“TOGRAI SMITH”
AND THE BEGINNING OF PUBLICATION ABOUT TURKISH ANTIQUITIES

European trade with Turkey and through Turkey goes back hundreds of years. Indeed, the Italian states of Genoa, Venice, Florence and Pisa fostered mercantile connections even before Turkish control over the late Byzantine empire was complete. As other European nations began to broaden their commercial horizons and diplomatic interests, Constantinople and Smyrna became the hubs for networks of trade routes that fanned out further to the east, to Persia, China, India. The Sultanates had already forged the transport lines, had provided the supporting facilities (such as hans and caravanserai) and established trade connections throughout Turkey. These resources became the basis of European prosperity and the rediscovery of many of the sources of an intellectual and cultural tradition that had revived in the European period called “the Renaissance”. Frequently however, Turkish resources (in history, cartography, and culture) were left unacknowledged in European writings that began to be published in the wake of commercial advantages. European contact with Turkey in this period was as much about redefining this “foreign” land according to Europe’s intellectual interests as it was about cultivating trade advantages.

Smyrna (modern Izmir) had long held an attraction to European states. It was ideally placed on the western seaboard of Turkey, and from early Ottoman times had maintained
a secure line of communication with Constantinople. European nations recognised this connection quite early by appointing consular officials to both places. In England’s case, these officials were endorsed by Queen Elizabeth I.

Elizabeth the First who, in a letter to the Ottoman Sultan addressed him as “emperor”.

The first ambassador, William Harborne, was appointed in 1588. However, these ambassadors were also nominated and paid by a business enterprise, the Levant Company (which was granted a royal charter in 1581). Ambassadors came with a coterie of assistants. Servants and bureaucrats all held, along with the ambassadors, the “special protection” status that the Sultan afforded them. Included within these privileged foreigners were the “chaplains”. These were well-educated men, trained in classical Greek and Roman literature, christianity and the place that religion had in the life of the nations from which they came. The Levant Company first appointed a chaplain to its staff in Constantinople in 1599 and in Smyrna in 1639.
These men sought an appointment as chaplain for different reasons. Some were attracted by the promise of adventure among a different people — the so-called “Orient” was already beginning to attract attention as much a result of exotic spices and textiles finding their way into English markets as from tales spread by sea travellers such as John Sanderson, Samuel Purchas and Richard Hakluyt. Other chaplains were attracted by more intellectual pursuits, eager for the opportunity to bring their training in classical literature and religious writings into engagement with the actual places mentioned in these texts. Their selection was dependent on their performance in a trial “sermon”, preached before the members of the company board, who either liked or didn’t like what they heard. Thomas Smith (1638-1710) was one such chaplain, who brought learning and, apparently, an acceptable sermon to the Levant Company in Constantinople.

Like many of the chaplains who tried to maintain the religious practices of the Europeans in Turkey, Thomas Smith’s appointment at Constantinople lasted only a short term (1668-1671). But his intellectual ability and thirst for historical enquiry happened to coincide with a developing emphasis of the Levant Company at the time. His travels in south-west Turkey were dependent on the arrangements that the ambassador, Sir Joseph Williamson, was able to make with the various Ottoman authorities. But Williamson obliged, obtaining the necessary documentation that explained the purpose of the journey, authorised the acquisition of horses and provided letters of introduction to the various Agas who controlled the regions they would visit.

Even though Smith is upheld as the first to write of the “Seven Churches”, he had a few models to follow, such as John Covell and John Luke. It seems that the Levant Company was already beginning to cultivate considerable good-will amongst Europeans by organizing regular tours, for as Smith adds “their practice and example have for the most part every year since in the Autumn been taken up and followed.” Autumn was the recommended season as Europeans found the unfolding heat of late spring and early summer oppressive.
At first Smith aimed the account of his travels at a narrow learned audience — by writing in Latin. But someone sensed a commercial advantage in bringing his work to a more popular readership and he was stirred to make his own translation from Latin into English. However, it was carefully noted in the preface to the new edition that Latin (the European language of learning) lay at the foundation of this new text, somehow bolstering its reliability and authority. Smith took the opportunity not only to supplement the material on the seven churches, but also to add a completely new section on Constantinople. Henceforth, Constantinople and the “Seven Churches of Asia” would frequently be seen together in European texts, as if one needed to be understood in terms of the other. The book in English was a “best-seller” in early publishing terms, going through a series of editions, even after his death.

Thomas Smith’s particular intellectual capacity lay in languages and history. He had already established this reputation in England before he travelled east. Given that “Smith” is such a common English name, the students and fellows at Magdalen College, Oxford university, nicknamed him “Tograi” or “Rabbi” Smith so he could be distinguished from all the other “Smiths” at the University. He made a perceptive analysis of Turkish and Arabic words in use at the time. He gathered considerable information on the state and practices of the Greek Church at Constantinople and, perhaps most significantly for the intellectual appreciation of Turkey in England, he made a sweeping tour of a section of territory from Smyrna to Ephesus through the Denizli region. The journal of his tour, with notes on the materials he collected, was subsequently organised into writing as “The Seven Churches of Asia”. So it was that existing roads, well-known to Turkish and Arab traders, began to be better known to Europeans wanting to explore the material remains of the “seven Churches”. These were the churches named by reference to cities of Asia in the last book of the Christian Bible: the Book of Revelation, also called the ‘Apocalypse’. Though Ephesus was named first in the list at the beginning of the book, the European base at Smyrna meant that it assumed the privilege of the first place of the tour. From Ephesus, the party of travellers set off for Pergamum, then Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. Last of all, as well as at furthest remove from the coast and its associated European ‘familiarity’, came Laodiceia.
Smith is somewhat guarded about what actually happened in this part of the tour, but he was disappointed that he could not spend more time at Hierapolis. Even though he was in a sizable company of three friends, “two stout and honest Janizaries (a Janissary was a guard and guide), two Armenian Christians, a Cook and three Grooms to look to our horses; in all 12 of us”, there arose “some great danger”, perhaps from robbers who constantly skirted the trade routes hungry for goods or money.
He mentions nearly having his throat cut at Bithynia’s Mount Olympus, and perhaps the cold sweat of fear grasped him again at news of an infamous brigand of the Denizli region, Inge Morad, even if 300 men were in pursuit of him and his band of outlaws. These experiences were enough to deter him from returning to Turkey. A number of church officials in England wanted him to revisit the east, this time in search of ancient manuscripts, but he declined, citing the dangers of the journey. In any case he had already brought back three ancient manuscripts, which he subsequently deposited in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

Even though Smith’s time at Hierapolis was limited, he was struck by the awesome majesty of the place, “one of the most glorious Cities not only of the East but of the World” he wrote of the brilliant white cliffs known to the local Turks as “Pambouk-Kulasi or the Cotton Tower”. The overwhelmed sentiment was repeated many times by later travelers. He managed to record four inscriptions clearly visible on the numerous ruins at the site. These have become prized not merely because of their recording nearly three hundred and fifty years ago but because these inscriptions have survived to greet recent visitors to the site. Two of them have become justly famous. One (IGR 4.874) speaks of Titus Flavius Zeuxis, a highly mobile merchant who claimed to have traveled from Hierapolis to Rome all of 72 times. Given the number of times shipwrecks are mentioned in the ancient world and attacks on roadways and in wayside inns, Zeuxis must have lead either a charmed life or a heavily-guarded one! A second inscription mentions a dyers’ association at Hierapolis, who clearly looked after one another’s interests at least in the event of their death, to ensure that they were given an honourable burial.
These inscriptions have justly been prized as indications that Hierapolis was far more than a tourist or health resort in the ancient world, though this is true as well. Hierapolis was, along with other cities in the Lycus Valley (such as Laodiceia and Colossae), keenly engaged both in textile production and marketing.

From Hierapolis, Smith eventually made his way to the town that had inherited the textile mantle, “Dingilsley” as he spelt the now more familiar Denizli. He thought it “a very large and handsome Turkish Town”. Amongst Europeans, Denizli became known as “the Damascas of Anatolia”, an allusion to its fertile and well-watered groves. For Smith, Denizli may well have been viewed in marked contrast in his mind to Chonos (Honaz). If Smith’s reaction to Honaz has any reliability to it, the town seems to have declined from its grandeur of the previous century when it housed Süleyman the Magnificent and his entourage for up to three days, on their way to a victory in the siege of Rhodes in 1522.
Suleyman I (sometimes called the Magnificent, sometimes the Lawgiver) who was responsible for more than doubling the area of the Ottoman empire

But perhaps Smith simply didn’t receive the welcome he expected — later incidents in his life (with fights with the authorities at Magdalen College, Oxford and only a month long stay in charge of a church near the university) show a man who, for all his academic brilliance, lacked a measure of amiability with his fellow human beings. He seemed happiest in his books. By contrast, in the same century as Smith, Honaz gains considerable positive treatment in the writings of the Turkish traveler, Evliya Çelebi.

The accolades bestowed on Smith as the first modern writer on south-west Turkey were accolades delivered by later European writers. They also readily repeated the accents that Smith provided in his work. For Smith, the evidence of classical antiquity was wedded with a christian connection; in one breath he combines “the love and respect I had to Antiquity, and to the memory of those Churches once so famous” (p. 207). Not only did the christian texts foster the claim that the churches were the legitimate successors to ancient sites, but the implicit contest with the realities of Turkish control were repeatedly described in terms detrimental to the Turkish government and the Moslem religion. Elizabeth I might officially address the Ottoman Sultan as “Caesar” implicitly recognising the Turkish succession to the Byzantine emperors. But this was political diplomacy that had little impact on European perspectives. The supposed failure of Turks to be responsible inheritors of these antiquities virtually legitimated the removal of
artefacts from the sites. Smith wrote unapologetically: “An incredible number of marbles still remain behind in those parts and others are continually dug up … and what might be purchased upon no very hard terms, if some excellent persons would be at the expense of enriching their country with the spoils of the East.” (Preface). He mentions one “marble” already having been removed to adorn the theatre at Oxford University in England.

So “Tograi Smith” opened up parts of south-west Turkey to European consciousness, beginning the rise of visits for scholarly, tourist and adventurous purposes. Over the next two hundred years, the lines of his description and interests would be repeated, establishing a standard way of looking at the country, its peoples and its ancient heritage. A European tradition of understanding the Lycus Valley had begun.

*Text by Alan Cadwallader; Hierapolis photograph by Julie Hooke*