

British-Ottoman Trade Relations and the American Commercial Orientation Towards the Port of Smyrna 1740-1774

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Abstract

The importance of trade relations between different countries was characterized by great importance as it is one of the means that contributed to cultural communication between peoples and nations, and some cities were often the key to that communication or a station for a global forum that contributed to the diversity of relations with which those countries were associated, and here comes the importance of the subject of the study to be traced. The history of one of the ancient cities with ancient historical depth, which is the city of Smyrna, a city that has a civilized history. It was one of the most important cities overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, and it brings together various cultural and economic activities. It has one of the most important ports in the world, as it has formed a forum for global trade since ancient times.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, trade, British Navy, Port of Smyrna.*

Introduction

The port of Smyrna was one of the largest Ottoman ports in the sixteenth century and the following centuries, as it received most of the European ships aspiring to trade and ship products from the East and Southeast. The importance of the study comes from following the historical and cultural value of the city of Smyrna throughout history, and then studying its positive role in linking the East with the West, i.e. the New World. Following the geographical discoveries at the end of the fifteenth century, Smyrna and its port became one of the most important maritime meeting places for transporting the goods of South and North America and the treasures they were rich in to reach the port of Smyrna via shipping by British ships, as the latter controlled the colonies of the New World in its northern part. The research was divided into an introduction, three axes, and a conclusion with the most important results. The first axis had studied the American commercial orientation towards the port of Smyrna for the period from 1700-1740, while the second axis had studied the maritime commercial orientation of American ships from the British colonies for the period from 1740-1762. While the third axis had studied the British position on the maritime orientation towards the Ottoman ports from 1762-1776. The conclusion had included several results.

The first axis: The maritime direction of British ships from the American colonies to the ports of the Ottoman Empire 1700-1740

As the years progressed, the number of British merchant ships arriving from American ports and heading with their cargoes towards the Mediterranean increased. Since the early eighteenth century (1700), the number of these ships ranged between (80-100) ships that sailed in the Mediterranean and docked in its ports to sell and buy the desired goods in their countries, and continued their sailing to reach the ports of the Ottoman Empire, especially the port of Smyrna in the first place. (), Perhaps the most prominent goods carried by these ships were raw grains and flour, in addition to rice, and dried fish among marine products, and various types of beverages, the first of which was wine, in addition to beeswax and honey, and among the woods were pine and oak.

After arriving and shopping at the port of Smyrna, she would buy a range of goods, including salt, olive oil, and various types of tanned hides, wool, and hair. These commercial operations were a model of communication between American society and Ottoman society, and had a major impact on the growth of friendly commercial relations between the two countries. However, they were under British control of the

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Thirteen Colonies, so the monitoring of these commercial operations and their results was done by British consuls in the ports of the Ottoman Empire or in its main cities such as Istanbul. ().

The second axis: The commercial activity of the British Navy towards the ports of the Ottoman Empire 1740-1762

Despite all of this, it continued to sail regularly, but it was exposed to a state of decline, as it went through several changes since 1740, which caused a significant decline in the number of ships sailing towards the Ottoman ports. The reason for this was the influence of the Ottoman-British disputes, as a result of the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). ()•The war was affected by the escalation of the conflict between Britain and France in the Mediterranean waters and the resulting damage to some ports due to that war, which prompted Ottoman merchants to ship their goods on board French ships rather than British ships, since Ottoman ships were damaged by military operations, which were often due to British warships attacking Ottoman and French ships transporting goods from Ottoman ports. Thus, Ottoman sailors and their ships found themselves easy targets, and they were even intentionally targeted by British ships.

This situation constituted a decline in the activity of British trade within the European sphere and the American colonies, and this was due to the British position as a result of the effects of the War of the Austrian Succession and Britain's intervention in it, as British merchant ships were exposed to many attacks, hundreds of which were destroyed by French ships, which imposed their control extensively over the Mediterranean, which prompted Ottoman merchants to agree with the French to ensure the safety of their ships or to load their goods on board French ships. On the other hand, French ships were not exposed to Ottoman ships as much as they were exposed to British warships, especially in 1744. As a result of this position, the Ottoman Empire took some legal measures against the attacks carried out by British ships on French ships later, which were often transporting Ottoman goods outside the Mediterranean, when several objections were submitted to the British Consul in the Ottoman Empire (Stanhope Aspinwall). ()•Stanhope Aspinwall• On May 13, 1744, he sent a detailed report to his government in London, which included full details of the Ottoman objection, informing the British side of the right to respond at the appropriate time. Despite this, the British authorities did not take any action to mitigate the Ottoman reaction, and matters became more complicated when the Ottoman court convened to begin taking legal measures through which it considered the British unwelcome on Ottoman lands and waters and reserved the word describing them as friends. After Stanhope Aspinwall was informed of these developments, he sent an urgent telegram on May 14, 1744, to London, in which he confirmed that "the Ottoman court began to conclude that the British were no longer their friends." (). Despite these developments, the British authorities did not take any step to improve the situation regarding French superiority in the field of transporting Ottoman trade. As a result of these events, the British ambassador (James Porter) was appointed. ()•James Porter • In Istanbul on January 26, 1746, he had commercial experience, which caused some confusion for the Ottoman government, as he had spent a large period trying to improve the economic situation of British merchants at the expense of weakening French commercial superiority in the ports of the Ottoman Empire, including the seaport of Smyrna. ()• Following the cessation and end of military operations resulting from the overlapping positions due to the Austrian Succession War in 1748, foreign ships returned, including those coming from the American colonies, and the percentage of exports and imports to and from the port of Smyrna increased to continue to increase after 1750, as European goods of various types were of interest and demand from Ottoman merchants to buy and store them for some time in the port of Smyrna while waiting for the rest of the merchants present in the port of Smyrna to buy them. Therefore, these goods, including types of European clothing and other goods, stimulated the commercial rise of the port, while the high-quality Ottoman cotton produced in areas close to the maritime cities was easy to reach the port of Smyrna, and on the other hand, mohair formed ()•Another source of trade, as the centers of its collection and weaving multiplied in preparation for trading in it, while this matter also contributed to the development of the production of woolen threads coming from the city of Ankara and other cities, so that both materials constituted a great interest for European merchants as they were two additional raw materials that could be traded and had a financial return in European markets due to the high demand for them, so the port of Smyrna became one of the most important Ottoman commercial ports that exchanged trade

with European ports within the continent and the rest of the colonies, especially in the New World and the American colonies. As a result of this commercial interest by European merchants, the role of Ottoman merchants increased in strengthening their commercial activities within the vicinity of the port of Smyrna until some of them became commercial intermediaries between European merchants and local residents, which was considered an important factor in the development of the management of commercial transactions with European merchants, as European merchants used to agree in advance with local intermediaries to prepare the goods before their season, as these advance operations constituted great importance in the advantages of commercial communication between them, and on the other hand, local entrepreneurs, i.e. intermediaries, were highly knowledgeable. The tastes of the inhabitants of the Ottoman regions, especially in determining the types of goods they consumed in the Ottoman cities and countryside, were such that they requested them from European merchants at prices lower than their prices in their markets.

Therefore, these operations enhanced the importance of the port of Smyrna, which became a center for managing these commercial operations. What increased their capabilities in developing their activity was their ability to communicate and speak different local and foreign languages. The matter did not stop there, but a number of Ottoman merchants appeared in Smyrna when they developed their financial dealings with European merchants, especially French merchants in the first place, and then British merchants on the basis of credit. The status of local brokers there was strengthened, and foreign merchants had to resort to them to guarantee the repayment of their due loans, which facilitated the completion of hundreds of commercial deals, which left a distinct impression on the development of these commercial relations. The percentage of what Ottoman merchants exported from the port of Smyrna in the period from (1700-1744) was (20%), and from (1744-1755) was 35%. A large percentage of these exports were shipped by French merchant ships, which were considered at that time the largest trading partner of the Ottoman Empire, while British trade declined in the same period for political and military reasons, which caused merchants to refrain from. Between the two sides, which negatively affected trade between the port of Smyrna and ships coming from the ports of the American colonies to the same port.

Despite the measures taken by the British consuls to overcome these difficulties, things got worse and the piracy war in the Mediterranean intensified during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). () 'This forced the British side, through James Porter, to appease the Ottoman authorities (), and to try to convince them to direct their pashas in North Africa to show a spirit of cooperation with British ships and to reduce the piracy attacks directed against British ships, as the aim of these attempts was to provide a guarantee for British trade to continue heading towards the Ottoman state. However, these events and political and commercial changes constituted a burden on his political and economic efforts, so his measures were weak and did not confront the French naval superiority and influence in the Mediterranean, which constituted a commercial competitor to its activity in the ports of the Mediterranean and the port of Smyrna.

Axis III: The Complications Facing British Trade with The American Colonies 1762-1776

As a result of these developments that exhausted British trade, especially that coming from and going to the New World, specifically the Thirteen Colonies, Canada and some islands in the Atlantic Ocean, the British authorities then placed the blame on their consuls in the Ottoman Empire, and held them responsible for failing to find solutions and overcome these difficulties. Therefore, the British government replaced its ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, James Porter, in 1762, with a new ambassador, Henry Grenville. () 'Henry Grenville ' Her vision of this diplomatic change was that she was aspiring to find quick solutions to the decline of her commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire, but Ambassador Henry Grenville faced great difficulties as a result of the entrenched hostility towards his country's policy and the unwillingness of the Ottoman authorities to cooperate in providing an atmosphere and opportunities for British merchants. Therefore, he did not continue for long, as he failed to overcome these difficulties when piracy in the Mediterranean imposed its control over British ships coming from the British Isles and the New World and intensified its influence against those ships, which caused the annoyance of British merchants bound by large financial obligations with the port of Smyrna and the rest of the European and British ports, and they had large sums owed to Ottoman merchants. () 'At that time, the British authorities

chose the experienced merchant and former British Political Resident in the Kingdom of Venice, (John Murray). (John Murray) A new consul who arrived in the Ottoman lands in 1766, Murray was a capable ambassador who had a lot of experience, but he did not succeed in resolving the difficulties that faced the British merchants, especially his failure to resolve the customs transactions that were practiced against them by the Ottoman authorities when they imposed customs duties on British goods at high rates, unlike French merchants, which made it clear that the Ottoman state did not want to continue dealing with the British side and work by all means to restrict the activity of merchants in its ports, including the port of Smyrna.

John Murray's efforts did not succeed despite all attempts by British policy to restore the course of trade relations with the Ottomans to their previous state. The British reaction was very bad, and they returned again to seize the opportunity in the wake of the Ottoman-Russian disputes when they poured out their hatred on the Ottoman state during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768. (When it became clear to the Ottomans that the British had provided direct military assistance to the Russian fleet in that war, the Ottoman authorities sent a warning to the British capital, London, explaining in its response that “it would go to war in response to Russian provocations.”) As a result of these major developments, the situation between the two countries became complicated, and events took a turn for the worse when the Russians destroyed the Ottoman fleet in the Battle of Chesma. (Battle of Chesma) Which took place in the Gulf of Cesme on July 5, 1770, the reaction of the Ottoman citizens was great, as the Ottoman authorities ignored the riots that occurred against the interests of British merchants in the Ottoman ports, including the port of Smyrna, and did not intervene to protect those interests after they blamed a large part of the repercussions of the war and its loss on British-Russian cooperation. (These acts of revenge by the Ottomans were also directed at the British ambassador, as he was the head of the conspiracies carried out against the Ottoman state, when he was harassed and feared being arrested when rumors reached him that the British were sending warships to help the Russians against the Ottoman state. (These events, in their entirety and their political, military and commercial content, constituted a major decline in British commercial interests with the Ottoman Empire. It became clear to British merchants that they were looking for other ports to conduct their activities away from the port of Smyrna, as a result of Ottoman discontent resulting from their high degree of certainty that British support for the Russians was the cause of that naval defeat. Following that, British trade in the port of Smyrna faced difficult conditions, as a boycott was practiced against them, which caused a major decline during that period. On the other hand, relations between the British authorities and the inhabitants of the American colonies in the New World were heading, in 1772, towards a new type of tense relationship as a result of the British retaliatory measures practiced against them, especially in the field of trade, imposing taxes and raising customs tariffs on their products in an attempt to compensate for their losses resulting from their involvement in several wars with other European countries, as we mentioned previously. Events were escalating in the American colonies, and it became clear that the relationship was heading towards armed escalation that would lead to the outbreak of war between the two parties.

Conclusion

Through the above, several results can be achieved, which the study concluded, including:

The historical and cultural value of the city of Smyrna contributed to the direction of trade towards the port of Smyrna during the period from 1700-1776, but this did not cancel the strategic value of the Ottoman coasts, the land depth of which, especially in the east and southwest, remained of commercial value for the goods it exported towards the Mediterranean Sea.

The historical and economic value of British trade coming from the British colonies, which increased in the years 1740-1762, contributed to the development of the axes of the global trade meeting, especially after the arrival of New World goods to the ports of the Ottoman Empire.

The control of the Ottoman Empire in the eighth century over the trade routes coming from the East caused European trade to search for new routes away from the control of the Ottoman Empire, but with

the passage of years it realized that its performance was weak, so it returned again to the Ottoman port of Smyrna loaded with the goods of the New World.

The distinguished location of the city of Smyrna and its port had a great impact on its social diversity, in addition to the beauty of its architecture and the health and pleasantness of its air, which made it a place for the establishment of most of the international trading houses, including the American trading house established by David Offley and some other merchants. It was a launch that broke the British barrier and paved the way for the beginning of American-Ottoman relations.

The British insistence on demonstrating naval power in the Mediterranean helped the flow of trade between the ports of the eastern American colonies and the port of Smyrna, despite facing challenges on the coasts of North Africa.

The global events coincided with British commercial activity in the American colonies with the Ottoman Empire, which together constituted factors that accelerated the Ottoman Empire's reception of American ships.

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