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JOHN TURNBULL THOMSON AND THE *HIKAYAT ABDULLAH*

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Introduction

Not many in New Zealand today would be aware that the Hocken Collections of the University of Otago houses an important national treasure of Malaysia and Singapore – the handwritten manuscript copy of the *Hikayat Abdullah*, the autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi (1797–1854), also known as Munshi Abdullah, the father of modern Malay literature and well-known Malay reformer in Malaysia and Singapore.¹

How did such an important item end up in New Zealand? It was brought to its shores in 1855 by one of Abdullah's students, John Turnbull Thomson (1821–1884), a significant figure in nineteenth-century New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. A man of many talents, Thomson's place in the history of these regions was forged in the fields of surveying, engineering, architecture, art and literature. Singapore's Horsburgh Lighthouse and Thomson Road, and the myriad of place names that were provided by Thomson in New Zealand's southern provinces of Otago and Southland, are testimonies to his engineering and surveying achievements. His accomplishments in the field of surveying led to him becoming New Zealand's Surveyor-General (1876–79). His paintings of nineteenth-century New Zealand and the Malay Peninsula are now valued as important historical pieces, as well as being collected as artworks, while his literary and philosophical works are still the subject of academic study.²

1 Anthony Milner, *The Malays* (2008; repr., Oxford and Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 70, 73; Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya* (1995; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11, 31-2, 50. Hassan Ahmad has, however, argued that Abdullah is not the father of modern Malay literature as he is commonly portrayed by European scholars: Hassan Ahmad, foreword by the chief editor of *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan, 2007), viii.

2 For instance, John Turnbull Thomson's book *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi* has been studied by scholars such as Amin Sweeney: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munsyi, jilid 3: Hikayat Abdullah*, trans. and ed. Amin Sweeney (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2005). New Zealand historian Tony Ballantyne has also analysed Thomson's writings: Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 69-74; Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Past* (Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books, 2012), 33-5, 38-9. Thomson's accounts of the Malay Peninsula were also used by writers when describing the region during the nineteenth century. For example, see: John Van Wyhe, *Dispelling the Darkness: The Voyage of Alfred Russell Wallace and Evolution without Darwin* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2013), 66, 75, 138.

This paper will focus on the extent to which Munshi Abdullah, through his autobiography – *Hikayat Abdullah* – may have influenced the development and outcome of Thomson's thought and writings during his time in New Zealand. Abdullah's significance to Thomson's literary works went beyond cultivating in him a fluency in the Malay language, an asset that would enable Thomson to undertake a linguistic analysis of Māori and the languages spoken in Polynesia, Southeast Asia and India, for the purpose of mapping the origin of Māori, and acquainting himself with the cultures of the Malay Peninsula. Thomson and many Europeans familiar with the *Hikayat Abdullah* considered the work to be a significant literary accomplishment by a native of the Far East. It offered proof of the level of intelligence that could be attained by a non-European, especially during a period in which European racial supremacy was commonly assumed.³ Thomson even suggested that intelligent non-Europeans like Abdullah should be afforded a greater role within the British Empire. But in spite of this, the *Hikayat Abdullah's* positive message was undermined by Abdullah's depiction of his countrymen as backward, superstitious and lazy, and by his portrayal of their rulers as immoral and despotic, in contrast to the Europeans whom he generally portrayed as industrious, progressive and benevolent. Although Thomson acknowledged Abdullah's intelligence, he attributed this to the positive European influence. The *Hikayat Abdullah* itself had, after all, given the impression that all good things come from Europe.

The relationship between Thomson and Abdullah provides an excellent example of the historical importance of Asia in shaping the intellectual and cultural environment of New Zealand. It adds to the pioneering works of historians such as Tony Ballantyne, James Beattie and Brian Moloughney, who have shown that the presence of Asia in New Zealand's cultural map was not a twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon, challenging the narrow bicultural visions of New Zealand's past that is centred on Māori and Pakeha.⁴ Ballantyne's network oriented approach to mapping New Zealand's history reminds us that the region was part of the vast multi-cultural British Empire that was held together by interlocking imperial networks that stretched the globe, which he called the "web metaphor."⁵ These vast networks facilitated the cross-cultural flows of ideas, information, policies, commodities, plants and animals from Asia to New Zealand, as evidenced by the presence of the *Hikayat Abdullah* in Dunedin.⁶

3 Alfred Russell Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection'," *Journal of the Anthropological Society* 2 (1864): clxxix-clxxx; John Stenhouse, "Alfred Kingcome Newman, the Dying Maori, and Victorian Scientific Racism," *New Zealand Journal of History* 30, no.2 (1996): 126.

4 Example of works: Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, "Asia in Murihuku: towards a transnational history of colonial culture," in *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), 65; Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*; James Beattie, "Plants, Animals and Environmental Transformation: India-New Zealand Biological and Landscape Connection, 1830s-1890s," in *The East India Company and the Natural World*, ed. Vinita Damodaran, Anna Winterbottom, and Alan Lester (Basingstone, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 219-47.

5 Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, 14-15, 25, 30, 42-44, 46.

6 James Beattie, "Making home, making identity: Asian garden making in New Zealand, 1850s-1930s," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 31, no. 2 (June 2011): 140-5.



Figure 1. Beyerhaus, *Government Surveyor to Singapore*. Portait of Thomson at the age of 24, in John Hall-Jones, *John Turnbull Thomson: First Surveyor-General of New Zealand* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1992), 18.

A large number of the leading figures in colonial New Zealand's intellectual and political circles, like Thomson, had strong Asian connection, and many had begun their careers in the service of the East India Company.⁷ Their experiences in Asia had a substantial influence in shaping the policies they implemented and their literary and intellectual output in New Zealand.⁸ Thomson provided the lens through which New Zealand understood Abdullah, Asia and the world.

John Turnbull Thomson's Background

John Turnbull Thomson, the son of Alexander and Janet (née Turnbull) Thomson, was born on 10 August 1821 at Glororum farm, near Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, England.⁹ According to John Hall-Jones, Thomson's great-grandson and biographer,

7 Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, 39.

8 Ballantyne and Moloughney, "Asia in Murihuku: towards a transnational history of colonial culture," 82.

9 John Hall-Jones, *John Turnbull Thomson: First Surveyor-General of New Zealand* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1992), 20.

Thomson's forebears were "Scottish Border farmers who lived near Lennel village on the Scottish Banks of the Tweed."¹⁰ He was educated at the Duns academy in Berwickshire, studied mathematics at Marischal College in Aberdeen, and later at the school of engineering at Newcastle.¹¹ After the completion of his studies, at the age of sixteen, Thomson embarked on his career in the "Far East" with an engagement to survey the estates of Brown, Scott and Co. in Penang.¹² He was appointed Government Surveyor to Singapore in 1841, and served till the end of his time in the region in 1855, when he decided to migrate to New Zealand due to failing health.¹³ Thomson associated his health decline to his exposure, for two years, to the harsh climate while constructing the Horsburgh Lighthouse on Pedra Branca, off the coast of Singapore, which had forced him to return to England on prolonged sick leave on 1 September 1853.¹⁴

Thomson arrived in Auckland on 6 February 1856.¹⁵ New Zealand at the time was a recent, rapidly growing British colony that was in need of a person with Thomson's surveying skills.¹⁶ This need was keenly felt in the recently established province of Otago, most of where the interior was uncharted; the only information available was on maps relating to coastal areas.¹⁷ Thomson's good reputation as a surveyor, engineer and architect from the British Straits Settlements caught the attention of the Superintendent of Otago, Captain William Cargill, who offered Thomson the position of Chief Surveyor

10 John Hall-Jones, *Mr. Surveyor Thomson: Early Days in Otago and Southland* (Sydney, New South Wales: A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd., 1971), 22.

11 *Ibid.*, 12.

12 Hall-Jones, *John Turnbull Thomson: First Surveyor-General of New Zealand*, 16.

13 James C. Mulwill to John Turnbull Thomson, 13 July 1854, Letters, National Library Board, Singapore; Thomson to Thomas Church, 9 Jan. 1855, Letters, National Library Board, Singapore; Thomson, "Original Exploration in the Scottish Settlement of Otago, and Recent Travel in Other Parts of N.Z.," *Royal Scottish Society of Arts* 10 (1878): 455; John Bastin, "The Thomson Paintings: Mid-Nineteenth Century Paintings of the Straits Settlements and Malaya by John Hall Jones," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 48, no. 2 (1985), 408-9.

14 Thomson to Church, 3 Aug. 1853, and 1 Sept. 1 Sept. 1853, National Library Board, Singapore. Pedra Branca was the site of a long territorial dispute between Malaysia and Singapore. The International Court of Justice concluded on 23 May 2008 that Singapore has sovereignty over the island: International Court of Justice, *Reports of Judgements, Advisory Opinions and Orders: Case Concerning Sovereignty over Pedra Branca/Pulau Batu Puteh, Middle Rocks and South Ledge*, 23 May, 2008, 96, <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/130/14492.pdf> (accessed 29 October, 2015).

15 Thomson, "Original Exploration in the Scottish Settlement of Otago, and Recent Travel in Other Parts of N.Z.," 455.

16 Flora Byar, "A Contribution to the History of New Zealand: John Turnbull Thomson" (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 1933), 13.

17 Alexander H. McLintock, *The History of Otago: The Origins and Growth of a Wakefield Class Settlement* (Dunedin: Otago Centennial Publications, 1949), 424-5, 432-6.



Map 1. John Turnbull Thomson, *Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts*, 1846, MS-3183/36, Hall-Jones family: Papers. ARC-0589, Hocken Collections, Dunedin.

and Engineer of Otago in 1856.¹⁸ Thomson's distinguished service in this position placed his department first in the Colony, and ensured him the eminent position of New Zealand's first Surveyor-General in 1876.¹⁹ He resigned in October 1879, and moved to Invercargill where he would spend the remainder of his years. He died at "Lennel", his home, in 1884.²⁰

The Surveyor and the Munshi

Although Thomson had contributed a number of articles to the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* when he was in the Malay Peninsula, he established his reputation as a writer and philosopher in New Zealand, where most of his writings

18 Hall-Jones, *Mr. Surveyor Thomson: Early Days in Otago and Southland*, 28.

19 Thomas M. Hocken, *Contributions to the Early History of New Zealand (Settlement of Otago)* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1898), 171.

20 Hall-Jones, *Mr. Surveyor Thomson: Early Days in Otago and Southland*, 123.

were produced. He was a founding member of the Otago Institute (1869), founded the Southland Institute (1880), and was a member of the New Zealand Institute.²¹ Many of the articles and books he published during his time in New Zealand reminded his audiences of his earlier attachments to Malaya and also its impact on him, which can be observed in the way he perceived New Zealand and the rest of the world.²² Of all his post-Malayan publications, he devoted only two of them to the Malay Peninsula – the books *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Life Far East* and *Translations from the Hikayat Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*. Nevertheless, nearly all of his other works contained references to the region: from his books *Rambles of the Philosopher; or, Views at the Antipodes by an Otagonian*, and *Social Problems: An Inquiry Into Life in the Far East*, to his articles published in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*.²³ *Translations from the Hikayat Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, Thomson's English translation and commentary of the *Hikayat Abdullah*, symbolises the significance of his encounter with Munshi Abdullah in influencing his perceptions in New Zealand, and, in doing so, the outcomes of his writings. Although he did not refer to it in his publications, Thomson was most likely to have met Abdullah and came under his tutelage when he was serving as Government Surveyor to Singapore. This was because Abdullah was never employed in Penang – where Thomson started his career – and was mainly based in Singapore and Malacca.²⁴

A Tamil Muslim of Arab ancestry, Abdullah was born in Malacca in 1797, and died on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1854.²⁵ Abdullah was employed by missionaries, merchants and British civil servants as a Malay language teacher, a translator and a copyist, and had worked closely with prominent European figures of the British Straits

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- 21 John Hall-Jones, "Thomson, John Turnbull," in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, ed. Claudia Orange, vol. 1 (Wellington, New Zealand: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 537.
- 22 I have demonstrated how Thomson's experiences in the Malay Peninsula were central in shaping the outcomes of his New Zealand writings in my BA Honours dissertation: Wilbert Wong Wei Wen, "John Turnbull Thomson and the Malay Peninsula: The Far East in the Development of His Thoughts and Writings in New Zealand" (BA Honours diss., University of Otago, 2014).
- 23 For example: Thomson, "Original Exploration in the Scottish Settlement of Otago, and Recent Travel in Other Parts of N.Z.," 455-97; Thomson, *Rambles with a Philosopher, or Views at the Antipodes by an Otagonian* (Dunedin: Mills, Dick & Co., 1867); Thomson, *Social Problems: An Inquiry Into the Law of Influences* (London: C. Keegan Paul & Co, 1878); Thomson, "Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 4 (1871), 23-51; Thomson, "Philological Considerations on the Whence of the Maori," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 6 (1973): xxx-lxv; Thomson, "Pronouns and other Barat Fossil Words compared with Primeval and Non-Aryan Languages of Hindustan and Borders," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 12 (1879): 233-7.
- 24 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad.
- 25 Raimy Ché-Ross, "Malay Manuscript in New Zealand: The 'Lost' Manuscript of the 'Hikayat Abdullah' and other Malay Manuscripts in the Thomson Collection" *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 75, no. 2 (2003): 13.

Settlements such as Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. Turning the pages of Malaysia and Singapore's history today, one is likely to find the name of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi as one of the most, if not the most, important local writers of the nineteenth century. His literary works are highly valued by scholars of Malay literature and history alike. Scholars have recognised that Abdullah's literary works – with their emphasis on the individual – heralded a transition from traditional to modern Malay writings.²⁶ Historian of Southeast Asia, Anthony Milner, regards Abdullah's usage of “aku”, or “I”, in his writings as revolutionary.²⁷ Attention has also been drawn to Abdullah's journalism – Thomson being the earliest to have commented on it, saying that “by his own account, he was a true *Times* reporter.”²⁸ Historians have much to appreciate in the richness of Abdullah's narratives and their value for social history, with his emphasis on the ordinary lives of the inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, and his recording of important historical developments in nineteenth-century Malaya. All of these features are present in his best-remembered literary work: the *Hikayat Abdullah*.

Thomson's *Hikayat Abdullah* Manuscript

Abdullah began writing the *Hikayat Abdullah* in 1841 and completed it on 3 May 1843 in Kampong Malacca, Singapore. But because of the closing down of the missionary press in 1843, it would be another six years before it was edited and published on Benjamin Peach Keasberry's lithographic missionary press in 1849.²⁹ This edition therefore became the official version that most are familiar with. Nonetheless, handwritten copies of the 1843 original draft had already been made before publication, and there are

26 C. Skinner, “Transitional Malay Literature: Part 1 Ahmad Rijaluddin and Munshi Abdullah,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie*, no. 134 (1978): 470; Hassan Ahmad, foreword by the chief editor to *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, viii; Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, 11, 38, 41-2; Milner, *The Malays*, 114; Van Der Putten, “Abdullah Munshi and the Missionaries,” 407.

27 Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, 38, 41-2.

28 The late scholar of the Malay World, Amin Sweeney, noted that Thomson was the first to dub Abdullah a journalist: Amin Sweeney, “Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi: A Man of Bananas and Thorns,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 34, no. 100 (Feb. 2007): 228; For Thomson's comment, see: Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1874), 231.

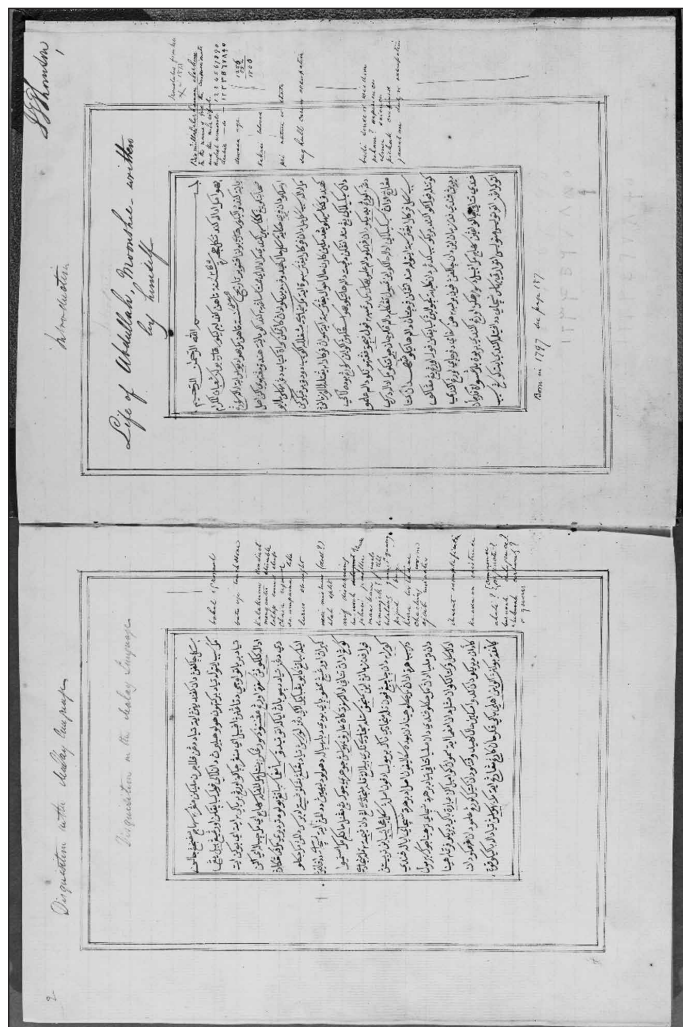
29 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 343; Sweeney, “Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi: A Man of Bananas and Thorns,” 230.

three known surviving copies scattered across different parts of the world today.³⁰ One of them, held in the Library of Congress, was discovered in 1967 by Andrei Teeuw. Another was found in the Houghton Library at Harvard University by Ian Proudfoot in 1999.³¹ The third, Thomson's copy, is the one now held in the Hocken Collections at the University of Otago, Dunedin. This was brought to light in 1984 by H.F.O'B. Traill, who detailed his discovery in a note in the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.³² Until then it had been thought lost, but turned out to be owned by Thomson's great-grandson, John Hall-Jones.³³

It is not difficult to discern how a manuscript copy of the *Hikayat Abdullah* came into Thomson's ownership. In *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, published nearly two decades after he left the Malay World, in 1874, Thomson informs us that he had been asked by Abdullah himself in 1846 to translate his autobiography, and was personally given a manuscript copy by the author.³⁴ This suggests, firstly, the author's confidence in Thomson's skill in the Malay language and, secondly, their good relationship. The likelihood that Abdullah had intended it to be a gift to Thomson must also not be discounted. Traill suggested that Thomson must have been one of Abdullah's best students, even surpassing his missionary friend and employer Alfred North himself.³⁵

Thomson's manuscript, as with the other two known handwritten copies of the *Hikayat Abdullah*, contained materials that differed from the 1849 published edition.³⁶ But suffice it to say, Thomson's world-views would not have changed had he read the 1849 edition. Of greater importance, however, is discerning Abdullah's influence

- 30 The original 1843 draft of the *Hikayat Abdullah*, written in Abdullah's own hand, has yet to be found: H.F.O'B. Traill, "The 'lost' Manuscript of The *Hikayat Abdullah* 'Munshi'," *The Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 55, no.2 (1982): 126; Ian Proudfoot, "Malay Materials in the Houghton Library," *Kekal Abadi* 19, no. 1 (2000), 3, http://myais.fsktm.um.edu.my/9569/1/malay_materials_in_the_houghton_library.pdf (accessed 10 December, 2013).
- 31 Ché-Ross, "Malay Manuscript in New Zealand: The 'Lost' Manuscript of the 'Hikayat Abdullah' and other Malay Manuscripts in the Thomson Collection," 17-18; Traill, "The 'lost' Manuscript of The *Hikayat Abdullah* 'Munshi'," 126; Ian Proudfoot, "Malay Materials in the Houghton Library," 2-3, 8-9.
- 32 H.F.O'B.mTraill, "A Note on the 'Lost' Manuscript of the *Hikayat Abdullah* Munshi," *The Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 57, no. 1 (1984): 69.
- 33 John Hall-Jones Correspondence with Dato Traill Relating to 'Abdullah' Manuscript, 27 March 1983, AG-276/1, Hall-Jones family: Papers. ARC-0589, Hocken Collection, Dunedin.
- 34 Thomson, preface to *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, v-vi.
- 35 See H.F.O'B. Traill, "Abdullah 'Munshi': Pioneer Writer and Raffles' Aide" SP 95/A/163, unpublished manuscript, Arkib Negara Malaysia, 284-5, quoted in Ché-Ross, 17n12.
- 36 Abdullah Munshi, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munsyi, jilid 3: Hikayat Abdullah*, trans. and ed. Sweeney; Ché-Ross, 1-50; Traill, "The 'lost' Manuscript of The *Hikayat Abdullah* 'Munshi'," 126-34.



Figures 2 and 3. Thomson's Manuscript copy of the Hikayat Abdullah (Fig.3 [right] pages 1 and 2), 1843, in John Turnbull Thomson, *Manuscript Volume 'Life of Abdullah Moonshee Written by Himself. Keddah Annals'*, AG-726/5, Hall-Jones family; Papers, ARC-0589, Hocken Collections, Dunedin.

on Thomson's perceptions through the *Hikayat Abdullah*. This is made easier by Thomson's inclusion of his personal reflections and comments in his English translation of Abdullah's autobiography.

The *Hikayat Abdullah* and its Message to Thomson

The contents of the *Hikayat Abdullah* are peppered with Abdullah's admiration for the Europeans, with considerable praise directed at the British and the missionaries. Abdullah portrayed British leaders as benevolent and egalitarian figures, and he suggested that because of their intelligence and competent leadership the Straits Settlements had prospered.³⁷ For example, Malacca under the leadership of William Farquhar was said to have flourished, the volume of trade increased, and the "poor were able to make a living as well as the rich."³⁸ Raffles, Farquhar and Lord Minto were noted for their respect and equal treatment of the poor and lowly.³⁹ Thomson, in response to Abdullah's positive assessments of these figures, said, in *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla*, "they are in a position to forward British interests beyond calculation," in spite of his critical views of the East India Company and its officials.⁴⁰

Abdullah marvelled at the advances of Western civilisation, especially in science and technology, and he wrote about the wonders of their applications back in Europe (although he had never been there). He recounted how on seeing a steamship he was utterly amazed at the "intelligence that God has bestowed on mankind." He repeated this remark in relation to other examples of European ingenuity in his autobiography.⁴¹ Most of the Europeans he interacted with were shown to be intelligent, and individuals of learning and progress.⁴² They had also shown good intentions in their attempts to promote education and knowledge amongst the local inhabitants. This was chiefly done through the efforts of the missionaries in the establishment of schools and the production of educational materials with their printing press.⁴³ Besides the missionaries, British notables such as Raffles were shown to have contributed to education as well, the latter by establishing the Singapore Institution and by encouraging Malay rulers to send their children to Britain for education.⁴⁴

37 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 57-8, 63, 67, 73, 84-5.

38 *Ibid.*, 53.

39 *Ibid.*, 67.

40 Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 189-90. For examples of Thomson's critical view of company officials, see 264, 330.

41 *Ibid.*, 343.

42 *Ibid.*, 117-22.

43 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 117-22; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 90, 92-3.

44 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 188-90; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 137-42.

The industriousness of the Europeans is also highlighted by Abdullah. In his account of an encounter with an officer of a vessel of the British East India Company, on a mission to survey the straits, he was “bedazzled to witness the energy and diligence of the white man” as soon as he learnt from the officer, “Mr. Smith”, the nature of the ship’s assignment.⁴⁵ Here, we can also observe one of Abdullah’s negative views of the Europeans: he found “Mr. Smith’s” fine behaviour and manners to be different from the “rough, drunk, and evil” conduct of sailors.⁴⁶ Abdullah despised the Dutch, but could be critical of some British officials as well. He described John Crawfurd, who governed Singapore after Farquhar, as an individual who lacked patience, was short-tempered and yet “whenever he performed a task he did [it] slowly and not immediately.” He also found him to be fond of wealth, and pompous.⁴⁷ In his reflection on the *Hikayat Abdullah*, Thomson said he had “read over the character given by Abdulla ... to a gentleman who used to meet Mr. Crawfurd ... and imagines it to be very correct.”⁴⁸ Missionaries did not escape Abdullah’s negative commentary either, especially Claudius Thomsen and his stubborn attitude towards the Malay language.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Thomson’s manuscript contained more scathing remarks on the missionaries than the 1849 edition of the *Hikayat Abdullah*.⁵⁰ Commenting on Abdullah’s observations and judgements of the Europeans, Thomson said, “It is an erroneous assumption in Europeans to think that their actions are not critically canvassed by the natives of India.”⁵¹

Abdullah’s criticisms of Europeans, however, paled in comparison to those he directed at his native brethren. Abdullah regarded the native inhabitants to be the opposite of the Europeans. They were portrayed as ignorant, backward, lazy and superstitious. The style of Abdullah’s narratives in the *Hikayat Abdullah* was orchestrated in a way that placed the ingenuity and advances of the Europeans against the backdrop of native backwardness:

I spoke of gas burning without wick or oil in thousands and thousands of houses in England, and wagons that were run by steam at a rate of twenties of miles an hour, and furthermore, that there was a road under the earth nine-hundred feet deep in London, over which a river flowed with twenties of ships sailing thereon, and under which horse carriages and men went and

45 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 261; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 226.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 244; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 208.

48 Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 209.

49 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 105-10, 115-16; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 94.

50 Sweeney, “Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi: A Man of Bananas and Thorns,” 231.

51 Thomson, preface to *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, vii. By “India” he meant the East Indies.

came ... that there is a lantern which can carry people up into the air, beside many miracles which I have heard of; but were I to even mention them to the Malays, they would certainly shut their ears and turn away their faces, calling me a liar ... Again, I have had to bear a great deal of opposition from these people regarding things that I have learnt from intelligent men, who have competent knowledge of the world, which they say is truly round, and which I have repeated to them; and I have especially been answered, that such a fact could not be believed, for [these things were] never heard of before, nor have our ancestors informed us of it. I showed them numbers of signs and proofs that the world was round, yet they would not believe me.⁵²

In a similar pattern, the Europeans had taken the role of champions of progress in the *Hikayat Abdullah* by knocking down the walls of native superstitions and emerging triumphant while the natives stood in awe of them. Farquhar was one of the actors who played the part - as was shown in Abdullah's account of the demolition of the Malaccan Fort: "Many Malaccans thought the English will never succeed in demolishing the Fort because of its strength, and because of the presence of spirits and demons within its walls." Farquhar had hired coolies to break down the fort but hundreds of them "could not even break a single stone after two or three days because of their fear of the fort's spirits and demons." Finally, when Farquhar succeeded in blowing it up with gunpowder, the inhabitants shook their heads and said "How intelligent and skilful these white men are!" Thus, those "who did not believe the fort can be demolished" were silenced, "And all the spirits and demons that filled their minds flew back to where they originated from, because of their fear of gunpowder."⁵³ Thomson, in his personal reflection on this episode on the demolition of the Malacca Fort, wrote:

The commencement of the demolition of the fort shows clearly how inefficient is native labour, and more so when to this is added the weakening influence of superstition; and here we may note how Abdullah himself, by the education and converse with a superior race, had thrown off the latter. It is curious to observe his glorying in the fort and lamenting its destruction; seeing it was by this that the European powers had overawed the natives ... as to the jins or evil spirits, I have often remarked that the natives were thoroughly persuaded that the Europeans were beyond their influences.⁵⁴

52 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 257-8; Abdullah Munshi, *The Autobiography of Munshi Abdullah*, trans. W.G. Shellabear (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1918), 36-9; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 217-18.

53 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 45-98; Abdullah Munshi, *The Autobiography of Munshi Abdullah*, trans. W.G. Shellabear, 36-9; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 19-21, 23.

54 Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 25-6.

Thomson's view that it was Abdullah's exposure to a "superior race" – Europeans – that was the reason he was beyond the influence of native superstition, and also had "ideas far advanced beyond his countrymen", is not unsubstantiated.⁵⁵ Because he had worked with Europeans, Abdullah had been exposed to Western ideas throughout most of his life.⁵⁶ This can be seen earlier, in Abdullah's account of his attempt to relate to the locals the advances of Western science and knowledge, which he said he learnt from "intelligent men." These "intelligent men" were without doubt Europeans, as Abdullah himself had told his missionary friend William Milne:

Milne: [Said laughingly] It is absolutely stupid for people to believe all these [superstitious] things.

Abdullah: A lot of races here believed in such things ... I used to believe in such things and was afraid because I was exposed to these tales when I was little by the elderly. However, ever since I started learning and was able to think a little, and read, and additionally, by mixing with men of intellect, that is the white men, I became aware that all of these were false, a big lie.⁵⁷

Though Abdullah criticised the local Chinese, and to a considerable extent his own Tamil Muslim community, he had one particular local group in mind when he penned his critique of the local inhabitants: the Malays.⁵⁸ In Abdullah's view, the backward state of the Malays was for the most part caused by the despotic and evil rule of their Rajas, and he painted them in an abhorrent manner throughout his autobiography. He was an outspoken critic of the Malay elites.⁵⁹ The Malay Rajas, according to Abdullah, were despotic and evil, and under their tyrannical leadership their subjects suffered

55 Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 143. The significance of Abdullah's close contact with Europeans such as Sir Stamford Raffles and his missionary employers in fostering a mindset that was different to his countrymen was also highlighted by Milner. See: Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, 50, 66, 83-4

56 In addition to this, Traill highlighted that Abdullah was brought up and lived in the British-governed Settlements, and was closely associated with Europeans throughout his life: Traill, "Aspects of Abdullah 'Munshi'," 37.

57 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 114; Abdullah Munshi, *The Autobiography of Munshi Abdullah*, trans. Shellabear, 95. This part is in Thomson's manuscript, but he chose not to translate it, without providing a reason why. For the romanised Malay translation of this part of Thomson's manuscript, refer to: Abdullah Munshi, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munsyi, jilid 3: Hikayat Abdullah*, trans. and ed. Sweeney, 651.

58 The Malays were the main inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula.

59 Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, 13, 31-2.

rather than prospered.⁶⁰ Their actions were governed by lust (*hawa nafs*) rather than reason and justice.⁶¹ Moreover, their tyranny was one of the chief reasons why the Malays “had over time not become smarter, but rather, were becoming increasingly stupid.”⁶² In their present state, they were “like soil without fertiliser”, that is: nothing could be done to elevate them above their stations.⁶³ Abdullah warned that if the Malays persisted in living in ignorance, they would be trampled by other races.⁶⁴

The manner in which the *Hikayat Abdullah* depicted local people had, on the whole, suggested that the Europeans were the superior race, especially when read by a nineteenth-century Western reader such as Thomson. Those who are familiar with the *Hikayat Abdullah* will know that Abdullah often used the words “stupid” and “stupidity” to describe the Malays, which is why the contents of his autobiography may not be positively received by some Malay readers to this day. The view of Abdullah being a proponent of British Imperialism is not far-fetched. His autobiography had shown that the natives were, after all, better off under the benevolent wing of the Europeans than under the rule of their despotic Rajas, as under their rule they could never hope to progress. Abdullah himself stood as a symbol of the positive outcome of European influence. These messages were made more convincing coming from an insider of the region itself. It is, therefore, not surprising that Abdullah’s writings were endorsed by the British.⁶⁵ As Milner has pointed out, the *Hikayat Abdullah* was later published by the colonial government and used as a textbook in the colonial education system.⁶⁶

Although the *Hikayat Abdullah* had advanced the notion of European superiority and by implication justified imperialism, in truth, Abdullah’s main preoccupation was not to advance British imperial power per se, but to encourage his countrymen to advance themselves by disregarding what he saw as pointless customs and superstitions, and embracing education. He made this clear in the concluding remarks on the *Hikayat Abdullah* in which he pointed out that the Europeans had once been even more savage than the Malays, but had thrown off their “old stupid customs” to arrive at their present modern state.⁶⁷ He offered his criticisms of the backward practices of the Malays as

60 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 297-301; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 267-74.

61 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 297-8, 300-1, 303, 345-7; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 267-8, 271-2, 274.

62 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 344.

63 *Ibid.*

64 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 350; Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 335.

65 Milner, *The Malays*, 113.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 348-9.

‘advice’ (*nasihat*) and this reflected his aspiration for Malay social reform.⁶⁸ He ended the *Hikayat Abdullah* by expressing his sincere hope that the Malays would take his counsel to heart, or in Malay: “*dengan sebesar-besar harapku mudah-mudahan mereka itu mengambil ibarat akan nasihatku ini.*”⁶⁹ But sadly, many have not seen the *Hikayat Abdullah* in this manner. From Thomson’s perspective:

Nature has given a climate that makes the Malays naturally lazy, so for them to be otherwise would be unnatural. Abdullah in this respect is an active disciple of Sir Stamford, having ideas far advanced beyond his countrymen; but it is to be remembered that he had Arab blood in him. Thus he was ambitious to advance the prestige of his adopted countrymen, but in this he, with a practical eye, sees there is no hope.⁷⁰

Although we must be cautious not to take Thomson’s comment at face value, it is worth noting that he, unlike other commentators on the *Hikayat Abdullah*, knew Abdullah personally and had actually spoken to him about the contents of his autobiography. For instance, when commenting on the part of the *Hikayat Abdullah* where Abdullah narrated the death of his daughter, Thomson said he remembered “as it were yesterday” when Abdullah related the circumstances to him.⁷¹ He was, moreover, the only commentator to have actually provided a description of Abdullah’s appearance.⁷²

While Abdullah’s praises of the British and Western civilisation were heartily endorsed by the colonial government, Milner has observed aspects of the *Hikayat Abdullah* that they might not have appreciated.⁷³ Abdullah’s tone reveals that he was unhappy about the current state of the Malays and was hoping to inspire them so that they could take charge of their future, warning them that they would continue to be dominated by others if they did not take measures to improve themselves.⁷⁴ This aspect of the *Hikayat Abdullah* is, in itself, anti-colonial in nature. But regardless of its anti-colonial elements, Abdullah’s messages about European supremacy would be the more appealing aspect to many European readers such as Thomson. To them, Abdullah’s desire for Malay social reform may just have been wishful thinking, as Thomson himself had suggested.

68 Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 353; This was highlighted in Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, 32, 45.

69 As quoted in: Abdullah Munshi, *Hikayat Abdullah*, ed. Hassan Ahmad and Norlaili Talib, trans. Kassim Ahmad, 353.

70 Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*, 143. Thomson’s discussions with Abdullah are also detailed in *ibid.*, 309-21, and in Thomson, *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East [With] Sequel* (London: Richardson & Co., 1864), 330.

71 *Ibid.*, 293.

72 Sweeney, “Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi: A Man of Bananas and Thorns,” 224.

73 Milner, *The Malays*, 113.

74 *Ibid.*

Abdullah's Influence on Thomson's Writings and Perceptions in New Zealand

The assumption of Western racial and civilizational dominance is a key feature of Thomson's New Zealand writings, as can be seen in his articles on the origin of Māori that were published in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* between 1871 and 1879. Here he made known his understanding of what would now be termed world history and argued that Māori were descendants of an archaic "Negroid" race of India, in what he called the "Barata" theory; "Barata" (or "Bharata" in contemporary spelling) being the ancient name of India.⁷⁵ His hierarchical view of race – the "white man" was placed at the top and the "negro", the most inferior of races, the bottom – was similar to the philosophy that was advanced by the Scottish Enlightenment, where every aspect of a society can be measured by an evolutionary scale and placed on a ladder of civilisation ranging from "savage" to "refinement."⁷⁶ That view became the driving force of his "Barata" theory. Thomson divided the human race into three primary divisions in his discussion – 'by colour, white, red, and black; or by name, Caucasian, Mongolian and negro, between which there are innumerable subdivisions and modifications of shade, and diversity of form, customs, and language.'⁷⁷ He wrote that the "white man's" long geographic confinement to the cold climate of Europe accounted for his "skill, boldness[,] intelligence", and superiority to other races.⁷⁸

The "Negro", Thomson thought, should have, at one era, "populated the plains of Hindustan, as well as Africa and Papuanesia."⁷⁹ Abutting closely to the region "were energetic hordes of white and red men settled in the mountain valleys of Aria and Thibet [*sic*]."⁸⁰ The hordes of these regions descended on the fertile plains of India "driving out or enslaving the simple and unwarlike black inhabitants."⁸¹ The invaders were also incorporated with the aboriginal inhabitants, causing the transformation of the latter's features.⁸² He theorised: "With the Moluccas as a basis, a stream of the mixed race

75 Thomson, "Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori," 37, 41; Thomson, "On Barat or Barata Fossil Words," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 12 (1879), 157.

76 Thomson's hierarchical view of race can be seen in an article he published when he was serving as Government Surveyor to Singapore: Thomson, "Remarks on the Selatar and Sabimba Tribes," *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* 1 (1847): 351. On Scottish enlightenment, see Jane Rendall, "Scottish Orientalism: From Robertson to James Mill," *The Historical Journal* 25, no.1 (March 1982): 20.

77 Thomson, "Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori," 23.

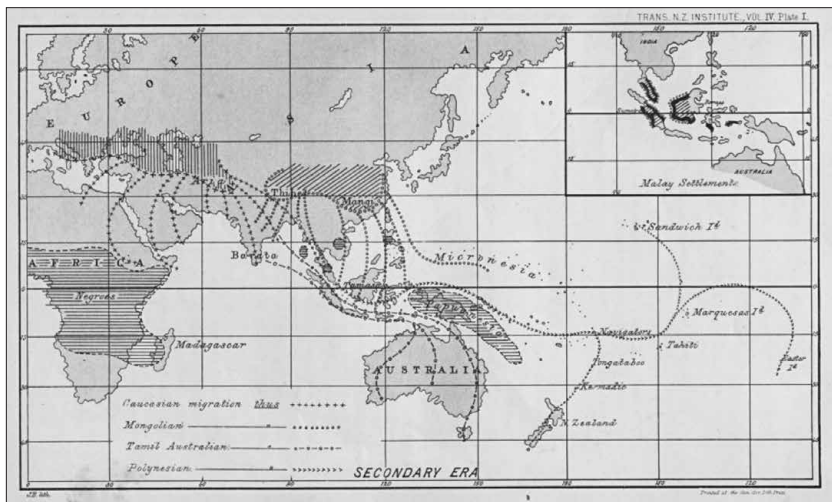
78 *Ibid.*, 24.

79 *Ibid.*

80 By "Aria" Thomson's was referring to the region above the northwestern border of modern India.

81 Thomson, "Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori," 24, 26. Also see: Thomson, "On Barat or Barata Fossil Words," 165.

82 Thomson, "Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori," 42.



Map 2. John Turnbull Thomson, *Secondary Era*, in Thomson, Plate I, “Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 4 (1871).

flowed eastward, from Island to Island over Polynesia – one branch finding its way to New Zealand”.⁸³ Māori were, hence, part of a wave of “migrations emanating from ... South India or Barata”.⁸⁴ To prove his point, Thomson stressed that Māori physiognomy was nearest to those of the Dravidians of South India.⁸⁵

Linguistic comparison was another method he used to support his theory. Thomson argued that remnants of the language of this ancient race of South India can be traced in the languages spoken in Madagascar, the Malay Archipelago, Polynesia and New Zealand.⁸⁶ By comparing the languages spoken in these regions, he demonstrated that, though different, there were similarities in the sound and meaning of certain words. For example, “*dua*” (two) in Malay; was “*daua*” in Mindanao; “*do*” in Hindi and “*rua*” in Māori.⁸⁷ These common words, in Thomson’s term, were “Barata fossil words” – remnants of the “Negroid” language of ancient India “which have not been eradicated

83 Thomson, “Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori,” 48; Thomson, “On Barat or Barata Fossil Words,” 135.

84 Thomson, “Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori,” 45, 47; Thomson, “On Barat or Barata Fossil Words,” 135.

85 Thomson, “Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori,” 31.

86 *Ibid.*, 41.

87 A breakdown of this analysis can be found in appendix III of *Ibid.*, 50.

by foreign influences.”⁸⁸ The presence of fossil words in a language, Thomson thought, would indicate a common ancestry.⁸⁹ One will notice when studying Thomson’s language analysis that he placed more focus on using Malay words than any other language, due to his higher competency in Malay than in others, as he himself admitted.⁹⁰ Although Thomson indicated in *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East* – a book about his experiences in the Malay Peninsula, published in 1864 – that he was already able to speak Malay before meeting Abdullah, the Munshi would have been instrumental in helping him improve his fluency in the language.⁹¹ Thomson asked his readers “what power could have given the Negro so wide an expansion?”⁹² The answer was that:

The power is not in himself, for he has never been known to increase beyond the limits of a petty and disjointed tribe. The Barata expansion can only be ascribed to the first infusion of the energy drawn from Central Asia, and from whence there has been constant flow, or tides of migration, if they may be so called. The negro controlled, propelled, and directed by such infusion, now named the Barata, was then quite capable of issuing forth from the teeming plains of his native country ... and planting his race and language east and west amongst a sparser and simple cognate people.⁹³

Thomson’s articles on his “Barata theory” in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* constitute part of a running theme of European racial supremacy in his New Zealand publications; a belief the *Hikayat Abdullah* seemed to affirm.⁹⁴ The *Hikayat Abdullah*, in its negative portrayal of Malay rulers who were unlike the effective and benevolent British leaders, would have also given Thomson the impression that the Malays, and many non-European races, were incapable of governing themselves. In *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East*, he wrote: “The native of the tropical East has not the vigour and intelligence of the Europeans; he can therefore neither combine for general protection, nor organise such a system of government as is capable of maintaining order.”⁹⁵

88 Thomson, “On Barat or Barata Fossil Words,” 158; Thomson, “On Barata Numerals,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 5 (1872): 131-8.

89 Thomson, “On Barat or Barata Fossil Words,” 158-9.

90 *Ibid.*, 158.

91 Thomson, *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East [With] Sequel*, 60.

92 Thomson, “On Barat or Barata Fossil Words,” 131; Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire*, 71.

93 Thomson, “Ethnographical Considerations on the Whence of the Maori,” 41.

94 Examples of Thomson’s other post-Malayan works that contain themes on European supremacy: Thomson, “Original Exploration in the Scottish Settlement of Otago, and Recent Travel in Other Parts of N.Z.,” 455-97; Thomson, *Rambles with a Philosopher, or Views at the Antipodes by an Otagonian*.

95 Thomson, *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East*, 153-4.

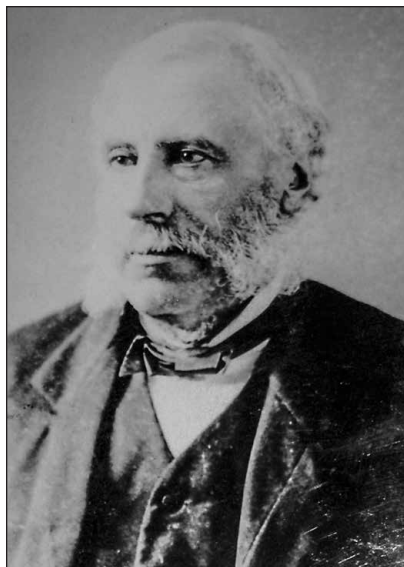


Figure 4. John Turnbull Thomson in New Zealand, Sandy Cleary Private Collection, Dunedin.

Then again, Abdullah in his capacity as author of an autobiography and his level of intellect, was also a figure who had demonstrated that the inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula were capable of achieving a level of civilisation comparable to the Europeans. In *Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla*, Thomson ascertained Abdullah's level of enlightenment to be "far in advance of his countrymen," and found it to be "equal to our most advanced civilisation."⁹⁶ He was convinced that intelligent locals such as Abdullah "by degrees, should be taught to bear the burdens of public service according to their intelligence and uprightness."⁹⁷ Thomson had, moreover, revealed in *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East* that he often debated with Abdullah on matters involving the philosophy of Islam and Christianity; there was no clear victor on either side.⁹⁸ Abdullah's ability to be engaged in an intellectual debate with Thomson, a European, was further proof of the level of intelligence a non-European could achieve. Commenting on Abdullah's intellect, he noted that he "had learnt a freedom of thought and an independent tone not often found in Southern Asiatics."⁹⁹

96 Thomson, *Translations From The Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar*, Munshi, 86.

97 *Ibid.*, 328.

98 Thomson, *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East*, 332.

99 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Abdullah, in his ability to produce a remarkable autobiography and by being able to successfully engage in debate with Thomson, was a clear example of what a local of the Malay Peninsula could accomplish. The intelligent and liberal-minded Abdullah had certainly left a lasting impression on Thomson, considering the amount of his literary investment dedicated to his Malay language teacher.¹⁰⁰ He had never written as much on any other person. Abdullah's achievements, however, strengthened rather than undermined Thomson's position on the supremacy of the "white men" above other races, which would govern his position on New Zealand's place in world history. This was because Thomson had connected Abdullah's achievements to his exposure to the "superior race", and the *Hikayat Abdullah* itself had provided him reason to believe that this was true. Abdullah had, after all, credited his advancement to his association with the "clever" Europeans.

Though one of Abdullah's main intentions in writing his autobiography was to encourage the Malays to advance themselves beyond their current backward state, the impact of this message was buried by the level of praise he afforded the Europeans regarding their effective and benevolent administration of the Straits Settlements, and their technological and cultural achievements. Abdullah's criticisms of the negative aspects of the Malays and their culture served only to confirm Thomson's view of European supremacy, a belief that influenced the outcome of his New Zealand writings, as illustrated in his articles on race in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* and others. Abdullah's attacks on Malay rulers in the *Hikayat Abdullah* had, furthermore, given the impression that the Malays were better-off under British rule. This imperialistic message would have reinforced, or even led to, Thomson's belief that the locals of the tropics were incapable of governing themselves. It must be acknowledged that Thomson's perception of Western ethnical and cultural dominance was in accordance to the Western literary, scientific and medical conventions of his time. Even so, the messages conveyed by the *Hikayat Abdullah* would have provided readers like him a sense that these racist theories were justified, especially when acknowledged by a non-European.

Abdullah's influence on Thomson's literary works can furthermore be assessed in the area of language. When charting the origin of Māori, Thomson mobilised his fluency in the Malay language, the fruit of Abdullah's tutelage, to link them to their alleged ancient homeland of India. The course of Thomson's understanding of New Zealand's history, as well as his study of its prehistory, which would have influenced the global perceptions of at least some of his New Zealand readers, was hereby shaped by his historic encounter with Abdullah; an encounter that further illustrates the place of Southeast Asia in colonial New Zealand's intellectual and print culture.

100 Thomson, *Translations From The Hakayit Abdulla, Bin Abdulkadar, Munshi*. The last chapter in *Some Glimpses Into Life in the Far East* was dedicated to Abdullah.

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Wilbert Wong Wei Wen graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History from the University of Otago in 2014. He has a broad interest in the field of history and intends to be a specialist in World History, with emphasis on cross-cultural interactions in the field of knowledge between Asia and the West. Mr Wong has recently served as a sessional assistant for the History Programme at the University of Waikato, tutoring the course War and Society – a subject that covers the world history of warfare. He is currently preparing for further studies in history.