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Tipu and the Turks: An Islamicate Embassy in the Age of British Expansion

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Abstract

In 1786, several hundred subjects of Tipu Sultan (r. 1782–99), ruler of the kingdom of Mysore in southern India, travelled to the Ottoman Empire on a diplomatic mission. This essay revisits the embassy's travels, and travails, across Eurasia and the Indian Ocean by drawing attention to a rich cache of administrative documents. I suggest that this collection, hitherto unexamined, can illuminate some significant aspects of diplomatic conduct and procedure in Islamicate Eurasia, yet underexplored. The essay accordingly highlights such overlooked themes as the bureaucratic complexities that were involved in long-distance ambassadorial tours, the role ceremonials played in elite intercourse, and the myriad ways in which material culture mediated interstate exchanges. While its significance lies also in how it decentres a dominant scholarly focus on encounters between Europe and its others, scrutiny of this collection, I additionally argue, can enhance historical understanding of how reciprocal relations between Islamicate polities transformed due to growing European influence. As contemporary configurations of imperial power changed in both South Asia and the Middle East, the Mysore–Ottoman embassy hence at once reflected and anticipated the advent of European—and more specifically, British—hegemony in non-European diplomatic contexts.

Keywords: Tipu Sultan (1751–1799); Mysore Sultanate; Ottoman Empire; English East India Company; British Empire.

Introduction

In South Asian historiography, transregional turns towards Eurasia and the Indian Ocean have breathed new life into diplomatic history. But in returning to an old subfield, scholars have also extended the focus beyond the study of ambassadorial careers, treaty agreements, and political epistolography. They have thus pushed diplomatic history to such new frontiers as oceanic history.¹ They have closely pored over the narratives of “embassy accounts.”² Diplomats has featured prominently in legal histories,³ while the journeys of

¹ Michael H. Fisher, “Diplomacy in India, 1526–1858,” in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850*, eds. H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 249–81.

² Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chap. 7.

³ Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

statesmen have explained the global diffusion of ideas.⁴ “Corporate diplomacy,” as practised by the English or Dutch East India Company, have come under renewed analysis.⁵ As well, recent works have recast the roles of traditional actors, artefacts, and archives. Emissaries also now appear in the literature as “trans-imperial subjects” and “go-between.”⁶ The “stuff” of political ritual, both literal and figurative, has become important in assessing cross-cultural encounters.⁷ And, as recent essays in the pages of this journal reveal, diplomatic correspondence is today examined not just for its empirical content but also its symbolic nuances.⁸ Among scholars of the Middle East—another region with which this present essay is concerned—similar investments have been made towards so-called “new diplomatic histories.”⁹

An insistence on methodological novelty has certainly brought fresh perspectives to diplomatic history, which until recently was regarded as something of a Rankean relic. Meanwhile, whether through the adoption of anthropological perspectives to study gift exchanges, cultural interactions, or state ceremonials, or through the use of literary-philological techniques to examine the writings of envoys, interdisciplinarity has become essential to most definitions of new diplomatic history.¹⁰ Yet despite the avowed newness, scholars have remained almost exclusively fixated on examples of embassies sent either to or from European polities.¹¹ This one-sidedness appears all the more provincial given that the literature has now very fully substantiated the historical viability of an “Islamicate Eurasia.” Described as a spatial configuration spanning the subcontinent and the Middle East, here was an early modern arena of interaction with a shared political-cultural idiom, whose classical features were in turn defined by the elites of the Mughal, Ottoman, and Safavid Empires.¹² Can the approaches of recent diplomatic historiography help advance new insights into interstate exchanges within this “ambient polity”?¹³

Aiming to redress some of the literature’s oversights, but tracing change as well as continuity in Islamicate diplomacy, this essay brings to light new evidence on a celebrated embassy that was sent from eighteenth-century South Asia to the Middle East. In 1786, several hundred subjects of the Mysore kingdom in southern India were dispatched to

⁴ Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), chap. 1, especially.

⁵ Guido van Meersbergen, “The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia, 1608–1717,” *Historical Journal* 62:4 (2019), 875–98.

⁶ Robert Travers, “The Connected Worlds of Haji Mustapha (c. 1730–91): A Eurasian Cosmopolitan in Eighteenth-Century Bengal,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 52:3 (2015), 297–333; Simon Schaffer et al., eds., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, Mass.: Science History Publications, 2009).

⁷ Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Gifts in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁸ Nikhil Bellarykar, “Two Marathi Letters from the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia: A Snapshot of Dutch-Maratha Relations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Coromandel,” *Itinerario* 43:1 (2019), 14–31; Ulfat Abdurasulov, “A Passage to India: Rhetoric and Diplomacy between Muscovy and Central Asia in the Seventeenth Century,” *Itinerario* 44:3 (2020), 502–27.

⁹ Tracey A. Sowerby and Christopher Markiewicz, eds., *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c. 1500–1630* (New York: Routledge, 2021); A. Nuri Yurdusev, ed., *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹⁰ Toby Osborne, “Whither Diplomatic History? An Early Modern Historian’s Perspective,” *Diplomatica* 1 (2019), 40–5.

¹¹ See, for example, Tracey A. Sowerby, “Early Modern Diplomatic History,” *History Compass* 14:9 (2016), 441–56, a recent historiographical survey with little to say about non-European diplomacy.

¹² For a concise statement, see Gagan D. S. Sood, “Circulation and Exchange in Islamicate Eurasia: A Regional Approach to the Early Modern World,” *Past & Present* 212:1 (2011), 113–62.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 123.

the Ottoman Empire. What follows revisits the story of their travels, and travails, across Eurasia and the Indian Ocean with special attention to a rich cache of Ottoman archival documents. The article suggests that this collection, hitherto unexamined, can illuminate some significant aspects of diplomatic procedure and conduct in Islamicate Eurasia, yet underexplored. The study therefore highlights such themes as the bureaucratic complexities that were involved in organising long-distance ambassadorial tours, the role ceremonial played in elite intercourse, and the myriad ways in which material culture mediated interstate relations. While its significance also lies in that it decentres a dominant scholarly focus on encounters between Europe and its others, scrutiny of this archive, I argue, can enrich historical understanding of how reciprocal relations between Islamicate polities transformed due to growing European influence. As balances of imperial power shifted in both India and the Middle East, the Mysore-Ottoman embassy hence at once reflected and anticipated the advent of modern European—and specifically, British—hegemony in non-European diplomatic settings.

I begin the essay by contextualising, with notes both of historical and historiographical relevance, the Ottoman sources on the Mysore embassy. I then delve into the collection's contents to delineate an account of the embassy's circulations between the Kaveri river basin and the Bosphorus Strait. Next, I broaden the focus to reveal how this case of political encounter was suggestive of a threshold moment between “early modern” and “modern” imperial formations, an observation that resonates with recent inquiries into both the regional Indian crown of Mysore and the sprawling intercontinental empire of the Ottomans,¹⁴ but which below is discussed with comparative insights into their diplomatic dispensations. I conclude with some reflections on how not just Islamicate diplomacy, but also its archives, transformed with European domination.

Mysore's Mediations

Tipu Sultan (r. 1782–99), ruler of Mysore, carved out one of the most powerful polities in India as the Mughal Empire fragmented. For historians, doubtless the most important legacy of his reign was the deft challenge it posed to British colonial expansion. Tipu is today also recalled, among other things, for his military innovations (“Tipu’s rockets,” for example, being important precursors to the famed British Congreve missiles) and his idiosyncratic obsession with tigers for royal iconography (and so a memorable moniker for the sultan, “Tiger of Mysore”). Beginning with the reign of Tipu’s father, Haidar ‘Ali, the relatively compact polity of Mysore had also begun making unusually ambitious efforts to shore up its transregional ties.¹⁵ Famously, thus, an “Indomania” that swept pre-Revolutionary Paris with the arrival there of a suite of Tipu’s envoys in 1788. In France to propose an alliance against the British, the stir this embassy created among local glitterati was vividly commemorated in print, watercolour, and even porcelain. A particularly arresting French gouache depicted a powdered, bewigged crowd at

¹⁴ Given the novel military-fiscal administrative profile of the polity, the Mysore sultanate has recently been described as “neither predominantly modern nor premodern”; Kaveh Yazdani, “Haidar ‘Ali and Tipu Sultan: Mysore’s Eighteenth-Century Rulers in Transition,” *Itinerario* 38:2 (2014), 101. In the lead-up to the state reforms that began in earnest in 1789, contemporary transformations in the Ottoman Empire have also been understood as “typifying the crisis of the old and the beginning of the modern era”; Ali Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), ix. For global historical reflections on a turn-of-the-century “saddle period” (*Sattelzeit*), or a bridge epoch between the early modern and modern eras, compare Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ See generally, Irfan Habib, ed., *State and Diplomacy under Tipu Sultan: Documents and Essays* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2014).

Saint-Cloud, swirling excitedly around Tipu's turban-draped, cummerbund-clad delegates.¹⁶ Later, Tipu also reached out to Napoleon after the general's invasion of Ottoman Egypt. Farther afield, he even indirectly captured the fascination of a new-born United States.¹⁷

But among historians of South Asia, it was an embassy that Tipu sent to the Turks which has so far excited the most attention. Two years before his envoys reached the Bourbon court, a remarkable number of some nine hundred of Tipu's servants travelled from India to the Ottoman court of Emperor 'Abdülhamid I (r. 1774–89). Much as matters stood with Mysore's French connections, this delegation to Istanbul sought to solicit support for the regime's protracted conflicts against the British.¹⁸ That diplomatic goal, however, proved quixotic. The Ottomans were themselves experiencing serious strains and upheavals at the time, owing both to rebellions within their domains and wars with adversaries abroad. Weathering as they were "generations of crisis," as Christopher Neumann put it in his survey of Ottoman diplomacy, the empire was ultimately in no position to commit to promises of an alliance with far-off Mysore.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the embassy remains important in South Asian historiography. In the main, this is because it heralded, in quite striking fashion at that, a very new phase in regional political culture. With the decline of the Mughal Empire, which had previously served as the main source for provincial claims to political legitimacy in India, regional crowns like Mysore now began betraying a "marked change" in more regularly reaching out to powers in the wider Islamic world.²⁰ As British colonial expansion accelerated in the second half of the eighteenth century, so did this trend.²¹

Previous histories of Tipu's embassy to the Turks have relied on several sets of sources, most of them either of Indian or European provenance. To begin, there exist materials from Mysore itself, which include Tipu's letters of instruction to his main representatives (*wakils*). Many of these letters were translated and published by an English East India Company servant as early as 1811.²² There exist, also, scattered reports on the embassy in French and British imperial archives.²³ Arguably the most significant source, however,

¹⁶ Meredith Martin, "Tipu Sultan's Ambassadors at Saint-Cloud: Indomania and Anglophobia in Pre-Revolutionary Paris," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 21:1 (2014), 37–68.

¹⁷ Blake Smith, "Revolutionary Heroes," *Aeon*, 7 December 2016, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-american-revolutionaries-admired-the-rebels-of-mysore>.

¹⁸ Ishiaq Husain Qureshi, "Tipu Sultan's Embassy to Constantinople, 1787," in *Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999), 69–78; Iqbal Husain, "The Diplomatic Vision of Tipu Sultan: Briefs for Embassies to Turkey and France, 1785–86," in Habib, *State and Diplomacy*, 19–65.

¹⁹ Christoph K. Neumann, "Political and Diplomatic Developments," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 3, *The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44–64.

²⁰ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, 1200–1800* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 22n31.

²¹ P. J. Marshall, "Introduction," in *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?*, ed. P. J. Marshall (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

²² William Kirkpatrick, trans., *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries: Including His Principal Military Commanders; Governors of Forts and Provinces; Diplomatic and Commercial Agents; &c. &c. &c.* (London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, 1811). See also the translations of Tipu's instructions to the embassy in Husain, "Diplomatic Vision." Copies of the original letters may be found in the British Library's Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections [hereafter APAC], India Office Islamic Manuscripts [hereafter IO Islamic] 2100, untitled Persian MS ["Letters of Tipu Sultan"] (for Tipu's correspondences with his *wakils*), and Oriental Manuscripts [hereafter OMS Or.]. 9686, *Khutūt-i Tipū Sultān* (for his royal letters to the Ottomans).

²³ For the French materials, see Mohibbul Hasan, "Introduction," in *Waqā'i'-yi Mānāzil-i Rūm: Diary of a Journey to Constantinople by Khwaja 'Abdul Qadir*, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1968), 4. For a sampling of British intelligence reports, see Maharashtra State Archives [hereafter MSA], Public Department Diary No. 89, pt. 1, Basra Factors to Bombay Council, 25 Oct 1786, fols.147–8.

has been the Indo-Persian text *Waqā'i-yi Manāzil-i Rūm* (Account of the journey to Rum). Written by a scribe embedded within the embassy, this narrative account was meant to serve as an official chronicle of sorts. But though an eyewitness report, it has its limitations as a historical source. As the editor of its modern recension himself complained, the text's language is "extremely careless." Its syntax is "defective." The prose is at times recendite to the point of illegibility, due in part to its use of "archaic words and forms of spelling," and in part because of its haphazard recruitment of loanwords from "Portuguese, Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, and Hindi."²⁴ The patient scholar can perhaps overcome such philological problems, some of which in turn doubtless owe to the peculiar creolisation that Persian underwent in peninsular India. Yet an issue which more seriously mitigates a thorough reconstruction based on this text alone is the incompleteness of its narrative. The text only covers the first leg of the embassy's travels. Beginning on the Malabar Coast, it ends abruptly once the envoys reach Ottoman Iraq.²⁵

What happened next? For firsthand answers to that question, we have to turn to the Ottoman Archives, whose paper trail picks up almost exactly where the *Waqā'i'* ends, and whose records feature at the heart of this essay. To date, only two scholars, Turkish historians Hikmet Bayur and İsmail Uzunçarşılı, have made any use of these sources.²⁶ They, however, were chiefly interested in the royal letters that were exchanged between Mysore and the Ottomans, and so neglected a larger clutch of administrative documents containing details regarding the embassy's movements through Turkish domains, its stay of nearly a year at the Ottoman capital, and the fêtes and formalities which punctuated the visit. To be sure, the Indian historian N. R. Farooqi had already alerted scholars to the value of Ottoman sources for the study of South Asia, whereas the Pakistani scholar Riazul Islam had painstakingly catalogued numerous instances of diplomatic exchange between the Mughals and Ottomans.²⁷ Focused as both those scholars were on the classical era of the Islamicate empires, neither however ventured any remarks on how connections between the subcontinent and the Middle East changed with "the manifest weakening of Mughal power by about 1750." For as Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have averred, transformations which arrived with Mughal decline and British colonialism did not simply spell the end of earlier transregional ties. To the contrary, those political changes had paradoxical yet powerful "consequences in terms of a growing place of the Ottomans in South Asia."²⁸ We shall be returning to this theme of imperial change presently. But first, a little more on the collection at hand.

In all, there exist some two dozen Ottoman documents on Tipu's emissaries, ranging from brief rescripts to detailed imperial orders (see the appendix, below, for a select list). Together, the sources span reports of the arrival of the embassy in Ottoman domains, its circulations through Iraq, Anatolia, and elsewhere, and its reception and

²⁴ Hasan, "Introduction," 4.

²⁵ But for studies of the embassy based on this text, see Kate Brittlebank, "From Tadri to Basra: The Journey of Khwaja Abdul Qadir as Recounted in the *Waqai-i Manazil-i Rum*," *South Asia Research* 25:2 (2005), 201–15; and Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 314–27.

²⁶ Hikmet Bayur, "Maysor Sultanı Tipu ile Osmanlı Pâdişahlarından I. Abdülhamid ve III. Selim Arasındaki Mektuplaşma," *Bellekten* 12:47 (1948), 617–54; Hikmet Bayur, *Hindistan Tarihi*, vol. 3, *Nadir Şah Afşar'ın Akınından Bağımsızlık ve Cumhuriyete Kadar (1737-1949)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1950), 190–6; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 4, pt. 2, XVIII. Yüzyıl (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1959), 158–9. Compare the notes in Azmi Özcan, "Tîpû Sultan (ö 1213/1799): Meysûr Sultanı (1782-1799)," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 41, 192–3, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/tipu-sultan>.

²⁷ N. R. Farooqi, "An Overview of Ottoman Archival Documents and Their Relevance for Medieval Indian History," *The Medieval History Journal* 20:1 (2017), 1–38; Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (1500-1750)*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1982).

²⁸ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 314.

sojourn in Istanbul. There may exist other documents still, as current indexes contain numerous errors stemming from an apparent confusion over Indic terms. “Tipu” is rendered as “Petyo” in some of the catalogue entries. His capital, Srirangapatnam, is sometime given as “Patam” (itself a corruption of the abbreviated “Patan”). Evidently more accustomed to encountering European plenipotentiaries in the Porte’s papers, in one index entry on the embassy, archivists have also muddled two regions that were under Ottoman influence, thereby mistaking Baghdad (Bağdat) for Moldavia (Boğdan). It may be added that the documents are strewn across different collections within the Ottoman Archives. They include its epistolary collections (“Name Defteri”);²⁹ records of internal and external affairs (“Cevdet Dahiliye”; “Cevdet Hariciye”); a major collection of executive commands (“Hatt-ı Hümayun”); and the sultanic collections of the then-emperor regnant (“Ali Emîrî Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid”). For a closer look at its contents, in the next section I recapitulate from the collection on the Mysore embassy some key moments, gleaning it selectively, not exhaustively, towards a narrative reconstruction.

Between the Kaveri and the Bosphorus

The first agent from Mysore to leave an impression on the Porte’s papers was not a member of the embassy itself. Rather it was one ‘Usman Khan, a messenger from Mysore who reached Istanbul in March 1785 with another Indian official.³⁰ Sent in advance to convey word of Tipu’s plans to pursue diplomatic contact, a pithy imperial record on ‘Usman Khan noted that he and his companion were assisted in their travels through Ottoman territories by Baghdad’s governor (*Vali*), Süleyman Paşa. The itinerary they took to Istanbul was identical to the one their compatriots would follow the next year. After a maritime journey from the western seaboard of India to the Persian Gulf, they transitioned to an overland caravan route which took them through Mesopotamia and Anatolia. On arriving in Istanbul, ‘Usman Khan and his companion were given a state subvention to defray their living costs (the stipend included money to visit a hammam, baths perhaps much needed after the journey of over four thousand miles).³¹ As we shall see below, in many ways the experiences of these messengers prefigured, in miniature, the more elaborate welcome that Ottoman statesmen accorded to the official embassy.

Setting sail from the port of Tadri on the Malabar Coast in March 1786, that large body of Tipu’s subjects reached Basra in the Gulf in August of that year. Once it made landfall in Iraq, Istanbul again delegated responsibility for receiving the party to the Iraqi governor: “with a pomp and dignity,” the pasha was instructed, “befitting our state.”³² Despite its mammoth size, or indeed because of it, the embassy was not acephalous, of course. There was a clear sense of hierarchy implied in the exchanges between the governor’s office and the Indian ambassadors. Süleyman Paşa primarily dealt with a handful of officials like Saiyyid Ghulam ‘Ali Khan and Shah Nurullah Khan, two figures whom Tipu himself had designated as his lead *wakîls*. Indeed, Tipu had also apparently played a part in stipulating for the embassy some specific chains of command. In a letter to one of the *wakîls* in February 1786, for instance, the ruler had listed and ranked several groups

²⁹ Royal letters from the *Name Defteri* have received the most scholarly attention. For facsimiles of some of the letters, together with transliterations (from Ottoman to Latin script) and translations (of the Indo-Persian letters into modern Turkish), see Bayur, “Maysor Sultan.”

³⁰ On Mysore also receiving news of ‘Usman Khan’s departure from Basra for Istanbul, see APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, “Parwāna-yi Bist o Duwum-i Biyāzī Sāl-i Azal, 1198 Sana-yi Hijrī [9 March 1785],” fol. 6a.

³¹ Osmanlı Arşivi [hereafter OA], Cevdet Hariciye [hereafter C.HR.] 148/737, 8 Cemaziyelevvel 1201/19 March 1785.

³² OA, Cevdet Dahiliye [hereafter C.DH.] 33/1639, 2 Muharrem 1201/25 October 1786.

that were meant to constitute a corps of 501 persons within the embassy. This particular cadre of Mysore's agents had military officials (*jauqdār*) at the top, but also "various other servants" (*shāgird-pesha wa-ghairu-hu*) below, as for example sweepers (*khāk-rob*), gofers (*har-kāra*), torch-bearers (*mish'al-chī*), artillerymen (*golan-dāz*), scribes (*munshi*), and translators (*do-bhāshī*).³³

Given its size, it may be worth adding here that the embassy must have also reflected something of Mysore's multi-confessional makeup, and so surely included many unaccounted-for non-Muslims. It also included a few women, at least on the return journey.³⁴ Yet the plethora of personnel also meant that the chief *wakīls* found it increasingly difficult to impose discipline on the large travelling body. During the stopover in Iraq, which lasted nearly a year, the most prominent theme became the embassy's dwindling numbers, a haemorrhage that owed both to desertions and to the shipwreck of one of the embassy's vessels in the Indian Ocean. The embassy's scribe frequently alluded to the problems caused by the insubordination and attrition of its staff, whereas from a rather cursory Ottoman headcount, which clearly did not factor in the many servants and factotums of the embassy, we find that by the time the Indians left Baghdad for Istanbul, their number had dropped to 330.³⁵

Even so, it is evident from Ottoman sources that the imperial state took it upon itself to welcome the envoys with sundry forms of assistance. From Iraq onwards, the host government supplied the visitors with funds, foodstuffs, and logistical support. All of this, in turn, was driven by a stated desire to adhere to specified protocols of diplomatic conduct. In orders sent to Baghdad, Istanbul indeed insisted on these points. Terms the Porte repeatedly invoked with reference to the embassy were *mihman-nevazi*, *mihmandarlık*, or *mihmandari*, all expressions for "hospitality," but which served here as concepts for diplomatic cordiality.³⁶ Tipu was himself a stickler for such niceties, and had given firm instructions to his *wakīls* to address notables in the Ottoman Empire with "complete respect" (*ba-kamāl-i 'ajir wa ilhāh*) and as "supplicants and solicitors" (*multajī wa mustad'ī*).³⁷ Besides seeing to it that their basic needs were met with regular grants of rations, Ottoman authorities made other arrangements for the visitors. We know from the *Waqā'i*, for example, that the Indians were eager to visit, for purposes of pilgrimage (*ziyarat*), different sacred sites in and around the Gulf.³⁸ In this regard, the most coveted destinations were the great shrine cities of Najaf and Karabala. Dated to May 1787, an Ottoman rescript illustrates how the wheels of the provincial government were made to turn to organise a pilgrimage caravan for the ambassadors to south-central Iraq, and how this too was regarded as a matter of diplomatic procedure:

³³ APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, "26 Yūsufī Sāl-i Jalau, az Maqām-i Patan ba-nām-i Ghulām 'Alikhān [1 February 1786]," fols. 73a-74b.

³⁴ We are aware that Tipu had ordered his main agents to exhort the "unbelievers" among the embassy's artillerymen to convert to Islam while in Iraq. The *wakīls* were also under instruction to buy "five or six fair-faced (slave) girls from amongst Turks, Arabs, or Mughals," Husain, "Diplomatic Vision," 33, 36. After Tipu's death, a Company official took note of a female "slave from Constantinople" at Srirangapatnam palace. She had reportedly also borne Tipu a child. My thanks to one of the reviewers for sharing this intriguing detail, which is evidently noticed in APAC, IOR/H/461, Wellesley Papers No. 5, Thomas Marriot to Josiah Webbe, 2 July 1800, fol. 175. On the women of Srirangapatnam, see Jennifer Howes, "Tipu Sultan's Female Entourage under East India Company Rule," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31:4 (2021): 855-74.

³⁵ OA, C.H.R. 178/8857, 12 Şaban 1201/30 May 1787.

³⁶ OA, C.D.H. 33/1639, 2 Muharrem 1201/25 October 1787; C.H.R. 62/3075, 12 Zilhicce 1787/15 September 1787.

³⁷ APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, "24 Sana ba-nām-i Ghulām 'Alikhān wa Lutuf 'Alikhān wa Shāh Nurullāh wa Muhammad Hanīf" [1 March 1786], fol. 82a.

³⁸ Brittlebank, "From Tadri to Basra," 205-9.

Regarding the ambassadorial messengers (*marsul sefareti*) of Tipu Sultan, sovereign of the regions of the Deccan in the domains of India (*memalik-i Hindistan Dekken memleketlerinin hükümrani*), who have arrived in Baghdad with three hundred and thirty individuals. The aforementioned are currently preparing for a pilgrimage, at the beginning of the month of Rajab, to [the tombs of] Imam ‘Ali and Imam Hüseyin (may God be pleased with them both), and [will therefore require] necessary provisions (*levazım zahireleri*) and special diplomatic rations (*mahsus mihmandar ta‘yın*).³⁹

It is not clear why the embassy’s stay in Iraq lasted as long as it did. Authorities in Baghdad may have had to wait for further word from Istanbul, or perhaps the fraying of order within the embassy itself caused the hold-up. Another reason was perhaps a central objective of the diplomatic mission itself, which, as historians have already noted, was to develop closer commercial relations with the Gulf.⁴⁰ From the Ottoman side, we learn besides that the embassy had presented a formal invitation for a Turkish trading settlement to be established at Mysore.⁴¹ In any event, come July 1787, preparations were finally put in place for the journey from Iraq to Istanbul. On the way to the capital, the consular convoy made stops in Ottoman towns and cities like Mosul, Mardin, Diyarbakır, and Çankırı. Two months later, it reached the Istanbul suburb of Üsküdar on the eastern banks of the Bosphorus. One Ottoman source tells us that the Porte received the party with a substantial stipend of 20,000 *kuruş*, as well as daily supplies of staples like salt, bread, and beef. Moreover, the imperial bureaucracy busied itself with other kinds of “organization and management,” such as supplying pack animals to porter the embassy’s luggage to a villa that it was assigned in Üsküdar.⁴² Another month passed before the embassy met with the Grand Vizier.⁴³ Finally, in December, the main *wakıls* were granted an audience with the emperor.

The envoys then settled to winter in Istanbul. But at this stage, their already trying experiences of travel took a turn for the worse. Many from the embassy died. The primary and most proximate cause for the fatalities was a plague epidemic that tore through Istanbul. Yet disease was compounded by the fact that the visitors reportedly found it difficult to adjust to the regional cold climate. “India falls among the tropical countries (*bilad-ı harridan*), while the lands of Rum belong to the temperate climes (*ekalim-i mu‘tedileden*),” one document at the Porte noted.⁴⁴ A record which more suggestively expanded on how diplomacy required sensitivity to such issues of cross-cultural accommodation was dated to January 1788 (Figure 1). It was an inventory of the foods that were provided to the embassy by the Porte. The source revealed that the Ottomans sought to accommodate the visitors by disbursing to them spices more common in Indian than Turkish cuisine. Besides basics like oil, sugar, candles, soap, starch (for laundry), beans, onions, vinegar, salt, milk, and meat, the list therefore also included more expensive and exotic items like ginger, cloves, cardamom, and saffron. And yet, the same document reported multiple deaths in the embassy since its arrival in Ottoman territories. As a result, annotations on the inventory reveal, the Porte also had to reduce the rations it had reserved for the embassy.⁴⁵

³⁹ OA, C.HR. 178/8857, 12 Şaban 1201/30 May 1787.

⁴⁰ Husain, “Diplomatic Vision.”

⁴¹ OA, Hatt-ı Hümayun 19/852, 29 Zilhicce 1201/12 October 1787; also see, APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, “24 Sana ba-nām-i Ghulām ‘Alikhān” [1 March 1786], fols. 81b–82a.

⁴² OA, C.HR. 5/233, 26 Zilkade 1201/9 September 1787.

⁴³ OA, C.HR. 142/7077, 19 Zilhicce 1201/2 October 1787.

⁴⁴ OA, Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid [hereafter AE.SABH.I.] 12/1029, 10 Receb 1203/6 April 1789.

⁴⁵ OA, C.HR. 82/4063, 17 Rebiülahir 1202/26 January 1788.



Figure 1 An Ottoman inventory of foods that were provisioned to the Mysore embassy. The document also mentions multiple deaths among the visiting envoys. Source: OA, C.HR. 82/4063, courtesy of Osmanlı Arşivi.

Matters began to improve with the spring thaw, which also brought a flurry of further activity at the imperial chancery. The Porte decided that the Indians could now benefit from a change of scenery and accommodation, because “from want of harmony to this

region's climate and food and drinks and flora, some of them have fallen ill, while some have succumbed to disease and died." It was proposed that the visitors be relocated to a house by the sea, with the hope that the air there might prove convalescing.⁴⁶ From the records that survive, it cannot be determined if the visitors were in fact granted a seaside villa. What was certainly arranged for, however, was a banquet in the suburb of Kağıdhane, a feast—*ziyafet*—to acclaim "the splendor and glory" of both the Mysore and Ottoman crowns. For that event, the hosts moreover organised entertainments focused on martial sports and prepared practice ranges for javelin, archery, shooting, and artillery, so that "they [the Indians] can offer a display of their skills." In the meantime, the British ambassador at Istanbul was summoned to supply additional information on Tipu and his kingdom.⁴⁷ With the feast, arrangements were also made for the Indians to be ferried through the Bosphorus on an imperial galleon for a sightseeing tour.⁴⁸ For that purpose, it was ordered that the visitors be given a handy map (*harita*) of the imperial capital (see Figure 2 for a near-contemporary example).⁴⁹

All of this culminated with another round of visits to the imperial court, where permission was finally granted for the ambassadors to take leave of the royal presence.⁵⁰ The journey back took them through a different route, by way of the Mediterranean and Red Seas. After a stopover in Mecca in the Ottoman Hijaz region for another round of pilgrimage, this time the hajj, what remained of the original embassy at last crossed the western Indian Ocean to return to Mysore.

In Between Go-Betweens

In terms of the general historical trends that are reflected in this collection of documents, two points bear emphasis. First, the archive affords an important view of how embassies were practically and materially organised in Islamicate Eurasia. The administrative perspectives it offers are particularly valuable when examined alongside the narrative and epistolary sources that have been used by earlier studies. Second, though these are the records of an Islamicate embassy, it is important to bear in mind that the historical undertaking itself was powerfully motivated by the exigencies of British imperial expansion. As such it is also indicative of a transitional or in-between moment in the imperial histories of both India and Eurasia. Below I treat each of these issues in turn, with reference to broader institutional and bureaucratic, as well as imperial and inter-imperial contexts. Throughout, I emphasise the dynamics of both continuity and rupture.

Consider, firstly, the matter of material history. For scholars interested in the logistical aspects of Islamicate diplomacy, these records provide an almost unrivalled set of sources. How did embassies travel? What kinds of room and board were envoys offered? Insofar as answers to these questions are forthcoming from accounts from before the nineteenth century, they are scattered across numerous instances of exchanges between the Mughals, Ottomans, and Safavids. But not one of those earlier examples involved more than a few envoys carrying letters from one royal court to another. By contrast, Tipu's embassy stands out both because of its size and the immense distances it traversed across the Indian Ocean and the Eurasian landmass. Combined with the *Waqā'i*, as well as documents from Srirangapatnam itself, the records in question also allow for a study of how embassies were assembled with a clear sense of internal rank and stratification, further

⁴⁶ OA, AE.SABH.I. 12/1029, 10 Receb 1203/6 April 1789.

⁴⁷ OA, AE.SABH.I. 10/906, 10 Receb 1203/6 April 1789.

⁴⁸ OA, AE.SABH.I. 6/584, 10 Receb 1203/6 April 1789.

⁴⁹ OA, AE.SABH.I. 6/593, 10 Receb 1203/6 April 1789.

⁵⁰ OA, AE.SABH.I. 251/16804, 6 Cemazyelahir 1202/14 March 1788.



Figure 2 Detail from an 1801 Ottoman map, showing Istanbul (Kostantiniye) and the European (Rumeli) regions of the empire. The Mysore embassy's sojourn in the Turkish capital was marked by some ups and downs. Source: OA, HRT.h. 18, courtesy of Osmanlı Arşivi.

research regarding which may force us to qualify a historiography that has tended to represent Islamicate diplomatic ventures as exclusively “ad hoc” undertakings.⁵¹ This collection is moreover truly bilateral in scope. No other example of an Islamicate embassy from before the Mysore-Ottoman exchange offers such depth and breadth of empirical evidence from both sides of an interstate exchange.

The collection also lends itself to a study of the cultural-symbolic aspects of Islamicate diplomacy. What role did language play? What ritual formalities structured elite interactions? Again, historians will find here much evidence of continuity with past traditions. So, while this collection is primarily in Turkish, the main mediating language between the embassy and the Porte remained that *lingua franca* of early modern Muslim elites—Persian.⁵² Meanwhile, as in Mughal-Ottoman courtly encounters in the past, extensive forms of gift-giving were also observed between Mysore and the Turks. Tipu personally oversaw the purchase of several elephants and precious stones for the Ottoman emperor.⁵³ As it happened, most of these gifts were lost during the shipwreck of the Mysore vessel at the Gulf. But in taking note of that accident, an Ottoman chronicler still made the telling observation, “it is customary in interstate relations to give gifts (*beyn-ed-düvel hedaya irsali mutad olup*).”⁵⁴ With respect to ceremonials of sociability like feasts, historians have paid relatively little attention to how formalities surrounding food and drink might have had implications for diplomatic conduct.⁵⁵ But the little

⁵¹ For “ad hoc” diplomacy, see Bülent Arı, “Early Modern Diplomacy: Ad Hoc Period,” in Yurdusev, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 36–65. Compare also N. R. Farooqi, “Diplomacy and Diplomatic Procedure under the Mughals,” *Medieval History Journal* 7:1 (2004), 59–86.

⁵² Many documents therefore refer to Turkish translations of Persian statements, e.g., OA, AE.SABH.I. 3/267, 10 Receb 1203/6 April 1789.

⁵³ APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, “Salkh-i Yūsufi Sāl-i Jalau ba-nām-i Shāh Nurullāh dar-mādda’-yi Zaud” [5 February 1786], fol. 75a.

⁵⁴ Bayur, “Maysor Sultani,” 623.

⁵⁵ But for a study of an Ottoman imperial ceremonial involving visiting emissaries, feasts, and mock battles, see Kaya Şahin, “Staging an Empire: An Ottoman Circumcision Ceremony as Cultural Performance,” *American Historical Review* 123:2 (2018), 463–92.

evidence we have at hand would seem to suggest that ambassadorial comportment crucially hinged on what Norbert Elias, in the context of European history, called “courtly manners.” Back in the 1650s, for instance, an Ottoman ambassador was roundly rebuked as an “ox” and an “ignorant Bosnian” for his uncouth behaviour at dinner with a Mughal counterpart.⁵⁶ As for the martial sports in which the envoys participated, Tipu himself had instructed that the embassy’s sentries be kept regularly drilled.⁵⁷

Notwithstanding the persistence of past patterns, however, the Mysore embassy was also illustrative of important inflection points. Mughal imperial decline, or what ‘Abdülhamid in his letter to Tipu described as “the weakening of the House of Timur,” supplied one backdrop for change.⁵⁸ But so did British expansion, regarding which Tipu complained bitterly to the Ottomans. In analysing these themes, some historians have put forward rather anachronistic views of Mysore as a bastion of quasi-nationalistic anti-colonialism.⁵⁹ For the same reason, they have argued that Tipu’s “foreign policy” was motivated by the need to be regarded as an “equal” of monarchs beyond India, including the Ottomans.⁶⁰ Careful research has contended, however, that such views are not altogether tenable, and that Tipu actually referred to the Ottoman ruler in entirely deferential terms.⁶¹ Elsewhere, Cemil Aydin has argued that this embassy was something of a last gasp in the history of lateral connections between premodern Muslim polities.⁶² In Aydin’s reading, the Mysore-Ottoman embassy served as the foil for another argument, which sought to stress how the Turkish empire only began to exploit its presumptive role as a pan-Islamist caliphate in the late nineteenth century. True, pan-Islamism was a modern response to the mature phase of European imperialism. But to reduce Tipu’s embassy to a hoary prelapsarian past is also to ignore its startlingly novel features.

To repeat, then, ours is an archive from a liminal era. As such, it is best explored not only for what it reveals regarding early modern trends, but also for how it presaged developments more usually associated with modernity. Take, for example, the question of Mysore’s place amid early modern Islamicate empires. Kate Brittlebank has already shown that Tipu’s “search for legitimacy”—in the Ottoman world as elsewhere—was crucially driven by the fact that the Mughals, succumbing to British pressure, refused to grant Mysore formal investiture in 1783.⁶³ Of course, this did not in turn mean that the Ottoman imperial caliphate suddenly replaced the Mughals as a source for regional legitimacy in South Asia. Well into the nineteenth century, denizens of Delhi continued to invoke an old imperial title for the Mughal capital—the Abode of the Caliphate (*dār al-khilāfat*). They even did so while travelling through Ottoman domains.⁶⁴ And yet, the formal titles with which Tipu festooned his letters to the Ottoman ruler still served as foretokens of the political language of the pan-Islamist era, when the seat of the Turkish emperor

⁵⁶ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 297.

⁵⁷ APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, “26 Yūsufī Sāl-i Jalau,” fols. 73a–74b.

⁵⁸ Bayur, “Maysor Sultani,” 638.

⁵⁹ Thus, Yazdani, “Haidar ‘Ali and Tipu,” 104, 109, a study that asserts, problematically, that Mysore’s politics was “clearly patriotic and anti-colonial” and driven by a need “not to become a vassal of foreign forces and lose independence.”

⁶⁰ Husain, “Diplomatic Vision,” 20.

⁶¹ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 325.

⁶² Aydin, *Idea of the Muslim World*, 14–5, 33–4.

⁶³ Kate Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan’s Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61.

⁶⁴ See for instance the travelogue, written in the 1840s, by a Delhiite in Ottoman Arabia, Mustafa Khan Muhammad Nawab Bahadur, *Sirāji Munir*, trans. Saiyid Zain-ul-‘Abidin [Persian to Urdu] (Farrukhabad: Lithographed by translator, 1910), 9–10. Note that just as they did with Tipu’s envoys, Ottoman officials often offered tours of their imperial capital to inspire awe among visiting diplomats. For more on Istanbul’s “diplomatic cityscape,” see Sowerby and Markiewicz, “Introduction,” in *Diplomatic Cultures*, 6–9.

acquired near-totemic significance for South Asia's Muslims.⁶⁵ Tipu addressed the Ottoman sultan in the most exalted terms: "Caliph, Chosen of God," "Sultan over Land and Sea," "Caliph of God the Sultan of Rum," and so on.⁶⁶ For his part, the emperor made no effort to respond in kind to this rhetoric. Far from implying political parity, in his letters 'Abdülhamid instead appeared to place Tipu as a definite subordinate of the Mughals.

These trends of tradition and transition were also apparent in the intricate itineraries taken by the embassy, which included frequent detours to sacred sites of both minor and major significance around the Middle East. Pilgrimage, particularly the hajj, had long served as a crucial axis of political communications across Islamicate Eurasia.⁶⁷ The last major exchange of ambassadors between the Mughals and Ottomans in the 1740s was entirely routed through the caravan and maritime routes of the Meccan pilgrimage, with each set of envoys dutifully stopping in Arabia before making their way to Istanbul and Delhi, respectively.⁶⁸ Tipu himself had initially intended to send his ambassadors to Istanbul by way of the Hijaz. They only took to the Gulf route after narrowly missing the sailing season to the Red Sea.⁶⁹ It turns out, though, that Tipu's envoys also had entirely new political aspirations in mind in visiting the pilgrimage sites of Iraq. To enhance the visibility and legitimacy of the relatively new regime, Mysore had sought to extend official patronage to the pilgrimage centres of Najaf and Karabala. In pursuing this ambition, Tipu might have been following the lead of Awadh, another Indian state which emerged from under the Mughal carapace in the eighteenth century. Like Awadh, Mysore sought also to fund the construction of a canal to supply fresh water to the Iraqi shrine cities.⁷⁰

Yet Islamicate imperatives now also jostled against European influences, and Mysore's diplomatic strategies were clearly absorbing the ways of the European polities in India. A major objective of the embassy, as noted above, was to establish commercial connections with the Gulf. This may not appear especially novel at first glance, but on closer inspection it becomes clear that Tipu's proposed trading settlement was to be modelled on that core institution of European corporate trade, the fortified warehouse or "factory."⁷¹ Tipu sought to build a similar commercial-cum-military establishment in Ottoman Basra.⁷² In seeking to construct such a warehouse, a place where Mysore could store merchandise, which, claimed Tipu, would otherwise spoil in India's tropical climate, the monarch also gave assurance to the Ottomans that he would garrison that establishment with his own men, raise taxes from adjacent areas to pay for its upkeep, and hand over to the imperial treasury all remaining revenue.⁷³ English factories in Mughal India operated almost exactly on these lines before they became nerve centres of colonial expansion. Ultimately, neither an Indian factory in Iraq nor an Ottoman one in India came to pass. Nevertheless, it is precisely the novelty of these ambitions that has led recent scholarship

⁶⁵ Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877-1924)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

⁶⁶ See for example APAC, OMS Or. 9686, *Khutūt-i Tipū Sultān*, "al-Hamdu lillāh al-Salām [1213 AH/1799 CE]," fols. 31b-32b.

⁶⁷ Farooqi, "Diplomacy and Diplomatic Procedure," 67-71.

⁶⁸ See Islam, *Calendar of Documents*, vol. 2, 346-55.

⁶⁹ APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, "24 Sana ba-nām-i Ghulām 'Alikhān" [1 March 1786], fols. 81a-82a.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 622. Awadh had in fact already completed that infrastructural project. Funded by its nawab, the aptly named Hindiya Canal was cut near Karabala in 1775.

⁷¹ van Meersbergen, "Diplomatic Repertoires," 6.

⁷² For crown trade with the Gulf, Mysore had commercial agents already billeted at ports like Muscat; APAC, IO Islamic 2100, untitled Persian MS, "Parwāna-yi Marqūma-yi Shab-i Panjum-i Biyāzī Sāl-i Azal, 1198 Sana-yi Hijrī" [20 February 1785], fol. 3b. Compare Hasan, "Introduction," 13-5.

⁷³ Husain, "Diplomatic Vision," 37-8; Bayur, "Maysor Sultani," 622-4.

to examine the place of Mysore in the historical evolution of global capitalism.⁷⁴ It was also the fact that Tipu was mirroring the monopolistic practices of his European rivals that led a Company servant to claim that the monarch was seeking to create “factories in the Turkish dominions” with the intention “that no Europeans shall [trade] therein.”⁷⁵

For all the transitional trends reflected in the Mysore-Ottoman embassy, in South Asia itself this period ultimately culminated in the formation of a colonial diplomatic order. In fact, the same year as Tipu’s ambassadors began their journey home from Istanbul, the British also began to assert for their agents in India far greater powers, leading to certain seismic shifts in regional norms of diplomatic engagement. Under the Mughals, English ambassadors usually appeared at Indian courts as little more than humble merchant-suppliants, pleading for trading privileges, hat in hand.⁷⁶ Although the Company’s envoys had rights by charter to act as agents of the English monarch, Mughal imperial ideology clearly also ranked that European crown below Islamicate empires like the Ottomans.⁷⁷ However, such asymmetries began to transform in about 1789, when growing military supremacy gave the Company’s Governor-General the gumption to assert that Indian kingdoms should regard British agents as “representatives of a government at least equal in power and dignity to their own.”⁷⁸ But of course, what was achieved in both the medium and long terms was not diplomatic parity at all, but rather a regime of colonial treaty-driven obligations that had inequality written into its very name: the so-called subsidiary alliance system. The rise of colonial relations of treaty and tribute in turn eventuated a broader imperial transition, “from Mughal-centered to Company-centered diplomacy.”⁷⁹

The most conspicuous consequence of this shift was that many regional states were compelled to host a diplomatic representative from the Company state. The British “resident” thenceforward also became an embodiment of indirect colonial rule, his proverbial whisper the thunder of any nawab’s durbar. As Michael Fisher notes, the advent of the Company’s residency system in this period led not only to the gradual obsolescence of Islamicate protocols of diplomacy, but also to the erosion of the powers of South Asian *wakils*. Persistent military hostilities meant that Mysore never had to admit into its realms a Company resident. However, following the turning point of the third Anglo-Mysore war—which in 1792 resulted in Tipu incurring heavy territorial losses to the British—what was striking was the very real mockery that was made of the peace negotiations pursued by Mysore’s “vakeel.” On arriving at the Company’s camp, this “ambassador” from Tipu’s side was “little respected,” nay “openly insulted,” and “sent back to his master, without being permitted to enter.” All this occurred, no less, to the “general

⁷⁴ Albeit with mixed interpretative results. See thus Kaveh Yazdani, “Mysore’s Pre-Colonial Potentialities of Capitalist Development and Industrialization,” in *Capitalisms: Towards a Global History*, eds. Kaveh Yazdani and Dilip M. Menon (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020), 152–79.

⁷⁵ MSA, Public Department Diary No. 89, pt. 1, Basra to Bombay, 24 September 1786, fols. 114, 16.

⁷⁶ See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris,” in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 69–96.

⁷⁷ A Mughal hierarchy of Eurasian monarchs was famously adumbrated in a court painting from circa 1615–18, which depicted the Timurid emperor granting audience, in order of importance, to a Sufi mystic, the Ottoman Sultan, and the English King. For a high-quality image, see <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1942.15a/>.

⁷⁸ Dick Kooiman, “Meeting at the Threshold, at the Edge of the Carpet or Somewhere in Between? Questions of Ceremonial in Princely India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40:3 (2003), 313. These diplomatic arrangements had their precedents, of course, as for instance in a controversially concessional *firmān* granted to the Company by the Mughals in 1717.

⁷⁹ Fisher, “Diplomacy in India,” 254.

satisfaction” of the British and their Indian allies.⁸⁰ A diplomatic order determined by such colonial condescension only gained ground in subsequent years. With British conquests dramatically speeding up under Governor-General Richard Wellesley (1798–1805), residencies proliferated across South Asia. Diplomatic rituals also began to transform, becoming oriented towards ceremonials implying indigenous subordination to the colonial state.⁸¹

Growing European influence was not unique to India, however, and we may thus conclude this section by noting parallel changes in Ottoman diplomacy. Around the same time as they received the Indian embassy, the Ottomans had also begun their own tortuous transitions to new diplomatic institutions and practices. These changes were partly thrust upon an increasingly weak empire, but they were also the product of conscious state-led reforms. Both effectively began under ‘Abdülhamid, during whose reign European powers first began pondering the infamous “Eastern question”—the diplomatic problem posed by a declining Ottoman Empire—which in the nineteenth century would metastasise into “the Sick Man of Europe.” The Eastern question was first raised in the wake of a 1774 Russo-Ottoman treaty, which one historian has described as the “single most humiliating treaty the Ottomans had signed yet.”⁸² But even as setbacks like these were pushing the Ottomans into an uncertain future, ‘Abdülhamid still appeared to cling to certain established forms of diplomatic discourse. In his letters to Tipu, and in the vaunting language characteristic of classical Islamic epistolography, the emperor made much of ongoing Ottoman preparations for war against Russia. “I have amassed an army so large,” wrote the sultan, “it can reach the stars.”⁸³ But ‘Abdülhamid died a little over a month after granting a farewell audience to Tipu’s envoys. And with him passed some of the older ways of Ottoman diplomacy.

His successor, Selim III (r. 1789–1807), ushered in the New Order (*Nizam-ı Cedid*), systemic bureaucratic reforms that brought to Ottoman diplomacy distant but definite echoes of changes then underway in the subcontinent. The Porte thus also began to establish its first resident embassies. Beginning in London in 1793, other Ottoman consulates then opened in quick succession in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. This “Europeanisation” of the Turkish diplomatic corps, as it has been described, was not just reflected in the capitals in which the embassies were placed, but also by the transformed contexts of Ottoman relations with European powers. Put simply, Europeanisation meant heightened European influence. Unsurprisingly, Western powers now also began to shift their diplomatic posture towards the Turks. For instance, contemporary Anglo-Ottoman relations may not have been troubled by direct colonial conquests, at least not of the kind which carried the Company in India “from trade to dominion,” as a well-worn historiographical formulation has it. But as one recent study has noted, it was nevertheless during this period that the office of the British ambassador in Istanbul, which for the previous two centuries had focused on commercial questions revolving around the English Levant Company, took on a more explicitly political role. That transformation was confirmed when the British crown assumed direct oversight

⁸⁰ Major Dirom, *A Narrative of the Campaign in India, which Terminated the War with Tippoo Sultan in 1792* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1793), 38.

⁸¹ Kooiman, “Meeting at the Threshold.”

⁸² Virginia Aksan, “War and Peace,” in *Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 3, 173. The treaty in question was that of Küçük Kaynarca. Besides territorial concessions, it gave the Russian Empire the unprecedented privilege to “protect” Ottoman Orthodox Christian subjects, an arrangement that would of course assume altogether new meanings with the emergence of nationalism. Yet the treaty may also be regarded as a parallel and a portent of caliphal politics, as pan-Islamism would later lead the Ottomans to claim analogous forms of moral authority over British India’s Muslims.

⁸³ Bayur, “Maysor Sultanı,” 639.

of that ambassadorial post in 1808.⁸⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, these developments would culminate with the Ottoman Empire's own diplomatic recognition of a "British India."⁸⁵

From Sultanic Libraries to Colonial Archives: An Afterword

With attention to a little-known archive concerning a well-known example of Islamicate diplomacy, this essay examined a pregnant moment of political change in both South Asia and Islamicate Eurasia. It argued that when studied alongside sources already familiar from received historiography, the Ottoman administrative documents on the 1786–89 embassy from Mysore allow for enquiries into an array of important themes in Islamicate diplomatic history. The collection can thus be consulted to investigate issues of bureaucracy and materiality. It allows for scales of analysis ranging from the microhistorical to the transregional. But above all, as I sought to show, the sources can be studied to advance our understanding of a crucial era of change in global imperial history. As South Asia and the Middle East alike experienced fundamental axial shifts from "early modernity" to "modernity," looming above it all was the fact that Islamicate polities, as indeed the linkages between them, increasingly came under the dominance of European imperial demands. This occurred both because of direct conquests (in what became British India) and indirect influence (in the Ottoman Empire).

But by way of a conclusion, let me shift focus to two vignettes from a decade after Tipu's ambassadors returned from Istanbul to Srirangapatnam. The first concerns another round of exchanges that took place between Mysore and the Ottomans; the second involves the fate of Tipu's royal library after his final defeat by the Company. Taken together, both may be read as a denouement to the themes I have highlighted in this essay regarding empire, diplomacy, and the historical sources we use to study them.

In early 1799, it was the turn of the Ottomans to contact Mysore. At the urging of the British ambassador in Istanbul, but spurred also by knowledge that Mysore was engaging in communications with the French in Egypt, Selim wrote to press Tipu to make peace with the British. "May God not let it come to pass," the emperor warned with reference to Napoleon's military adventures in the eastern Mediterranean, "but imagine, should a full [French] invasion occur through the Suez, they shall take all of India into their hands. Facing no opposition, they shall take that country's wealth and put to the sword all of its Muslims."⁸⁶ In warning Tipu thus, the Ottomans perhaps knew well that they were asking him, unfairly, to choose between two rival European powers, both of which were then extending their imperial frontiers.⁸⁷ In his reply to the Ottomans, Tipu politely

⁸⁴ Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations, 1661-1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017).

⁸⁵ A resident Ottoman ambassador was posted in colonial Bombay in the mid-nineteenth century. On the establishment of this embassy, see OA, Hariciye Nezaratı 321/53, 13 Şaban 1275/18 March 1859.

⁸⁶ Bayur, "Maysor Sultanı," 648.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 642. The French invasion of Egypt led to a momentary Anglo-Ottoman alliance; J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record, 1535-1914*, vol. 1, 1535-1914 (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1956), 65-6. Incidentally, several twists and turns informed the course of the second set of Mysore-Ottoman exchanges. After an initial letter was sent from Istanbul to Srirangapatnam through British channels in February 1799, Tipu responded with two letters. The first was sent to Istanbul via the British. The second was a secret message. Later the Ottomans drafted another letter, urging Tipu again to make peace with the Company. On this occasion they even contemplated sending an envoy directly to Mysore. But by then, Srirangapatnam had already fallen. For details, see the marginalia in the letters (in their Persian original and English and Turkish translations, respectively), in APAC, OMS Or. 9686, *Khutū-ti Tipū Sultān*, "al-Hamdu lillāh," fol. 31b; National Archives of India, Foreign Department (Persian Branch), From Tipoo Sulatun, 16 February 1799, fols. 275-9; and Bayur, "Maysor Sultanı," 642-3.

refused to accede to the British. But as one of the first historians to study the exchanges between Mysore and the Ottomans observed, “Whether the letter of Selim III or the response from Tipu, each may be read as the cry of an Eastern monarch against the colonialism of the great Western powers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”⁸⁸

Mere months after receiving the Ottoman letter, Tipu and his army again went to war with the Company. In May 1799, Srirangapatnam fell to the British. Tipu himself was slain in battle.⁸⁹ As the British ransacked his capital, much treasure was of course taken and shipped off to the metropole. This included Tipu’s iconic hand-cranked automaton of a tiger mauling a Redcoat, today on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum. But a trove that was of equal interest to the victors was Tipu’s library, which had not only books but also the sultan’s royal papers, including his letters to the Ottomans. The British scattered this library to different collections. It contributed immensely, for instance, to the Persian riches of the British Library, a corpus that remains important to historians of South Asia today. Yet like the act of military conquest itself, the colonial state’s expropriation of the sultan’s library was of course also an exercise of power. By arrogating the library of a major rival in India, the British indeed even began the project of reimagining India itself. As Joshua Ehrlich has cogently argued, the plunder of Tipu’s library played a central if surprising role in the ideological invention of “British India.”⁹⁰

Arriving at the closing year of the eighteenth century, these two sets of events could certainly be regarded as discrete inaugural moments to the colonial politics that would go on to define the modern age of empires. But Tipu’s embassy to the Ottomans posed not only a direct challenge to the emergence of those later colonial configurations. It did so with direct reference to the connections that once prevailed across the early modern Islamicate world. The 1786–89 embassy from Mysore to the Ottomans therefore remains an important example of an intermediate moment in the evolution of diplomacy across the subcontinent and Islamicate Eurasia. Its archives should therefore be studied not simply for how they gestured to emergent historical horizons, but also for how they remained rooted in patterns from a deeper past.

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⁸⁸ Bayur, “Maysor Sultani,” 642.

⁸⁹ For Ottoman reports on the Company’s conquest of Srirangapatnam and Tipu’s death, see OA, HAT 145/6119, 27 Rabiulahir 1213/28 September 1799, and HAT 40/2040, 3 Şaban 1214/31 December 1799. See also in this context, Anne Buddle, “The Tipu Mania: Narrative Sketches of the Conquest of Mysore,” *MARG* 40:4 (1989), 53–70.

⁹⁰ Joshua Ehrlich, “Plunder and Prestige: Tipu Sultan’s Library and the Making of British India,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 43:3 (2020), 1–15.

Appendix: Tipu's Turkish Archive (1785–1789)

Cevdet Hariciye 148/737	19 March 1785. Arrival of a messenger from Tipu Sultan.
Cevdet Dahiliye 22/1639	25 October 1786. On provisions for the envoys, with instructions for Süleyman Paşa, <i>vali</i> of Baghdad.
Cevdet Hariciye 178/8857	30 May 1787. On the three hundred and thirty envoys from Tipu Sahib, and their plans for a journey to Istanbul via Anatolia.
Cevdet Hariciye 135/6725	1 July 1787. Regarding the disbursement of necessary supplies, including horses, for the Indian envoys.
Cevdet Hariciye 5/233	9 September 1787. Appointment of senior palace guard (<i>kapıcıbaşı</i>), Mustafa Ağa, to accompany the envoys from Baghdad to Istanbul.
Cevdet Hariciye 62/3075	15 September 1787. Ambassadors Seyyid Gulam 'Ali Han and Şah Nurullah Han, who come with gifts from the country of the ruler of Peten [i.e., Srirangapatnam] in India, should be brought to Istanbul from Mardin in a way that is worthy of glory.
Cevdet Hariciye 142/7077	2 October 1787. On the reception to be accorded in Istanbul to Seyyid Gulam 'Ali Han and Seyyid Nurullah Han.
Hatt-ı Hümayun 19/852	12 October 1787. On the ruler of Peten's invitation to establish a commercial settlement in India.
Cevdet Hariciye 184/9173	20 January 1788. Inventory of the provisions meant for the Indian ambassadors.
Cevdet Hariciye 82/4063	26 January 1788. Register of the expenses of the embassy's travels from Baghdad.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 251/16804	14 March 1788. Permission granted to the Indian envoys to take their leave.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 10/883	6 April 1789. Imperial rescript issued to the Baghdad governor regarding the envoys from Tipu Sultan, son of the late ruler of the Deccan, 'Ali Haydar Bahadır (<i>sic</i>).
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 10/889	6 April 1789. Regarding the villa where the Indian envoys are residing.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 12/1029	6 April 1789. On the Üsküdar villa assigned to the Indian envoys.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 10/906	6 April 1789. On a banquet to be held for the Indian envoys.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 15/1342	6 April 1789. More on the banquet.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 6/584	6 April 1789. On arrangements to be made to ferry the Indian ambassadors across the Bosphorus, from Üsküdar to Istanbul.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 6/593	6 April 1789. Imperial command to soldiers of the Üsküdar galleon (<i>Üsküdar kalyoncu</i>) to receive the Indian ambassadors.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 3/267	6 April 1789. Further commands and instructions regarding the Indian ambassadors.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 14/1240	6 April 1789. On the chief envoys of the embassy of the Peten ruler Tipu Sultan.

Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 15/1352	6 April 1789. Imperial rescript regarding the ceremonial reception of the Indian envoys.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 9/816	6 April 1789. On accepting the Indian envoys to the imperial Presence.
Ali Emiri Tasnifi I. Abdülhamid 3/267	6 April 1789. Translation of a Persian letter from four Indian envoys, presented to the emperor.

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