

An Ottoman Occidentalizer in Central Asia: Mehmet Efendi meets the Turkmen Tribes in 1877

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Ottoman and Russian relations were very active from the beginning of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century due to a number of pressures. On July 21st, 1718, following the agreement of Pasarofca, while the Ottomans were at war with the Safavid in the east¹, the Russians began occupation of the western shore of the Caspian Sea and from there, they wanted to come down from north to south. They also occupied Baku, a situation that made Russian and Ottoman relations very sensitive and explosive, beginning on July 24th, 1724. Although they signed the agreement of Mukasem-Namisi², it did not minimize the tension escalating between them. In 1733, Nadir Ali suddenly attacked and defeated the Ottoman governor Memis Pasha at Ak-Derbend. What is more, he killed Sadrazam Halil Pasha in Kerkuk(city). By 1734, he had surrounded Baghdad. In order to lighten Nadir Ali's attacks on the city and draw his attention north, the Ottoman Sultan Mahmut I started preparing for war in the Kars area. He appointed the Kopruluzade Fazil Mustafa Pasha as a governor of Anatolia and minister of war in Kars. Moreover, he ordered the Khan of Crimea, Kaplan Giray, to bring his army to the region of Azerbaijan. The passage of the Crimean army through the Caucasus to reach Azerbaijan resulted in a very aggressive Russian policy against the Ottomans. Firstly, Russia protested Ottoman Empire. Russia's Minister of War, Levasav, and Fatih Giray's armies confronted each other a few times.³ Then Abdullah Pasha was killed by an Iranian in 1735, because the Ottoman Empire was dealing with an Iranian war that was not finished yet. The Ottoman Empire did not want to go war with Russia due to this previous costly and extended conflict. They asked the Khan of Crimea to pull his army out of the Caucasus. However, these precautions did not prevent the Ottoman-Russian War from breaking out in 1736.⁴

The war lasted from 1736-1739, ending with the signing of the Belgrade Agreement in

¹ Uzunçarşılı, İsmail Hakkı, *Osmanlı tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1949), 172-182

² Aktepe, M. Münir, *Osmanlı-Iran Münasebetleri, 1720-1724 ve Silâhsöz Kemanî Mustafa Ağa'nın Revan Fetihnamesi* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1970), 15

³ Halim Giray Sultan, *Gülbün-i hânân* (Erzurum: Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1990), 142

⁴ Ibid. , 172

1739. Following this agreement, Ottoman sent Mehmet Emni Beyefendi to Russia as an ambassador. There were two important factors that led up to the Ottoman-Russian War. First was a contest over the crown in Lehistan(Poland). The second reason was the Crimean army's desire to pass through Kabartay territory before arriving in the Caucasus. Kabartay has been west and east of north Caucasus and ruled by the Ottomans through the Crimean Khan until the beginning of the 18-century when Russia took it over.⁵

Ivan III sent a letter to the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud I in 1740. Ivan points that:

" With the permission of God, I am the emperor of Russia, tsar of Moskoviay, Kiyoviya, Viladimirya, Novoagrodiya, Kazan, Ejderhan and Siberia. I am ruler and owner of Peskovya, Ismolenkya, Islandiya, Finland, Karliya, Pogarya, Parmiya, Viyanga, Polgorya. Moreover, I am king of the land below Novograd, Cernekovya, Razanya, Rostovya, Kabardiya, Cerakise and leader of mountains thorough inheritance. To the very respected Sultan Mahmud I, that he is king of Medina and Mecca and protector of Jerusalem (Kudus), Rumeli, Anatolia, and the Mediterranean and Black Sea. I would like to inform you that the empress of Russia, Anna Ivanovna, Czarina of Moskoviay, Kiyoviya, Viladimirya, Novoagrodiya, Kazan, Ejderhan and Siberia. In addition, ruler and owner of Peskovya, Ismolenkya, Islandiya, Finland, Karliya, Pogarya, Parmiya, Viyanga, Polgorya. Moreover, queen of the land below of Novograd, Cernekovya, Razanya, Rostovya, Kabardiya, Cerakise and leaders of mountains has passed away."⁶

Ivan III with his letter wanted to inform the Ottoman Sultan of the death of Anna Ivanovna and the change in administration at the Russian court. He defined himself as king of Moskoviay, Kiyoviya, Viladimirya, Novoagrodiya, Kazan, Ejderhan, Siberia, Peskovya, Ismolenkya, Islandiya, Finland, Karliya, Pogarya, Parmiya, Viyanga, Polgorya and the land below of Novograd, Cernekovya, Razanya, Rostovya, Kabardiya, and Cerakise. This declaration of power excluded the Ottoman Sultan from power over Central Asia and the Caucasian area. Ivan III restricted the Ottoman Sultan's power and authority to the areas of the Medina, Mecca, Jerusalem (Kudus),

⁵ Ferazizade Mehmet Said, *Gulsen-I Ma'arif* (Istanbul: 1740) volume II, 1157-1166

⁶ This letter bearing the name of Ivan III was sent to the Ottoman Sultan Mahmut I in 1740. Prime minister Archive (Basbakanlik Arsivi), *Name-I Humayun Defteri*, number. 8, p. 35-37

Rumeli, Anatolia, and the Mediterranean and Black Seas. It seems that he was using diplomatic language against the Ottoman Sultan to imply that the Ottoman Sultan should not dare to involve himself in the power structures of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In return, equally diplomatically, the Ottoman Sultan never used any geographic terms or specific place names when he wrote to Ivan III, rather he used a general and abstract word saying, "My grand friend Ivan III, who is still the emperor of Russia."⁷

Nonetheless, the Ottoman administration did give up on their struggle against Russia. Mehmet Emin Efendi's presence at the Russian court is proof of this, showing that the Ottoman Empire had changed their position from a defensive policy to an active policy by sending an emissary to seek out Ottoman interests and provide information for its political, economic and military superiority.

A Trip to Central Asia from Istanbul

Today, we do not have enough information about Mehmet Emin Efendi⁸. In his book, he stated that his family and tribe were known in Turkistan. He graduated from school in Istanbul. He wanted to be a soldier, but because of a health condition and physical excuse was not eligible to be in the military. He decided be a pen pusher instead. He said that: " I can not put up with difficulty. I have no patience and I cannot deal with stress. Therefore, I do not want to work for the rest of my life as a pen pusher." Thus, he decided to travel from mountain to mountain and from savanna to savanna in an attempt to overcome his unhappiness. He divided his life into three periods, marked by symbolic discards. First was the removal of his turban cloth,⁹ indicating that he either no longer belonged to the religious clergy or stopped praying. Next, he threw out his sword, representing his inability to soldier due to his physical condition. Third, he threw away his pen pusher's pen after he quit that job. At the end, he "grabbed wand," considering the opportunity to travel all around the world.¹⁰

He traveled through most of the European countries, such as France, Germany,

⁷ Basbakanlik Arsivi, Name-I Humayun Defteri, number. 8, p. 78-79

⁸ This book was first published in 1878. It was published again in 1989. Mehmet Emin Efendi, *Istanbul'dan Asya-yi vustaya seyahat* (Istanbul: Kirkanbar Matbaasi, 1295[1878]); Mehmet Emin Efendi, *Istanbul'dan Orta Asya'ya Seyahat*(Ankara: Kultur ve Turizm Bakanligi, 1986)

⁹ Sarik: (wrapped around a headpiece to form a turban)

¹⁰ Mehmet Emin Efendi, *Istanbul'dan Asya-yi vustaya seyahat* (Istanbul: Kirkanbar Matbaasi, 1295[1878]), 5

Russia¹¹ and Italy. He tried to understand the essence and innermost workings of European civilization to prevent the Islamic world from backwardness. He wanted to understand what made Western civilization superior so that he could use the same methods to lead a revival of the Islamic world.

Mehmet Emin Efendi's book, which is entitled "*A Travel to Central Asia from Istanbul*" was published in Istanbul in 1878. There are many reasons his book is very important. Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844-1912), a well-known Turkish intellectual and journalist, wrote a prologue that emphasized the importance of travel books such as Efendi's to the Ottomans. He says:

"Ottomans did not give importance to traveling. On the other hand, European travelers journeyed all around the world and they wrote books that reflected their impression and memoirs. The development of the Islamic world depends on the guidance of Ottomans, who geographically remained in the middle of the Islamic world. Therefore, Ottomans should circulate information about new innovations and laws of European civilization to the whole Islamic world. What is more, the Ottomans consider it a a holy mission to follow the development in Europe"¹²

Ahmet Mithat Efendi argues that people from the Ottoman Empire who visited European countries just saw entertainment in places, as if they traveled from Istanbul to Beyoglu¹³. In his words, " If they saw an interesting thing, they would write their memoirs and impression about it."¹⁴ He emphasized that there were a couple of traveler books written that proved that Ottoman travelers are rare. He described Ottoman society and people as very static, immobile and had a close relationship with his environment. He criticized the Ottoman lack of interest in travel for both economic and political reasons.

"Until now, we did not give priority to our political interest but 100 ships and 1000 explorers traveled all around the world to extend their territory from England, Holland, Portugal, Spain, France, Sweden and Norway. For example, Britain is ruling a territory that is 7-8 times larger than their population. On the other hand, the Ottomans are sleeping on the bed of

¹¹ He perceived Russia as a European country that he did not take consider geographical but he considered them culturally close.

¹² Ibid. , 6

¹³ Beyoglu is a district that was outside of the Ottoman castle non- Muslims and their embassy and entertainment place were base in during the 19-century.

¹⁴ Ibid.

unawareness.”¹⁵

The Ottomans did not only seek their interests in far away countries but also in the members of Islamic countries like Algeria, Morocco, Caucasus, Iran and Arabia. Unfortunately, they did not pay attention their interest through traveling instead they were investing a lot of money building palace that can easily destroyed by fire in two hours. Ottomans should focus on long-term economic investment. Therefore, they should give up perceiving traveling as a burden! Traveling is great pleasure that nobody compared it with anything else in this world. Ahmet Mithat Efendi was most known Turkish intellectual who dedicated his life making progressive of Turkish society stressed importance of political, economic dimension of traveler for the Ottomans.¹⁶ With the word of Ahmet Mithat Efendi¹⁷,

“ All world knows that origins of the Ottomans stems from Central Asia. But the Ottomans do not have enough knowledge about Central Asia yet. French called their motherland as a “mon patrie” that for the Ottomans are Central Asia. Known lands of the Ottomans are spiritual extensions of Central Asia”

In 1877, Mehmet Emin Efendi started his travel from Istanbul¹⁸ while the Ottomans and Russians were preparing to declare war against each other. There are many reasons that this trip is very important. Mehmet Efendi gathered information about the Turkmen tribes in looking for an alliance and bulwark against Russian Empire in the coming conflict. He was using Islam to mobilize people against Russia. He provided a glut of examples of the cruelty of Russian soldiers against Muslim women and the people of Central Asia. Moreover, he emphasized the economic activity and oil revenues, as well as the fertile lands of Central Asia in order to legitimize war against Russia. Iran, Russia and the Dynasty of Bukhara are characterized as the potential threats in the travel book of Mehmet Efendi. He defined Turkmen tribes who fought against the Russians as heroes, branding Turkmen who collaborated with the Russians as traitors.

After Russia began its rule of rule Baku, it became a very important base. Even though Vakhia Astraha was the most known port of the Caspian Sea, Baku was

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. , 7

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ In his book Dersaadet refers to Istanbul that means gate of happiness.

between Iran and Dagestan. Moreover, it provided a base in middle of the south Caucasus for Russian merchants to transport products through to Iran. Therefore, Baku will be a very important base in the future due to its geographic position. Moreover, if the Tiflis(Tbilisi) railway connects with Baku, it will empower its location. Mostly Shii Muslims, Armenian and Russians lived in Baku. It has a very windy climate. Most of the people have eye illnesses like in Egypt.¹⁹ It seems that Mehmet Emin Efendi showed the economic importance of Baku for the Russian and Iranian market.

City of Krasnovadsk

This region took its name from the river of Kizil (red) Su (water) that was named by the Turkmen. After the Russians arrived in the region, they translated the city's name as Krasnovadsk, which means red water in Russian. In addition, before the Russians came to the region, the original name of the city was " Sah-Kadem". There were 40-50 stores and a few house existed in the area. Russians made a distinct effort to increase prosperity in the city.²⁰ Particularly, Krasnovadsk was very important place for the Russians because they wanted to use it as a military base in order to dominate the Turkmen tribes. A sharp and high cliff surrounded the city. They got water from wells that were very salty for Russians. Therefore, they tried to refine the seawater. He pointed out that he found very important information as to how the Russians conquered the region. In 1717-1737, Devlet Girey, who was Muslim at the beginning, after he converted to Orthodox Christianity started to work as an agent of the Russian Empire in this area. He came to Sah-Kademor or Krasnovadsk, and made alliance with the Turkmen for Russia. At the beginning, he was able to persuade some of Turkmen tribes that he took under control to follow him on the road between Krasnovadsk and Hiyve. When he entered the Hiyve, these Turkmen resisted against him. In the long run he failed to succeed against the Turkmen. In the end he lost his all armies in the conflict.²¹ After a while, Russia understood that it was impossible to win a war against Turkmen in the desert. Therefore, the Russians decided find alliances for themselves. They began to bring presents to Turkmen leaders when they visited them. In the end, they were able to conquer Asur Island on the Caspian Sea from Iran, which they then used as a military base for their navy. As a result, Russia easily controlled Iranian and Turkish shorelines through Asur Island. Russia did not create alliances with Turkmen directly. They appointed army officer

¹⁹ Ibid. , 16-17

²⁰ Ibid. , 17.

²¹ Ibid. , 18

Derya Begi to create alliances for them. His duty strengthened Russia's ties with the Turkmen tribes. He made Turkmen who lived in Hasan Kuli and Gumustepe.²² Mehmet Emin Efendi narrates the Russian colonization of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The way he represented Russian colonization processes showed that the Ottomans shared the same religion with Turkmen, and that the Ottomans could create alliance much more easily than the Russians.

He described Russia's military officer, Siviston, who had an ignorant, corrupted, selfish, arrogance, aggressive personality that used violence against Krasnovods people. Turkmen not only complained about Siviston but also Iranian and Armenian officers. They were fed up with his behavior and his decisions. Mehmet Efendi accused him of being a rapist. He tried having relations with Turkmen women against their will. Moreover, they started take children of Turkmen tribes leader to sent Moscow for education.²³ Most Turkmen moved from Krasnovadsk in order to save their honour.²⁴

Ottoman traveler Mehmet Emin Efendi argues that Turkmen perceived Iranian as enemies. In one of their songs, they repeat Koroglu's name, telling how he was very successful against the Iranians. They compare an Iranian coward to a women, singing of how Koroglu dispersed the Iranian army and shook the throne of the Iranian Shah.²⁵ Mehmet Emin Efendi mentioned the positive and good behavior of Turkmen. However, he also harshly criticized them at times, such as when one of his guides that Rahmanverdi robbed food during their trip in desert. In this he shows that he is an accurate and impartial chronicler of these people. ²⁶

Efendi dreamt of unity between the 200 million Muslims in the Asia when he traveled in this region. His hope grew while he was in Asia.²⁷ When Nurverdi Khan, the Teke Turkmen tribe leader, heard Mehmet Emin Efendi was a citizen of the Ottoman Empire, he showed him more respect. Nurverdi Khan was very brave person who won a war against Iran, Buhara and Russia. Particularly, he destroyed the Iranian army and kept their gunpowder at Merv castle.²⁸ Even though he won lot of war against Russia. He told Mehmet Efendi that whoever lives in Istanbul should try to unify the Turkmen. It was difficult for him to unify Turkmen against Russia. There

²² Ibid. , 19

²³ Ibid. , 43.

²⁴ Ibid. , 40-41

²⁵ Ibid. , 72

²⁶ Ibid. ,91

²⁷ Ibid. , 90

²⁸ Ibid. , 94

were a lot of disputes between Turkmen.²⁹ This made Efendi more inclined to like Nurverdi Khan, enough so that he made him a gift of a handgun made in Britain. Nurverdi Khan replied with an Arab horse, and Efendi is clearly touched by the gesture, explaining how they became next world brothers through this exchange.³⁰

Iran- Britain and the Ottoman representatives meet Turkmen in Iran

Father of Mehmet Emin Efendi's guide, he went to with Mehmet Emin Khan and his ambassador Ates Muharem to Tehran. They had a meeting with the Iranian Shah, British and Ottoman representatives. According to the Iranian tradition, when you see the Shah, you must prostrate yourself and glorify the Shah. However, he did not do it because he told them he only prostrates God. The Ottoman traveler appreciated his behavior against the Shah. Ates Muharem and the Ottoman representative had a talk on making Hiyve part of Ottoman territory. But it was unrealistic because Hiyve does not have connection with Ottoman territory.³¹ Whereupon, the Ottoman representative suggested that all of the Maveraunnehir dynasty should unify their power. Ates Muharem responded, "There is no possibility for Hiyve and Kokland joining together because the selfishness and arrogance of the Khan of Bukhara makes unity impossible,"³² and then Ottoman representative asserted that Hiyve and Hokand must force Bukhara for Unity.³³

Mehmet Emin Efendi's Impression of Hiyve

Mehmet Emin Efendi stayed in Hiyve two days and then he decided to go to Taskent. He informed "Divan Beyi" of his decision, but was told that the Khan of Hiyve wanted him to stay for circumcision wedding of Hiyve Khan's children or Shahzade. He decided to stay in Hiyve. There were 500 hundreds important tradesmen and Hiyve's people gathered in the one of the gardens of the Hiyve Khan. They were very quiet and very respectful to Mehmet Emin Efendi, so he felt very good. However, 30 minute later a young and well-dressed man appeared in the garden with two men. Suddenly, all of the people stood up and showed him their respect.³⁴ They crossed their arms over their chests. They showed him the best place in garden to sit. He turned to Efendi, asked "How are you?" and Mehmet Efendi stood up respectfully and

²⁹ Ibid. , 103

³⁰ That means they will meet in next world.

³¹ Ibid. , 117

³² Ibid. , 118

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. , 135

answered him, "Kulluk" meaning 'I am your slave.' And then people who were around him smiled to Mehmet Efendi that he felt that he made mistake. It was a custom to bring guest food. Therefore, they brought him food as like as they had brought it to Efendi earlier. He ate it and then they served him tea. He filled his teacup. "I thought it was shame and disrespectful behavior that young and well dressed man that filled his own teacup."³⁵ Mehmet Efendi thought that he was a very important person. He was sure that the young man was the child of Hiyve Khan. Someone else should fill his teacup. After he drank his tea, he offered Efendi a drink of tea from his cup. He drank it in order to show the young man his respect. Again people smiled at effendi, and he felt very shy. He did not return his cup. Later, the young man pointed at the man offered tea. He stood up and then he crossed his arms over his chest to show his respect and said to him 'I would be your slave'. After he drank it he returned the teacup. Later, two men showed up, took him and made him wear women's clothing beside they played Saz (A long-necked Turkish lute in the Baglama family) and Tambour. He emphasized that Homosexuals had very important prestige in Turkmen culture.³⁶ Most Turkmen brought Köçek (formerly youth who performed erotic dances in woman's garb) for dancing in their wedding. Every street, tea place, bazaar had one Köçek in order to entertain and served people (Erbabi Keyf). People gave them a lot of compliments. For Example, they said 'I scarified myself for you, I would like to spin you like a propeller.' Mehmet Emin Efendi argues that Homosexuality originated from Iranian rather than Turkmen culture. He said that: " I am sure that this bed custom transmitted from Iranian to Turkmen"³⁷ The dancer played very well and people spilled money over him. The dancer man lay down on his back in order to gather money with his teeth from ground. They watched him dance until the sun went down. They distributed candy and Corek(a round, braided cookie or bread roll) that signifies a circumcision wedding's end with reading Fatiha (a verse from Qur'an).³⁸

People put their present at their waistband since they don't have pocket at their pants (Don). Women wore thin and very yummy fabric pants thats front sides are made very strong and backsides are made of very weak cloth. They wore sharp and long things on their head that they called Tepelik. When they intended to go market they wore Tepelik in order to seem taller. In addition to Tepelik, they wore headscarves in the market. Hiyve's women pierced their noses and wore hoops in

³⁵ Ibid. , 136

³⁶ Ibid. , 136

³⁷ Ibid. , 137.

³⁸ Ibid.

them. Hiyve's houses architecture was build Baghdadi style and so did do not have windows on the street side. They had windows at the middle of their houses that looked out toward a courtyard. They had Haremlik and Selamlik, which are portions of a house reserved for women and men. They covered their roof with terrain that showed they don't know about roof tile. Their houses were made of sun-dried bricks (Kerpic). They drew very nice figures and graven at theirs doors and walls.³⁹

The Administrative Structure of Hiyve

At the beginning there was no central authority in Hiyve. The feudal lords were dominant. However, Seyid Mehmet Khan united all feudal lords and tribes using violence against some tribes and persuasion on therest of them. As a result, he became dominant and decision makers of Hiyve. Khan was a member of the "Kongirat" tribe that was one of four important Uzbek tribes. "Nakip" and "Hoca Kelan" participated Khan's Divan in official day, which meetings started every mid-afternoon. Sometimes Khan and his officers listened to people complain and tried to solve their problems. When Khan didn't attend meetings "Reis-ul Umera" represented him and made decision in his name. Leaders of Uzbek tribes had superiority and privilege over other tribes. Moreover, Khan's Tribe, Kangirat tribe, had more privileges than the other three Uzbek tribes.

Khan's administrative structure was comprised of the three main administrative positions that were mentioned above. In addition to this, each tribe has 8 administrative titles that represented its tribe in front of Khan.

- Inak has four members. 2 of the members had to be very close relative of Khan. Other 2 members selected in the Khan's tribe.
- Atalik: Fatherliness
- Seyhulislam: is charge religious ceremony that has close ties with prophet.
- Fermanecisi: person who handles matters of protocol, protocol officer
- Beg: tribe's nobleman
- Mirab: person who is responsible for water and conduit.
- Darugasi: playful of Khan.
- Agasi: footmen of door.

The Grand Vizier was chosen from the Sart tribe. Kusbegi(Second vizir) was chosen from Uzbek. They collected taxes. Divan Begi(head of council) was the

³⁹ Ibid. , 138

assistant of Khan as a chief secretary and custom minister that "Divan Begi" had two "Yasavul Basi" that their duty look liked Zaptiah or police. In addition, they had 8 more "Esik Agasi" that were servants.⁴⁰ Military administration was composed of two major commanders and four-brigade and gunpowder and 2-3 captains. In addition, Khan had officers named Mirseb, Mabeyinci, Esvabci Basi, Hazinei Hassa Naziri. They weren't paid by Khan. Khan gave the revenue of town, village and city to them. Mehmet Emin Efendi points that they were all corrupt. In addition these revenues, Khan distributed horses and money to the officers. Islamic law was practiced in Hiyve. However, they threw criminals from the minarets of mosques to the ground. Moreover, they tied criminals to fireworks dispersing his body with gunpowder. He argues that they acted very wildly.⁴¹

Conclusion

Mehmet Emin Efendi tried to save the Ottomans from military defeat against Russia. Therefore, he traveled from Istanbul to Central Asia to find alliances for Ottomans and provide Islamic unity. There is a similarity between European travelers and his writing in his use of detailed travel records that served to expand the political and economic thinking of the leaders of his home nation. His writing and efforts to describe the Islamic people of Central Asia and the Caucasus revealed a group of people whose similarity to the Ottoman Empire's people was cause enough to extend a diplomatic hand in an effort to halt the tide of Cyrillic expansion into the area. Despite its ultimate failure, it was an effort that opened doors and attempted to bring the Ottoman Empire to modernity, a worthy effort indeed.

⁴⁰Ibid. , 156

⁴¹ Ibid. , 157