

Hacer Topaktaş,

Osmanlı-Lehistan Diplomatik İlişkileri. Franciszek Piotr Potocki'nin İstanbul Elçiliği (1788-1793) (Prof. Dr. Halil İnalçık Takdimi ile)

[Ottoman-Polish diplomatic relations. Istanbul embassy under Franciszek Piotr Potocki (1788-1793) (with introduction by Prof. Dr. Halil İnalçık),

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This book is the first comprehensive study of the last phase of Ottoman-Polish diplomatic relations in Turkish. As pointed out by İnalçık in the introduction, it is a seminal contribution to the field since the author utilized both Ottoman and Polish archives among others. Based on the author's dissertation (Hacettepe University, Ankara, 2012), this monograph is a descriptive study that rests on a solid research conducted in Turkish, Polish, British, French, and Russian archives; the bibliography includes titles in these languages as well. A description of the archival material used in the study and a brief evaluation of the literature on Ottoman-Polish diplomacy are available in the introduction.

Currently the head of Polish Language and Literature section of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Istanbul University, Dr. Topaktaş has published several articles in Turkish and English on different episodes of Ottoman-Polish relations.

Despite her descriptive style, Topaktaş lays out a theoretical framework in the introduction and offers a number of new views in the conclusion. She discusses relevant concepts of the eighteenth-century diplomatic history such as the multi-polar system in which a dominant power and regional hegemons were necessary to maintain the balance of power through a complex system of alliances that served either to maintain the status quo or revise it by the force of arms. She implies that by carrying out negotiations for an alliance in 1788-1793, the Ottomans and the Poles were responding to the collapse of the old world, as they knew it. According to the author, the fate of the embassy was sealed by the late arrival in Istanbul (10 March 1790). The critical phase of the Ottoman wars against the Habsburgs and the Russians was over when the Ottomans had allied themselves to Sweden (1789) and Prussia (1790). While the Prussian ally dragged foot for a possible Polish-Ottoman alliance, the pro-Russian Polish king Poniatowski was also unwilling to become an Ottoman ally. He rather demanded

commercial concessions particularly in the Black Sea trade. As the Ottomans did not consent to a trade treaty without military alliance, no treaty was signed at the end of 30 months spent in Istanbul. The author contends that Poniatowski could have capitalized on the 1787-1792 Turkish Wars to further his political independence through a series of treaties with the Ottomans and other European states. Topaktaş argues that this was unlikely to prevent the final partitions of Poland-Lithuania; nevertheless, Warsaw would have had allies on its side should it bring negotiations to a successful end.

The first chapter is an overview of the history of Ottoman-Polish relations prior to 1789 (pp. 15-37). Chapter two typically describes the regular activities of the embassy starting with Potocki's appointment to Istanbul, his itinerary, routines of reception ceremonies, and his return to Warsaw. This chapter is substantiated by nine appendices attached at the end of the chapter (pp. 92-108). These include Potocki's journal containing daily entries in August-September 1789 (Appendix I), report of his reception by the Sultan on 10 August 1790 (Appendix II), portrait of Potocki and several paintings about his receptions (Appendix III-VI), the picture of the commemorative coin (mint in 1789) featuring Potocki (Appendix VII), the itinerary map of the Polish embassy to Istanbul (Appendix VIII), and lastly the table of spendings the Sublime Porte made for the maintenance of the Polish embassy (Appendix IX). The author detects a degree of Europeanization in the Ottoman procedures of ceremony in the reception of the Polish envoy. Moreover, the Ottomans made in-cash and in-kind allowances to the embassy throughout its stay in Istanbul contrary to the customs. The author estimates the total cost of the embassy to the Sublime Porte as 1,500,000 – 2,000,000 qurush in 30 months – an impressive sum indeed for a state with annual revenue of 18,000,000 qurush. According to Topaktaş, the extravagancy of the Polish embassy might have been one of the reasons for Selim's new regulation that cancelled free provisioning of the foreign embassies.

The author deals with Ottoman-Polish alliance against Russian expansionism in the third chapter, which is supported by three appendices (pp. 147-156): the drafts of the treaty of alliance and trade between Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire in Polish and Ottoman archives (Appendix I-II) and a chronology of Ottoman-Polish negotiations (5 May 1790 – 30 May 1792) along with the name of the negotiators and venues (Appendix III). In accordance with the Hertzberg plan the Ottomans hoped that Prussia would declare war on the Habsburgs and separate the Russian and Austrian armies from one another by attacking Moravia

and Bohemia. This would be coupled with a Prussian-Ottoman attack on Russia in order to challenge her on Poland-Lithuanian territory. The author thinks that the failure of the embassy should not be attributed to incompetence of Potocki; as mentioned above, the Polish king and pro-Russian groups in Warsaw had no desire for an Ottoman alliance, a fact that was unknown in Istanbul. Moreover, Prussian presence in every stage of Ottoman-Polish negotiations (18 in total in a period of 30 months) would prove to be counter-productive since Berlin had a chance to manipulate the process for a long time. The Treaty of Reichenbach (27 July 1790) manifested that Berlin dropped the plans for a war with Vienna. Later, it would agree with Vienna and St. Petersburg to partition Poland-Lithuania.

The last chapter discusses several proposals of alliance and the final partitions of Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Prussia made it clear that it could not attack Russia without the support of a British fleet which prime minister Pitt actually readied in the Spring of 1791. Nevertheless, strong opposition in Britain averted all these plans for a Prussian-British attack on Russia. That rendered any Ottoman-Polish alliance useless and Potocki's efforts futile. The appendix of this chapter (pp. 191-192) contains a painting depicting the first partition of Poland (Appendix I) as well as a map showing the partitioning of Poland between 1772-1795 (Appendix II).

As for technical details of the publication, the author provides two lists of abbreviations and tables (13 in total), respectively. Unfortunately, there is no separate Appendix section and the book lacks a list for the fourteen appendices scattered throughout the chapters. The book suffers from frequent minor typos and misprints as a result of complications due to the publisher's policy to out-source the printing and editorial assignments by auction. A major disadvantage for the reader is that the endnotes (1812 in total) are placed at the end of the book in a continuous numerical order (pp. 201-309) in line with the publisher's rules and regulations. It is difficult to follow the endnotes when they are not broken down by chapter. To make things more complicated, the page numbers are not included at the heading. Lastly, a meticulous reader should notice that excerpts from various Polish documents in Turkish translation appear not only in the appendices, but also in many endnotes.

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