

INNER LAKE OR FRONTIER? THE OTTOMAN BLACK SEA IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES*

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In his monograph of seventeenth century Istanbul, Robert Mantran evokes the famous anecdote, depicting futile efforts of Western merchants to get access to the Black Sea. In 1686 the French ambassador, Pierre de Girardin, was told by a Porte official that the sultan would rather open the gates of his harem than let strangers a free passage to the Black Sea¹. A similar metaphor was used in 1700 by the chief dragoman, Alexander Mavrocordatos, in his discourse with a Russian envoy, Dimitrij Golicyin. Denying the Russian claim to the right of free navigation, Mavrocordatos compared the Black Sea to a chaste and pure virgin, whose virginity would be violated by foreign vessels².

While sexual connotations with harems and virgins seemed to dominate the seventeenth century imagination, twentieth century historians had a special liking for a geographic – and nationalistic – term: the "Turkish lake" [*Türk gölü*]. According to Paul Cernovodeanu, the Black Sea became a "Turkish lake" for almost three centuries, between the conquest of Caffa in 1475 and the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774³. Yet, it was Halil Inalcık whose powerful picture of an "Ottoman economic mind" mostly influenced a few generations of historians. In his eyes, Mehmed the Conqueror was a proto-mercantilist and proto-absolutist ruler, whose conscious policy converted the Black Sea into the Ottoman reserve. Inalcık rejected the stereotype of "Turkish hostility towards

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¹ Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1962, p. 575.

² Paul Cernovodeanu, "England and the question of free trade in the Black Sea in the 17th century", *RRH*, 6, 1967, p. 15-22, esp. p. 21, n. 26.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

trade," coined by his predecessors Wilhelm Heyd and Marian Małowist. He stressed the Ottoman efforts to provide safe conditions for the international trade and for the provisioning of Constantinople. The only notable difference after the Ottoman conquest was that – to quote Inalcık – the Ottomans "put an end, in favor of the indigenous populations, to the economic and political dominance of the Italian maritime states, which exploited and diverted the wealth of the region as alien colonial powers"⁴.

Inalcık did not deny that the Ottomans aimed to remove foreign merchants from the Black Sea, but he also stressed the Ottoman pragmatism that delayed the final closure of the region. Various authors, including Maurice Aymard, Mihnea Berindei, Gilles Veinstein, and Christiane Villain-Gandossi proved beyond doubt the presence of Italian merchants in the Black Sea at least until mid-sixteenth century⁵.

According to Inalcık, it was not with the conquest of Caffa of 1475, not even the conquest of Kili and Akkerman in 1484, but only with the conquest of Budjak in 1538 that the dream of an "Ottoman lake" was finalized⁶. Yet, there were sections of the Black Sea shore where the Ottoman sovereignty was still questioned for another century. Since the late fourteenth century the Black Sea shore between the mouth of Dniester [Turla] and the mouth of Dnieper [Özü] belonged to Lithuania. The Lithuanian grand duke, Vytautas, fortified his new frontier by founding strongholds in Tawań, Oczaków, Hadzibej and Majaki⁷. In the late fifteenth century the eastern and southern frontiers of Lithuania were endangered by the consolidating powers of Muscovy and Crimea. The Crimean khan Mengli Giray occupied the Lithuanian Black Sea shore and

⁴ Halil Inalcık, *Sources and studies on the Ottoman Black Sea*, vol. 1: *The customs register of Caffa, 1487-1490*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p. 110-111; cf. also Id., "The question of the closing of the Black Sea under the Ottomans", *Αρχαίον Ποντιου* 35, 1979, p. 74-110.

⁵ Maurice Aymard, *Venice, Raguse et le commerce du blé pendant la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle*, Paris, 1966, p. 46; Mihnea Berindei and Gilles Veinstein, "La Tana-Azaq de la présence italienne à l'emprise ottomane (fin XIII^e-milieu XVI^e siècle)", *Turcica*, 8/2, 1976, p. 110-201, esp. p. 149 and 152; Christiane Villain-Gandossi, "Contribution à l'étude des relations diplomatiques et commerciales entre Venise et la Porte ottomane au XVI^e siècle", *SF*, 26, 1967, p. 22-45, esp. p. 32-35 and 40; continued in *SF*, 28, 1969, p. 13-47; see also the annex in *SF*, 29, 1970, p. 290-301, esp. p. 280-281 and 291-292.

⁶ Inalcık, *Sources and studies on the Ottoman Black Sea*, p. 110.

⁷ Bertold Spuler, "Mittelalterliche Grenzen in Osteuropa, I: Die Grenze des Großfürstentums Litauen im Südosten gegen Türken und Tataren", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 6, 1941, Heft 2/4, p. 152-170, esp. p. 162-163.

somewhere between 1495 and 1498 founded a new fortress of Cankerman in the place of the Lithuanian Oczaków⁸. Sometime before 1538 this new fortress was garrisoned by Ottoman troops. In the future decades this fortress - known to the Ottomans as Özü kalesi - would become the center of a sandjak, and later of an *eyalet*.

Yet, the rulers of Lithuania, being simultaneously the kings of Poland, did not easily recognize the loss of the Black Sea shore. In May 1538, shortly before the Ottoman campaign in Moldavia which was to result in the conquest of Budjak, the Polish king Sigismund instructed his envoy to the Porte, Erazm Kretkowski, to address the sultan in his name: "Allatum est etiam ad Regiam Maiestatem quod Caesarea Celsitudo Vestra arcem Oczakow, et alias nonnullas arces, quae ad Regnum Maiestatis Regiae, a nullo retroacto tempore pertinent, praesidiis firmaverit et illas extruere decreverit. Maiestas Regia rogat ut Caesarea Celsitudo Vestra, pro animi sui magnitudine, non pluris facere, arcem Oczakow, velit quod suam, in servandis foederibus usque adeo laudatam constantiam"⁹.

An indirect response to these claims is contained in a letter by Sultan Süleyman to King Sigismund, dated four years later, in November 1542. The sultan, informed by his border commanders that the territory in question had belonged to the Crimean khan for at least 30-40 years (*otuz kirk yıldan ziyade Tatar hanları zabt idüb*), expressed his astonishment with such delayed and stubborn reaction of his royal partner¹⁰. The failed

⁸ On Cankerman and its founding, see V. Syroečkovskij, "Puti i uslovija snošenij Moskvy s Krymom na rubeže XVI veka", *IAN SSSR*, 7 series: *Otdelenie obščestvennyx nauk*, 1932, p. 194-237, esp. p. 219-221; Zygmunt Abrahamowicz (ed.), *Księga podróży Ewliji Czelebiego (wybór)*, Warsaw, 1969, p. 378, n. 1; Id., "Stara turecka mapa Ukrainy z planem wysadzenia dneprzańskich porohów i ataku floty tureckiej na Kijów", *Studia Historyczne*, 44, 2001, p. 3-23, esp. p. 18.

⁹ Warsaw, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych [hereafter, AGAD], Libri Legationum, sign. 6, fol. 33v; the same fragment, preserved in the Opaliński's manuscript of *Acta Tomicianiana*, is published in Iancu Bidian, "Moldova în tratativele polono-otomane într-un document din anul 1538", *SMIM*, 7, 1974, p. 309-319, esp. p. 312. The most detailed treatment of the Lithuanian-Ottoman border conflict of 1538-1544 is by Gilles Veinstein, "L'occupation ottomane d'Oczakov et le problème de la frontière lituano-tatare 1538-1544" in: Ch. Lemercier-Quelquejay, G. Veinstein, S. E. Wimbusch (eds.), *Passé Turco-Tatar, présent soviétique. Études offertes à Alexandre Bennigsen*, Louvain-Paris, 1986, p. 123-155; Kretkowski's embassy is mentioned on p. 131.

¹⁰ AGAD, Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie [hereafter, AKW], dział turecki, karton 68, teczka 78, no. 165; for a Polish summary, see Zygmunt Abrahamowicz, *Katalog dokumentów tureckich. Dokumenty do dziejów Polski i krajów ościennych w latach 1455-1672*,

demarcation of 1538-1544 between Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire was already studied by Gilles Veinstein, who based his research on the preserved correspondence between the king and the sultan¹¹. In 1542 commissioners were appointed from both sides, but they failed to meet till the end of that year. While the Poles officially demanded the acknowledgment of the Black Sea border, they proposed to meet at the river Kodyma, the right tributary of the Boh [Aksu]. Osman Beg, the Ottoman commissioner, requested that the initial meeting should take place on the river Sawrań, since the future border should be demarcated further north. Finally, he agreed for a meeting on the Kodyma, but it was too late for the Poles. After another year of correspondence, mutual explanations and accusations, in 1544 King Sigismund notified the sultan that his commissioners were ready to resume the task. Süleyman answered that he would love to, but he was too busy with hunting near Bursa so the matter had to be postponed.

What strikes one is that both sides treated the disputed border as an Ottoman-Polish one though formally the border palatinates of Kiev and Braclav still belonged to Lithuania and only in 1569 they were incorporated to Poland. Border commissioners and envoys to the Porte were mostly recruited from among Polish, and not Lithuanian nobles. All these factors disclose the fact that already in the 1540s the southern policy of Poland-Lithuania was directed from Cracow rather than from Vilnius. Possible claims by the Crimean khans were equally ignored, though the Ottomans readily used the existence of Tatar mosques and tombstones with Muslim inscriptions on the disputed territories to further their own claims¹².

Warsaw, 1959, p. 77-79. A Polish contemporary translation (wrongly dated 1540) is published in Zygmunt Bartoszewicz (ed.), "Z rękopismów Dogiela (tomu II części I) wyjątki ściągające się do działań między królami Zygmuntem I i Zygmuntem II, a Solimanem sułtanem tureckim", *Dziennik Wileński/Historia i literatura*, vol. 1, 182), p. 228-232.

¹¹ Veinstein, "L'occupation ottomane d'Očakov".

¹² "Zikr olunan sinur içinde ehl-i islamdan niçe kimesnenin makbereleri ve niçe mescidler ve medreseler 'alametleri dahi bulunmuş," see AGAD, AKW, dział turecki, karton 68,teczka 78, no. 165 (cf. n. 10). In 1540 the Polish envoy, Jakub Wilamowski, notified the king of his disputes at the Porte: "daleko się w pola wpierają [...] allegując iż tam są groby tatarskie murowane z pismem"; see AGAD, Libri Legationum, sign. 9, fol. 49v-54v; this last fragment is published in Ilie Corfus (ed.), *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone. Secolul al XVI-lea*, Bucharest, 1979, p. 31.

Amazingly, the ultimate failure of the demarcation did not lead to a war. For almost another century, Polish-Ottoman relations remained largely peaceful, at times even friendly. A major war broke out only in 1620, and the first real demarcation was happily concluded in 1633. By that time, however, the Polish-Lithuanian side could - at least *de iure* - support its claim to the Black Sea shore. Michalon Lituanus, the renaissance writer identified today as Wencław Mikołajewicz, was sent in Lithuanian embassy to the Crimea in 1542. In his treaty *De moribus Tartarorum*, composed by 1550, he described the limits of Lithuania reaching "ad pontum Euxinum ubi ostia Borysthenis, et [...] ad terminos Tauricae, ac Towani traiectu Borysthenis"¹³. Piotr Zborowski, the Polish envoy to the Porte in 1568, suggested the Polish king that one should make use of the clause of the Ottoman-Polish capitulations, providing that Tatar and Turkish herdsmen should pay pasture taxes for using pasturages within the royal domain. According to Zborowski, all pasturages on the left shore of the Dniester should have been regarded as belonging to the king¹⁴.

As late as 1605, Florian Oleszko, a Polish envoy to the Crimean khan, was instructed to demand the acknowledgement of Polish borders reaching the Black Sea¹⁵. Subsequent Polish envoys to Bahçesaray repeated this request in 1610, 1620, and even after the Hotin campaign, in 1622¹⁶. Yet, apparently this demand was not treated seriously. Firstly, the Poles knew well that the khan could not cede territories controlled jointly by him and the Ottoman garrisons without the consent of the sultan. Secondly, the Polish envoys demanded simultaneously that the Tatars do not cross the Polish territory while heading for campaigns. Since the khans were often summoned to join the Ottoman campaigns in Hungary, one could not expect that they do not cross the Polish territory, if it

¹³ *Michalonis Litvani de moribus Tartarorum, Litanorum et Moschorum fragmina X, multiplici historia referta*, Basle, 1615, p. 24; on the author, see Jerzy Ochmański, "Michalon Litwin i jego traktat o zwyczajach Tatarów, Litwinów i Moskwicininów z połowy XVI wieku", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 83, 1976, p. 765-783, esp. p. 772.

¹⁴ Piotr Zborowski, "Relacya poselstwa pana wojnickiego królowi [...]" in Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (ed.), *Podróże i poselstwa polskie do Turcji*, Cracow, 1860, p. 65-82, esp. p. 81. For the clauses regarding pasture taxes, typically contained in the *ahdnames*, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-16th Century). An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents*, Leiden, 2000, *passim*.

¹⁵ Dariusz Skorupa, *Stosunki polsko-tatarskie 1595-1623*, Warsaw, 2004, p. 128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158, 223-226, 246.

extended to the Black Sea! Judging upon the everyday practice, it seems that already in the mid-sixteenth century the Polish court tacitly regarded the river Kodyma as the southern border. Yet, only in 1633 this border was officially recognized.

Documents left from the embassy of Piotr Zborowski reveal the complexity of the international Black Sea policy in the second half of the sixteenth century. Due to the scarcity of grain and wood in Italy, Venetian and Papal diplomacy developed a project of exporting Polish products through the Dniester River and the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Typically, the alleged hostility of the Porte towards any foreign navigation has later been blamed for the fiasco. Yet, perhaps this blame is wrongly addressed. In the instruction to Zborowski, dated in December 1567, King Sigismund Augustus admitted that the Black Sea export project had been discussed and rejected by the Royal Council for the fear that opening the Dniester trade would encourage a Turkish galley invasion into Poland¹⁷. Officially forbidden to further this project, Zborowski still anticipated potential gains and secretly procured an Ottoman privilege for his brother, Krzysztof, allowing him to dispatch wooden products on his own ships down the Dniester and sell them in Ottoman provinces¹⁸.

Historians claiming that the Ottomans controlled the Black Sea must assume that they were familiar with its geography as we are today. In the Polish archives we find two letters by Sultan Süleyman to King Sigismund, dated respectively in July 1538 and in October 1540. In both letters, among other issues, the sultan engages to forbid his subjects from attacking the royal castles situated in the province of *Pulya* or *Polya* [پولیه]: *Pulya vilayetinde olan mülk kal'elerinize [...] dahl eylememek*. In the contemporary Polish court translations, preserved today along with the Turkish originals, the confusing term *Polya* is rendered as *polskie* ["Polish"], *w polach*, ["in the fields"], or not rendered at all¹⁹. A modern

¹⁷ For the extended bibliography on this subject, see Kołodziejczyk, "Imperium Osmańskie w XVI wieku – kilka uwag o potencjale demograficznym i gospodarczym", *Przegląd Historyczny*, 78, 1987, p. 375-394, esp. p. 392.

¹⁸ For a copy of the respective order, dated in July 1568 and addressed to the bey and kadis of the sandjak of Akkerman, see Istanbul, BOA, MD 7, p. 643, no. 1791.

¹⁹ The document from 1538 [AGAD, AKW, dział turecki, karton 68, teczka 59, no. 126] is provided with a sixteenth century translation, whose author chose not to translate the term *Pulya* but only mentioned that the afore-mentioned castles were located in Moldavia (*w ziemi walaskiej*), and with a seventeenth century translation by Samuel Otwinowski, who rendered *Pulya* as "w polach." The document from 1540 [AGAD,

Polish scholar, Zygmunt Abrahamowicz proposed to derive the Turkish term *Pulya* from the Polish *Dzikie Pola* ["Wild Fields"] a common contemporary Slavic term for the steppe frontier lands on the northern shore of the Black Sea²⁰. This proposal was also accepted by two Romanian historians – Mihail Guboglu and Mustafa A. Mehmed – who studied the aforementioned documents as well²¹. Yet, in the second letter Sultan Süleyman names the recipient of his order, forbidding any attacks against the royal castles, namely the governor of Algiers, Hayreddin [*Cezayir beglerbegisi Hayreddin*]. A vision of Hayreddin Barbarossa, shelling some mysterious Polish castles, situated on the Black Sea shore in 1540 almost equals the powerful fictional vision of *Beyaz Kale* created by Orhan Pamuk. The truth is – as usually – more banal. Gilles Veinstein was the first who correctly noticed that the mysterious *Pulya* of the Ottoman documents must refer to Italian Puglia, or rather the Principality of Bari, being the hereditary property of King Sigismund's wife and the queen of Poland, Bona Sforza²². The question remains: were the Ottoman chancery clerks, charged with issuing these documents, aware of the geographic dispersion of the properties of the Polish royal couple²³? Did

AKW, dział turecki, karton 68, teczka , no. 148] is provided only with Otwinowski's translation, who for this time rendered *Pulya* as "w Polsce;" yet another translation of this document is published in Bartoszewicz (ed.), *Z rękopismów Dogiela*, p. 309-315; there we read about "the castles that you have in Poland" ("zamczech, które wy w polskiej ziemi macie").

²⁰ See the Polish summaries of both documents in Abrahamowicz, *Katalog dokumentów tureckich*, p. 58-59 and 67-68.

²¹ Guboglu (ed.), *Catalogul*, vol. 2, p. 7; Mehmed, *Documente turcești*, vol. 1, p. 31-34.

²² Veinstein, "L'occupation ottomane d'Očakov", p. 132, n. 31; the mention of Bari and other Italian towns can be found in the royal instruction for Kretkowski, who was charged to discuss this issue with Ottoman dignitaries; see AGAD, *Libri Legationum*, sign. 6, fol. 36r; cf. Bidian, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

²³ Admittedly, Puglia and Bari can be found in the text and maps of the famous Ottoman naval atlas by Piri Reis, composed between 1521 and 1526. Yet, no mention is made there of the Polish claims to this region, described as belonging to the lord of Spain (*Ispanya begine tabi*). Moreover, even if sixteenth century Ottoman clerks were fluent in political geography, this hardly can be said of their descendents in the modern Turkish Republic. In the prestigious new edition recently prepared under the patronage of the Turkish Prime Ministry's Undersecretaryship of Navigation, the Ottoman term *Pulya kenarlarında* is consequently mistranslated into English as "in the Naples Coast" [sic]; see Piri Reis, *Kitab-ı Bahriye [Book of Navigation]*, Ankara, 2002, p. 344-367. On the depiction of Puglia in early Ottoman cartography see also Antonio Ventura, *La Puglia di*

they really care? We know that the Ottoman chancery often mechanically copied the whole expressions contained in the petitions addressed to the Porte. If the contemporary Polish crown translators, not to mention the twentieth century scholars, did not identify Puglia, did it really matter for the sixteenth century Ottoman statesmen that there might be some Polish castles still left in the Black Sea and thus challenging the Ottoman claim to its full control?

An amusing event occurred a hundred years later, in 1640, and was recorded by the Polish envoy to the Porte, Wojciech Miaskowski. During his audience with the grand vizier, Kara Mustafa Kemankeş, the envoy was accused that the new Polish fort of Kudak had been built on the Ottoman soil. Miaskowski asked for a map to refute the Ottoman claim. Yet, there was no map available in the Topkapı Palace! To quote Miaskowski: "in the absence of a map, I had to delineate the border in sand with a singlestick, showing him the Dnieper, Dniester, Boh, Oczaków, Black Sea, Kiev, and others, as he was totally unaware [of their location]. Only then he began to trust me that Kudak [...] had been founded within His Royal Majesty's borders"²⁴.

Nobody contributed more towards creating the myth of the Ottoman geographic idiocy than baron de Tott. Reporting the Ottoman shock after the lost battle of Çeşme, de Tott claimed that the Ottoman statesmen had not believed in the possibility that the Russian Baltic fleet could reach the Mediterranean²⁵. As some Western presidents even today, certainly some Ottoman statesmen must have had problems with geography and map reading. On the other hand, we should not generalize. Among the Crimean letters addressed to Danish kings, preserved today in Copenhagen, one finds a letter by Khan Mehmed IV Giray, dated in 1658 and asking the king of Denmark, Frederick III, not to send his fleet to help the Venetians defend Crete against the Ottomans. If a Crimean khan was

Piri Re'is: la cartografia turca alla corte di Solimano il Magnifico [Cavallino di Lecce, 1987].

²⁴ "Przyszło mi delineaować mu na ziemi palcatem, kiedy mapy nie było, Dniepr, Dniestr, Boh, Oczaków, Czarne Morze, Kijów i insze, bo niewiadom był nic. Dopieroż począł wierzyć, że Kudak i słobody na granicy K. J. Mci posadzone," see Adam Przyboś (ed.), *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, Warsaw, 1985, p. 64.

²⁵ François de Tott, *Mémoires sur les Turcs et les Tartares*, Amsterdam, 1784, pt. 3, p. 20.

aware of the oceanic connection in the seventeenth century, it is hard to believe that Ottoman statesmen were unaware of it a century later²⁶.

A sound skepticism towards the "orientalist" stereotypes, attributing illiteracy and idiocy to pre-modern non-Westerners is one thing. Yet, to assume that the early-modern Ottoman statesmen led their politics fully equipped with the geopolitical notions of today, might be equally misleading. In his recent book focusing on Kâtib Çelebi and the "Ottoman geographic mind," Gottfried Hagen coins the term "Salongeographie" and concludes that the worlds of scholarly science and political praxis rarely met. To quote Hagen: "die osmanischen Militärs verschafften sich ihre Kenntnisse eher durch Streifzüge, durch Verhör von Gefangenen, durch die Befragung von im Auftrag der Pforte Reisenden als durch die Lektüre von geographischen Werken"²⁷.

The lack of a precise, delimited border encouraged garrison commanders, irregulars and ordinary robbers to unlimited raids on the neighbor's territory, typically explained as reactions to the attacks from another side. Bernard Pretwicz, the commander of the Podolian fortress of Bar, was so notorious in his raids on the Ottoman territory, that his name figures prominently in the correspondence between Sultan Süleyman and the Polish court. Pretwicz excused himself by explaining that he was only chasing Tatar robbers. In fact, he was wrongly accused of burning Oczaków, effectuated by another frontier commander in 1545. Yet, the correspondence between Istanbul and Cracow confirms that numerous Ottoman merchants were robbed by the Polish troops while traveling between Caffa and Akkerman. These attacks often happened in the very neighborhood of the Ottoman seaside forts of Akkerman and Oczaków or at the place [Tur. *mevzi*] known as Hocabeg or Hacibey – the future Russian Odessa²⁸.

²⁶ Josef Matuz, *Krimitatarische Urkunden im Reichsarchiv zu Kopenhagen. Mit historisch-diplomatischen und sprachlichen Untersuchungen*, Freiburg, 1976, p. 128 and 131.

²⁷ Gottfried Hagen, *Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit. Entstehung und Gedankenwelt von Kâtib Çelebis Ğihännümâ*, Berlin, 2003, p. 115. In fact we know that at least some Ottoman commanders used maps during their campaigns, also in the Ukraine; see Abrahamowicz, "Trzy tureckie strategiczne mapy Ukrainy z XVI-XVII w." in *Sprawozdania z posiedzeń komisji Polskiej Akademii Nauk. Oddział w Krakowie (styczeń-czerwiec 1964)*, Cracow, 1964, p. 103-105.

²⁸ Numerous letters with complains, dated 1544-1552, are preserved in the Polish archives; for their summaries, see Abrahamowicz, *Katalog dokumentów tureckich*, p. 86-88, 93-100, 109-133; for Pretwicz's apology, see Andrzej Tomczak (ed.), "Memorial

Another prominent figure who soon replaced Pretwicz as the Ottoman arch-enemy was Dmytro Vyšneveckyj, the founder of the Ukrainian Sič on the Dnieper. Though he was captured and executed in Istanbul in 1563, by the end of the sixteenth century the Cossacks had become a constant phenomenon, whose activity in the Black Sea seriously challenged any Ottoman claims to its control²⁹.

In 1569 Jędrzej Taranowski, a Polish envoy to Sultan Selim II, was invited to participate as an observer in the Ottoman-Crimean campaign against Muscovy. In order to join the troops besieging Astrakhan he traveled from Istanbul along the Black Sea. Having crossed Dniester in Akkerman, he traveled two days to Oczaków along the seashore. According to his relation, there were no settlements in this area save for some wells where one could water one's horses³⁰. In 1578 another Polish envoy, Marcin Broniowski, visited the area. He also described the ruined place of Hacibey [Cacibiei Horodisae]. According to Broniowski, due to the Cossack activity the travelers were afraid not only to camp overnight there, but even to feed their horses: "idcirco ille locus viatoribus adeo terrori est, ut in eo non solum per noctem quiescere, verum ne pabulari quidem satis secure habeant"³¹.

The situation was not much better offshore. In July 1601 Aleksander Piaseczyński, the Polish envoy to the Crimea, arrived at Akkerman. There, he rented a Turkish galley in order to cross the sea to Gözleve. After the galley was loaded, somebody brought news of approaching Cossacks. The galley was so hastily unloaded that some of the envoy's wares were lost³². Having successfully concluded his mission,

Bernarda Pretwicza do króla z 1550 r.", *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości* 6, 2, 1960, p. 328-357. On this issue, see also Andrej Dziubinski, "Polsko-litewskie napady na tureckie pogranicze czarnomorskie w epoce dwu ostatnich Jagiellonow", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 103, 1996, no. 3, p. 53-87.

²⁹ Veinstein, "L'occupation ottomane d'Očakov", p. 155.

³⁰ "W Białogrodzie przewiozłem się przez Dniestr ku Oczakowu i dwa dnim jechał polmi, wszystko nad morzem, wszakoż na jednym miejscu są studnie gdzie może konia napoić", see Jędrzej Taranowski, "Krótkie wypisanie drogi z Polski do Konstantynopola, a z tamtąd zaś do Astrachania zamku moskiewskiego [...]" in: Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (ed.), *Podróże i poselstwa polskie do Turcji*, Cracow, 1860, p. 41-62, esp. p. 44.

³¹ Martini Broniovii [...] *Tartariae descriptio*, Cologne, 1595, p. 3.

³² Kazimierz Pułaski (ed.), "Trzy poselstwa Ławryna Piaseczyńskiego do Kazi Gireja, hana Tatarów perekopskich (1601-1603). Szkic historyczny" in: *Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki* 39, (1911), p. 135-145, 244-256, 358-366, 467-480, 553-566, 645-660, 756-768, 845-864, 945-960, esp. p. 359.

next year, Piaseczyński was again sent to the khan. In May 1602 he witnessed another wave of panic in Akkerman, caused by a Cossack foray³³.

Though often presenting themselves as Christian warriors, the Cossacks did not make much difference between their victims – be they Turks, Greeks, Armenians, or Slavs. An Armenian priest from Caffa named Xaçatur, who left his memoirs covering the first half of the seventeenth century, presented the Cossacks as godless bandits, who murdered Christians, plundered churches, and kidnapped women. After one such Cossack incursion to the Crimea Xaçatur recalled that "Armenians and Turks mourned and cried together"³⁴.

In his in-depth studies, Victor Ostapchuk has demonstrated the psychological effects of Cossack raids on the Ottoman subjects inhabiting the Black Sea region in the seventeenth century³⁵. In the Ottoman political language, this region already belonged to the Domain of Islam [*Darü'l-Islam*], contrary to the Western Mediterranean, described as the Domain of the Holy War [*Darü'l-Cihad*] and still to be conquered³⁶. Yet, the Ottomans themselves, when referring to fighting the Cossacks on the Black Sea, typically used the term *gaza*, thus confirming the fact that "infidels" were still in good standing in this region. In the 1620s the English envoy Thomas Roe made several references to the absence of the Ottoman fleet from the Mediterranean since it had to be used in the Black Sea³⁷. The most lapidary comment was made in 1676 by the Venetian

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 651-652, 655.

³⁴ Edmond Schütz (ed.), "Eine armenische Chronik von Kaffa aus der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29, 1975, p. 133-186, esp. p. 149.

³⁵ Victor Ostapchuk, "The human landscape of the Ottoman Black Sea in the face of the Cossack naval raids", *Oriente Moderno* 20 (81), n. s., 2001, (*The Ottomans and the Sea*), edited by K. Fløet, p. 23-95, esp. p. 94; see also Ostapchuk, "An Ottoman *Ğazānāme* on Halil Paşa's naval campaign against the Cossacks (1621)", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 14, 1990, (*Adeiphotes: a Tribute to Omeljan Pritsak by his students*), p. 482-521.

³⁶ For instance, in the sultan's intitutionation from the Ottoman *'ahdname* given to the Polish king, dated 1577, Algiers was still described as the Domain of the Holy War (*darü'l-cihad*) even though it had been conquered over 50 years earlier. The same expression, even enriched as *darü'l-cihad ve'l-harb*, was repeated in the Ottoman documents from 1591, 1597, 1598, 1607, 1623, 1640, and 1667 (*darü'l-cihad* only); see Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, p. 270, 285, 303, 314, 330, 389, 403, 459, 477.

³⁷ Ostapchuk, "The human landscape", p. 88-89.

bailo, Giacomo Quirini: "da questo mar Nero dipende la difesa e la conservazione del mar Bianco"³⁸.

Ostapchuk mockingly treats the "chimera of Ottoman lake" as supposedly lasting for 300 years. According to this author, seventeenth century Ottoman statesmen and chroniclers "tried to avoid admitting that the sea's former 'pristine' state no longer existed," thus leading modern historians "to uncritically and unwittingly accept and perpetuate the notion of the Ottomans having three centuries of undifferentiated control and security in the Black Sea"³⁹. These arguments were so powerful that they convinced Charles King – the author of a recent history of the Black Sea – to move the chronology, once proposed by Cernovodeanu, a hundred years ahead. According to King, it was not the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, not even the Russian conquest of Azov, the appearance of French consuls in the Crimea, or granting the right of navigation to the Dutch already in 1680, but the Cossack activity in the early seventeenth century that terminated the "Ottoman lake"⁴⁰.

Ostapchuk and King questioned the longevity of "Ottoman lake," but not the concept itself. To quote a recent article by Ostapchuk: "In his works Halil Inalcık has demonstrated the significance of control of the Black Sea for the strength and well-being of the Ottoman Empire. [...] Establishment of control of the Black Sea basin, though relatively easily accomplished, was an achievement not to be underestimated"⁴¹.

Perhaps one should go a step further. To remind the thesis of Inalcık, only with the conquest of Budjak in 1538 did the Ottomans fulfill their dream of controlling the Black Sea. Less than a century later, in 1637 the Don Cossacks captured the Ottoman fortress of Azak (Azov), badly humiliating the prestige of the padishah. Thus, at least between

³⁸ Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet (eds.), *Le Relazioni degli stati Europei lette al senato dagli ambasciatori Veneziani nel secolo decimosettimo*, series 5: *Turchia*, pt. 2, Venice, 1872, p. 168; see also Kołodziejczyk, "The Ottoman northern policy as seen from the Venetian archives" in T. Baykara (ed.), *CIEPO Osmanlı Öncesi ve Osmanlı Araştırmaları Uluslararası Komitesi XIV. Sempozyumu Bildirileri, 18-22 Eylül 2000, Çeşme*, Ankara, 2004, p. 417-426.

³⁹ Ostapchuk, "The human landscape", p. 89 and 93.

⁴⁰ Charles King, *Black Sea: A History* (Oxford, 2004), p. 132-134; cf. Cernovodeanu, "England and the question of free trade in the Black Sea", p. 19-22.

⁴¹ Ostapchuk, "The Ottoman Black Sea Steppe Frontier and the Struggle for a New Order in Eastern Europe, 1648-1681", *Turkish Studies Association Journal* [forthcoming]; I would like to thank the author for letting me quote his article before publication.

1538 and 1637 one should expect a relative peace. Yet, at the beginning of this period, the Ottoman northern Black Sea border was still uncertain and in 1545 Oczaków was reduced to ashes by Polish and Lithuanian troops. The following decades brought several Polish interventions in Moldavia, the rise of Michael the Brave in Wallachia, and rising Cossack activity.

Apart from the mouth of the Dnieper, there was another section of the Black Sea shore where the Ottoman control was never complete. Two interesting documents are preserved in the Spanish archive of Simancas. The first one is the letter of the Georgian king of Kartli, Simeon I, addressed to King Philip II of Spain and issued in Tiflis in August 1596. The letter is preserved in two sealed copies - one in Armenian and one in Greek, and provided with contemporary Spanish translations. The king of Georgia proposed Philip II a common military action against the Turk, expecting that the proposed coalition would also be joined by Alexander, the Georgian king of Kakheti, Zsigmund Báthory, the prince of Transylvania, and Shah Abbas of Persia. One must admit that the moment was auspicious: it coincided with the long Habsburg-Ottoman war and the crisis of Ottoman authority in the Danubian principalities. The second letter, preserved in Simancas, was issued in Georgian in 1625 by King Teimuraz I of Kakheti. It also contained a proposal of a league, addressed to King Philip IV and formulated in a most megalomaniac form. The letter was brought by a monk who presented his patron as "el Rey de la Iberia, que por otro nombre se llama Rey de los Jorgianos; el qual tiene sus Reynos y estados entre Persianos y Turcos, que se tienden desde el mar Caspio hasta el mar Negro cerca del monte Caucaso"⁴². Interestingly, two years later, in his famous memorial addressed to the pope, Pietro della Valle proposed to use the Cossack Black Sea fleet in order to keep communication with Georgia while preparing an anti-Ottoman crusade⁴³. Like so many others, these exotic projects never materialized. Yet, they reflected the state of mind of some prominent inhabitants of the region.

⁴² Luis Gil and José Manuel Floristan, "Cartas de los reyes georgianos Simeón I de Kartli a Felipe II y Teimuraz I de Kakheti a Felipe IV", *Estudios Clásicos*, 89, 1985, p. 307-345, esp. p. 332.

⁴³ See David Kolbaia, "Informacja o Gruzji, przygotowana w 1627 roku dla Jego Świątobliwości Urbana VIII przez Piotra della Valle, pielgrzyma", *Pro Georgia. Journal of Kartvelological Studies*, 12, 2005, p. 129-151, esp. p. 151.

To be sure, for over 300 years the Ottomans controlled the large part of human activity in the Black Sea. Yet, this image should not be taken as too static since the control of any early modern state over its subjects and natural resources had obvious limits. If the comparison with the harem is to be taken seriously, a historian must admit that the sultan's control of his womenfolk was not complete either.

In the last decade, many an Ottoman historian has consciously or unconsciously moved away from the centralistic and statist view once proposed by Halil İnalcık. Amy Singer exploited the potential of negotiation, available even to most humble Ottoman peasants⁴⁴. Jane Hathaway explored ancient tribal connections and their bearing on the political life of Ottoman Egypt⁴⁵. According to Gábor Ágoston, "in discussing the 'classical age' students often become victims of their sources. If one looks at the sultanic decrees sent from Istanbul to the provinces during the mid-sixteenth century, the impression gained is one of an Ottoman central government whose will prevailed even in the most remote frontier areas"⁴⁶. One should add that in the Turkish historiography this "centralist" and "Weberian" bias was further strengthened by the intellectual climate of the early Kemalist Republic.

Admittedly, the centralized model has also its believers, to mention only Murat Çızakça or Şevket Pamuk. Yet, Çızakça labels the Ottoman centralism as "proto-pseudo-socialism" and blames it for the ultimate stagnancy and collapse of the Empire⁴⁷. Pamuk, in his recent *Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* admits the highly centralistic character of Ottoman state under Mehmed II. However, he also warns that this example should not be treated as typical. To quote Pamuk: "in fact, the reign of Mehmed II was unique in the way the central government intervened to regulate not only specie and money but also trade and the urban economy"⁴⁸. According to Pamuk, in the sixteenth century Ottoman

⁴⁴ Amy Singer, *Palestinian Peasants and Ottoman Officials. Rural Administration around Sixteenth century Jerusalem*, Cambridge, 1994.

⁴⁵ Jane Hathaway, *A Tale of Two Factions. Myth, Memory, and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen*, Albany, 2003.

⁴⁶ Gábor Ágoston, "A Flexible Empire: Authority and its Limits on the Ottoman Frontiers" in Kemal H. Karpat with Robert W. Zens (eds.), *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Changes*, Madison, 2003, p. 15-32, esp. p. 15.

⁴⁷ Murat Çızakça, *A Comparative Evolution of Business Partnerships. The Islamic World and Europe, with Specific Reference to the Ottoman Archives*, Leiden, 1996, p. 210.

⁴⁸ Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 45.

society the state control and regulative mechanisms were already much weaker.

Certainly, there is still much to learn about the Ottoman control of the Black Sea. Moreover, I am deeply convinced that our future understanding and evaluation of this control will be closely related to our general perception of the functioning of the Ottoman Empire and the effectiveness of its state bureaucracy in the "classical" and "post-classical" age.