

## RIVER ON THE CROSSROADS: HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF KILIA FOR THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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### ÖZET

Bu çalışmada Tuna nehrinin Karadeniz'e dökülen kollarından Kili (Kilia)'nin tarihsel coğrafyası ve Osmanlı Devleti için taşıdığı önem ortaya konulmaya çalışılacaktır. Kili'nin, Tuna nehrinin diğer kollarından olan Sünne (Sulina) ve Hızır İlyas (St. George)'a göre debisinin düşük olması, üzerinde yapılan seyr-i sefaini sürekli olarak olumsuz etkilemiştir. II. Bayezid döneminde aynı adla anılan şehrin de dâhil olduğu havzanın Osmanlı idaresine girdiğini görmekteyiz. Bu yeni dönemle birlikte uygulanan yeni iskân politikası ve ticaretin geliştirilmesi amacıyla çıkarılan kanunnâmeler (*Kili Kalesi Bâc ve Gümrük Kanunnâmesi*, *Yasaknâme-i Baluklağ-u-yı Kili*, *Kanun-ı Dekâkîn Der Dâhil-ı Kili*) buranın coğrafi olumsuzluğuna rağmen pazar ve transit ticaretinin kısa sürede gelişmesine sebep olmuştur. Kili'nin Osmanlı Devleti için taşıdığı ticarî ve siyasî önemi, elinden çıktığı 1878 Berlin Antlaşması esnasında dahi Erkân-ı Harbiye-i Bahriye Dairesi tarafından haritasının yapılması çabalarından anlamak mümkündür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kili, Sünne, Hızır İlyas, Tuna Nehri, Karadeniz.

The Danube River holds the maximal output of water and it is the second longest river [Volga is the longest one] in Europe. The basin of the Danube River is about 300.000 miles. It flows into the Black Sea after traversing 1750 miles. It is the only river which flows from the west to the

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east in Europe. The north of the Danube is surrounded by the Schwarzwald Mountains, some unimportant parts of the Alps, the Bohemia Mountains, and Carpathian Mountains. There are Alps and Crimean Mountains in the south. The Danube also represented power and sovereignty of kingdoms in the history. Kilia, which is known as Chilia in Romania, is a branch of the Danube River, and it is named after the two towns in Romania located on the sides of the river<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. Kilia: Branch of the Danube

The Danube has three major branches, Kilia, Sulina and St. George and they all pour their water into the Black Sea. The branches of the Danube are major trade-arteries of the region<sup>2</sup>. The depth of the branches of the Danube is at most 240 inches<sup>3</sup>. When the seasonal change of the output is not considered, the average depth of this region is around 165 inches. The depth of the Sulina is more than St. George, and the depth of the St. George is more than Kilia. Sulina's depth rises into 165 inches, St. George's depth into 135 inches, and Kilia's depth into 112.5 inches. They are often polluted with the garbage thrown from the trading vessels and shipwrecks. In addition, wind and alluvial soil causes blockage in the rivers. However, the speed of the current clears all the hurdles in the rivers and provides trading vessels with a safe reach to the harbour in Kilia, Sulina and St. George.

### 2. Historical Importance of Kilia

The Danube and Kilia were subject to invasions and pillaging by different tribes and kingdoms in the past. The Kilia was controlled by the Greek kings, Iskits, Huns, Avars, Pechenegs, Hungarians, Kumans, Oghuzs, Slavs, Venices, and Genoese. The history of Kilia Vechi dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The city, also known as Kilia, was *the* trade center during the Byzantium period. The city was also controlled by Genoese for short time after the Byzantium Empire<sup>4</sup>. The city was on the crossroads of the Moldavian trade artery, which adds to the weight of the town. Aydınoğlu Umur Bey came to Kilia between 1339 and 1341. He defeated the Moldavian army but could not stand the Genoese. The Ottoman army also

<sup>1</sup> Ahmet Rıfat, *Lugat-ı Tarihiye ve Coğrafiye*, Vols: 5-6-7, Ankara 2004, p.115.

<sup>2</sup> *Karadeniz Kalagözü*, This guidance is published by the Ministry of Sea, and is translated into Turkish by Mehmet Hikmet, Bahriye Matbaası, 1314, p.91.

<sup>3</sup> 15 inches equals to 1 foot (measurement) 1 Ottoman foot equals to 1243 English foot. Süleyman Nutki, *Kamus-i Bahri*, Bahriye Matbaası, İstanbul 1917, p.306 .

<sup>4</sup> The name of the Kilia refers to the mythological character Akilleos. The island is considered to be the birth place of Akilleos. Minas Bijişkyan, *Karadeniz Kıyıları Tarih ve Coğrafyası (1817-1819)*, Trans. Hrand D. Andreasyon, İstanbul University Faculty of Literature Publications, İstanbul, 1969, p.104.

threatened the city several times. The Dobrogea Dynasty of Ivanko, to prevent the Ottomans, gave privilege to Genoese to establish church, embassy and trade centres. Control of the city was taken over by Marcia the Elder, ruler of Walachia. The city attached itself to the Moldavian dynasty before the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century. Poland and Hungarian kings made a secret pact in 1412 [Lublin Pact] to share the lands of Moldavian Dynasty. According to the pact, the western parts of the city, and Kilia, would belong to Hungary, and the eastern parts to Poland. Just before the application of the terms in the pact, the Ottoman Emperor, Mehmet I marched to Dobrogea and claimed Kilia and Akkerman castles<sup>5</sup>. The Poland king refused his claim after which Fatih Sultan Mehmet conquered Moldavia in 1476 but the khan of Moldavia, Stephan, destroyed all the food supplies to force the Ottoman army to return. In spite of the lack of food supply, the Ottoman army defeated Stephan's army. However, due to plague and Hungarians' war campaign, the Ottoman army returned to İstanbul<sup>6</sup>. 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries' historical and war chronicles refer to the Ottoman policy in the region.

Many of the historians think that the Ottoman could not achieve a complete victory over the Moldavian until Bayezid II had a complete victory over Moldavian dynasty at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. The Ottoman Sultan took the control of the Moldavian trade artery which connects the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea after the fall of Moldavia. The castles of Kilia and Akkerman were also captured. The Ottoman Army was in war against Persia, Egypt and Hungary, therefore did not force the Moldavians to pay the taxes<sup>8</sup>. The information about the conquest of Kilia by Bayezid II exists in the Roman sources as follows:

Sultan Bayezid invaded our country with a big army. He conquered Kilia and Akkerman. However, he got these castles with the help of Walachia's Voyvoda, Vladul Vodı Kılagirul. The Turks took the Kilia castle on 14<sup>th</sup> July and the Akkerman castle on 5<sup>th</sup> August. Voyvoda Stephan did not want to fight against the army of Sultan in an open area. However; he would rather deal a blow in narrow places. Maybe, the Turks would also occupy the other castles of this region but they heard that the Polishes came to help Stephan and then they thought to move backward. By the way, the king of Pole gathered soldiers from Lithuania and Russia. He arrived at Kolomea with 20.000 soldiers. Stephan also went to Kolomea. He met the king of Pole there and talked. He gave a lavish meal in honor of the King

<sup>5</sup> Mihai Maxim, "Kilia", *İA*, Diyanet Vakfı Public., Vol: 26, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol: II, TTK Publications, pp. 79-80.

<sup>7</sup> Viorel Panaite, "Osmanlı Hakimiyetinin Tuna Nehrinin Kuzeyinde Yayılışı: XIV ve XI Yüzyıllarda Eflak ve Boğdan", *Turkler*, Vol: 9, Yeni Türkiye Publications, Ankara 2002, p.212.

<sup>8</sup> Uzunçarşılı, p.342.

Voyvoda Stephan. He gave 3.000 soldiers to help him. Stephan beat the Turkish Army with the help of the foreign soldiers. He removed his enemies from the country. However, he was not able to get back the castles of Kilia and Akkerman. Since the Turks strengthened the castles with soldiers and weapons. They had enough food supply in the castles which are controlled by Turks<sup>9</sup>. Hammer refers to the conquest of the castle as follows:

*The first day of May 1484, Bayezid was ready to start a war campaign against Moldavia. He arrived to Adrianople the same year. The food supply of the Ottoman army is sent through the Danube from the Black Sea. While the army was passing through Isakcha on 24<sup>th</sup> June, Walachia's Voyvoda joined the Ottoman army with a force consisting of 20.000 people and paid tax. The castle of Kilia was conquered on Wednesday on 15<sup>th</sup> of July after besieged from the land and sea on 6<sup>th</sup> July.<sup>10</sup>*

Bayezid II wanted to control Kilia for the following reasons:

a. Economic Reasons: Geopolitical significance of the town, being on the trading arteries, made it crucial for the Ottomans to take the control of the Kilia and Akkerman castles and the city. Mehmed II prepared the conquest of the city for his son by conquering Trebizond, Kefe and Crimea in 1475. Although he marched to Kilia and Akkerman, he could not conquer.

b. Geopolitical Reasons: Control of Akkerman and Kilia would provide an opportunity to make the Black Sea a Turkish territory. Control of the city could secure the Crimean border of the Empire and would make the conquest of Hungary and Poland accessible. In addition, the Ottoman could access the Danube and prevent piracy against the Ottoman merchants.

c. The Policy of Stephan: Stephan waged wars against the Ottoman army to save the Walachia which made it necessary for Bayezid II to conquer and prevent the plunders of Stephan.

d. Taxation: Stephen's refusal to pay tax to the Ottoman Empire was another reason for the war campaign.<sup>11</sup>

The Ottoman Empire took the control of Kilia at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman order changed the face of the city. After the Byzantium, the city first time became a safe commercial town. The Ottomans also contributed to the development of trade in the city and made it a significant trade centres. Evliya Çelebi visited Kilia in 1657. He writes his observation as follows:

<sup>9</sup> Mehmet Ali Ekrem, *Romen Tarihi ve Eserlerinde Türk Tarihi I Kronikler*, TTK Publ, Ankara 1993, pp. 8-9; P.P.Panaiteescu, *Letopisetul Tarii Moldovei*, Bükreş 1958, pp.106-107.

<sup>10</sup> Hammer, *Büyük Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol:2, Emir Publications, p.323.

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Köroğlu, *483 No'lu Tapu Tahrir Defterine Göre Kili Kazası*, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2004, p.20.

*The land-border of the castle is 2000 feet, and the sea-frontier is 1000 feet. The castle is totally 3000 feet. The inner-castle is covered by two-folds and the outer castle is covered by three-fold walls. It has one big main entrance and 170 towers. The castle is protected by a deep-longer ditch. The city was conquered on Friday, for this reason the flags and the sounds of cannons are run up on Fridays. There are 500 shops inside of the main castle; these shops belong to the Walachia's, Moldavians, and Russians. All the gardens are full of grapes. Kilia's sausages, honey, wheat and fish are famous<sup>12</sup>.*

Minas Bıjıskyan, the priest of Trabizond, travelled around the coasts of southern and northern Black Sea. He went by the Kilia Castle and visited the town. He writes about the town as follows:

*The Kilia River, the northern extension of the Danube, has a harbour where trading vessels reach safely. The castle of Kilia is closer to the coast. There are few landing piers; one is made by the blacksmiths of iron rings to anchor the vessels<sup>13</sup>.*

The Ottoman did not only change the face but also population of the town. The local governor of the town, with respect to the immigration policy of the Empire, located the Anatolian immigrants in the town. Although native people are permitted to stay in the town, a lot of people migrated to İstanbul. According to the historical sources dated 1569, the population of the Muslims was 2672; 1710 of them lived in the inner castle, and 962 of them lived in the outer castle. The non-Muslim population was consisted of Orthodox Gagavuz, Greeks, Walachia's, and Jews. Many of the Muslims here were the Anatolian Turkoman who were located in the city after the conquest and remained there in time. Non-Muslim population declined compared to the situation before the conquest<sup>14</sup>. The Ottoman authority decided to evacuate the town, and applied a special immigration policy to populate the town with Turks. But some of the local population stayed in the city. Bayezid II granted security and safety to local population and promised not to force people to leave the city. In spite of this, İstanbul changed the fate of the local people in Akkerman. Nearly 500 family were sent to exile and located in Silivri Kapı district of İstanbul. Some local people of the castle were made slave. The slaves were presented to the

<sup>12</sup> *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, 5th Book, Yapı Kredi Publications, İstanbul 2001, pp. 114-115.

<sup>13</sup> Minas Bıjıskyan, *Karadeniz Kıyıları Tarih ve Coğrafyası (1817-1819)*, Trans. Hrand D. Andreasyan, İstanbul University Faculty of Literature Publications, İstanbul 1969, p.104.

<sup>14</sup> Köroğlu, pp. 43-47. Information see: Feridun Emecen, "Karadeniz'in Kuzey-Batı Kesimi ile İlgili Osmanlı Tahrirleri ve Özellikleri", *Ata Dergisi*, Nu: 6, Konya, 1997.

Crimean Khanate and given to the Janissary corps. The rest of the population decided to migrate to Moldavia<sup>15</sup>.

Kilia and Akkerman became part of the Rumelia Principality [Beylerbeyliği]. From the beginnings of 17<sup>th</sup> century, Russia sometimes treated Kilia. The Ottoman Empire used Kilia, like the other quays in the region, for military transport in wars against Russia. Although the region was controlled by Russian army in 1770, it was given to the Ottomans with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774). It was invaded again in 1806. The borders between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was negotiated in 1812 and the Pact of Bukreş defined the border. The Paris Pact (1856) returned certain parts of the region to Moldavia on condition for being part of the Ottoman principality. The agreement also returned certain part of the land near the Danube to the Ottoman Empire. At the end of Ottoman-Russian wars held of 1877 and 1878, Rumania became independent<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. Kilia as a Trade Centre

Kilia stands between the Danube River and Transylvania and bridges the Black Sea and the Middle-East Europe. The city was a cause of conflict between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In order to secure the borders from Walachia's invasion the Ottomans took the control of the region and re-distributed the lands between landlords. Local people were not content with the new order and occasionally rebelled against the new land lords. The Ottoman authority competently dealt with the rebellions and re-constructed the order and peace in the region. The Ottomans extended the trade arteries from Kilia-Akkerman to Lowlands of the Danube River, which increased the demands of İstanbul for stock-breeding. The major reasons for this demand depended upon cheap sea transportation, and the fertile lands. The interest of the central government in the region increased the exchange of food supply, supply of horses, sheep, and cattle<sup>17</sup>. İnciciyan also remarks that Kilia became a significant trade artery through which trading vessels transported goods such as wheat, candles, and cattle leather<sup>18</sup>. The export of these goods sometimes caused problems in customs taxes, and these problems were solved by the Ottoman policy.

Bayezid II signed three important acts in order to increase the enterprise for trade. These acts are, respectively, "The Act of Customs in Kilia Castle, the Prohibition Act of Fishing in Kilia, and the Act of the Kilia Shops". According to the first Act, the custom rules, and the goods arrived

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<sup>15</sup> Köroğlu, pp. 36-37.

<sup>16</sup> Maxim, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp.217-218.

<sup>18</sup> Bjikşyan, opcit.

to, and left from the castle were to be recorded. The most important export goods were respectively the wine, fabric, wheat, flour, sheep, fish, caviar, grape, cattle, and pork<sup>19</sup>. The ships rotating from İstanbul carried Aegean goods such as dried grapes, figs, nuts, walnuts, rice, and cotton. On the way to return, these ships were loaded by the goods such as pickles of Mersin and Morina fish. These goods were exported from Kilia to İstanbul and Italy<sup>20</sup>. The Prohibition Act of Fishing in Kilia was legitimized in order to establish new rulers for fishing. The fishermen became wealthy in fish trade and regularly paid their tax to the central government<sup>21</sup>. Non-Muslim merchant also dealt with wine-export. All of the merchants had to pay tax to the central government in order to benefit from the trade in the region, which increased the income of the Empire. On condition for the payment of the tax the Ottomans permitted Venice to carry wines to Kilia in 16<sup>th</sup> century. The trading vessels, which transported wine from Vidin, Silistra, Varna, and Missouri had to pass through the Ottoman harbours to reach Kilia. The Monemvasia wine, the most popular drink of Samsun and Sinop, was also exported from Kilia<sup>22</sup>. İstanbul's yearly needs for the wheat were also provided by this region<sup>23</sup>. The provision of grain was loaded 7000 Keyli-İstanbuli from the harbours such as Bergos, Varna, Balçık, Kavarna, Mankalya, Köstence, Karaharman, Beştepe, Tulçı, İsakçı, Maçın, Tayaköyü, İbrahim, Kalas, Tomar-abad, Kartal, İsmail Geçidi, Kilia, Akkerman, Acıdere, Balyan and Özi to be carried to İstanbul<sup>24</sup>. The grain was ordered to the Hırsova, Kilia, Brayıl and Tekfurgölü Cadis. However Tatars' plunders,<sup>25</sup> ineffective rule of the local governor caused a decline in the tax and badly influenced the trade. In 1736 local people of the Kilia complained about the local authority. The central government appointed the Cadis of Üsküdar to Kilia to contend the local people<sup>26</sup>.

The piracy was another major problem that the central government authority had to deal with. The Ottoman merchants were often attacked by pirates near Kilia. In order to prevent the attacks by the pirates, the Ottoman government commanded the Khan of Silistra to arm the vessels in Kalas

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnameleri ve Hukuki Tahlilleri*, Vol: II, İstanbul 1990, pp. 433-434.

<sup>20</sup> İnalçık, p.350.

<sup>21</sup> Akgündüz, p.437.

<sup>22</sup> İnalçık, pp. 350-351.

<sup>23</sup> On the grain supply in the Ottoman Empire in general see Lütfi Güçer, *XVI-XVIII. Asırlarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Hububattan Alınan Vergiler*, Sermet Matbaası, İstanbul 1964.

<sup>24</sup> Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umur-ı Belediye*, Vol: II, İstanbul 1995, p.748; Keyli-İstanbuli is an Ottoman measurement which equals to 25, 656 kilograms.

<sup>25</sup> *3 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (966-968/1558-1560)*, Osmanlı Arşivi Public., Ankara 1993, p.576.

<sup>26</sup> *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Atik Şikayet Defteri. (Sene 1148/24 Mart- 2 Nisan 1736)*.

harbour<sup>27</sup>. There were also some plunders on the way to the Kilia- İstanbul due to the shipwrecks. The Ottoman Empire prepared acts to protect the rights of the merchants who had shipwrecks. For example, one of the historical sources sent to the Ottoman deputy in Şile, dated 1733 identified the condition of the shipwreck on the way from Istanbul to Kilia. The central government covered all the losses of the merchants<sup>28</sup>. In one case, the ship, which left from Kilia, had an accident in Yeniköy, and the goods such as grain, oil, sausages, leather, wax, wood, honey, and half of barley dropped to the sea. The rest of the goods were plundered by the folk whose names were identified. The Ottoman Empire compensated the loss of the merchant<sup>29</sup>. Bursa was the centre of silk and cotton fabrics of the Ottoman and Europe during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Kilia was on the crossroad of the cotton-export. The fabrics sent from Bursa first reached Kilia. The central authority wrote a letter to Kadis of Kilia in October in 1710 and allowed the fabric of Bursa to be used by Christian soldiers<sup>30</sup>. Sometimes the merchants competed with one another or brought cases. The impact sent to the Kilia Kadis in 1717 reflects one of the cases between the two merchants. According to this case, one of the comrades sells the goods and saves the money and hides himself in Kilia. The other comrade complains about him, and the Ottoman Empire orders his army to find the criminal<sup>31</sup>.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a struggle between Russia and the Ottoman Empire to hold the region. The struggle caused a serious political conflict between the two powers. The central government forced the local authority to make trade difficult for Russian merchants. This condition continued until the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774). The Treaty made Russia more active and free in the Black Sea. The Russian merchant loaded their vessels from the Mediterranean harbours and Aegean Islands. They transported the goods through the Black Sea to Russia. They had to pass through Azev to Taganrog harbour. The merchants could also sail through Kılburun and Charkaski to reach Russia. Nuts, vinegar, wine, coffee, cotton, cotton thread, cloth, young tree and some possessions were all transported to Russia. The Russian merchant had to use the Ottoman sea and land to take caviar, meat, wheat, barley, fish, tobacco, beeswax, iron, piece of majolica, rope and meat<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> 5 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri, (973/1565-1566), Osmanlı Arşivi Public, Ankara 1994, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> BOA, *Atik Şikayet Defteri*, (Sene 1146/8- 17 Aralık 1733).

<sup>29</sup> Ahmet Kala, *İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri*, İstanbul 1997, pp.88-89.

<sup>30</sup> BOA, *Atik Şikayet Defteri*, (Sene 1122/15-23 Ekim 1710).

<sup>31</sup> BOA *Atik Şikayet Defteri*, (Sene 1130/5-14 Aralık 1717).

<sup>32</sup> İdris Bostan, Rusya'nın Karadeniz'de Ticarete Başlaması ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu (1700-1787), *Bellekten*, Vol: LIX, Nu:225, TTK Publications, Ankara 1995, pp.360-362.

#### **4. Last Map of the Ottoman Empire**

The Ottoman Empire made the trade possible with a new map of the Kilia region. The old maps were not sufficient for the growing population of the Ottoman merchants. Seraglio ordered the board of the administration of the admiralty to draw a new map of the region. The new map would cover the coasts of the Black Sea and rivers which are used as major trade arteries. The central government aimed to provide merchant with safe sea and river navigations in the region. The new map was made soon. Major and minor streams, rivers and their branches were identified in the map. In particular, the Danube river and the Kilia were depicted in details in the new map. Ottoman Russian war between 1877 and 1878 did not interrupt the military academy who went on working the new map.

#### **Conclusion**

Kilia, a branch in the Danube, has been a significant crossroads for the Ottoman merchants. It was a bridge between the Middle-east Europe and the Black Sea. After the conquest of the Ottoman Empire, Kilia became a popular trade centre. Bayezid II signed certain acts to develop the trade which worked well. However, Kilia could not become as popular as the Sulina and St George. The output of the water of Kilia was lower than that of the Sulina and St George. The alluvial and shipwrecks many times blocaged the river and made the trade impossible. Not only the shallow water level, but also the plunders of the pirates badly influenced the trade of Kilia. Some of the goods, like grains, were wasted by the local governor as well. Due to the weather conditions, and shipwrecks, goods of the trading vessels were plundered. But, Kilia has kept its significance as a crossroads for a long time.

#### **ABSTRACT**

In this study we will try to deal with the importance of the historiographical geography of Kilia for the Ottoman Empire. The water level of the Kilia River had negative effect on the sailing activities. Bayezid II annexed the city of Kilia and its region to the Ottoman territory. The Ottoman administration made some regulations and increased the volume of trade in the region. Kilia carried its political and economical importance for the Ottoman Empire until 1878 Berlin Agreement.

**Keywords:** Kilia, Sulina, St. George, Danube River, Black Sea.

