

CONSULS OF SMYRNA: THEIR PLACE IN THE CITY AND THE EMPIRE IN THE 17TH
AND 18TH CENTURIES

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Before the seventeenth century Ottoman Empire's diplomacy and international trade was very restricted. Because Ottoman State was so powerful in term of military and had been able to get whatever it wants by force, the diplomacy was restricted only making treaties or demanding surrender.¹ Since the state's economic policy was based on conquering lands, it also had not needed international trade very much. However, after turning the state to an empire, Mehmed the Conqueror adopted relatively more integrative policy to the West in terms of international trade and diplomacy. He gave capitulations to the Genoese and permanent delegation to the Venetians,² but it was a partial integration, the empire still was mostly protecting its old-style, aggressive diplomatic policy. The vital integration has been taken place in the seventeenth century, when the empire started to decline in its military and therefore in its economic power. This decline paved the way for seeking new integrative policies such as international trade and diplomacy. Hence, new ports arose in the Levant. One of the most important ports was Smyrna.

Before the seventeenth century, because its economic vitality Chios was a more important port where foreign merchants and therefore consuls resided densely. Even there had been no descriptions of Smyrna in travel books until then. In the first years of the seventeenth century, Izmir suddenly jumped vividly into travelers' imaginations and writings and merchants from the Europe chose Izmir to foster as a port of transit for the

¹ Timuçin Kodaman and Ekrem Yaşar Akçay, "Kuruluştan Yıkılışa Kadar Osmanlı Diplomasi Tarihi ve Türkiye'ye Bıraktığı Miras" SDÜ Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 22 (2010): 80, http://uvf.ulakbim.gov.tr/uvf/index.php?cwid=9&vtadi=TSOS&c=ebsco&c=summon&c=ebsco&ano=125642_16b18293c12d5d364d6c9e79f3a1eca7

² Kodaman and Akçay, "Kuruluştan Yıkılışa Kadar Osmanlı Diplomasi Tarihi ve Türkiye'ye Bıraktığı Miras" 81.

commodities of western Anatolia.³ This transition in the city also brought foreign consuls to the city. By 1612 a Venetian consul and a Dutch vice-consul had arrived, and in 1619 the French consul in Chios was transferred to Smyrna. The consuls were the key power-brokers in the city and lived like princes in “small palaces” in Smyrna⁴ They were very important elements of the city and the empire itself. Most of them enjoyed independence, great respect and close relations with the state officials, in return they introduced the Ottoman Empire to the West objectively through their works on Ottoman state and society.

The consulates were treated as independent bodies in Smyrna by the Ottoman state in 17th and 18th centuries. They were almost acting as “small states” and every consuls asserted authority over his subjects. The consuls were also collecting payments from their subjects to maintain the consulate.⁵ These subjects whose nations had Capitulations also had the right to establish itself within Ottoman territory and they could live as a nation with their own juridicial system and religion.⁶ For example, the Dutch consular courts could pronounce sentences to its subjects, even death-penalty. Ottoman government was invoked only a few times about such juridicial activities.⁷ The French consul who appointed to Smyrna in 1619 also extended his jurisdiction over Anatolia and many Aegean islands, where he appointed vice-consuls. In addition, a chapel was built for the consul in 1628, which was an example in term of religion independence and was a common practice in

³ Daniel Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World, 1550-1650* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1990), 50-51-64.

⁴ Philip Mansel, *Levant* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) 19-27-29.

⁵ A.H. De Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and The Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten Noordeindsplein 4-6, 1978) 221.

⁶ Geert Jan van Gelder and Ed de Moor, ed., *Eastward Bound* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1994) 85.

⁷ De Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and The Dutch Republic* 222.

Smyrna.⁸ The consuls were also maintaining consulship independent from Ottoman officials. For instance, François Dupuy who became consul in 1651 declared that “no one from the Ottoman administration, police superintendents, or others shall enter his house.”⁹ The consuls were also able to act independent in their private lives. In Smyrna, for example Dutch people and their consuls could preserve elements of life as they were at home. The consuls’ demands sometimes might have been excessive. For example, in the eighteenth century European consuls tried to stop Turks frequenting the taverns of the Frank quarter, where they could enjoy “the most absolute freedom... to commit every kind of outrage”¹⁰

The consuls in Smyrna were in very respectful and prestigious position in the city. They were escorted by janissaries to enhance their status and to protect their persons.¹¹ They even could choose those janissaries.¹² Furthermore, there were families which consulship inherited from father to son. Even they were called as “dynasties”¹³ For example, one of those families is the Hochepped family. They were the most prominent Dutch family in Smyrna. They served as consuls in in Smyrna and ambassadors in Istanbul. One of the members of the family was Daniel Jean de Hochepped, who has been consul in Smyrna between 1688 and 1723. He was very respected and called “Monsieur le Consul”, as he was the only consul in the city. He was not just respected by minority, when he died thousands of Muslims, Greeks, Armenians and Franks attended to his funeral. Thanks to their respective position, sons inherited parents’ networks in the city they stayed until

⁸ Mansel, Levant 19-20.

⁹ Goffman, Izmir and the Levantine World 89.

¹⁰ Mansel, Levant 32.

¹¹ Mansel, Levant 27.

¹² Goffman, Izmir and the Levantine World 102.

¹³ De Groot, The Ottoman Empire and The Dutch Republic 225.

1922.¹⁴ We see this respective position almost for every consul in Smyrna. For example, in a depiction, the French consul is provided a chair when he was presenting his capitulations to the kadı of Izmir. The depictions shows that the consuls were treated as equals and respected by kadıs, at that time who was the one of the most important authorities in the city.



The one who sits in the chair is the French consul-Goffman, Izmir and the Levantine World 80.

The consuls of Smyrna had relations with Ottoman officials and had influence on them. In early 17th century, the consuls, especially the Venetian consuls, were appealing to their ambassadors in the capital city, Istanbul about local issues and through the ambassador Ottoman officials often fulfilled the consuls' demands. However after the mid-17th century this style of diplomacy became inefficient.¹⁵ From then on, consuls in Smyrna established direct relation with the Ottoman state officials in the capital city. Even they were in touch with the imperial family. Daniel Jean de Hochepped's wife Clara Catherine was very close with the Sultan's mother, she helped to Madame de Hochepped to obtain a firman authorizing the construction of a new church for the Franciscans of Smyrna. Another example was the British consul, Paul Rycaut. His books on Ottoman Empire was written thanks to his relations with the Ottoman officials. He was able to

¹⁴ Mansel, Levant 29.

¹⁵ Goffman, Izmir and the Levantine World 110-118.

examine Ottoman registers and be provided information from the palace by Levant informants such as palace employee Albert Boboski, the imperial dragoman Mamucha Della Torre, the Sultan's doctor Dr. Marcellini and Şeytan İbrahim, who had been governor of Egypt and was later commander-in-chief of Ottoman forces in Hungary.¹⁶ Paul Rycout was also lucky in one more respect. During his service, he had very close relations with famous reforming Grand Vizierate Fazıl Ahmed Köprülü. Grand Vizierate was in favor of the West and “was very observant of the Capitulations between our King and the Grand Signior” Rycout wrote that he had seen him often and known him well.¹⁷ One of these lucky consuls was Charles-Claude de Peyssonnel. During his service, he also witnessed a reforming family, which was called Karaosmanoğlu Family or in some resources Karaosmanoğlu dynasty.¹⁸ They were local notables and hereditary nobles who began to modernize Ottoman provinces. Peyssonnel had good relations with them, he would invite them to balls and plays, and would send them his doctor when necessary. The family also had good attitude toward Peyssonnel. For instance, Karaosmanzade Hacı Mustafa Ağa, who was one of the members of the Karaosmanoğlu Family, invited the consul to tilting parties and he would end his letters with “may the Lord grant you precious gifts and long life”, and greetings to the consul's wife, daughter and sons.¹⁹

Some of the consuls in Smyrna also contributed to scholarship within the Empire. They made observations and tried to go beyond prejudices of the West towards Ottoman Empire. For example, Paul Rycout, who was appointed as British consul of Smyrna in 1667, wrote four books

¹⁶ Mansel, Levant 29-27.

¹⁷ V.L. Menage, review of *An English Consul in Turkey: Paul Rycout at Smyrna 1667-1678*, by Sonia P. Anderson, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 54 No.1 1991 170-171

¹⁸ "Karaosmanoğlu Ailesi" last modified in March, 2010, http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karaosmanoğlu_Ailesi

¹⁹ Mansel, Levant 41.

about the Ottoman Empire: *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1667), *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* (1679), *The History of the Turkish Empire* (1680) and *The History of the Turks* (1700) He presented these books to the British Empire's king and served as a cultural transmitter.²⁰ His books were in the mainstream of scholarship. His perspective, detailed observations and historical scholarship was significant for the Ottoman society. Moreover, he tried to be objective when describing Turkish politics and government. Even, for his objectivity, he was "hailed as the new Tacitus"²¹ We see his objectivity claim in his book, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*:

I present thee here with a true systeme or model of the Turkish Government and Religion; not in the same manner as certain ingenious Travellers have done, who ... are consequently subject to many errors and mistakes: But having been an Inhabitant my self at the Imperial City for the space of five years, and assisted by the advantage of considerable journeys I have made throughout divers parts of Turkey, and qualified by the Office I hold of Secretary to the Earl of Winchilsea Lord Ambassador, I had opportunity by the constant access and practice with the Chief Ministers of State, and variety of Negotiations which passed through my hands in the Turkish court, to penetrate farther into the Mysteries of this Politie, which appear so strange and barbarous to us, than hasty Travellers could do, who are forced to content themselves with a superficial knowledge²²

Since during Paul Rycaut's service Ottoman Empire was not weak as it would be in the next century, his perspective towards the Empire in his books partially understandable. However, in the 18th century, circumstances changed, the Empire became more weaker and the West was seen as superior. Despite such negative conditions Charles-Claude de Peyssonnel, who served as consul in Smyrna in 1766-78, still looked different to the Empire's future. In his writings, he goes beyond clichés about Ottoman barbarism and Western superiority.²³

²⁰ Mansel, Levant 27.

²¹ I. Metin Kunt, review of *An English Consul in Turkey: Paul Rycaut at Smyrna 1667-1678*, by Sonia P. Anderson, *The English Historical Review*, Vol.108, No. 426 January 1993 201-202.

²² Paul Rycaut, the epistle to the reader of *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, by Paul Rycaut (Westmead, Farnborough, Hants., England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1972)

²³ Mansel, Levant 38.

To sum up, the consuls were very active figures of the Empire and especially Smyrna. Since there was a cosmopolitan environment in Smyrna, they become much more effective and independent than any other consuls. They even affected Ottoman politics. However, these properties was not valid for every consul in Smyrna, because of several reasons: Their effectiveness, importance and independence depended on Ottoman officials' attitude toward consuls, consuls' individual characteristics, the Ottoman Empire's external politics and their effect on the reactions of the Muslim people. In other words, the consuls' condition in Smyrna always fluctuated. Although they usually restricted to the "red lines" of the Ottoman state and society, if you work on or talk about the 17th and 18th century of the Ottoman Empire, you would not able to put the period without using the word "consul" in your sentence.

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