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Research Articles

From Berlin to Istanbul: The First Balkan Passengers of the Ottoman-German Alliance*

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Abstract: At the beginning of World War I, the Ottoman Empire and Germany signed a secret alliance treaty, which obligated Germany to protect Ottoman territories. Although the Ottoman government initially declared neutrality, it had committed to joining the war on Germany's side once mobilization was complete. This necessitated strengthening the defence of strategic locations, particularly the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. At the same time, the Ottoman Navy had to be reinforced. In August 1914, to fortify the straits and navy, more than 500 German military and technical personnel, led by Admiral Guido von Usedom, were secretly transported to Istanbul via the Balkans. To avoid attracting attention, the journey was conducted under civilian disguise with careful planning. This operation marked the first major military deployment under the alliance and significantly increased German influence in Istanbul while the Ottoman Empire was still officially neutral. The article examines this journey through the accounts of German officers and archival documents.

Keywords: Ottoman, German Empire, World War I, Balkan journey, Straits.

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Introduction

The secret treaty of alliance signed between the Ottoman Empire and the German Empire at the outbreak of the First World War obliged Germany to protect Ottoman territory. Although this treaty was secret and the Ottoman government initially declared its armed neutrality, it was promised to join the war on the side of Germany as soon as it completed its mobilisation preparations. This situation required the highest level of defence preparations against the Entente powers. The foremost preparation had to be made against threats to the capital. It was obvious that for the Ottoman Empire, joining the war on the side of Germany would mean that the Entente states would target the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, the two gateways to the capital Istanbul.

It was in such conjuncture that a special German unit was organised for the purpose of fortifying the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and made its way to Istanbul via the Balkans in mid-August 1914. The main purpose here was to make the Straits ready for war within the framework of the war objectives of the secret alliance. Admiral Guido von Usedom was appointed as the head of the Special Command for Turkey, which was established within the German Imperial Navy upon requests from Istanbul, and more than five hundred German naval military and technical personnel under his command travelled to Istanbul by rail via the Balkans. However, this journey was not to be a conspicuous and military dispatch, but rather a civilian and clandestine one. Plans and assignments were made in advance to avoid problems on the route to Istanbul via Austria-Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Despite the measures taken, problems encountered necessitated changes in the plans from time to time.

This voyage was important as it took place shortly after the signing of the secret treaty and was the first major shipment of military personnel within the framework of the alliance. It was also a development that increased German influence in Istanbul at a time when the Ottoman Empire was still neutral. In this study, the story of the journey that started from the shipyards of Northern Germany in the first weeks of the First World War and reached Istanbul via the Balkans will be discussed through the narratives of some German experts and officers who participated in the above-mentioned voyage and the reports reflected in the German archive.

Despite the close allied relationship between the two nations during World War I and the abundance of primary sources, the scarcity of research focusing on Germany's effectiveness within Ottoman headquarters and at the fronts has been the starting point of this study. Specifically, the rapid formation and deployment of the Special Command for Turkey to defend the Straits clearly demonstrates the significance Germany placed on the Ottoman Empire and the strategic importance of Straits in its World War I strategy. This special command directly contributed to the defence capacity of the Straits, playing a critical role in the success of its defence. This contribution can be observed during key periods, starting with the mobilization phase, particularly in the autumn of 1914, when the Ottoman Empire was preparing for war. It continued throughout 1915 when the Allied forces attempted to cross the Dardanelles, and in ensuring the security of the Straits region until 1918. This article aims to shed light on the early effectiveness of the German Imperial Navy in defending the Turkish Straits, an often-overlooked aspect of the Ottoman-German alliance.

Arbitration of the Straits: Special Command of the German Imperial Navy in Turkey [Sonderkommando der Kaiserliche Marine in der Türkei]

The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles were strategic waterways leading to Istanbul, and their security was vital for protecting the capital of the Ottoman Empire in case of a naval attack. The loss of these straits could have led to the occupation of the Ottoman capital, Istanbul, and consequently to the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire—Ger€les straits accelerated.

After the passage of the German battleships SMS Goeben and SMS Breslau, which would play a decisive role in the Ottoman entry into the war, through the Dardanelles on 10 August 1914 under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Anton Souchon (Souchon, 1921), the issue of the fortification of the Straits became an even more important agenda item. Two days after arriving in Istanbul on the battleship Goeben, Admiral Souchon, Commander of the German Mediterranean Division [Deutsche Mittelmeer-Division], held a meeting with Liman von Sanders, Head of the German Military Mission in Istanbul. Admiral Souchon was

de facto put in charge of the Ottoman Navy immediately after his arrival in Istanbul. In his meeting with Sanders, Souchon emphasized that the Dardanelles should be strengthened with all available means, that German naval officers and necessary personnel should be requested for this purpose, and that an effective wireless telegraph system should be established to monitor the Straits. Admiral Souchon aimed to establish an effective communication system between Berlin and the defence of the Straits by stationing German personnel in the Straits and in the large communications centre in Istanbul Okmeydanı (Yavuz, 2000: 145). According to the German Ambassador in Istanbul, Hans von Wangenheim, who reported to Berlin on 17 August 1914, Admiral Souchon had the authority to call for German officers or personnel for employment in the Ottoman Navy (PA AA, R 13320; BArch MA, RM 40/55: 5). In addition, Enver Pasha wrote to the Ministry of the Navy on 13 August that naval elements had been placed under Admiral Souchon's command and that his requests for materials and personnel should be fulfilled immediately, and this information was also conveyed to Souchon (BArch MA, RM 40/420: 140-141). The person who provided the communication between Admiral Souchon and the Minister of War Enver Pasha on these issues was the German Naval Attaché Hans Humann (BArch MA, RM 40/420: 136).

Admiral Souchon made plans as soon as he arrived in Istanbul and sent a telegram to Berlin on 15 August requesting naval officers, personnel and materials from Germany for coastal defence, navy and other necessary positions (Mäkelä, 1936: 129; Lorey, 1946: 3). The request for personnel and material, which Admiral Souchon in Istanbul personally conveyed to the German Emperor, was quickly responded to in Germany. In a short time, the Special Command of the German Imperial Navy in Turkey [Sonderkommando der Kaiserliche Marine in der Türkei] was organised under the command of Admiral Guido von Usedom. Retired Admiral Guido von Usedom, who was known to be close to the German Emperor, was personally preferred by Wilhelm II (BArch MA, RM 40/59: 16).

Thus, within the framework of the Ottoman-German secret military alliance dated August 2, 1914, one of the most important steps taken after the German warships in the Mediterranean (Goeben and Breslau) took refuge in Ottoman waters was the establishment of a special command unit aimed at fortifying the Straits. The main purpose of this newly established special command, which

was sent to Turkey, was to strengthen the coastal fortifications within the framework of the Turkish-German war goals, to make the defence of the Straits ready for war, and thus to create the basis for the Ottoman entry into the war. In the same way, another goal was to supplement the specialized navy personnel for the Ottoman Navy and to increase the offensive power of the navy (Janson, 1928: 64, 70; Lorey, 1946: 3; Hildebrand, 2000: 63).

Personnel Selection and Preparation Process for the Command

Upon the request sent to Germany by Admiral Souchon, who was in Istanbul, correspondence was immediately started for the determination of personnel who would be assigned to the Ottoman Empire and the execution of the necessary procedures. For this purpose, a top-secret telegram sent from Istanbul on 15 August 1914 under the signature of Naval Captain [Richard] Ackermann, captain of the Goeben battleship on behalf of the Commander of the German Mediterranean Division, was submitted to the information of the Chief of Staff of the Imperial German Navy and the Minister of the Navy the next day. In this telegram, the demands of Admiral Souchon, Commander of the Mediterranean Division, for the defence of the Dardanelles and Istanbul Straits were expressed as two admirals for the command, 10 naval officers, as many artillery commanders, rangefinders, gunboat commanders, mine technicians and pointers. Admiral Souchon also requested 10 naval officers, 10 engineers, 30 gunsmiths, 10 torpedo masters, 10 pointers, 60 torpedo technicians and machine personnel to be assigned to Turkish warships and torpedo boats. Thus, the telegram stated that the British Naval Mission personnel, who had been active in the Ottoman Navy until then, would now be replaced by German officers, engineers and technicians (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 3). Efforts were started to send the requested personnel without delay, and information about the personnel planned to be sent to Turkey was forwarded to Admiral Souchon (Wolf, 2014: 86-87).

In those days, the selection of the first volunteers and the preparation process at the naval bases in the port cities in the north of Germany were remarkable. Then, with the participation of other troops, the journey, which started on June

20 and continued through Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria to Istanbul, lasted about ten days. Memoirs and archive reports provide important information about both the selection of volunteers, the gathering in Berlin, and the long and adventurous journey that lasted ten days.

One of the sources providing information on this issue is a German naval non-commissioned officer named Erwin Bossert, who will later be stationed at the Orhaniye Bastion at the entrance to the Dardanelles Strait. Bossert gives interesting information about the assembly and preparation process of this special unit in his memoir. According to Bossert, on the afternoon of August 16, the entire marine artillery unit was called together in the barracks courtyard. In the courtyard, their commanders made a short speech and announced that a special volunteer corps would be established on behalf of the German Emperor. Those who would join this unit were not supposed to be married. According to the brief speech of their commander, this particular mission could have been quite boring, but it could also have been very, very interesting. Gunners, rangefinders, specialists with mine training were wanted for heavy calibre and rapid-firing firearms. Only the most perfect candidates suitable for dispatch and administration could be considered. It was also promised that adequate assistance would be provided to the people left behind and dependents in case of death. According to Bossert, everyone who was there thought that this secret mission could be very interesting.

Before long, about 50 sailors from different ranks, including himself, stepped forward and signed up as volunteers. The volunteers' identity details were recorded, as well as the details of their relatives so that they could be notified in case of death and so that their civilian clothes and other belongings could be sent. So, they volunteered for a special mission, the location of which had not yet been announced, and they had nothing to do but prepare for it. The next day at 1 o'clock in the afternoon they assembled in the barracks yard. After a warm farewell speech by the commanding officer and congratulations from the friends left behind, they set off for Berlin, where they were to meet with volunteers from other Marine units. There they would also learn the details of the purpose of this special mission.

They stayed overnight at the deck officer school in Berlin, where they met their comrades from naval bases such as Wilhelmshaven, Cuxhaven, Wangeroog and Lehe. Thus, they formed a unit of about 400 men. In their conversations in the canteen of the deck officer school, they exchanged ideas about what purpose they would serve. There were different ideas about where and what kind of mission awaited them. Bossert wrote that no one thought about sleep that night; everyone's mind was on the loved ones they had left behind. Would they ever see them again? Early on the morning of 18 August they were taken to a gymnasium. There were racks on which thousands of new civilian clothes were hung. There were piles of hats, underwear and shoes on the floor. Naval Captain Meerscheidt Hüllessem then introduced himself as the leader of this special journey. Afterwards, there was no one left in the hall but the newly formed team and the doors were locked. There was a deathly silence, followed by the following announcement: 'His Majesty has chosen to send you through neutral countries to the Straits. This is the key to Turkey and we will defend it to the last man against any attack.' After the statement, if anyone thought that they could not fulfil this task, they were asked to come forward, but no one did so (Bossert, 1925: 9-11).

It is understood that the personnel designated to serve in the Ottoman Empire set off in groups by railway to converge at the main stations after the preparations were completed within a few days. The German Foreign Office informed Vienna about the continuation of this journey. A topsecret coded telegram dated 19 August 1914, signed by Arthur Zimmermann, Undersecretary of German Foreign Affairs, was sent to the Embassy in Vienna (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 10). In the telegram, it was reported that approximately 600 German officers, engineers and shipyard workers would be travelling to Istanbul via Oderberg, Budapest, Romania and Bulgaria to be assigned to Goeben, Breslau and Turkish ships, and that the first group of 85 people would depart early the next morning. According to the information given, the personnel would present themselves as technicians and labourers, would be dressed in civilian clothes and would carry only personal needs and foodstuffs. In the letter, it was requested that the German personnel in question be provided with effortless and duty-free passage. It was also requested that the train and customs personnel be kept in the strictest secrecy and be instructed to act accordingly. In the handwritten draft

in the continuation of the same file, the names of 26 senior officers, 10 staff officers, 169 non-commissioned officers, 253 sailors and 89 sailors for the Breslau are given (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 22-23).

On the other hand, according to the information received from the German Ambassador to Romania [Julius von] Waldthausen, it was stated that the shipments to be made should be carried out very quickly due to the increase in espionage activities in Romania. Especially in Bucharest, it was advised to continue on the road without delay and the personnel should be advised not to talk among themselves or with strangers (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 9).

During this preparatory process, a directive was also drawn up regarding the status of the soldiers and personnel of the German Navy who were newly sent to Turkey and those who were already there. According to the directive dated 19 August 1914 and signed by [Eduard von] Capelle, Deputy Minister of the Imperial Navy (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 11), naval personnel, both those sent to the Ottoman Empire on special missions and those who were there voluntarily, were to remain active members of the Imperial German Navy and German citizens. If the course of the war also necessitated his enlistment in Turkish service, the Emperor's approval was required. In such a case, their military or citizenship ties with Germany would remain intact. In addition, it was stated that their salaries would be paid according to their ranks, and that the German Navy would undertake this if the Turkish government could not afford it. Even if there was a problem in Turkey and a claim was made, the rights of both the personnel and those they left behind would be regulated according to German law.

At the same time, Admiral Guido von Usedom was informed of the details of the task he was to undertake as head of the Special Command for Turkey. In a secret letter dated 20 August 1914, signed by von Capelle, Deputy Minister of the Imperial Navy, and sent to Admiral Usedom, it was stated that he had been assigned the task of delivering reinforcements to the German Mediterranean Fleet in Istanbul on the occasion of his appointment as the head of the Special Command. According to the information given in the letter, these reinforcements were to be travelled from Berlin to Budapest by special trains prepared by the German and Austrian General Staffs, and their necessary needs such as food etc. were to

be met at the stations. No difficulties were expected at the Austrian frontier. In Budapest, the German Naval Attaché, Naval Major Baron von Freyberg, would wait for them and take care of the continuation of the shipment. He was given instructions to continue the shipment through Romania and Bulgaria. All weapons and uniforms were to be left in Budapest first and sent later. During the transport through Romania and Bulgaria, nothing was to attract attention and secrecy was to be maintained at the highest level. Personnel were forbidden to converse with strangers. The manner in which the shipment from Budapest was to proceed was left to the discretion of Admiral Usedom and the ambassador. German representatives in Romania and Bulgaria, still neutral, were informed that the shipment would be in transit. Their help would only be forthcoming in cases of extreme urgency. The troops were to take enough food with them to get through these two countries. Finally, Admiral Usedom was told that he could charge the expenses necessary to fulfil this mission to the Imperial account (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 13-14). Thus, Admiral Usedom would be the head of this special command between 19 August 1914 and 2 November 1918, in other words, from its formation shortly after the signing of the Ottoman-German Alliance until its dissolution in the days following the signing of the Armistice of Mudros (Altıntaş, 2023, 2024b: 183; Hildebrand, 2000: 63).

An Extraordinary Journey from Northern Germany to Istanbul

The records indicate that upon the request sent from Istanbul to Berlin, work started immediately on determining the German personnel to serve in the Ottoman Empire. For this purpose, intensive preparations took place in the northern German port cities of Kiel and Wilhelmshaven between 15-20 August 1914. In addition, the possibility of encountering some difficulties on the route of the journey was quite high. As a matter of fact, the attitude of Romania in the first weeks of the war required special precautionary measures to be taken in order to avoid difficulties during the passage of the shipment. Therefore, all personnel had to travel in civilian clothes. All volunteers enrolled in the unit had to appear as shipyard labourers and officers as civil servants. The part of the personnel

shipment from Kiel and Wilhelmshaven arrived in Berlin on 21 August 1914 (BArch MA, RM 40/59: 16).

Medical Captain Wilhelm Rosenberger, who was among the personnel who served in Turkey, like artillery non-commissioned officer Erwin Bossert, also provided information about this journey in his report (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 34-39). Dr Rosenberger also provided information about this voyage and his duties in the medical field in the Straits Command in an article he wrote in the following years (Rosenberger, 1935: 89-91). According to Rosenberger's account in his report, the train carrying the first 150 personnel designated for the special command departed Kiel at 6.55 a.m. on 20 August and arrived at Berlin's central railway station (Lehrter Bahnhof) at night. Approximately 80 personnel from Wilhelmshaven had already arrived in Berlin. The members of the special unit spent the night in the barracks of the 2nd Guards Regiment in Berlin. The entire contingent departed for Turkey on 21 August on their allocated trains. The officer in charge of the party was Naval Captain Meerscheidt Hüllessem. The medical staff consisted of Navy doctor Wilhelm Rosenberger, assistant doctor Zacharias-Langhans and two paramedics. Since the journey had to be made through neutral countries, the officers and men were dressed as civilians. They had to identify themselves as engineers, assemblers and factory workers. All non-commissioned officers and enlisted men wore civilian suits, shirts and hats. The military uniforms and other belongings were packed in cartons and travelled in luggage to Budapest. However, these items had to be left there to be sent back after a while. Rosenberger wrote that these items only reached their owners in October and were subjected to numerous thefts (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 34).

A list of the German naval officers involved in the shipment and a table on the number of low-ranking military personnel is included in the archive report. Accordingly, 26 officers and enlisted personnel, including the commander, are listed below (BArch MA, RM 40/59: 16-17, 20).

List of officers involved in the expedition:

1. Vice Admiral z. D.[1] Merten
2. Captain (Navy) z. D. von Kühlwetter
3. Captain (Navy) Baron von Meerscheid-Hüllessen
4. Lieutenant Commander Wossidlo
5. Lieutenant Commander E. von Müller
6. Lieutenant Commander Baron von Kottwitz
7. Captain Second Lieutenant von Janson
8. Captain Second Lieutenant Conn
9. Captain Second Lieutenant Firle
10. Captain Second Lieutenant Baron von Fircks
11. First Lieutenant at Sea z. D. Boltz
12. First Lieutenant at Sea Frege
13. First Lieutenant at Sea Raydt
14. First Lieutenant d. R. M. A.[2] Herschel
15. First Lieutenant d. R. M. A. Koritzi
16. Second Lieutenant to Sea Woermann
17. Second Lieutenant to Sea von Wurmb
18. Second Lieutenant d. R. M. A. Natz
19. Navy Staff Engineer z. D. Zimmermann
20. Navy Senior Engineer Berndt
21. Navy Senior Engineer Candidate Reeder
22. Navy Senior Engineer Candidate Schmidt
23. Navy Staff Physician (of the Reserve) Dr Rosenberger
24. Navy Assistant Physician (of the Reserve) Zacharias Langhaus
25. Navy Staff Paymaster, Danz.

1 The German military term "zur Disposition" (z. D.) means "retired" or "in reserve". This term is often used to indicate that an officer has retired from active service or is in the reserve.

2 "d. R. M. A." stands for "der Reserve-Marineartillerie," which in English can be expressed as **"of the Reserve Naval Artillery."**

Low-ranking naval personnel				
		Deck officer	Non-commissioned officer	Enlisted personnel
Seaman divisions		-	27	31
Torpedo divisions	seamen	-	13	9
	technical	7	42	49
Dockyard divisions		3	7	2
Artillery detachments		-	80	162
	=	10	169	253
Total 432 Officers 26 Total number of personnel 458				

According to Rosenberger's report, officers and non-commissioned officers/enlisted personnel travelled in separate wagons determined by their rank during the journey. While the officers could move between the wagons and make use of the dining car, the enlisted personnel had to travel in a third-class wagon. There was no side corridor and there was no possibility to pass between the wagons if necessary. Perhaps partly for this reason, the train had to stop a lot. Each compartment in the carriages accommodated six to eight people, with two hammocks hanging from the ceiling and beds on the seats. But because of the lack of space, they had to take it in turns to lie down. Each person was given a blanket to cover themselves with. The equipment also included plates, glasses, forks, spoons, knives and handkerchiefs. Each carriage had a water bucket and a broom for cleaning the carriage (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 34-35).

While in German territory and travelling through Austria-Hungary, the soldiers' needs were well catered for at the railway stations. At the same time, the soldiers were increasingly given gifts at each station, which they could enjoy. As they travelled further south from Hungary, the gypsy music became more and more extravagant. Although it was carried out in civilian clothes and secret, there were people waiting for the train at the stations with slogans such as 'Greater Germany'. This shipment must have been heard. These people brought alcohol,

cigarettes, food, and fruit with them and offered them to the passengers on the train. Although they were all well-intentioned, these gifts had negative health consequences such as illness or diarrhoea. In his writings, Dr Rosenberger frequently evaluated the developments on this journey from the point of view of the medical profession. He also provided information on the health status of soldiers and officers, diseases during the journey, vaccination and health facilities (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 35).

After a two-day journey with frequent stops, Budapest was reached. They stayed here for a while so that the non-commissioned officers and enlisted men could eat, sleep and rest properly, at least for one night, in the nearby buildings such as schools and power stations. Here, the team grew even larger with the inclusion of 1 officer and 89 enlisted men who were planned to serve on the battleship Breslau. With their addition, the departure from Budapest continued at noon on 24 August (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 36; BArch MA, RM 40/59: 20). When this figure is included in the table above, the number exceeds five hundred.

Meanwhile, after arriving in Budapest at 17.30 on 23 August, the continuation of the shipment was discussed with the German Consul General Count Fürstenberg and the Naval Attaché Captain Baron von Freyberg. The shipment had to be carried out unobtrusively through Romania and Bulgaria. A decision had to be made as to whether the shipment should be carried out all at once or in portions, as assumed by the German Foreign Office. The leader of the shipment was authorised to do so, and it was decided to continue the journey in its entirety, as it was considered that repeated transports might attract more attention than single transports. At the same time, it was decided to load the uniforms and weapons into the baggage wagons of the next scheduled train, without waiting for the mine transport, once the shipment was under way (BArch MA, RM 40/59: 16-17).

According to the information given from the Vienna Embassy to the Foreign Ministry in Istanbul on 25 August; 546 people, including two admirals, 27 officers, 517 junior officers and enlisted personnel, had been shipped from Pest to Romania by a special train the previous day. Although it was understood that a second group of personnel was on its way from Germany, no definite information had yet been received about their number (BOA. HR. SYS, 2392/1, 11).

Everything had to be as secret as possible in order to make the shipment as inconspicuous as possible. In fact, this point is emphasised in the section where German petty officer Erwin Bossert described the process after arriving in Berlin. As a matter of fact, according to his account, the journey was planned by private trains through Romania and Bulgaria with fake passports to work as labourers on the Baghdad Railway. They would address their commanders as Mr. Foreman. If they encountered a problem, they had to try to reach Istanbul in groups of two or three by taking care of themselves. Though such a negative situation, the officer in charge of the party, who hoped that they would meet in Istanbul in a complete way, also asked that this secret mission be kept secret even from relatives. He suggested that, if possible, they should take good pocket-sized pistols and good knives with them secretly. Soon everyone was impeccably dressed from head to toe in new civilian clothes. However, although everyone was dressed in civilian clothes, different hats were provided according to ranks so that their military rank could be easily determined. According to Bossert's account, they had gone in groups of three or four to the Stettin (Berlin North) Station, where an empty train was waiting, in order not to attract attention and avoid unnecessary questions. There were enough blankets and hammocks in each wagon, as well as enough food. This small space was supposed to be a shelter for them for perhaps 14 days in terribly cramped conditions. Uniforms, rifles and pistols were to arrive in a special supply wagon wrapped in tarpaulin. Quickly everyone settled down; postcards were written to those who were left behind, and the train set off for "an uncertain future" (Bossert, 1925: 11-12).

Without long breaks through Breslau and Oderberg, they reached the Romanian border via Austria, Hungary. Bossert noted that all the German naval personnel who participated in this shipment would never forget how warmly and enthusiastically their allies welcomed them during the trip. Apparently, the news was spreading from station to station that a train carrying German navy personnel was on its way. There were plenty of treats at all the train stations. The train stations were full of people who wanted to greet the German navy personnel. These people were constantly handing flags in the national colors of Austria and Hungary to German naval personnel. The train had to stop at the smallest

stations on the Hungarian plain in the middle of the night. Because the locals insisted on greeting the German special mission unit and providing treats. A brewery in Timisoara had sent a truck full of beer barrels for this special unit. The officer in charge sometimes allowed the personnel to go out. They arrived at the Romanian border on the evening of August 25. Of course, it was not allowed to leave the train in the border area. They had witnessed from the windows of the train how the officer in charge of the party tried to negotiate with a Romanian police officer in the Romanian station chief's office and handed over long rows of German gold coins on the table. However, otherwise it might not have been possible to continue from this station (Bossert, 1925: 12-13).

On the other hand, while the wagons were viewed with suspicion by the people walking around the railway station, the unrest increased even more when a train with Russian reserve soldiers arrived on the neighbouring tracks. The Russians instinctively began to sense their enemies on the train and menacing challenges appeared. Bossert wrote that in such a tense environment, they were waiting behind the windows, ready for the worst-case scenario, alert with their weapons in an appropriate way to deal with the Russians. Then the officer in charge jumped on the locomotive and the train started moving quickly. In this way, it was possible to get away from the dangerous environment that could turn into a conflict (Bossert, 1925: 12-13).

According to Rosenberger's report, Kronstadt (Braşov-Romania) was reached on August 26. According to the report, due to secrecy, the train caravan was divided into two and separate routes were followed by crossing the Romanian border in this way in the evening. By morning, the Danube had been reached from the territory of Romania and Ruse had been crossed. Here, a meal was eaten with a stopover at a German-run hotel. After that, the meals on the journey would be taken care of on the train and with the bread, cheese, salami etc. that everyone took with them. Previously, the adjustment of the passenger car from Ruse was neglected, so the journey continued towards noon with groups of 15 people with freight cars. Sofia was reached only at night and the party spent the night in freight cars.

Rosenberger, through the eyes of a doctor, mentioned that after crossing the Danube, the fight against various insects, which were a sine qua non of the Balkans and the East, began. In addition, in the Bulgarian countryside, where there were few trees, the August heat was showing itself and the journey in the wagons was becoming unbearable. Almost all of the soldiers were overwhelmed and climbed on top of the wagons. It was all covered in dust, dirt, rust. The fact that the train once broke down by the side of a stream was seen as an opportunity to get into the water by all the officers and enlisted personnel. Rosenberger mentioned that the differences in rank, which were already difficult to understand in civilian dress, have completely disappeared when everyone undressed. However, on August 28, while continuing on the Turkish territory, there was an unfortunate incident which resulted in the death of a soldier near Uzunköprü. While most of the soldiers sought refuge on the roof of the train from the heat and were enjoying themselves, one of them tripped on the telegraph wires, lost his balance, and fell between two wagons. He was fatally injured and then died. After the body was placed in an empty section, it was delivered to SMS Goeben (Yavuz) the next day (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 38-38). The soldier who died as a result of this accident must have been Karl Szernik from the navy personnel of the German battleship Breslau (then Midilli) (Wolf, 2008: 223).

Bossert also mentioned in his memoirs the journey they made through Plovdiv on Bulgarian territory and the unbearable heat he experienced while traveling in freight wagons. He also mentioned about the traces of the bloody Balkan War on the Lüleburgaz and Çatalca lines that the huge piles of soil on this battlefield point to mass graves where about five thousand Turkish soldiers lost their lives due to extraordinary efforts, starvation and exhaustion (Bossert, 1925: 13-14).

Arrival in Istanbul and Distribution of Duties of German Military Personnel

Hans Humann, the German Naval Attaché, pointed out the issues that should be taken into account when the party reached Turkish territory after negotiations with the Minister of War Enver Pasha. On the one hand, the party that came from Germany and the one already on its way should have reached its destination safely, but on the other hand, German personnel should not have entered

the centre of Istanbul in the first place in accordance with Ottoman military interests. For this reason, when it was reported that the train was approaching, it was planned to stop at the Zeytinlik military station between San Stefano (Yeşilköy) and Bakırköy as an exception. The German personnel expected to arrive should have been considered as workers who would work at the gunpowder factory in Zeytinlik hired by the Turkish government. The station commander was to accompany the "workers" on their passage to the ready-waiting steamer. This practice was applicable to the enlisted men rather than officers. Humann, in his telegram dated August 25, 1914, wanted the staff to be informed about the issue through an officer, but also to pay attention to the possibility of enemy agents. When the entrance was made from Edirne, he requested that Chief Aide to the Minister of War Kazim Bey [Orbay] be informed by telegram in order to make the necessary preparations in Zeytinlik (TTK Archive, KO, 21, 82, 82; BArch MA, RM 40/59, p. 21). Admiral Usedom later wrote in his report that although the borders of Turkey had been entered, contrary to his expectations, he was disappointed by this kind of secrecy. Because in fact, he expressed that he expected a great welcome for the allied friends who were being awaited with excitement (BArch MA, RM 40/1: 3).

The date of 25 German officers and 520 naval personnel who sailed from Germany under the command of Admiral Usedom reached Istanbul via the neutral Balkan states Romania and Bulgaria was August 29, 1914. After arriving in Istanbul, the navy personnel to be assigned to the Ottoman Navy and the personnel to take some administrative duties were separated, and the remaining 15 naval officers and 281 naval soldiers and personnel were placed under the command of this special command, which was established to support the defence of the Straits. By dividing into two, the number of these command personnel assigned to Istanbul and the Dardanelles straits would increase to close to 700 in a short time. Admiral von Usedom would be appointed as the top officer of the coastal defence of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits, with the headquarters being in Istanbul (Wallach, 1985: 139; Lorey, 1946: 6; Feldmann, 1939: 642-643; Mühlmann, 1940: 19; Wolf, 2014: 91-92).

According to the account of Medical Captain Rosenberger, who was among the personnel from Germany, the Turkish border was reached on the evening of August 28. August 29th, after a night journey, the train arrived at Bakırköy station on the Marmara coast between San Stefano (Yeşilköy) and Istanbul in the early morning hours. Then the German Naval Unit boarded the ferry named General, which had been anchored on the shore. The Goeben (Yavuz) and Breslau (Midilli) battleships appeared to be anchored on the side of Istanbul's (Prince's) Islands in the distance. In the afternoon, they entered the Bosphorus on board the General and sailed to Tarabya. After being informed about the duties of the troops, the troops assigned to the Bosphorus passed to the deck of the steamer SMS Corcovado there. In the evening, as the sun was setting, they went out to the Marmara Sea again. After dark, Breslau berthed and picked up the navy personnel designated for her, and then the journey continued from there to the Dardanelles. Thus, 10 days after the departure from Berlin, the journey had reached its final destination in Istanbul and the Dardanelles (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 37).

According to the German petty officer Bossert, he got off the train at the station on the morning of August 29 and boarded the General that was anchored in the harbour, within two hours. After a little rest, the personnel were called to the deck and the distribution of duties was made in accordance with their training. Signal personnel, light ship gunners for Goeben and Breslau, artillery personnel for the Bosphorus had been designated. A mine unit was formed to search for and locate mines in the straits. Bossert stated that this was the most dangerous and difficult job. He, along with 160 friends, was assigned to the team that would serve in the Çanakkale artillery batteries, and this team stayed on the ship after the other groups had left. The ship anchored at midnight and arrived at Kilitbahir in the Dardanelles Strait on the morning of August 30 (Bossert, 1925: 14-15).

Admiral Usedom, together with Admiral Souchon, made his first inspection of the Istanbul Strait fortifications on August 30. Then he informed Enver Pasha about the framework of the mission he received from the German Emperor Wilhelm II during their meeting the next day. According to this, he would perform the task of strengthening the fortifications of the Dardanelles and Istanbul

Straits and training the personnel stationed there. At this meeting, in which Naval Attaché Major Humann was also present, the form of duty of the special command was determined. Since the Turkish coastal defence was connected to the army, the personnel of the Imperial German Navy Special Command would be assigned to the army command and wear the army uniform, they would have a senior rank like in the military delegation. However, even though they wore Ottoman uniforms, the inner workings of the special command would continue in the hands of the Germans, and even the pensions would be given according to the German rank (BArch MA, RM 40/59: 22); (Lorey, 1946: 7). Admiral Usedom stated that this meeting, which took place at Enver Pasha's house where he was resting due to a small medical operation, was binding within the framework of command relations, but he mentioned that he got the impression during the meeting that they were not very welcome (BArch MA, RM 40/1: 4).

It was seen that when the German naval officers and personnel reached Istanbul, the distribution of duties was made within an inspectorate responsible for the defence of the Bosphorus acting on orders of the Ottoman General Headquarters. Accordingly, as previously planned, Admiral Guido von Usedom would be responsible for the Straits and would be the inspector in charge of strengthening the fortifications in the Straits. German naval officers and gunners were to be distributed to bastions and posts in the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits and to begin training and fortification works. Vice Admiral Johannes Merten was to be the representative of the General Headquarters of the Ottoman Commander-in-Chief for the Dardanelles Strait. On the other hand, Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, who had previously come to Istanbul, was responsible for making the Ottoman Navy ready for war with personnel who came from Germany as reinforcements (Mühlmann, 1940: 19; Schneider, 1925: 12; Wolf, 2014: 91-92).

Vice Admiral Merten, who was appointed as the representative of the General Headquarters for the Dardanelles Strait, departed from Istanbul to Canakkale on August 29 on board the General with 7 officers and 165 navy personnel. Naval Captain [Friedrich von] Kühlwetter was also assigned to the Bosphorus in Istanbul with 5 officers and 98 navy personnel. Admiral Usedom, on the other hand, anchored in front of the German Embassy summer house in Tarabya with the

SMS Corcovado steamer and established his headquarters here. Thus, he would be in constant contact with the embassy (Lorey, 1946: 10). The special command report indicated 5 officers and 68 navy personnel for the Bosphorus, and for the Dardanelles, it indicated 8 officers and 160 navy personnel (BArch MA, RM 40/59: 21-22). The information provided by Admiral Usedom was in the form of 8 Officers, including Vice Admiral Merten, 100 Non-Commissioned Officers and the rest were enlisted personnel (BArch MA, RM 40/1: 4).

In the Imperial Navy documents in the German military archive, there are summary lists of German officers and personnel assigned to the defence of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits. A review of the list of German officers assigned to the command positions in the Straits under the general inspectorate shows that there are 20 officers listed by name including those mentioned above (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 40). In another list, information is provided about the distribution of command personnel to the chief of staff of the inspectorate and to the two straits. When looking at those who were assigned to the Dardanelles, Admiral Merten, the Commander-in-Chief Delegate, and German officers such as [Fritz] Wossidlo, [Wilhelm] Rosenberger, [Heinrich] Herschel, [Konrad] Frege, [Hans] Woermann, [Emil] Natz are included in the list. In addition, there is information that about 160 artillery petty officers, naval gunners, technical and training personnel were assigned (BArch MA, RM 40/55: 42).

Conclusion

In this study, the journey of the special German naval unit, which was established to strengthen the Ottoman Navy and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, to Istanbul via the Balkans in mid-August 1914, was examined. The main purpose of the Turkish Special Command, created within the Imperial German Navy and containing more than five hundred German naval military and technical personnel, was to make the Straits and the Ottoman Navy ready for war within the framework of the secret alliance's war goals. This unit had made its way to Istanbul by rail through the Balkans with more than five hundred members during the tense days when the First World War began. The importance of

this trip lies in the fact that it took place shortly after the signing of the secret military alliance treaty between the two states and that it was the first major shipment of military personnel within the framework of the alliance.

On the other hand, the arrival of this unit in Istanbul increased the German presence and activity in the capital during the first months of the war, when the Ottoman Empire was still neutral. At the same time, it was an important and triggering development in the process leading to the actual involvement of the Ottoman Empire in the war on the side of Germany. Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits were critical for the Ottoman Empire and represented strategic points for Germany within the framework of the signed alliance. When the Turkish Special Command was being created, the personnel selected for the special mission were told, "His Majesty has chosen you to send to the Straits through neutral countries. This is the lock of Turkey and we will defend this place to the last man against possible attacks ...". This statement reveals the Straits' importance.

The narratives of some German experts and officers who participated in this journey and the reports reflected in the German archive provide remarkable information about the story of the journey that started from the North German shipyards and reached Istanbul through the Balkans. First of all, the efforts of this special German unit, which is on its way to Istanbul, through diplomatic missions to ensure a smooth journey and duty-free passage are noteworthy. In addition, when looking at the narratives, it becomes clear that this shipment, planned to be made in great secrecy, was actually overheard and continued its way among people's gifts and songs in a war propaganda environment, and even narrowly avoided conflict with Russian reserve troops in the first weeks of the war. It is seen that great importance is attached to this journey, especially to the smooth crossing of Romania. Because from the very first weeks of the war, Romania's attitude required special precautionary measures to avoid difficulties during the passage of the shipment.

Of course, for the Ottoman-German alliance to be meaningful, the establishment of a physical connection between the territories of the two allied states was a prerequisite from the very beginning. From this point of view, in the later months of the war, the Balkans became a great obstacle that had to be overcome, and a lock that had to be broken at the point where it could not be overcome. It

would take until the autumn of 1915 for this lock to be broken and for a transport connection between Berlin and Istanbul to be established. As a matter of fact, it was only after Bulgaria joined the alliance and the military operation against Serbia was organized that it was possible to establish a rail connection between Berlin and Istanbul (Altıntaş, 2024a: 126).

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Between Empires, Among Believers: A Microhistorical and Borderland Analysis of Benedikt Kuripešić's 1530 Travel Diary

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Abstract: This article offers a microhistorical and borderland-centered analysis of Benedikt Kuripešić's 1530-1531 travel diary, composed during a Habsburg diplomatic mission to Ottoman Constantinople. Often cited yet rarely studied in depth, Kuripešić's text is reinterpreted here as more than a record of geographic movement; it is a rich epistemic artifact that captures early modern inter-imperial friction in the Balkan borderlands. Drawing on the methodologies of Carlo Ginzburg and Anssi Paasi, the article argues that Kuripešić's diary reveals how borders were experienced not only through political boundaries but through affective registers: faith, fear, memory, and resistance.Through close readings of selected diary entries, such as encounters with chained Christian children or whispered appeals from peasants, the article illuminates the lived experience of Ottoman-Christian coexistence. It also traces Kuripešić's rhetorical positioning as interpreter, diplomat, and narrator of martyrdom, highlighting how sacred geography and narrative mapping became acts of Christian counter-sovereignty. The legend of Miloš Obilić, retold with reverence, is analyzed as a key site of myth-making and identity projection. Furthermore, the article explores the Ottoman strategies of governance; taxation, devşirme, and regulated religious tolerance, as an early form of "soft conquest", prefiguring modern theories of biopolitics.

By combining microhistory and border theory, the study demonstrates that Kuripešić's "small text" bears large historical implications for understanding Balkan identity, imperial subjectivity, and religious resilience across fluid frontiers.

Keywords: Kuripešić, Microhistory, Balkan borderlands, Devşirme, Christian martyrdom, Miloš Obilić, Sacred geography, Habsburg-Ottoman relations

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Introduction

In the late summer of 1530, a Habsburg diplomatic convoy departed from Ljubljana, winding its way through the rugged and politically fractured landscape of the Balkans. The aim was Constantinople, famed seat of Sultan Süleyman I, where royal envoys would negotiate with one of the most formidable rulers of the age. Among those in the imperial retinue was a relatively obscure figure: Benedikt Kuripešić, a man from Obernburg, serving as Latin interpreter. Yet it was he, not the noble emissaries, who would leave behind the most enduring trace of this mission: a travel diary written in German, blending observation, lamentation, cartographic record, and confessional polemic.

Kuripešić's *Reisebericht*, or *Embassy Travel Diary*, offers more than a diplomatic log. It emerges as a richly textured document of early modern Balkan realities, bearing witness to the religious dislocation, forced conversions, and administrative routines of Ottoman power. The diary, written in the vernacular and only partially translated in modern editions, remains a relatively underexplored historical source, despite its frequent citation in works on Ottoman-Christian relations, Balkan ethnography, and early modern mobility. What distinguishes it is its emotional register, political urgency, and attention to quotidian detail. His narrative is marked by a fervent Christian voice, writing as he journeys through what he regards as lands suffering under "Turkish tyranny" (Kuripešić, 1950: 8).

The uniqueness of Kuripešić's account lies in its position at the crossroads of empires and epistemologies. The Balkans of the early sixteenth century were not simply a frontier between Christianity and Islam; they were a zone of negotiation, adaptation, and silent resistance. Kuripešić's text captures that ambiguity. He is at once observer and participant, intermediary and chronicler, filtered through Habsburg imperial ideology but also affected by the direct human encounters of his journey. His sympathetic portraits of Christian peasants, clandestine expressions of faith, and recurring invocations of divine justice reveal a layered and unstable perception of empire, one in which power was contested not only through arms but also through ritual, rumor, and belief.

To approach such a source with appropriate methodological sensitivity, this article adopts the perspective of microhistory, as developed by Carlo Ginzburg and

Giovanni Levi. Microhistory privileges the small scale: not to obscure the broader structural forces of history, but to render them intelligible through the specificity of individual experience. Ginzburg's classic studies, such as *The Cheese and the Worms,* showed how marginal figures could embody the fractures and transmissions of larger cultural systems (Ginzburg, 2012). Kuripešić, though not a peasant or heretic, similarly stands at a marginal threshold: a minor court interpreter thrust into the geopolitics of a continental conflict. His narrative, shot through with sensory immediacy and confessional passion, allows the historian to read empire not from its capitals, but from its contested peripheries.

At the same time, the article draws upon the conceptual lexicon of borderland studies, especially as articulated by scholars such as Anssi Paasi, Sebastian Conrad, and James Scott. Borderlands are not merely geographic zones; they are social processes: spaces where identities are renegotiated, loyalties tested, and sovereignties blurred; to quote Laine and Cassaglia (2017, 3), "borders do not simply exist, but are ceaselessly both contested and maintained by diverse processes and practices". Paasi emphasizes that borders are never static, but are continually reproduced through institutional, discursive, and spatial practices, stating that "one distorted ideological expression of the territorial trap is to perceive national cultures and identities as homogeneous, coherent and static phenomena" (Paasi, 2000: 5). In Kuripešić's diary, the border is everywhere: in the checkpoints of customs officials, in the fearful whispers of Christian villagers, in the uncertain gestures of hospitality from Muslim hosts. These are not liminal spaces in a romanticized sense; they are zones of real danger and moral calculation.

What emerges, therefore, is not a travelogue in the traditional sense, but an epistemic artifact of inter-imperial friction. Kuripešić records a world in motion: children taken for the devşirme; monks praying for deliverance; ruined monasteries; cities half-abandoned. The empire he encounters is not monolithic. The Ottoman officials are courteous; the Turkish military displays order and magnificence. Yet beneath the civility lies coercion, economic extraction, and the subtle erosion of Christian lifeways. By reading the diary as both a historical and literary source, this article seeks to recover the subjective and affective

dimensions of empire: how domination was felt, interpreted, and resisted in the minds of those who lived on its edges. It explores how Kuripešić's account navigates not just physical terrain, but also moral and theological boundaries. Through a close textual and contextual analysis, we shall follow his itinerary not merely through space, but through meaning: from Ljubljana to Constantinople, from surface observation to cultural translation.

In doing so, we gain more than a sharper image of the sixteenth-century Balkans. We also enter into a conversation about the nature of borders, the construction of imperial knowledge, and the fragile persistence of belief under conditions of occupation. The Kuripešić diary is not a neutral report. It is a plea, a warning, a record of cultural memory inscribed by a witness who believed he was traveling through the ruins of Christendom. And yet, in its sorrow and testimony, it also preserves the dignity and agency of those it depicts: those who, under duress, still crossed themselves, buried their dead, and waited for deliverance.

This article, then, will examine the diary not as a footnote to diplomacy, but as a central document of Balkan early modernity, one that allows us to think critically about empire, identity, and the lived experience of borderland existence.

Historiographical Silence and Opportunity

Benedikt Kuripešić's *Travel Diary*, despite its length, detail, and narrative richness, has largely remained a marginal text within Balkan historiography. It is frequently cited, often for its vivid descriptions of Ottoman-occupied Christian lands, yet rarely is it the central object of focused scholarly inquiry. Where it does appear, it is typically in footnotes, invoked as a supporting voice on topics ranging from the demographic history of Bosnia to the Ottoman devşirme system or the material condition of border monasteries. This pattern of citation without sustained engagement constitutes a striking silence, a historiographical gap that reveals much about the priorities and limitations of early modern Balkan studies.

Several academic works have drawn from Kuripešić's observations to corroborate local or regional historical trends, particularly in relation to Christian-Muslim dynamics in Ottoman borderlands. In his work on Ottomanization in Bosnia,

Noel Malcolm mentions Kuripešić briefly when noting the presence of forced conversions and economic pressures on Christian populations, using the travel diary to illustrate the psychological toll of Ottoman taxation policies (Malcolm, 1994: 46). Similarly, Dubravko Lovrenović references Kuripešić's lament over the chained Christian children as evidence of the devşirme's moral and social implications, but stops short of analyzing the narrative structure or ideological underpinnings of the diary itself (Lovrenović, 2009).

In the field of historical geography, Kuripešić is often mined for toponyms and descriptions of routes and settlements. Vladimir Ćorović and others in the Yugoslav scholarly tradition treated the diary as a sourcebook for historical geography and administrative borders, extracting names, place descriptions, and route data with little attention to the narrative form or subject position of the author (Ćorović, 1933). These uses have preserved the diary as a referential object but have left its literary, ideological, and emotional dimensions largely untouched.

Yet Kuripešić was not a mere bureaucratic observer. He was a narrator, an interpreter, and a cultural mediator. His diary is not a transparent window onto early modern realities but a carefully constructed narrative, shaped by Habsburg political priorities, Christian cosmology, and the moral dilemmas of inter-imperial diplomacy. As the designated interpreter for the Habsburg embassy, Kuripešić translated not only languages but also social behaviors, local customs, and religious atmospheres into a textual form palatable to his imperial patrons. The diary thus becomes a space where cultural translation takes place; not always faithfully, but always revealingly.

To read Kuripešić merely as a passive chronicler is to miss the diarist's agency as a representational figure. The emotional charge of his prose, his strategic selection of vignettes, and his repeated emphasis on Christian suffering point to a deeper ideological mission. His account is performative: it seeks to convince, to stir conscience, and to frame the Ottoman realm as a territory not only of political domination but of theological aberration. In this sense, the diary aligns with the tradition of confessional polemics that proliferated in the wake of the Reformation and the Ottoman advance into Central Europe. Texts from Martin Luther to Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq's *Turkish Letters* (1881) projected the East as a foil

to the moral, ecclesiastical, and political order of the Christian West. Kuripešić, though far less well known, operates in the same register: offering a vision of the Balkans as a fallen Christian space awaiting liberation.

The diary also fits within the larger corpus of early modern travel writing, a genre shaped by the tensions of curiosity, fear, and projection. As Mary B. Campbell and Joan-Pau Rubiés have argued, early modern travel texts often served as modes of knowledge-making that reflected as much about the traveler's epistemological frameworks as about the lands visited (Campbell, 1999: 215; Rubiés, 2002: 356). Kuripešić's diary exhibits these qualities with clarity: the reader encounters not only landscapes and peoples but a moral economy, an implicit map of civilization and barbarity, encoded in the distinctions between bell towers and minarets, chained children and well-fed Ottoman officials.

Given this layered textuality, it is striking that no sustained literary or cultural analysis of Kuripešić's narrative has yet been undertaken. While scholars such as Maria Todorova have addressed Balkan representation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the lens of Orientalism and internal othering, early modern Balkan texts remain on the fringes of such theoretical attention (Todorova, 1997). Kuripešić's diary offers precisely the kind of liminal material that invites such reevaluation. It is a text from the margins that speaks in the idiom of empire, a vernacular document that discloses imperial anxieties through its affective register.

The opportunity, then, is twofold: to re-center Kuripešić not merely as a witness but as a cultural agent, and to reframe his diary as a site of narrative production shaped by the volatile pressures of inter-imperial contact. To do so requires a methodology sensitive to both the microhistorical context of the journey and the borderland logic of the world it describes. Kuripešić was not simply traveling; he was recording a vision of what Europe was, what it feared to become, and what it had perhaps already lost.

Balkan Borderlands as Liminal Space

In the sixteenth century, the Balkans occupied a liminal and contested zone between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires; a fluid space shaped by overlapping

sovereignties, hybrid identities, and imperial anxieties. Benedikt Kuripešić's 1530 travel diary functions as an imperial "sensorium", surveying a region that was politically Ottoman but religiously and culturally heterogeneous. His observations capture a disjointed geography where sovereignty did not align with faith, customs, or cultural allegiances. This disjuncture is not incidental but emblematic of borderland life, where surveillance, hybridity, and suspicion defined both governance and daily life.

Imperial Borderlands as Zones of Hybridity and Anxiety

The early modern Balkans were structured not by rigid frontiers but by porous and negotiated spaces, zones where allegiances were often pragmatic, affiliations fluid, and categories like "Christian" or "Ottoman" insufficient to encapsulate social reality. Scholars have described such regions as "ambivalent spaces", where multiple loyalties could coexist (Stanić, 2017: 121). The Habsburg-Ottoman military frontier, for instance, was less a fixed border and more a shifting corridor of accommodation, resistance, and mixed identities (Ballinger, 2004: 31).

Kuripešić's diary is particularly telling in this respect. While traveling through Ottoman-controlled lands, he repeatedly notes the presence of Christian rituals, ecclesiastical architecture, and monastic hospitality. In Sarajevo, for instance, he reports: "There are more than 100 Christian houses, and also a fine church". Despite the region's political incorporation into the Ottoman world, Christian lifeways persisted, visibly and materially. Churches stood intact, processions were held, and clerical figures played prominent roles in community life. This coexistence of Islamic sovereignty and Christian visibility illustrates the hybrid nature of frontier governance, where empire ruled through incorporation rather than eradication.

Kuripešić's travelogue thus presents the Ottoman Balkans not as a monolithically Islamic space but as a palimpsest of imperial and religious overlays; what Zrinka Stahuljak calls "textual métissage", or the layering of conflicting codes of power and meaning in border zones (Stahuljak, 2010). These were "minor

empires", according to her, not in size but in their embeddedness in translation, mediation, and negotiated authority.

The Diary as a Tool of Imperial Surveillance

More than a mere narrative of travel, Kuripešić's diary served an explicitly political function: to assess not only geography and military infrastructure but also the religious and social dispositions of the population. In this sense, the text embodies what Norton (2007: 79) terms "reflected and contested identity". The Habsburg interest in mapping Ottoman subjects' confessional loyalties, tax obligations, and potential for rebellion turned the diary into an early modern intelligence report. This resonates with the idea of the "imperial sensorium", proposed by Thomas (2022), in this context explored by Virginia Aksan (1999), who analyzes Ottoman and Habsburg comparisons of internal dissent and political loyalty, showing how tax policies and records were used to monitor instability and rebellion, whereby empires mobilized not just armies but epistemologies to understand and manage contested regions.

Indeed, Kuripešić frequently remarks on taxation systems, noting whether Christian populations are taxed more heavily than Muslims; a reflection of Ottoman policy under the millet system. He also comments on the extent of Islamization, observing in some areas that the population remains "largely Christian", while in others, conversions have occurred. These details suggest a concern with religious stability, loyalty, and potential leverage: classic indicators of imperial anxiety.

This surveillance also manifests in the detailed mapping of rituals and public behavior. Monasteries and churches are not just spiritual centers; they are read as signs of latent Christian loyalty. Kuripešić's detailed attention to these markers underscores a strategic vision; religious infrastructures become indicators of imperial influence or resistance.

Liminality and Disjointed Sovereignty

Anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of "liminality" is especially applicable to the Balkans in this period. As Turner argued, liminal spaces are those "betwixt

and between", where norms are suspended, and transformation is possible. The Balkan borderlands exemplify this condition. They were not merely peripheral but *liminal*: inhabiting a third space between submission and autonomy (borrowing from Bhabha, 2012), orthodoxy and heresy, Islamic law and Christian canon (Dobreva, 2011: 34; Grmuša & Oklopčić, 2022).

Kuripešić's diary records this liminality in everyday practices. In the village of Goražde, he observes that although ruled by Ottoman authorities, the local population "still celebrates Christian holidays", and the monastery welcomes him with "the rite of blessing". Such rituals defy the prescriptive boundaries of sovereignty, suggesting an enduring religious geography that maps imperfectly onto political borders.

This disjunction reveals the dialectic of imperial anxiety and accommodation. The Ottomans tolerated many Christian institutions; not out of benevolence, but as a pragmatic strategy to ensure order and tax compliance. Simultaneously, such tolerance bred suspicion in the Habsburg mind: these Christians might one day become insurgents or collaborators in a future war.

As scholars like Ljuckanov (2015: 80) and Laven & Baycroft (2008) argue, early modern Balkan borderlands created a "borderline identity", where neither empire could fully assert control nor fully relinquish claims (Laven and Baycroft, to go into more details, discuss numerous, interlocking identities). They were constantly surveilled, negotiated, and reinscribed by cartographers, ethnographers, and emissaries like Kuripešić.

The Politics of Hospitality and the Moral Economy of Loyalty

One of the most vivid features of the diary is its emphasis on hospitality, especially by Christian monastic communities. Kuripešić often frames these encounters as affirmations of shared faith and subtle resistance to Islamization. In one passage, he describes how a monk at Mileševa welcomed them with "bread and wine, according to the custom of our people", thus drawing a line of communal identity across political divides.

This form of hospitality performs dual work. It asserts Christian solidarity in a landscape of Islamic authority and functions as a coded expression of political allegiance. Hayden explored how shared traditions of hospitality became tools of inclusion or exclusion depending on broader power structures (Hayden 2007: 105). It allowed Christian communities to maintain a moral economy that positioned them closer to Habsburg Christendom despite Ottoman rule.

Thus, hospitality becomes a technology of border navigation. It signals loyalty while maintaining plausible deniability. It affirms identity through ritual without inviting retaliation. Kuripešić's reception by Christian hosts reveals this performative balancing act that was crucial for survival in the borderlands.

Kuripešić's diary renders the Balkan borderlands not as inert peripheries but as dynamic zones of hybridity, liminality, and surveillance. His descriptions capture the profound dissonance between political and religious borders: Ottoman military control coexisting with Christian rituals, monasteries, and iconography. The diary thus becomes a proto-ethnographic instrument of imperial sensing, tasked with assessing not just the terrain but the terrain's moral and confessional contours.

In these liminal spaces, empires ruled not by obliteration but by negotiation. Christian symbols persisted under Islamic rule, and imperial emissaries like Kuripešić became the eyes through which Vienna monitored these delicate balances. The frontier was not just a place of potential warfare; it was a site of epistemological labor, where loyalty, identity, and faith were continually produced, recorded, and interpreted.

Everyday Tyranny and Resilient Faith: Microhistorical Vignettes

In the corpus of early modern travel writing, few texts expose the quotidian operations of imperial rule as vividly and affectively as Benedikt Kuripešić's *Diary* (1530-1531). Beneath its formal framing as a diplomatic travel report lies a layered narrative structure that interweaves personal observation, affective appeal, ethnographic detail, and Christian polemic. This section offers a microhistorical approach to selected episodes in Kuripešić's diary, demonstrating

how the text performs the role of a "witness" to injustice and a chronicler of Christian resilience. The microhistory lens allows us to reconstruct the experiences of non-elite actors (peasants, monks, women, children) within the overlapping systems of Ottoman administration and religious stratification. Their fragmentary voices surface through gestures, rumors, iconography, and expressions of faith, filtered and reconstituted through Kuripešić's narratorial agency.

The diary's structure lends itself to close reading. Dates and places are meticulously recorded, creating the skeleton of a diplomatic itinerary. Yet within this framework, Kuripešić often halts the chronology to describe what might otherwise be peripheral events: a villager's gaze, a lament overheard, or the markings on a tombstone. These interruptions (deliberate and weighted) become the loci of his political theology. They are the places where the moral geography of empire is redrawn not through cartographic lines, but through symbolic resistance and human testimony.

One of the most harrowing microhistorical moments occurs on *7 January 1531*, in the village of Slatmwerde (Saparjevo). Kuripešić recounts: "where we encountered many Christians, bound in iron chains. May God have mercy on them!" (Kuripešić, 1950: 49). The brief sentence sears itself into the narrative not through rhetorical excess, but through its stark economy. No elaboration is needed. The chained bodies speak for themselves. The visual image conveys more than a list of injustices ever could. This is no generic scene of conquest; it is a glimpse into the technologies of control deployed at the edges of empire. The use of chains literalizes the metaphor of captivity: these are not merely subjects of an alien power, but its hostages, its collateral.

The imagery here parallels Ginzburg's insight that microhistory rests on the interpretative potential of minute details, "clues" that open toward larger structures of meaning (Ginzburg, 1993). Kuripešić's chain-bound Christians are not just victims of a localized abuse. They are emblems in a broader Christian discourse of martyrdom, functioning as moral referents in a Christian-Ottoman dialectic. Moreover, the passive suffering they embody is not inert. It is articulated, even weaponized, through the narrator's call to solidarity: "May God have mercy on them!"; a prayer, but also a prompt for action.

This call is echoed throughout the diary in scenes where villagers approach the envoys in secrecy, offering words or gestures of desperation. Kuripešić repeatedly narrates moments in which peasants, constrained by fear, communicate their discontent through indirect channels. In one striking episode near Sarajevo, he observes:

"Oh, how many times have we seen them standing before us with their arms crossed, sighing and looking at the sky, not daring to talk to us. But when one of them was left alone with us, he would say: 'Oh, with what desire we have waited, but you will free us with Christ's help!" (Kuripešić, 1950: 24).

This is a choreography of repression and hope. The villagers' crossed arms and upward gaze enact a silent liturgy of supplication. Their bodies speak what their mouths cannot. Once alone, the whispered desire for liberation (phrased in eschatological language) positions the Habsburg emissaries as messianic figures. Kuripešić may well be reporting these moments to flatter his sovereign's cause, yet the pattern and consistency of these accounts suggest more than narrative flourish. They are instances of what Michel de Certeau would call "tactics"; small, everyday ways of asserting meaning under conditions of domination (de Certeau, 1984: xix).

Equally evocative are the numerous references to Christian iconography that survive amid the Ottoman-ruled landscape. Kuripešić takes pains to note ruined churches, neglected graveyards, and above all, the persistence of crosses. At the tomb of the Serbian duke Radoslav Pavlović near Rogatica, the diary shifts registers, moving from ethnography to elegy. Kuripešić transcribes the tombstone's inscription:

"I, voivode Radoslav Pavlovich... While I lived, the Turkish king could neither oppress nor defeat me; even less did I think about renouncing my faith."(Kuripešić, 1950: 25).

The text is self-consciously monumental. Radoslav's epitaph is not only a record of death, but a profession of militant faith. The stone becomes a chronotope of resistance, a place where history, geography, and ideology converge. Even in ruin, the inscription resists erasure. It reminds the reader that the territory Kuripešić crosses is not a void, but a palimpsest of struggles, sanctified by loss.

This devotional resilience is not confined to elite figures:

"May God deliver these unfortunates from Babylonian and eternal slavery! May the merciful God quickly free them with his mercy! The Turks are afraid of them, and they secretly kill many" (Kuripešić, 1950: 32).

The plea is simultaneously political and theological. It invokes ancestry, continuity, and mutual obligation. The speaker does not beg for military assistance alone; he demands fidelity to a shared covenant. The Christian "borderlander", stripped of worldly power, becomes the guardian of a transhistorical moral order. And it is he - not the imperial envoy - who instructs the Habsburgs in faithfulness.

The paradox that emerges from these episodes is fundamental to the structure of Kuripešić's narrative: political boundaries may be fixed by conquest, but spiritual boundaries remain porous. Christian communities on both sides of the frontier recognize each other as kin. This is not the ecumenism of official theology but the solidarity born of shared suffering. As borderland studies scholars like Scott (2009) and Paasi (1996) argue, borders are not only sites of regulation but of interaction. They are "performed" in everyday life. Kuripešić's diary reveals a borderland not only mapped by the Ottomans, but spiritually surveilled and morally contested by its inhabitants.

The diary also contains meta-commentary on the Ottoman state's economic and social pressures. Kuripešić describes the devşirme (child levy), forced taxation, and restrictions on church restoration. But these are often framed not simply as policies, but as sins—violations of divine as well as human law. The language is stark:

"The Turk no longer allows churches to be renovated or new ones to be built. This is how he thinks he can force them to convert to his faith"(Kuripešić, 1950: 23).

Here again, the policy becomes a symbol. A ban on construction is read as an assault on permanence, a denial of spiritual futurity. In the microhistorical frame, this restriction is not abstract. It is embodied in the weeping of monks, the silence of destroyed bells, the bent heads of children in chains.

In sum, Kuripešić's diary stages a series of micro-encounters where structural tyranny and individual resistance meet. Through his selective narration - what he chooses to see and record - the borderland becomes a space of contested sovereignty. Yet it is also a sanctuary of enduring belief. The true frontier in this narrative is not territorial, but moral: between tyranny and fidelity, silence and witness, despair and hope.

Interpreting the Interpreter: Kuripešić's Positionality

Benedikt Kuripešić's *Putopis* is more than a documentary log of diplomatic passage; it is an authored narrative, one that bears the marks of its writer's positionality as an interpreter, Christian, imperial subject, and, most subtly, as a cultural broker. Throughout the diary, Kuripešić's presence is not limited to translation between spoken languages. His mediating role encompasses the interpretive, rhetorical, and symbolic domains of early modern frontier politics. He listens, observes, records - and crucially, re-narrates. What emerges is not a neutral relay of events but a highly charged moral and political narrative, one in which Kuripešić oscillates between the roles of chronicler and polemicist, observer and confessor.

As a Latin interpreter serving an imperial mission, Kuripešić's primary role was linguistic. But his diary reveals that he also functioned as an epistemic intermediary. He frequently translates not only words but entire worldviews. What he records from Christian villagers, Orthodox monks, Turkish officials, or Greek subjects is filtered through a Catholic-Habsburg conceptual lens. Often, the "local" is transmuted into an allegory for imperial concerns. His repeated invocations of divine justice such as the mentioned "May God have mercy on them!" act as punctuation marks across the diary, turning descriptive passages into theological appeals (Kuripešić, 1950: 49).

These interjections are never neutral. They construct a moral binary between the "right" faith and "tyrannical" Islam. Kuripešić's interpretive gaze flattens the complex religio-ethnic diversity of the Balkans into a Manichaean battle between persecuted Christianity and encroaching Islam. His rhetorical strategy draws heavily on soteriological imagery: the Habsburgs are framed as potential

deliverers, while the Ottomans are described as "bloodthirsty" and "unmerciful" foes of Christendom. In his opening lines, Kuripešić laments that "the blood-drinker and sworn enemy of the Christian faith… continues striving to conquer all of Christendom" (Kuripešić, 1950: 8). The language is not diplomatic. It is apocalyptic.

While these polemics might be dismissed as typical of Habsburg propaganda, Kuripešić's role complicates such an interpretation. He is not a court scribe composing official dispatches; he is an interpreter embedded in the convoy, moving across villages, interacting with peasants, and attending monastic liturgies. His proximity to the local, combined with his loyalty to the imperial mission, generates a tension that permeates his writing. The diary oscillates between empathy and distance, detail and generalization. One moment he transcribes a villager's plea; the next, he universalizes the condition of "Christian slavery". In this sense, his positionality bears resemblance to what Natalie Zemon Davis called the "double vision" of cultural intermediaries; those who see both sides but must write for one (Zemon Davis, 2011: xii).

Kuripešić's rhetorical treatment of Muslims is uniformly negative, yet his depiction of Greeks and Jews is more complex. The Greeks, particularly those encountered near Constantinople, are portrayed with a mixture of pity and reverence. He notes their suffering, their liturgical discipline, and their adherence to Christian faith, despite Ottoman domination (Kuripešić, 1950: 42-43). The Greeks, while not Catholics, are still rendered as part of a broader Christian "we". Their identity is subordinated but not demonized. This stands in contrast to his mention of Jews, which is rare but telling. When Jews appear, it is often in the context of commerce or servitude, never as spiritual interlocutors. Their role is peripheral, instrumental.

The selective empathy in Kuripešić's narrative reveals an ideological project: the stabilization of a Catholic-Habsburg identity amid cultural and confessional ambiguity. The interpreter becomes a builder of boundaries. He records how Christians under Ottoman rule continue to mark graves with crosses, sustain monastic life, and whisper prayers to emissaries from the West. These fragments are gathered to construct an imagined trans-border Christian continuity, threatened by Muslim rule but awaiting salvation from the Habsburg center.

But Kuripešić is also deeply aware of the fragility of this vision. He is not writing from a position of triumph, but of negotiation. In Constantinople, the delegation must perform submission. The Habsburgs, far from being liberators, are supplicants. The interpreter watches as his patrons kiss the Sultan's hand. The contradiction is not lost on him. In one of the most anguished passages, villagers lament: "Now we see that even you must bow to the Turkish Sultan" (Kuripešić, 1950: 24). This is not just a political humiliation. It is a spiritual wound. Kuripešić, too, must submit: to service, to empire, to narrative constraints.

This raises a final interpretive question: is Kuripešić offering a proto-nationalist narrative, or is he merely echoing imperial rhetoric? The answer is complex. His moral geography is clearly shaped by imperial categories: Christendom, Habsburg sovereignty, Ottoman tyranny. But within these coordinates, he collects and preserves local voices: peasants, monks, elders. His diary becomes a vernacular archive. While the notion of nationalism is anachronistic in this context, there is a nascent sense of cultural identification that transcends politics. He constructs a Christian "people", defined not by ethnicity or language, but by faith and suffering.

Yet this identity is hierarchical. The Catholics of the West are imagined as the elect, while Eastern Christians are depicted as faithful but needing rescue. The interpreter, positioned between these worlds, resolves the tension by making himself a conduit. He is not a hero of liberation, but a narrator of affliction—a voice that renders distant suffering legible to imperial ears. In doing so, he prepares the moral ground for future interventions, future claims, future borders.

Kuripešić's diary is thus not a simple report, nor a fully formed nationalist vision. It is a liminal text, born of a liminal position. It speaks from the edge of empire and the edge of identity. And in doing so, it reminds us that the interpreter is never just a translator. He is a builder of meaning, a shaper of perception, and (however unwittingly) a maker of history.

Memory and Myth-Making: The Case of Miloš Obilić

Among the many vignettes recorded by Benedikt Kuripešić during his diplomatic mission to Constantinople, none resonates with such emotional and

ideological intensity as the account of Miloš Obilić, the Serbian knight who, according to legend, assassinated Sultan Murad I at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 (Bataković 2015: 578). This retelling, inserted in the diary during the delegation's passage through Kosovo Polje in late September 1530, occupies a narrative space markedly different from other observations. Here, Kuripešić shifts from observer to orator, recounting the event with theatrical vividness and unmistakable reverence. The tale becomes a hinge between memory and prophecy, past and future, suffering and hope.

The episode begins plainly enough. Upon visiting the memorial site on 24 September, Kuripešić describes a tower-like tomb with a rounded roof, believed to be the burial place of Sultan Murad, and introduces the story of "Serbian knight named Miloš Kobilović" who stabbed the sultan in his tent (Kuripešić, 1950: 34). From this point forward, the narrative pivots into moral theater. Miloš, once slandered and humiliated by his own prince, proves his loyalty not by complaint or defection, but through an act of supreme sacrifice: "I will end the war, even if I must lose my life" (Kuripešić, 1950: 35).

Kuripešić frames the assassination not as a political stratagem, but as a Christian martyrdom. Obilić's stabbing of Murad is not merely vengeance for insult or a patriotic duty: it is redemptive justice, an act of faith and fidelity that restores moral order. "Oh, Kobilović... you avenged in a Christian manner and repaid evil with good" (Kuripešić, 1950: 36). Here the language no longer belongs to the genre of travelogue or diplomacy, but to hagiography. Obilić is portrayed not simply as a brave knight, but as a Christ-like figure; wronged, misunderstood, but ultimately vindicated through self-sacrifice.

This shift from empirical narration to moral allegory is significant. Kuripešić's retelling of the Obilić legend marks a moment in which memory becomes myth, and myth becomes ideology. It is one of the few places in the diary where fiction (or rather, what modern historiography would label unverified legend) is granted full narrative dignity. The insertion of this mythic episode within a diplomatic travel diary invites several layers of interpretation. On one level, it serves to deepen the diary's spiritual narrative: Obilić becomes a surrogate for all Christian resistance against Ottoman power. At a time when the Habsburg delegation

was traveling in submission to the Porte, and when Kuripešić observed Christian villagers beaten, taxed, and chained (Kuripešić, 1950: 49), the invocation of Obilić offered a symbolic reversal. Here was a moment in which the West triumphed, however briefly and mythically, over the East; not through imperial force, but through individual virtue. Moreover, the Obilić narrative blurs the boundary between historical memory and affective propaganda. By the 1530s, the Battle of Kosovo had already entered the realm of nationalist martyrology among South Slavs, though not yet in its modern form. Scholars such as Maria Todorova have shown how the Kosovo myth became a central element of Balkan national imaginaries in the nineteenth century (Todorova, 1997: 186). Yet Kuripešić's diary suggests that the seeds of this mythic structure (self-sacrifice, betrayal, redemption, divine justice) were already culturally legible in the early modern period. What distinguishes Kuripešić's version is not its nationalism, which would be anachronistic, but its supranational Christian universalism.

Indeed, Kuripešić's admiration for Obilić operates within a theological frame. The knight is valorized not as a proto-Serbian or ethnic hero, but as a Christian martyr whose virtue transcends borders. This allows Kuripešić to deploy the tale in service of Habsburg ideology. The narrative becomes a moral exhortation: a reminder to Western Christian princes of the sacrifices endured by their brethren under Ottoman rule, and a call to spiritual solidarity. Obilić is thus conscripted into a moral economy that legitimizes imperial diplomacy and frames submission as temporary, contingent on a higher divine plan.

What is remarkable about this narrative gesture is that it upends the formal logic of the mission itself. In the same diary that records emissaries kissing the Sultan's hand and receiving Turkish gifts (Kuripešić, 1950: 45-46), we find a counter-myth of resistance and vindication. This contradiction is not resolved but dramatized. Kuripešić, positioned as intermediary and interpreter, uses the legend to insert a moment of Christian agency into a narrative otherwise defined by political passivity.

This episode also reveals much about the politics of memory in the early modern Balkans. It illustrates how oral tradition, sacred landscape, and political grievance coalesce in moments of narrative crystallization. The tomb at Kosovo Polje

is not just a monument to a dead sultan; it is a site of competing meaning. For the Ottomans, it is a sign of imperial reach. For Kuripešić, it is a stage for moral resurrection. That both perspectives coexist within the same topography underscores the ambiguity of the borderland: a zone where history becomes myth, and myth becomes a weapon of interpretation.

The case of Miloš Obilić in Kuripešić's diary is not an incidental folkloric detour. It is a moment of narrative transformation, a literary and ideological pivot that anchors the diary's moral vision. Obilić serves as a vessel for expressing Christian longing, political frustration, and theological hope. His story blurs fact and fiction not to deceive but to mobilize. In the process, it anticipates the emergence of modern heroic narratives and signals the enduring power of martyrdom as a political theology.

Border Bureaucracy and Ottoman Soft Power

Kuripešić's travel diary, while primarily a record of diplomatic movement, becomes a revealing lens through which the Ottoman state's subtle yet extensive apparatus of control may be seen. His descriptions of the child levy (devşirme), taxation structures, and military obligations constitute more than ethnographic notations. They chart the contours of a quiet conquest; an imperial rationality that sought not merely to subjugate, but to reshape.

Kuripešić reports that, in many of the Christian villages traversed, "from each place or region, the third, fourth or fifth boy "is taken, with the best-looking and most intelligent selected, even "if the father and mother have only one child "(Kuripešić, 1531: 23). These children were destined to become janissaries, soldiers of the Sultan, ideologically remolded. This "child tax", enforced annually, becomes emblematic of the Ottoman Empire's conversional biopolitics. As Güneş Yılmaz argues, the devşirme was not merely a military draft; it was "a system of epistemic and bodily transformation" that enacted "a performative biopolitics well before the modern state" (Yılmaz, 2021: 239-245).

Kuripešić also notes a taxation regime increasingly detached from land and anchored in persons. In addition to one florin per household, new levies emerged: "several aspri for each head of cattle, for each field, garden, vegetable garden...

for the doors in the house" (Kuripešić, 1531: 23). These fragmentary taxes mimic the strategies of the pre-modern fiscal-military state, but here they perform an additional function: disaggregating communities, as obligations are tallied by individual units rather than collective estates or parishes. The economic burdens, combined with the symbolic toll of witnessing one's children taken, amount to what Agamben terms "thanatopolitics": a sovereignty exercised through decisions on life, lineage, and future (Agamben, 1998).

In this light, Kuripešić's comments on local responses become especially poignant. He notes Christian villagers in Bosnia who secretly accept gifts and whisper their grief: "Often, before our eyes, the Turks mercilessly beat not only the old, but also the young and women", and adds, "they often did not dare to accept anything from us…they took only what we gave them secretly" (Kuripešić, 1531: 24). Their cautious interactions reflect a deep awareness of Ottoman surveillance mechanisms and the constant balancing of loyalty and resistance.

What the interpreter records here is not mere cruelty. Rather, it is the embedding of coercion within the very rhythms of daily life. Taxation becomes ritualized, child-culling institutionalized, and movement conditional upon compliance. As Čedomir Nestorović outlines, the devşirme functioned both "as military recruitment and as psychological deterrent", designed to enforce hegemonic compliance not through visible terror alone, but through "a system of learned helplessness" (Nestorović, 2023).

Kuripešić does not use the language of modern critical theory, but the outlines of Michel Foucault's "governmentality" are visible in his narrative. The Ottomans did not need to garrison every village, for they had installed networks of informants, pashas, and revenue-collectors who operated in tandem with the architecture of fear and fiscal rationality. Control was exerted through the promise of protection as much as the threat of punishment. As Başak Bayraktaroğlu writes, "the Ottoman Empire did not so much rule by eliminating Christianity, but by entrenching its presence under conditions of permanent dependency" (Bayraktaroğlu, 2021); Bozluolcay (2023: 12), in a dissertation on Ottoman Damascus, similarly describes how revenue collection, regional governors, and networks of power worked in the absence of permanent military garrisons. This confirms the role of *administrative* rather than *martial* governance.

Kuripešić's diary reveals these techniques of dominion not as abstract policies but as tangible encounters. His record of children chained in Saparjevo, the lamentations of enslaved monks in Toplica, and the visible impoverishment of the Christian countryside, where, he notes, peasants "flee with all their property to the mountains…they cultivate their land far from the roads" (Kuripešić, 1531: 32), tells of a form of conquest designed to make rebellion seem irrational.

And truly, the effectiveness of this "soft conquest" lay in its ability to fracture communities from within. Religious tolerance was conditional, churches allowed but not repaired, clergy retained but unempowered. The boundaries of Ottoman tolerance were fluid, allowing cultural continuities so long as they posed no challenge to central authority. This mimics what Foucault described as "biopolitics": a state logic that governs populations by managing their life potential, rather than through visible spectacles of death (Foucault, 2004).

Yet for all its efficiencies, Kuripešić also records moments of rupture. The whispered hopes of peasants, the persistent presence of Christian rituals, and the melancholic hospitality of monks suggest a society under strain but not spiritually vanquished. It is here that Kuripešić's record transforms into an interpretive document. His depiction of these social mechanisms (precise, observational, yet also moralizing) makes the diary a proto-ethnographic account of imperial rule and its discontents.

Sacred Geography and Christian Cartographies

Benedikt Kuripešić's diary does not merely chart the itinerary of a diplomatic mission; it redraws a mental and spiritual map of the Christian Balkans under Ottoman dominion. His pages are thick with place-names, but more importantly, with meanings. Monasteries, graves, relics, and sites of martyrdom are given weight far beyond their strategic significance. They emerge as fixed points in a sacred geography, anchoring a cultural identity amid the disorienting fluidity of imperial borders.

Throughout the journey, Kuripešić does not hesitate to describe physical spaces through the lens of spiritual symbolism. When the delegation reaches the monastery near the river Rzav, the scene departs from political observation and

enters reverence. “The monks received us very well…and prayed for our successful journey and return”. (Kuripešić, 1531: 27). This moment of hospitality from the monastic community offers more than comfort; it becomes an interlude of moral continuity, a reminder that the land retains its Christian rhythm despite its Islamic governors.

The landscape is inscribed with stories. In his moving description of the grave of Voivode Radoslav Pavlović near Rogatica, Kuripešić cites the gravestone’s inscription: “While I lived, the Turkish king could not defeat me with any heroism, any gifts…; even less did I think about renouncing my faith”. (Kuripešić, 1531: 25-26). This is not just a lament for a fallen noble but a declaration of territory; faithful land, held through defiance, even in death. Kuripešić includes these words not as quaint folklore, but as testament. The tomb becomes a monument to resistance, and its inclusion in his narrative a form of sanctification.

In this sense, Kuripešić participates in what Denis Cosgrove has termed “cartographic performance”; the act of mapping not only terrain, but worldviews and value systems (Cosgrove, 2008: 135). Every monastery visited, every cross observed, becomes part of a Christian counter-cartography. The monk who blesses them, the ruin where relics once were, the sacred spring identified with a saint: all these coalesce into what Iver Neumann calls “memoryscapes”, which reterritorialize imperial space along lines of faith rather than flag (Neumann, 1999).

This act of narrative mapping is most visible in Kosovo. As the delegation moves through the region, the landscape becomes saturated with religious and heroic memory. The field of Kosovo is marked not merely as terrain, but as stage of martyrdom. The tomb of Miloš Obilić is described in vivid physical detail: “grave…like a rectangular tower, with a rounded tin roof”, but more crucially, its meaning is explained: here lies the man who died for Christendom. The site is not a grave; it is a reliquary. Kuripešić’s inclusion of Obilić’s story cements this site as a shrine of collective memory.

Christianity, in this diary, is more than a faith; it is a cartographic principle. The spaces that matter (where prayer is said, saints remembered, relics venerated) form a map that overlays the Ottoman administrative geography like

a palimpsest. Michel de Certeau famously distinguished between "maps" and "tours", between abstract representations and lived itineraries (de Certeau, 1984: 121). Kuripešić's travelogue, though linear, is no neutral route. It is a pilgrimage route disguised as diplomatic passage.

And through this sacred geography, Kuripešić resists the erasure that conquest attempts. He shows that territory does not belong solely to the sovereign who taxes it, but to the faith that remembers it. The names of churches, graves, monastic orders, and inscriptions become instruments of remembrance. This geography is thus mnemonic: it records presence not by asserting ownership, but by preserving prayer.

In doing so, Kuripešić maps an alternative vision of the region, not as Ottoman Rumelia, but as a Christian landscape-in-waiting, layered with signs of faith, sorrow, and fidelity.

Conclusion

Benedikt Kuripešić's diary is more than the record of a diplomatic passage; it is a palimpsest. Written during a volatile epoch of territorial negotiation between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, it overlays cartography with faith, geography with emotion, and itinerary with ideology. Beneath the surface of logistical precision (such as the listing of rivers, towns, nights spent, and the like) lies a Christian cosmology attempting to make sense of an increasingly unfamiliar political landscape. The diary emerges not as neutral description, but as a prism through which the anxieties, hopes, and dogmas of early sixteenth-century Christian Europe refract.

This article has argued that Kuripešić's diary, when read through the twin lenses of microhistory and borderland theory, offers a rare window into the mechanics of empire and the resilience of faith. Its microhistorical texture: scenes of chained children, whispered supplications from peasants, or the gesture of monks offering blessings, captures the granular realities of those who lived at the blurred seams of imperial orders. These vignettes resist abstraction; they force the historian to reckon with empire not as ideology alone but as daily intrusion.

Borderland studies, particularly as articulated by scholars like Anssi Paasi (1999) and Konrad and Scott (2011), remind us that frontiers are not merely lines drawn on maps but zones of ambiguity, adaptation, and contestation. Kuripešić's journey through the Balkans illustrates this vividly. The Ottoman-controlled Christian villages, the continued operation of monasteries, the presence of Orthodox clergy, and the cross-cultural socialities he describes all reveal a landscape in which sovereignty is both present and porous. Taxation and devşirme, as Kuripešić documents, were mechanisms of imperial control, but also produced hybrid identities; Christians in turbans, peasants fluent in both prayer and fear (Kuripešić, 1531: 23, 45).

Kuripešić's narrative must also be seen as a performance of identity. As interpreter, he mediates between empires. But as narrator, he positions himself as a loyal subject of Habsburg Christendom. His invocation of God, his condemnation of the "Turkish curr", and his sanctification of figures like Miloš Obilić are rhetorical maneuvers; strategies to stabilize Catholic identity in a world that threatened its coherence. Whether Kuripešić offers an early proto-nationalist myth, or merely echoes the political theology of his time, remains a question. But that he writes in a voice both devotional and political is indisputable.

This diary, viewed from a contemporary standpoint, speaks not only to its time but to ours. The Balkans remain a region where history weighs heavily on identity, where the traces of old empires persist in cultural memory, and where religion continues to shape political imaginaries. Kuripešić's effort to draw sacred maps and narrate faith through motion anticipates later Balkan struggles to define belonging not only by state but by story.

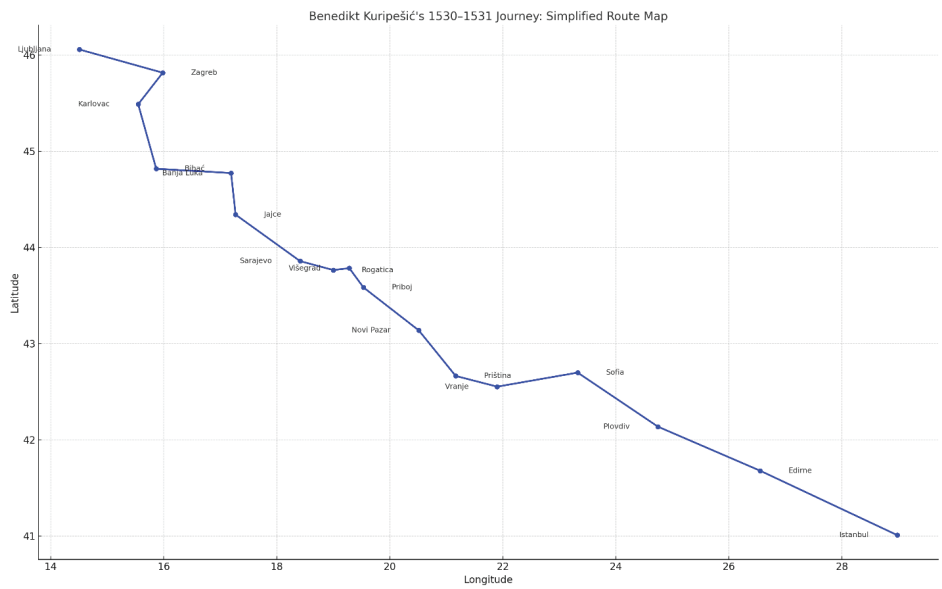
Further research could build on this foundation. Comparative analysis with other early Habsburg or Venetian travel texts (such as those by Luigi Bassano or Bertrandon de la Broquière) could clarify whether Kuripešić's rhetorical mode was unique or representative of a broader discursive formation. Another promising path lies in gender: the near-total absence of women in Kuripešić's text prompts questions about visibility, power, and the masculine coding of space and diplomacy. How did female presences, often relegated to silence or captivity, inhabit these same contested spaces?

Digital humanities tools could also illuminate new dimensions of the diary. A geospatial mapping of Kuripešić's route, overlaid with present-day borders and religious sites, would help visualize the diachronic transformations of the region. This could in turn contribute to larger debates about memory, territory, and the legacies of imperial cartography.

Kuripešić's diary, in the final measure, is a small text with wide resonance. Its power lies not in its scale but in its sensitivity to suffering, its ability to record nuance within empire, and its conviction that faith could survive even the most unstable borders.

Additional material

Figure 1: Kuripešić's travel, mapped



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Broker-Diplomats and Balkan Trade Corridors: British Commercial Networks in Ottoman Salonica and Smyrna, 1800–1850

Üzeyir Serdar Serdaroğlu

Abstract: This article studies how British Levant Company merchants in Ottoman Smyrna and Salonica leveraged diplomatic office to sustain and expand Anglo-Ottoman trade under recurring political and fiscal crises. Confronting wars, uprisings, and shifting Ottoman tariffs, the core question is: how did these 'broker-diplomats' operationalize consular commissions, firmans (the right to free trade), safe-conducts, and gift protocols to stabilize margins and secure commercial corridors? Drawing on prosopographical network analysis of key families (Borges, Murray), GIS mapping of maritime and caravan corridors, and archival sources, including Ottoman archival sources-registers and British consular dispatches, the study demonstrates that formal diplomatic mandates and informal patronage networks coalesced into resilient commercial infrastructures. Key findings show that family-firm governance structures, complete with councils, credit syndicates, and multi-branch ledgers, underpinned adaptive strategies; post-consular ventures like Hague & Co. successfully transformed convoy-pass networks into joint-stock shipping consortia; and traditional alliances (e.g., Peach & Curling) faltered without flexible capital arrangements or technological reinvestment. Theoretically anchored in commercial diplomacy and Actor-Network Theory, our analysis reveals that the durability of the Smyrna–Salonica corridor derived less from geography and more from the strategic integration of diplomatic mission and business-commercial networks, enabling British traders to navigate persistent political and economic crises.

Keywords: Commercial Diplomacy, Broker-Diplomats, Smyrna and Salonica Corridor, Diplomatic Networks, Consular Privileges, Ottoman Levantines, Merchant Networks

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Introduction

The Aegean ports of Smyrna and Salonica occupied pivotal nodes in the Ottoman Balkans' commercial system, anchoring a network that stretched from Istanbul's imperial markets to Vienna's manufactories and beyond. As gateways between Anatolia's fertile plains and Europe's burgeoning industrial centers, these ports linked the Empire's Asian and European provinces through a seamless blend of sea lanes and Danubian–Vardar riverine routes. By the turn of the nineteenth century, local entrepôts had blossomed into truly cosmopolitan hubs: Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian, Levantine, and European merchants converged here to trade in agricultural staples, textiles, and colonial luxury goods. The ports' deep-water harbors, sheltered bays, and overland caravan roads reinforced the Ottoman state's strategic integration of the Balkans, while dense webs of credit, brokerage, and family-firm alliances transcended provincial borders to undergird the Empire's fiscal and political cohesion.

Yet, commerce in the Ottoman Mediterranean and Balkan provinces was never a purely market-driven enterprise. Imperial capitulations and firmans-ahdname[1] issued by the Sublime Porte intertwined trade privileges with diplomacy, ensuring that economic concessions reinforced Ottoman sovereignty and provincial governance. British merchants of the Levant Company, in particular, leveraged their consular appointments across Smyrna and Salonica to secure tax rebates, safe-conduct letters, and ceremonial honors, tools that insulated their ventures from wartime blockades, tariff hikes, and regional unrest. This article

1 *Firman (Ferman)*: It is the general name given to Ottoman Sultan's orders bearing the signature (tuğra). For this study, the meaning of "firman" is more in the context of granting the right to free trade for the foreign merchants in the territories of the Ottomans.

Ahdname: A document containing commercial privileges or peace treaties granted to foreign states by the Ottomans. The Ottoman compound noun 'ahdname' is derived from the Arabic word 'ahd ("promise, pledge") and the Persian noun name ("letter, text"). In early modern Ottoman usage, as in the literature noted, these documents were called Ahdname-i Hümayun, Charters of Imperial Pledge, and they were issued to certain European states, granting their citizens the right to reside in the Ottoman Empire and to engage in trade with minimal tariffs. The ahdnames bestowed by the Ottomans upon their tributary states stipulated that in return for payment of annual tribute, these states would enjoy military and political protection, as well as trading privileges. Levant Company's British merchants did their commercial operations under the Ottoman authority with firmans or ahdnames (capoitılations).

investigates how, between 1800 and 1850, these "broker-diplomats" systematically transformed the instruments of their public office into mechanisms of commercial resilience, embedding diplomatic protocols within the very architecture of Anglo-Ottoman trade across the Balkans.

This article examines how British Levant Company merchants in Ottoman Smyrna and Salonica transformed their consular offices into engines of commercial resilience between 1800 and 1850. Confronted by wars, uprisings, and shifting Ottoman tariffs, these "broker-diplomats" leveraged a suite of diplomatic instruments, consular commissions, firmans granting free-trade rights, safe-conduct letters, and ceremonial gift exchanges, to stabilize profit margins and secure vital trade corridors. To frame this analysis, Section 1 (Literature Review) surveys prior scholarship on the Levant Company's institutional evolution and merchant networks, charting how mid-eighteenth-century reforms empowered individual traders to fuse private enterprise with official office. Section 2 (Methodology and Theoretical Framework) outlines our mixed-methods approach, combining prosopographical network analysis[2], GIS mapping of maritime and caravan routes, and archival research, grounded in commercial diplomacy theory and Actor–Network Theory. In Section 3 (Institutional and Logistical Foundations of Balkan Trade), we detail how firmans, customs reforms, and investments in port and caravan-route infrastructure underpinned the Smyrna–Salonica corridor's operational backbone. Section 4 (Adaptation and Failure of Merchant Families, 1800–1850) traces divergent trajectories among broker-diplomat dynasties, highlighting how families like the Borges and Murrays thrived through corporate-style governance and risk-sharing syndicates, while others faltered under capital constraints and technological change. Finally, Section 5 (Diplomatic Mechanisms and Commercial Resilience) unpacks the procedural strategies behind firman renewals, convoy-pass systems, and

2 Prosopography is the study of groups of people through the collective examination of their lives, often using historical records, literary sources, and artifacts. Rather than focusing on a single individual, prosopography (prosopographical network) analyzes patterns in a group, such as shared roles, relationships, or social status, to better understand historical societies and social structures. This method is especially useful when detailed information about individuals is scarce, as it allows researchers to draw insights from broader trends and connections between people.

gift-giving ceremonies, demonstrating how these diplomatic tools were systematically repurposed as commercial levers. Together, these five parts reveal that the Smyrna–Salonica corridor's durability owed less to geography than to the strategic integration of diplomatic mission and business-commercial networks.

This study draws on three main groups of sources. First, primary sources include the State Papers held at The National Archives (TNA) in Kew Gardens, London; the collections of the Presidency's Ottoman Archives (BOA) in Istanbul; and the Shipping Lists (1741–1826) from the Maritime Archives, Lloyd's Lists, London. Second, secondary sources consist of scholarly monographs and articles on the Levant Company, Ottoman commercial practices, and family-firm historiography. Third, online sources comprise digital editions of consular lists, archival finding aids, and relevant research databases.

Literature Review

Institutional Transformations and Merchant Networks

The Levant Company, founded in 1581, secured trading privileges across the Ottoman Mediterranean, facilitating the direct entry of English goods into Anatolian and Balkan ports. Over time, its network of consulates and "factories" in key centers such as Salonica and Smyrna established the company as a dominant force in regional markets and a strategic linchpin of Anglo-Ottoman economic relations. The following three foundational studies offer comprehensive overviews of the Levant Company's institutional evolution and commercial strategies, providing essential context for understanding its mid-18th-century transformations:

A.C. Wood (1964) argues that the Levant Company's permanent charter of 1605 marked a decisive shift toward a crown-backed monopoly, empowering merchants to underwrite increasingly large shipping ventures and to leverage royal patronage in securing firmans (Wood, 1964: 243–244). He further shows that systematic entries in the Company's Minute Books reveal a deliberate expansion into agrarian exports, especially currants and olive oil, thereby consolidating the Company's economic dominance in the eastern Mediterranean (Wood, 1964: 254–255).

Christine Laidlaw (1997) highlights how British merchants in Smyrna and Salonica adeptly navigated Ottoman legal frameworks, deploying capitulations to enforce contracts and extend credit, thus embedding themselves within local judicial networks (Laidlaw, 1997: 67–68). She also demonstrates that Levant Company members employed Orientalizing tropes in their correspondence, not merely as exotic embellishment but as a strategic claim to commercial legitimacy that distinguished them from independent traders (Laidlaw, 1997: 112–113).

M. Epstein (1968) traces the Company's progression from a series of periodic charters to its establishment under a permanent charter in 1605, underscoring how this document formalized residency requirements and financial guarantees for consuls in İzmir and Salonica (Epstein, 1968: 45–46). He further contends that the strict regulation of membership and capital subscriptions, instituted after 1592, was crucial to stabilizing the Company's finances in the face of volatile Ottoman tariff regimes (Epstein, 1968: 67–68).

Recent scholarship highlights how mid-18th-century reforms within the Levant Company reshaped British commercial penetration in Ottoman ports. Serdaroğlu (2019) demonstrates that the liberalization of shipping in 1744 and the Act of 1753 dramatically widened individual merchants' access, precipitating a shift from convoy-based trade to joint-shipping and fostering the rise of independent business networks centered on Smyrna and Salonica (Serdaroğlu, 2019: 406–407). Schulz's (2018) analysis of the Levant Company's dual diplomatic-commercial mandate further argues that ambassadors and consuls acted not merely as envoys but as "broker-merchants," embedding commercial interests within their diplomatic functions (Schulz, 2018: 120–123).

The mid-18th-century institutional reforms of the Levant Company created an unprecedented opening for individual merchants to forge integrated diplomatic-commercial careers across the Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia. By lifting convoy restrictions in 1744 and broadening membership rules in 1753, the Company empowered figures such as George Webster and David Wedderburn to navigate freely between consular offices and private trade ventures. These changes catalyzed the emergence of a class of "broker-diplomats" whose authority derived as much from letters of accreditation as from their cargo manifests. In this way, institutional liberalization laid the groundwork for merchants to

operate simultaneously as official envoys in Salonica and Smyrna while maintaining extensive commercial networks that spanned from Anatolian caravan routes to British textile markets (Schulz, 2018: 120–121). The Company's Minute Books record those admissions jumped sharply post-1753, from just 13–14 annually to over twenty a year, reflecting this liberalization's impact on provincial as well as London merchants.[3]

Commercial Diplomacy in Smyrna and Salonica

The intertwined role of consular officials and merchants in promoting Ottoman–British trade has been foregrounded by Vlami (2014), who traces how consular "factories" in Smyrna and later Salonica served both as trading posts and as nodes of diplomatic negotiation, particularly in securing monopolistic privileges for opium and textile imports (Vlami, 2014: 10–12). This framework illuminates George Webster's 1763 admission to the Company and subsequent drug-import ventures, which mirrored France's operations in the same ports (Çizakça, 2012: 245).

Consular officials served as both envoys and private traders, using their diplomatic status to secure firman renewals (on free trade) and preferential import quotas for opium, textiles, and other high-value commodities. Early on, George Harborne secured a three-percent customs tariff in 1580, two points below other Europeans, an arrangement he reinforced through lavish gifts to the Sultan, demonstrating the centrality of gift-giving in Ottoman-English negotiations.[4] By the later 18th century, British diplomatic efforts had evolved toward free-trade and investment promotion, reflecting shifting post-Industrial Revolution imperatives (Geyikdağı, 2017).

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3 List of British Consular Officials in the Ottoman Empire and its former territories, from the 16th century to about 1860 by David Wilson. Retrieved Date: February 13, 2025.

http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/List_of_British_Consular_Officials_Turkey(1581-1860)-D_Wilson.pdf

4 O. G. D. Busbecq, E. S. Forster and K. A. Roider, The Turkish letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, imperial ambassador at Istanbul, 1554-1562: translated from the Latin of the Elzevir edition of 1663, 1927, (No Title).

For the abstract version of this source, see https://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/Discuss_the_reception_of_European_diplomats.pdf. Also see, S. A. Skilliter, William Harborne and the trade with Turkey 1578–1582: A documentary study (Vol. I). British Academy, 1977.

Salonica and Smyrna functioned not merely as transshipment points but as twin nodes in a unified corridor of British commercial diplomacy. Consuls posted to Smyrna routinely shuttled between Smyrna's factories and Salonica's burgeoning opium and currant markets, using their diplomatic privileges to secure favorable terms for silk and drug imports. Merchants like Samuel Peach and Edward Hague leveraged their consular status to negotiate firman renewals in Istanbul, while simultaneously coordinating joint-shipping ventures that linked the two ports. This seamless integration of diplomatic office-holding and merchandise trade illustrates how Levantine merchants institutionalized the Smyrna–Salonica axis as a single economic space under British influence (Vlami, 2014: 10–12).

Smyrna and Salonica as an Integrated Center

Building on archival evidence from Lloyd's shipping lists and Ottoman registers, Serdaroğlu (2019) maps how Smyrna's expanding Mediterranean and trans–Atlantic routes (e.g., Michael James's networks linking Lisbon, Barbados, and Stockholm) catalyzed Salonica's emergence as a hinterland center for mohair and currant trade after the 1760s (Wood, 1964: 88-89; Epstein, 1968: 100-150). These studies reveal that British merchants did not treat the two cities in isolation but as a contiguous trade corridor, with ships[5] either calling at both ports in a single voyage or trans-shipping goods between them. This interconnected maritime activity both reflected and reinforced each city's role as a cosmopolitan hub, whose physical geography and diverse populations undergirded their commercial significance.

Salonica's natural deep-water harbour and cosmopolitan composition mirrored the transformations of eighteenth and nineteenth-century world ports, drawing merchants of diverse backgrounds into its vibrant commercial nexus (Mazower, 2004; Mazower, 2010). To complement this qualitative portrait of urban pluralism, a series of quantitative studies offers concrete measures of the trade volumes and fiscal impact that Smyrna and Salonica commanded. Its pluralistic social fabric, encompassing Jewish, Muslim, Greek, and Levantine communities, enabled the emergence of dense trade networks underpinned by

5 For the ships and related information, see http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/lloyds-list.html.

intercommunal credit syndicates and multilingual brokerage arrangements (Mazower, 2004).

Similarly, Smyrna's evolution paralleled that of Salonica, as its naturally sheltered bay and cosmopolitan citizenry attracted a flux of Levantine and European traders, integrating the city into global maritime circuits by the nineteenth century (Kütükoğlu, 2013). The city's heterogeneous population, comprising Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Levantine converts, fostered adaptable credit networks and joint-venture firms that harnessed Smyrna's strategic position between Anatolia's agricultural hinterland and Mediterranean trade routes (Kütükoğlu, 2013).

To support the qualitative explanation of the integrated trade corridor between Izmir and Thessaloniki, the following quantitative findings from specialized studies provide concrete evidence of the volume and economic importance of their trade networks. It is important to rank these studies here.

Kılıç (2020) demonstrates that in the wake of the 1838 Baltalimanı treaty, İzmir's customs revenues more than doubled between 1838 and 1876, reflecting a rapid expansion of Anglo-Ottoman commercial flows through the port (Kılıç, 2020).

Küçükkalay (2006) calculates from the 1797–1799 İzmir Efrenç customs ledgers that currant exports alone generated roughly 1.2 million akçe in duties, fully one-third of Smyrna's total customs revenue in that period (Küçükkalay, 2006). Küçükkalay (2013) shows that over 1793–1803 Istanbul's imports were dominated (45 %) by cotton textiles, mirroring İzmir's import profile and underscoring their functional interchangeability as trade hubs (Küçükkalay, 2013).

Küçükkalay & Elibol (2004) comparing 1795–1804 caravan-import data, report that 28 % of overland grain shipments into Istanbul originated from Smyrna's hinterland, underscoring Smyrna's integration with the capital's food supply chain (Küçükkalay & Elibol, 2004).

Frangakis-Syrett (1992) reconstructs that Smyrna's French carriers moved an average of 12,000 tons of cotton and silk per year between 1700 and 1820, highlighting the port's pivotal role in Western European textile networks (Frangakis-Syrett, 1992). Frangakis-Syrett (1988) shows that by the 1780s, over 40 % of İzmir's

total imports were processed colonial commodities (sugar, coffee, spices), underlining the city's position as a distribution node for global consumption goods (Frangakis-Syrett, 1988). Frangakis-Syrett (1992) also demonstrates that Ottoman and Western merchant communities in Smyrna jointly financed nearly £50,000 worth of ship-loads in the 1750s, indicating a highly integrated, multi-confessional commercial infrastructure (Frangakis-Syrett, 1992). Taken together, these figures not only underscore each port's individual prowess but also validate their operation as a unified Anglo–Ottoman corridor, one whose combined strengths eclipsed the sum of its parts.

Although Smyrna's strategic depth and global shipping routes made it the premier Ottoman port of the 18th century, Salonica's rapid rise in the 1760s demonstrated the power of hinterland synergy. Merchants such as Michael James and James Saunders[6] maintained overlapping factor networks in both cities, rotating their ships through Smyrna's Mediterranean connections and Salonica's European hinterland via Salonica's caravan roads. By treating Smyrna and Salonica as interchangeable waypoints, either calling at both in one voyage or trans-shipping goods between them, Levantine traders knitted together Anatolian raw materials with Balkan agricultural produce, reinforcing a bilateral flow of goods and information that underpinned British commercial dominance in the region (Schulz, 2018: 125–126). Salonica's first resident British consul, Richard Kemble, appointed in 1718, exemplifies this close linkage: his dual remit covered Salonica, Negroponte (Euboea), and "all Greece," underscoring the factory's emerging importance (Demiryürek, 2023: 113-114).

Ethnic and Cultural Dimensions of Levantine Commerce

While most literature focuses on institutional and economic factors, recent work on Levantine merchant identities underscores the importance of shared culture and religious affiliation (e.g., Dönmeh[7] and Greek Orthodox families) in

6 For further information, see http://www.levantineheritage.com/testi23.htm.

7 Dönme (Convert): Jewish sect founded in Salonika (now Thessaloníki, Greece) in the late 17th century, after the conversion to *Islām of Shabbetai Tzevi*, whom the sectarians believed to be the Messiah. The Dönme, who numbered about 15,000 in the late 20th century, are found primarily in Istanbul, Edirne, and İzmir, Türkiye. For further details, see https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donme.

forging trust-based networks. Though specific studies on Salonica's Dönmeh are limited, parallels with Smyrna's multi-confessional quarters (Çelebi, 1984) suggest that co-ethnic ties facilitated credit arrangements and factor appointments across both ports.

Beyond formal privileges, shared Levantine identity, rooted in multi-confessional urban communities, fostered trust and facilitated credit across Salonica and Smyrna. Merchants drawn from Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Dönmeh backgrounds often intermarried or partnered on joint ventures, using kinship ties to underwrite large consignments of mohair, silk, or currants. These co-ethnic networks operated parallel to, and at times intersected with, official consular assemblies, allowing merchants to pool resources, share insider information, and mitigate political risk. In this way, cultural affinity functioned as an informal "diplomatic" channel that buttressed the British Crown's commercial foothold in both Anatolia and the Ottoman Balkans (Çelebi, 1984: 210). Such co-ethnic ties operated alongside formal consular councils, creating informal "diplomatic" channels that buttressed British commercial footholds.

Beyond the British broker-diplomat networks, the Dönme communities of Salonica constituted a powerful, parallel commercial-economic network. As Marc David Baer shows, leading Dönme families, such as the Kapanci and Akif[8] households, controlled significant financial capital through banking and textile ventures, while also holding extensive agricultural estates in the environs of Salonica that anchored their agrarian investments (Baer, 2007: 150–151; Baer, 2010: 26). This Dönme network operated largely independently of the British consular privilege system, yet intersected with it to finance local trade and to distribute Salonican produce throughout the Balkan interior.

8 Hasan Akif was a famous tobacco merchant in Salonica. Hasan Akif, recognized in the Yearbook of the Province of Salonica (Selanik Vilayet Salnamesi - 1889-1890), as of the great merchants of the city. For further details, see Baer, M. D. (2007). Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and the Dönme in Ottoman Salonica and Turkish Istanbul. Journal of World History, 18(2), 141–170.

Gift-Giving and Court Culture

European and Ottoman accounts, ranging from Busbecq's letters to Lello's dispatches, agree that ceremonial gifts (kaftans, jewels, cash stipends) were vital for maintaining favor at the Sultan's court (Talbot, 2017: 105–107). The Levant Company's diplomatic budgets even included dedicated allocations for these presentations, which in turn secured trade concessions and tariff privileges. After the Company's abolition, British envoys continued to depend on Levantine networks to procure antiquities for the British Museum (Patrizio Gunning & Vlami, 2024: 60).

Building on Laidlaw's detailed account of British consular life in the Levant, gift-giving emerges not merely as a bilateral exchange but as a performative diplomacy that shaped metropolitan perceptions of Ottoman power and prestige. Laidlaw (2010) highlights how British vice-consuls meticulously recorded the selection, ceremonial presentation, and reception of kaftans and jewelry in their private diaries, often noting that the Sultan's appreciation of such costly offerings conferred informal legitimacy upon the donor's commercial petitions. These entries reveal that British envoys tailored gift packages to the courtly tastes catalogued in their own dispatches, thereby reinforcing the mutual intelligibility of elite cultures and securing tangible concessions, reduced duties, expedited firman renewals, or priority in convoy allocations. Moreover, Laidlaw's analysis underscores that such ritualized generosity underpinned networks of patronage extending beyond Istanbul; agents in Salonica and Smyrna invoked these ceremonial precedents in local gift exchanges, linking provincial merchants into the same diplomatic economy that animated the Sultan's court (Laidlaw, 2010: 58–62).

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study employs a three-pronged mixed-methods design to investigate the ways in which diplomatic privileges, customs infrastructures, caravan networks, and family-firm organizations collectively sustained British trade in the Ottoman Balkans. First, an archival institutional analysis draws upon Ottoman archival sources-registers registers, Salonica customs ledgers, and British consular dispatches (FO 78) to trace the evolution of firman-based tariff schedules,

quay assignments, and safe-conduct issuances between 1800 and 1850. By systematically coding these sources alongside Levant Company Minute Books, changes in duty rates and facility expansions are charted, thereby assessing the concrete impacts of consular interventions on port administration (Serdaroğlu, 2019; Geyikdağı, 2017).

Second, geospatial and network mapping integrates Lloyd's shipping lists and Ottoman caravan waystation inventories with contemporary Thrace and Macedonia maps via GIS. This spatial overlay illustrates maritime corridors between Smyrna and Salonica and overland routes through Ioannina, Monastir, and Bitola. Network software (Gephi) then quantifies route centrality and betweenness, revealing how local agha[9] intermediaries and consular safe-conduct letters sustained trade flows even during wartime disruptions (Vlami, 2014).

Third, the prosopographical family-firm investigation draws upon the archival records of the Borges, Murray, Saunders, and Hague dynasties, as well as consular council minutes and factory account books. Reconstructed organizational charts, mapped capital flows, and identified risk-sharing syndicates reveal the governance principles, succession planning, interbranch financing, and joint-stock partnerships, that underpinned dynastic resilience (Colli and Perez, 2020: 98-123).

This analysis is further enriched by a formal Network Analysis of Broker–Diplomat Linkages, wherein merchant-consuls, port facilities, and institutional actors serve as nodes, and their interactions, kinship ties, commercial partnerships, and usages of diplomatic instruments, are encoded as weighted edges. Degree, betweenness, and closeness centrality metrics then pinpoint the most influential brokers, while clustering coefficients expose cohesive familial or syndicate-based modules. Finally, a force-directed sociogram (Figure 2) renders visible how firmans, safe-conducts, and gift protocols were systematically mobilized as sources of commercial leverage.

9 *Agha (Ağa) – (Local Intermediaries):* In the Ottoman State, the title given to respected emirs, chiefs at the head of many institutions, and people who took control of the administration of regions.

Theoretically, our approach is grounded in commercial diplomacy (Mansfield & Milner, 1999), portraying consuls as proactive trade negotiators, and in Actor–Network Theory (Callon, 1986), which recognizes customs sheds, ships, and gift protocols as co-actors that, alongside human agents, co-construct the Smyrna-Salonica trade corridor. Together, these methods offer a holistic perspective on how public office and private enterprise coalesced into enduring commercial systems in the volatile Ottoman Balkans.

This study relies on partial archival records, Ottoman archival sources-registers, customs-shed ledgers, and consular dispatches, some of which survive unevenly across the period under review. Gaps in caravan waystation inventories and intermittent Levant Company minute-book entries may underrepresent certain credit syndicates or local gift-giving practices. While GIS mapping and network analysis mitigate these lacunae by triangulating multiple sources, future research should seek to supplement these findings with Ottoman court registers and private family archives where available.

Institutional and Logistical Foundations of Balkan Trade

The following section analyzes how diplomatic-administrative privileges and logistical infrastructures underpinned British commercial operations in the Ottoman Balkans by examining the formal institutions, transport networks, and organizational models that sustained the Smyrna–Salonica corridor. Between 1800 and 1850, British merchant-consuls not only negotiated firmans and secured tariff rebates (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 22–24) but also invested in customs facilities and caravan waystations to enhance trade efficiency. For example, Salonica's upgraded customs sheds and adjacent consular chambers streamlined cargo clearance during wartime congestion (Geyikdağı, 2017: 48–49). Overland trade similarly depended on a network of agha-managed caravan routes linking Smyrna to Salonica via Ioannina and Bitola, where consular letters of safe-conduct functioned as de facto passports for goods and pack animals (Vlami, 2014: 15–16). Moreover, family-firm governance, exemplified by the Borges and Murray dynasties, employed corporate-style reporting, risk-sharing syndicates, and cross-branch financing to absorb political shocks and market volatility (Epstein, 1968: 67–68; Serdaroğlu, 2019: 414–415). Collectively, these institutional

and logistical foundations constituted the backbone of resilient British trade in the Ottoman Balkans.

Customs Administration and Trade Hubs in Salonica

Between 1800 and 1850, Salonica's customs administration evolved from a rudimentary Ottoman port office into a sophisticated hub tailored to Western merchant needs. The issuance of firmans, imperial edicts granting specific trading rights, proved central: British vice-consuls such as John Oliver (1818–1832) and the Borges family (1812–1845) negotiated successive firmans that lowered duties on currants, mohair, and opium from the standard 8 percent to as low as three percent (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 22–24)[10]. These edicts not only stabilized profit margins during wartime inflation but also standardized tariff schedules, reducing arbitrary surcharges by local officials.[11]

Simultaneously, investments in physical infrastructure, partly financed by consular fees, transformed Salonica's waterfront. New stone customs sheds, designed to process multiple vessels in parallel, cut inspection times by up to 50 percent compared to pre-1800 wooden warehouses (Geyikdağı, 2017: 48–49). The co-location of the British consulate and the Levant Company factor adjacent to these sheds created an administrative cluster: merchants could petition for firman renewals on free trade rights, submit cargo manifests, and arrange convoy passes without leaving the port precinct. During the Russo-Ottoman War (1828–29), this arrangement allowed swift re-routing of grain consignments to Trieste when Salonica's northern roads were blockaded, an operation coordinated through daily consular minutes and the port's quay master (Chronakis, 2024: 91–93). Moreover, the expansion of Salonica's quay, extended by nearly 200

10 For the list covers all names and relevant information, see Levant Company: Admissions of Freemen and Grants of Liberty of Trade, 1695-1824. http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/Levant-Co-Members-1695-to-1824-D-Wilson.pdf and List of British Consular Officials in the Ottoman Empire and its former territories, from the 16th century to about 1860 by David Wilson.

http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/List_of_British_Consular_Officials_Turkey(1581-1860)-D_Wilson.pdf

11 TNA: SP 105/332 and SP 105/333. These data and findings have been compiled from the aforementioned archival collections.

meters between 1810 and 1840, provided berths for larger British and French vessels, further reducing unloading delays (Vlami, 2014: 17–18). Together, these administrative and infrastructural reforms not only optimized Salonica's capacity to handle increased Anglo-Ottoman trade but also institutionalized consular roles as integral components of port governance.

In addition to customs modernization, nineteenth-century Ottoman tax reforms fundamentally reshaped the fiscal landscape in ways that advantaged foreign trading networks. The 1839 Aynalıkavak Agreement extended capitulatory privileges by codifying reduced "extraordinary" levies on European merchants, while the 1838 Baltalimanı Treaty abolished many domestic duties on imports and exports, effectively aligning Ottoman tariff policy with British free-trade principles and granting the Board of Trade's stakeholders enhanced market access (Shaw, 1975: 435–442). These agreements were complemented by sweeping Tanzimat-era reforms that centralized tax collection under the new "iltizam" system, replacing a patchwork of ad hoc surcharges with standardized excise and land taxes, measures that not only increased state revenues but also stabilized duty expectations for Levant Company factors and other consular agents (Shaw, 1975: 450–455). As a result, Salonica's port duties became more predictable and transparent, reinforcing the administrative cluster around consular offices and customs sheds and further embedding British and other European networks into the Ottoman fiscal regime.[12]

Role of Local Intermediaries and Caravan Networks

By mid-century, the coastal capitals, Salonica in the north and İzmir in the south, had grown into truly cosmopolitan entrepôts whose urban fabrics reflected their global reach. Their Ottoman-style caravanserais sat beside European-designed customs houses; synagogues, Orthodox churches, and mosques lined streets once plied by Venetian galleys; and new hotels catered to steamship passengers bound for Marseille or Odessa. As Lyberatos (2009) and Harlaftis (2010) observe, guild halls and franc-styled coffeehouses provided the

12 For further information, Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, "Baltalimanı Muahedesi", TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/baltalimani-muahedesi. Retrieved Date: 09.05.2025.

institutional scaffolding for credit syndicates and information exchange, while experimental steam-tug services on the Gulf of İzmir and pilot-boat systems at Salonica reduced pilotage delays by half, knitting each port ever more tightly into a resilient, multi-modal network.

While maritime routes bound Smyrna and Salonica, overland caravan networks linked the Balkans' interior to these ports, underpinned by local intermediaries. Greek, Jewish, and Albanian aghas controlled pack-animal convoys that traversed mountain passes and river valleys, routes formalized through Ottoman menzil waystations (Chronakis, 2024: 102–105). British consuls issued safe-conduct letters that local aghas honored as de facto passports, guaranteeing unimpeded passage even through insurgent-held territory (Vlami, 2014: 15–16). This mechanism proved vital during the Greek War of Independence (1821–29), when coastal shipping was disrupted.

By 1830, archival caravan manifests show that up to 30 percent of goods entering Smyrna had first transited Salonica by land, including Balkan grains, wool, and copper ores bound for British textile mills (Schulz, 2018: 131–133). The Murray family capitalized on this system, organizing joint-stock caravan syndicates that pooled resources and spread risk among consular peers and intermediaries. These syndicates financed fodder, guides, and lodging, ensuring caravans could move year-round despite winter snows and summer banditry (Vlami, 2014: 15–16).

Waystations at Monastir (Bitola) and Ioannina, modernized with consular grants, offered secure storage and rudimentary insurance schemes: deposits lodged with local customs officials guaranteed compensation for lost or damaged goods. Through these caravan networks, British merchants extended their reach deep into the Ottoman hinterland, integrating rural producers into European commodity chains and reinforcing the Smyrna–Salonica corridor's resilience against maritime shocks.

Family Firms and Organizational Structures in the Ottoman Balkans

The longevity of British merchant-consul dynasties in the Ottoman Balkans rested on robust family-firm structures that blended consular governance with commercial enterprise. Histories of nineteenth-century Balkan business emphasize that clear succession planning, diversified management roles, and corporate-style decision-making were essential for enduring political and economic volatility. The Borges and Murray families exemplified these principles by appointing successive generations to consular or vice-consular posts, ensuring institutional memory and uninterrupted access to firmans and convoy privileges (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 23–24).

Operationally, family firms divided tasks geographically and functionally: Salonica offices specialized in currants and mohair exports, while Smyrna branches managed opium and tobacco imports. Interbranch ledgers tracked capital flows, profits from Mediterranean shipments funded Balkan caravan ventures, and vice versa, enabling dynamic reallocation of resources in response to regional crises (Chronakis, 2024: 110–112). Family assemblies, convened within consular chambers, acted as proto-board meetings to set tariff negotiation strategies, sanction new infrastructure investments (e.g., steamship shares), and coordinate syndicated insurance pools against wartime losses (Geyikdağı, 2017: 50–52).

Building on riverine, maritime, and overland arteries that linked Salonica and other Aegean ports with Vienna, Livorno, Marseille, Odessa, Manchester, London, and beyond, Balkan gateway cities leveraged their deep-water harbors and trans-Danubian connections to foster an integrated transport network. The naturally sheltered bays of Salonica and Varna, coupled with navigable river links up the Vardar and Danube, allowed grain, wool, copper, and timber to flow seamlessly from inland producer zones to European industrial centers, while coastal tramp steamers and river barges interchanged cargoes at tri-modal terminals. Investments by British and Austrian shipping firms in coaling stations, lighthouses, and covered quays further codified these logistical synergies,

lowering transit times by up to one-third between Balkan sources and northern European markets (Palairet, 2003; Roussev, 2016).

By mirroring emerging corporate governance models in Britain, such as risk-sharing limited partnerships and joint-stock shipping companies, these family firms achieved economies of scale and reduced transaction costs (Schulz, 2018: 140–142). In contrast, merchant houses lacking such structures, most notably the Saunders alliance, failed to withstand capital shortages and patronage lapses, contracting sharply by the mid-1830s. Thus, the intersection of family governance and consular office produced a distinctive organizational form that underwrote British commercial dominance in the 19th-century Ottoman Balkans.

The Balkans' geographic pivot, wedged between Russian grain belts, Austro-Hungarian manufactories, Italian finance houses, and Ottoman agricultural heartlands, made its ports irresistible prize in a growing economic contest. Salonica's and Smyrna's hinterlands supplied not only staple crops and raw wool, but also processed colonial goods drawn in by shifting consumption patterns, while consular-backed customs reforms funneled duty rebates to favored carriers. As the region became a node for five-way competition, Russia sought expanded Black Sea access, Austria mobilized Danubian rail concessions, Italy pressed for Levantine shipping rights, and the Ottoman state deployed firmans to balance them all (Karpat, 1972; Todorova, 1996; Fleet & Ianeva, 2014). This multi-vector rivalry institutionalized the Balkans as both a crossroads of empires and a laboratory of early globalization dynamics.

Adaptation and Failure of Merchant Families (1800–1850)

Between 1800 and 1850, the resilience or collapse of British merchant families in Salonica and Smyrna hinged on their ability to integrate diplomatic privilege with commercial innovation amid wars, revolutions, and shifting Ottoman policies. Drawing on scholarship in commercial diplomacy (Mansfield & Milner, 1999), Levant Company history (Schulz, 2018), Balkan trade studies (Chronakis, 2024), and family-business historiography, this study identifies five distinct trajectories.

Resilient Dynasties: The Borges and Murray Families

The early nineteenth century witnessed the rise of enduring "broker-diplomat" dynasties in the Ottoman Balkans, whose consular offices became linchpins of commercial continuity amid regional turmoil. In Salonica, the Borges family held the vice-consulship uninterrupted from 14 August 1812 to 1845 (Wilson-Member Lists, 2017, 1812-B92; Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 22). This long tenure enabled annual firman renewals at the Sublime Porte, capping duties on currants at a preferential 3 percent, significantly below the standard Ottoman rate, and thus shielding their London-bound exports from wartime tariff surges (Wilson-Member Lists, 2017: 22–24). Archival dispatches further reveal that during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–1829, the Borges coordinated maritime relief for shipwrecked British crews and employed lavish gift-giving protocols to deepen ties with Ottoman officials, smoothing bureaucratic delays and protecting shipments (Demiryürek, 2023: 113–114; Chronakis, 2024: 87–89). Even at the end of the century, the Borges Family was trading in the Salonica-Smyrna corridor with the merchant ships they owned, and this continued under the control of the Ottoman Empire.[13]

Concurrently, the Murray family, admitted as Levant Company freemen in 1812 (Wilson-Member Lists, 2017, 1812-B92), leveraged their Smyrna consular commission to innovate around naval blockades. During the Dardanelles crisis of 1811, they secured safe-conduct letters from the Smyrna vice-consulate (FO 78 series) to reroute bulk cotton and currant cargoes overland through Salonica and Ioannina (Vlami, 2014: 15–17). This caravan-relay network, operated in partnership with local ağhas, cut insurance premiums by nearly 40 percent, enabling the Murrays to diversify into grain and tobacco, thereby reducing dependency on a single commodity, and maintain revenue streams despite Greek privateer depredations (Geyikdağı, 2017: 42–44). The family's relations with the Ottoman Empire continued to develop in the second half of the century. In this context, it is known that Grenvill Murray had a letter requesting a meeting with the relevant statesmen regarding the supply of ships, which was needed by the Ottoman navy.[14]

13 BOA, BEO, 845-63302, 28 September 1896.

14 BOA, HR. SFR. 3., 148-29, 18 January 1869.

By marrying consular privilege with flexible logistical strategies, annual firman renewals, tariff rebates, safe-conduct arrangements, and multi-commodity diversification, both the Borges and Murray houses transformed diplomatic office into a mechanism of commercial resilience. Their factor networks, quay allocations, and credit syndicates remained operative even when Ottoman administrative reforms or regional revolutions threatened to sever conventional trade routes.

Partial Adapters: The Saunders House

The Saunders house in Salonica exemplifies a merchant-consul enterprise that showed initial promise but ultimately succumbed to overextension and undercapitalization. Appointed vice-consul in 1824 (Wilson-Member Lists, 2017, 1824-B101), James Saunders immediately established a factor in Monastir (Bitola) to shore up mohair exports whenever coastal roads to Salonica were disrupted by local revolts. In 1826, consular minutes from the Salonica factory assembly record Saunders's successful petition for a two-year firman extension, securing a duty rebate on mohair shipments and illustrating his adept use of diplomatic privilege (Demiryürek, 2023: 125).

However, Saunders's narrow reliance on a single commodity and his limited access to broader capital networks soon proved liabilities. Ottoman archival sources-registers show that by 1830, the scope of his tariff-waiver firmans covered only about 60 percent of his total transit volumes, as rising competition from well-financed French and Greek intermediaries began eroding his margins (Geyikdağı, 2017: 43). Facing cash shortages, Saunders entered a profit-sharing arrangement with a local Greek syndicate by 1835, an alliance documented in consular council minutes, that diluted his firm's autonomy and signaled a strategic retrenchment rather than growth (Demiryürek, 2023: 125–127). Although his early adoption of caravan links demonstrated some adaptability, Saunders's failure to diversify his cargo base or secure formal partnerships within the Levant Company ultimately led to his withdrawal from both Salonica's consular assembly and its wider trading networks.

Fragile Enterprises: John Oliver's Decline

John Oliver (consul at Salonica, 1818–1832) combined his diplomatic commission with grain and tobacco trading, but his enterprise collapsed under wartime disruption and insufficient social capital. Oliver's appointment is recorded in the official consular list (Wilson-Member Lists, 2017, 1818-B100), and his commercial correspondence, preserved in Kew's FO 78 dispatches, details initial success in shipping 500 tonnes of Anatolian grain to Istanbul (Demiryürek, 2023: 120–121).

However, the 1821–1822 Greek uprising severed overland caravans from Salonica to Istanbul, and Oliver's lack of robust co-ethnic networks, unlike the Borges or Murray houses, left him unable to reroute shipments or secure alternative financing (Chronakis, 2024: 95). Consular ledger entries show mounting demurrage and demurrage-related fines, while Ottoman customs registers reveal grain cargos detained for months awaiting firman renewals, a delay Oliver could not offset with gift-gifts or convoy-pass interventions. By 1833, the Levant Company Minute Books record Oliver's insolvency and resignation, underscoring how consular rank alone could not substitute for dense kinship and credit networks in navigating Balkan crises.

Post-Consular Entrepreneurs: Hague & Co.

Edward Hague's evolution from vice-consul (1836–1838) to shipping entrepreneur illustrates how former diplomatic officeholders could leverage their networks for commercial innovation. Though his vice-consular commission is recorded in official registers (Wilson-Member Lists, 2017, 1836-B115), Hague opted not to renew it, instead founding Hague & Co. in Smyrna in 1838 with seed capital mobilized through his Greek Orthodox kin in Salonica and Istanbul (Busbecq et al., 1927: 210–211). Archival partnership contracts housed at the London Metropolitan Archives reveal that his consortium secured loans against future consignments of Anatolian tobacco and Balkan oak and pine timber, commodities in high demand by Marseille's shipbuilding industry (Talbot, 2017: 111). Further evidence from Lloyd's manifests, cited in Salonica's customshed ledgers, shows Hague & Co.'s inaugural 1839 charter carried 200 tons of tobacco at a 5 percent freight discount, a rate negotiated via the convoy-pass privileges Hague

once held as consul (Vlami, 2014: 17). By embedding his semi-formal consular connections within a joint-stock shipping framework, Hague transformed diplomatic privilege into a replicable, capital-intensive business model, outlasting many traditional family firms that failed to adapt to free-trade imperatives.

Declining Houses: The Peach & Curling Alliance

By the 1840s, the once-formidable Peach and Curling families, Levant Company freemen since 1769 and 1775 respectively (Peach, 1769, B56; Curling, 1775, B56), saw their mid-century alliance in silk and opium trade unravel under technological disruption and rising competition. Operating consular factor rights in both Smyrna and Salonica, they coordinated shared quays for opium shipments in Salonica port (Wood, 1964: 88-89). However, French merchants' adoption of steam-powered vessels on the Marseille–Smyrna route halved transit times and undercut traditional sailing-ship ventures. Peach & Curling's joint partnerships, anchored in consular-minute–codified sailing agreements, lacked the capital to purchase steamship shares or charter modern tonnage (Schulz, 2018: 140–142).

Ottoman customs records from the 1840s document repeated demurrage charges on Peach & Curling's sailing hulls, while freight manifests show French-chartered steamers capturing an increasing share of opium and silk consignments. Attempts to renew consular patronage proved futile as the families could not match the financial guarantees offered by steam-capital syndicates. By 1850, both families had shuttered their Salonica factor houses[15], and their remaining trade devolved into regional peddling, marking a precipitous decline from their earlier broker-diplomat apex.

15 The Levant Company merchants were based on the Ottoman commercial organization, with agent and factories in various port cities (Salonica being one of them) and diplomatic missions in Istanbul, Aleppo and Izmir. Factor Houses represented the offices used by these agents and factors, where both residential and commercial activities were officially conducted. Salonica, in particular, had numerous factor houses, similar to those of almost all European powers from 18th century.

Diplomatic Mechanisms and Commercial Resilience

Diplomatic instruments such as firmans[16], safe-conducts, and gift protocols were systematically repurposed into tools of commercial resilience in the Ottoman Balkans between 1800 and 1850. In an era marked by administrative reforms, regional uprisings, and the broader Napoleonic and Russo-Ottoman conflicts, British Levant Company merchant-consuls leveraged these privileges to reduce tariffs, secure convoy protections, and cultivate patronage networks. By doing so, they not only navigated wartime perils and bureaucratic hurdles but also reinforced the longevity and adaptability of their trading enterprises. The following analysis unpacks the operationalization of these diplomatic mechanisms, detailing the procedural strategies employed and the tangible advantages gained by transregional trade networks.

A key factor in the survival and success of broker-diplomat families between 1800 and 1850 was their strategic use of diplomatic office, and the rights it conferred, to dismantle obstacles to commerce. Consular appointments granted merchants privileged access to Ottoman capitulations, which they wielded in three principal ways:

Firman Renewals and Tariff Exemptions

Between 1800 and 1850, British merchant-consuls in the Ottoman Balkans turned firman renewals and tariff exemptions into vital diplomatic instruments to stabilize trade margins amid fiscal volatility. A firman; an imperial edict issued by the Sultan; formally granted specific trading rights, including reduced customs duties. The Borges family of Salonica, holding the vice-consulship from 1812 to 1845, leveraged successive firmans to cap duties on currants at three percent, well below the standard Ottoman rate of 8 percent, thereby insulating their London-bound exports from wartime inflation and abrupt tariff hikes (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 22–24; Serdaroğlu, 2019: 411–412).

Securing these edicts required carefully drafted petitions, often prepared in both Ottoman Turkish and English, submitted to the Defterdar (finance minister) at the Sublime Porte. Archival minutes from the Salonica consular factory

16 It represents permissions in the context of more free trade here.

assembly indicate that merchants, working alongside the chancellor and treasurer, compiled cargo manifests, ship tonnages, and requested duty rates in the factory's chancery, then presented these petitions with customary gift payments to court officials (Demiryürek, 2023: 113–114). Once approved, Sultan Mahmud II's decree was dispatched back to the consulate, logged by chancery staff, and distributed to port authorities, guaranteeing reduced duties upon inspection (Vlami, 2014: 10–12).

This mechanism extended beyond currants. In the late 1820s, Edward Hague, vice-consul at Smyrna, secured firmans granting rebate privileges on Anatolian tobacco, offsetting losses from Dardanelles blockades. Ottoman registers confirm that his rebate firmans covered 70 percent of his annual throughput, significantly enhancing his firm's resilience (Busbecq et al., 1927: 210–211; Geyikdağı, 2017: 43). By embedding fiscal privileges within Sultan's edicts, British consular merchants institutionalized a stable administrative framework, ensuring predictable costs essential under the Balkans' shifting geopolitical pressures.

Safe-Conducts and Convoy Passes

Throughout the Napoleonic Wars and the Greek uprising (1821–1829), privateer attacks and soaring insurance premiums imperiled unescorted ships in the Aegean and Levant Seas (Schulz, 2018: 138–139). To counter these dangers, British merchant-consuls invoked their government credentials to secure berât-style safe-conduct letters and convoy passes from Ottoman naval authorities, effectively transforming contested waters into quasi-state-sanctioned trade corridors (Vlami, 2014: 15–16). These documents, issued by the Sultan's naval ministry and countersigned by the consulate, stipulated reciprocal obligations: British vessels paid token tribute or joined naval convoys, and Ottoman escorts guaranteed armed protection.

Archival Lloyd's List manifests, cross-referenced with Salonica customs-shed ledgers, record Hague & Co.'s use of convoy passes in 1839 to ship 200 tons of Anatolian tobacco to Marseille at a 40 percent reduced insurance rate (Talbot, 2017: 111). Likewise, during the 1811 Dardanelles crisis, the Murray firm's safe-conduct letters facilitated an innovative overland relay via Ioannina: local

ağhas recognized these letters as passports, ensuring uninterrupted passage for currants and cotton despite rebel blockades (Vlami, 2014: 15–17).

Consular records from the Salonica vice-consulate detail the administrative mechanics: ship captains presented registries and cargo manifests in the chancery, paid nominal consular fees, and received sealed convoy passes. These were then deposited alongside firmans in port offices, enabling quay masters to assign naval escorts promptly and expedite cargo inspections (Demiryürek, 2023: 120–121). By weaving diplomatic negotiation with precise administrative coordination, safe-conducts and convoy passes underpinned resilient British trade networks even amid wartime perils.

Gift-Giving and Network Cultivation

Gift-giving at the Ottoman court and among provincial officials served as a vital, informal diplomatic mechanism that complemented formal instruments like firmans and safe-conducts. Levant Company–financed consular budgets explicitly allocated funds for "presents", kaftans, fine textiles, jewelry, and cash stipends, intended to cement patronage ties and smooth bureaucratic processes (Talbot, 2017: 105–107). For instance, John Oliver's 1820 dispatches to the British embassy record a 500 Ottoman lira expenditure on kaftans and jewelry for the governor of Salonica, an outlay that directly facilitated the release of grain consignments previously detained at port customs (Demiryürek, 2023: 120–121).

Similarly, the Borges family's gift campaigns, documented in personal correspondence at the London Metropolitan Archives, coincided with the seamless renewal of firmans and the reduction of port quarantine delays during cholera outbreaks, underscoring the practical impact of ceremonial generosity (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 22–24). These exchanges extended beyond senior bureaucrats to Ottoman naval officers, caravan ağhas, and even rival European consuls, weaving a web of reciprocal obligations. In Smyrna, Edward Hague's gifts to the Kapudan Pasha (Grand Admiral) are recorded in Ottoman naval logs; these presents led to preferential convoy assignments for his vessels, reducing wartime insurance costs (Busbecq et al., 1927: 210–211).

Consular minute books further reveal that shared feasts and ceremonial visits fostered relationships across the Balkan trade network, facilitating quick resolutions of cargo disputes and active intelligence-sharing on market conditions (Chronakis, 2024: 93–95). By institutionalizing gift-giving within their diplomatic portfolios, British merchant-consuls created flexible, personality-driven channels of influence. This hybridization of public office and private enterprise underwrote the longevity of dynasties such as the Borges and Murrays and reshaped the architecture of Ottoman–British trade in the Balkans.

Commercial Actors and Business–Commercial Networks

The following analysis examines how broker-diplomat families (Borges, Murrays), post-consular entrepreneurs (Hague & Co.), and firm alliances (Peach & Curling) operationalized diplomatic tools through internal organizational structures, credit syndicates, and trans-Mediterranean partnerships. Drawing on archival partnership contracts (London Metropolitan Archives), Lloyd's shipping manifests, and Lloyd's List convoy records, this analysis maps the web of inter-firm loans, joint-stock ventures[17], and factor networks that converted firmans, safe-conducts, and gift-giving into tangible commercial outcomes across multiple ports (Chatziioannou & Harlaftis, 2015; Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011; Chronakis, 2024).

In the business-history tradition, firms are social organizations embedded in institutional and familial networks rather than mere profit-seeking engines. The Borges and Murray dynasties exemplify this embeddedness. Both were admitted freemen of the English Levant Company, a status conferring not only trading rights but also eligibility for consular appointments (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011: 22). Successive Borges generations held the Salonica vice-consulship (1812–1845), while the Murrays leveraged their Smyrna consular commissions to shape cargo quotas and secure firmans (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011). They maintained formal family councils recorded in Levant Company minute books to allocate capital, divide labor, and manage succession. Their governance resembled proto-corporate hierarchies, with roles such as chancery manager,

17 *Joint-Stock Company or Ventures:* A business that is owned by the group of people who have shares in the company.

caravan agent, and shipmaster enabling rapid mobilization of diplomatic privileges and commercial assets during crises (Chronakis, 2024: 110–112).

Credit syndicates underpinned their resilience. Archival partnership contracts reveal that the Murray firm formed a rotating credit pool among ten merchant-consuls, each underwriting caravan expenses in exchange for proportional dividends on grain and currant sales from the 18th century SP 110/87, Murray Family Papers). As Levant Company merchants, they could petition directly for safe-conduct letters through official channels, guaranteeing overland passage even through insurgent territory. Such joint-stock arrangements, akin to early nineteenth-century limited partnerships, blended diplomatic office with commercial innovation.

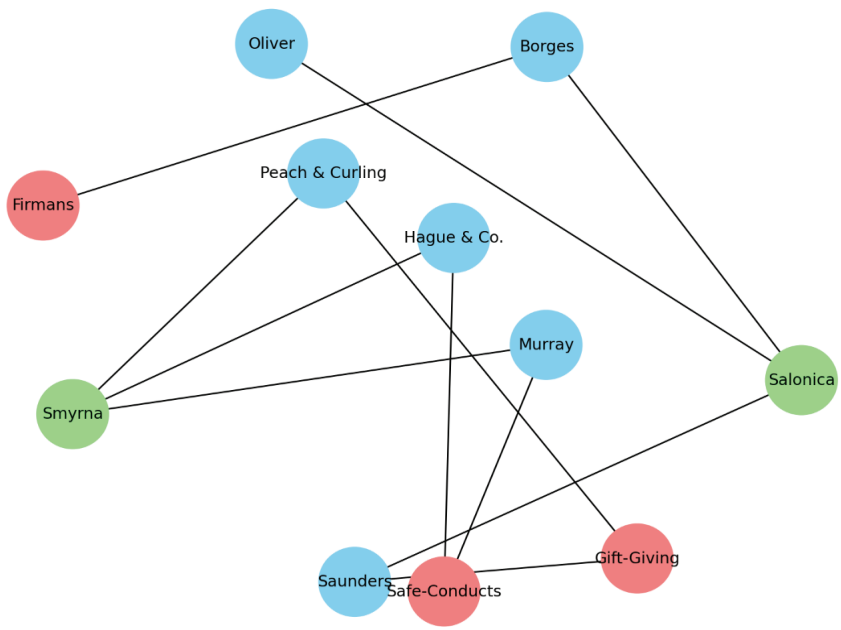
Hague & Co. illustrates successful post-consular adaptation. Freed from vice-consular duties, Edward Hague, vice-consul of Smyrna (1836–1838), recast his convoy-pass network into a chartered shipping consortium. Lloyd's manifests document Hague & Co.'s 1839 charter of the Levant Princess, funded by a thirty-member subscription of Greek Orthodox kin, many former Levant Company factors, across Salonica and Istanbul (Lloyd's, 1839; Busbecq et al., 1927: 210–211). This joint-stock venture offered differentiated returns, tobacco investors earned higher percentages, timber backers accepted steadier yields, mirroring modern portfolio practices.

By contrast, the Peach & Curling alliance shows the limits of traditional Levant Company partnerships. Admitted freemen since 1769 and 1775 respectively, Peach and Curling coordinated opium shipments through shared quays in Smyrna and Salonica (Serdaroğlu, 2019: 48). Yet their rigid sailing-ship agreements, codified in consular minutes, prevented timely reinvestment in steam technology. As French steamers halved transit times on the Marseille–Smyrna run, Peach & Curling's recorded charters plummeted by 80 percent between 1842 and 1848 (Schulz, 2018: 140–142). By 1850, their factor houses lay idle, and their trade devolved into regional peddling.

Figure 1, visualizes the core "broker-diplomat" network that underpinned Anglo-Ottoman commerce in the early nineteenth century. Nodes represent principal merchant families (Borges, Murray, Saunders, Hague & Co., Peach &

Curling), key port factories (Salonica, Smyrna, Ioannina, Monastir), and diplomatic instruments (firmans, safe-conducts, gift protocols), each coded by shape and color to distinguish actors, locations, and privileges. Edges trace the direct linkages, such as the Borges dynasty's recurrent firman renewals in Salonica or the Murray family's overland safe-conduct routes via Ioannina, illustrating how consular commissions were operationalized through both sea-lane and caravan networks. By mapping these multi-modal connections, the figure reveals the structural integration of public office and private enterprise, highlighting how merchant-consuls leveraged administrative tools to weave resilient trade corridors across the Ottoman Balkans.

Figure 1.Broker-Diplomat Networks, Ports, and Instruments



Note: Nodes sized and color-coded by type (families in blue, ports in green, instruments in red). Edges showing which families used which instruments and where they operated.

Across these cases, two features stand out: first, Levant Company freeman status provided both trading rights and a pathway into consular office; second, diplomatic credentials were repurposed as commercial levers; firmans, safe-conducts, and gift protocols became instruments of credit and corporate governance. Ultimately, the durability of the Smyrna–Salonica corridor rested not just on geography but on these broker-diplomat families and firms, whose organizational acumen and network-building prowess institutionalized a hybrid logic of public office and private enterprise in the volatile Ottoman Balkans.

Network Analysis of Broker-Diplomat Linkages

Building on GIS mapping and prosopographical data, a formal network analysis was conducted to quantify the structural positions of key actors, families, consular offices, and port nodes, within the Smyrna–Salonica corridor. Utilizing Gephi software, a bipartite graph was constructed in which one set of nodes represents broker-diplomat entities (e.g., the Borges and Murray dynasties, Hague & Co., Peach & Curling) and the other set represents institutional and geographic nodes (e.g., the Levant Company, the Ottoman Naval Ministry, Smyrna port, Salonica customs sheds). Edges were encoded to capture documented relationships: shared firman petitions, co-membership in credit syndicates, joint-stock shipping ventures, and safe-conduct endorsements (Wilson-Consular Lists, 2011; Chronakis, 2024).

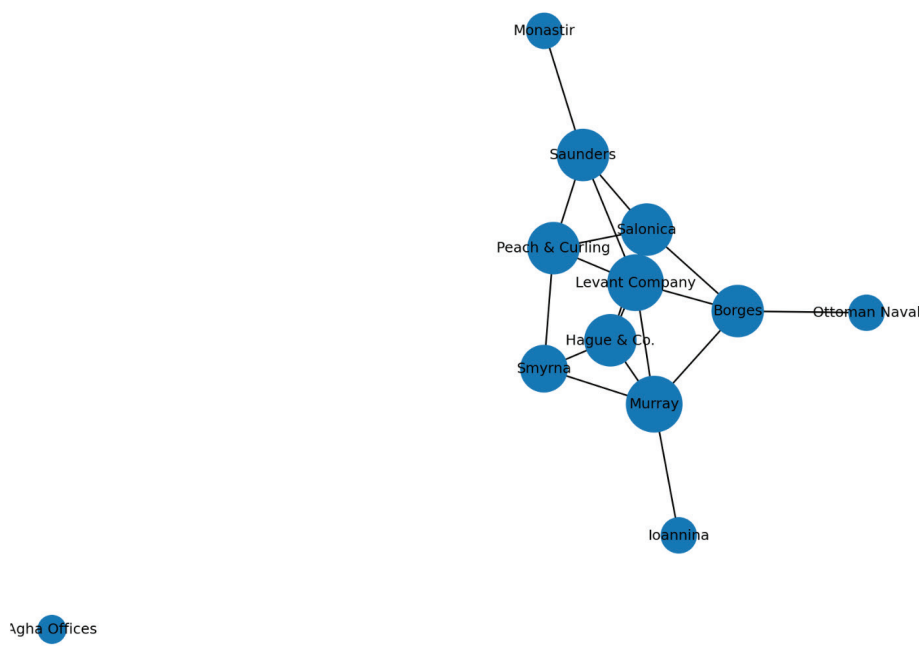
Degree centrality is calculated to identify which actors held the most direct connections, revealing the Borges family's extensive ties to both diplomatic and commercial institutions, and betweenness centrality is employed to uncover brokers who bridged otherwise disconnected clusters, notably the Murray caravan syndicate linking Anatolian producers to Balkan markets (Vlami, 2014, pp. 15–16). Closeness centrality further indicates which nodes could most efficiently disseminate information and privileges across the network, highlighting the pivotal role of the Levant Company's factory councils in London and Salonica.

Community detection via the Louvain algorithm subdivides the network into cohesive modules, each corresponding to thematic clusters: "firman negotiation," "caravan banking," and "convoy coordination." Analysis of module membership

shows that post-consular entrepreneurs like Hague & Co. occupy a distinct cluster centered on chartered shipping, whereas traditional alliances such as Peach & Curling remain confined to the "sailing-ship partnership" module, explaining their failure to adapt to steam technology (Schulz, 2018: 140–142).

Visualization of these metrics in Figure 2 illustrates how broker-diplomats converted diplomatic-administrative privileges into commercial leverage: actors with high betweenness functioned as critical intermediaries in tariff negotiations and convoy arrangements, while those with high degree maintained multiple credit and gifting relationships simultaneously. This network analysis therefore empirically substantiates the argument that the resilience of British trade in the Ottoman Balkans derived from the strategic embedding of merchant-consuls within dense, multiplex networks of formal and informal ties.

Figure 2. Broker-Diplomat Network Centralities



Note: visualizing the key relationships among merchant families, ports, and institutions. This network graph highlights the centrality of each actor; families

such as Borges and Murray, trading hubs, and institutional nodes; demonstrating how diplomatic offices (Levant Company, Ottoman Naval) and local intermediaries (Agha Offices) interconnected broker-diplomat families with port operations and each other.

Figure 2, illustrates the centrality measures within the broker-diplomat network, underscoring the pivotal roles of key families, consular offices, and port nodes in sustaining the Smyrna–Salonica trade corridor. Using degree and betweenness centrality metrics calculated via Gephi, the graph shows the Borges and Murray dynasties occupying the highest centrality scores, reflecting their extensive ties to both Ottoman authorities (e.g., firman issuances, safe-conduct passes) and British commercial partners. Ports such as Smyrna and Salonica emerge as critical hubs, linking maritime routes with overland caravan networks managed by local aghas. Institutional nodes, namely the Levant Company and the Ottoman Naval Ministry, serve as the principal brokers of diplomatic instruments that enabled credit syndicates and joint-stock ventures to function across multiple jurisdictions. This visualization thus confirms the argument that network position within this hybrid diplomatic–commercial system directly correlated with firms' resilience and capacity to navigate geopolitical and economic disruptions.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the intertwining of diplomatic mission and commercial operations created a resilient Anglo–Ottoman trade corridor between Smyrna and Salonica from 1800 to 1850. Our analysis shows a clear positive relationship between the scope of consular authority and the ease of trade: merchants who held or closely allied with consular posts systematically transformed firmans, safe-conducts, and gift-giving into practical instruments that smoothed customs procedures, secured convoy protections, and mitigated bureaucratic delays. During periods of Russo-Ottoman conflict, Greek insurgency, and administrative reforms, the Borges and Murray families leveraged their vice-consular commissions to cap duties, reroute cargoes overland, and negotiate tariff rebates, actions that directly insulated their currant, cotton, and tobacco exports from geopolitical shocks.

Equally, post-consular entrepreneurs such as Hague & Co. recast convoy-pass networks into chartered shipping consortia, while traditional partnerships like Peach & Curling faltered when they failed to reconfigure their partnerships around new diplomatic-commercial realities. These cases underscore that diplomatic privilege was not an end in itself but a lever for underwriting joint-stock ventures, rotating credit pools, and factor networks that spanned the Aegean, the Balkans, and beyond.

Crucially, the familial structure of these merchant houses proved decisive. Formal family councils, recorded in Levant Company minute books, allocated capital, divided labor, and managed succession, enabling rapid mobilization of diplomatic tools and commercial assets in crisis. Embedded credit syndicates spread risk across multiple partners, while trans-Mediterranean alliances linked Salonica's Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and British Levant Company freemen into webs of reciprocal obligation. In effect, family-firm governance and consular office coalesced into a hybrid organizational form, one capable of weathering tariff hikes, blockade disruptions, and political upheavals alike.

Mapping these broker-diplomat networks through prosopographical analysis, GIS trade-flow reconstructions, and archival correspondence demonstrates that the Smyrna–Salonica corridor was sustained not by geography alone but by the strategic deployment of diplomatic privileges within robust commercial architectures. In this way, British Levant Company merchants institutionalized a durable form of commercial diplomacy: converting firmans into predictable margins, convoy passes into secure corridors, and gift-giving into enduring patronage. Ultimately, the symbiosis of diplomatic mission, family-firm organization, and inter-firm networks enabled British traders to sustain, and even expand, their operations amid the persistent political and economic crises of the early nineteenth-century Ottoman Balkans.

The broker-diplomat model documented here offers a historical exemplar for contemporary commercial diplomacy: embedding trade negotiators within hybrid public-private networks can stabilize supply chains under geopolitical stress. Modern policymakers might draw lessons on structuring

export-promotion agencies with quasi-consular privileges or on leveraging local business councils to underwrite trade corridors in fragile regions.

Ultimately, this study underscores that the resilience of British trade in the Ottoman Balkans derived not from purely commercial or purely diplomatic strategies, but from a deliberate fusion of both. Broker-diplomat families wielded formal consular offices and informal patronage networks together, unlike merchants who operated solely on market terms or diplomats confined to protocol, thus sustaining commerce through successive regional crises.

Endnotes

1 *Firman (Ferman):* It is the general name given to Ottoman Sultan's orders bearing the signature (tuğra). For this study, the meaning of "firman" is more in the context of granting the right to free trade for the foreign merchants in the territories of the Ottomans.

Ahdname: A document containing commercial privileges or peace treaties granted to foreign states by the Ottomans. The Ottoman compound noun 'ahdname' is derived from the Arabic word 'ahd ("promise, pledge") and the Persian noun name ("letter, text"). In early modern Ottoman usage, as in the literature noted, these documents were called Ahdname-i Hümayun, Charters of Imperial Pledge, and they were issued to certain European states, granting their citizens the right to reside in the Ottoman Empire and to engage in trade with minimal tariffs. The ahdnames bestowed by the Ottomans upon their tributary states stipulated that in return for payment of annual tribute, these states would enjoy military and political protection, as well as trading privileges. Levant Company's British merchants did their commercial operations under the Ottoman authority with firmans or ahdnames (capoitılations).

2 Prosopography is the study of groups of people through the collective examination of their lives, often using historical records, literary sources, and artifacts. Rather than focusing on a single individual, prosopography (prosopographical network) analyzes patterns in a group, such as shared roles, relationships, or social status, to better understand historical societies and social structures. This method is especially useful when detailed information about individuals is scarce, as it allows researchers to draw insights from broader trends and connections between people.

3 List of British Consular Officials in the Ottoman Empire and its former territories, from the 16th century to about 1860 by David Wilson. Retrieved Date: February 13, 2025.

http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/List_of_British_Consular_Officials_Turkey(1581-1860)-D_Wilson.pdf

4 O. G. D. Busbecq, E. S. Forster and K. A. Roider, The Turkish letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, imperial ambassador at Constantinople, 1554-1562: translated from the Latin of the Elzevir edition of 1663, 1927, (No Title). For the abstract version of this source, see https://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/Discuss_the_reception_of_European_diplomats.pdf. Also see, S. A. Skilliter, William Harborne and the trade with Turkey 1578–1582: A documentary study (Vol. I). British Academy, 1977.

5 For the ships and related information, see http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/lloyds-list.html.

6 For further information, see http://www.levantineheritage.com/testi23.htm.

7 Dönme (Convert): Jewish sect founded in Salonika (now Thessaloníki, Greece) in the late 17th century, after the conversion to Islām of Shabbetai Tzevi, whom the sectarians believed to be the Messiah. The Dönme, who numbered about 15,000 in the late 20th century, are found primarily in Istanbul, Edirne, and İzmir, Türkiye. For further details, see https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donme.

8 Hasan Akif was a famous tobacco merchant in Salonica. Hasan Akif, recognized in the Yearbook of the Province of Salonica (Selanik Vilayet Salnamesi - 1889-1890), as of the great merchants of the city. For further details, see Baer, M. D. (2007). Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and the Dönme in Ottoman Salonica and Turkish Istanbul. Journal of World History, 18(2), 141–170.

9 Agha (Ağa) – (Local Intermediaries): In the Ottoman State, the title given to respected emirs, chiefs at the head of many institutions, and people who took control of the administration of regions.

10 For the list covers all names and relevant information, see Levant Company: Admissions of Freemen and Grants of Liberty of Trade, 1695-1824. http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/Levant-Co-Members-1695-to-1824-D-Wilson.pdf. Retrieved Date: February 11, 2025; List of British Consular Officials in the Ottoman Empire and its former territories, from the 16th century to about 1860 by David Wilson http://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/List_of_British_Consular_Officials_Turkey(1581-1860)-D_Wilson.pdf

11 TNA: SP 105/332 and SP 105/333. These data and findings have been compiled from the aforementioned archival collections.

12 For further information, Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, "Baltalimanı Muahedesi", TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/baltalimani-muahedesi. Retrieved Date: 09.05.2025.

13 BOA, BEO, 845-63302, 28 September 1896.

14 BOA, HR. SFR. 3., 148-29, 18 January 1869.

15 The Levant Company merchants were based on the Ottoman commercial organization, with agent and factories in various port cities (Salonica being one of them) and diplomatic missions in Istanbul, Aleppo and Izmir. Factor Houses represented the offices used by these agents and factors, where both residential and commercial activities were officially conducted. Salonica, in particular, had numerous factor houses, similar to those of almost all European powers from 18th century.

16 It represents permissions in the context of more free trade here.

17 Joint-Stock Company or Ventures: A business that is owned by the group of people who have shares in the company.

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The Balkan Football Cup as an Instrument of Political Rapprochement in the Balkans (1929–1936)

Nemanja Mitrović, Nikola Mijatov

Abstract: During the interwar period, the Balkan states were plagued by mutual mistrust, which hindered any possibility of deeper cooperation among them. Despite ongoing political issues, efforts were made to improve relations, and football emerged as a means to bridge the divides. In the late 1920s, football players became national symbols, with their successes and failures reflecting on their countries' reputations, but also on relations with other nations. Eventually, the growing popularity of football in the Balkans led to the organization of the Balkan Cup, a football competition between Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, which was also intended as a political tool to bring this region's countries closer together. In total, there were six Balkan Cups, and each one had its distinguished political background. What should have been used as a tool for closer relations had become an area where current political issues had been manifested in sports. As a result, football suffered, and politics overshadowed the potential for sport to foster unity in the region. The Balkan Cup was canceled due to the shifting political landscape in Europe and the diverse sports and political aspirations of the Balkan nations. This paper explores precisely the role of the Balkan Cup as a political instrument aimed at fostering cooperation among Balkan states between 1929 and 1936.

Keywords: Balkan Cup, Football, Politics, Balkan, Sport

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Introduction

The legacy of World War I left a tense atmosphere in Southeast Europe. By creating the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania at the expense of the former territory of the Habsburg Empire and territories claimed by countries such as Italy and Bulgaria, it led to the fact that states with revisionist aspirations surrounded the two mentioned kingdoms. In the Balkans, such friendly relations prevailed only between Belgrade and Bucharest. It should be emphasized that even here, higher interests, the desire to preserve the Versailles order, were essentially the main factors of their good neighborliness.

From the very beginning, football followed foreign policy, supported its goals, and often served as a means of polling public opinion and improving relations between nations. Not by chance, the creation of the Little Entente was accompanied by football matches. The Little Entente represented the military alliance of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, created based on bilateral agreements signed in the period 1920-1922. The purpose of the alliance was defense against Hungarian revisionism. More precisely, from the claims of Hungary and Austria to the territories of the former Habsburg Empire, which belonged to the mentioned countries after the Versailles peace negotiations. The alliance later expanded to include cooperation in the economic and socio-cultural spheres. It existed until the Munich Agreement in 1938 and the division of Czechoslovakia (Сладек, 2019: 280-290; Vanku, 1969: 313-316).

The Yugoslav national team made its first appearances against its allies, Czechoslovakia and Romania, during 1921 and 1922 (Oprișan, 2022: 6-7; Stanišić, 1969: 17-18). This period is also associated with the creation of the first tournaments. Namely, the representatives of the football organizations of Belgrade and Bucharest, with the great support of the two monarchs, created the Cup of Friendly Countries, which lasted throughout the interwar period. During the interwar period, two such coups were held. The first, which lasted from 1922 to 1930, was named after King Aleksandar I Karađorđević, and the other 1936 to 1940, it bore the name of the Romanian king Charles II of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. The winner of the first cup after seven games was the national team of Yugoslavia, and the second after four matches was the national team of Romania.

A little later, when the Little Entente exceeded the borders of the political-military alliance, the Little Entente Football Cup was created in 1937–1938, which was named after one of the biggest supporters of the alliance, the Czechoslovak president Edward Benes (Mitrović et Mijatov, 2025, 37-58; Stojković, 1999: 65-66).

The Balkans and sport cooperation

The year 1929 was crucial for Balkan sports cooperation. Although the focus of this paper is football, it should also be mentioned that cooperation in the field of athletics laid the foundation of the Balkan sports games. The roots of seeing sport as a powerful means of bringing people together appeared in 1927. Petko Zlatev, representative of the Bulgarian Sports Association, suggested that sports contacts be established between Greece and Bulgaria to create and later promote friendly relations between the two nations. At that moment, there was great hostility between the two countries, especially because of the small war on the border from 1925. Zlatev's proposal, therefore, had a strong political connotation. In October, the Greek Athletics Association managed to organize a successful competition between Bulgarian and Greek athletes. It was also the first meeting between the two countries, which took place in a friendly atmosphere. The unexpected success of the competition attracted a lot of attention from politicians who began to look at sports more and more as a useful political tool. When the idea of organizing the Balkan Athletics Games took shape among the Greek athletes, their Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, strongly supported it (Balkan games, 2016). He believed that such a competition would be a convenient place for formal and informal meetings and discussions between the athletes themselves and diplomatic representatives ready to work in the direction of developing cooperation. Many politicians in Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, and Turkey shared the same viewpoint (Kissoudi, 2016: 10-11).

Along with the final preparations for the Balkan Athletics Games in 1929, negotiations were also conducted for the Balkan competition in the most popular sport - football. As in athletics, Greece was the initiator of the idea due to its long sports tradition, so in football, it was Yugoslavia and Romania, where football was at a higher level. The first conference of football representatives

of Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece, and Bulgaria was held in the "Palace" hotel in Belgrade on April 14, 1929 (Konferencija delegata sportskih saveza Rumunije, Grčke, Bugarske i Jugoslavije, 1929). Although Turkey was interested, it did not send its delegate, but stated in the letter that it accepts all solutions adopted by the conference. The position around which all the delegations gathered was that the competition be organized without outside interference and in accordance with the rules that were applied in the Central European Cup. The Central European or European International Cup of Nations was a competition between the football teams of Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, which was first organized in 1927. The idea for the competition came from long-time coach of the Austrian national team and prominent European football worker, Hugo Meisl (1881-1937). As it was a double-point system, the first tournament lasted until 1930. Cup 1927-1930, it was also known as the Cup of Antoni Švehla, the Czechoslovak prime minister who donated the "crystal cup". In the period 1927-1960, a total of six cups were organized, and in the last one, in addition to the mentioned countries, Yugoslavia also participated (D'Avanzo, 2020: 214-217).

However, the meeting in Belgrade concluded that the Balkan federations independently organize a competition under the double cup system for two years, that the federations independently finance the costs of their national teams, that they allocate an equal amount for the purchase of a cup on which the tricolors and coats of arms of the countries would be engraved, that the judges be exclusively from the participating countries, as well as that the competition is managed by the Cup Committee, which will meet every year at the end of the games. Until the next meeting, which was scheduled for May 9 in Bucharest, the Yugoslav Football Association was given the task of drafting a Statute that would prescribe all the rules, as well as penalties in case of non-appearance at the scheduled match or other violations. Also, it was agreed in Belgrade that the cup would start in the fall of the same year (Balkanski kup ostvaren, 1929).

One cannot help but notice the fact that the first concrete steps in the organization of the Balkan Cup took place at the time of the organization of the first world championship, which is why the interest of FIFE and the federations from

Central Europe in the idea of the Balkan Cup was great. Hugo Meisl, an important figure in European football, supported the idea of the Balkan Cup and was considered one of the "conveners of the conference in Belgrade". Although the other countries were against interference from the outside, he was supposed to attend the meeting as an observer, but was prevented due to health problems. However, behind his desire was the intention to win over the Balkan federations for the idea of a European championship, in which the Balkan Cup would be one of the branches, and against the French proposal on the World Cup adopted at the 17th FIFA Congress in Amsterdam on May 25-26, 1928 (Minutes of the 17th Annual Congress, 1928).

On May 9, 1929, at the second conference in Bucharest, the Romanian Medeanu was elected president of the cup, and the Yugoslav Josip Riboli was elected secretary. In addition to the aforementioned, the Cup Committee included two other members, the Bulgarian Dimitar Ivanov (president of the Bulgarian National Sports Federation) and the Greek Kostas Konstantaras. The first session of the committee was also held then. On it, the drawing of pairs was carried out, and the proposal to appoint five judges from each participating country was accepted, with the Bulgarians submitting their list a little later. Although Turkey sent a delegate to Bucharest, he did not have the authority to actively participate in the work and only followed the work of the conference with observer status. Turkey's problem has been its indecision about emphasizing its geographical affiliation, which is why, in football, it has been between accepting matches with Middle Eastern countries such as Palestine and Egypt or with Balkan countries (Balkanski kup, početak utakmica i izbor sudija, 1929).

The statute drafted by JNS was adopted in Bucharest, and according to it, the competition was defined as amateur, which, as it turned out later, did not suit everyone. The double point system meant that all participants had to play two games against the same opponent, one at home and one away. Since there were a total of four participants, each had to play six games within two years. Such a system, on the one hand, meant less burden for the clubs because the players would be absent from the club competitions three times a year for the purposes of the cup, but it carried with it the risk of losing the interest of the audience,

as well as the participants themselves in the competition. This bad side of the cup was soon noticed by the organizers, and from the next cup, a single-point system was applied, which could be realized in a much shorter time. Since then, tournaments have been organized once a year in the capital of one of the participants and have lasted an average of about a week (Stojković, 1999: 62-65).

The Balkan Cup was initiated and followed by political interests from the very beginning. In political circles, it was believed that "the beginning of a new era of Balkan football" would have a beneficial effect on public opinion and influence the rapprochement of countries in the cultural, economic, and political spheres. The opportunity to hold informal talks, to create a propaganda image of good interstate relations, was something that attracted high state representatives to football. Which is why you could often read that almost all the matches of the Balkan Cups were played in the presence of diplomatic representatives, ministers, generals, and even members of royal dynasties. The year 1929 was of high importance as the Wall Street stock market crashed in October of that year, leading to the Great Depression (Hobsbaum, 2002: 69-86). All of this only contributed to Balkan states looking for allies in their nearest surrounding.

Cup matches were accompanied by various events and had a specific protocol. Apart from the ceremonial opening, the parade, receptions, cocktails, tours of the most important cultural landmarks, etc., were organized. Visiting football players were given attention, no less than that prescribed for the reception of official-held delegations. In addition to each other, football workers often met with various state representatives on those occasions. The relationship between politics and football was close and mutually beneficial. Not only was football used as a political tool for the development of other forms of interstate and regional cooperation, but also the favor of the government contributed to the faster development of this sport. States began to invest more seriously in football and its promotion, to build and expand stadiums and help organize football matches. As the Romanian newspaper Gazeta Sporturilor estimated, with the establishment of the Balkan Cup, "a new era has begun for Balkan football" and regional cooperation as a whole (Cupa Balcanică, 1929, 1).

I Balkan Cup

The draw determined that the first Balkan Cup would start with a match between Yugoslavia and Romania, and the date was set for October 6, 1929. As Yugoslavia did not send its best team, the result of the match was 2:1 in favor of the Romanians. The second match, which took place in Zagreb on Vidovdan in 1931, was decisive for the cup. With a 4:2 victory over Yugoslavia, Romania secured first place, while Yugoslavia was second with three wins and three losses (Romania–Jugoszlavia 2:1, 1929; Reprezentacija Rumunije pobedila je sa 4:2, 1931). The national teams of Greece and Bulgaria followed with two wins and four losses each. The most drastic result difference was recorded during the match between Romania and Greece played on May 25, 1930. Then the Romanian national team triumphed with 8:1. For Romanian football, this was one of the most sensational matches of the interwar period. The Romanian captain, center forward Rudolf Wacher, scored as many as 5 goals (România-Görögország 8:1, 1930; Momento 26. Mai 1930, 1998).

Important for the further fate of the competition was the last match between Greece and Romania, held in Athens on November 29, because the Congress of the Cup was held during that period. During the two-day session on November 28-29, there were disagreements regarding the participation of professionals and the issue of further organization of the competition. The only ones who had professional players were the Romanians. The representatives of Greece were expressly against the use of professional players, while the others, led by Yugoslavia, believed that professional Romanian players were not significantly different in quality from the others. To the Greek proposal presented at the session on November 28 to respect the amateur principle of the competition and ban the use of professionals, Romania responded by being ready to leave the competition. After a sharp debate, which continued into the next day, the Greek representative gave up his request and closed the problem that could lead to the collapse of football cooperation in the Balkans. Interest in holding the tournament prevailed, and the rest of the conference was realized in an atmosphere that contributed to significant changes in the organization of the competition (Grci protiv učešća rumunskih profesionalaca u utakmicama za kup, 1931).

The most significant proposal was presented by Mihailo Andrejević, representative of the Yugoslav Football Association. After his presentation on the problems that arose during the implementation of the competition, he proposed changing the system and the organization itself. He believed that organizing the Balkan Cup according to a single point system and in one place would be more successful and beneficial. It was agreed that the host would change every year, and the choice was made with a die. The draw determined Belgrade as the host for the II Balkan Cup, Bucharest for the III, and Athens for the IV. At the session of November 29, the new Committee Management was elected. Greek Kostas Konstantaras became the president of the II Balkaniad, and Mihailo Andrejević became the secretary due to his support (Idući kongres i utakmice..., 1931).

Since Turkey also attended the congress this time, the draw for the II Balkan Cup was richer for one participant. The national teams of Romania and Turkey were supposed to open the cup in Belgrade on June 25. However, shortly after the congress in Athens, the Turkish Football Association decided not to participate in the competition. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian Olympic Committee organized the Balkaniad from September 37 to October 4, 1931, in Sofia. It was a competition in athletics, swimming, cycling, fencing, equestrian games, and, in addition, football. Since matches were played between Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Turkey, that competition is wrongly named as the II Balkan Cup in some works. The first reason why it is wrong is that the organizer was not the Committee of the Balkan Cup, and the second is that the matches were played at a time when the 1st Balkan Cup was still going on. As it was, in that football competition, Bulgaria took first place with two victories, Turkey second with one victory and one defeat, and Yugoslavia took last place with two defeats. (Grčka i Bugarska počinju program na olimpijadi, 1931; Balkanijada u Sofiji je počela, 1931; Podela nagrada pobednicima na Balkanijadi, 1931).

Već posle uspešno realizovanog prvog Balkanskog kupa saradnja između regionalnih fudbalskih saveza je dostigla zavidan nivo. Politički napori za zbližavanjem zemalja regiona plodonosno su uticali i na saradnju fudbalskih saveza. Povoljna atmosfera dovela je i do zajedničkog nastupa pet zemalja Balkana na kongresu održanom u Stokholmu od 13. do 15. maja 1932. godine na kojem je

izvršena reorganizacija FIFE, doneta odluka da ova organizacija ne organizuje olimpijsko takmičenje u fudbalu, izabran Cirih za sedište FIFE i odabrana Italija za domaćina narednog Mundijala. Cilj zajedničkog nastupa balkanskih fudbalskih saveza bio je aktivno uključivanje u rad ove organizacije, zaštita interesa i posebo prekid prakse da se bez njih donose odluke koje se tiču fudbala na Balkanu

Following the successful implementation of the first Balkan Cup, collaboration among regional football associations reached an enviable level. Political efforts aimed at fostering closer ties between the countries in the region positively influenced this cooperation. The favorable atmosphere led to the joint participation of five Balkan countries at the congress held in Stockholm from May 13 to 15, 1932. During this congress, FIFA was reorganized, a decision was made that this organization would not organize an Olympic football competition, Zurich was selected as FIFA's headquarters, and Italy was chosen to host the next World Cup. The goal of the Balkan football associations' joint appearance was to actively engage in the discussions at this congress, protect their interests, and, crucially, to end the practice of making decisions regarding football in the Balkans without their involvement. After the FIFA congress, football associations of Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece continued to further deepen their ties through the organization of the next cup (Balkanski savezi istupiće zajedno na kongresu FIFE, 1932; Lisi, 2022: 18).

II Balkan Cup

After all the changes and subsequent changes due to the withdrawal of Turkey, the II Balkan Cup started in Belgrade on June 26 and lasted until July 3, 1932. The tournament began with a ceremonial parade of all national teams and the performance of their national anthems at the "BSK" stadium. In addition to this, the FC "Yugoslavia" stadium was also used. The one-week competition was opened by the host match against the Greek national team. The convincing victory of Yugoslavia with an unprecedented score of 7:1 created a feeling among the home crowd, but also among the players themselves, that the cup trophy would remain in Belgrade (Stanišić, 1969: 94).

Due to the rain that prevented the match between Bulgaria and Romania on June 25, the committee decided to play it before the main match. After Yugoslavia, the favorite was the Romanian national team, in which Rudolph Watzer, a Romanian football player from Timișoara, who was important for the development of Yugoslav football, played as a captain. Namely, he was 1924-1925, together with another Romanian, Desideri Laki, the first foreign professional footballer to play for a Serbian club. Thus, Rudolf Rudi Vecer (1901-1993) is one of the most important figures of Romanian interwar football. During his sports career, he played for many teams. He started his career in the club "Kinezul Timisoara" in 1920, and then played for "Unirea", "Juventus" from Bucharest, "Ripensia" from Timisoara, and many others. Among the foreign clubs in the 20s, he played for the Hungarian "FC Terekves", "Ujpest", and "FC Pécs", for the Yugoslav "BSK", and the French club "Jer". He left a significant mark on the Romanian national team, for which he played from 1923 to 1932. He was the captain of the national team that participated in the 1st World Cup in Uruguay in 1930. At the 1st Balkan Cup, he scored a total of 7 goals, which helped win the cup. He played the last game for the national team against Bulgaria in Belgrade during the II Balkan Cup in 1932 (Ionescu et Tudoran, 1964: 420-421).

Romania's defeat of 2:0 encouraged the Yugoslavs on the one hand, and caused surprise on the other. The football played by the Bulgarian national team was at a high level and could have posed a problem for Yugoslavia's quest for the trophy. From the first day, it was hinted that the most important match for the trophy would be between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. That meeting took place on June 30, and to the great disappointment of the audience, the Yugoslav national team lost 3:2. As the newspaper noted, the culprit of the home team's defeat was that "the players took their opponent too lightly and played completely casually." (Prače od pobede, 1932).

As far as the audience is concerned, the first signs of biased and unsportsmanlike cheering appeared at this match, and it can be said during the competition as well. At the beginning of the development path, the fans primarily cheered for football and welcomed the successes of both the home team and the opposing team almost equally. However, already at the beginning of the thirties, the

first signs of a nationalist and chauvinist audience appeared. During the Romania-Bulgaria match, the Belgrade audience wholeheartedly cheered for the Bulgarians, considering them a weaker team whose eventual victory would contribute to an easier path for the Yugoslav national team to the trophy. Such an atmosphere was also typical in other matches, where the audience directed its favor towards the weaker teams. However, at the match of home team against Bulgaria, there was an unexpected reaction from the audience. The poor performance of the Yugoslavs created a shocked and unpatriotic audience, which vented its anger with shouts and whistles in the direction of not the opponent, but the home team. As a journalist from the newspaper Vreme noted: "Truly, even in Singapore, ours would not have encountered such a hostile audience." The citizens of Belgrade, who came in large numbers to the BSK stadium expecting a victory, were met with great disappointment. (O držanju beogradske publike..., 1932).

Even then, it was clear that the cup was in Bulgaria's hands, even though there were two more matches between Bulgaria and Greece and Yugoslavia and Romania before the end of the competition. The first match ended with a score of 2:0 in favor of Bulgaria. However, the trial by the Romanian judge was questionable. The Greeks, therefore, filed an appeal and asked for a replay of the game due to bias, the recognition of an offside goal, as well as the rejection of a regular goal scored by the Greek national team. This issue was discussed at the Committee meeting on July 3. Yugoslavia and Greece were in favor of accepting the appeal, while the other two countries were against it. The dispute was resolved by the chairman of the committee, Greek Konstantaras, who, in case of a tied vote, decided by the right of an additional vote. Due to the fact that some Bulgarian players had already left Belgrade, he decided to withdraw the appeal because a regular replay of the game was no longer possible (Grčka je povukla svoj protest..., 1932).

At the end of the II Balkan Cup, the standings were as follows: Bulgaria with all three wins, Yugoslavia with two wins and one loss, Romania with one win, and Greece with three losses. The cup awarding ceremony took place on the last day of the tournament after the match between Yugoslavia and Romania, which ended 3:1 for the home team. The ceremony began with the raising of the cup

winner's flag, the Bulgarian players coming onto the field and singing the national anthem, after which the teams of Yugoslavia and Romania joined in. The Bulgarians took the cup with them. On July 5, they arrived in Sofia by special train, where a festive welcome was organized for them. Houses were decorated with state flags, shops were closed, and a mass of people followed the team from the train station to the National Assembly, where they were greeted by the mayor of Sofia and other high-ranking government officials (Kraj turnira za Balkanski kup, 1932; Oduševljeni doček..., 1932).

In the same year, 1932, the Nazi Party of Germany won the majority in the elections. It was an announcement of the dark ages of Europe, which the whirlwind of war would destroy. That year, no one expected such rise of the Nazi Party, given that the power was firmly in the hands of Paul von Hindenburg (Hobsbaum, 2002: 87-92).

III Balkan Cup

According to the decisions made in Belgrade, the III Balkan Cup started on June 3 at the ONEF stadium in Bucharest. The Romanian authorities invested a lot in this cup. On the opening day, the renovation of the Romanian stadium "Oficiul Național de Educație Fizică - ONEF" was not completely finished. Although the surface was changed, which was the basis for playing the games, the stands were not finished. By June 3, only a part of the stands that could accommodate around 6,000 spectators were ready. It should be emphasized that the stadium's capacity was several times higher. During its grand opening in 1926, it attracted a crowd of over 28,000 people. The very fact that the stadium was renovated and that it was practically the largest in the Balkans at that time speaks in favor of how much the Romanian authorities have invested in the development of their football, but also the development of Balkan cooperation through football. Also, it is worth mentioning that King Carol II was a great fan of sports and often personally advocated for its development in Romania (Stadion još nije gotov..., 1932; Povestea Stadionului ANEF / ONEF / Republicii, 2022; Sport, Cupa balcanica, 1933).

By this cup, the opening ceremony had already been established. It consisted of a parade of all the teams in the stadium, lining up in the middle, chanting the anthems of the participants, and an address by the organizer, that is, the president of the association in whose country the competition is organized. After the ceremony, only the teams whose meeting was supposed to start the cup remained on the field. In this case, it was the national teams of Yugoslavia and Greece. Like the Belgrade crowd, the Bucharest crowd heartily cheered for the weaker ones in the matches of the other national teams. Although without support from the stands, the Yugoslavian national team achieved their first victory of 5:3 in this cup (Prva pobeda Jugoslavije…., 1933).

The match against Bulgaria, which was played on June 5, was very important for the Romanians. To the delight of around 15,000 fans, the home team recorded a convincing 7:0 victory. The Minister of Labour, Health and Social Protection, Dimitrie Ioanițescu, who watched the match with other high-ranking representatives, congratulated the players after the match and rewarded their success with gifts (România–Bulgária 7:0, 1933; O strălucită victorie românească…, 1933).

In the remaining games against Bulgaria and Greece, the Yugoslav and Romanian national teams recorded victories, and their meeting, which ended the tournament, was decisive. The match between the hosts and Greece took place on June 8, coinciding with the Romanian national holiday, which added a special significance to the event. It was attended by King Carol II, Grand Duke Mihai, Prime Minister Vaida Voevod, along with various ministers, military representatives, and members of the diplomatic corps. Due to the holiday, newspapers focused more on the opening ceremony, the parades, and the distinguished guests than on the game itself, which concluded with a 1-0 victory for Romania. Following the match, journalists interviewed numerous Romanian and foreign politicians and diplomats present in the stands, sharing their insights about the game with their readers. The responses led sports journalists to believe that these officials were quite knowledgeable about the sport (Impresionanta sărbătoare a sportului, 1933; Declarații dupa matchul de eri, 1933).

There was tremendous interest from both the audience and officials during the decisive cup match between Romania and Yugoslavia, which took place on the final day of the competition, June 11, 1933. The stands of the stadium were packed, and according to some estimates, the match was watched by around 28,000 fans, including Crown Prince Mihai and several ministers. The result was 5:0 to the joy of the Bucharest crowd. The sharp play of the Romanian players led to the fact that in most of the match the Yugoslav team played with ten, at one point nine players, which partially explains the result (România–Jugoszlávia 5:0, 1933). Romania won the cup for the second time, while Yugoslavia was second, Bulgaria was third, and Greece was fourth.

The Third Balkan Cup helped establish Romanian football as one of the best in the region. This success positively influenced national pride among the population and improved Romania's image among other Balkan nations. The belief that football could serve as a significant representative of Romania in Europe and beyond led to political interference in the Romanian Football Federation's operations. In August, Viorel Tilea, a prominent politician and diplomat with extensive connections, was appointed to lead the organization. His appointment aligned with Romania's political goals of expanding cooperation and building football ties with various countries, which would foster positive sentiments towards Romania. In an interview following his appointment, Tilea emphasized the importance of sports in educating younger generations, instilling discipline, promoting teamwork, and encouraging physical development. He highlighted football as the most popular, healthiest, and easiest sport to promote. According to him, football held exceptional national significance and should be encouraged even in the smallest Romanian towns. Previously, as a politician, he advocated for the creation of a secretariat for physical education, urging the state to invest more in sports (De vorbă cu d. Ministru Viorel V. Tilea, 1933).

IV Balkan Cup

The draw decided that the match between Greece and Yugoslavia would open the competition, and the match between Yugoslavia and Romania would close (Zaključene su dve utakmice..., 1934). The games were opened with a ceremony

and the laying of wreaths on the tomb of the Unknown Hero in Athens on December 22, 1934, and the beginning of the committee's congress, whose first task was the selection of referees for the upcoming matches. As with the previous cups, part of the Balkan Cup included ceremonial receptions, tours of sights in the city and its vicinity, which is why the cup was more than just a football competition (Danas se otvaraju..., 1934).

Yugoslavia was also considered the favorite at these games. In the forecasts, Romania came after it, then Bulgaria, while the Greek national team was considered the weakest team. A surprise happened in the first game. The favorite was defeated by the outsider, that is, Greece defeated Yugoslavia with 2:1. There was great interest in the match, and around 20,000 Greeks enjoyed the success of their team (I pored teškog poraza..., 1934).

The uncertainty of the competition lasted almost until the last day, when two important games were played, the outcome of which depended on the winner. The first was between Bulgaria and Greece, and it ended with Bulgaria winning 2:1. Greece's defeat created the possibility for Yugoslavia and Romania to win the trophy. Therefore, the winner of the last game was also the winner of the cup. Romania needed only one point to return the trophy won at the last cup to Bucharest, and Yugoslavia only needed a victory. After 90 minutes of intense play and a particularly difficult atmosphere that had a bad effect on the concentration of the players, Yugoslavia emerged as the winner. With a 4:0 victory, the Yugoslav players finally won the Balkan Cup trophy after three missed opportunities (Jugoszlávia–Románia 4:0, 1935).

What marked the games in Athens was not only the unsportsmanlike cheering of the audience, but also the behavior of the people who were in charge of the safety of the participants. Even before the cup, the Greeks earned the epithet of ardent fans, but during the tournament, that cheering reached a special level. The desire to keep the cup in Athens at all costs was also widespread among the players, who often caused injuries to opposing players with their sharp play. Of course, the Athenians applauded every violation by the home team and greeted the referee's decisions in those cases with shouts. As mentioned, the key match for Greece was the match against Bulgaria on January 1, refereed by Yugoslavian

referee Bora Vasiljević. During the entire match, the audience insulted the referee, threw various objects at him, and even stones. However, the height of the scandalous behavior was the moment when a Greek policeman pointed a gun at him, screaming that he was going to kill him. The Greek players also showed no respect for Vasiljević. Goalkeeper Gramatikopoulos, for example, physically assaulted the referee twice, once in the dressing room and the second time after the end of the game (Balkanski kup je naš..., 1935; Jugoslavija je juče u Atini..., 1935).

The impression that the Yugoslav referee was to blame for the Greek defeat was also reflected in the audience's attitude towards the Yugoslav national team in the match against Romania, which took place on the same day. When they went out on the field, instead of greeting them, the audience greeted them with shouts, ugly words, but also with oranges and various objects that they threw at them. The gendarmes standing next to the field also could not refrain from an outburst. After the duel between goalkeeper Bartul Čulić and Romanian striker Dobaj in the 15th minute of the game, the Romanian footballer was injured. This was met with excitement by the audience, who, together with the gendarmes, stormed the field and attacked the Yugoslav goalkeeper in the goal itself. When the crowd around the goal dispersed, the goalkeeper remained lying on the grass. What happened was that a gendarme hit him in the head so hard that he passed out. Čulić, who was carried off the field on a stretcher, was replaced by reserve goalkeeper Bratulić. In the continuation of the match, the audience got more and more hooliganism. Throwing stones on the field was especially dangerous for the players. At one point, the situation was so critical that it was only thanks to the intervention of the Greek Minister of the Army that further rampage of the crowd and its encroachment on the field was prevented (Kako smo pobedili Rumune, 1935). The match eventually ended with a convincing victory of 4:0. The Yugoslav players won the cup, and as a reward, they received another day of stay in Athens from the Yugoslav Football Association. Yugoslav national team member Anđelko Marušić remembered the match like this: "As I said, more emotions bind me to the Athens match against the Romanians." Although the Romanians were not a worthy partner for us at that moment, we still had to beat them in that hot-tempered crowd that whistled nonstop and cheered them

on. If the Romanians had taken only one point from us, Greece would have been the champion of the Balkans. Well, we didn't give that. We won convincingly - out of pure spite!" (Stanišić, 1969: 19, 28).

This atmosphere led to serious discussions at the last meeting of the Cup Committee held on January 2nd in Athens, where Konstantaras, the vice-president of the Greek Federation, was elected as the next president, and Petar Stojadinov, the secretary of the Bulgarian Federation, as the secretary. The representative of Yugoslavia, Kostić, together with his Romanian colleague Octav Luchide, suggested that the next matches should be as disciplined as possible. Some of the decisions made were in that direction. It was voted to pay more attention to the safety of the players and take the necessary measures to prevent the crowd from breaking into the field. Also, a ban was passed that anyone can stand behind the goal. Stricter measures have also been introduced in terms of punishing players. The members of the Cup Committee were given the function of members of the penalty committee. Thanks to their dual position, they have since been able to penalize players for rough play or indiscipline without prior notification from the referees. One of the biggest prescribed penalties was a ban on participation in the next games within the cup. As for the next tournament, it was decided that it would be held in June in Sofia (Specijalne mere za rad..., 1935).

It is important to note that this was the last cup before the serious tightening of relations in the whole of Europe, including in the Balkans. In 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany, which would contribute to the growth of right-wing forces throughout Europe (Hobsbaum, 2002: 92). In this new geopolitical division of the old continent, the Balkan states would find themselves on opposing sides.

V Balkan Cup

The opening ceremony of the fifth consecutive Balkan Cup took place on June 15. About 10,000 athletes took part in the event, and in a procession accompanied by music and torches, they visited the most important landmarks of the city. The procession ended with the singing of national anthems by all participants and speeches by Bulgarian officials and foreign representatives. The speeches were held next to the monument dedicated to the Russian Tsar Alexander

II the Liberator, which is located near the Bulgarian Parliament. The competition opened with a match between Bulgaria and Greece on June 16, 1935, at Sofia's Junak Stadium. In the presence of around 25,000 spectators and almost the entire Bulgarian Council of Ministers, King Boris announced the official opening of the cup. Although the king said in his speech: "these peaceful, friendly matches will contribute to familiarity and rapprochement between the Balkan youth and will cultivate in them a feeling of mutual respect and friendship", the atmosphere among the participants was quite different (Svečano otvaranje Balkanijade, 1935).

The development of political relations in the Balkans, especially since 1934, led to a colder atmosphere. Although it was not highlighted in public, events such as the creation of the Balkan Pact directed against Bulgaria's revisionist aspirations to correct borders, and the assassination of King Alexander in 1934 opened a new stage in regional cooperation. Then came the replacement of the "ringleaders" in Bulgaria who advocated an alliance with France and unification with Yugoslavia, the coming of pro-German currents to power in Romania and Yugoslavia, and political instability in Greece, which will lead to the fall of the Second Greek Republic and the return of the monarchy in November 1935 year, but also the increasingly strong foreign influence were factors that had a bad impact on the region. Greece and Romania were against the Yugoslav rapprochement with Bulgaria, which led to pressure and a certain cooling down. All this was reflected in the atmosphere in Balkan sports. Due to the issue of Dobrudja, Romania had the most pronounced opinion that Bulgaria should be isolated. The impression that it could not protect its interests from Bulgaria if it were more closely connected, or united with Yugoslavia, was the basis of its Balkan policy (Avramovski, 1986: 199-201). The first hints that the peak of football cooperation has passed and that it is slowly moving towards its end came in Athens, and for the first time in Sofia, there were statements that the cup should be liquidated.

The competition was plagued by problems from the very beginning. The first to arise was the issue of selecting judges. At the meeting of the Cup Committee, the Romanians objected to the participation of the Yugoslav referee Mika Popović, who was supposed to referee the Bulgaria-Romania match. While the

host agreed, the Romanian representatives demanded that the Greek Stavros Hatzopoulos be chosen as the main referee of that match. In the remark submitted to the committee, it was written that the Romanian national team was not satisfied with his refereeing during the match with Bulgaria at the cup held in Belgrade in 1932, when the Romanians lost 2:0. As a compromise solution, it was proposed to invite judge Ružić from Yugoslavia, which was accepted. However, the following day, the representatives of Romania and Bulgaria agreed that the match should be refereed by the mentioned Greek, which made the arrival of Ružić in vain. Because of this solution to the issue of appointing arbitrators, it happened that not a single game was refereed by someone from Yugoslavia. The first match between Bulgaria and Greece was refereed by Romanian referee Costel Radulescu. The matches Yugoslavia-Romania, Bulgaria-Romania and Bulgaria-Yugoslavia were refereed by Stavros Hadzopoulos. The matches Greece-Yugoslavia and Greece-Romania were led by the Bulgarian referee Ivan Dosev (Balkan cup 1935 results, 2025).

The first match between Bulgaria and Greece on June 16 ended with a 5:2 victory for the hosts. The next match was between the predicted favorites, Yugoslavia and Romania, on June 17. He was followed by many problems and misunderstandings, which, in principle, clearly showed the atmosphere in which the Balkan football cooperation was carried out. Due to the rain, the start of the match was postponed several times. Instead of the match starting at 17:00 Sofia time (one hour less in Yugoslavian time), it started at 18:55. The reason for the postponement was a discussion about whether the field was fit for the game. The Romanians advocated a postponement, while Yugoslavia and especially the Sofia audience demanded that the match be held. Due to the darkness, the match could not be finished regularly, but the Greek referee, at the special insistence of the Romanian representative, ended the game in the 78th minute with the score 2:0. As there were still 12 minutes of the game left, it was agreed that that time would be played later. However, on the same evening, the Romanian representatives Davila and Radulescu sent a complaint and a request to the committee to repeat the game, with the explanation that the field was not in condition. Yugoslav representatives Andrejević and Boško Simonović considered such a complaint unfounded. The Yugoslav position was that it was only necessary to

play the remaining twelve minutes. A fierce debate developed around this, and even the Romanians threatened that if the committee did not come up with an acceptable solution for them, they would boycott the rest of the matches, that is, they would leave the Balkan Cup (Utakmica Jugoslavija – Rumunija, 1935).

At the Committee meeting held on the night between June 19 and 20, many problems were manifested. Yugoslav judges Ružić and Popović pointed out in a note handed to the organizers that, as a sign of protest for the behavior towards them, they will no longer respond to summonses for trial. In addition to the fact that the Yugoslav referees did not judge a single game, their opinions in the function of line referees were not respected, especially by the Romanian referee Radulescu. To avoid the problem of arbitrators in the future, the committee at the mentioned session adopted the proposal of the Yugoslav and Romanian representatives that, in case the federations of the participating countries do not submit a list of domestic judges, it is possible to hire judges from abroad. Another problem was related to the financing of the competition. All the organizing countries, except Yugoslavia, managed to organize the cup with a certain financial profit. For example, the Bulgarian Federation, as the organizer of the cup, managed to pay the entire costs of the organization only based on a percentage of the sale of specially printed postage stamps of the Ministry of Posts of Bulgaria. So, the income from tickets remained entirely with the Bulgarian Federation (Bugari prihodom..., 1935).

Only Yugoslavia did not earn from the Balkan Cup. As its minus was a large representative of the JNS, at the committee meeting, he proposed that the other countries raise their share so that Yugoslavia could reduce its deficit. The Romanian representative agreed to pay Yugoslavia 500 dollars more than the previous sum of 1700 dollars. However, such a procedure was accompanied by the condition that the next tournament, instead of Belgrade, be organized in Bucharest. The Bulgarian federation, on the other hand, offered that a match between the national teams take place in Belgrade and that all the revenue from it would go to Yugoslavia as compensation for the deficit created in the Balkan Cup. The Greeks were asked to raise their expenses by $300, but they did not accept it.

The epilogue of the discussion about playing the remaining 12 minutes of the Yugoslavia-Romania match was that the Romanian representative, according to the score his team achieved, decided to accept the result from the interrupted game as final, which ended the need to make up the remaining time. In the longer term, this example led to the inclusion of a provision in the Statute of the Balkan Cup that "a match that was interrupted for sports-technical or atmospheric reasons must be continued the next day or when the cup committee determines" (Daleko nadmoćnija, 1935).

At the JNS meeting held on June 22, the general line towards the Balkan Cup was determined. The behavior of the Romanian representatives was understood in Belgrade as a desire to break the cup. To preserve the very basis on which the competition rested, a decision was made to give up financial claims and to go over the referee problem, and to preserve the order of organization of the tournament by country at all costs. Therefore, the position of JNS was that the organization of the cup in 1936 must belong to Belgrade. It was precisely around this question that the most heated discussion took place. Romania did not give up its offer and demands, and Yugoslavia was not ready to give in. In the end, that item was put to a vote on June 23. As Bulgaria supported Yugoslavia, and Greece supported Romania, the situation arose that the president decided with his vote. Of course, Konstantaras voted in accordance with his country's position, and the Romanian proposal was adopted. Since such a decision was final, the Yugoslav Football Association was given a period of two months to accept or reject it (Jučerašnja utakmica..., 1935).

At the same time, the decisive match Yugoslavia-Bulgaria to be played on June 24 or not. However, at the insistence of the Yugoslav representative, the Committee decided almost at the last moment to hold the meeting. According to the calculations, the Yugoslav national team needed a win or a draw, and Bulgaria needed a win to climb to the podium. The desire of the Bulgarians to win the cup was manifested in numerous promises of the authorities and the previously unprecedented interest of the population in a football match. The Bulgarian players were promised 20,000 leva and a suit by their association in case of victory. Apart from the authorities and organizers, richer citizens also promised

the players prizes. One of the examples was the free annual entrance to the Sofia cinema for all national team members. Such promises stimulated the players to give their maximum to win. The "spirited Bulgarian national team players" needed some time to consolidate on the field. After the Yugoslav lead of 2:0, there was an unexpected twist. Bulgaria took the lead with 3:2 to the great joy of around 30,000 fans and the Bulgarian Prince Kirill, who followed the game from the first to the last moment. Yugoslavia's goal in the 75th minute made the final score 3:3, which at that moment meant the victory of the "white eagles" (Jugoslavija je nerešenom igrom..., 1935).

The direction in which the matches were played eventually led to the calculations of the Bulgarians, and they also turned against Yugoslavia. It should be emphasized that her motives were exclusively aimed at winning the cup, because after all the games played, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were equal in terms of points. In such cases, a system of quotients obtained based on conceded and given goals was applied, according to which Yugoslavia was the winner. However, at the meeting where the question of the winner was resolved, the other members sided with Bulgaria, and the trophy remained in Sofia, and arbitration was requested from FIFA, even though the Balkan Cup was an independent tournament. In the end, it was decided that after 10 months, an additional match would be played to determine the winner. As Yugoslavia was no longer interested, the trophy remained with the Bulgarians (Balkan cup (For Nations), 2020).

Due to the overall behavior during the tournament, the Yugoslav Football Association held an emergency meeting immediately after the return of the national team. The key decision of the JNS was to withdraw from the competition and ban local referees from arbitrating in Romania (Jugoslavija je istupila, 1935). After that decision, JNS turned to the Central European Cup, where they were accepted in 1937 (Стојановић, 1953: 49-50; Mitropa Cup 1937, 1999).

VI Balkan Cup

As for the Balkan Cup in Bucharest, it took place with three participants in May 1936. According to the decision of the committee meeting in Sofia, the organizer

of the next cup was given the authority to consider Turkey's request to join the competition. As Romania took over the role of organizer and Yugoslavia left the competition, the question of Turkish participation was of great importance. Although Bucharest made great efforts, in the end, Turkey was not one of the participants this time either. The Balkan Cup was slowly coming to an end.

The first match of the Balkan Cup was played on May 17, 1936, at the ONEF Stadium in Bucharest between the hosts and Greece. Romania won 5:2 in front of around 15,000 fans. The next match was between Bulgaria and Greece. The Bulgarian national team emerged victorious from that match with a score of 5:4, even though they had about 20,000 Romanian fans in the game in addition to the sharp and rough Greeks (România a învis Grecia cu 5:2, 1936, 1; България бие Гърция съ 5:4, 1936). This game meant that Romania and Bulgaria would fight for the trophy in the last game. That decisive match was played on May 24. Although the tickets for the game were distributed, due to the rain, about half of the expected 40,000 fans came to the stadium. After the first half, which ended 1:1, the second half was mostly played on the Bulgarian side of the field. During 45 minutes, the Romanian players exerted constant pressure and scored 3 more goals. With a score of 4:1, Romania won the gold trophy of the Balkan Cup (Футболъ, Въ последния мачъ, 1936).

However, in the end, the issue of the whole competition arose. The key for the future of the competition, according to Luchide, was the return of Yugoslavia and the entry of Turkey into the competition. In that direction, JNS and the Turkish Football Federation were contacted by phone and asked to send their representatives for the last session scheduled for May 24. On the other hand, the further participation of Romania was questionable. Like Yugoslavia, it applied to participate in two important competitions: the European Cup (4th International Cup) and the Mitropa Cup (Central European Cup). It was quite clear in the committee that in case she was accepted, in the mentioned competitions, she would leave the cup. Which is why he was pressured to withdraw his request for membership in the Central European Cup (Балканската купа е предъ, 1936; Последнитъ сведения отъ Букурешъ, 1936).

According to the agreement, the subsequent conference of the Balkan Cup was held in Sofia on October 18. Representatives of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Turkey, but not Yugoslavia, gathered in the hall of the Main Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs (Šta bi trebalo učiniti, 1936). Since no new leadership was elected in Bucharest, the first step was to elect the president, secretary, and committee members. Octav Luchide was elected president, and the representative of Turkey, Enel Bey, was elected secretary. Turkey was unanimously accepted as a member, and some changes were introduced. One of the more important ones was that the tournaments be organized either in the period from November 27 to January 1 or from June 25 to July 10. Athens was chosen as the venue for the next tournament, and then the hosts should be Ankara, Bucharest, and Sofia in 1940. The competition system has not been changed, except for the referees. There, the Turkish proposal to choose neutral arbitrators, i.e., foreigners, was accepted (Turska je postala..., 1936).

Although the future of the cup seemed to be secured, after a week, there were serious concerns in Sofia about the Yugoslav and Romanian plans to enter the Central European Cup. The fear that, like Yugoslavia, Romania will leave the competition was reinforced by rumors that Italy is setting the suspension of the Balkan Cup as a condition for admission. On the other hand, since April 1936, a change in football orientation was felt in Bucharest. In the article titled "The Last Balkaniad", published in Gazeta Sporturilor, it was unequivocally pointed out that Romanian sports interests are no longer in the Balkans but in the West. Sports commentators also underlined the visible differences in the level of development, organization, and popularity of football in Romania and Yugoslavia on the one hand, and other Balkan countries on the other. In the political sense, there was also a clear differentiation. In May 1936, a debate was held in the Romanian Parliament about whether Romania belonged to the Balkans. Her already visible pro-German orientation led to the statement of the vice-president of the Romanian Senate that "the placement of Romania in the Balkans is a geographical heresy" (Breuil et Constantin, 2015: 591-603; Ultima Balcaniadă, 1936, 1).

The end of the Balkan Cup

The fate of the Balkan Cup was sealed after the decision of the Central European Cup conference in Prague on October 30, 1936, which admitted Yugoslavia and Romania to that competition. After that, the Romanian Football Association showed less and less interest in this competition, but did not even want to leave it officially. Bulgaria was the only one that wholeheartedly advocated for the competition to survive. The arrival of the Yugoslav national team and JNS officials in Sofia on July 12 on the occasion of the scheduled friendly match was used by Bulgaria to discuss the Balkan Cup. The representatives of the Bulgarian National Sports Federation tried in every way to rekindle the desire of Yugoslavia and to return it to the competition. However, the position of the JNS was unyielding, although some of the officials positively accepted the Bulgarian arguments (Bugarski sportski funkcioneri, 1937).

The Balkan Cup fell into a serious crisis in the spring of 1937. Greece, which was supposed to be the organizer of the competition, left the organization to Turkey due to financial and other difficulties, and for a while, Ankara was promoted as the place of the cup in 1937. Soon, Turkey also gave up, so according to the draw, Romania was the next in line as organizer. On August 12, the Romanian Sports Federation accepted the organization and announced that the tournament would be held in Bucharest from October 3 to 10, and after Bulgaria's request from October 10 to 17 (Kratke vesti, 1937; Bugarska je umolila..., 1937). However, soon Romania also gave up on organizing, thus ending any hope that the competition would take place.

Conclusion

The Balkan Cup was quietly extinguished; different political interests, different sports orientations, as well as financial difficulties, prevented occasional initiatives for renewal from being implemented. The outbreak of World War II put an end to football cooperation within the Balkan region, but the memory of the Balkan Cup remained alive. The benefits of football and the wide possibilities of using sports to build socialism and international cooperation were quickly noticed by the Communists. The Balkan Cup, albeit in a new form, was restored as

early as 1946, and football was widely used to promote the idea of brotherhood and unity among the Balkan people's democracies - Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania (Breuil et Constantin, 2015: 591-603).

In the end, we can say that the Balkan Games have fulfilled, even exceeded, the expectations of political circles during their existence. By creating friendly contacts between athletes, sports workers, journalists, and diplomatic representatives, they greatly helped the efforts of governments to overcome political animosities and create conditions for joint cooperation in the Balkans. Already in the late 1920s and early 1930s, people equated the state with football players. Their successes were the best promotion of a country and its people, and their defeats were a shame. When looking at the period 1929-1934, it can be said that the mentioned sentence of journalist that until then the relations were not good and that the football players reconciled the Balkan peoples with their game was close to the truth.

The period after 1937 represents a time of gradual degradation of football regional cooperation. The speed with which football developed, spread among the people, and created ardent supporters also led to negative phenomena. The ardent fans tried in every way to help their national team win, and sports cheering slowly turned into hooliganism. As far as the Balkan Cup is concerned, the games in Athens in 1934 marked a clear turning point. In the eyes of the audience, sports rivals became enemies, and enemies were allowed to throw various objects and verbal abuse. Even the referees could not avoid the anger of the fans. Football managers also began to violate the spirit of sports competition, and in the matches, they primarily saw their financial background. No matter how bad they were, negative events could not damage the foundation of football, which is the preservation of the competitive spirit, the constant desire to advance, and make new contacts. All in all, football left a positive mark on the Balkans in the interwar period.

Contribution Rates and Conflicts of Interest

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Author Contributions	
Data Collection	Ni.M (%50), NM (%0)
Data Analysis	KZ (%50), NM (%50)
Research Design	Ni.M (%50), NM (%50)
Writing the Article	Ni.M (%50), NM (%50)
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book reviews

MALEČKOVÁ JITKA, "THE TURK" IN THE CZECH IMAGINATION

Brill Rodopi, Leiden-Boston, 2021, 240 pages

Reviewer: Barkın Burak Bingöl

One of the nations perceiving Ottoman and Turkish identity as 'other' is the Czechs. Although the Czechs were never under Ottoman rule, the formation of an 'image' for the Turkish and Ottoman identities is quite remarkable. Jitka Malečková's study is unique in that reveals the perception of Ottoman identity in general, and Turkish identity in particular, trough the Western gaze. The study starts in the 1870s and ends in 1923, when the Ottoman Empire disappeared from the stage of history and the Republic of Türkiye emerged. This period is also significant for illustrating how the 'sick man' description of the Ottoman

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Empire was perceived by the others. The significance of 1923 is that it allows us to see how the young Republic of Türkiye, which had turned towards Western civilisation, was perceived.

Malečková in her introduction states that the book will tell two stories. The first narrative concers the perception of the Turk as the 'other' in European eyes, while the second focuses on the parallels between Czech and Turkish modernisation. The evaluation of the fact that these two nations, despite never having been under each other's rule, have passed through similar cradles of modernisation is important for understanding the study's overall framework. The study, which is an example of how the consequences of the global dimension of modernisation transform the perception of independent nations, also gives the opportunity to evaluate the cultural effects of Czech-Turkish relations.

The theoretical framework underlying the study is 'imagology'. The author has tried to make sense of the Czech-Eastern relationship through the lens of national discourses and stereotypes. In this context, another aim of the author is to address the modernisation relationship that the Turks experienced first with the Arabs and then with the Western civilisation through the Czechs. In this way, Malečková has charted a unique path for the Czechs in establishing their own national discourse and developing their historiography by looking for the effects of the 'Czech-Slavic' approach. The author's search for her findings in the 19th century, which was the spiral of European transformation, gives the main correspondences of Czech-Turkish modernisation and reveals the global influence of some criteria (national discourse, national identity consciousness, etc.).

In the light of this scope, the book is organised under four main headings and these chapters deal with four different problematics. The first chapter is entitled 'The Return of the Terrible Turk'. In this chapter, the Turkish nation, which is evaluated from the perspective of the other, is discussed with concepts such as 'terrible' and 'warrior', which are common images. Malečková states that the origin of these images is related to the fact that Turks were seen as Christian enemies in the Middle Ages. This 'image', which would later be reinforced by the expansionist policy of the Ottoman Empire, was transformed in the 20th century. It should not be forgotten that before this transformation, the Ottoman

Empire in particular had a charismatic identity that attracted 'interest', 'curiosity', 'excitement', 'entertainment' and even 'sympathy'. Malečková also notes that this charismatic identity created a sensation in Europe and fuelled the desire for discovery. The remarkable aspect of this distinction is Malečková's treatment of Turkish and Ottoman identities within the framework of 'orientalism'. In the Westernisation section of Orientalism, the author sees Turkish modernisation as weaker than Ottoman modernisation, and explains this with the Ottoman focus on Istanbul.

It is quite remarkable that the author constructs his findings and arguments based on the connotations of the concept of 'transformation'. Because, the transformation of the Ottoman-Turkish image into a more positive light in European eyes began in the 17th century, and a transition period of neutral perceptions was experienced in the 18th century. However, it is observed that the transitional period was a time when Turkish modernisation progressed in a largely 'passive' manner. The transformation of the actual perceptions and images into a 'zigzagging' pattern occured during the 19th and 20th centuries, when Turkish modernisation was actively taking place.

Malečková states that the transformation of the image of the Turks in Czech eyes began with the decline of Ottoman military power in Europe. Moreover, the loss of Ottoman power led to a decline in the curiosity, excitement and interest of the Czechs. Malečková attributes another important reason for the decline in interest to the Czechs' realisation of their own modernisation in the 19th century and the creation of a national discourse with a national content. Looking at the history of negative images, Czech and German Protestants regarded the 16th century as a period when the Turkish threat to Europe was felt intensely. They claimed that 'the Turks were sent by God to punish humanity for its sins' (Malečková, 36). Another negative image (mostly centred on 'religion') is the Czech characterisation of the Turks as 'antichrist'. According to the works of Rataj and Wagner, in the context of 'religion', the Turks were 'the mortal enemy of all Christianity' (Rataj, 2002). However, in these centuries, Malečková noted that there were not only negative maxims. One of the 'moderate' attitudes given by the author is that 'the Turks can be corrected'. In this respect, Malečková praised Komenský's

praise of the Turks' piety and charity, and advised the Sultan to translate the Bible into Turkish. In this respect, it can be said that there is no straight line in the transformation of the image of Turks in the eyes of Europe in general and Czechs in particular. The transformation that is meant in this study is a radical and mostly holistic change in perception. Perception transformations, on the other hand, have cultural, political and social dimensions and present a broad lens. Another noteworthy aspect is the treatment of images in literature. The author states that especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the intense influence of the Balkan wars, Czechs wrote vaudeville, songs, poems and plays and Turks were included in many works. Malečková also stated that the Czechs, who wanted to reach a national and national discourse in these works, acted with a sense of superiority over the Turks. These feelings also led to the treatment of Ottoman-Turkish images as 'funny' and 'ridiculous'. The author also noted that there were ridiculous sculptures such as 'Turek z Kamenýho mostu' and songs written in an ironic, sarcastic manner.

The second part of the book is titled 'Czechs Abroad'. In this chapter, Malečková focuses on the perception of Turks by Czechs living abroad, especially those who stayed in Istanbul (Constantinople) during the Ottoman period. The important concepts emphasised in the chapter are the Orient and Orientalism. In this context, seeing the real first contacts/encounters of the Turkish image through Czech eyes makes the basic arguments in Western perception understandable. The most important of the original aspects of the study lies here. Seeing the positive and negative images of the Czechs, who were never under Ottoman rule, allows us to understand the Turkish perception or prejudices in the eyes of Europe.

Czechs who visited the Ottoman Empire for various purposes had the opportunity to spread their travel and historical narratives over a wide area. Malečková argues that through their travels, travellers had the opportunity to understand the distinctions in the pre-modern and modern condition of 'Eastern spaces', as well as to study the relationship of Turkish men and women with other ethnic groups. In addition, the occupational group of the travellers who came to the Ottoman Empire is also heterogeneous. The structure is generally composed of

upper-class individuals, including teachers, academicians, lawyers and doctors. One of the main arguments of the travellers in their travelogues was 'the backwardness of the East' in contrast to the 'modernity of the West'. Within this context, the images representing the Turkish-Ottoman Empire were largely shaped by negative narratives. Malečková stated that the travellers acted with 'feelings of superiority' rather than hostility, especially in the use of negative connotations such as 'Turek (Turk in singular), Tureček (little Turk)'.

The use of depiction and negative images coincides with the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In this context, it is quite natural that Czech travellers, who witnessed a collapsing state, had more negative judgements than positive impressions. Regarding positive impressions, there is generally a homogeneous judgement: Constantinople's external beauty. According to Malečková, the travellers found the appearance of the city 'mesmerising'. However, the travellers, who made an 'inside-outside' distinction, continued their negative arguments for a decadent empire in terms of the interior depiction. Another point to be emphasised in this section is Svátek's categorisation of the Turkish people:

1. Educated, advanced, open to progress and European-like intellectuals

2. The uneducated, lazy, fatalistic and violent, defending outdated values

The third chapter, 'Civilising the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina', deals with the Czechs' activities, which are more related to their own "Orientalist" views. The nationalist ideas that have transformed the world have instilled in societies the consciousness of nationhood. The Czechs interacted with the 'ethnic' and 'linguistic' tribes belonging to the 'Slavs'. The ambivalent attitude of the Czechs towards Slavic Muslims allowed us to see again their negative view of Eastern values. Malečková stated that Slavic Muslims were associated with the Ottoman Turks in many respects and were therefore regarded as the 'other', as opponents and enemies. This Czech view of Muslims strengthened the Muslim=Turk hypothesis and led them to negatively view the 'ethnically' Slavic nations as well.

The fourth and last chapter of the book is entitled 'Our Mission in Oriental Studies'. The chapter is very valuable in terms of showing how Oriental Studies are approached from a European perspective in general, and from a Czech perspective in particular, while also providing a historical overview. The main problematic of the chapter is the following: How do Czech academics evaluate the purpose and mission of studies in the Middle East and especially in the field of Turkish language and literature? In this context, if we list the reasons for the demand for Orientalism and Orientalism studies based on the study:

1. The material and intellectual superiority of Europe, which was effective in imperialism

2. To belittle Eastern elements by treating them solely as objects of study.

3. Special curiosity arising from admiration and sympathy

4. To have questionable and interpretative arguments about Middle Eastern civilisation

5. The shortcomings of non-European societies

6. Evaluation of the East according to Western criteria

Within this framework, orientalists of German, Hungarian, Polish, Russian, etc. nations analysed the Middle East and compared it with the dynamics of their own ethnicity. Malečková states that the study of everything related to the Turks (history, past and present of the Turks) under the umbrella of Orientalism (Orientalistika in Czech) began in the 19th century. The chapter includes the writings of key figures in Czech-Turkish studies such as Josef Brandejs, Rudolf Dvořák, Alois Musil, Jan Rypka and Felix Tauer, as well as the contributions of various researchers at Charles-Ferdinand University to the field. The domestic and international impact of these studies and Czech Orientalism is also discussed.

'In the concluding chapter, 'The New Republics', Malečková begins by stating that 'the Czechs do not have a "Turk" of their own'. This observation shows that Czechs do not perceive the Turks as an essential 'other' and that the positive and negative images of the Ottoman-Turkish image are transmitted as 'clichés'. One of the arguments that is not conveyed as a cliché is the distinction between

people with backwardness/modernity dichotomy among Turks. The author characterised that positive and negative images of 'Turks' in Czech literature have never disappeared from the existing culture. Turks occupy a vivid place in the Czech imagination in folk songs, fairy tales and historical narratives, and are included in the elements of heritage from tradition. Images and images of foreign ethnicities are kept alive as the 'other' and used as a continuous 'motivational tool' in strengthening national consciousness. The Czechs did not keep their view of the Turks in an orientalist perspective and in general considered all ethnic groups living under Ottoman rule as 'exotic' and especially Muslims (including Slavs) as the 'other' under the guise of 'Christian enmity'. Malečková characterised that nowadays, after the emergence of the Czech Republic and the Republic of Türkiye as two independent states, a certain commonality of interests has developed between the two countries. Nevertheless, the author also states that the persistent negative images, especially the 'Terrible Turk' description, can be revived through political actors and the media. The most significant aspect of the book's relevance lies precisely in this spiral of 'continuity'.

AHMET ERDEM TOZOĞLU, "DEMİRYOLU VE KENT 19. YÜZYILDA OSMANLI BALKAN ŞEHİRLERİNİN MEKÂNSAL DEĞİŞİMİ"

Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2024, XII+352 pages

Reviewer: Anıl Göç

Ahmet Erdem Tozoğlu's book, *Demiryolu ve Kent* (Railway and City), originates from his 2013 doctoral dissertation, which was written in English at Middle East Technical University. The author developed the research over nearly 10 years before its Turkish publication. It makes the book an adaptation rather than a translation of the dissertation.

The book is based on the primary sources, including archival documents, maps, plans, memoirs, periodicals and visual materials. The relevant academic literature, comprising dissertations, articles, books and other previously studies are also used. One of the main sources originates from the Ottoman archive. The majority of the other sources are drawn from Turkish and English literature, with

Göç A. (2025), Demiryolu ve Kent 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Balkan Şehirlerinin Mekânsal Değişimi, by Ahmet Erdem Tozoğlu, *Journal of Balkan Studies*, 5(1), 319-323

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additional use of German and, to a lesser extent French materials. In addition, the book incorporates a variety of visual materials, such as maps, photographs and plans, which help to contextualise the study and enhance understanding of the subject. However, the utility of some visual materials is constrained by technical issues, such as limitations in print quality.

This study basically asks how railway projects transformed Balkan cities between 1870 and 1912. It examines how railway transportation influenced civil architecture, the social environment and perceptions of time. The author argues that railways were the catalyst for Ottoman modernization. He identifies three main actors, the state, international figures and locals (devlet, uluslararası figürler ve yereller). The author evaluates changes through these actors and their relationships.

In the introduction, the author explains the methodology, sources and objectives. Following this, the book is structured into three main chapters. First part includes the general history of railways worldwide and within the Ottoman Empire, particulary in the Balkans. In the second chapter, the author describes the construction and architecture of railway stations in the Balkans. Lastly, the third chapter primarly explores how this process changed the social and economic statuses in these cities.

At the beginning, the author indicates that previous studies on railway history had not reached an international readership. Therefore, he aims to frame the study from the modernization perspective, rather than solely focusing on the technical and economic history of railway projects. He also clearly emphasized that he avoided Eurocentric explanations in understanding Ottoman modernization.

In the second main title, the writer describes the general history of Istanbul, Thessaloniki (Selanik), Bitola (Manastır), Edirne and Alexandroupolis (Dedeağaç), as well as their respective railway establishment processes. He uses primary sources in this chapter, such as archival documents, memoirs and various visual materials. The writer illustrates public opinion regarding these projects by analyzing newspapers. This approach helps to incorporate people's perspectives and understand the social dimensions of the projects. For instance, the

author discusses different arguments presented in newspapers against Baron Hirsch's Istanbul railway project (pp. 68-69).

The author's choice to describe the history of cities from ancient times to the 19th century is open to discussion. However, it can be said that each city's brief history was well-compiled and clearly summarized. On the other hand, some quotations and terms are sound questionable in terms of their historical accuracy. For example, a quotation from Basiretçi Ali Bey on page 82 is rendered in today's Turkish, which changes the original tone of Ali Bey's writing. This decision was presumably made by the author for reasons of fluency. In my opinion, the inclusion of the original Ottoman Turkish text in a footnote would have been more beneficial. Furthermore, some terms appear overly modernized or anachronistic, lacking of historical precision. For example, using "*Gülhane Tıp Fakültesi*" and *"Osmanlı Genelkurmay Başkanlığı"* (pp. 103, 171) instead of their original names "*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye"* and "*Ottoman Ministry of War",* or "*Harbiye Nezareti/ Seraskerlik",* diminishes historical accuracy. If the original names had also been employed, the historical context would have been more precise.

The last main chapter focusses on the transformation of cities shaped by three actors: the state, railway investors, and local figures. The author examines the impact of these three actors on urban architecture and social change within these cities. He discusses local conflicts and their resolution between authority and railway companies. Firstly, the case of Alexandroupolis is investigated. This section details the reclaiming of lands initially allocated to the railway company and the subsequent construction of an administrative building and a public park (*millet bahçesi)* by the district administrator (*mutasarrıf*) Ebubekir Hazım Bey.

The author discusses the role of railways in political propaganda, citing Sultan Mehmed V Reşad's Balkan visit (pp. 220-226). This section is well-analyzed using primary sources, such as contemporary local newspapers and the other studies. It could be argued that İsmail Bey's memoir would also have been benefical for this part, because he was one of Sultan Mehmed V's court servants and a primary source for the entire journey.[1]

1 İsmail Bey. (2020). *Hâtıra-yı Seyâhat Selanik, Üsküp, Priştine, Kosova ve Manastır Notları*, haz. Adem Ölmez, Türk Tarih Kurumu.

Furthermore, the three example presented (Ebubekir Hazım Bey's actions in Alexandroupolis, the conflict between the government and railway company during the construction of Edirne station and Sultan Mehmed V's visit for propaganda) may not be sufficient to comprehensively discuss the state's role and control over railways. However, it is understood that the author realized this limitation and strategically selected these examples to highlight the state's social and political influence.

The role of international actors is evaluated through the progression of railways in Alexandroupolis, Edirne, Thessaloniki and Bitola. The author particulary argues that establishment of Alexandroupolis as a city and its port was linked to the railway station's development. This argument is supported by maps and plans. The author cites the construction of railway settlements as the most distinct impact of railway investors on the transformation of cities.

The final chapter focusses on how local actors transformed cities through the influence of railways. Firstly, the author stated that the stations were established on public lands, often located on the outskirts of cities, in order to prevent additional construction expenses. Consequently, this led to the emergence of "station streets" (*istasyon caddesi*) in cities, featuring new commercial buildings such as hotels, cafes and clubs. These station streets are evaluated as a creation driven by local people. The author indicates that this transformation was a key element in the formation of modern cities. This transformation also fostered social, economic and municipal progress of these cities. For example, new tram lines were established in some cities to facilitate integration with railway stations.

In the end, summarily, the author argues that railways were one of the main actors in urban transformation, in terms of their physical, social and economic influence. This study examines this argument through the lens of on selected cities and the narratives of key actors.

Throughout the book, political and local history are evaluated with equal weight alongside the main subjects. Technical information is presented understandably. In addition, it incorporates significant aspect of city and urban history. In

conclusion, this book stands as a premier study interpreting Ottoman modernization through the lens of railway projects. Furthermore, in terms of different approaches to Ottoman modernization, as the author hopes, many comparative studies should be revealed in the future.

HIKMET KARČIĆ, GENOCID U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI - INSTITUCIJE, POČINIOCI I POSLJEDICE

Institut za islamsku tradiciju Bošnjaka, Sarajevo, 2024, 156 pages

Reviewer: Omer Merzić

Hikmet Karčić's book "Genocid u Bosni i Hercegovini - institucije, počinioci i posljedice" provides a shocking study of the camp system and the way in which mass war crimes, from sexual abuse to genocide, were carried out during the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. As emphasized in the subtitle of the book itself, the emphasis of the book is placed on the institutional structures that enabled the crimes to be carried out.

The author of the book, Hikmet Karčić, is a research associate at the Institute for Research on Crimes Against Humanity and International Law at the University of Sarajevo. This book is a kind of adaptation of a doctoral dissertation. The author systematically approaches the research of this topic with the first two

Merzić O. (2025), Genocid u Bosni i Hercegovini - Institucije, Počinioci i Posljedice, by Hikmet Karčić, *Journal of Balkan Studies,* 5(2), 325-327.

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chapters, “The Eve of Genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina” and “The Year of Intention - 1991”, in which he provides the context and roadmap for a detailed plan for the dehumanization of Muslims and gradual escalation through the establishment of a parastate and accompanying elements in the form of paramilitary formations and parallel structures of the judiciary, army and police.

The most extensive chapter, which is also the most important in the book, is the third chapter, or “Institutions of Crime - Camps”. Karčić begins the chapter with a historical overview and a cross-section of the use of camps and their history, and then provides one of the more significant elements of this book in the form of a literature review. In addition to citing world-famous authors who created and wrote in English, he devotes a significant part of the literature review to Bosnian-Herzegovinian authors and their works. Only after these introductory considerations does Karčić begin his analysis of the camp system in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the aggression.

The book cites the Omarska, Manjača, Uzamnica, Batkovići and KP Dom Foča camps as case studies. These camps were chosen to present a wider range of events and abuse of detainees during the war, and the author himself often uses the comparative method to show the similarities and differences between these camps. In doing so, he does not omit disturbing details and testimonies of surviving prisoners; rather, based on their testimonies, creates a broader spectrum of crimes and cruelty which were more pronounced and deadly in some camps, especially those operated by the police.. Karčić uncensoredly lists the inhumane conditions of the camps, as well as the crimes that were committed, including physical and psychological torture, sexual violence, rape, but also liquidation and murder. He also lists individuals he calls “kapo”, that is, collaborators and helpers of the Serbian forces from among the Muslims. In addition to detailing the events and crimes inside the camps during the war, Karčić explores the long-term consequences of the genocidal policy and the collective trauma suffered by Bosniaks, as well as the systematic dehumanization they went through during their captivity, in the last three chapters, “Consequences of Genocide Policy”, “Triumphalism” and “Responsibility and Punishment”. The author also touches on the problem of triumphalism, where in the chapter of

the same name he discusses the phenomenon of denial, but also the glorification and glorification of crimes and their perpetrators.

Finally, Karčić explores the crucial issue of responsibility and punishment, as well as the consequences that the perpetrators themselves suffered after the war. He presents different levels of responsibility from low-ranking soldiers, police officers, members of the reserve forces, to lower-ranking officials in courts, prosecutors' offices and other government structures. Finally, he states that although individual perpetrators from the ranks of high-ranking military and state apparatuses, as well as direct perpetrators of crimes, were prosecuted, this problem was never completely resolved, and a detailed legal analysis and criminal process aimed at the entire system of oppression and crime were never conducted.

Although this book contains many shocking personal testimonies taken from the testimonies of victims during the trials in The Hague, it is still an essentially important work that analyzes the bloody system of camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war. As the author himself states in the subtitle, he presents the institutions and perpetrators of genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the consequences of these events on Bosnian and Herzegovinian society.