SOME TURKISH RECORDS AND MATERIALS IN THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE (LONDON) AND ENGLISH LIBRARIES

The aim of this article is to give a very short summary of the Turkish documents in The Public Record Office and other English Libraries. The Public Record Office contains many Turkish records and a great deal of material concerning Anglo-Turkish relations. The Turkish records consist of the Letters of Sultans and Grand Viziers to the English sovereigns, as well as the Letters of the rulers of the Barbary States. They are not systematically classified and described, and many of them are dispersed in different bundles; but some of them have been brought together and bound. In the LISTS AND INDEXES (No XIX) are given some short descriptions of these Turkish Papers; viz. STATE PAPERS 102/61 and 62 (Royal Letters, Turkey). The Anglo-Turkish relations began during the reigns of Sultan Murad III. and Queen Elizabeth, and the first Letter from the Sultan was written on 20 March 1579; but there exists only a Latin translation of it (State Papers, Foreign 97/1; see also Hakluys Voyage V, 169 in English) The oldest Turkish Letter preserved in P. R. O. is from Sultan Murad III. to Queen Elizabeth, dated the 9th of the Moon Radjab 988 Hijrah, 1-10 September 1580, concerning a Turkish (Armenian) merchant, sent to England. More important is the second Letter of Murad III, from the end of Rab. II. 991=12-22 May 1583, which is exhibited in the Museum of P. R. O. (A 2/2, The Sultan's Letter to Queen Elizabeth); it is 35.4x14.3 inches, 22 lines and with an Imperial Monogram in gold (Tughra). It is a typical document among the Turkish Sultan's Letters. (See the facsimilé). The Turkish Sultan Murad III. (Amurath) after the usual greetings, promises to the Queen that William Harborne (the first English Ambassador to Turkey), whom she has sent to the Porte with a most friendly letter, shall enjoy all such privileges there as have been granted in Turkey to the French Ambassador; the English merchants are permitted come and go freely to the Dominions of the Grand Seigneur. There are some twenty Letters sent to Queen Elizabeth from the Sultans Murad III, Selim II and Mehmed III, and Grand Viziers.

Besides these two books (SP 102/61 and 62) there are several Letters in the Bundle 1-4 of SP 102; they are not classified and not described. The 61 Turkish documents listed here are taken from SP 102/4, 61 and 62. The full list of all Turkish documents can be given only after a detailed study; the author of this article hopes in the near future to prepare in collaboration with Dr. Bernard Lewis, University of London, an edition of some twenty of these Turkish
Letters and to give a fuller description of Turkish records in P. R. O.

Alfred W o o d s A History of the Levant Company (Oxford University Press 1935) gives a pretty clear picture of the Anglo-Turkish economic relations; it is important not only for the English economic history, but also for the economic history of the Ottoman Empire; he gives a detailed bibliography and record material on this subject; his study is based mainly on the Papers of the Levant Company, preserved in P. R. O. (in English); but there is also a bundle of Turkish documents, with translations in Italian (Consular Archives, Levant Company, SP 105-216 and 217).

The English interest in the Turkish Empire had chiefly economic aims, but that did not exclude some political character in the relations, as is evident from the letters of Sultan Murad III. to Queen Elizabeth, as well as from the English correspondence. Queen Elizabeth was anxious to move the Sultan to attack Spain; her Ambassadors at the High Porte, Harborne and Barton, were instructed to obtain the Sultan’s promise in this matter. Sultan Murad, indeed gave, assurances several times that he would attack Spain with an immense Turkish fleet (See Letters NN 4, 6, 11, 17); but the Turkish promises were not kept, and the Turks did not help the English to destroy the Spanish Monarchy. In spite of these vain promises the - Anglo - Turkish relations were continued in a very friendly manner, and the Letters of Sultans and Grand Viziers gave a pretty clear idea of the mutual friendship between the two countries.

The Despatches of English Ambassadors from Constantinople contain most important information about the Anglo-Turkish relations as well as the Turkish Empire. (State Papers, Foreign, Turkey 97 / 1-55; from 1577 until 1719; See CALENDARS OF STATE PAPERS, FOREIGN, Elizabeth, vol. XIV - XXIV). Very interesting reports are made by the first English Ambassador William Harborne; some of them contain much information about the internal affairs of the Turkish Empire and events in Constantinople. Again the Despatches of Lord Paget (SP 97/21, the Peace Treaty of Carlowitz), and Sir Robert Sutton’s Despatches (SP 97/22 and 23, about Charles XII’s stay in Turkey (1710-1714) ) are most valuable for the students of Turkish History.

In P. R. O. are preserved translation of some Turkish Letters (in Latin, or English), whose originals are lost; in this way we can reestablish the original Turkish Letters, even if they (Copies) are not preserved in the State Archives in Constantinople. The originals of the Letters from Christian sovereigns to Sultans are rarely preserved in Turkish Archives; none of the Letters from Queen Elizabeth were found in Istanbul; only some translations from the Lettres of English Kings are known; in P. R. O. there are some copies of these Letters, viz. a
Letter from Charles I. to Sultan Murad IV. in English, which is given here as Appendix II.

Special interest attaches to the Turkish material in the JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY in Manchester. The bulk of the Arabic, Persian and Turkish MSS in the John Rylands Library came from the Bibliotheca Lindesiana, being acquired by Mrs Rylands from the 26th Earl of Crawford (d. 1913) in August, 1901. They total roughly 1900 volumes. Among these, particular attention deserves to be paid to the Arabic manuscript No. 769, in 14 volumes, a Koran Text, with Persian and old Turkish translations; and among the Turkish manuscripts, No 37, containing a collection of official correspondence from the middle of the XVII. century.