

In His Father's Footsteps? Ahmed Münir İbrahim's 1910 Journey from Harbin to Tokyo as a Member of the First Ottoman Student Delegation to Japan

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Abstract

In the historiography of Japan's Interaction with the Turkish and the Muslim World, Ahmed Münir İbrahim (1887-1941) has been overshadowed by his father, Abdürreşid İbrahim (1857-1944). Abdürreşid, a Russian Tatar scholar and journalist, spent five months in Japan in the first half of 1909. After his journey, he published a two-volume travelogue entitled *Alem-i İslam ve Japonya'da İntişar-ı İslamiyet* in Istanbul in 1910. This travelogue has remained one of the most important sources for the history of early Turkish-Japanese relations and has predominantly been regarded as an expression of pan-Islamist and pan-Asianist thinking. Similar to his father, Münir too traveled to Japan in December 1910 as a member of the first Ottoman student delegation. Münir and his two companions, Hasan Fehmi and Mehmed Tefik, were sent to Japan at the request of the pan-Asianist society Ajia Gikai to take up their studies in Tokyo. After his arrival in Japan, Münir published a brief, serialized travelogue in the Kazan newspaper *Beyanülhak*, which relates the students' journey from Harbin to Tokyo, alongside other articles on Harbin and Japan. While Münir's articles in the Ottoman journal *Sebilürreşad* and the Japanese journal *Daitō* have recently been scrutinized by historians, his travelogue in *Beyanülhak* has to date remained completely obscure. This article will, first, provide a concise discussion of the Ottoman student delegation to Japan and, second, examine key aspects of Münir's travelogue, which may provide historians with important insights into the more mundane aspects of Turkish-Japanese exchanges behind the idealizing visions of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism.

Keywords: Japan, Russian Tatars, Ottoman Empire, Manchuria, pan-Asianism, pan-Islamism

Introduction: Two İbrahims in Japan

A towering figure in the history of Japanese-Ottoman and Japanese-Tatar relations is without a doubt Abdürreşid İbrahim (1857-1944), who visited Japan in the first half of 1909 and established relations with high-ranking politicians and pan-Asianist circles. İbrahim was an influential intellectual among Russia's Muslims and a prominent figure in the *ittifak* movement following the Russian revolution of 1905. Abdürreşid left his country in late 1908 after his popular reformist journal *Ülfet* (published in St. Petersburg 1905-1907) had been suppressed by the authorities. Having completed his journey, which led him from Japan via Korea, China, India, and the Arabian Peninsula to Istanbul, he published his Ottoman Turkish travelogue *Alem-i İslam ve Japonya'da İntişar-ı İslamiyet* (The World of Islam and the Spread of Islam in Japan) in two volumes in 1910-1913. This impressive work has served as an important source in historical writing, particularly with regard to "Japan's Interaction with the Turkish and the Muslim World".

In contrast to his father, Abdürreşid's son Ahmed Münir İbrahim (1887-1941)¹ has been largely neglected in historiography. During his father's journey to Japan, Münir worked as a journalist for the Kazan newspaper *Beyanülhak*, where he was involved in the publication of Abdürreşid's writing in Tatar Turkish (cf. Türkoğlu 1997, 67). After first migrating from Russia to the Ottoman Empire, Münir became part of the first Ottoman student delegation to Japan and traveled to Tokyo in December 1910. Together with his two companions, he stayed in Japan for several years and enrolled at Waseda University in Tokyo. There are still many gaps regarding Münir's life in general and the length of his stay in Japan in particular.²

1 For Münir's year of death, I follow Gündoğdu 2007. With regard to his date of birth, I refer to Cwiklinski 2012, 77, 82 n. 179. Cwiklinski mentions two different likely dates: archival documents indicate 1887, but Abdürreşid's personal notebook gives 1886. I have opted for the first, official version.

2 According to Gündoğdu (2012, 138-41), Münir basically stayed in Japan until returning to Turkey in 1924. Türkoğlu (1997, 13-14 n. 18), on the other hand, has claimed that Münir first returned to Kazan after completing his studies in Japan, went to Berlin after the Russian Revolution

He seems to have remained in East Asia for a few years after the end of World War I, at least, working for a Japanese bank in Vladivostok. In 1924, he moved back to the newly established Republic of Turkey, where he briefly worked for the Japanese embassy and then became the director of a high school in Ankara (Gündoğdu 2012, 139-40).

The neglect of Münir's role in the historiography of Japan's interactions with the Turkish and the Muslim World is partly attributable to the fact that he did not publish a travelogue in the form of a book. Not being as prolific a writer as his father, Münir limited himself to shorter newspaper articles (including printed lectures and letters), which were published in Ottoman, Tatar, and Japanese journals. Only part of his Ottoman Turkish and Japanese writing has been discussed by scholars so far, in the context of Japanese-Ottoman relations and pan-Asianism (Gündoğdu 2012, 2007; Misawa 2013, 507-9, 2001). In this article, I add to the few existing studies by, first, providing a brief discussion of the Ottoman student delegation to Japan and, second, introducing a serialized travelogue that Münir published in *Beyanülhak*. I argue that Münir's travelogue, which relates the students' journey from Harbin to Tokyo, provides historians with important insights into the more mundane aspects of Turkish-Japanese exchanges behind the idealizing visions of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism.

Münir's travelogue and other Japan-related articles in *Beyanülhak* have been completely ignored by scholarship. A similar neglect of *Beyanülhak* as a source even exists with regard to Abdürreşid İbrahim, whose extensive travel notes in this journal have been largely overlooked by historians (although both Abdürreşid's and Münir's connections to *Beyanülhak* are well known).³ Besides revealing a scholarly bias towards monographic sources, which are usually in better condition and easier accessible, this situation shows a second bias that favors Ottoman Turkish sources over

and went to Turkey in 1920. Archival documents corroborate that Münir entered Turkey in 1924, but his activities during the years of World War I and its aftermath still remain obscure.

3 Komatsu Hisao and Komatsu Kaori, in the introduction to their annotated Japanese translation of Abdürreşid İbrahim's travelogue, have made use of *Beyanülhak*, though. Cf. H. Komatsu and K. Komatsu 2013. Sebastian Cwiklinski, in his yet unpublished PhD thesis on Abdürreşid, also consulted the articles in *Beyanülhak* as well as Abdürreşid's Tatar travelogue *Devr-i Alem* (1909), which compiled a part of these articles. I am grateful to Komatsu Hisao's research group for kindly giving me access to scanned images of *Beyanülhak* covering the years 1909-1911.

those published in Russia. The problem is, however, that Münir and Abdürreşid, similar to many other Russian Muslim intellectuals in the late Ottoman Empire, frequently moved between the Ottoman and Russian domains and intervened in both public spheres (cf. Meyer 2015; Shissler 2003). Abdürreşid's articles in *Beyanülhak* provide additional detail, a clearer chronology, and sometimes even a different framing of events than the two volumes of *Alem-i İslam* (cf. Brandenburg 2018b). Regarding Münir, the contrast between his writing in different languages is particularly striking: for Japanese audiences, he served by and large as an expert on the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East, commenting predominantly on political developments. In his articles for the Istanbul-based Islamist journal *Sebilürreşad* (up to 1912: *Sırat-ı Müstakim*), he variegated pan-Asianist messages with observations on Japanese modernity and a call for closer relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire. In *Beyanülhak*, however, Münir largely abstained from political messages and focused on social reform, trade and industry, as well as general travel impressions. We may interpret these differences as an adjustment to the distinct preferences of Münir's audiences in Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Japan.

Abdullah Gündoğdu (2007, 250) has correctly pointed out that Münir often followed in the footsteps of his dominant father and "always felt his father's influence on his personal life and interests." This observation holds true when we look at the overlapping networks in which father and son were involved: in Istanbul, both published in the pan-Islamist journals *Sebilürreşad* and *Tearüf-i Müslimin*; in Kazan their writings appeared in *Beyanülhak*, and in Japan they both frequented the pan-Asianist society Ajia Gikai and wrote for its journal *Daitō*⁴. These parallels between father and son should not lead us to underestimate the historical value of Münir's writing, however. In historical sources, father and son come across as distinct personalities: while Abdürreşid was blessed with the gift of oral and written communication,⁵ Münir seems to have been a

4 The surviving issues of *Daitō* have been made available on CD-rom by Tōyō University under the direction of Misawa Nobuo, see (Tōyō Daigaku Ajia Bunka Kenkyūjo Ajia Chiiki Kenkyū Sentā 2008).

5 The scale of Abdürreşid İbrahim's writings and activities is nothing less but impressive. During his stay in Japan from late January to mid-June 1909, he published more than forty articles in *Beyanülhak*. At the same time, he explored Japan, met with a considerable number of influ-

more intellectually minded character. The Czech Orientalist Alois Nykl, who made his acquaintance in Tokyo in late 1911, described him as “the most enlightened Turk I have ever met.”⁶ In Münir’s articles, the reader is confronted with a density of detailed information and often statistical data. Nonetheless, historians have commonly focused on commonalities between father and son, presenting Münir as continuing his father’s activities in the service of pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism (Gündoğdu 2012, 141). In the following discussion, I show that Münir in his Tatar travelogue was hardly interested in advocating grand political visions of Muslim or Asian unity. Instead, Münir’s writing is particularly insightful regarding the daily practices and challenges in the development of Japanese-Turkish and Japanese-Tatar exchanges.

The Ottoman Student Delegation to Tokyo

Münir arrived in Tokyo on December 29, 1910, as part of the first Ottoman student delegation to Japan and was welcomed by representatives of the pan-Asianist society *Ajia Gikai* (“Asian Society”) (*Ajia Gikai* 1911). The other members of the group were two recent graduates of the *Mekteb-i mülkiye*: Hasan Fehmi, who also frequently published articles on Japan in the Ottoman press, and Mehmed Tevfik (cf. Şahin 2001, 165-166 n. 475). Originally, another graduate of the *Mekteb-i mülkiye*, İbrahim Edhem, was supposed to be the third member of the group. When he fell sick before the journey, however, he was replaced by Münir (Türkoğlu 2015, 112).

Although the circumstances of the student’s dispatch to Japan have not yet been completely illuminated, Abdürreşid played a major role in the preparations. During his stay in Japan in 1909, Abdürreşid had helped found the *Ajia Gikai*, which one year later invited Ottoman students to Tokyo. The invitation was published in the Istanbul-based journal *Tearüf-i Müslimin* (1910a), which was edited by Abdürreşid, and the dispatch of the delegation was likewise announced in *Tearüf-i Müslimin* (1910b). It is uncertain how much financial backing the *Ajia Gikai* eventually gave to the delegation (Misawa 2013, 507). According to Ottoman sources (İctihad

ential personalities, gave several public speeches and communicated with *Sırat-ı Müstakim*. Japanese interlocutors repeatedly mentioned his tendency to talk a lot.

6 Nykl papers, folder 79: deníky [diaries] 1912 až 1916, Náprstek Museum, Prague.

1911; *Tearüf-i Müslimin* 1910b) an Ottoman sponsor (Mısırlı Abbas Halim Paşa?) provided the financial means. Hasan Fehmi pointed out after his return to Istanbul that the Ajia Gikai falsely claimed to have supported the Ottoman students, while this was done in fact by a sponsor at home (Türkoğlu 2015, 126 and 130). As we read in *Tearüf-i Müslimin* (1910c), the Ottoman şeyhülislam was also supportive of the delegation. Documents of the Ottoman embassy in London, through which the Ottoman foreign ministry communicated with Japan, further indicate a degree of involvement by the Ottoman bureaucracy.⁷ Official backing was not strong enough, however, to enable the students to enroll at Tokyo Imperial University as was initially planned; instead they enrolled at Ōkuma Shigenobu's Waseda University (Misawa 2013, 508).

The three students were in close contact with the Ajia Gikai at least until 1912, when the society reportedly moved its activities to China (Misawa 2013, 509–10). The Ajia Gikai publicly celebrated its success in bringing the first students from the Middle East to Japan as the first step in its endeavor “to make the relations of Asiatic people closer and to promote political, commercial and educational interests in Asia” (The Japan Times 1911). It made use of the three students as experts for the Middle East and teachers of the Turkish language (Nakano 1911). The students were also charged with the translation of articles from the Ottoman Turkish press (Ahmed Münir İbrahim 1911a). All three were named honorary members of the Ajia Gikai and thereby served as symbols of the society's outreach towards the Middle East and the world of Islam (cf. Misawa 2013, 508).

We often encounter the three students in the vicinity of the Indian revolutionary and pan-Islamist Muhammad Barakatullah, who had moved to Tokyo from the USA in 1909 to start a position at the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages (Brandenburg 2019). Soon after his arrival, Barakatullah made the acquaintance of Abdürreşid İbrahim, became involved with the Ajia Gikai, and began publication of the journal *Islamic Fraternity*. After the three students arrived from the Ottoman Empire, Barakatullah published an article in the *Islamic Fraternity* (reprinted in Japanese translation in *Daitō*), in which he praised the emerging cooperation between Muslims

⁷ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, HR.SFR.3 611.11, Nov. 5, 1910.

and the Ajia Gikai in bringing Asians together and making Islam known in Japan (Barakatullah 1911a). He invited the three students to the widely publicized conversion ceremony of Hatano Uhō and Hatano's wife and father-in-law on December 3, 1911 (Barakatullah 1911b). Hatano, celebrated by Barakatullah as the first Japanese Muslim, was a writer and journalist who frequently translated Barakatullah's ideas into Japanese and assisted in the latter's publishing activities (Kubota 2005, 172–73). Münir's articles in *Sirat-ı Müstakim/Sebilürreşad* occasionally mentioned Hatano and presented him as a pioneering Japanese Muslim who tried to spread Islam in Japan (Ahmed Münir İbrahim 1912). Münir also sent Hatano's pan-Asianist book *Ajia gōdō ron* (On Asian Unity) to İstanbul (Sebilürreşad 1913b). It was subsequently translated into Ottoman Turkish by Abdürreşid İbrahim and Nakao Hideo and published under the title *Asya Tehlikede* (Asia in Danger) (Sebilürreşad 1913a; Dündar 2015).

İsmail Türkoğlu (2015) has drawn our attention to an important report on Japan that Hasan Fehmi compiled for the Ottoman government in 1915. Fehmi's report illustrates that interpersonal relations within the small Muslim community in Japan and among the three Ottoman students were not as harmonic as they may at first glance seem. Written shortly after Fehmi's return to the Ottoman Empire, his report aggressively accused all major figures of pre-World War I Japanese-Muslim relations – Abdürreşid İbrahim, Barakatullah, Hatano, as well as Münir – of being liars and imposters, who habitually inflated their own importance for personal gain. While some of the accusations may be attributed to personal grudges, it is true that Abdürreşid, for example, adapted his stories to changing circumstances and often exaggerated his achievements (cf. Brandenburg 2018b). Barakatullah also combined different political positions and public profiles; and Barakatullah and Abdürreşid, together with Hatano and members of the Ajia Gikai, projected a grossly misleading picture of the success of Islam in Japan to Ottoman and Middle Eastern audiences (cf. Brandenburg 2018a). With regard to Münir, Hasan Fehmi bitterly pointed out that Münir frequently mislead Japanese interlocutors to appear more important, that he had taken money from the two other students to travel to İstanbul, and that he did not hesitate to support Russia against the Ottoman

Empire after the outbreak of World War I (Türkoğlu 2015, 127–28). At this point, it is difficult to corroborate these claims with other sources. They should remind us, however, that Russian Muslims in the Ottoman Empire (as well as other transnational Muslim activists) embraced different and sometimes contradictory identities and frequently adapted their messages and political positions to changing contexts (cf. Meyer 2015; Shissler 2003).

Among the three students, Münir has probably left the biggest public imprint. *Sebilürreşad* alone published sixteen of his articles (cf. Gündoğdu 2012, 2007). The Ajia Gikai selected him to deliver a public lecture on the Caucasus and Persia, which was reprinted in *Daitō* and partly reproduced also in the daily press (Ahmed Münir İbrahim 1911b; Tōkyō Asahi Shinbun 1911). *Daitō* also published several other articles by Münir, which advocated Asian unity or explained developments in the Middle East (cf. Misawa 2001, 66).⁸ In an eight-part interview with *Yomiuri Shinbun* (1912), we see Ahmed Münir explain Turkish culture and history. *Beyanülhak*, finally, published his (usually serialized) articles on Manchuria and Japan in at least 35 of its issues in 1910-1911.

The Students' Journey through Manchuria

Münir did not specify details of his journey to Japan in the Ottoman or the Japanese press. In *Beyanülhak*, however, he published a sixteen-part series of travel impressions from East Asia under the headline "The Journey from Harbin to Port Arthur and from there to Tokyo."⁹ This serialized travelogue appeared in the feuilleton of the newspaper between January 29 and April 9, 1911.¹⁰ It was preceded by two separate articles, which dealt with the Muslim community in Harbin.¹¹ Taken together, Münir's texts allow us to reconstruct the East Asian part of the students' itinerary.

8 Two of these articles are signed "İbrahim," without giving the full name. While I agree with Misawa Nobuo that they should be attributed to Münir, there is a certain ambiguity here.

9 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [1-16], *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 713 (Jan. 29), 716 (Jan. 31), 718 (Feb. 9), 719 (Feb. 12), 721 (Feb. 16), 722 (Feb. 19), 723 (Feb. 21), 724 (Feb. 23), 726 (Feb. 28), 728 (Mar. 7), 729 (Mar. 9), 732 (Mar. 16), 733 (Mar. 19), 736 (Mar. 26), 738 (Mar. 30), 742 (Apr. 9). All dates are given according to the Gregorian calendar.

10 Abdürreşid İbrahim's articles "Devr-i Alem" (Around the World) were likewise published in the feuilleton of *Beyanülhak* during Abdürreşid's journey 1909-10.

11 "Harbin'de İslamlar" and "Harbin'de Bayram," *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 699 (Dec. 27, 1910) and 702 (Jan. 3, 1911).

They took the Trans-Siberian Railway to Irkutsk and continued to Harbin via Zabaykalsk, where they changed into trains of the Russian-owned Chinese Eastern Railway. The travelers arrived in Harbin on the morning of December 12, 1910.¹² On December 22, Münir, who held Russian nationality, received his travel documents from the Russian authorities in Harbin.¹³ One day later, on December 23, the group traveled to Changchun on the Chinese Eastern Railway and there changed into an express train of the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railway to Dalian (Dalny/Dairen), a Chinese port that Russia had leased in 1897 and ceded to Japan after the Russo Japanese War 1904-05.¹⁴ On December 24, they went on a day trip to neighboring Port Arthur,¹⁵ and on December 25, the group left Dalian for Japan in the early morning.¹⁶ Traveling on the Japanese ship *Amakusa Maru* for two days, the students arrived in Shimonoseki on December 27.¹⁷ From Shimonoseki, they took a train to Tokyo and were welcomed at Shinbashi station by representatives of the Ajia Gikai on December 29.¹⁸

In several respects, the students' journey is comparable to Abdürreşid's, who had also spent two weeks in Harbin in January 1909 to apply for Russian travel documents (Abdürreşid İbrahim 1910, 160). While Abdürreşid continued his journey to Japan via Vladivostok and Tsuruga, Münir and his companions, on the other hand, chose the route through the Japanese-dominated southern part of Manchuria, which Abdürreşid had only visited after his departure from Japan. In Harbin, Abdürreşid had been particularly impressed by the imam of the local Tatar mosque, Inayetullah (Ginietulla Selikhmetov), a young man of 24 years. During his stay in Harbin, Abdürreşid was a guest at the house of the local merchant

12 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [1]. The text gives the Julian date December 29, 1911, but on this day the travelers were already in Tokyo. It is most likely that they arrived in Harbin on November 29, i.e., December 12, 1910, according to the Gregorian calendar.

13 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [3].

14 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [5].

15 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [7].

16 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [10].

17 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [11].

18 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [13]. Although Münir alluded to a stopover in Kobe in the first part of the series, he does not mention it in this article. The report by the Ajia Gikai in *Daitō* states that a member of the society was sent to Kobe on December 28 and transmitted the students' time of arrival in Tokyo by telegram. Cf. Ajia Gikai 1911.

Hüseyin Efendi Ağışev (Agishev), whose family maintained a profitable clothing business in Harbin (ibid., 146–47; cf. Miller 1904, 12). As both Abdürreşid and Münir point out, Harbin was a young city that developed after 1898 as headquarters of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company, i.e., as a result of Russia's economic penetration into Manchuria (cf. Bakich 1986, 131–39). Harbin grew rapidly into a multi-ethnic or "international" city (*beynelmilel bir şehir*, in Münir's expression) and housed sizeable Russian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese communities.¹⁹ The city was a particularly attractive destination for Russian liberals and ethnic minorities such as Jews, who could enjoy the privileges of Russian nationality in what was de facto a Russian colony on Chinese territory without being exposed to the same discrimination as at home (Goldstein 2015, 103–28; Wolff 1999). From early on, Harbin was home to a Tatar community of around 200 people, which constructed a first wooden mosque already in 1901 and a stone mosque in 1906-07 (Chernolutskaia 2000, 83–84; Dündar 2008, 21–25).

Münir and his companions arrived in Harbin at the beginning of Eid al-Adha/Kurban Bayramı. They also arrived in the midst of a plague epidemic that hit Harbin and Manchuria in autumn 1910, but this apparently did not give too much concern to Münir.²⁰ In Münir's article "Bayram in Harbin," we learn that the three travelers spent the third day of the bayram with Inayetullah, who continued to be imam of Harbin mosque (and would remain so until his death in 1926, cf. Chernolutskaia 2000, 83). In a long exchange with the imam, Mehmet Tevfik spoke about the brotherhood between Ottoman Turks and Tatars, and the respect that Tatars received from people in the Ottoman Empire. Inayetullah was particularly delighted to be informed about the recent political situation in the Ottoman Empire (Türkiye) and the empire's future development, which both Tevfik and Hasan Fehmi regarded with optimism.²¹

Harbin, Münir met with both Inayetullah and Hüseyin Ağışev and again followed in the footsteps of his father, although he did not admit

19 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [1].

20 "Harbin'de İslamlar." The Chinese suburb Fujiadian was much more heavily hit than the Russian-dominated parts of Harbin that Münir frequented. Most of the casualties were Chinese subjects.

21 "Harbin'de Bayram."

doing so. Instead, the meeting with Ağışev is narrated as an unexpected event. When the travelers arrived in Harbin and ordered tea at the train station, a stranger approached them and asked in Russian: “Excuse me, you have just arrived from Istanbul, haven’t you?” The man presented himself as Hüseyin Ağışev and revealed that the imam had sent him to guide the three travelers to the mosque for the prayer on the first day of bayram.²² The travelers rejoiced at this encounter and followed Ağışev to the mosque, coincidentally passing by the store that the Ağışevs owned in Harbin’s quarter Pristan and that Abdürreşid had visited in 1909.²³

Münir relates how the three travelers were received with great respect by the local Muslims while the imam introduced the visitors to the congregation and in his sermon (in Turkish and Arabic) underscored the meaning of Muslim encounters. For Münir, the meeting with the Muslims of Harbin provided an occasion to provide detailed information on the Muslim community in Harbin. According to Ağışev, Harbin housed 270-300 Muslims. The mosque had been constructed in the course of three to four years and could accommodate around 250 people. The mosque, together with a library and the house of the imam, was maintained by a committee of the local community (*mahalle*) and cost around 2500 rubles per year. For Münir this was an impressive achievement by a small community based on effort (*ictihad*) and fervor (*gayret*). Münir consequently admonishes Tatars in Kazan to pursue a path towards national unity by following the example of the Harbin Tatars.²⁴

The encounter with Inayetullah does not play out in a solely religious framing, however, but leads over to a topic which connects much of Münir’s writing in *Beyanülhak*: a fascination with trade and industry. In the second part of his travelogue, it is imam Inayetullah who first explains to Münir the economic importance of Harbin and provides information on different banks in the city.²⁵ Ağışev later follows up by outlining the important role of the Tatars in the fur trade and the international activities of his company

22 “Harbin’den Port Arthur’a ve andan Tokyo’ya seyahat” [1].

23 “Harbin’den Port Arthur’a ve andan Tokyo’ya seyahat” [2].

24 “Harbin’den Port Arthur’a ve andan Tokyo’ya seyahat” [2].

25 “Harbin’den Port Arthur’a ve andan Tokyo’ya seyahat” [2].

from Europe to the USA.²⁶ After arriving in Tokyo and making his first observations in Japan, Münir concludes his travelogue by lamenting that the Tatars in Kazan had neglected trade and industry and had thus fallen behind other nations.²⁷ By presenting first the Harbin Tatars and second the Japanese as role models, Münir tries to encourage readers in Kazan to improve themselves and dedicate themselves to business and learning.²⁸

Münir's exhortations to his Tatar readers in Kazan indicate that he consistently inserted his observations into a Russian perspective. Not only did he frequently move from depictions of Japan towards identifying a need for reform in Tatar society, but also habitually used Russian references, favorably comparing for example the express train of the South Manchurian Railway to the "Nord Express" which circulated between Moscow and St. Petersburg.²⁹ In Shimonoseki, he compared the best hotel in the city with hotels in St. Petersburg, finding the Japanese hotel to be of the same quality but more affordable.³⁰ In his drawn-out narration of the students' visit to Port Arthur, Münir describes Russian military cemeteries, inquires about the interment of Muslim soldiers, critically examines the costs that the fortification of Port Arthur had brought to Russia, and mentions how Russian tourists shed tears after visiting the war museum.³¹ Moreover, while in Manchuria Münir and his companions seem to have communicated primarily in Russian, and one wonders to what degree this might have made Münir into the de facto leader of the group.³² Münir's journey through Manchuria overall takes place within a decidedly Tatar and Russian framework, where Islam is addressed only in its relation to the Tatar nation. One exceptional event, which brings ideas of pan-Islamic unity to the foreground, is the students' emotional departure from Harbin when

26 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [3].

27 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [5].

28 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [13].

29 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [3].

30 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [11].

31 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [7-10]. Hasan Fehmi's article in *Tearüf-i Müslimin* provides a more concise narration of the visit, cf. (Fehmi 1911).

32 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [11]. After their departure from Manchuria, the students mainly tried to communicate in French although they struggled to find interlocutors. İsmail Türkoğlu (2015, 113) has pointed out that Hasan Fehmi too spoke fluent Russian. Münir does not mention this in his writing.

the local Tatars and the travelers assure each other that spatial separation would never break their spiritual connections (*manavi rabitalar*).³³ Apart from this event, however, Münir's travelogue keeps by and large quiet on pan-Islamism and thus stands in stark contrast to Abdürreşid's *Alem-i İslam*, where transnational Muslim unity is one of the most prominent ideas.

Arriving in Japan

In the introduction to his travelogue, Münir explains that he chose to relate his journey from Harbin to Tokyo because this part of his journey would have been most unfamiliar to the readers of *Beyanüllhak*. He adds the caveat, however, that the journey's "most important part" from Dalian to Tokyo may contain factual errors since the author had faced severe difficulties in communication with the people he met. From Dalian onwards, Münir admits, he could hardly find anybody who spoke Russian or French. The Japanese-controlled part of East Asia was instead dominated by Japanese and English, languages which he did not understand. In this sense, his journey was split into two – a first half where he felt at ease and a second half where he felt insecure.³⁴

Münir is extremely attentive with regard to communication, and language is a recurring topic in his travelogue. We find traces of this interest in language also in an article in *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, where Münir describes that the Ajia Gikai had received issues of *Sırat-ı Müstakim* from Istanbul but that nobody was yet able to read them (Ahmed Münir İbrahim 1911a). In his articles for *Beyanüllhak*, he relates various anecdotes about his and his companions' difficulties in understanding their interlocutors or in making themselves understood. In Dalian, they stay at a Yamato Hotel (a chain of hotels owned by the South Manchurian Railway) but soon realize that they are unable to communicate with the Japanese personnel. They are relieved when they find a Japanese interpreter for Russian, who would also serve as their guide in Port Arthur.³⁵ In Shimonoseki, too, the travelers are happy when they find someone who knows a little Russian and

33 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [3].

34 Although he wrote extensively on the Tatars of Harbin, Münir does not mention Turkish among his languages of conversation, neither in its Ottoman nor Tatar varieties.

35 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [6-7].

who inquires for them about the train schedules.³⁶ During the transit from Dalian to Shimonoseki, the three students experience a certain isolation in an environment dominated by English and Japanese but enjoy speaking to the fifteen-year-old mate of the ship who knows French – although he understands only ten to twenty percent of what they say to him.³⁷ In the reading room of their hotel in Shimonoseki, Münir is impressed by the number of available journals and magazines. All three travelers are, however, completely enthused when the hotel staff brings them an older issue of the French magazine *La Revue Illustrée*, which they avidly start reading like something “written in our mother tongue.”³⁸ Difficulties continue in Tokyo, where Münir remarks that the leader of the Ajia Gikai, Ōhara Bukei, spoke very little French and that all communication had to go through the interpreter Nikki Jirō.³⁹

From the viewpoint of pan-Asianism, Münir's description of the Ajia Gikai is especially interesting. It largely confirms the Ajia Gikai's own report in *Daitō* but provides some additional detail. We read, for example, that two Japanese members of parliament, Kōno Hironaka and Sasaki Yasugorō, who had made the acquaintance of Abdürreşid İbrahim in 1909, sent representatives to Shinbashi station to present the students with their calling cards.⁴⁰ After driving the students to their hotel⁴¹, the Ajia Gikai (which Münir correctly translates as “Azyalılar Cemiyeti”⁴²) invites the students to a welcome dinner at which Ōhara and Aoyagi Masao give speeches on Asian unity and the awakening of the East. Ōhara outlines the Ajia Gikai's goal of assisting Japan's Asian brothers and sisters (*kardeşlerimiz Asyalılar*) to reach the same degree of progress (*terakki*) as the Europeans. He thanks the Turks and in particular the Ajia Gikai's members in Istanbul⁴³ for having responded first to this ambition by sending students

36 “Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat” [12].

37 “Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat” [11].

38 “Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat” [12].

39 “Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat” [14].

40 “Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat” [13].

41 Münir gives the name of the hotel as “Sabani” while the Ajia Gikai (1911) gives it as “Ouékya.”

42 Abdürreşid İbrahim, (1910, 427), in *Alem-i İslam*, gave the suggestive mistranslation “Asya Kuvve-i Müdafaası,” i.e., Asian Defense Force.

43 Apart from Abdürreşid İbrahim, the Ajia Gikai included the Ottoman şeyhülislam in the list of its members. We may assume that they did so after the şeyhülislam had requested members-

to Tokyo. Still on their first day in Tokyo, the students visit the British embassy where Hasan Fehmi and Mehmet Tefvik expected to receive mail from the Ottoman Empire (which had not yet arrived).⁴⁴

While Münir embraced pan-Asianist messages in several of his articles in *Sebilürreşad* and *Daitō*, he leaves the Ajia Gikai's call for Asian cooperation uncommented, and his reaction thus remains ambivalent. He even abstains from further discussions of the Ajia Gikai or his own position within the society and rather concludes his travelogue by addressing characteristics of the Japanese language, which he discovers to be similar to Turkish,⁴⁵ and by pointing out the importance of trade and industry for the future of the Tatars.⁴⁶ His subsequent articles for *Beyanülhak* take up various issues that would have been of interest to reformist Tatar intellectuals in Russia: institutions for the public good (*menafi-i umumiye*) such as parks and museums,⁴⁷ hospitals and schools (discussing both boys' and girls' education),⁴⁸ international trade and business administration,⁴⁹ national holidays,⁵⁰ travel,⁵¹ as well as the role of women in society.⁵² None of the articles further address the activities of the Ajia Gikai, and Münir instead introduces the Japan Welcome Society, which assists the students in arranging visits to hospitals and other places.⁵³ Whenever Münir alludes to the idea of Asian unity, he presents it not as an expression of his own

hip in a letter that was published in *Tearüf-i Muslimin* (1910c).

44 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [14].

45 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [15].

46 "Harbin'den Port Arthur'a ve andan Tokyo'ya seyahat" [16].

47 "Japonya'dan" [1-3], *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 748 (Apr. 18, 1911), 751 (Apr. 21, 1911), and 753 (Apr. 24, 1911).

48 "Japonya mektupları: Hastahaneler ve mektepler" [1-2], *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 765 (May 9, 1911) and 766 (May 10, 1911); "Japonya'da mektepler" [1-3], *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 769 (May 14, 1911), 772 (May 17, 1911), and 777 (May 23, 1911).

49 "Japonya mektupları: Tokyo'dan Yokohama'ya seyahat" [1-2], *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 820 (July 14, 1911) and 821 (July 15, 1911).

50 "Japonya mektupları: Japonlarda milli bayramlar" [1-2], *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 825 (July 20, 1911) and 827 (July 23, 1911).

51 "Japonya mektupları: Seyyahlar," *Beyanülhak*, No. 844 (August 14, 1911).

52 "Japonya mektupları: Muharrir Isamura Hanım ve Japon hatunları" and "'Japonya mektupları: Japon hatunları," *Beyanülhak*, Nos. 845 (August 15, 1911) and 846 (August 16, 1911).

53 "Japonya mektupları: Hastahaneler ve mektepler" [1]. Membership was open to all tourists to Japan for a modest fee; Abdürreşid İbrahim too had joined it and made use of its services in 1909 (Abdürreşid İbrahim 1910 [1328], 245-247). See also "Devr-i alem," *Beyanülhak*, No. 438 (Mar. 16, 1909).

political or cultural vision but as an attitude of strong sympathy towards Tatars and other Asians that he encountered among the Japanese.⁵⁴

It is likely that Münir's writing in *Beyanülhak* contains a degree of self-censorship with regard to pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism, given the curtailment of public expression in Russia. On the other hand, he readily reveals his ties to the Ajia Gikai, points out the society's connection to military and political circles in Japan, and even quotes its leaders' speeches on Asian unity. To a certain degree at least, we may thus regard Münir's abstention from a grand political vision as a confirmation of James H. Meyer's (2015, 92) observation that "politically active Muslims in central Russia were concerned primarily with issues that were practical and administrative, rather than theoretical or identity-laden." By mentioning Japanese sympathy for the Tatars, Münir does not advocate a pan-Asianist alliance but tries to encourage other Tatars to travel to Japan for trade and learning where they will be received with open arms.⁵⁵ In their indifference to foreign politics, Münir's articles in the Tatar press differ markedly not only from his articles in *Daitō* but also from those in *Sebilürreşad*. In future studies, it might thus be revealing to further examine differences between Ottoman and Tatar perspectives on Japan.

Conclusion

The dispatch of the first Ottoman student delegation to Japan was a remarkable achievement that has unfortunately drawn little scholarly attention. For the first time, Ottoman journals could benefit from the insights of Turkish-speaking correspondents in Tokyo who, after initial difficulties, became more and more familiar with their Japanese environment. When we examine Münir's articles in *Sebilürreşad*, we immediately perceive the positive effects of this local expertise. Münir reports, for example, on the 1912 "Three Religions Conference" (*sankyō kaidō*) in Tokyo at which representatives of state and religious communities (Shintō, Buddhism, and Christianity) discussed the role of religion in Japan's educational system. When misunderstandings of the conference's purpose caused rumors that

54 "Japonya mektupları: Hastahaneler ve mektepler" [1]; "Japonya mektupları: Seyyahlar."

55 "Japonya mektupları: Seyyahlar."

Japan would adopt Christianity as its state religion, Münir was able to expose this as false news based on an interview with a Japanese politician (Ahmed Münir İbrahim 1912).

While many of Münir's articles in *Sebilürreşad* are unequivocally pan-Asianist and pan-Islamist, his writing in *Beyanülhak* largely abstains from political messages, instead combining the personal experience of travel with a fact-based exhortation to social reform and engagement in trade. Differences between Münir's messages in Ottoman and Tatar Turkish as a result of his continued involvement in both Ottoman and Russian contexts provide the background to Hasan Fehmi's later criticism of Münir and his father Abdürreşid for not being completely loyal to the Ottoman Empire. Münir's Manchurian travelogue already exposes possible tensions between Russian and Ottoman identities. While Münir clearly identifies with his Tatar readers in Kazan, his companions Hasan Fehmi and Mehmed Tevfik are consistently depicted as Ottoman Turks.⁵⁶ It is they who explain the present and future of the Ottoman Empire to Harbin's imam Inayetullah while Münir remains silent on this topic. From the very beginning, Münir thus distinguishes himself from his companions through his Tatar identity – at least towards the readers of *Beyanülhak*.

In researching and writing this article, I have had access to the years 1909-1911 of *Beyanülhak*. My findings are thus limited to Münir's journey to East Asia and his first year in Japan. It is likely that Münir continued to write for *Beyanülhak* or other Tatar journals, and later articles might contain information regarding the development of his viewpoints on Japan, pan-Asianism, and Turkish-Japanese relations. In the years 1910-1911, it is astonishing to see that Turkish-Japanese exchanges were hampered not only by the mutual ignorance of each other's language but also by diverging preferences for a second language – English or French. When Münir returned to Turkey in 1924, he had mastered both Japanese and English and was fluent in at least six languages (Gündoğdu 2012, 139–40). This makes it all the more mysterious, however, why he would hardly play a role in the Japanese-Turkish exchanges of the interwar years. Two brief

⁵⁶ İsmail Türkoğlu (Türkoğlu 2015, 112–13) has pointed out that Hasan Fehmi, too, was of Tatar descent and even born in Kazan. Münir, however, seems to have regarded him simply as an Ottoman Turk.

encounters with Yamaoka Mitsutarō and Ōtani Kōzui in Ankara in the 1920s might suggest that Münir, contradistinction to his father Abdürreşid, had become disillusioned with Japan and distanced himself from pan-Asianist circles (Misawa 2013, 509; cf. Küçükyağcı 2010, 53). Future research will hopefully provide clarity on this point.

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