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History of Russia to 1800

Final Paper: The Rhetoric of the Enlightenment in the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca

The Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca is considered critical in understanding both the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Russian Empire not least in part due to its implications regarding the development of relations between these two states through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Specifically, the vague nature of the Treaty's prescriptions regarding the Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire has been cited as a primary cause of the Crimean War. The Treaty was signed during a period of relatively rapid political transformation within both the Ottoman and Russian Empires: the external political failures of the Turks, along with a host of factors, were beginning to affect the state's internal political disintegration, especially in Egypt, while Catherine's rapid territorial expansion primarily through the destruction of Poland was matched by (some would say contrasting) attempts to reorganize the Russian administration along Enlightenment ideals. The Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca contains elements of Enlightenment rhetoric, but these are not blindingly apparent and do not characterize the language of the entire document. The precise reasons for the inclusion of Enlightenment tropes in the Treaty remain unclear, however it will be made clear that these tropes served to buttress the political aims of Catherine and her administration and so they had a demonstrably utilitarian purpose. In this way, Enlightenment rhetoric does appear in the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, at least in the context of the promotion of Catherine's political aims.

Some sections of the Treaty were considerably influenced by Enlightenment ideals and rhetoric, particularly the passages relating to the primary political outcome of the treaty, the new independence of the Crimean khans. Articles III and IV deliver most of the document's Enlightenment rhetoric within a rhetorical construction of the newly independent Tatar nation in Crimea. Specifically, Article III provides for the independence of Crimea and the Tatar people thereof as 'free nations, and entirely independent of every foreign power Power'.¹ Catherine does acknowledge the religious authority of the Ottoman caliph over the Muslims of Crimea, but only insofar as that suzerainty did not compromise the 'stability of their political and civil liberty' (this provision made no sense to the Ottoman caliph-sultans).² The ideals upon which the independence of the Tatars was established in Article III are explicitly stated in the preamble of Article IV (which establishes that right of the Ottomans and the Russians to reconstruct fortresses in the frontier regions): "It is conformable to the natural right of every Power to make, in its own country, such dispositions as it may consider to be expedient: in consequence whereof, there is respectively reserved to the two Empires a perfect and unrestricted liberty of constructing anew [various structures]."³ In this passage, the authors of the Treaty established the 'natural right' of every 'Power' of self-determination regarding the internal affairs of the state – this is the ideology at the core of the proposed Tatar nation as it was established in Article III, and with this in mind the type of state that was being rhetorically constructed by the authors becomes apparent.

Firstly, it is clear in the context of Article III that the phrase 'every Power' as it is used in Article IV is including and referring back to the Tatar nation as well as Russia and the Ottoman Empire. One excerpt from Article III makes it clear that the Ottoman state will 'acknowledge and consider the said Tartar nation, in its political and civil state, upon the same footing as the other Powers who are

1 National University of Singapore. "Treaty of Peace (Kucuk Kaynarca), 1774." Accessed April 26, 2020. http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/documents_archive/kucuk-kaynarca.php

2 Heywood, Colin. "Kucuk Kaynardja" In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Vol. 5. Leiden: Brill (1986), 312-313.

3 Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca

governed by themselves, and are dependent upon God alone'.⁴ So when, in the next article, the authors refer to 'every Power', that reference can be inferred to include the Tatar nation which had already been established as 'on equal footing' with all other free 'Powers' or those 'who are governed by themselves'. It can also be inferred from this excerpt that the 'natural right' referred to in Article IV is a God-given one (with regards to the 'Powers' who are only responsible, or dependent, to 'God alone'). All major Enlightenment thinkers recognized 'natural rights' as granted and confirmed by God. As such, that belief is represented in the Treaty in that the Tatars, and all the other free 'Powers', are recognized as free nations if they are responsible only to God. So, the natural right defined in Article IV, one that extended to the Tatar nation, can be recognized as an Enlightenment ideal.

Secondly, the 'natural right' being exercised by the Tatar nation on the whole was probably meant to be understood as an expression of the natural rights of all Tatar people. Again, this construction is evidenced by means of a connection from the preamble of Article IV back to the founding criterion of the Tatar state discussed in Article III, where it is stated that the Tatar people should be "governed by their own Sovereign ... elected and raised to the throne by all the Tartar peoples ... neither the Court of Russia nor the Ottoman Porte shall interfere, under any pretext whatever, with the election of the said Khan, or in the domestic, political, civil and internal affairs of the same".⁵ The authors express a fairly traditional Enlightenment-era positive assessment of monarchy: the monarch acts as the ideological expression of the collective will of his/her people. That being said, this passage goes further than philosophers like Thomas Hobbes because it implies that actual elections would be held and that they would include 'all the Tartar peoples'. Although the process alluded to here is so vague that it may be considered pure rhetoric, the authors nonetheless seem to confuse the elective process of a republic with the social contract theory of Enlightened monarchy because they make reference to an actual election, one that could be interfered in by foreign powers. Was the Tatar khan actually elected 'by all the Tartar peoples'? He was not, and the conditions laid out in that passage were observed by neither the Turks nor the Russians, the violations of which precipitated another war between the two powers only thirteen years after the treaty was signed.⁶ Setting aside the implementation of the provisions, however, and considering only the language of the treaty, it seems that the Crimean khan was envisioned, by those who negotiated the treaty, as the head of at least a rhetorical republic, one that held formal elections that were respected by foreign powers and in which great multitudes of citizens with natural rights participated. So the conception of the Tatar state as it was rhetorically constructed in Articles III and IV was essentially founded on a handful of Enlightenment concepts: the God-given natural rights of the people and of the state, the monarchical social contract, and free elections.

With all this being said, it should be mentioned that the perspective taken by the authors of this treaty is not at all impartial: in both of these Articles, the authors clearly portray Catherine as a liberator of Crimea and the Turks as being made to follow in the footsteps of a truly Enlightened monarch. For example, when prescribing the territories to be granted to the Tatar state, the authors state that 'Russia leaves to this Tartar nation ... all the towns ... which it has conquered in Crimea and in Kuban'.⁷ This quote obviously reflects the on-the-ground political situation in Crimea, which was being occupied by the Russians who would thus theoretically act as the last foreign occupiers of Crimea, but the rhetoric expresses this state of affairs in manner that portrays the Russians as liberators because they, having won the war against the Turks, are deciding the terms of the Treaty and as such have provided for the

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Figes, Orlando. *The Crimean War: A History*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011, 15-17.

7 Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca

independence of Crimea, while the Turks are being made to respect it. Later in Article III this perspective is expressed more clearly when it is written that the Ottoman state will cede occupied Crimea ‘in the same manner as the Court of Russia has done’.⁸ Here, the authors go as far to imply that the Russians had already, at least ideologically, evacuated Crimea, and that now the Turks should (or, indeed, must) follow in their footsteps. Article III concludes with a flourishing of that perspective, stating that the Ottomans should ‘leave all the Tartars in the same perfect liberty and independence in which the Empire of Russia leaves them’. Again, it is implied that the freedom of Crimea has already been ideologically confirmed by the Russians, and that the Turks should thus follow in line behind them. Obviously, portraying Catherine as an Enlightened monarch freeing oppressed peoples from foreign occupation and encouraging the neighboring Empires to do the same had political implications because it provided her with a political justification for her wars, a *casus belli*.

The rhetoric of Catherine as a trailblazer of the Enlightenment and driving force behind the newly freed Crimean state should also be viewed within the context of another trend in the language of the Treaty. Most of the major western Powers had already extracted severe economic, political, and in some cases cultural concessions from the Ottoman Empire over the previous two centuries, collectively referred to (especially in the case of the French) as the Capitulations. This phenomena is reflected in the language of the Treaty to the extent that the negotiators constantly refer to the western Capitulations in order to contextualize the concessions being made to the Russians, sometimes even going as far as to use them as legal precedent. Article XI states that Russian subjects trading in Ottoman territory should be afforded “all the same privileges and advantages as are enjoyed in its States by the most friendly nations, whom the Sublime Porte favours most in trade, such as the French and the English; and the capitulations of those two nations and others shall, just as if they were here inserted word for word, serve as a rule, under all circumstances and in every place”.⁹

Thus the language of the treaty is sometimes couched in the rhetoric of inter-European competition, but instances of this language go further than the economic context. Article V states that the Russian envoy to Constantinople should be granted ‘all the attentions and respect which are observed towards the Ministers of the most distinguished Powers’. Article VIII states that Russian pilgrims should be ‘provided with such passports and firmans as are given to the subjects of the other friendly Powers’. Article XXVII states that ambassadors on both sides ‘shall be received and treated with the same honours and ceremonies as are observed in the respective Embassies between the Ottoman Porte and the most respectable Powers’.¹⁰ Western Europe (France, England, Holland, and Venice are explicitly mentioned) was thus both a reference point and a point of contention regarding how the Russians were to be treated with regards not only to strictly utilitarian phenomena such as trade but also to symbolic phenomena such as the exchanging of embassies. Thus, from the perspective of the authors of the Treaty, if Catherine was not being afforded the same symbolic respect as the monarchs of western Europe, then she certainly should have been, at least as the guarantor of Crimean freedom and a champion of the Enlightenment. Of course, the language of the Treaty is not explicitly antagonistic with regards to the western Powers, but certainly the language of an inter-European rivalry, a contest for recognition from the Porte, is present throughout the treaty.

These two perspectives, firstly of Catherine as the liberator of Crimea and secondly of Russia as being rightfully elevated to an equal footing with western Europe, are important because they both affect how the Enlightenment-tinged construction of the Crimean state should be viewed in context. It is made clear that the state was being provided for not by the Turks but by the Russians on the one hand,

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

and that Catherine and her representatives should be treated with the same respect and dignity as the westerners on the other hand. If the language of the inter-European rivalries is read in the context of Catherine as an Enlightened monarch and the liberator of Crimea, then an ideological program (one of many) of the Treaty becomes apparent, at least from the Russian perspective: the raising of Russia to the status of the other great powers, specifically France and England, might come about by the Catherine's championing of Enlightenment ideals, by the projection of Catherine not as a conqueror but as a liberator, and by the casting of Russia as a state which had already begun, after only a short period of reform, to lead other foreign states onto the path of Enlightenment by enforcing their complacency in the freeing of certain oppressed peoples. Furthermore, these aims provide an extremely convincing explanation for why this document would have contained Enlightenment rhetoric: because it was politically expeditious for Catherine. This presentation of Catherine as a liberator, first and foremost, justified the war she had already fought against the Turks, but perhaps even provided her with a blueprint on how to structure *casus belli* for future wars against the Turks and potentially even against other powers. So there is no need to doubt that the efforts of the Russian delegation were made to increase Catherine's political position with respect both to the Ottomans and to the western powers.

Finally, the potential influence of the Ottoman delegation to Kucuk Kaynarca on the language of the treaty should be addressed. The Ottoman vizierate was occupied by two different men through 1774, Muhsinzade Mehmed Pasha, who fell ill during the drafting of the Treaty and who had to return to Constantinople soon after it was signed, and Izzet Mehmed Pasha, who was granted the office later in the year.¹¹ The character of Muhsinzade can be considered relatively standard for the office: he was raised in Constantinople and was not ethnically Turkish – he was the son of an Arab merchant from Aleppo who had risen through the ranks of the Ottoman financial administration and had been the vizier earlier in the century.¹² Muhsinzade, however, was not in charge of the Turkish delegation at Kucuk-Kaynarca. That responsibility fell on Ahmad Resmi Efendi, an extremely prominent diplomat from the Ottoman Porte. Originally a Greek from Rethymno, Crete, Resmi came to Constantinople relatively late, in his early thirties, and after over twenty years in the Ottoman administration he quickly became one of the most experienced diplomats in the Porte.¹³ While he was brought in by Muhsinzade to negotiate the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, he was not responsible for the military action of the war (Muhsinzade was the field-commander) and was essentially a pure diplomat.¹⁴

Resmi was the Ottoman ambassador to Vienna in 1757 and to the Berlin of Frederick the Great in 1763, and he wrote detailed impressions of both trips, especially of the latter one to Prussia which was even read in the west.¹⁵ That work was hugely influential in the Ottoman administration: the extent of his praise for the Prussians has been seen as evidence by some historians that Resmi began the centuries-long trend of Ottoman reformists' looking to Germany for a modern military apparatus.¹⁶ He presented an idealized depiction of Frederick the Great and his military administration and extolled the virtues of the Prussian military's academies, tactics, discipline, and efficient command-structure. Resmi became both an ardent reformist and an extreme critic of the Ottoman administration, and he was perhaps the greatest advocate of what we might call Enlightenment reformism in the Ottoman Porte for at least some decades. One of his most recognized works, aside from his account of Berlin, was the

11 De Groot, Alexander. "Mehmed Pasha, Muhsin-Zade." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Vol. 6. Leiden: Brill (1986), 998.

12 Enver, Karal Ziya. "Abd Allah Pasha." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill (1986), 56.

13 Babinger, Franz. "Ahmad Rasmi" In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill (1986), 294.

14 Heywood, Colin. "Kucuk Kaynardja" In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed. Vol. 5. Leiden: Brill (1986), 312-313.

15 Ibid.

16 Uyar, Mesut, and Edward J. Erickson. *A Military History of the Ottomans: from Osman to Atatürk*. Santa Barbara (California): ABC-CLIO, 2009, 116.

Hulasatu'l Itibar. Written shortly after the signing of the Treaty, it was a vicious attack on the Ottoman government and military administration. Resmi asserted that the decision to begin the war with Russia in the first place was entirely uninformed and predicted (correctly) that initiating another war with Russia would be disastrous. He criticized the Ottoman military from top to bottom, from the 'classical corps' to the 'mercenaries, tribal levies, and militia units' arguing that the military apparatus on the whole was 'more like a mob than an army' and that the Ottoman state simply did not have the resources to wage an offensive war against Russia.¹⁷ Needless to say, the Ottoman negotiator of the Treaty may have been just as if not more influenced by the Enlightenment than the Russians. Resmi would have seen an imperative in bringing the Enlightenment to his country where, unlike in Russia, the Enlightenment seemed to have no hope: the Ottoman government was controlled by a pro-war faction at court and declared war on Russia in 1787, resulting in the humiliating Treaty of Iasi which forced the Porte to recognize Catherine's 1783 annexation of Crimea.¹⁸ If any Ottoman diplomat at the time would have appreciated the Enlightenment influences contained in the rhetoric of the Treaty, it would have been Resmi. By looking at Resmi's career and political positions, it is clear that the assessment of the Treaty as tinged with Enlightenment rhetoric makes sense in both the context of the Russian and Ottoman delegations. Had the treaty been negotiated by a more traditional Ottoman bureaucrat like Muhsinzade, it might be much more reasonable to doubt that Enlightenment rhetoric may have slipped into the Treaty's language. That being said, the construction of the Tatar nation and the presentation of Catherine as a liberator was intended to bolster her image anyways, so it should not be assumed that Resmi was the driving force behind the implementation of rhetoric that portrayed the enemies of his state in an extremely positive light.

By all accounts, the Tatar nation constructed in the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca was a fantasy. Catherine's annexation of Crimea not even a decade after the treaty was signed has been generally seen as an indication that her promises of a state 'entirely independent of every foreign power' governed by a sovereign independent khan 'elected and raised to the throne by all the Tartar peoples' were nothing more than diplomatic smoke and mirrors intended to facilitate her true goal, complete political domination of Crimea. That being said, the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca should still be noted for its containing a token of Enlightenment thought, although that token, which related almost exclusively to the Tatar nation, was probably implemented for the purpose of increasing Catherine's political and diplomatic standing. By constructing an idealized Enlightenment-influenced Tartar nation based on principles of republicanism and natural rights, Catherine's diplomats could portray their monarch as a liberator, a technique that can be viewed within the context of an inter-European contest for diplomatic recognition and political influence in the Ottoman Porte. Ultimately, the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca serves to demonstrate how analyzing the complexities of the language of diplomacy can sometimes reveal, or at least shed more light on, the diplomatic and political programs of the parties involved in the processes of peacemaking.

17 Ibid., p. 118.

18 Figes, Orlando. *The Crimean War: A History*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011, 16-17.

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