

Ambassadors, Spies, Captives, Merchants and Travelers: Ottoman Information Networks in the East, 1736-1747

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This thesis reveals a network of Ottoman intelligence in Iran under the rule of Nadir Shah by analyzing singular cases of ambassadors, spies, captives, merchants, and travelers and sheds light on the connections among them. The study is based mainly on Ottoman sources but benefits from other sources in Persian, Arabic, English, Armenian, French, Dutch, Italian, and Russian. It gives a central place to Ottoman agents but makes room for Iranian, Indian, and European actors too. It focuses on the regions of Anatolia, Iraq, the Hedjaz, Iran, and India, and to the people who were in contact with the Ottoman central and local officials.

Ottoman awareness of the developments in neighboring countries and their sources of information are issues that are usually overlooked in Ottoman historiography. This study intends to help close this gap and try to answer the following questions: How were the Ottomans informed about the developments in lands to the east of the empire? What were the sources of information they relied on? My thesis explores these questions focusing mainly on Ottoman-Iranian relations during Nadir Shah's reign in Iran from 1736 to 1747.

Studying an information network in the pre-modern era reveals the story of the basic element of a decision-making process, namely information. Although the story itself includes many steps such as gathering, transferring/narrating, and perceiving, I focused on a simplified version of the process, focusing on the arrival of information to Istanbul and possible relations among its carriers. Surveying the reports from the borders also helps us to notice what the chroniclers in the capital knew and chose to write about. In other words, the differences between the chronicles and intelligence reports give us clues about Ottoman historiography and the extent of its biases. Examining the agencies in an information network also presents a usefully detailed narrative. Besides its contribution to biographical studies, such an approach sheds light on the dim areas between war and peace, between voluntary and involuntary actors, and between planned and coincidental events. Brief narratives mostly overlook these matters. The relations among certain agents disclose their personal networks and agendas as well as clarifying central and local government policies. This method can bring new approaches into the literature and present alternative understandings that can replace monolithic considerations of the Ottoman bureaucracy.

The thesis includes six chapters and four appendices. The introductory chapter presents an overview of Ottoman-Iranian relations between 1736 and 1747 pointing to their political, diplomatic, and cultural dimensions. It does not give a complete account of the wars between two sides, but it presents a summary of diplomatic relations, in

addition to certain examples of flow of information and cultural exchanges among the diplomats and poets.

Chapter Two includes three parts. The first two parts introduce the reader to the variety of sources and the seven groups of agents discussed in the study. The last part points to inconsistencies in primary sources along with popular mistakes encountered in current literature. The primary sources of Ottoman-Iranian political relations in the second quarter of the eighteenth century are mainly in Turkish. However, one needs to consult sources in several other languages as well, such as those in Persian, Arabic, English, Armenian, French, Dutch, Italian, and Russian. One of the aims of this research has been to cover as many of the relevant sources as possible. However, it is hard to access all the relevant literature within the confines of an MA thesis. Consequently, this thesis has only the modest claim of providing a preliminary framework within which to discuss the agents of information.

Osmanlı Arşivi, and Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi are the two leading archives for Ottoman sources while others outside of Turkey, like the National Library of Bulgaria, also preserve numerous Ottoman documents. A second group of primary Turkish sources is the writings of Ottoman statesmen that are preserved as manuscripts. These texts come in various flavors such as descriptions of battles, sieges, and diplomatic negotiations, contemporary diaries, and prosopographical works. Moreover, Persian, and Armenian chronicles, British newspapers, the reports of the Dutch East India Company in Iran and Carmelite missionaries in Iraq are also examined to a certain degree.

Chapter Three elaborates on the Ottoman foreign policy of Iran in the 1730s and 1740s in a distinctive approach. It argues that there were two rival factions of bureaucrats under the leaderships of Ahmed Paşa and Hacı Beşir, respectively, that shaped the Ottoman foreign policy of Iran in this period. The factions refer to and, to a certain degree, speculate about the rivalries, friendships, and patronage relations among certain actors like governors, ambassadors, and members of the Ottoman missions to Iran.

The Ottoman higher bureaucracy was highly volatile during the reign of Mahmud I (r. 1730-54), compared to the era of his predecessor, Ahmed III (r. 1703-30). Hacı Beşir Ağa, the chief of black eunuchs (*dariüssaade ağası*), emerged as an exceptional and important figure in this picture. He survived the 1730 rebellion and maintained his position until his death in a period when grand-viziers and *şeyhulislams* were deposed frequently. Another (unusually) constant Ottoman actor who influenced Ottoman-Iranian relations was Ahmed Paşa, the governor of Baghdad. He kept this position for twenty-one years and served as a crucial mediator between Nadir Shah and Mahmud I. Ahmed Paşa defended Baghdad against Nadir Shah in 1733, but he favored diplomacy and worked for peaceful settlement of differences. This approach enabled him to dissuade Nadir from attacking Baghdad again. Although Ahmed Paşa remained ever loyal to the Porte, his preference for diplomatic solutions and his differences with Hacı Beşir caused some doubts about his allegiances in Istanbul.

This categorization helps to explain seemingly bizarre situations in Ottoman-Iran relations: Why did Nadir's army besiege Mosul and Kars but not Baghdad in the 1740s? Why did Ahmed Paşa decide to send his delegate to the meeting at Najaf while the Porte did not? Authors on the history of Iraq like Longrigg and Olson point to the

conflict between Ahmed Paşa with Hüseyin Paşa in their works (Four Centuries of Modern Iraq; The Siege of Mosul and Ottoman-Persian Relations, 1718-1743). I explained the conflict not only at the regional level but also in a more detailed and broader perspective. A major outcome of this approach is the realization that the Ottomans honored the negotiated treaty in 1746 and did not launch a new campaign against Iran after Nadir's death not necessarily because they thought it proper to honor a deal as such but because that deal satisfied the requests of both factions.

We can consider Beşir's faction as an idealist one while Ahmed's faction as a realist/pragmatic. The concepts of idealist and realist are used in simplified terms and refer to the degree of concession in their politics in this study. The first difference between the two factions was about accepting or rejecting the Jafari *madhhab* as a legitimate legal school along with the four major Sunni schools of law. The primary concern of Beşir Ağa and his fellow courtiers was a peace agreement with Iran without reference to the *madhhab* issue. Beşir Ağa and some religious scholars of the era did not accept Nadir's proposal and defended the continuation of the war until the issue was withdrawn from the negotiation table. When Nadir gave up in late 1745, the Kurdan Treaty was signed the following year. In the end, the faction of Beşir Ağa reached its goal without any concession, although its leader did not see his victory since he passed away in early June 1746.

Ahmed Paşa and some other Ottoman statesmen had another view on the terms of a possible peace with Iran. Nadir's proposal of the recognition of Jafariyya as a legitimate *madhhab*, the establishment of a pillar (*ruqn*) for it in Mecca, and the shah's appointment of an overseer over Iranian pilgrims were acceptable terms for the sake of reaching an agreement to end the Ottoman-Iranian war, which had lasted for years. Their main goal was the immediate end of the war within the borders agreed upon in 1639. Although the Hamadan Treaty of 1732, the Istanbul Treaty of 1736, and the negotiations from 1736 to 1743 did not bring peace between the two countries, Ahmed Paşa was partly successful in his policy. He reached a ceasefire agreement with Nadir Shah on certain occasions and was able to move the battleground away from Baghdad to northern Iraq and eastern Anatolia.

A second and probably more important difference between the two factions concerned the scope of territorial concessions. The Porte demanded to keep the newly conquered areas in western Iran in the 1720s whereas Ahmed Paşa easily agreed to return to the borders of 1639 in 1733. He was aware of the challenges and threats against Ottoman rule due to social, cultural, and geographical conditions in these largely Shii, tribal and mountainous areas that were so distant from the capital. The Porte appears to have had a very optimistic view of its ability to overcome these difficulties.

Chapter Four is about ambassadorial and deputed missions and their hosts (*mihmandars*). It investigates the journeys and sojourns of the Ottoman, Iranian, Indian, and Uzbek ambassadorial missions and examines the official documents they delivered and received, in detail. The result of the comparison on the official missions' journeys is interesting but not surprising. The average daily speed of the Ottoman and Iranian missions in the first negotiation period (from 1736 to 1742) was fourteen kilometers, whereas it was twenty-five kilometers in the second period (from 1745 to 1747). The

Ottomans were at war with the Austrians and the Russians from 1736 to 1739, while Nadir Shah was dealing with the Afghans in Qandahar, the Mughals in India, and the Uzbeks in Central Asia between 1736 and 1742, in addition to local rebellions in Iran. The ambassadors of two sides traveled at a slower pace in a period when their rulers engaged in wars with other countries. After a series of battles and sieges between the armies of Mahmud I and Nadir from 1743 to 1745, securing a peace treaty became a top priority in both courts' foreign policy. So, they made haste to reach the other side.

An extensive examination of Ottoman and Iranian official correspondence reveals an interesting point about Ottoman historiography. The Ottomans did not record the letters Münif Mustafa Efendi brought into their royal letter registers (*name-i hümayun defters*), although the Ottoman ambassador delivered Nadir's letters to the Ottoman court in 1742. When Münif came back to Istanbul, he was summoned to the presence of the sultan and presented his ambassadorial report along with the letters. Nevertheless, almost all Ottoman chronicles summarize Münif's mission in a few sentences simply mentioning that Nadir was persistent on the article of the fifth *madhhab*, and that the Porte immediately started preparations for a coming war. If we leave the reports of Münif Mustafa and Nazif Mustafa in 1742 aside, there are no details in the Ottoman sources about Münif's mission. That is to say, the Ottomans knew but preferred not to record any details regarding the mission of Münif Mustafa and, more importantly, ignored the letters Münif brought.

Chapter Five reveals short but important stories of the other agents within five parts: Spies, captives, travelers, couriers, and Nadir Shah's Indian campaign as a case study of Ottoman intelligence. All these agents, whether intentionally or not, played essential roles in Ottoman information networks in the East during the 1730s and 1740s. The first part involves Ottoman spies in Iran and Iranian spies in the Ottoman Empire. The second examines the reports of three Ottoman captives in Iran and two Uzbek fugitives from the Iranian army. In the third part, three contemporary travelers among many are highlighted: Jean Otter, Tanburi Küçük Arutin Efendi, and Khwaja Abd-ul Karim Kashmiri. These travelers share three points in common. First, all three visited Iraq and Iran in the late 1730s and early 1740s. Second, they were in contact with the Ottoman and Iranian bureaucrats. Third, they wrote about Nadir's life and his Indian campaign, in addition to the interactions between the Ottomans and Iranians.

This chapter also presents the outcomes of a preliminary investigation of primary sources on when, how, and what the Ottomans knew about Nadir's campaign in India. It introduces the first Ottoman chronicle on the campaign, namely İbrahim Müteferrika's *Zeyl-i Tarih-i Seyyah* which is unique regarding the details it covers and the language it employs. It was the first and most detailed account on Nadir Shah in Turkish. Subhi Efendi, the Ottoman court chronicler of the time, did not write a word on Nadir's campaign in Afghanistan and India. His chronicle only mentions that the Shah had returned from India and his army was preparing for war in Dagestan. In his work on the siege of Kars by the Iranian army in 1744, Sırrı Efendi emphasizes the manipulations and deviousness of Nadir's strategy in India against the Mughals without giving any detail on the campaign. If we leave Tanburi's travelogue and Müteferrika's study aside, there are two more Ottoman-Turkish texts that cover Nadir's life and his campaign in India. They were,

however, written after Nadir's death. The archival documents and *Zeyl-i Tarîh-i Seyyâh* indicate that the Sublime Porte was well informed about developments in Iran and India, although the contemporary Ottoman scholars preferred not to write about Nadir's Indian campaign, except for Mütferrika.

Four appendices contain the details of the primary sources of the thesis. The first explains three main routes from Istanbul to the cities in Iran, Afghanistan, and India such as Yerevan, Qazvin, Isfahan, Qandahar, Surat, and Delhi. It also presents the distances of these routes in the modern metric system in form of tables. The second introduces a new Ottoman ambassadorial report on Iran to the literature: Münif Mustafa Efendi's *İran Sefaretnamesi*. It includes a short review on the academic writings on Münif, the list of Münif's works in manuscript libraries, and the Latinised versions of Münif's *İran Sefaretnamesi* and Nazif's short report on the Ottoman mission in 1742. The third intends to explore a neglected area between political history and literary history by giving examples of Turkish poems on Nadir and Iran, between 1736 and 1747. The last appendix contains selected paintings of the certain actors like Mahmud I, Hacı Beşir Ağa, Nadir Shah, and Jean Otter.

In conclusion, this study establishes the main features of Ottoman information networks in lands to the east of the empire in 1736-47. It explores how and when the Ottomans learned about the significant developments in the region in these years, when Nadir Shah dominated Iran and challenged its neighbors. Furthermore, this thesis uncovers the stories of other agents such as travelers, captives, spies, and merchants who played essential roles regarding the flow of information between Iran, India, and the Ottoman Empire. This effort should highlight the significance of paying close attention to studying the multiple dimensions of the interactive relations between the Ottomans and Iranians, Indians, and other eastern states and societies. Studies on this *terra incognita* would enhance our knowledge of eighteenth-century Ottoman history and of the changes that affected Ottoman policies, society, and culture.