



## **THE BEGINNING OF ANGLO-TURKISH RELATIONS (1580 – 1603)**

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### **Abstract**

At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spain, which dominated the sea routes with geographical discoveries, was the biggest rival of England and the Ottoman Empire in the sea. With England's adoption of Protestantism, competition between the Catholic Spain increased. England, looking for an ally against Spain, found the solution in the Ottoman Empire. Although it was seen as the trade in the Mediterranean that started the relations between the two states, the strengthening of Spain behind the scenes could not be ignored. Queen Elizabeth I sent William Harborne to Istanbul as the first English ambassador and officially started the relations between the two states. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the correspondence between The Queen of England Elizabeth I and The Ottoman Emperor Sultan Murad III, the English were helped against Spain and the right of free trade in the Mediterranean was given by giving an *ahidname* (capitulation).

**Key words:** England, Ottoman Empire, Queen Elizabeth, Sultan Murad III, Mediterranean.

### **Introduction**

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, England's merchants vigorously sought new markets in Europe for ports where they could trade under their own flag for the manufacture of new fabrics. Under the rule of Elizabeth I, the merchants travelled farther to find new markets in Africa, Asia and America. Private English merchants were the first to travel on legal occasions, representing their country at the Tsar's court in Moscow and in Agra at India.<sup>2</sup> Encouragement by the English to engage in foreign trade was the chief consideration of Elizabeth's government. During the reign of Elizabeth's predecessors, most of the markets were out of hand. What they particularly needed was to secure new markets. Thus, the main need of English merchants was to save old markets or secure new ones, while the government helped them by strengthening old companies or hiring new ones.<sup>3</sup>

By the time Elizabeth's reign began, three companies already existed. The Staplers Company was trying to get on its feet, but the charter given by Elizabeth was not enough to revive their wealth. Merchant adventurers were more successful. By moving their warehouses from Flanders to northern Germany and later opening a branch in the Netherlands, they more

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<sup>2</sup> G.M Trevelyan, *History of England*, Anchor Book, New York 1953, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Lunt, *History of England*, Harper & Brothers, New York 1956, p. 359.



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than recovered the wealth they had lost. Established in 1553 to search for the northeast gateway, the Muscovy Company developed a profitable trade with Russia and sought to establish trade with Asia by crossing Russia by land. This was the first company established on the principle of joint stock companies. The issue of charter to new companies began as a result of further difficulties in the Hanseatic League. In 1579, Hanseatic privileges were further restricted and a regulated English merchant company called the Eastland Company was given a monopoly of trade with the Baltic lands. Two years later, the Turkish company was organized by the joint stock company to stimulate trade with the eastern Mediterranean. In 1583, the Venice Company followed suit. Both companies were successfully merged a few years later and the Levant Company was formed.<sup>4</sup>

Upon the strengthening of the purchase of oriental goods, England, who wanted to have a direct say in the Mediterranean trade, started to float ships in the Mediterranean between 1579 and 1582. In Ottoman waters, only two states could trade under their own flag. One of them was Venice and the other France. Ships of other nations could sail under the French flag with the taxes paid to the consulates. The English merchants, on the other hand, got in touch with the Ottoman state because they wanted to avoid taxes and keep the profits in their pockets.<sup>5</sup>

Another reason for England to come into contact with the Ottoman Empire is due to the conflict with Spain. When Queen Elizabeth was excommunicated by the Pope in February 1570, the queen and her followers isolated themselves from Catholic Europe. The conflict between the Protestant queen and Catholic Spain also increased.<sup>6</sup> Spain as in King Philip II, did not only want to dethrone Queen Elizabeth of England, but also wanted to prevent her trade in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire was under threat by Catholic forces in the Mediterranean. With the conquest of Cyprus in 1571, a great crusader navy was established and defeated the Ottomans in Inebahtı. The Ottoman Empire's greatest enemy in the Mediterranean was the Kingdom of Spain. Having a common enemy with England pushed the Ottomans to become allies with the English against Spain.<sup>8</sup> We can say that the first official contacts between the Ottoman Empire and England emerged after the

<sup>4</sup> Lunt, *ibid*, p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı – İngiliz İktisadi Münasebetleri I (1580 – 1838)*, Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, III/A12, Ankara 1974, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ayşe Özge Ercan, *İngiliz Seyyah John Sanderson'ın Seyahatnamesi (1584-1602): Türkçe Çeviri ve İstanbul Gözlemlerinin Değerlendirilmesi*, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 2014, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmet Refik, "Türkler ve Kraliçe Elizabet", *Darülfünun Edebiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, İstanbul Matbaacılık ve Neşriyat Türk Anonim Şirketi, V.8/L.5, September 1932, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Taha Niyazi Karaca, "Dostluktan Çatışmaya: Osmanlı Dönemi Türk – İngiliz İlişkileri", *Türk – İngiliz İlişkileri Dergisi*, V1/I1, Ocak 2020, p. 13.



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second half of the 16th century. The reason for the late start of the relations between the two states can be counted as the fact that England was geographically far from the Ottoman lands and that the English were able to participate in the trade activities in the Mediterranean to a large extent only in the second half of the 16th century.<sup>9</sup>

England first sent Edward Osborne and Richard Staper to the Ottomans. The purpose of these merchants was to contact the statesmen in the Ottoman Empire. Afterwards, Joseph Clement and John Wright were sent to Istanbul in 1575 in order to investigate the commercial conditions in the Ottoman Empire. After staying in Istanbul for exactly one and a half years, they returned to London.<sup>10</sup> However, William Harborne was the first official to be sent to the Ottoman Empire by Queen Elizabeth.<sup>11</sup> Harborne's mission was originally purely for trading purposes. But in due course Elizabeth must have perceived that if he were given a political position, he would be the better able to win the Sultan's support against Spain. No doubt the common hostility of the two rulers to Spain helped to draw them closer together.<sup>12</sup> Harborne, while continuing his commercial activities in Istanbul, also contacted influential people in the palace. Among them, Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, his doctor Salamon and there is Sadeddin Efendi, Sultan Murad III's teacher. Successfully fulfilling this duty in Istanbul, he returned to London in March 1579, receiving a letter from Sultan Murad to Queen Elizabeth.<sup>13</sup> With this letter, William Harborne, Edward Osborne and Richard Staper acquired the right to trade in the Ottoman lands in 1579. At the same time, they had equal rights with the French, Polish and Venetians.<sup>14</sup>

Queen Elizabeth replied to Sultan Murad's letter by writing another letter on October 25, 1579. After thanking the trade concession given to the three merchants who were sent first, she demanded that the permission granted be valid for all the English as well, and stated that it would also facilitate Turkish merchants to do business in England.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in 1580, as a result of the correspondence between the English Queen of the period and the Ottoman Sultan, Sultan Murad gave the Englishmen capitulations of 22 provisos.<sup>16</sup> After the first diplomatic contacts between the states, Queen Elizabeth appointed William Harborne as the

<sup>9</sup> Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türk-İngiliz Münasebetlerinin Başlangıcı ve Gelişmesi (1553-1610)*, TTK, Ankara 1953, p. 1-31.

<sup>10</sup> Kütükoğlu, *ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmet Refik, *ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> M. Epstein, *The Early History of The Levant Company*, George Routledge & Sons Limited, London, 1908, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Kütükoğlu, *ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Rabia Demir, *Osmanlı – İngiliz Diplomatik Münasebetleri (1580 – 1699)*, İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Tezli Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İzmir 2021, p.24.

<sup>15</sup> Kütükoğlu, *ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Tuğrul Arık, "Osmanlı – İngiliz Ekonomik İlişkilerinin Başlangıcının Arka Planı ve 1675 Senesine Kadarki Seyri", *Marmara Üniversitesi Öneri Dergisi*, V12/I45, January 2016, p.138.



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Ottoman ambassador in 1582. Harborne returned to Istanbul in 1583 with the task given to him and the official period began in Turkish-English relations. Another task assigned to William Harborne was to prevent a possible Turkish-Spanish alliance. Sadeddin Efendi, the teacher of Sultan Murad, was pro-English, and Harborne, with his support, managed to prevent a possible Ottoman-Spanish agreement in 1587. Thus, the Ottoman Empire stalled the Spanish navy in the Mediterranean and provided an advantage to the British. After England defeated the great Armada in 1588, it started to become a great power in the seas.<sup>17</sup>

When the Englishmen had the opportunity to trade freely under their own flag, considering the activities of the Muscovy Company, Edward Osborne and Richard Staper sent a petition to the Queen for the establishment of a company that would control the trade in the Ottoman Empire. Queen Elizabeth, on the other hand, gave permission to 12 merchants, including Osborne and Staper, to trade with the Ottomans for seven years. Thus, a new company called the Turkish company was established in the Ottoman Empire by the English merchants. However, only 12 authorized traders will be able to do the trade.<sup>18</sup> This permit, valid for seven years, will be withdrawn if they are not successful: if they are successful, another permit for seven years will be given. While all foreign traders were liable to pay 5 percent of customs duties, from 1584 the English merchants were only liable to 3 percent. This situation led to the development of trade by the English in a short time.<sup>19</sup> At the end of seven years, differences of opinion began to emerge regarding the renewal of the Turkish company's license. The traders working in the company were not satisfied with the salaries they were given and wanted the trade to end, but they were in the minority in this opinion. The merchants who wanted the concession to continue could not get what they wanted from the Privy Council.<sup>20</sup>

The Turkish Company was not the only English company that was trading in the Eastern Mediterranean at that time. There was another company established by the English merchants in Venice and its dominions in 1583 by the leave of the Queen. The establishment was called the Venice Company. By the time of 1581 and 1588 there were two companies in the Mediterranean. After the end of the Turkish Company charter in 1588 the members of the company couldn't renew their patent.<sup>21</sup> The merger of these two companies, which traded almost the same goods, could have been a very profitable business for the English. In 1589,

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<sup>17</sup> Karaca, *ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> M. Epstein, *ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Kurat, *ibid*, p. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Kütükoğlu, *ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Epstein, *ibid*, p. 25.



within the framework of this desire, the merchants sent a letter to the English Treasury Secretary and asked the Queen for approval.<sup>22</sup>

The wish of the merchants took a long time to come true. Because at that time, England was preparing for war with Spain and was looking for ways to make an agreement with the Ottoman state. The English ambassador in Istanbul, William Harborne tried to persuade the Sultan and the Grand Vizier to support England. With his great effort the Ottoman Empire did not renew their agreement with Spain and supported England. With the support given by Ottomans, England gained a great victory against Spain. With this victory, the Queen gave an edict on January 7, 1592. With this edict, the two companies, The Turkish and The Venice companies, were merged and the Levant Company was established. There were many companies in the Mediterranean such as Muscovy Company, Morocco Company, Venice Company and the Turkish company. But upon its establishment the Levant company was the largest company by far which has trade points in many cities such as Istanbul, Aleppo, Zante, Patras, Peloponnese, Cairo, Alexandria, Lisbon, Seville, Venice, Livorno and Naples.<sup>23</sup> The official relations of England with the Ottoman Empire were shaped by the commercial activities of the Levant Company, which started its activities in 1581. Relations with the Ottoman Empire continued after Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603.<sup>24</sup>

### **Content and Enforcement of the Ahidname**

With the official start of Turkish-English commercial relations, William Harborne was able to receive an ahidname from Sultan Murad in May 1580. With this ahidname, the English had all the privileges that the French, Venetians and Poles had, and provisos were put in place to secure the English subjects who would come to the Ottoman lands to trade, and if necessary, the goods.<sup>25</sup> The substances are;

I. Regarding the English ships sailing in the Mediterranean:

a) All ships belonging to the English will travel freely to the piers and ports within the Ottoman territory,

b) If they cannot continue on their way in the event of a storm, those on board will be assisted in providing their money and supplies,

c) If the storm throws the English ships ashore, the gentlemen and women will help themselves and return their surviving goods,

d) Ships visiting Ottoman piers and ports will be taken under protection,

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<sup>22</sup> Kütükoğlu, ibid, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Taha İ. Özel, *İngiliz Doğu Hindistan Şirketi*, Vadi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2021, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> Kütükoğlu, ibid, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Kütükoğlu, ibid, p. 20.



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e) When Turkish ships, galleys and navies encounter English ships in Ottoman territorial waters, the parties will be friendly to each other and avoid causing any harm to the other party,

### II. About the English cases in the Ottoman Empire:

a) English Subjects merchants, translators and consuls in the Ottoman countries, trade, surety, etc. The issues will be recorded in the kadı registers and the evidence will be examined and acted upon.

b) The cases of those who do not have records and evidence in the registry will not be heard.

c) If they claimed that they were blasphemed by using false witnesses, they would be prevented from violating the "shar-i sheriff".

### III. Debt and inheritance:

a) The debt belonging to any Englishman will only be claimed from him, and no other Englishman can be held responsible for it.

b) However, those who are guarantors of the debtor are exempted from this.

c) The property of a deceased Englishman will be given to the person he willed, and if he has died without a will, no one will interfere in giving it to another Englishman by his consul.

### IV. About the English captives:

a) The Englishmen, who have been taken prisoner in any way, whether in Ottoman Empire or in another country, will be released by their consul after it is determined that they are English.

b) If the "Levend boats" want to blow the English and sell them in Rumelia and Anatolia from the date of issuance of the Ahidname, these persons will be carefully searched and found, and if the captive has become a Muslim, the money taken from the seller will be returned to the buyer and the prisoner will be released.

### V. On tribute and immunity from plunder:

a) No tribute will be taken from English subjects residing in Ottoman lands, married or unmarried.

b) If an English ship is plundered, its goods and people will be found and returned, and the perpetrators will be punished regardless of who they are.

### VI. About the appointment of the consul and interpreters:



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a) Alexandria, Tripoli – Damascus, Algeria, Tunisia, Tripoli, Egypt etc. No interference will be made in the appointment or replacement of English consuls sent to other places.

b) If their translator has left his job for an important job, he will wait until they arrive; but the English will also keep their translators ready.

### **VII. Customs duty, safety of life and property:**

a) Everyone who is an English subject will be able to trade freely within the Ottoman Empire, and no one will be able to interfere with persons and goods after the customs tax is paid.<sup>26</sup>

After the first ahidname was given, the English ambassador William Harborne, appointed a consul for Egypt, Alexandria and its surroundings in the same year. He also appointed consuls for Algeria, Tripoli, Tunisia and Chios, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, and other Syrian ports, with Tripoli being the centre.<sup>27</sup> Mutual correspondence occurred between Queen Elizabeth of England and Sultan Murad, thus the privileges given to the English were expanded and strengthened. These privileges, which were given to England during the reign of Sultan Murad III, were continued after Sultan Mehmed's III accession to the throne, and were expanded in 1601 by giving new provisions to the ahidname.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ottoman – English Relations after the Ahidname**

Receiving trade concessions from the Ottoman Sultan was a very important development in London by the great merchants and the government. Lord Burghley and Walsingham, who investigated in detail the profits to be made from trade with the Ottomans, presented this review to Elizabeth in a report. In the presented report, it was stated that the trade to be carried out would improve the English maritime and at the same time, the fees paid to the ships of other states would be left in their pockets.<sup>29</sup> Gaining the right to trade freely in the Mediterranean under their own flag, England, under the leadership of Edward Osborne and Richard Staper, established a new company that would provide superiority in Mediterranean trade. This company, called the Turkish company, controlled the trade made through the Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup> Queen Elizabeth I, granted a temporary seven-year monopoly privilege to trade with the Ottoman country to the merchants who founded the Turkey Company on September 11, 1581. With this concession, the right to trade in the Ottoman

<sup>26</sup> Kütükoğlu, ibid, p. 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> M. Sait Türkhan, “Osmanlı-İngiliz Ticaret Tarihinin İngiliz Arşiv Kaynakları: State Papers Tasnifi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme”, *History Studies*, 11/5, October 2019, p. 1756.

<sup>28</sup> Kütükoğlu, ibid, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Erhan Şigan, *İngiliz Yakın Doğu Şirketi'nin Kuruluşu ve 1583 – 1630 Osmanlı-İngiliz İlişkileri*, Erciyes Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Kayseri 2015, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Kütükoğlu, ibid, p. 13.



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ports became a concession reserved only for the merchant member of the company. Within the framework of the conditions of the period, the continuation of long-distance commercial voyages with a company solidarity was deemed appropriate for the English national interests. While the partners of the company benefited from the privileges provided by the company membership, they had to pay consular fees in Ottoman ports on imports and exports.<sup>31</sup>

Another company established by Queen Elizabeth in the same period was the Venice Company. It was founded in 1583 by Edward Cordell, Edward Hambdon, Paul Banning and a few other merchants on a six-year leave. This company, which imported currants, sweet wine, and oil in Venice, was doing almost the same trade as the Turkish company. Only members of the Company could bring currants into England, and no others. The Company, however, went beyond this and levied a tax of five shillings and sixpence on every hundredweight of currants brought into the country by any merchant who was not a member of the Company. In 1588 the Charter of the Turkish Company was not renewed. The merchants objected the decision and during the next three years the members of the Turkish company negotiated with the Privy Council for a renewal of their patent. They sought larger powers than their previous charter gave them, and to this the Venice Company objected. Their own charter came to an end in 1589, but even before that they registered their protest against giving enlarged powers to their rivals. However, after coming on a conclusion of a higher trade the merchants of Turkish and Venice companies joined forces in negotiating with the Council.<sup>32</sup> After the merchants who requested for the merger of these two companies waited for three years, on January 7, 1592, both companies were merged and the Levant Company was established.<sup>33</sup>

With the establishment of the Levant Company, the English goods going to the Mediterranean, as well as the oriental goods coming from the Red Sea and Aleppo, started to be transported by English ships. The most important goods brought by the English to the Ottoman lands were the English woollen fabrics. Its prices are quite high, but its quality has surpassed its competitors. Another reason why the Levant Company overshadowed its competitors was that they exported the goods, such as tin and lead, that the Pope prohibited Christian ships from taking to the east, without heeding this prohibition. In its first years, the company shipped fabrics of different types and colours, tin, lead and black rabbit skin, in return for a variety of oils, indigo, raw silk, cotton and cotton yarn, spices, dyes, currants, white soap, goat skin, sulphur and carpets, purchased goods and thus made a 300% profit. Tobacco entered in Ottoman Empire for the first time in this period, with English ships. Tobacco, which entered the country in the 1600s, quickly became a pleasant commodity. The reason the Levant Company made huge profits was not simply the high quality of its goods or

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<sup>31</sup> Türkhan, *ibid*, p. 1756.

<sup>32</sup> Epstein, *ibid*, p. 23-27.

<sup>33</sup> Kütükoğlu, *ibid*, p. 15.





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the export of goods prohibited by the pope. Unlike the Venetians, the French and the Dutch, the British did not sell the goods for money, but instead practiced bartering for goods. These commercial systems, which led to huge profits at first, started to lose their value over 18th century. Since the 19th century, instead of trading with goods, sales for money have begun to be made in the Ottoman Empire. The Levant Company, which tried to trade with goods that replaced money, suffered losses in the face of the French and Dutch, who traded with plenty of cash. As a result, the Levant Company was closed at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>34</sup>

After the Ahidname was given, an agreement was made between England and the Ottoman Empire in terms of alliance and trade against the Spanish. After the agreement, the correspondence between the two states started to increase.<sup>35</sup> These correspondences between the two states continued until Sultan Mehmed III wrote to Elizabeth but died before the letter could reach her.<sup>36</sup> England had its golden age when the Queen was on the throne. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, England experienced its brightest period in economic, commercial, political and social areas. English commercial expansion and the establishment of colonies began during the reign of Elizabeth I.<sup>37</sup>

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spain, which dominated the sea routes with geographical discoveries, was the biggest rival of England and the Ottoman Empire in the seas. With England's adoption of Protestantism, competition between the Catholic Spain increased. England, looking for an ally against Spain, found the solution in the Ottoman Empire. Although it was seen as the trade in the Mediterranean that started the relations between the two states, the strengthening of Spain behind the scenes could not be ignored. Queen Elizabeth I sent William Harborne to Istanbul as the first English ambassador and officially started the relations between the two states. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the correspondence between The Queen of England Elizabeth I and The Ottoman Emperor Sultan Murad III, the English were helped against Spain and the right of free trade in the Mediterranean was given by giving an ahidname.

The end of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain was out of the way and the trade routes were in control of England. After the ahidname was given to England, Elizabeth and her Privy Council started to establish new companies around the Mediterranean Sea. The best-known companies were The Venice and The Turkish Company. Since they were trading the same goods, they were merged as a profit margin and the Levant Company was established. There were many companies in the Mediterranean such as Muscovy Company, Morocco Company, Venice

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<sup>34</sup> Kütükoğlu, *ibid*, p. 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Ahmet Refik, *ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmet Refik, *ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Kurat, *ibid*, p. 19.



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Company and the Turkish company. But upon its establishment the Levant company was the largest company by far which has trade points in many cities such as Istanbul, Aleppo, Zante, Patras, Peloponnese, Cairo, Alexandria, Lisbon, Seville, Venice, Livorno and Naples. With Levant Company, England controlled the trade route in the Mediterranean Sea till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The help of Ottoman Empire against Spain and the right of free trade in the Mediterranean Sea, was the turning point of England. With these two England slowly started to form an Empire whose name will be called the empire on which the sun never sets. England and the Ottoman Empire started their diplomatic relations in the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century and it continued after Elizabeth's and all the other Monarchs deaths.



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