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The Letter of Tsar Peter I to Sultan Ahmed III on the Occasion of the End of the Northern War

Introduction, Translation from Ottoman-Turkish and Commentary

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Abstract: The Treaty of Nystad signed between Russia and Sweden put an end to the prolonged Northern War (1700–1721). Russia gained an access to the Baltic Sea, acquired new territories and strengthened its international prestige. In a letter written on September 30 (October 11), 1721, Tsar Peter I informs the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III about Russian military and diplomatic success. Till nowadays, there is no information about the original letter, but its text has been preserved in translation into Ottoman-Turkish. The contents of the letter reflect the desire of the Russian Tsar, who had just finished a long war, to maintain good-neighborly relations with the Ottoman Empire. Being a source on the history of Russian-Turkish diplomatic relations, the letter is also an example of the Ottoman-Turkish language of the first half of the 18th c.

Key words: Great Northern War, Treaty of Nystad, Russia-Turkey relations, Russian-Turkish diplomatic correspondence, Ottoman manuscripts

The letter in question was written by the Russian Tsar Peter I shortly after the end of the Great Northern War (1700–1721). Russia gained an access to the Baltic Sea, acquired new territories and strengthened its international prestige. At the same time, the state was weakened by the long war. Therefore, one of Peter’s concerns was to avoid military confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, relations with which were very tense at the beginning of the 18th c. The contents of the letter sent to the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III (ruled 1703–1730) reflect this desire of the Russian Tsar.

The letter is a part of the manuscript known as “İbretnümâ-yı Devlet-i Câvid” (“Instruction to the State by Jâvid”),¹ kept at the Rare Works Library

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¹ Jâvid is listed as the compiler of the manuscript by mistake. See KESîl 2002: XXIX–XXXI.
of Istanbul University (shelf mark: İÜNEKTY 5943). The manuscript includes texts of different official documents copied by an Ottoman official who wrote under the pseudonym Kesbî. The documents were used by this Turkish historiographer in his work “İbretnümâ-yı Devlet” (“Instruction to the State”). The manuscripts of this work have been preserved in Istanbul, Paris and St. Petersburg. Writing his work, Kesbî did not use all the material available to him; many documents, including the letter in question, were not introduced into the final text. The letter of Peter I was copied by the historiographer along with some other samples of diplomatic correspondence. Among them are letters from Russian monarchs: Anna Ioannovna (ruled 1730–1740), Ivan VI (formally ruled 1740–1741), Elizabeth Petrovna (ruled 1741–1762), Catherine II (ruled 1762–1796), as well as from rulers and diplomats of some European and Asian states.

As indicated in the text itself, the letter is dated by September 30 (October 11), 1721. It seems that this is one of the last letters to foreign monarchs written by Tsar Peter before accepting the title of “Emperor of All Russia” on October 22 (November 2), 1721. Translation of the letter allows to see the differences of the title of the Russian Tsar before it was officially changed to the Emperor. Besides, some features of the translation of the monarchical title into the Ottoman-Turkish can be seen.

2 The text of Kesbî’s work “İbretnümâ-yı Devlet” was published in 2002 by Ahmet Öğreten based on the manuscript Ali Emîri, Tarih nr. 484 kept at the National Library of Turkey. The text of the manuscript İÜNEKTY 5943 was also included into the publication. See Kesbî 2002. Unfortunately, the publication does not contain a facsimile reproduction of the Ottoman-Turkish text in Arabic script. I express my gratitude to the colleagues from the Rare Works Library, Library and Documentation Department of Istanbul University who kindly provided me with a digital copy of the manuscript İÜNEKTY 5943.

3 One of the later copies of “İbretnümâ-yı Devlet” is kept in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS (Collection of manuscripts written in Arabic script, shelf mark: B 747). In 1881 it was published by Vassily D. Smirnov (1846–1922). See Shorniš 1881.

4 Until 1918, the Julian calendar was officially used in Russia. The corresponding dates in the Gregorian calendar are given in parentheses.

5 According to Peter’s decree, issued on November 11 (November 22), 1721, the title of the Emperor of All Russia in the correspondence with foreign sovereigns had to be written as follows: “By the Grace and Aid of God, We Peter the First, Emperor and Sovereign of All Russia, of Moscow, Kiev, Vladimir, Novgorod; Tsar of Kazan, Tsar of Astrakhan, Tsar of Siberia; Sovereign of Pskov and Grand Duke of Smolensk; Duke of Estland, Lifland, Korelia, Tver, Yugria, Permia, Vyatka, Bolgary and others; Sovereign and Grand Duke of Novgorod of the Lower Land, Chernigov, Ryazan, Rostov, Yaroslavl, Beloozero, Udoria, Obdoria, Kondia, and Ruler of all Northern territories; and Sovereign of Iberia, Kartalinian and Georgian Tsars; and hereditary Sovereign and Ruler of the Kabardinian lands, Circassian and Mountain Princes and others.” See Polnoe sobranie 1830: No. 3850.
Most of the names of Russian cities and territories are transliterated accurately. However, in some cases, the Turkish translator resorts to transliterating the words that should be translated. This refers, for instance, to the words “cümle Siveryâ memleketlerinin” which definitely should be translated as a “(Ruler) of all Northern territories”. Another example is “Novgrod’ın, Nijoya’nın” which can be recognized as Nizhny Novgorod (in the original the city’s name “Novgorod of the Lower Land” is used). The Tsar’s title of Grand Duke, which in the letters of later monarchs is usually translated as “Büyük Duka”, here is partly transliterated, partly translated, and looks like “Büyük Knez”. Similarly, the Russian interpreters from Ottoman-Turkish in the Ambassadorial Office, when unable to find synonyms for the Sultan’s titles, transliterated them. For instance, the Ottoman title of Persian origin “Hudâvendigâr” (“the second or the other God’, ‘godlike’) was never translated: it was usually rendered in various distorted forms (“Khandyker”, “Khanker”, etc.) in Cyrillic script. At the same time, in the absence of the original text, this approach allows, if necessary, to recreate it accurately enough.6

The text of the letter contains the names of the territories conquered by Russia during the war. Despite the peculiarities of Arabic script, toponyms are transmitted quite accurately and can be easily recognized. They include such regions as Liflandia,7 Estlandia,8 Ingermanlandia9 and half of Karelia, as well as the largest and most significant cities and fortresses: Riga, Dünamünde,10 Pernov,11 Revel,12 Dorpat,13 Narva, Vyborg, Kexholm.14

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6 ZAYTSEV 2006: 56.
7 Before 1713 — Swedish Livonia; now its territory partly lies in Latvia, partly in Estonia.
8 Northern part of today’s Estonia.
9 Historical region which now lies within the territory of Leningrad Oblast, Russia.
10 Daugavgrīvas fortress near Riga, Latvia.
11 Now Pärnu, Estonia.
12 Now Tallinn, Estonia.
13 Now Tartu, Estonia.
14 Now Priozersk, Russia.
The text in Ottoman-Turkish (Pl. 1–3)

15 The title of the letter added by the compiler as well as the Sultan’s name printed in bold here, in the manuscript are written in red ink.

16 Should be read: نوغروفک.
Moskov Çarı tarafından gelen nâmesi tercemesidir. 25 Zîl-ka'de sene 1134

Biz Petrûs Aleksiyâvic ki bi-inâyeti'l-lâhi teâlâ Moskov'un Çarı tamâmen Büyük | ve Kâçûk Rus'un müstakil hâkimi Kiyeşâ'nın, Vâlâmirîyâ'nın, Novgrâdyâ'nın | Büyük Knezi, Kazân'ın, Ajderhân'ın, Sipiryâ'nın Çari, Piskovîyâ'nın, | Esmûlençkîyâ'nın, Tiveryâ'nın, Ozûyâ'nın, Permyâ'nın, | Bulgaryâ'nın, Nóvgorod'un (sic!)17, Nójova'nın ve tevâbi' diyârların, | Cernihovyâ'nın, Rîjanyâ'nın, Rostovîyâ'nın Yâroslâvyânları (sic!), | Plôjriyâ'nın (sic!),18 Òbdoêryâ'nın, Òdôryâ'nın, Köndinyâ'nın ve cûmle | Siveryâ memleketlerinin ve Apôhrîyâ'nın Mâlikî, Kartâlı'n, Grûljîn] || (f. 147 r.) hâkîmlerinin Hâkimi, Kabardîyâ'nın, Çerkes'in ve sârş şarç ve garb ve şimalde | váktı' nice beyliklerin ve yerlerin Hâkımı ve Sâhib ve Vârisiyûz. Tarafımızdan | a'zam-i selâtîn-i izâm ve ekrem-i havâkín-i kirâm, Mekke-i müküreme, Medîne-i münevverê | ve Kuds-i mubahêkenin Pâd-sâhî ve Hâmîsi, Anadolu ve Rumeli'nin, Akdeniz | ve Karadeniz'in ve sâr nice memleketlerin Sâhib ve Mâlik ve Vârisi olan | şevketli azametli kudretli Şehinşâh-i mu'azzam, Pâd-sâh-1 al-i Osmân Sultân Ahmed Hân | bin Sultân Mehmed Hân bin Sultân Îbrahîm Hân ulu dostumuz hazretlerinin taraf-i hümâyûnlarına | dostâne arz-1 hulus iblâğından sonra mubahbâne inhâ olunan

17 Should be read: Nóvgorod'un.
18 Should be read: Belôzeryâ'nın.

19 In the manuscript it is written together with the previous word.
Pl. 1.
Istanbul University, Library and Documentation Department, Rare Works Library.
İÜNEKY 5943, f. 146 v.
Pl. 2.
Istanbul University, Library and Documentation Department, Rare Works Library.
İÜNEKTY 5943, f. 147 r.
Pl. 3.
Istanbul University, Library and Documentation Department, Rare Works Library.
IÜNEKY 5943, f. 147 v.
Translation

Translation of the letter from the Russian Tsar. 25 Dhu al-Qa'dah 1134

We Petrus Alekseevich, by the Grace of God, Tsar of Moscow, Sovereign of All Great and Small Russia, Grand Duke of Kiev, Vladimir, Novgorod; Tsar of Kazan, Astrakhan, Siberia; Sovereign of Pskov, Smolensk, Tver, Yugria, Permia, Bolgary, Novgorod of the Lower Land, and others; Chernigov, Ryazan, Rostov, Yaroslavl, Bielo-ozero, Obdoria, Udoria, Kondia, and Ruler of all Northern territories; of Iberian lands, Ruler of Kartalinian and Georgian rulers; hereditary Sovereign, and Ruler of Kabardinian, Circassian, and many other provinces and lands in the East, West, and North. From our side, to the Greatest of the Great Sultans and the Most Venerable of the Glorious Rulers, the Sovereign of Monarchs and the Protector of Mecca the Honored, Medina the Enlightened, and the Holy City of Jerusalem; hereditary Sovereign, and Ruler of Anatolia and Rumelia, the White and the Black Seas and many other places; Monarch of the House of Osman, Sultan Ahmed Khan, the son of Sultan Mehmed Khan; our great friend His Royal Majesty, with the announcement of the most sincere friendship, the following is amicably proclaimed. Without the approval of the Almighty God, for such a long time hot battles and fights between your above-mentioned friend and the Swedish King had been flaring up and protracted wars and murders had been carried out. At the same time, as, by God’s grace, it became possible to turn discord and strife to friendship and consent and to change cooling and hostility to amity, which refers to the permission of the Great God, delegates were appointed and approved from both sides, and a place called Nystad was chosen for negotiations, and when they gathered in that place, then, after discussion and conversation to this day, by the power of our hands, we have annexed from his kingdom such lands as Liflandia, Estlandia, Ingermanlandia and half of Karelia, and the adjacent coasts related to them. And the large cities of Riga, Dūnamünde, Pernov, Revel, Dorpat, Narva, Vyborg, Kexholm with all districts and islands have been conquered and they will

20 A latinized version of the name “Piotr” (Russian for: Peter) is used. Tsar’s patronymic is given in transliteration.
remain in my possession, in confirmation of which on August thirty fourth\(^{21}\) of this year of our Lord seventeen hundred twenty one, peace was established and at the same time the end and resolution were laid. On the basis of the growing and developing eternal friendly ties between Your Royal Majesty with us, first of all, with this message of our devotion, we hasten to express our highest degree of affection and love to Your Imperial Majesty, carelessness in the expression of which we do not consider appropriate. And we have no doubt that this news, based on amity, will be received joyfully. Therefore, our representatives, currently residing in Your High State, have been instructed to inform <You> in detail verbally. And because of this, the endless friendship and unity that exists between us, along with the most sincere intentions, is not subjected to any secret or obvious doubts from our part, and from Your Royal part, the consent of the undoubted royal favor in respect and reverence of friendly ties is also expected, as it should be. And in accordance with the eternal peace it is requested that for the serenity, security and welfare of the subjects on both sides, it should be strongly prescribed especially to the Tatar tribes that are under Your subjection and authority, that they avoid and refrain from causing any harm and damage. On our part, we have also issued strict decrees to ensure that those who are in our subjection, respect to the highest degree the rights of their neighbors. May the Almighty God send down from His bounty in the splendor of His kingdom a prosperous health throughout <Your> life. Recorded on the thirtieth of September, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred twenty one, in the fortieth year of our reign in our city of Petersburg.

References


\(^{21}\)The word “four” is clearly a scribe’s mistake. The Treaty of Nystad between Russia and Sweden was signed on August 30 (September 10), 1721.
Sbornik 1881: Sbornik nekotorykh vazhnykh izvestii i ofitsial’nykh dokumentov kasatel’no Turtsii, Rossii i Kryma [A miscellany of some important news and official documents concerning Turkey, Russia and Crimea]. Published with appendices by V.D. Smirnov. St. Petersburg.