undergone meticulous scrutiny. Following a comprehensive examination of these records pertaining to the Malay Archipelago within the Ottoman archives, the present article systematically categorizes relevant documents. Ultimately, significant insights regarding the introduction and diffusion of Islam in the Malay Archipelago were inferred from the implicit content of these documents and are now presented for the reader's perusal. Ottoman Language or Ottoman Turkish, an archaic form of writing, is no longer in contemporary use. Over its extensive history within the empire, this writing style has undergone notable transformations. For instance, substantial distinctions exist between the calligraphy employed in the sixteenth century compared to that of the nineteenth century. Consequently, even minor errors in deciphering these documents can lead to significant interpretation errors.

The official connection that commenced between the Ottoman Caliphate and the Malay Archipelago during the mid-sixteenth century, initiated through the establishment of relations with the Sultanate of Aceh, gradually expanded to encompass the entire Malay Archipelago by the mid-nineteenth century. The increased connections between the two regions during the nineteenth century led to a greater abundance of manuscripts from that era. During this period, the Ottoman Caliphate fostered connections and documented interactions across a broad geographical expanse, including regions such as Riau, Jambi, Johor, Kedah, Pattani, and the Java Islands.

Over the past few years, select documents from the Ottoman archives pertaining to Southeast Asia have been translated into both

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² Diplomatic interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay World occurred in two distinct historical epochs. The initial period transpired during the mid-sixteenth century, while the second phase unfolded in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the Ottoman archives contain a plethora of records pertaining to the Malay world, authored in both the 1560s and the latter half of the nineteenth century.

English and contemporary Turkish.³ An illustrative instance is the publication in 2017 of a research work titled *Ottoman-Indonesia Relations in the Context of Ottoman Records* authored by a team of researchers.⁴ Subsequently, in 2019, the collaborative effort of İsmail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock resulted in the work *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations (2 Vols.): Sources from the Ottoman Archives.*⁵ This valuable compilation brought together numerous manuscripts from the Ottoman archives pertaining to Southeast Asia.

The scope of this study is limited to elucidating the process of Islamization within the Malay Archipelago as depicted in the Ottoman manuscripts, along with previously unexplored documents. Throughout the development of this study, the emphasis remains solely on presenting information from historical manuscripts housed in the Ottoman archives, deliberately avoiding reference to existing studies concerning the Islamization of the Malay World. Therefore, any interpretive commentary within the text has been consciously omitted.

Sixteenth-Century Manuscripts in the Ottoman Archives

The initial manuscript on this topic consists of a 122-line letter, originally penned in Arabic then translated to Ottoman Turkish, dispatched to the Ottoman sultan by the ruler of Aceh, Sultan Alâeddin Ri ayat Shah al-Qahhar (1537-1571), in January 1566. By chance, this letter was unearthed in the Topkapi Palace Museum Archive by Razaulhak Shah, originally hailing from Pakistan, in 1967, subsequently undergoing publication in Turkish. Within this

³ The abbreviation "BOA," mentioned in numerous footnotes throughout this article, denotes *Directorate of the State Archives of Türkiye* (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi). This archive contains a significant portion of manuscripts related to Ottoman history.

⁴ Mehmet Akif Terzi, Ahmet Ergün, Mehmet Ali Alacagöz. *Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Osmanlı Endonezya İlişkileri* (Istanbul: Hitay Holding, 2017).

⁵ Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives*, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

⁶ Razaulhak Şah, "Açi Padişahı Sultan Alaeddin'in Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'a Mektubu," *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5, no. 8 (1967): 373-409.

extensive letter, the Acehnese Sultan Alâeddin Ri'ayat Shah al-Qahhar appeals for military support from the Ottomans in their conflict against the Portuguese. The substantial length of the letter offers insight into the state of Islam within the Malay Archipelago, with implicit information conveyed between its lines. As per the contents of the letter, Alâeddin Ri'ayat Shah al-Qahhar expounds that:

It is furthermore humbly stated to [your Imperial Majesty's Illustrious Court that: Between this land and the city of Mecca [may Allah Almighty ennoble her!] there are twenty-four thousand islands, known [collectively] as Diva [the Maldives]. At one extremity of these islands lies Goa of the Franks, while the other extremity reaches to the Lands of Darkness. Of these twenty-four thousand islands, twelve thousand are inhabited by men, while the other twelve thousand are desolate and uninhabited. The people of these islands, in their entirety, belong to the community of [Muhammad] the Prophet of the Last Day, and pray and fast in the manner of the Shafi'i school [of Islam]. They have built mosques on all of the islands, and read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world and shadow of Allah [on earth].

Continuing within the same manuscript, it becomes evident that the Sultanate of Aceh in the Malay Archipelago extended its backing to the Islamization endeavors not only within the confines of the Malay Archipelago itself but also across certain territories encompassing present-day Sri Lanka and India. This insight is gleaned from the

⁷ Topkapı Palace Museum Archive No: E-8009. H. 16/Jumādā al-'Ākhirah/973 [January 7, 1566]. See for the full English translation of this manuscript; Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives*, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 43-51. See for the full Turkish translation of this manuscript; Razaulhak Şah, "Açi Padişahı Sultan Alaeddin'in Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'a Mektubu." *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5/8 (1967): 373-409.

manuscript originating in 1566; it underscores that:

ان اولى ما يستخده اسباب الجوالها و وازكها بتأكد به انواع المبودة والوداد احداء خدل تنتصب خاله طويته استفاه جا ويحلّ وتم بالها توتم الهيدة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة المدينة بالهيدة وتم المدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة المدينة المدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة المدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة المدينة والمدينة igure 1: The Arabic prayer section of the extensively prepared letter⁸ sent by Acehnese Sultan Alâeddin Ri´ayat Shah al-Qahhar in the year 1566. [Topkapı Palace Museum Archive No. E-8009]

Ceylon [Sri Lanka] is situated at a distance of eight-day sea journey from our land, and among its inhabitants are Muslims who devoutly follow the true religion. They have built a total of fourteen mosques and read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world, and pray for the longevity and prosperity of Your Majesty's state. [...] Likewise, the ruler of Calicut (Calcutta) is a famous infidel ruler known as the "Samuri." Most of the inhabitants of his country are Muslims, and they have built twenty-four mosques and also read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world, and pray for the longevity and prosperity of [Your Majesty's] state. [...] When the rulers of Ceylon and Calicut received news that your Majesty's servant Lutfi had arrived here, they

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⁸ The original version of the letter, consisting of a total of 122 lines, is likely to have been written in Arabic, and the translation into Ottoman Turkish may have been commissioned either while the envoy delegation was at the port of Jeddah or after their arrival in Istanbul. It seems more plausible that the delegation, traveling by sea, would have arranged for the translation of the Arabic letter in Jeddah. During the translation process, the Arabic prayer section in the initial part of the letter was not omitted; instead, it was reinserted into the beginning of the letter. The section provided in the article corresponds to this Arabic portion.

sent ambassadors to us who proclaimed: "We are servants of his Imperial Majesty, Refuge of the World and Shadow of Allah" and then took an oath swearing that if your Imperial Majesty's propitious fleet were to journey to these lands, they themselves would come to the faith and profess the religion of Islam, and that likewise all of their infidel subjects would forsake the way of false belief for the straight path of the one true religion.⁹

For a lengthy period, there existed no correspondence between the Ottoman State and the Malay Archipelago. This situation endured until the initial years of the latter half of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Archives host more substantial resources pertaining to this region.

For example, much like his great-grandfather, Sultan Ibrahim Mansur Shah (1838-57 / 1857-1870) dispatched an envoy to Istanbul back in 1850. For him we gain insights into the Muslim populace of the Malay Archipelago. Ibrahim Mansur Shah's letter conveyed that under his rule, the Acehnese sultanate governed 22 million Muslims and 1 million pagans [majūsiyy]. This information left Ottoman diplomats taken aback, as this number seemed remarkably substantial. When questioned, Mansur Shah's envoy clarified that 1 million corresponded to 10 sets of 100 thousand. Thus, the Ottomans were introduced to the existence of such a considerable Muslim population within the Malay Archipelago.

Nineteenth-Century Manuscripts in the Ottoman Archives

Certain documents provide even more specific insights into the process of Islamization on particular islands within the archipelago. For instance, a six-page manuscript delves into the Islamization of

⁹ Topkapı Palace Museum Archive No: E-8009: H. 16/Jumādā al-ʾĀkhirah/973 [January 7, 1566]. The original date of the letter is Hijri calendar in Arabic and written as "Tahfîran fî evâsıt-ı şehr-i Cumâzi's-sâni sene selâse ve seb'în ve tis'a ve mi'e."See also; Kadı: 47-48.

¹⁰ BOA, İ. MVL, 226/7706: H. 30/Muḥarram/1268 [November 25, 1851].

Java Island. The original text, authored in French¹¹ in 1874, outlines the progression of events. The content within these documents, fully translated into Ottoman Turkish and meticulously compared, reveals coherence between the original text and the translation. The initial segments of these records emphasize that the Malays orchestrated the introduction of Islam to Java. Leveraging their adeptness in navigation and active participation in trade, the Malays played a pivotal role in transmitting the Islamic faith to Java, a strategically important island within the archipelago. In accordance with the manuscripts;

It is acknowledged in Constantinople [Istanbul] that there exists a Muslim populace on the island located between India and China, known in a somewhat vague manner as the inhabitants of Java. This island, Java, holds a prominent status within the Indian archipelago, and its inhabitants constitute a distinct ethnic group situated amidst this archipelago. The Malay people, a conquering race with the longest-standing affiliation to Islam in this region, represent the earliest Muslims in this land. This role of introducing Islam into the expanse of this new world was undertaken by the Malays, whose population is approximated to range from 15 to 20 million individuals. While the Javanese populace is largely inclined towards a sedentary lifestyle, the Malays, renowned as maritime experts, traverse the seas encompassing these regions and frequent ports in India and China. Their reputation extends beyond their audacious maritime capabilities and the spirit of daring they infuse into their commercial pursuits. The Malays are also known for their remarkable courage, verging on recklessness. They are amenable to positive treatment, yet provoking their dignity can yield hazardous consequences. ¹²

 $^{^{11}}$ I would like to thank Assoc. Dr. Selim Tezcan for helping with the transcript of the French manuscript.

¹² BOA, HR. TO, 582/32: H. 22/Dhu'l-Qa'dah /1291 [December 31, 1874].

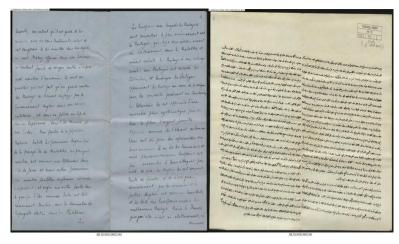


Figure 2: Manuscripts dated 1874, written in French and Ottoman Turkish, concerning the Island of Java.

Continuing within the same document, the interactions between the Europeans who arrived in the region, the Malays, and their endeavors to alter their religious beliefs are succinctly outlined in the following statements: "The Portuguese subjected the Malays to persecution and sought their conversion, while the Dutch pursued a more systematic persecution in order to extract financial gains from them."

In addition to intergovernmental diplomatic correspondence, reports prepared by Ottoman consuls sent to the region also provide clearer information about the initial arrival and spread of Islam in the Malay World. More details that are explicit emerge in an 1897 report written for the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Kamil Bey, the Ottoman Consul in Batavia. The report states: "The total population of the Malay Archipelago has reached 35 million. Moreover, based on the places of worship and graves in the region, it can be deduced that the inhabitants of Java, Sumatra, and nearby islands within the Malay Archipelago believed in the religions of Buddha and Brahma due to their historical interactions with the Chinese and Indians. However, starting from the thirteenth century

¹³ BOA, HR. TO, 582/32: H. 22/Dū al-Qa dah/1291 [December 31, 1874].

AD, following the migration of Arabs to these islands for commercial purposes, Islam rapidly spread throughout the Malay Archipelago." ¹⁴

Merely four months after that aforementioned report, Kamil Bey composed another report that delves into the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago in much greater detail. In the introduction of this report, after providing an extensive account of the Hadramaut region Yemen, he then discusses the descendants of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein (RA). He notes that their number has reached 40,000, with a portion of them still residing in Hadramaut. However, a significant group is engaged in trade and resides in the vicinity of India. Kamil Bey indicates that these descendants, known as 'Alawi (a term historically associated with a variety of Islamic sects), were compelled to migrate to India around five centuries ago due to conflicts among Bedouin tribes in Hadramaut, which forced the urban population into migration. Subsequently, they migrated to the Malay Archipelago. 15 Although the introduction of the Ottoman consul's extensive report focused primarily on the Hadramis, the subsequent sections of the report delve into how the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago took place. The report goes on to discuss the process as follows:

The spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago began much earlier than the arrival of these mentioned Hadrami Arabs; it initiated through the efforts of Maghribi Arabs who had come here from Al-Andalus [Islamic Spain]. This fact is evident from the tomb inscriptions found in the cities of Banten and Surakarta [Solo] on Java Island. However, the Hadrami Arabs who migrated from Hadramaut significantly contributed to the further consolidation of Islam already present in the region. [...] Among these Hadrami settlers in the Malay Archipelago were those from the Sayyid class. Among them, the most influential and renowned were the families of Âl-Sakkâf, Âl-Kâff, Âl-Cüneyd, Âl-Sırrî, Âl-Attâs, Âl-Shihâb, Âl-Aydrûs, Âl-Aydîd, and

¹⁴ BOA, Y. PRK. EŞA, 28/58: H. 19/Rajab/1315 [December 13, 1897].

¹⁵ BOA, Y. A. HUS, 385/2: H. 21/Dū al-Qa'dah/1315 [April 13, 1898].

Âl-Haddâd. These families enjoyed prosperity for about one and a half centuries from the time of their settlement in the region. However, with the arrival of Europeans, they fell into a vulnerable state. ¹⁶



Figure 3: Report of Kamil Bey, the Ottoman Consul in Batavia, dated April 13, 1898.

Thanks to these and similar reports prepared by Kamil Bey, a young and determined consul, during his relatively short tenure, Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), the reigning Ottoman emperor of that era, gained insights into the Muslims of the Malay Archipelago.

Another manuscript on the subject appears to be authored by Sahl Bey, an intellectual from the recent times, known to be the son of Sayyid Fazıl Pasha. He prepared an extensive report about the Malay Archipelago, containing significant information about how the region was Islamized, intended to be presented to the Ottoman Sultan. Although this document in the Ottoman archives was prepared in 1903, it is apparent that Sahl Bey wrote it much earlier and had already passed away by the time it was translated into the Ottoman Language. The main purpose of his report is to convey the Dutch oppression in the region to the Ottoman sultan. However, at the beginning of the report, he explains when Islam arrived in the archipelago with the following sentences;

¹⁶ BOA, Y. A. HUS, 385/2: H. 21/Dū al-Qa'dah/1315 [April 13, 1898].

During the period when the Islamic State of Al-Andalus collapsed and Muslims fled from the oppression of Christians in groups towards North and Central Africa, a family of Prophet Muhammad's descendants arrived in the Malay Archipelago via the route of the Cape of Good Hope. Reaching the Sumatra Island from these archipelagos, which were still unknown to Europeans, they conveyed Islam to the local populace. From that point onward, Islam rapidly spread throughout these islands and was embraced by millions. Half a century later, Arabs hailing from the southern regions of Arabia, for the purpose of trade, reached the shores of India and the Malay Archipelago, attempting to spread Islam from Sumatra Island to the Maluku Islands. By the time the Portuguese arrived in the Malay Archipelago, all the archipelagos had already embraced Islam.¹⁷

While we do not have precise information about its exact authorship, the document states that it was penned by Seyyid Fazl Pasha-zâde (Ed-dâ'î) Sehland presented to the Ottoman sultan. As indicated in this document, it becomes apparent that this route, known as the Cape of Good Hope, was used to reach the Malay Archipelago long before the discovery of the Cape. This indicates that this route was utilized to access the Malay Archipelago.



Figure 4: The manuscript regarding when Islam arrived in the Malay Archipelago in the Ottoman Archives.

¹⁷ BOA, Y. PRK. AZJ, 46/10: H. 29/Dū al-Ḥijjah/1320 [March 29, 1903].

The last manuscript on the subject is a translation document concerning a session of the State-General [the Dutch Parliament] discussing the budget for the East Indies in the year 1898. The translation was carried out by the Ottoman Embassy in The Hague on January 12, 1898, from French to Ottoman Turkish. During this assembly, a Catholic Member of Parliament, Mr. Van Den Biesen, proposed that the Dutch government should take measures against Islam in the Malay Archipelago to promote Christianity. This document was previously translated by İsmail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, and the complete content can be found in their book. This document sheds light on the ongoing process of Islamization even in the nineteenth century. It appears that this development unsettled certain individuals within the Dutch Parliament. According to the translated manuscript, the Catholic Member of Parliament remarked that;

As stated in the most recent colony report, Islam's presence is gradually but consistently spreading into the interior regions of Palembang. The report indicates that leaders of the country have recently embraced Islam. Efforts are being made to advance Islam even in Tebing-Tinggi. New mosques are being constructed and existing ones are renovated to ensure their permanence in Langgars [Langgur?]. In the northern regions of Borneo, Ceram, and the Kei islands, Islam has made inroads among some individuals. Particularly in North Ceram, the spread of Islam poses a challenge to the growth of Christianity. Consequently, my question is

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¹⁸ Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations*): Sources from the Ottoman Archives, 2 vols., (Leiden: Brill 2019), 523-528.

¹⁹ Some of the geographical names mentioned in the manuscript are not clear. For example, while Tebing-Tinggi (Medan) is clear, the second city or region is not specified. This could be either an old settlement or a mistake in the Ottoman translation. Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock have read this name as it is or as possible alternatives. See for the full translation of this manuscript; Ismail Hakkı Kadı and Andrew CS Peacock, *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations (2 Vols.): Sources from the Ottoman Archives* (Leiden: Brill 2019): 526-528.

whether the government plans to take measures to prevent Islam from prevailing over Christianity and thwarting this perceived threat. Mr. President, I propose that the government initiates actions such as restricting the travel of pilgrims to the esteemed Mecca, or alternatively, disrupts the Hajj by issuing passports at an exorbitant cost.²⁰

The viewpoint of the Catholic Member of Parliament, suggesting a ban on Hajj, did not receive approval from the Minister of Colonies. The Minister stated that prohibiting Hajj would not offer a solution. Notably, it is intriguing that a central city such as Palembang has not undergone complete Islamization during this period.

Conclusion

Understanding the process of Islamization in the Malay Archipelago, a significant region within the Islamic world, holds considerable importance. To gain insights into the spread of Islam in this densely Muslim-populated region, this research has delved into the archives of the Ottoman Empire, historically one of the most influential states within the Islamic World. This investigation not only sheds light on the propagation of Islam in the Malay World but also provides a glimpse into how the Ottomans comprehended the Malays and their relationship with Islam. The complexities inherent in the Islamization process across Southeast Asia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, continue to be subject to scholarly discourse. While conventional narratives posit Arab merchants as the primary agents of Islam's dissemination, scholarly investigation underscores the nuanced contributions of Sufi orders and indigenous Muslim communities in both facilitating and shaping the trajectory of Islamization. Therefore, this article presents a new dimension to the existing debates from primary sources.

From the correspondence regarding the Ottoman Caliphate and the Sultanate of Aceh relationship that took place in the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottomans had gained a general understanding of the Islamization in the Malay Archipelago during

²⁰ BOA, Y. A. HUS, 383/50: H. 18/Sha 'bān/1315 [January 12, 1898].

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that period. However, in documents written in the nineteenth century, the Ottomans encountered different information about how these archipelagos underwent Islamization. Perhaps the most intriguing of these claims is the assertion that, following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba, a group of Muslims who had been residing there crossed the Cape of Good Hope and arrived on the island of Sumatra.

It is asserted that the commencement of Islamization began during this period. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Muslim Arabs from Yemen migrated in cohorts to the Malay Archipelago, sparking a significant upswing in Islamization, ultimately leading to the swift conversion of nearly all the islands in a brief span. Beyond these points, the archival records also present diverse assertions and details, including the assertion that Java Island embraced Islam through the influence of Malay traders. Consequently, the Ottoman archives stand as crucial primary sources that aid in comprehending the process of Islamization in the region.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

	Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr
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ث	th	th	th	th	ص	ș	ş	ș	ş	وا	W	v/u
ج	j	j	с	j	ض	ģ	Ż	Ż	ż	ی	у	у
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VOWELS

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		Arabic and	Urdu	Ottoman
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Long	١	ā	ā	ā
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	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iyy (final form i)
	ۇ	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uv	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	<u> </u>	a	a	a or e
	*	u	u	u or ü
				o or ö
	-	i	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. 😝 jh gh گھ

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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