OXFORD JOURNAL
OF STUDENT
SCHOLARSHIP

The Empire Europe Could Not Ignore: To What Extent Did Ottoman Commercial Power Shape the Rise of the Atlantic World?

Salar Varis
salarvariskhan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper reassesses the Ottoman Empire's position in relation to the emergence of the Atlantic world by asking whether Ottoman control of key commercial channels in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries diverted European expansion towards the Atlantic. The Ottoman Empire is examined in consideration of how its control over Constantinople, the Levant, Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf transformed commercial calculations for its European counterparts while also weighing the opportunity costs faced by the Europeans and the Ottomans during the Age of Exploration. Ottoman control over key trade corridors did not foreclose European ties with Asia, which can be seen when the Venetians signed a trade agreement with the Ottomans imposing customs duties and taxes in 1454. Although Ottoman control did contribute to the search for alternative trade routes, which shifted European attention towards the Atlantic, this paper further challenges the assumptions around Ottoman detachment and awareness regarding the Atlantic: Piri Reis's 1513 world map attests to early Ottoman awareness of the American continent, while Ottoman expeditions and naval engagements across the Atlantic and Mediterranean highlight Ottoman ability to operate on a broadly commensurate scale to European maritime capabilities. Yet it is important to foreground the opportunity costs and strategic priorities, particularly the protection of deeply entrenched commercial networks against the ever-growing Portuguese challenge to Ottoman commercial interests.

INTRODUCTION

“Sultan Mehmed Gazi bir ata binüp cennet seyrine çıkar gibi ulemâ vü ümerâsıyla kal‘aya teşrif eyledi,” wrote the Ottoman chronicler Tursun Beg as Mehmed II emerged within the fallen city of Constantinople. The phrase *cennet seyrine çıkar gibi*, literally evoking a journey to behold Paradise, lends the account an elevated and distinctly celebratory tone, presenting the Sultan’s entry as a moment of triumph. This exaltation is further reinforced by Tursun Beg’s use of the title *pâdişâh-ı zıllullâh*, “Sultan, the Shadow of God,” a formulation that situated Mehmed’s authority within a broader language of “divinely” sanctioned sovereignty. The same conception of imperial authority appears in Mehmed’s 1478 inscription at Topkapı, which presents him within the formula of the ruler of “the Two Continents and the Two Seas” and as the

"Shadow of God," thereby extending the symbolism of the conquest beyond the immediate fall of Constantinople into a more developed conception of universal sovereignty.[1]

Standing in the stillness of the city, once the sun's throne upon the Bosporus, the young sultan was reportedly said to have answered conquest with a Persian verse by Sa'di: "The spider serves as gatekeeper in the halls of Khosrau's dome, the owl plays martial music in the palace of Afrasiyab."[2] The choice of verse is striking, perhaps revealing less triumph than reflection. Ironically, history would inflict a similar fate upon the Ottomans themselves. The empire once revered and feared across three continents would later succumb, in the European imagination, to the epithet of the "Sick Man of Europe."[3] Appearances notwithstanding, between these two portrayals lies one of history's most remarkable distortions.

For centuries, the biased historiographical tradition framed the Ottoman Empire as reactive, defined by territorial conquests, religious absolutism (in the form of "Jihad bi'l-saif": Jihad by the sword).[4] Yet to leave the story there would be to miss its greater significance. The Ottoman Empire is too often remembered for what it prevented, while cascading consequences of the mentioned prevention remain remarkably underappreciated and often entirely neglected. European accounts cast it as the barrier separating Christendom from the wealth of the East, considering the Empire an obstacle to Europe's rise and eventual ascent.[5] By the close of the fifteenth century, Ottoman authority stretched from the Balkans to Anatolia and, after 1517, across Egypt and the Levant, placing under one imperial administration the principal arteries through which spices, silk, precious metals, other textiles and commodities reached the Mediterranean.[6] Europe, in no case whatsoever, ceased trade with Asia; rather, it increasingly did so on Ottoman terms, which many Europeans regarded as burdensome and politically constraining.[7] This, in turn, begs the question: what did Ottoman success leave the rest of the world to do?

The difficulty, however, lies primarily in how Ottoman history has been perceived and consequently situated within the context of European expansion. Much of the older literature treated Ottoman power as

---

[1] Tursun Bey, *Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth*, ed. A. Mertol Tulum (Istanbul: Fetih Cemiyeti, 1977), 41–43; Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 13.

[2] Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 94.

[3] Harold Temperley, "Stratford de Redcliffe and the Origins of the Crimean War," *The English Historical Review* 48, no. 192 (1933): 601–621; 49, no. 194 (1934): 265–298; see also M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923* (London: Macmillan, 1966).

[4] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5, 33–36, 69–72, 121.

[5] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 59–73.

[6] Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 218–266.

[7] Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300–1600," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 218–266; Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101–133.

a formidable eastern barrier, an interpretation that must be considered in recognition of the fact that these were predominantly European/Orientalist accounts.[8] Within such a hostile interpretation, the Ottoman Empire is largely perceived as an obstacle, a wall that is powerful enough to restrict, tax, impede, and contest European access, yet rarely considered in its contribution to Eurasian trade and thereby neglected in the picture of the geographical reorientation that subsequently followed. Recent scholarship, including the work of Giancarlo Casale, Suraiya Faroqhi, and Daniel Goffman, has elucidated the Ottoman role in which the empire is instead shown to have participated in the commercial and maritime systems that connected Europe with Afro-Eurasia, a revision significant in its displacement of the question from what Europe encountered in opposition to the Ottomans towards what consequences Ottoman power produced beyond the empire itself, tracing the repercussions of Ottoman influence across the wider commercial geography within which European expansion subsequently unfolded.[9] Yet the two interpretations remain connected by a common omission. The older literature tends to treat Ottoman power as an obstacle and constraint upon European expansion, while the newer literature has concentrated on recovering the Ottomans as active participants within the very networks from which they were once portrayed as detached, thus leaving comparatively little attention given to the effects beyond these immediate regions.[10] Less fully examined is the possibility that these two observations are not mutually exclusive: that an empire capable of exercising such influence over the established commercial geography of Afro-Eurasia could have contributed, indirectly, to Europe's search for an alternative one. This paper therefore shifts the question from whether the Ottomans merely obstructed European expansion to whether their commercial predominance helped redirect it, tracing the intricate relationship between the consolidation of Ottoman power and the movement of European attention towards the Atlantic. It further extends this argument beyond European reaction by examining why the Ottomans themselves, despite possessing knowledge of the Atlantic and evidence of maritime capabilities beyond the Mediterranean, did not pursue a sustained Atlantic expansion of their own. In doing so, the paper does not seek to position the Ottomans as the sole reason for European expansion but rather as a force capable of shaping the direction of its ascent, while simultaneously accounting for the strategic choices made by the empire itself, all variables considered.

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws upon a combination of Ottoman chronicles, e.g., Tursun Beg, who is believed to have been present at the construction of Rumeli Hisarı due to his detailed account, as well as the siege of Constantinople itself, as part of the Ottoman administration.[11] Furthermore, cartographic material and modern historical sources are used to examine the relationship between Ottoman commercial power and

[8] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 1–2.

[9] Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–12; Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 1–2.

[10] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 1–2; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 3–12.

[11] Kenan İnan, "Ṭursun Beg," *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Cemal Kafadar, Halil Karateke, and Cornell H. Fleischer (2011), 1.

the emergence of the Atlantic world. Tursun Beg's *Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth* is used to establish the political and ideological significance of Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople, while the surviving portion of Piri Reis's 1513 map, alongside the work of Svat Soucek, Gregory McIntosh, and Abbas Hamdani, provides evidence for early Ottoman knowledge of the Atlantic and the Americas. The commercial and naval dimensions of Ottoman expansion are examined primarily through the well-regarded scholarship of Giancarlo Casale, Halil İnalcık, and Daniel Goffman, as well as Ardian Muhaj (author of a detailed study published in the 2014 proceedings of the International Piri Reis and Turkish Maritime History Symposium, held in September 2013, drawing on contemporary documentary evidence and existing scholarship), whose works situate Ottoman trade and administration within the wider networks of early modern Eurasia. These sources have been selected principally from established academic presses, scholarly journals, primary sources, and recognized academic publications making them suitable for reconstructing Ottoman commercial networks and therefore their wider geopolitical ramifications. Nevertheless, the sources present limitations that require caution. Tursun Beg wrote within the Ottoman court; therefore, he portrayed the Sultan through a highly favourable lens, while Piri Reis's map survives only in fragmentary form and its precise sources and methods of compilation cannot always be established with certainty, requiring its evidence to be considered alongside corroborating cartographic material. Modern scholarship also differs in its interpretation of Ottoman influence, particularly concerning the extent to which European expansion can be attributed to Ottoman pressure rather than to technological developments or Iberian political ambitions, with the relative weight of these factors remaining a matter of historiographical contention. This paper therefore does not treat Ottoman power as a single or sufficient cause of European expansion into the Atlantic. Instead, the purpose is to establish Ottoman influence and role, more importantly the extent of that role, by placing Ottoman commercial consolidation alongside European attempts to circumvent established routes and subsequent evidence of Ottoman Atlantic awareness and naval activity within the same historical framework.

OTTOMAN CONSOLIDATION

Only recently has the conversation begun to shift as historians look beyond battles and borders to the often overlooked ways in which the Ottomans shaped global geopolitics.[12] Giancarlo Casale has demonstrated, across a substantial body of his scholarship, an Ottoman presence in the Indian Ocean that was anything but "passive", as many suggest, contesting Portuguese expansion through a variety of means, including naval engagements undertaken in alliance with states such as Aceh.[13] A comparable picture emerges from the work of Suraiya Faroqhi, who traces an Ottoman multi-dimensional world held together by webs of exchange and enduring commercial relationships whose influence could be discerned beyond just the "political reach".[14] Yet it is worth noting that even this body of scholarship leaves one strand of the web unexamined. Could the Ottoman commercial powerhouse have left Europe to navigate an altogether new world?

[12] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 1–18.

[13] Giancarlo Casale, "The Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade in the Sixteenth-Century Red Sea and Persian Gulf "*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 2 (2006): 170–198.

[14] Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), especially Introduction and Chapters 2-4.

That wider consequence, curiously enough, has occupied remarkably little space within historical literature such as that undertaken by the likes of Giancarlo Casale and Suraiya Faroqhi.[15] Such an omission is perhaps unsurprising. For generations, interpretations shaped by the assumptions of Orientalist scholarship largely downplay Ottoman influence as Europe's civilisational counterpart, an eastern obstacle against which the West managed its own ascent.[16] Within such a narrative around the Ottomans, their power appeared as an impediment to European expansion rather than one of the elements that helped redirect it.[17] Although the work of scholars such as Giancarlo Casale and Suraiya Faroqhi has helped in dismantling the prevailing historiographical conception and narrative of an internally oriented Ottoman Empire,[18] attention has largely remained directed towards recovering the empire's place within the established story of European expansion,[19] while stopping just short of assessing all possibilities of how it can be perceived differently. Once the arteries through which the wealth of Afro-Eurasia circulated had, over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, come to pass beneath Ottoman domain,[20] the economic calculations constraining Lisbon, Seville and, before long, much of Atlantic Europe were an outgrowth of the search for alternative routes to the Asian markets.[21] This consequently recasts the narrative to the point where the gradual reorientation of European attention and economic activity towards the American continent is indicative of Europe's pursuit of commercial possibilities outside the Ottoman commercial bubble.[22]

The military prowess of the Ottomans has rarely been in doubt; it stands as an extraordinary historical feat, as attested to by the historical literature.[23] Far less attention, however, has been given to what those victories produced or subsequently birthed.[24] By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the empire had consolidated its territorial holdings under the rule of a unified state and sultanate; indeed, “all outlets for Persian silk open to Europeans were now in Ottoman hands."[25] Constantinople's fall consolidated the

---

[15] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 1–12.

[16] Said, *Orientalism*, 1–28; Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–796.

[17] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 3–11; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–20.

[18] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 1–14; Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 1–20; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–17.

[19] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 3–8; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762.

[20] Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 118–131; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 81–118.

[21] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 118–131; Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 180–209; Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, 51–72.

[22] Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 59–84; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 19–33; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 418–441.

[23] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 1–22.

[24] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 1–12.

[25] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 118–131; Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 100–123.

Bosporus for the Ottomans as a bridge between the two continents of Europe and Asia with the incorporation of Syrian territories thereby bringing the Levantine ports through which eastern goods entered European markets under Ottoman rule while the conquest of Egypt in 1517 integrated Alexandria, Cairo, and the Red Sea into Ottoman territorial holdings.[26] What is conventionally represented in the historical record as a succession of territorial campaigns under Sultan Selim I takes on a different meaning in commercial terms.[27] These acquisitions placed the long independently governed routes under one state, extensively reducing the political uncertainty surrounding commercial transit through the Bosporus for participating states and merchants.[28]

OTTOMAN COMMERCIAL AND NAVAL RESPONSE

Beyond geography lay the economic and political significance of this transformation**.** All merchants and people travelling through the previously mentioned trading points, whether Venetians or pilgrims to the holy cities, encountered administrative regulations that were increasingly uniform throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa.[29] Customs duties, protection for merchants, the maintenance of roads and caravanserais, together with the administration of maritime commerce, were now matters of a single state, as opposed to those previously negotiated between numerous competing states.[30] This administrative coherence found an early expression; in 1454, an agreement with Venice imposed fixed customs duties upon Venetian merchants for the first time, establishing one of the earliest major written diplomatic trade agreements between a European power and a major Muslim empire.[31] As Suraiya Faroqhi has observed, Ottoman prosperity rested upon the ability to preserve and administer the commercial life that it had conquered with sword.[32] The Ottomans, therefore, held many of the key points of commercial exchange responsible for the exchange of a variety of goods and people.[33]

The incentive for negotiation for the European powers was the need to secure access to Asian markets, the keys to which were held by the Ottomans.[34]

---

[26] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 9–20, 118–131; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 19–33.

[27] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 111–134.

[28] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 118–131; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 81–118.

[29] Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 114–132; Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History*, 129–150.

[30] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 124–131; Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 114–132.

[31] Kate Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 88–97.

[32] Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 114–132.

[33] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 100–123.

[34] Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, 100–123; İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 124–131.

Giancarlo Casale has notably argued that the Ottomans should not be considered merely confined to the Mediterranean but rather in consideration of their involvement in the Indian Ocean and military affairs with the Indian states.[35] With Bartolomeu Dias' rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 preceding Vasco da Gama's arrival a decade later on the Malabar Coast, Portuguese alternative to the Ottoman domains opened a maritime route towards Asian markets that drew Ottoman attention towards the Indian subcontinent and the Red Sea.[36] The incorporation of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1516-17 therefore placed the defence of the Red Sea under the Ottoman Navy, initially under the command of Admiral Selman Reis.[37] The chronology, however, requires an explicit distinction between the incorporation of Egypt in 1517 and the commercial conditions that preceded it. Portuguese activity had already begun disrupting the southern routes of oriental trade by the early sixteenth century, years before the Ottoman incorporation of the Mamluk Sultanate. By the year 1502, Portuguese purchases in India had already reduced the quantity of spices reaching Alexandria and Beirut, while the subsequent Portuguese blockade of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf further disrupted the southern routes.[38] When Selim I conquered Egypt in 1517, he inherited a commercial system already substantially diminished due to Portuguese purchases in India. Lybyer accordingly argues that the Ottoman conquest did not initiate the decline of the Levantine routes, but the consequences of Portuguese expansion nevertheless placed direct pressure upon territories now under Ottoman control.[39]

Consequently, Ottoman naval expansion proceeded along with Portuguese expansion.[40] The arsenal and fleets established at Suez, which became the base for Ottoman Indian Ocean operations following the incorporation of Egypt, therefore enabled operational capacity beyond the Mediterranean towards Ottoman interests in the Indian Ocean, while Ottoman commanders, including Selman Reis and, later, Piri Reis, appeared throughout the region, primarily in the western Indian Ocean, in response to an increasingly aggressive Portuguese presence.[41] Selman Reis successfully defended Jeddah against Portuguese attack, while the Ottoman capture of Aden in 1538 secured the entrance to the Red Sea.[42] Multiple Indian states approached the Ottomans for assistance against Portuguese naval and military operations, to which the Sultan dispatched the Ottoman Navy, as it served a greater commercial interest for the Ottomans.[43] The struggle extended all the way from the Persian Gulf to Diu, upon the western coast of India, where the Battle of Diu (1538), commanded by Hadım Süleyman Pasha, represented one of the largest Ottoman naval expeditions into the Indian Ocean, while the conquest of Basra in 1546 further

[35] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 1–14.

[36] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 19–45; Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, 121–156.

[37] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 45–67.

[38] Albert H. Lybyer, "The Ottoman Turks and the Routes of Oriental Trade," *The English Historical Review* 30, no. 120 (1915): 583–584.

[39] Lybyer, "The Ottoman Turks and the Routes of Oriental Trade," 584–585.

[40] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 19–45.

[41] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 45–81.

[42] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 63–75.

[43] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 81–118; Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, 220–252.

extended Ottoman influence into the Persian Gulf.[44] Piri Reis subsequently campaigned against Hormuz and Muscat in 1552.[45] Further east, the Sultanate of Aceh sought Ottoman artillery and military expertise in resisting Portuguese encroachment, to which the Sultan responded by dispatching cannon founders, musketeers, engineers, artillery specialists, and military supplies between 1565 and 1567.[46] This clearly demonstrates a strong Ottoman presence beyond the Mediterranean and also illustrates the Ottoman push to maintain control over the commercial channels already within or adjacent to its imperial sphere, a priority that helps explain its later restraint in the Atlantic.[47]

INVOLVEMENT IN THE ATLANTIC

Considering Ottoman networks extending as far as the Atlantic, Piri Reis, serving under his uncle Kemal Reis, a renowned Ottoman admiral who was widely known as the "Camalicchio" and asserted Ottoman dominance in the Mediterranean against the Venetians at the Battle of Zonchio, drew on Portuguese portolan charts, information from captured Spanish pilots, and navigational knowledge gathered directly from Iberian exploration before presenting, in 1517, his famous world map he had drawn in 1513, which included the coastlines of the newly discovered Americas, to Sultan Selim I.[48] This chart represented what Abbas Hamdani describes as the Ottoman response to the discovery of America and the Cape route.[49] Piri himself, in fact, recorded that it had been compiled from approximately twenty *mappae mundi*, among them Portuguese charts, an Arabic map of Hindistan (India), and, most remarkably, a chart associated with Christopher Columbus, after Kemal Reis captured a Spanish sailor who claimed to have crossed the Atlantic with Columbus on three separate voyages.[50] The surviving portion of the mentioned map preserves the Atlantic basin, identifying "Colon-bo" by name while reproducing numerous Caribbean place names in Ottomanized form.[51] Hamdani repeatedly emphasises that the Ottomans had become aware of, and therefore deeply interested in, the discovery of the New World at an early date, relatively close to Columbus's fourth voyage.[52]

Under the reign of Bayezid II, the newly appointed commander of the Ottoman Empire's largest fleet, Kemal Reis, landed in the Canary Islands in 1501 after campaigning along the Iberian coast in support of the last standing Islamic emirate in Andalusia, the Nasrid Emirate of Granada, even transporting Jewish

[44] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 95–125.
[45] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 113–125.
[46] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 127–154; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, vol. 2: *Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 272–280.
[47] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 1–14.
[48] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 53–57; Svat Soucek, *Piri Reis and Turkish Mapmaking after Columbus* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16–39.
[49] Abbas Hamdani, "Ottoman Response to the Discovery of America and the New Route to India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101, no. 3 (1981): 323–330.
[50] Gregory C. McIntosh, *The Piri Reis Map of 1513* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 25–41; Hamdani, "Ottoman Response," 324–326.
[51] McIntosh, *The Piri Reis Map of 1513*, 63–90.
[52] Hamdani, "Ottoman Response," 329–330.

and Muslim refugees fleeing Spain in 1492.[53] Later in the century, Murat Reis, distinct from the later Murad Reis the Younger discussed below, launched several campaigns from Algiers against Lanzarote, navigating the waters of the Atlantic and capturing around 300 prisoners, including the governor's family, in an expedition described by Ardian Muhaj as an early Atlantic incursion by a Moroccan or Ottoman sailor, before returning two years later with a considerably larger fleet of 18 galleons compared with the 3 used in his previous expedition.[54] Ottoman corsairs subsequently ranged as far as establishing temporary bases upon islands such as Lundy in the Bristol Channel and conducting raids across the coasts of Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Furthermore, Peter Lamborn Wilson notes that Murad Reis the Younger (Jan Janszoon), who served in Ottoman Algiers under the Algerian corsair Sulayman Reis, flew the red half-moon of the Turks when attacking Christian shipping, suggesting an Ottoman association. Murad later extended his raiding activities into the Atlantic, reaching Grindavík, Iceland, in 1627 and Baltimore, Ireland, in 1631.[55] Therefore, it is evident that the Atlantic was neither unknown nor beyond Ottoman naval capabilities. Even if the empire ultimately directed its attention towards preserving the commercial trade routes within Ottoman domains, it is important to note that the Ottomans possessed knowledge of and maintained a significant naval presence in the Atlantic.[56]

CONCLUSION: THE OTTOMAN OPPORTUNITY COST

The question nevertheless remained. If the Ottomans understood the Atlantic, possessed such experienced navigators capable of crossing it, and had even incorporated the Americas into geographical works scarcely two decades after Columbus's first voyage, why did they never seek to expand? Why never seek an Atlantic empire of their own in this vast New World?[57] Hamdani suggests the answer lies in the strategic realities confronting the Porte, while the empire seems to have carefully assessed the opportunity cost of such an expedition.[58] The discovery of the Cape route and the Americas certainly demanded an Ottoman response, yet that response unfolded in the Indian Ocean, where Portuguese expansion placed pressure on long-established Ottoman commercial channels upon which imperial revenues and Ottoman prosperity relied.[59] Additionally, to divert men and enormous financial resources towards an uncertain part of the world whose commercial value remained rather speculative would be stretching the empire's treasury thin and simply relinquishing attention from a much more immediate threat to an imperial economy already embracing Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the Hijaz, and the eastern Mediterranean, together with

[53] McIntosh, *The Piri Reis Map of 1513*, 5–6.

[54] Ardian Muhaj, "Ottoman Corsairs in the Atlantic During the 16th Century: Murat Rais, the Albanian and the First Ottoman Expedition on the Canary Islands," in *Uluslararası Piri Reis ve Türk Denizcilik Tarihi Sempozyumu 26–29 Eylül 2013, Türk Denizcilik Tarihi*, vol. 3 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 264–265.

[55] Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegadoes* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1995), 95–118.

[56] Hamdani, "Ottoman Response," 329–330; Muhaj, "Ottoman Corsairs in the Atlantic," 264–265

[57] Soucek, *Piri Reis and Turkish Mapmaking after Columbus*, 23–39; Hamdani, "Ottoman Response," 323–324.

[58] Hamdani, "Ottoman Response," 324–328.

[59] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 81–118; Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 48–73.

customs revenues generated by some of the world's busiest entrepôts.[60] In the case of Spain and Portugal, the Atlantic represented an opportunity; for the Ottomans, rather, a gamble at the expense of possessions whose wealth already formed part of the Ottoman economic base. It was rather akin to asking the wealthiest merchant in the marketplace to abandon his busiest stall in pursuit of a rumor heard across the sea.[61]

This argument builds upon the work of historians who have increasingly, over the course of time, moved beyond the depiction of the Ottoman Empire as merely an impediment or obstacle to European expansion. This paper extends the contribution of existing scholarship by foregrounding what Ottoman consolidation meant for those attempting to move beyond it and the consequential effects of Ottoman commercial power. At the same time, the evidence of Ottoman knowledge of the Atlantic and its limited ventures beyond the Mediterranean suggests that European expansion was not solely due to Ottoman pressure, nor can Ottoman restraint be reduced to an absence of capability. With all matters considered, it was rather the contrast between European pursuit of the unknown and Ottoman concentration upon an existing commercial network that reveals two different strategic responses to the same transformation of the early modern world.

The Ottoman Empire eventually succumbed to the same current of history that swept away the once-mighty Byzantium centuries before. Empires and states disappear, yet the geographies upon which they were built remain. Constantinople ceased to be the *Pâyitaht* it once was, "the Foot of the Throne," though the Bosporus remained the narrow passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the bridge between Europe and Asia. The flags may have changed, the rulers may have changed, the times may have changed, the economics may never change. The same corridors that once elevated Osman's small frontier principality to the pinnacle of the early modern world continue to operate as they once did; they may do so under a different state, a different border, yet the marks engraved into history remain. As many still define the Ottomans through the means of territorial conquest or the territories they governed, the true significance lies in what the empire compelled others to become. When Mehmed II entered Constantinople and remembered Sa'di's words, he perhaps knew history would eventually fulfil that prophecy for the Sons of Osman themselves. Ultimately, Ottoman commercial power shaped the rise of the Atlantic world indirectly but significantly: it was not the sole cause of European expansion into the Atlantic, but its commercial routes altered the incentives that encouraged European powers to seek alternatives, and although the spider would one day weave its web through Ottoman halls as well, the world crafted under Ottoman supremacy would endure far longer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Salar Varis is a high school student at Roots Millennium School, Pine Campus, in Abbottabad, Pakistan. He takes an interest in history and international affairs, particularly in the ways political and economic

[60] İnalcık, *The Classical Age*, 118–131; Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, 48–73; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 81–118.

[61] Hamdani, "Ottoman Response," 324–328; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 81–118.

forces have shaped societies throughout history. He hopes to pursue further study and research in these fields.

REFERENCES

Anderson, M. S. *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923*. London: Macmillan, 1966.

Babinger, Franz. *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Translated by Siân Reynolds. 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Casale, Giancarlo. *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Casale, Giancarlo. "The Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade in the Sixteenth-Century Red Sea and Persian Gulf" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 2 (2006): 170–198.

Diffie, Bailey W., and George D. Winius. *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

Faroqhi, Suraiya. *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Faroqhi, Suraiya. *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.

Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. *Columbus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Finkel, Caroline. *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.

Fleet, Kate. *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Goffman, Daniel. *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hamdani, Abbas. "Ottoman Response to the Discovery of America and the New Route to India." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101, no. 3 (1981): 323–330.

İnalcık, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600*. London: Phoenix Press, 2000.

İnalcık, Halil. "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300–1600." In *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, edited by Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, vol. 1, 218–266. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

İnalcık, Halil, and Donald Quataert, eds. *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

İnan, Kenan. "Ṭursun Beg." *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*. Edited by Cemal Kafadar, Halil Karateke, and Cornell H. Fleischer. October 2011. University of Chicago, Division of the Humanities.

Kafadar, Cemal. *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Lybyer, Albert H. "The Ottoman Turks and the Routes of Oriental Trade." *The English Historical Review* 30, no. 120 (1915): 577–588.

Makdisi, Ussama. "Ottoman Orientalism." *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–796.

McIntosh, Gregory C. *The Piri Reis Map of 1513*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

Muhaj, Ardian. "Ottoman Corsairs in the Atlantic During the 16th Century: Murat Rais, the Albanian and the First Ottoman Expedition on the Canary Islands." In *Uluslararası Piri Reis ve Türk Denizcilik Tarihi Sempozyumu 26–29 Eylül 2013, Türk Denizcilik Tarihi*, vol. 3, 261–269. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014.

Necipoğlu, Gülru. *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Vol. 2, *Expansion and Crisis*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Soucek, Svat. *Piri Reis and Turkish Mapmaking after Columbus*. London: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia." *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762.

Temperley, Harold. "Stratford de Redcliffe and the Origins of the Crimean War." *The English Historical Review* 48, no. 192 (1933): 601–621; 49, no. 194 (1934): 265–298.

Tursun Bey. *Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth*. Edited by A. Mertol Tulum. Istanbul: Fetih Cemiyeti, 1977.

Wilson, Peter Lamborn. *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegadoes*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1995.