

Politics, Trade, and Diplomacy: The Anglo-Ottoman Relationship, 1575-1699

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In 1575, two enterprising London merchants dispatched a pair of agents overland to Constantinople in order to secure the right to trade directly with the Ottoman Empire. This privately funded action, motivated by the pursuit of profit, proved to be the basis for England's diplomatic relationship with Turkey, establishing foundations that remained in place for 300 years. In line with its beginnings, the relationship between England and the Ottoman Empire remained predominantly mercantile during the first stage of its existence. The Levant Company was established in 1581 to conduct trade with the Ottomans; the merchant William Harborne was shortly dispatched as England's first ambassador to the Ottoman Porte.¹ All early ambassadors had prior experience as the Company's agents in the Ottoman Empire.² Moreover, these early ambassadors were selected and paid by the Levant Company rather than by the state. The ambassador's role extended beyond diplomatic representation on behalf of the monarch, to managing the Company's interests in Turkey.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, the diplomatic relationship between England and the Ottoman Empire began to shift. The Levant Company gradually lost control over Anglo-Ottoman relations, which changed from a predominantly commercial relationship to a more conventionally diplomatic one. This shift was complete when, in 1691, Ambassador William Hussey died at his post, and William III appointed a successor without consulting Levant Company officials. While the Company remained nominally involved with the ambassadorship until 1803, after Hussey's death, Company authorities ceased to influence ambassadorial appointments and were merely presented with the king's choice as a *fait accompli*.³ In

¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 442-443.

² Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154; Alfred Cecil Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 80.

³ Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 133; James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 135.

examining the reasons behind this fundamental change in the nature of the ambassadorship, it is crucial to consider the dual nature of England's early ambassadors to the Ottoman Porte. Men such as William Harborne served two masters, the Levant Company and the Crown, in two different capacities, those of diplomatic representative and commercial agent. For the Elizabethans, trade was not a matter of state. It was, therefore, private initiative that inaugurated official contacts between the English and the Turks. Over the course of the seventeenth century, however, trade became increasingly political. As commercial interests became a matter of state, the ambassador's two roles were fused, and he became a creature of the Crown rather than the Company.

Trade, Politics, and Imperialism: Traditional Answers Revisited

In examining why the diplomatic relationship between England and the Ottoman Empire evolved from primarily commercial contacts dominated by the Levant Company to diplomatic relations controlled by the central government, scholars predominantly point to one of three factors: English imperial aspirations, an economic shift away from Levantine trade, and internal political considerations. Because the hundred-year period between Harborne's appointment to Istanbul and the establishment of royal control over diplomatic relations with Turkey coincides with the beginnings of England's imperial ambitions, some scholars point to the emergence of English imperial aspirations as the driving factor behind the shift in Anglo-Ottoman relations. Literary scholar Gerald Maclean describes the dynamic between England and the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as "imperial envy."⁴ At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, the English were a relatively unimportant nation bent on competing with Spain for New World riches. The Ottoman Empire, meanwhile, was a fabulously wealthy polity that

⁴ Gerald Maclean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 20.

stretched across three continents. Maclean argues that the “imperial envy” the English experienced in their relations with the Ottomans played a role in inspiring their own imperial ambitions and was part of the impetus that transformed them into an imperial nation. This transformation, in turn, changed the fundamental nature of the Anglo-Ottoman relationship.⁵

By the end of the seventeenth century, Maclean argues, “imperial envy started to give way to an emergent imperiousness;” the English increased the power of their navy and laid the foundations of their own Eastern empire.⁶ Shortly after the Restoration of 1660, the English began establishing colonies in North Africa and the Indian Subcontinent.⁷ With the Restoration also came the chartering of the Royal African Company and the acquisition of Tangier and Bombay.⁸ The Treaty of Utrecht gave the newly minted British Newfoundland, Acadia, and Nova Scotia at the expense of the French, while the Spanish ceded Gibraltar and Minorca.⁹ The British had become Europe’s dominant colonial and maritime power. Envy was replaced by a sense of parity, and the Ottomans were increasingly seen as useful, but subordinate, allies. By the late seventeenth century, English writers had begun presenting the Ottomans less as distant trading partners and more as potential allies in the game of international intrigue and empire building.¹⁰ Moreover, there was a new consciousness that the Ottoman government might hold valuable lessons for the ordering and administration of empire.¹¹ As a result of this shift, the Anglo-Ottoman relationship, Maclean argues, was increasingly seen in political, rather than commercial, terms.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁹ Ibid., 197.

¹⁰ Ibid., 189, 197.

¹¹ Ibid., 191.

The imperial consciousness that emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century brought with it the development of a centralized imperial state.¹² Historian Alison Games argues that state centralization gradually eroded the English style of piecemeal expansion governed by the large overseas companies.¹³ Whereas trading companies had once carried out their own diplomacy and funded their own armies, the emergence of a centralized imperial state meant that the Crown assumed direct control over English diplomatic relationships.¹⁴ Like Maclean, Games presents English imperial aspirations as the driving force behind the shift in Anglo-Ottoman relations.

Despite its later imperial dimensions, the initial relationship between England and Turkey was predominantly commercial. Economic factors drove the establishment of diplomatic relations between England and the Ottoman Empire, and some scholars see in them an explanation for this relationship's subsequent evolution. Whereas between 1620 and 1683 England was the undisputed leader in the Levantine trade, in the eighteenth century, commercial relations with the Americas and the East Indies began to eclipse England's commerce in the Mediterranean.¹⁵

From the second half of the seventeenth century on, the Levant Company felt mounting competitive pressure from the East India Company in the domestic market, especially with regard to spices, raw silk, and manufactured silk goods.¹⁶ In the Mediterranean, meanwhile, the French were becoming an increasingly formidable commercial competitor. Beginning in the 1660s, Jean-Baptiste Colbert made a conscious effort to promote French trade with the Levant,

¹² Games, *The Web of Empire*, 298.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade, and the Struggle for Land, 1600-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 21; Games, *The Web of Empire*, 51.

¹⁶ Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 103.

reviving the French cloth industry and tightening administrative control over trade with Turkey. Colbert's efforts came to fruition beginning in the 1680s, when French trade with the Turks began to make significant gains at the marked expense of the Levant Company.¹⁷ English trading activity accounted for 39.8 percent of Ottoman exports in 1634 and 39 percent in 1686; by 1784, however, England's share had fallen to a mere 9.2 percent.¹⁸ After 1700, English woolen fabrics fell behind French textiles; the English themselves lost interest in Levantine silk, one of their major imports from the region.¹⁹ As Alfred Wood argues in his book *A History of the Levant Company*, the resurgence of France and competition from the East India Company were crucial factors in the decline of Anglo-Ottoman trade. Wood explains that as Levantine trade suffered, so did the power of the Levant Company, and he attributes the shift in the relationship between England and the Ottoman Empire to an economic shift away from Levantine trade.

In addition to economic and imperial considerations, internal political realities also influenced international diplomacy. Historian Daniel Goffman argues that England's internal political situation had ramifications for its nationals in the Levant, and that the 1640s saw conflicts between various English factions in the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Because the Levant Company's merchants tended to sympathize with Parliament, Charles I hoped to curb Company power and increase his control over Levantine commerce and diplomacy.²¹ As Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell was also eager to diminish Company control over England's diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Porte. Although the Levant Company appointed him, Thomas Bendish, who served as ambassador from 1647 to 1661, largely circumvented the Company in his relationship with Cromwell. Whereas, before 1653, the bulk of ambassadorial

¹⁷ Ibid., 106-108.

¹⁸ McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe*, 16.

¹⁹ Ibid., 21-22.

²⁰ Daniel Goffman, *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642-1660* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 5.

²¹ Ibid., 71.

correspondence was addressed to the directors of the Company, Bendish corresponded primarily with Cromwell and his secretary, John Thurloe.²² Upon the restoration of the monarchy, Charles II sought to curtail further the Levant Company's authority in order to bolster royal power. He recalled Bendish and removed much of the Company's autonomy.²³

Charles II appointed Heneage Finch, second earl of Winchilsea, as Bendish's replacement. Finch was the first nobleman to hold the ambassadorship and the first ambassador whose correspondence was addressed almost exclusively to the royal court.²⁴ "This ambassador was very much the king's man rather than a representative of the company, and his papers reflect the affairs of state rather than of commerce," Goffman explains.²⁵ Those letters that the Company did send to the ambassador were more supplicating in tone than its correspondence with his predecessors, and were primarily concerned with imploring him to decrease his expenses. A 1663 dispute over compensation and the Company's unwillingness to cover the expenses of the ambassador and his secretary "probably accelerated the company's forfeiture of control to the state, which picked up the purse and with it absolute authority over its ambassador."²⁶ Goffman ascribes the shift in Anglo-Ottoman relations to English domestic political maneuverings.

Upon closer examination, however, these three explanations for the changing nature of the Anglo-Ottoman relationship leave something to be desired. The Levant Company's definitive decline did not begin until the eighteenth century, well after the ambassadorship had begun its definitive shift to the Crown. Although the East India Company eventually overtook the Levant

²² Ibid., 190-191, 194.

²³ Ibid., 201.

²⁴ Ibid., 207.

²⁵ Ibid., 208.

²⁶ Ibid.

Company, the latter's dominant position in the silk trade was secure until the 1680s.²⁷ Far from seeing the Ottomans as a model of imperial rule, English ambassadors frequently remarked on the rampant corruption present in the Ottoman administration and engaged in speculation on the Empire's imminent decline.²⁸ The politically turbulent 1640s, meanwhile, were a period of stability in terms of the ambassadorial appointment.²⁹ In examining the shifting nature of the ambassadorship, it is important to focus on the duality of the ambassador's role. The traditional narratives all assume that the political dimension of the ambassador's role came to eclipse his importance as an agent of English commerce. In actuality, rather than being subordinated to politics, trade itself became political. The separation between the two spheres ceased to exist, and the ambassador's two functions were fused.

Establishing Trade with Turkey

Harborne's voyage did not mark the beginning of commercial contact between England and the Ottoman Empire. The English had traded woolen cloth to Turkey since at least the early fifteenth century, and Levantine goods, such as currants and wine, had long been present in English markets.³⁰ Before Harborne's voyage to Istanbul, there existed two main arteries for Ottoman-English exchange: an overland route via Poland, for which the main entrepôt was Antwerp, and the Mediterranean trade conducted by Venice and Genoa.³¹ Englishmen could—and, on rare occasion, did—trade with Turkey, provided they sailed under the French flag.³²

²⁷ Mather, *Pashas*, 204-208.

²⁸ See, e.g., "The Earl of Winchilsea to Sir Henry Bennet," June 24, 1665, *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch, Volume 1*, 379.

²⁹ Gary M. Bell, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives, 1509-1688* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1990), 285.

³⁰ Halil Inalcik, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600," in Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 1996, 364; Mather, *Pashas*, 34.

³¹ Inalcik, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600," 364.

³² "Giovanni Francesco Moresini, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate," March 4, 1581, *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, Volume 8*, 50-51; Inalcik, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-

Nevertheless, this route was “not heretofore in the memory of any man nowe living knowen to be commonly used and frequented by way of merchandize, by any the Marchants or any Subjects of us, or our progenitors [*sic*],” as the letters patent granted by Elizabeth I to the Turkey Company note.³³ It was not until the closing decades of the sixteenth century that direct trade—English merchants sailing, under the English flag, from their homeland to Istanbul, Aleppo, or another of the Empire’s major commercial centers—was established. Although the government acknowledged the benefits that such a commercial relationship would entail, it was the mercantile community that drove the establishment of relations with Turkey and the foundation of the Turkey Company and its successor, the Levant Company.

Direct trade between England and Turkey held great potential for English merchants because the commercial needs of these two states were reciprocal. England was a source of tin, lead, and steel—raw materials necessary for the production of armaments for Turkey’s frequent wars with Persia—as well as wool, which was used for Ottoman army uniforms. As a Protestant country, England did not have to abide by the papal prohibition on export of these and other military items to the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ Turkey, meanwhile, as the polity that controlled the vast swath of territory stretching from the Maghreb to the Arabian Peninsula, lay between European markets and the Eastern luxuries Europeans craved. The Ottomans controlled the major trading routes for Indian cotton textiles, indigo, and spices, as well as Persian silks. The Empire also exported valuable local produce such as cotton, beeswax, grain, and Anatolian silk.³⁵ By trading

1600,” 365. For early English travel to Ottoman dominions, see, e.g., Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations and Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation, Volume 5* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), 63-63, 109-110, 153-164.

³³ “The letters patents, or privileges graunted by her Majestie to Sir Edward Osborne, Master Richard Staper, and certaine other Marchants of London for their trade into the dominions of the great Turke, in the yeere 1581[*sic*],” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 192.

³⁴ Games, *Web of Empire*, 50; Inalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 188; Mather, *Pashas*, 34-35.

³⁵ Mather, *Pashas*, 24-25.

with the Ottomans directly, rather than through Italian middlemen, English merchants could cut their costs significantly.³⁶

The international situation was also favorable to the establishment of direct trade between England and Turkey. In the 1570s, the Dutch war for independence led to a complete disruption of the Antwerp entrepôt, while Venice's 1570-1573 war with Turkey interrupted the Serene Republic's trade with northern Europe.³⁷ Phillip II's 1580 annexation of Portugal and its colonies further restricted English access to both eastern imports and outlets for English woolen exports.³⁸ With their supply lines disrupted and their competitors otherwise occupied, England's merchants found themselves with both the motivation and the opportunity to establish direct trade with the Ottomans.³⁹

Elizabeth's government also had an interest in the prospect of establishing English trade with Turkey. Indeed, once the Turkey Company was established, the Queen and individuals connected to her contributed £40,000 to the fledgling enterprise's capital, half of the total sum.⁴⁰ Sir Francis Walsingham penned, most likely in 1578, a brief treatise on the potential benefit of establishing a direct commercial relationship with the Ottomans, outlining the steps necessary to undertake such a venture.⁴¹ "You shall vend your own commodities with most profit, which before did fall into strangers' hands," Walsingham writes, explaining the trade's high potential for profitability. "You shall furnish not only this realm but also the most part of the hitherpart of Europe with such commodities as are transported out of the said Turk's dominions to the great

³⁶ Ibid., 35.

³⁷ Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (London: Verso, 2003), 16; Inalcik, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600," 365.

³⁸ Inalcik, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600," 365-366.

³⁹ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 16.

⁴⁰ Mather, *Pashas*, 36.

⁴¹ S.A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey: 1578-1582* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 28.

enriching of this realm.”⁴² Nevertheless, Sir Walsingham was adamant that this would be a venture financed by merchants, recommending, “some apt man ... be sent with her majesty’s letters unto the Turks to procure an ample safe-conduct, who is always to remain there at the charge of the merchants, as agent.”⁴³

While the state granted its support to the establishment of direct trade with the Ottomans, the impetus lay squarely with England’s merchants. It was two such enterprising merchants, Edward Osborne and Richard Staper, who laid the foundations for England’s commercial relationship with Turkey. In 1575, these two prominent members of London’s mercantile community dispatched a pair of agents to Constantinople via Poland, so that they might secure a safe conduct from the sultan for William Harborne, a factor of Osborne’s. Following the successful completion of this mission, Harborne set out for Constantinople in July 1578. Osborne and Staper financed both journeys.⁴⁴ Their investment proved fruitful, for in May 1580, Sultan Murad III issued Harborne a charter of privileges granted to English merchants. This document, which would be the basis for English trade in the Levant for the next three hundred years, established that English subjects were free to trade within Ottoman dominions, English slaves were to be set free, Englishmen living in Turkey would not be liable to taxation, and English ships were not to be plundered. It also conferred on England the right to appoint consuls in major commercial cities.⁴⁵ The following year, Queen Elizabeth, acknowledging that the capitulations

⁴² Sir Francis Walsingham, “A consideration of the trade into Turkey,” in M. Epstein, *The Early History of the Levant Company* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), 245-246.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁴⁴ Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 7-8; Mather, *Pashas*, 36.

⁴⁵ Mather, *Pashas*, 26; “A Latin rendering of the privileges or letters of the most potent Mussulman the Emperor Sultan Mured Khan at the request of Elizabeth, etc. confirming peace and alliance,” *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 14*, 284.

had been obtained “by [their] great adventure and industry, with their great costs and charges,” granted Osborne and Staper letters patent, establishing the monopoly of the Turkey Company.⁴⁶

In addition to laying the foundations for the establishment of the Turkey Company, Harborne’s journey to Constantinople marked the beginning of diplomatic correspondence between the English government and the Ottoman Porte. From the outset, the Crown saw commercial interests as paramount in the English relationship with Turkey. Despite the potential strategic benefits of their alliance, Elizabeth I focused her first letter to Sultan Murad III almost exclusively on the commercial benefits that the opening of trade between England and Turkey would confer on the sultan’s dominions:

The products in which our realm abounds and which those of other princes lack are so necessary for the uses of mankind that no people can be without them, or fail to rejoice when it has obtained them by long and difficult journeys. But everyone sells more dearly to others in proportion as he seeks a living and a profit from his labor. So as the acquisition of those products is advantageous, but the purchase of them from these others burdensome, the advantage to your subjects will be increased by this free access of a few of our people to your land; the burden will be diminished by allowing any of our subjects to go.⁴⁷

This preoccupation with the commercial dimension of the Anglo-Ottoman relationship is also evident in the role envisioned for Harborne when he was appointed as England’s first ambassador to the Porte. On November 20, 1582, Elizabeth granted Harborne a commission to “make, ordain and constitute him our true and undoubted Orator, Messenger, Deputy, and Agent” in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸ His duties and privileges focused on England’s mercantile presence in Turkey. These privileges included the confirmation and ratification of agreements with the sultan, ensuring that English merchants operated within the confines of the privileges

⁴⁶ “The letters patents, or privileges graunted by her Majestie to Sir Edward Osborne, Master Richard Staper, and certaine other Marchants of London,” 192.

⁴⁷ “Her Majesty’s Answer to the Turk’s Letter,” October 25, 1570, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 14*, 76.

⁴⁸ “The Queenes Commission under her great seale, to her servant master William Hareborne, to be her majesties Ambassadour or Agent, in the partes of Turkie,” Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 223.

granted to them by Murad III, determining in which Ottoman ports and cities they were permitted to trade, appointing consuls, and fulfilling “all and singular things whatsoever, which shall seem requisite and convenient for the honest and orderly government of our said subjects, and of the manner of their traffic in those parts.”⁴⁹

The highly commercial nature of England’s new venture in the Levant is illustrated by the fact that most of the men who would become the founding members of the Turkey Company were well-established merchants. The Company’s original joint stock had twelve investors, almost all of whom were extensively involved in the Russian and Spanish trade. Ten of them were members of the Spanish Company, nine were Muscovy Company investors, and eight belonged to both categories. Only one was not involved in either company.⁵⁰ Founding the Turkey Company furthered goals that these merchants had pursued through both the Muscovy Company and the Spanish Company. The overland route from Russia to Persia, which had been established in the 1550s and 1560s, was more dangerous and costlier than the seaborne trade that the Turkey Company conducted, while the Spanish Company’s activities were disrupted by Spain’s hostility to England and Phillip II’s annexation of Portugal.⁵¹ In establishing the Turkey Company, its founding members were both pursuing new commercial opportunities and adjusting their approach to existing commercial ventures. In both regards, their primary concerns were profit and trade.

The Turkey Company experienced almost immediate success. On June 9, 1584, the first English merchant ship, sailing under the English flag, arrived at Constantinople, and England soon became the Ottoman Empire’s most important supplier of key strategic goods, such as

⁴⁹ Ibid., 223-224.

⁵⁰ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 16-17.

gunpowder, arms, tin, and steel.⁵² “At this present juncture the arrival of an English ship with tin, tallow, and a vast quantity of swords among her cargo, has given great satisfaction,” the Venetian ambassador in Constantinople reported to his government in February 1596.⁵³ English merchants also sent cloth, herring, and cod to the Levant.⁵⁴ English cloth exports were highly competitive because of low wages and the availability of inexpensive, native wool. Moreover, the English were able to stabilize their prices, while their competitors were forced to steadily raise prices.⁵⁵ Already in the first half of the seventeenth century, the Levant Company was re-exporting pepper, ginger, indigo, cochineal, sugar, and brazil wood, the fruits of England’s fledgling colonial trades, to Turkey.⁵⁶

The Company’s ships returned to England with valuable cargoes of Anatolian cotton, carpets, and gallnuts; raw silk from Persia; currants, wine, and olive oil from the Mediterranean islands; and spices, drugs, and dyes from India and Indonesia.⁵⁷ The cargo of a single of its ships brought the Turkey Company £70,000 in revenues, in 1588. In 1603, the *Royal Exchange* was reported to be carrying 300,000 ducats’ worth of indigo, silk, spices, bombazine, and other goods.⁵⁸

In January 1592, the Turkey Company merged with the similarly oriented Venice Company to become the Levant Company, an entity that monopolized English trade in the

⁵² Mather, *Pashas*, 29; Inalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 370.

⁵³ “Marco Venier, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate,” February 10, 1596, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, 183.

⁵⁴ Games, *Web of Empire*, 50; Inalcik, “The Ottoman State, Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 188, 370.

⁵⁵ Inalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 370.

⁵⁶ Mather, *Pashas*, 57.

⁵⁷ Inalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 370; Games, *Web of Empire*, 50; “Piero Bondumier, Venetian Governor in Zante, to the Doge and Senate,” January 15, 1603, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, no. 1119.

⁵⁸ Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 17; “Giovanni Carlo Scaramelli, Venetian Secretary in England, to the Doge and Senate,” February 19, 1603, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, no. 1136.

eastern Mediterranean.⁵⁹ This merger established a general pattern of English trade in the Levant—the exchange of woolen cloth, lead, and tin for raw silk in Ottoman ports, and the subsequent purchase of currants and wine in the Greek islands controlled by Venice—that proved to be highly lucrative. Profits from the resale of silk in Europe were very high, enabling Levant Company merchants to dump their woolen cloth and eliminate their Venetian competition.⁶⁰ “They are utterly supplanting your subjects in the carrying trade, weakening your customs and ruining the merchant service, as your Excellencies must be well aware,” the Venetian governor at Zante complained to the doge and senate in February 1603. “They trade in their own ships to the ports of Alexandria, Alexandretta, and Smyrna and other Turkish cities in Asia Minor, and in the Archipelago, where our ships only used to trade, to the great benefit of the State and of private individuals.”⁶¹

From 1620 to 1683, England was the undisputed leader in the Levantine trade.⁶² From 1662 to 1668, the value of the Levant Company’s exports to the Ottoman Empire grew by over 25 percent, while the value of their imports from the Levant increased by 15 percent.⁶³ Although the establishment of the East India Company in 1600 gave the Levant Company serious competition in the importation of spices into England, the Company remained dominant in the highly profitable silk trade.⁶⁴ Indeed, in the 1660s, the Levant Company accounted for the vast

⁵⁹ Inalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 369; Suraiya Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change, 1590-1699,” in Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 368.

⁶⁰ Inalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600,” 369; Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change, 1590-1699,” 523.

⁶¹ “Maffio Michiel, Venetian Governor in Zante, to the Doge and Senate,” February 22, 1603, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, no. 1140.

⁶² Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade, and the Struggle for Land, 1600-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 21.

⁶³ Mather, *Pashas*, 129.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

majority of English silk imports, transporting roughly 280,000 pounds of silk annually.⁶⁵ In addition to their commercial success, Levant Company merchants also enjoyed a high degree of domestic prestige. In 1638, Lewes Roberts remarked that the Levant Company “for all its height and eminency is now second to none other of this land.”⁶⁶ The Company’s membership was described by another contemporary as being “composed of the wealthiest and ablest merchants in the City.”⁶⁷ During the years of the Company’s early prosperity, trade was a matter firmly controlled by merchants, rather than by the state.

Serving Two Masters: The Dual Role of the Ambassador at the Ottoman Porte

The early years of England’s trade with Turkey established enduring patterns that proved crucial to the later development of the Anglo-Ottoman diplomatic and commercial relationship. From the outset, English ambassadors to the Ottoman Porte occupied a dual role. When William Harborne was dispatched to Constantinople as ambassador, he was expected to act on behalf of both the Queen and the Company. Into the eighteenth century, English ambassadors to Constantinople received two sets of instructions, one from the Company, and one from the Crown.⁶⁸ This dual position was unique among English officials in Turkey. Unlike the ambassador, consuls in cities such as Smyrna and Aleppo, although they answered to the ambassador, concerned themselves almost entirely with Company affairs.⁶⁹

While the ambassador was officially a representative of the Crown, he was also a salaried servant of the Company. Harborne’s gifts to the sultan, which included several dogs, an elaborate silver clock, a case of candlesticks, and ten pieces of gold plate, were presented in the name of the Queen, but financed by the Turkey Company, and this precedent was followed for much of

⁶⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁶ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mather, *Pashas*, 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the Levant Company's subsequent history.⁷⁰ In the early decades of the Anglo-Ottoman relationship, the Levant Company selected and paid for England's ambassadors to the Porte, offering them generous salaries.⁷¹ Indeed, when the Company was temporarily dissolved in 1603, there was speculation that the ambassador would be withdrawn.⁷² As one Venetian official put it, "that Company alone as its sole charges maintained the English Ambassador in Constantinople, the Crown contributing nothing but credentials."⁷³

Much of the ambassador's business related directly to the English commercial presence in Turkey. Barton was able to secure the right to export grain from Ottoman territories, something that had been, up to that point, forbidden by imperial decree.⁷⁴ In 1600, Henry Lello, the newly appointed ambassador to Constantinople, renegotiated the English capitulations, securing a customs rate of three percent, down from the previous five or six percent.⁷⁵ On several occasions, ambassadors were instructed by the Company to administer oaths to its merchants operating in the Levant, so that they would be honest in their accounting and refrain from selling goods on credit, on pain of fines to be extracted by the ambassador.⁷⁶ Ambassadors also brought abuses against English merchants to the attention of the Sultan and his officials,

⁷⁰ Susan Skilliter, "William Harborne, The First English Ambassador, 1583-1588," in William Hale and Ali Ihsan Bagis, eds., *Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations* (North Humberside, UK: The Eothen Press, 1984), 17, 21; "The presents made to the Grand Signior and others the chief of his Court by the English ambassador in Constantinople the 24th of April, 1582," *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 15*, 653.

⁷¹ Mather, *Pashas*, 47.

⁷² "Giovanni Carlo Scaramelli, Venetian Secretary in England, to the Doge and Senate, June 13, 1603," *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 10*, no. 91.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ "Copy of a letter sent by the Grand Signior to the Queen of England," January 30, 1592, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, no. 20.

⁷⁵ "Agostino Nani, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate," December 3, 1600, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, no. 936.

⁷⁶ Mather, *Pashas*, 124, 127; "The Levant Company to the Earl of Winchelsea," January 22, 1663, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 3*, 22.

attempted to intercede on behalf of English slaves in Ottoman dominions, and worked to secure English access to various Ottoman ports.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, ambassadors concerned themselves not only with purely commercial matters, but also with those that might be deemed more traditionally diplomatic. Ambassadors provided government officials with intelligence concerning the actions of the Turks and of other European representatives in Constantinople. The reports sent by Edward Barton, who succeeded Harborne as ambassador in 1588, to Walsingham range in topic from the quality of Turkish coins and the prospects for peace between Turkey and Persia to the Imperial ambassador's treatment of his servants.⁷⁸ From the beginning, the English Crown attempted to use its new relationship with the Ottomans to the disadvantage of Spain. Harborne and Barton made repeated attempts to secure Turkish naval assistance in restoring Portugal to its displaced king, Don Antonio, engaging in elaborate calculations as to the best way to bribe the appropriate Ottoman officials into supporting the venture. Various English diplomats also urged the sultan to attack Spain in support of the United Provinces and later France.⁷⁹ These unsuccessful—but remarkably persistent—attempts to draw the Ottoman fleet into conflict with Spain demonstrate the political dimension of the ambassador's role in Constantinople.

England's first ambassadors to the Ottoman Porte were all merchants connected to the Company. This was an unusual arrangement, a fact that did not escape the notice of representatives of the other European states that had a diplomatic presence in Constantinople.

⁷⁷ "Matheo Zane, Venetian Ambassador in Germany, to the Doge and Senate," May 6, 1586, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 8*, 161; "Lorenzo Bernardo, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate," June 23, 1586, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 8*, 172.

⁷⁸ "Edward Barton to [Walsingham?]," March 14, 1589, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 23*, 133; "Edward Barton to [Walsingham?]," August 29, 1588, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 22*, 165.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., "[William Harborne] to [Walsingham?]," August 1, 1588, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 22*, 101; "Edward Barton to [Walsingham?]," August 15, 1588, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 22*, 138; "Agostino Nani, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate," February 20, 1601, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, no. 959.

“The English ambassador has been to the Pasha, and has lodged a vigorous complaint, alleging that the other Ambassadors go about saying he is a merchant and not entitled to the rank of Ambassador,” Giovanni Moresini, Venice’s ambassador at the Porte, reported to his government.⁸⁰ Indeed, Harborne’s mercantile background proved to be a continued point of tension, allowing the French and the Venetians to express the hostility they felt towards the ascendant English commercial presence in the Levant. This hostility is very clearly expressed in an exchange reported by Venice’s representative at the Porte:

The day after the [newly arrived] French Ambassador’s entry, the English Ambassador sent his secretary, and some of his gentlemen, to make the usual complimentary greetings. The secretary began, “My Master the Ambassador,” when the French Ambassador broke into a rage, saying “Ambassador! Why he is a merchant, your master, Ambassador!”⁸¹

Such derision was also directed towards Harborne’s immediate successors, all of whom were mercantile men.⁸²

This abuse directed at England’s early ambassadors is not only a reflection of French and Venetian hostility to English trading interests in the Levant. It is also clearly indicative of the sharp distinction drawn by Harborne’s contemporaries between trade and politics. Their more conventionally diplomatic French and Italian counterparts did not see the Levant Company’s ambassadors as fitting political representatives. Moreover, late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century government representatives saw trade and politics as not only different, but also potentially conflicting, interests. Matheo Zane, Venice’s ambassador to the Porte, suspected Barton of not adhering fully to his political instructions because of his dependence on the

⁸⁰ “Giovanni Francesco Moresini, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate,” May 22, 1584, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 8*, 93.

⁸¹ Lorenzo Bernardo, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate,” April 12, 1586, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 8*, 154.

⁸² See, e.g., “Simon Contarini, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate,” February 25, 1612, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 12*, no. 444.

mercantile community. “Probably the Ambassador used language suited to the inclination of the Turks and the position of affairs, rather than expressly ordered by the Queen,” Zane wrote to the Venetian doge and senate. “He is dependent on the English merchants who pay his salary and employ him in the interests of their trade.”⁸³

The Company and the Crown also perceived this distinction between political and commercial interests. In the first months of James I’s reign, the Levant Company decided to disband and renounce its charter, claiming that it could not make the annual payment of four thousand pounds that it had promised the Crown during Elizabeth’s reign, and that it “could only meet the charges of the Ambassador.”⁸⁴ This was a political maneuver meant to decrease the Company’s financial duties to the monarch. The king replied, however, that “it was a matter of no moment to him that an Ambassador should reside at Constantinople, as he had no wish to continue friendly relations with the Turk,” adding, “if the Company found an ambassador necessary to their own interests they must pay for him themselves.”⁸⁵ When Company officials saw that the king would not lower his financial demands, they petitioned for, and subsequently received, the reinstatement of their charter.⁸⁶ Because it did not aid James I’s political interests to maintain an ambassador at Constantinople, the king felt no compulsion to support the diplomatic post for commercial reasons.

Monetary questions continued to be points of contention. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Levant Company became increasingly vocal in its opposition to the use of its money in the carrying out of state business. Heneage Finch, Earl of Winchelsea and cousin

⁸³ “Matheo Zane, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, to the Doge and Senate,” November 21, 1593, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 9*, 110.

⁸⁴ “Nicolo Molin, Venetian Ambassador in England, to the Doge and Senate,” February 18, 1604, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 10*, no. 190.

⁸⁵ “Nicolo Molin, Venetian Ambassador in England, to the Doge and Senate,” March 4, 1604, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 10*, no. 278.

⁸⁶ “Nicolo Molin, Venetian Ambassador in England, to the Doge and Senate,” March 4, 1604, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 10*, no. 192.

to the speaker of the House of Commons of the same name, served as ambassador from 1661 to 1668, and engaged in heated disputes with Company officials over the financial resources with which they provided him. Finch decried the Company's "preposterous frugality," claiming it interfered with his ability to carry out the king's work.⁸⁷ "His Majesty's private instructions cannot be observed, for the Company disown the charges of what is done for him, he makes no provision for them, and in this country, nothing can be done without money [*sic*]," Finch complained.⁸⁸ Company officials corresponded not only with Finch, but also with his wife, regarding monetary disputes between themselves and the ambassador.⁸⁹

These disputes are indicative of the shifting nature of the ambassadorship. Finch saw his role as servant to Charles II, while the Levant Company declined to finance what it saw as political, rather than commercial, expenses. The Company refused, for instance, to cover expenses associated with Finch's trips to Adrianople or journeys undertaken by his secretary, Paul Rycaut, contending that these were carried out "on business of State, and not of [the Company's] concernment."⁹⁰ They also refused to reimburse expenses incurred by Finch in entertaining the Dutch ambassador for the same reason.⁹¹ The Company pointedly noted that its financial resources "were no more to be disbursed without consent than those of a private person."⁹² Company officials also complained to the Crown, contesting that they should only be

⁸⁷ "The Earl of Winchelsea to Sir Henry Bennet," June 24, 1665, *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch, Volume 1*, 379.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ "Sir And. Riccard, Governor of the Levant Company, to the Countess of Winchelsea," July 31, 1668, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 8*, 513.

⁹⁰ "Levant Company to the Earl of Winchelsea," September 16, 1663, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 3*, 273; "Levant Company to the Earl of Winchelsea," March 14, 1664, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 3*, 516.

⁹¹ "Levant Company to the Earl of Winchelsea," September 8, 1668, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 8*, 575.

⁹² "Levant Company to the Earl of Winchelsea," December 23, 1663, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 3*, 387.

liable for those expenses incurred in “support of their trade.”⁹³ This trend continued, and by the time of William Trumbull’s tenure as ambassador at the Porte (1686-1691), the Levant Company’s refusal to countenance any expenses deemed “political” was well established.⁹⁴

Trade as Politics: The Ambassador’s Role Transformed

In order to understand the nature of the shift that occurred in Anglo-Ottoman relations, it is useful to examine the backgrounds of the ambassadors who represented the English monarch and the Levant Company in Constantinople. William Harborne was born around 1542, in the port town of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, where he was exposed to a commercial environment from a young age. His family lived on Yarmouth’s South Quay, surrounded by the activity of a busy harbor, and Harborne left home at about age seventeen to work as a commercial agent abroad. He worked for some time as a factor for Edward Osborne, and Harborne is listed as one of the principal members of the Spanish Company in its 1577 incorporation documents.⁹⁵ Harborne was first a merchant, as observed and criticized by his foreign contemporaries. His background is characteristic of England’s early ambassadors to the Ottoman Porte. Harborne’s successor, Edward Barton, spent his entire adult life in service of the Company, while Paul Pindar, who served as ambassador from 1611 to 1620, was a merchant involved with the Venetian trade before becoming the Company’s consul at Aleppo.⁹⁶

⁹³ “Sir Andrew Riccard, Governor of the Levant Company, to Secretary Bennett,” October 12, 1664, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 4*, 30.

⁹⁴ C.J. Heywood, “English Diplomatic Relations with Turkey, 1689-1698,” in William Hale and Ali Ihsan Bagis, eds., *Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations* (North Humberside, UK: The Eothen Press, 1984), 34; Bell, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives, 1509-1688*, 287.

⁹⁵ Susan Skilliter, “William Harborne, The First English Ambassador, 1583-1588,” in William Hale and Ali Ihsan Bagis, eds., *Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations* (North Humberside, UK: The Eothen Press, 1984) 10-11.

⁹⁶ Christine Woodhead, ‘Barton, Edward (1562/3–1598)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1597>, accessed 21 Oct 2009]; Robert Ashton, ‘Pindar, Sir Paul (1565/6–1650)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22291>, accessed 21 Oct 2009]

Over time, however, the position of ambassador to Constantinople fell increasingly to aristocrats and government officials. The prestige of the posting increased as well. Sir Richard Bulstrode, who served as the English agent in Brussels under Charles II and James II, called Constantinople “a post of more honor, and profit, than Paris.”⁹⁷ In the second half of the seventeenth century, the ambassadorship was given to men such as Heneage Finch, second earl of Winchelsea; his kinsman Sir John Finch; James Brydges, eighth baron Chandos; and Sir William Trumbull.⁹⁸ Lord Paget, the last ambassador to Constantinople appointed in the seventeenth century, epitomizes this shift. William, seventh baron Paget, came from a firmly aristocratic background. The eldest son of William Paget, sixth baron Paget, Paget served in the House of Lords from 1678 until 1689, when he was appointed English ambassador to Vienna, a post he held until mid-1692. In January of the following year, Paget was dispatched, as William III’s ambassador to Constantinople, for a strictly political purpose—the arrangement of peace between Turkey and the Habsburgs, and, by extension, cementing the alliance between William and Emperor Leopold I.⁹⁹ Although it took him until January 1698, it was Paget who ultimately negotiated the peace settlement that formed the basis for the Treaty of Karlowitz.¹⁰⁰ His role in a major diplomatic success is a significant departure from Harborne’s preoccupation with customs duties and privateers.

Paget is emblematic of the transformation undergone by the ambassadorship over the course of the seventeenth century. This change occurred both in how the ambassadorship was

⁹⁷ C.J. Heywood, “Sir Paul Rycaut, a Seventeenth-Century Observer of the Ottoman State: Notes for a Study,” in Ezel Kural Shaw and C.J. Heywood, *English and Continental Views of the Ottoman Empire: 1500-1800* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1972), 50; J. D. Davies, ‘Bulstrode, Sir Richard (1617–1711)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3930, accessed 12 Dec 2009]

⁹⁸ Bell, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives*, 286-287.

⁹⁹ Colin Heywood, ‘Paget, William, seventh Baron Paget (1637–1713)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21124, accessed 10 Dec 2009]; Heywood, “English Diplomatic Relations with Turkey, 1689-1698,” 26-27.

¹⁰⁰ Heywood, “English Diplomatic Relations with Turkey, 1689-1698,” 38.

perceived by the men who occupied it, and in the attitudes of the Crown and the Company toward the posting. Convinced that his presence as ambassador in Constantinople concerned the king more than it had previous monarchs, Heneage Finch considered it appropriate that the government should contribute to his salary:

I believe I have that share of matters of state in my hands which former English ambassadors could never pretend to ... and may deserve to be regarded as one of a greater trust that the mere concernment of merchandize and trafficke, and consequently to have other encouragements from his Majesty, and allowances thereunto, than the merchants' pension [*sic*].¹⁰¹

By the time William Paget served as ambassador in the 1690s, the Crown, indeed, provided him with money for his equipage, his “ordinary entertainment,” as well as his “extraordinary expenses.”¹⁰²

While ambassadors came to see themselves primarily as the king's servants, the Levant Company was increasingly excluded from the selection of England's diplomatic representatives at the Porte. The question of who had the right to appoint ambassadors—the Company or the Crown—was an ambiguous one. The Company's 1605 charter gave the Company the right to appoint consuls, but it made no mention of the ambassadorship.¹⁰³ The precedent of the Company choosing an ambassador, and then presenting its choice to the king, began to give way in the 1620s. But, for the next few decades, a compromise was usually reached between the Company and the king in making the final appointment.¹⁰⁴ As trade became increasingly a matter of state, however, the monarch gained the upper hand in ambassadorial appointments to

¹⁰¹ “The Earl of Winchilsea to Sir Heneage Finch,” August 20, 1661, *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch, Volume 1*, 145.

¹⁰² “William and Mary: April 1689”, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: William and Mary, 1689-90* (1895), pp. 47-84. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57538&strquery=Paget> Date accessed: 12 December 2009. >

“William and Mary: April 1695”, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: William and Mary, 1694-5* (1906), pp. 415-450. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57822&strquery=Paget> Date accessed: 20 December 2009. >

¹⁰³ Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 87.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-88; Mather, *Pashas*, 140.

the Porte. This change was clearly expressed by Sir John Finch, ambassador from 1672 to 1682, who contended, “the Company had no more authority to choose ambassadors than [a] servant had, and that they might as well coin money, or raise men.”¹⁰⁵

The first definitive move in this direction occurred in June 1660, when Charles II informed the Company that he intended to recall Sir Thomas Bendish and replace him with Heneage Finch, the first peer to hold the ambassadorship, as he was “a person whose quality may raise the reputation of the office.”¹⁰⁶ This change occurred despite the Company’s desire that Bendish continue his appointment as ambassador, and was the first instance in which the king’s will was imposed against the Company’s will (Company authorities had rejected royal recommendations under Charles I, for instance).¹⁰⁷ Finch was still expected to look after England’s commercial interests in the Levant. “The principal part of your employment is to protect our merchants in their lawful trade and to assist them in the orderly government thereof,” the Crown’s 1660 instructions to Finch explained.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Finch would fulfill his duty as a servant of the king, rather than the Company.

The transference of the ambassador’s commercial duties from the Company to the Crown is illustrated by the instructions sent to Finch’s successor. In 1667, Charles II wrote to the Company that he had recalled the Earl of Winchelsea from his post in Constantinople, as he had served there longer than was customary, and announced that he had chosen as Finch’s replacement Sir Daniel Harvey.¹⁰⁹ Whereas they wrote directly to Paul Rycaut, then Consul at

¹⁰⁵ Sir John Finch’s Notebook,” *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch, Volume 2*, 152-153; Bell, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives*, 287.

¹⁰⁶ “The King to the Turkey Company,” June 25, 1660, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II Volume 1*, 65.

¹⁰⁷ “Sir Andrew Riccard, governor, and the Levant Company, to Sir Thos. Bendish, ambassador,” October 17, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, 1660-1661*, 315; Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Mather, *Pashas*, 135.

¹⁰⁹ “The King to the Turkey Company,” December 28, 1667, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 8*, 103.

Smyrna, instructing him to “help suppress false and adulterated moneys,” Company officials requested that the king “direct his ambassador to intimate to the Grand Vizir and the Sultan the ill consequences of permitting such coins to be imported and passed in payment.”¹¹⁰ The Crown did not only appoint Harvey, it also gave him instructions that can be deemed strictly commercial, something that had previously been done by Company officials.

The Company briefly regained its voice in nominating ambassadors, in the 1680s, before definitively losing its authority in the years following the Glorious Revolution. In 1691, William Hussey died en route to taking his post as ambassador in Constantinople. William III selected William Harbord to replace Hussey, instructing him to travel first to Vienna, in order to confer with the Emperor about a potential peace settlement with the Turks. This was a purely political appointment, made without as much as a pretence of consulting the Levant Company.¹¹¹ Lord Paget, who was then serving as English ambassador to Vienna, was to inform the Emperor and his ministers that “Mr. Harbord is sent on purpose for this service; for he is not to stay as ordinary ambassador for the merchants.”¹¹² From 1691 on, the Company lost all its authority in selecting the ambassador, and was merely presented with the royal choice for unanimous ratification.¹¹³

It was not only the choice of ambassador that fell increasingly to the Crown. The Company was also beginning to lose its control over purely commercial questions. In 1663, Charles II conducted negotiations with the Ottoman sultan concerning English trade in Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, without the knowledge of Company officials. “The negotiations with the

¹¹⁰ “Levant Company to Consul Rycout,” May 21, 1668, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 8*, 402. “Order of a general court of the Levant Company,” June 16, 1668, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, Volume 8*, 441.

¹¹¹ Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 133.

¹¹² “Nottingham to Lord Pagett,” October 30, 1691, *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch, Volume 3*, 293.

¹¹³ Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 133-135.

Porte required so much secrecy that, although the Company has to bear part of the charge, they could not be communicated to it until placed beyond responsibility of miscarriage,” the king explained in a letter to the Company.¹¹⁴ During his tenure as ambassador, Sir John Finch noted that Charles saw commerce as a means of exerting political pressure on the Turks, because “no nation could furnish them with tinn or leade but himselfe, nor with cloth so good as that of England [*sic*].”¹¹⁵ Finch criticized the instructions he had received from the Company as a violation of the royal prerogative, an attempt at wielding authority that the merchants “could no more exercise than the whole city, nor neither of them more than a company of cobblers.”¹¹⁶ When two merchants informed Finch that the Company intended to send him orders to intercede with the Grand Signor on behalf of an English merchant, he curtly told them that he “supposed they meant the Company would desire the King to send [him] such an order.”¹¹⁷ Whereas, in the early decades of the Anglo-Ottoman relationship, the English government lacked any concept of trade policy, by the second half of the sixteenth century, trade was becoming a political matter, the province of the state.¹¹⁸

A similar affront to Company authority occurred, in 1673, when the English consul in Venice, “without making any communication to the Levant Company, which gives the rule in such matters, ... obtained from his Britannic Majesty ... an order to impose on all effects and merchandise brought to this mart in English ships a charge of half a ducat per ton.”¹¹⁹ The Council of Trade confirmed this tariff, which the Venetians deemed “intolerable.” It was heatedly disapproved of by the Levant Company, however, which expressed as much in a letter

¹¹⁴ “The King to the Levant Company,” December 22, 1663, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II*, Volume, 385.

¹¹⁵ “Sir John Finch’s Notebook,” *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch*, Volume 2, 148.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹¹⁷ “Sir John Finch’s Notebook,” *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of the Late Allan George Finch*, Volume 2, 153.

¹¹⁸ Mather, *Pashas*, 136.

¹¹⁹ “To the Most Illustrious Savii alla Mercanzia.” May 9, 1673, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, Volume 38, no. 71.

to Venetian authorities.¹²⁰ “So far as we are concerned we have never approved and what he has obtained was not at our instance, indeed directly opposite. In our opinion it is a charge that will injure trade and navigation,” the Company wrote.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the Company could do little to circumvent the will of the Crown. “I suspect that the merchants of the Levant Company here will not have the courage to say as much as they wrote,” the Venetian secretary in England confided to his government.¹²² Disheartened by the opposition they encountered from government officials, “they do not dare to venture any fresh remarks, anticipating difficulties and even greater obstinacy on the part of the Ministry.”¹²³ Commercial policy had fallen firmly within the jurisdiction of the Crown.

Conclusion

The Anglo-Ottoman relationship was initiated, in the 1570s, by two merchants who hoped to supplement and expand their Spanish and Russian commercial enterprises. In these early years, the impetus for establishing relations with the Porte came from private individuals rather than from the Crown. Consequently, the Levant Company controlled the appointment of English ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire. Although they did participate in diplomatic questions, such as potential Turkish naval intervention against Spain, the early ambassadors were all mercantile men who spent most of their lives in the service of the Company. Over the course of seventeenth century, however, this early model for Anglo-Ottoman relations underwent a gradual but significant change. The ambassadorship became more prestigious and more

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ “Letter Written from England upon the tariff of the Consul Hayes in reply to the merchants of this mart,” March 6, 1673, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 38*, no. 72.

¹²² “Girolamo Alberti, Venetian Secretary in England, to the Doge and Senate,” June 2, 1673, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 38*, no. 83.

¹²³ “Girolamo Alberti, Venetian Secretary in England, to the Doge and Senate,” June 9, 1673, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, Volume 38*, no. 84.

aristocratic. Its occupants began to see themselves as servants of the king, rather than the Company, and the Crown took an increased interest in the commercial aspects of their role.

This shift in the nature of the ambassadorship, marked by turning points, in 1661, and 1691, resulted from the rise of trade as a matter of state. The ambassador's political role did not supersede his commercial function. Rather, the mercantile dimension of the ambassadorship became part of the ambassador's role as the Crown's representative. This altered role of England's ambassador at the Porte is significant because it is indicative of a broader change in the nature of the English government. As politics became less universalist, and more oriented towards the pragmatic benefits of economic dominance, commercial policy emerged as an aspect of the modern state.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Steve Pincus, "From holy cause to economic interest: the study of population and the invention of the state," in *A Nation Transformed: England After the Restoration*, Alan Craig Houston and Steven C. Pincus, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 274-275.

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