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Research paper

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THE ANGLO-OTTOMAN TRADE IN THE WESTERN CASPIAN REGION IN THE 16TH CENTURY

Abstract. This article analyzes the engagement between Ottoman authorities and English merchants from the Muscovy Company within the Caucasus during the latter half of the sixteenth century. This period constitutes a significant phase in the evolution of international commerce and diplomatic ties, coinciding with the peak of the Ottoman Empire's political and economic influence and the concomitant emergence of England as an active participant in global politics and trade. In 1553, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent bestowed a capitulation of commercial privileges upon the English merchant and explorer Anthony Jenkinson, marking the inception of formal relations between the two states in the realm of trade. Of particular significance in the development of these relations were the occurrences of 1579–1580, during which English merchants affiliated with the Muscovy Company commenced vigorous commercial operations within the Western Caspian region. Here they interacted with the Ottoman Pasha Osman Özdemiroğlu, who at that time held a key role in consolidating Ottoman influence within the Caucasus. It is noteworthy that, contrary to prevailing assumptions, the genesis of these contacts did not transpire in the Mediterranean, but rather within the Caucasus. Consequently, the Caucasus emerged as the locus of the initial establishment of direct commercial linkages between Ottoman authorities and English merchants. Subsequently, this interaction served as a crucial phase in the evolution of official inter-state commercial relations, a trajectory that continued within the purview of the Levant Company, founded on September 11, 1581. The article underscores the significance of employing general historical and comparative historical analysis as the primary research methodologies. Particular emphasis is placed upon the utilization of archival sources preserved within Turkey, many of which previously remained beyond the purview of scholarly investigation. For the first time in Russian, the text of the Ottoman-English treaty of 1580 is published, constituting a substantial contribution to scholarly dissemination and facilitating a more profound comprehension of the incipient stages of trade and diplomatic ties between the Ottoman Empire and England.

Keywords: Ottoman state; Osman Pasha Özdemiroğlu; English merchants; Caucasus; Muscovy Company; trade.

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Исследовательская статья

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КОНТАКТЫ КУПЦОВ МОСКОВСКОЙ КОМПАНИИ С ОСМАНСКИМИ ВЛАСТЯМИ В ЗАПАДНОМ ПРИКАСПИИ ВО ВТОРОЙ ПОЛОВИНЕ XVI ВЕКА

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается взаимодействие османских властей с английскими купцами из Московской компании на Кавказе во второй половине XVI в. Этот период был важным этапом в развитии международной торговли и дипломатических контактов, когда Османская империя находилась на пике своей политической и экономической мощи, а Англия впервые начала активно участвовать в мировой политике и торговле. В 1553 г. султаном Сулейманом Кануни был вручен документ о торговых привилегиях английскому купцу и путешественнику Энтони Дженкинсону, что знаменовало начало официальных отношений между двумя государствами в сфере торговли. Особое значение в развитии этих отношений сыграли события 1579–1580 гг., когда английские купцы, связанные с Московской компанией, начали активно вести торговую деятельность в Западном Прикаспии. Здесь они взаимодействовали с османским пашой Османом Оздемироглу, который на тот момент играл ключевую роль в укреплении османского влияния на Кавказе. Примечательно, что вопреки распространённому мнению, зарождение этих контактов произошло не в Средиземноморье, а на Кавказе. Таким образом, Кавказ стал местом установления первых прямых коммерческих связей между османскими властями и английскими купцами. Впоследствии это взаимодействие послужило важным этапом в развитии официальных межгосударственных торговых отношений, что нашло своё продолжение в деятельности Левантийской компании, основанной 11 сентября 1581 г. В статье подчёркивается важность использования общеисторического и сравнительно-исторического анализа как основных методов исследования. Особое внимание уделяется работе с архивными источниками, хранящимися в Турции, многие из которых ранее оставались вне поля зрения исследователей. Впервые на русском языке публикуется текст османско-английского договора 1580 г., что вносит значительный вклад в научный оборот и углубляет понимание ранних этапов торгово-дипломатических отношений между Османской империей и Англией.

Ключевые слова: Османское государство; Осман-паша Оздемироглу; английские купцы; Кавказ; Московская компания; торговля

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Introduction

The activities of the Muscovy Company (“Russian Company” since 1697) have been the subject of considerable attention in historiography. However, the engagement of this company’s merchants with Ottoman authorities within the Caspian region cannot be characterized as fully explored. Existing scholarship has primarily concentrated on the activities of English traders in Central Asia, the Far East, and Iran [1; 2; 3]. Currently, there is a clear lack of studies devoted to the Ottoman Empire and incorporating Ottoman sources into scholarly discourse. This study primarily aims to fill this gap.

Existing studies mainly focus on trade relations between the Ottoman Empire and England within the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Anatolia (Asia Minor), a focus likely reflecting the historical and strategic significance of these regions [4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9]. However, the Caucasus region, characterized by its unique geographical position and diverse ethnic and religious composition, also facilitated frequent trade interactions between the Ottoman Empire and England. Nevertheless, these interactions have yet to be adequately explored.

Several factors contribute to the relative understudy of trade relations within the Caucasus. Firstly, regional and temporal priorities within historical research often led to a neglect of certain topics. For instance, the tendency in regional historical studies to focus on specific historical periods or geographical areas can result in the exclusion of other important areas of inquiry. Notably, scholarly works originating from Turkey, Europe, and America exhibit a near-total disregard for the Caucasus’ role in trade relations between the Ottoman Empire and England.

From the onset of the 16th century, England began to exhibit increasingly ambitious aspirations within the realms of international politics and commerce. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603), English commercial companies were re-established, forging connections with numerous partners in diverse countries, including the Ottoman Empire. The English queen and her court sought to penetrate eastern markets. However, opposition from France, Genoa, and particularly Venice within the Mediterranean region, coupled with the maritime dominance of Spain and Portugal in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, presented significant obstacles to British access to these eastern markets.

Certain English merchants engaged in commercial activities within the Mediterranean during the first half of the sixteenth century were compelled to operate under the auspices of France or the northern Italian republics, a circumstance that inevitably diminished their profit margins. This predicament compelled English merchants to explore alternative avenues for developing trade relations with the countries of the East.

It should be noted that the initial trade and economic interactions between England and the Ottoman Empire did not yet manifest as inter-state agreements or negotiations and were characterized by an episodic nature. These interactions commenced with the commercial endeavors of the English merchant and explorer Anthony Jenkinson¹ within the Mediterranean and the Middle East. During the sojourn of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in Aleppo in 1553, E. Jenkinson succeeded in securing certain commercial privileges from the Sultan (Turkish: *ticaret müsaadesi* – “trade permit”) [10, p. 6]. It is essential to note that the commercial privilege bestowed upon E. Jenkinson by Sultan Suleiman was granted exclusively to him as an individual [11, pp. 109–110]. The subsequent encounter between the English merchant and the Ottomans would transpire within the Safavid Palace.

Having obtained the “trade permit,” Jenkinson promptly returned to London, likely with the intention of maximizing its political benefits. In 1556, he was appointed head of the Muscovy Company and subsequently returned to Russia in 1557. In total, he undertook four journeys to the Russian state and compiled one of

1. Anthony Jenkinson (8 October 1529 – 1610/1611) was an English diplomat, merchant and traveler, the first English ambassador plenipotentiary to Russia.

the earliest detailed maps of Muscovy. However, a prospective analysis reveals that England was unable to fully capitalize on Jenkinson's personal commercial privilege. It required an additional 25 years for the English state to commence independent trading activities within the Mediterranean.

Having already visited many countries by this time, Anthony Jenkinson clearly understood the potential of the Persian, Indian and Chinese markets. In view of this, while in Moscow in 1557, he asked the Russian Tsar for permission to explore the trade opportunities of the Caspian Sea [12, p. 38]. Anthony managed to gain the personal sympathy of Ivan IV, thanks to which he received permission to continue the trip. However, his first trading expedition to Persia was unsuccessful. Jenkinson himself explained the reason for this by the fact that the Shah was afraid of the Ottomans and the Venetians [10, v. I, p. 133, 135].

However, the main reason was that the problem of the fate of the shehzade² arose between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavids during this period. Shehzade Bayezid, the son of Sultan Suleiman, fought with his brother Selim for the throne during his father's lifetime, but was defeated and took refuge with the Safavids [13, pp. 109–110]. As a result of complex negotiations between Istanbul and Qazvin, the Shah negotiated the condition of free passage of Iranian goods through the territory of the Ottoman Empire in exchange for Shehzade Bayazid. Having acquired a shorter route to the West, to the Mediterranean, Shah Tahmasp was not particularly interested in trade along the long and difficult route through the Volga and the White Sea.

Anthony Jenkinson and the English in general possessed a very limited understanding of the Caspian Sea's contours, the geography, ethnography, and economic potential of the adjacent regions. The Italians (Venetians and Genoese), who had achieved considerable success in their exploration, concealed their cartographic materials from potential competitors for centuries [14, p. 770]. Lacking any maps or precise information regarding local currents and shoals, the sixteenth-century English presence on the Caspian bore a striking resemblance to the endeavors of New World explorers.

Despite the initial setback, Anthony Jenkinson did not abandon his ambition to open the Trans-Caspian market to the English and, between 1562 and 1564, undertook another journey to Safavid Persia. In total, between 1561 and 1580, the English traversed the Caspian Sea from north to south on five occasions [15, p. 23; 16, p. 63]. During their final expedition, the English merchants encountered the Ottoman authorities within the Eastern Caucasus. The outcomes of the Ottoman-Safavid War (1578–1590) enabled the Ottoman state to establish control over strategically significant centers such as Derbent, Shemakha, and Baku [4, p. 59]. These cities served as crucial intersections of trade routes.

Having departed from Astrakhan, the merchants reached the coast of Shirvan. Upon mooring in Bildi, a boat carrying a crew composed of two Turks and several local inhabitants approached them [11, v. II, p. 452; 17, pp. 269–270]. Amicable relations quickly developed between the parties. The factors dispatched the English merchant Robert Golding, accompanied by a namesake, to the bey, the commandant of the city of Baku, to present the goods they had brought and to convey their intention to establish a secure trade route. The bey (in this context: commandant) of the city extended a warm welcome to them.

The following day, the commandant arrived ashore to inspect the goods delivered by ship. The merchants erected tents on the shore to display their wares for sale. The factors³ greeted the governor of the city with great cordiality upon his approach to the tent and presented him with gifts. Following the negotiations, the ruler of Baku observed that the British were seeking a personal audience with the Turkish governor in Shirvan, Osman Pasha. At that time, Osman Pasha served as the governor of the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus and would later ascend to the position of Grand Vizier. It is noteworthy that Osman Pasha's father, Ozdemir Pasha, possessed North Caucasian ancestry.

2. Shehzade – the title of the sons of the Sultans in the Ottoman Empire.

3. Factor – 1. obsolete; a trusted person, an attorney-in-fact, who unquestioningly carries out someone's instructions; 2. a legal agent (intermediary) who is entrusted with selling goods (in UK law).

The Baku mayor pledged to ensure their safe passage to the city of Derbent, where Osman Pasha was then stationed. The English merchants conveyed the letter from the bey to the pasha and embarked on a journey by foot along the coastal path, accompanied by a military escort provided for their protection. Osman Pasha's soldiers guided them along a circuitous forest route, as the customary route was deemed perilous [11, pp. 453–454].

The pasha received the English merchants within the Naryn-kala fortress and presented them with valuable horses. Osman Pasha then excused himself to allow the merchants time to rest, promising to engage in more detailed discussions the following day. In the morning, the merchants approached the pasha and requested his permission to conduct trade activities, seeking the privilege of doing so securely within Shirvan and all territories under his dominion. Osman Pasha consented, pledging his protection and offering to provide them with any necessary provisions. Subsequently, one of the merchants, Thomas Hudson, was dispatched to Baku to transport the ship to Derbent. The ship, accompanied by the Ottoman guard, departed from Baku on June 11, 1580.

The goods aboard the ship, upon its arrival in Derbent, were unloaded within the garden of Osman Pasha's mansion. At the conclusion of the negotiations, the merchants received 500 batmans of raw silk from the Pasha, followed by an additional 500 batmans a few days later [11, p. 459; 5, p. 275]. In return, Osman Pasha stipulated a 4% tax on their commercial activities [18, p. 71].

However, the merchants were unable to depart from Derbent, as the prevailing unrest caused by the ongoing war rendered travel to the surrounding cities perilous. While residing in Derbent, they received news of the demise of their ship's pilot, Arthur Edwards, who had remained in Astrakhan, at the end of August. After a four-month stay in Derbent, the merchants resolved to depart from the city on October 2. In the middle of the month, they acquired a new vessel, as their previous ships had been wrecked.

The English did not allow setbacks to deter their efforts. When their ship became entrapped in the ice due to the freezing of the Volga's mouth, they were compelled to abandon the vessel and its cargo. In the ensuing days, a substantial portion of the cargo was transported to Astrakhan via sleds in a rescue operation. The English traders spent the winter in Astrakhan and finally returned to Yaroslavl in the spring of 1581. The trade that the English merchants had been unable to conduct independently on the western borders of the Ottoman Empire (the Mediterranean) was successfully executed without intermediaries on the empire's eastern border (the Caucasus). These initial direct commercial ventures would serve as the foundation for the subsequent development of Mediterranean trade between the two states.

The inaugural official contact between the Ottoman and British governments transpired on March 15, 1579 [10, p. 6]. Ottoman Sultan Murad III dispatched a letter to Queen Elizabeth, and the Queen's response reached the Sultan in June 1580. These official inter-state relations, coupled with the positive outcomes of direct commercial initiatives within the Caucasus, would ultimately lead to the establishment of the Levant Company on September 11, 1581. Through this company, English merchants were granted the right to engage in unrestricted trade within Ottoman territories. With the inauguration of Levant Company consulates in the Middle East, the commercial activities of the Muscovy Company within the Caspian Sea gradually ceased.

In conclusion, it is important to note that, contrary to prevailing assumptions, the locus of the initial direct commercial interaction between the English and Ottoman authorities, as well as the site of the first direct Ottoman-English trade contact, was not the Mediterranean Sea, but rather the Caucasus. The direct Ottoman-English trade contacts established within the Caucasus subsequently served as the foundation for the activities of the Levant Company.

The information obtained from Turkish and English archival sources and diplomatic documents possesses the potential to unlock new avenues of research on this topic. A detailed analysis of Ottoman-English trade relations within the Caucasus region promises to significantly enrich our comprehension of

the historical dynamics of the region and expand the boundaries of existing knowledge regarding the multifaceted Ottoman-English relationship. Future research within this domain will not only address a perceived gap within regional historical scholarship but will also furnish a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the Caucasus' role within the broader context of global history.

Below is the text of a trade agreement between the Ottoman Empire and England (1580). The text of the agreement is derived from the journal of the Darülfünun Literary Faculty (Dârülfünun Edebiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası), published by Ahmet Refik in 1932 [19]. The original agreement is currently preserved within the Ottoman Archives. This treaty constitutes the inaugural significant official document pertaining to trade relations between England and the Ottoman Empire.

Trade Agreement with Queen Elizabeth The highest decree is as follows:

“To the now reigning Queen of England, France and Hibernia, by our just court and highest command, the lord and patron of the rulers of the world, the defender and ruler of rulers, exchanged letters with the plenipotentiary managers William Harborne, who arrived at our throne abode of bliss⁴ and expressed sincere submission, courtesy and politeness, asking permission on the issue of the arrival of merchants in our sacred state. In this regard, [we express] our highest permission and honorable command not to oppress or intimidate anyone in trading houses and inns, bridges and ports, on land and sea. The French, Venetian, Lich and other kings have humbly and kindly addressed our most just court, and in accordance with the agreements of friendship and cooperation concluded with them, subjects and other merchants [are free] to conduct trade in our sacred state, remaining in complete safety, to engage in their craft, and [it is necessary] to free the people ... (names), taken captive in ... (name of the place). To kindly [grant] by our sacred command to the said kings our most elevated capitulations. In addition to the above, our honorable and blessed padishah's majesty has been informed of the most humble request, which has been graciously accepted by our luminous command, and for this reason this most elevated capitulation has been patronizingly issued. And [it is necessary] to bring to the attention of the subjects of our sacred state, the beys, beylerbeys, qadis and all port officials our sacred commands, and our order to be carried out in the following manner: the conditions of the above-mentioned agreement henceforth become the guarantor of peace and must be duly observed. Under no circumstances shall anyone attempt to take galleons and other ships arriving by sea, their crew and goods, other means and products, and ensure the free activity of merchants and farmers. If, while sailing to our sacred state and other countries in our possessions, artisans are captured in one way or another, they shall be released. No one shall hinder or cause inconvenience to the crew or other members of the ship, galleon and other means of transport, and during the transportation of goods or money [it is necessary] to provide all assistance. If the ship is thrown ashore, the beks and qadis [must] facilitate the return of the saved goods and funds to their owners. Do not hinder or attack the English, wandering by sea and on land. Captains, reis and other military personnel must not cause inconvenience to merchants, interpreters and other people from this country, arriving in our sacred state by sea or by land to carry out trade, paying the duties established by customs and laws. Do not encroach on them, their people, property, do not reject their claims. If any of the English is a debtor, demand payment of the debt from him. Do not demand payment of the debt from other people who are not guarantors. If someone dies, his property and goods are to be transferred to the one to whom they were bequeathed. If the recipient of an inheritance dies, he is to be transferred to his fellow countrymen with the knowledge of the consul. Do not involve others. Merchants, interpreters and consuls of England and

4. Âsitane-i saadet âşiyânımız; İstanbul.

her vassal lands who come to our sacred state for the purpose of trade, surety or for other legal reasons must be registered or receive a [deed of sale] from the qadis. If disputes arise, decisions on them are to be made taking into account the records and registration data. If there are none, no restrictions on travel are to be imposed, no illegal hearings are to be held, and those who slander: “We have been sworn at,” wishing to restrict freedom of movement and illegally arrest are to be prevented. If any of them turns out to be a debtor who is charged and is in hiding, no one is to be arrested in his place without surety. If a prisoner turns out to be connected with the English, and there is no doubt about his English citizenship, then, at the request of the consuls, [he must] be handed over to the English. No payment of *kharaj* is to be demanded from married or single resident farmers or artisans arriving in our sacred state from England or its vassal lands. Not to hinder the consuls in fulfilling their obligations to appoint and reappoint employees in the ports of Alexandria, Lebanon Tripoli, Algiers, Tunis, Libyan Tripoli, Cairo, as well as employees without a specific appointment. If an urgent need arises, interpreters may be detained upon arrival. But their detention must not be prolonged under other pretexts. If a dispute arises between the English, the said ambassadors and consuls must resolve the dispute according to their customs. No one must hinder this. The ships of seafarers who have captured Englishmen at sea for subsequent sale in Rumelia and Anatolia, after the payment of these capitulations, are subject to a thorough inspection to establish the origin of the goods. If the prisoner turns out to be a Muslim, he is released and funds are collected from him for subsequent transfer to the English who captured him.”

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