

## Unpublished Ottoman and British Archival Records of Circassian Coins and Medals

Yahya Khoon\*

This paper presents unpublished Ottoman and British archival materials that shed light on the Circassians in the Northwest Caucasus and their leaders' claim to sovereignty and to an independent nation-state.

Records and materials in both archives are interesting, not only because they reveal the continuation of Ottoman and British involvement in Circassian affairs — despite the Treaty of Paris signed by the powers that ended the Crimean War on March 30, 1856 — but also because they clearly indicate plans prepared by the Circassians and their foreign allies for the transportation to Circassia of dies most likely to cast three types of local coins,<sup>1</sup> including medals and *Nishan Iftikhar* (literally “orders of glory”).<sup>2</sup>

Following are some of the materials relating to coin-minting dies and tools seized by the Ottoman Customs authorities on board the British vessel the “African” in Istanbul in 1857.

Obviously, a more thorough investigation is required and a forthcoming research by the current author shall hopefully reveal further details of the planned schemes, answering questions as to who was behind the plans and how they were drawn up and implemented. When published, both the current author and the Editorial Board of JOCAS believe that it will have the potential to

---

\* Yahya Khoon, Dr., The Open University of Israel, Middle Eastern Studies, yahyak@openu.ac.il (Received: 30.05.2020; Accepted: 31.05.2020)

<sup>1</sup> See attachments no. 1 and no. 2. It should be noted that the Circassians, in particular those who inhabited the Black Sea shores, had, for many years, been trading with other peoples, especially with the Ottomans. The Circassian (internal and external) commercial activity was largely based on a barter system; in the absence of local currencies, the currencies used by the Circassian traders were mostly Ottoman and Russian.

<sup>2</sup> See ATCH-3.

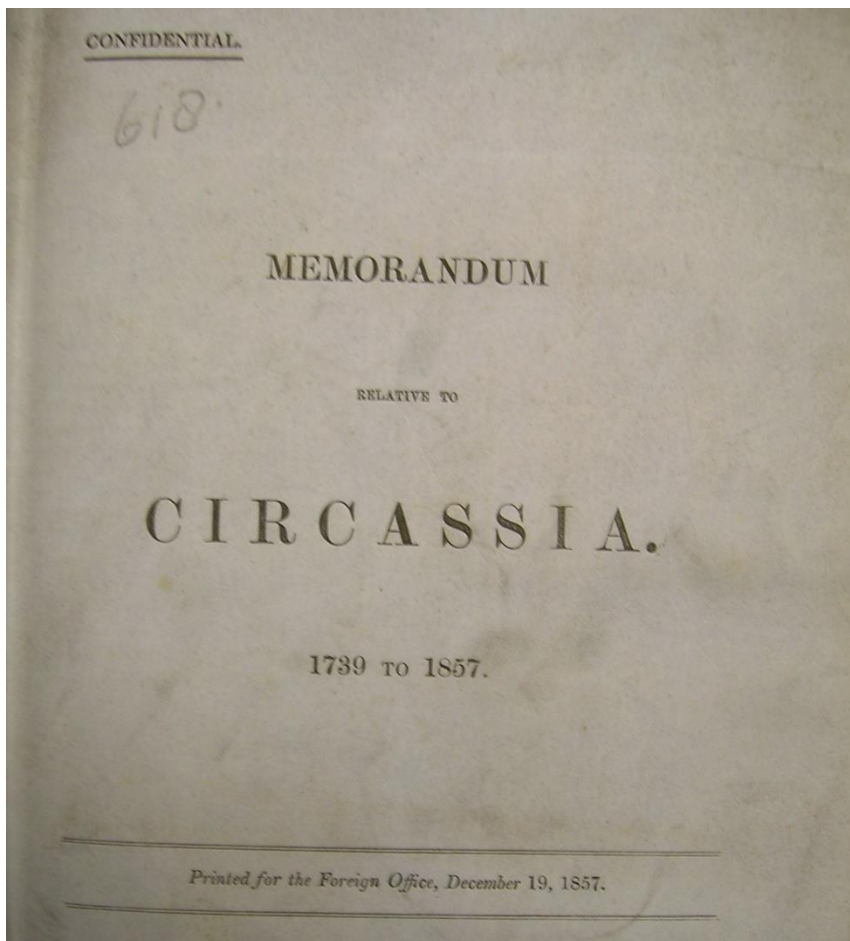
make a colossal contribution to Circassian studies in terms of the state-forming process in general and the hitherto unknown attempts to acquire financial sovereignty in particular in Circassia of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century — a process that was cut short by the Russian conquest and the exile of Circassians from their homeland.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> From a Russian colonial point of view, continuing harm to Circassian trade routes and sovereignty symbols not only meant cutting off the Circassians from the external “artificial respiratory tract” they were in dire need of, especially at such a critical stage in the war, but it also forced them to curb their commercial interaction and affinity, ultimately subduing them and shattering their dream of becoming an independent nation-state.

**ATTACHMENTS**

ATCH-1: National Archives UK, Foreign Office, 881/618<sup>4</sup>



---

<sup>4</sup> UK, The National Archives, F.O. 881/618, p.104, No. 638, From Lord Stratford, 22 July 1857.

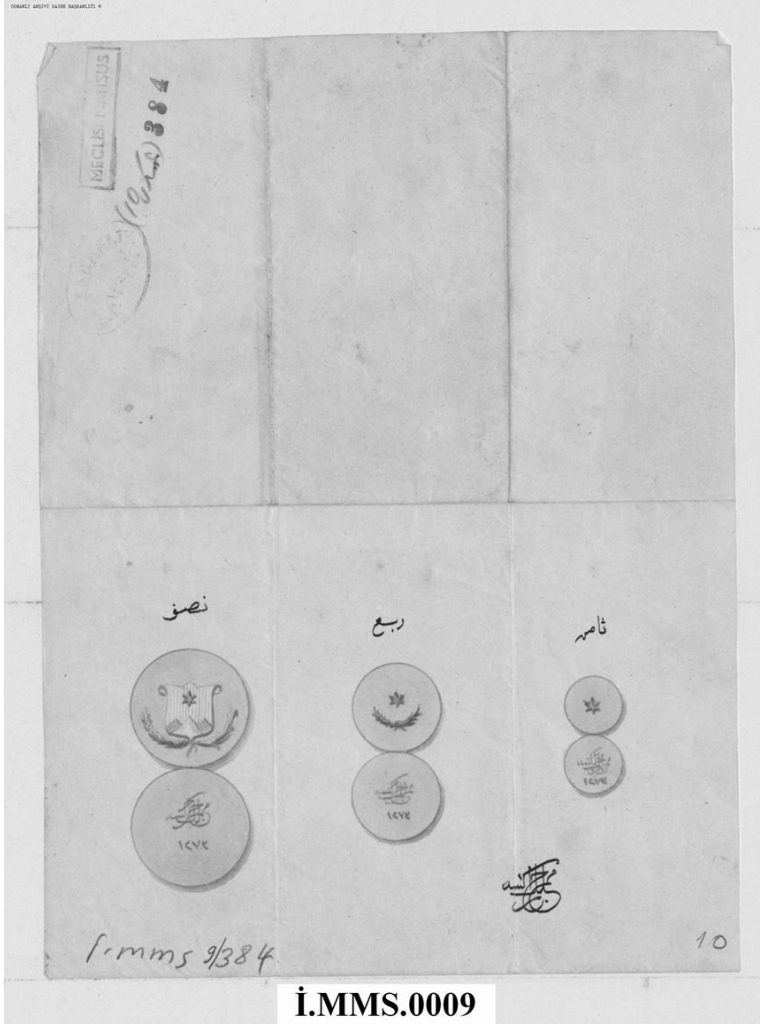
Government.”

In the same month, the Captain Pasha acquainted the British Ambassador, in writing, that the English steam ship “African,” had arrived from England, having on board as part of her cargo, four cases, which had been detained in the Custom House, and were reported by the Grand Customer as containing dies, intended to strike Circassian coins, implements for the manufacture of fire and side arms, and also a considerable number of bullet moulds;—and that these cases were intended for transit to Circassia.

From Lord Stratford, No. 638.  
July 22, 1857.

To Lord Strat-

ATCH-2: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, İ.MMS, 9/384<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Istanbul, [BOA] Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministry Archives), [İ.MMS.], irade Meclis-i Mahsus, 9/384, 17 Şevval 1273 [9 June 1857]. The note on the top of the above drawing contained, from right to left, the following text: *Thamin* (Eighth), *Rub'a* (Quarter), *Nisf* (Half) and on the opposite side of the three coins one sees the penciled words *Memlek(et) Cherakisa*, 1273 (Circassian Sovereignty or homeland, 1856–1857).

ATCH-3: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, İ.MMS, 9/384

