International Memory of the World Register

Peace treaties (ahdnames) concluded from the mid-15th century to late-18th century between the Kingdom (or Republic) of Poland and the Ottoman Empire (Poland)

2012-27

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The Turkish section of the Royal Archives of Warsaw includes some 1,500 documents from a period of over 300 years. These documents testify to centuries of direct contacts by neighbours with differing traditions and religions, but also provide substantial source material for research on all types of contacts with the Ottoman Empire. The contents are exceptional for the history and culture of the late Middle Ages and early modernity. The peace treaties (ahdnames) between the two states are an example of mutual tolerance and universal values in international relations. A period of particular importance is the reign of Suleiman I (1st half of the 16th century) and his contemporaries, the last two Polish rulers from the Jagiellon dynasty, Sigismund I and Sigismund II Augustus. These rulers maintained lively contacts. The “eternal peace” they concluded in 1533 was a decisive step toward a modern foreign policy and lasted nearly a hundred years. The letters to the Polish king from Suleiman’s queen Roxelana and her daughter Mihrimah are a rarity of global rank. Also notable are the precise form, appearance and size (some over 4 m long) of the documents issued by the sultan’s chancellery, and the sultan’s decorative, painted seal (tughra).

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Central Archives of Historical Records

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

National archival resource, stored in the Central Archives of Historical Records in accordance with applicable law.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Hubert Wajs, PhD, Head of the Central Archives of Historical Records

2.4 Contact details

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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Royal Archives of Warsaw, Turkish section, 1455–1792
(Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie, dział Tureckie, 1455–1792)
1471 archival units
Documents illustrating diplomatic relations between the Kingdom (or Republic) of Poland and
the Ottoman Empire from the mid-15th century to the late-18th century, with particular attention to peace treaties (ahdnames) concluded between the two states.

3.2 Catalogue or registration details


3.4 History/provenance

The Turkish section belongs to the archival collection known as the Royal Archives of Warsaw (*Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie*), currently stored at the Central Archives of Historical Records (AGAD). Until the end of the 16th century, documents concerning Poland’s diplomatic relations with other countries were stored at the Royal Castle in Cracow. After the royal court was moved from Cracow to Warsaw in 1596, incoming documents from other states necessary for conducting foreign policy were kept at that location, thus creating a new archive referred to, based on the location of the new royal residence, as the Royal Archives of Warsaw, separate from the documentary archive of the earlier Republic, which continued to be maintained at Wawel Castle in Cracow, known as the Royal Archives of Cracow. Only the most important documents were sent to Cracow—primarily international treaties, includes those concluded with Turkey. These documents were brought to Warsaw in the early reign of King Stanisław August (in the 1760s) and incorporated into the Royal Archives (*Archiwum Koronne* (Polish) or *Archivum Regni* (Latin)) then being established. The Royal Archives of Warsaw were first described in those years by the royal registrar at that time, Ignacy Ludwik Nowicki, and the Turkish documents were compiled by Antoni Crutta, who was then the translator of Oriental languages at the Polish royal court. Because the great majority of the documents from Turkey were written in the Turkish (Ottoman) language, using the Arabic alphabet, it was necessary to prepare immediate Polish translations. Historical translations from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries have been retained for some of the documents. Some of them are accompanied by Latin or French translations. After the fall of the Republic of Poland (in 1795), the Russians moved them from Warsaw, first to St. Petersburg and then to Moscow, and placed them together with other archival materials concerning relations between the Republic of Poland and other states in the Central Archive of the Russian Foreign Ministry. A fond was created for these archival materials, named the Archive of the Kingdom of Poland (*Archiv Carstva Pol'skogo*). This fond was restored to Poland pursuant to the Treaty of Riga in 1923 and located in Warsaw, at the Central Archives of Historical Records. There, archivists separated the Royal Archives of Warsaw from the Archive of the Kingdom of Poland, creating a separate fond which exists to the present day.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
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<td>00-263 Warsaw</td>
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4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

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4.3 Legal status

The entire archival holdings of the Polish State Archives are owned by the State Treasury. Administrative responsibility for the protection of state archival resources (under the Act on State Archival Resources and Archives dated 14 July 1983) is under the general responsibility of the Head Office of the State Archives and the current holder, the Central Archives of Historical Records.

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

In the Reading Room of the Central Archives of Historical Records, which is open to the public Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Wednesdays until 6:00 pm.

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:
The archival materials are microfilmed, and thus the originals are not ordinarily accessible.

Short descriptions and some scans (in part only of the tughras) are on the internet (http://www.agad.gov.pl/AKW_Turcja/AKW_TURECKIE.html) at the website dedicated to Polish-Ottoman relations.

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

Not under copyright.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.
The peace treaties concluded between Poland and Turkey, which are stored in the Royal Archives of Warsaw and are the subject of this application, are originals that were created in the Sultan’s chancellery. This applies as well to other Turkish documents, including letters by the Imperial Princess Consort Roxelana. Most of these documents are accompanied by Polish translations prepared in the 16th–18th centuries. About 15% are preserved in the form of originals, but the majority in the form of copies prepared by A. Crutta in about 1789.

The authenticity of the documents discussed here is indisputable.
5.2 World significance

The contents of the Turkish section of the Royal Archives of Warsaw, thanks to the great number and variety of documents from a period of over 300 years, are of an exceptional nature for history and culture from the era of the late Middle Ages and early modernity. Illustrating the peaceful coexistence of states with differing religions as well as differing political, social and economic systems, and competing with one another (except for a period of wars waged in the last quarter of the 17th century), these are documents that reveal an exceptional chapter in the political history of Europe and the centre of the world at that time, and are exceptionally valuable for the history of our continent.

Apart from this, considering the position of women in the Islamic world, an exceptional and notable rarity is the portion of the collection that includes letters from the Imperial Princess Consort Roxelana to King Sigismund Augustus, as well as letters from Mihrimah, daughter of Suleiman, from 1548–1549.

The documents contained in this section display how important and positive a role was exerted by policy and diplomacy on the history of the modern period. The skilful policy toward Turkey of successive Polish kings, from Casimir IV Jagiellon through Michał Korybut, succeeded in effectively avoiding armed conflict. In Cracow, logical conclusions were drawn from the catastrophe of the Kingdom of Hungary observed in 1526. The disproportion in forces between Turkey and Poland (even though the Kingdom of Poland had achieved during this period its optimal area and was one of the most important European states) made it possible to predict the result of a future war. It could not be permitted. On the other hand, diplomatic initiatives could not give the impression of infringing on the sovereignty of either of the parties. Polish and Turkey diplomacy rose splendidly to the difficult challenge of maintaining this balance. The first “eternal peace” of 1533, which was to last to the end of the lifetime of either of the kings (Sigmismond or Suleiman), was of crucial importance. Essentially it was a departure from the previous ideology and conception of concluding brief truces, in favour of a permanent peace between an Islamic state on one side and a Christian state on the other. The letters of condolence sent by the sultan and his wife Hürrem to Sigmismond Augustus after the death of his father are an excellent testimony to these friendly relations. Over the course of nearly 150 years there was only one Polish-Turkish war, which ended after the First Battle of Chocim (1621). Peace was successfully maintained not only under the rule of the Ottoman Empire by Sultan Suleiman I, who was generally favourably disposed toward Poland, but also under his successors.

It was not until the last quarter of the 17th century that a dramatically different situation arose, when military actions were conducted between Poland and Turkey nearly nonstop. The Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), which ended these struggles, was supposed to restore the former peaceful relations, but under the modified distribution of power in Central and Eastern Europe, with the growing strength of Russia also threatening Turkey, this had a different meaning. These documents are a testimony to the highly modern approach of the Polish and Turkey ruling elite, who understood, despite their religious differences, the importance of a lasting peace between the states. The “eternal peace” of 1533 had such a pioneering significance. Within Europe, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), over a century later, is regarded as the first international treaty overcoming religious disputes. The documents meet the criteria of Time, Place, People, Subject and theme, and Form and style.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

Is the document evocative of its time (which may have been a time of crisis, or significant social or cultural change? Does it represent a new discovery? Or is it the “first of its kind”?

The archival content of the Turkish section of the Royal Archives of Warsaw illustrates very well the transformations underway in Turkey’s relations with Christian states, beginning with the Latin documents issued from the chancellery of Sultan Bayezid II, through Italian documents
created at the chancellery of Sultan Selim I, to Turkish documents from the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, when the Ottoman Empire reached the peak of its power and it appeared that it need not pay any account to its Christian neighbours. The number of peace treaties and other documents of lower rank clearly demonstrate the exceptional nature of the relations between the Polish Republic and Turkey, during times of peace as well as war. It is an exceptional example of mutual tolerance and respect for universal values in international relations.

2. Place

The documents in question reflect the past, depict a reality that is fundamentally different from today’s, and address various forms and aspects of relations between two of the main political powers in the eastern part of Europe at that time: the Polish Republic and the Ottoman Empire. Through these materials, we perceive the formation of mutual relations (from the 15th century) and their evolution (through the end of the 17th century), in an historical context, but also the interpenetration of cultures, influences and customs. The documents from the sultans’ Latin and Italian chancelleries are witness to this. The manner in which far-away Turkey affected Polish culture in the 17th century is apparent from the contemporary clothing and arms of Polish nobles. Later, in the 18th century, these states lost their position as powers, which led first to the fall of the Polish Republic and the elimination of the Polish state as a result of the partitions, which Turkey never recognized. During the partitions (in the 19th century), Turkey was often perceived as a country supporting the Polish cause. Polish insurgent governments during the two national uprisings had missions there. This fond is thus a significant testimony, displaying how two political organisms, so different and often hostile and competing, and two nations, could coexist and have a mutual influence on each other, and in conditions of national threat could support their strivings. These facts had an impact on the development of peaceful ideals in the world.

3 People

Among the rulers of the Ottoman Empire maintaining diplomatic relations with Poland, the one who stands out is Suleiman I—not without reason known as the “Magnificent” and the “Lawgiver.” Born in 1494, the son of Sultan Selim I, he acceded to the throne in 1520. His long reign, lasting until his death in 1566, was characterized by the greatest territorial expansion of the Turkish state in its history, as a result of victorious wars with the Knights of Malta, the Hungarians, the Holy Roman Empire, and Persia. Suleiman I introduced fundamental reforms of the law, administration, the military and finance. During his reign the Ottoman Empire became the greatest military power in Europe. The sultan was also distinguished in the field of literature and architecture. He had a remarkable relationship with one of his wives, the princess Hürrrem, popularly known as Roxelana. During his entire reign, Suleiman maintained unusually lively contacts with the Polish kings Sigismund I the Old and his son, Sigismund Augustus. The “eternal” peace concluded between Sigismund I and Suleiman in 1533 was a decisive step in the direction of a modern foreign policy and lasted nearly a hundred years.

4 Subject and theme

When analyzing the treaty documents (ahdnames) and other accompanying archival materials over numerous generations, one can see that in one way or another, despite religious and cultural differences, and despite conflicts, there was a constant striving by the Ottoman Empire and the Polish Republic to arrange and regulate their mutual relations. It seems that from the point of view of Turkey, this may be understood as establishing lasting relations with Europe—at least along this front. It should be stressed that the Republic in the contemporary age was a very favourable partner, in light of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious population (the tolerance documented by the Warsaw Confederation of 1573—entered in the Memory of the World register—was addressed as well to followers of Islam). Even the first contacts by the Kingdom of Poland in the time of Władysław Jagiello and Sultan Mehmed I—described in the chronicles of Jan Długosz (15th century)—already display the mediating role of Polish diplomats. Another groundbreaking step, before its time, was the “eternal peace” concluded with Suleiman I. There
were also Polish hopes tied to Turkey during the time of the partitions (in the 19th century) (Józef Bem and Adam Mickiewicz). The current perception of Turkish matters by Polish diplomacy appears to follow from this experience over many centuries. This section of the Royal Archives of Warsaw, currently numbering almost 1,500 documents, is not only a testimony to centuries of direct relations by neighbours with differing religions and traditions, but also represents fairly complete source material for research by historians covering the issue of all types of contacts with the Ottoman Empire. These materials throw light on various aspects of their relations, from diplomatic and military to commercial and social. They demonstrate the close and frequent contacts of the political elites of the two states. Thanks to the works of Z. Abrahamowicz (a detailed inventory of 381 documents, up to 1672, published in 1959), and now Prof. D. Kołodziejczyk (source publication of 69 treaty documents with an English translation in 2000), it is easier for a broader range of researchers to learn about the contents of documents written in Turkish. The enclosed selective bibliography demonstrates how significant the scope of the impact of this section is, internationally as well.

5 Form and style

Documents, particular those marking special occasions, should take an appropriately careful form and manner of writing. Their appearance also stresses the rank of the issuer. Therefore, treaty documents (ahdnames) have an appropriately solemn form and appearance. Their arrangement is typical for the sultan’s chancellery and contains the required elements for documents of this type (invocation, notification, legalization—tughra—devotional formulas, disposition etc). The careful script divani is a calligraphic variant of Arabic writing used in the sultan’s chancellery from the times of Suleiman I for recording official documents. Some of them are over 4 m in length. A particularly decorative element of a sultan’s document was the tughra, which is why there are separate images of them in the internet presentation. A specialized clerk, the artist painted the tughra in gold, blue or red pigment at the beginning of the documents. In addition to the name of the ruler, the tughra also contained the name of his father and the title of khan, with the formula el-muzzafer-da’ima (always victorious). It should be stressed that the formula for providing the dates of the first two ahdnames from 1489 and 1494 used the Christian dating Anno Jesus! The Turkish documents described are thus an example, during the period in which they were created, of the refined culture of the Islamic world, at the highest level of style and form. The value of the form and style of the tughra, alongside numerous other Turkish documents from the Royal Archives of Warsaw, was recognized by the organizers of an exhibition devoted to Suleiman I in 1990 in Paris. This document was the greatest attraction of the exhibition.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The contents of the Turkish section of the Royal Archives of Warsaw, comprising almost 1,500 documents from a period of over 300 years, are exceptional in nature. A similar fond, Documenti turchi, from the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, contains about 750 documents from 1454–1813 (see http://www.archivi.beniculturali.it/serviziIII/pub/pas/strumenti/stru122.html). Documents connected with diplomatic relations with Turkey are found in the archives of countries which had contacts with Turkey. However, in the archives of Vienna, Paris, London and Moscow, not to mention for example Madrid or Stockholm, such documents are later and are not so numerous, because the diplomatic relations of these countries with Porta began much later. In larger complete collections, they are only in Venice and in Warsaw. The collection of treaty letters (ahdnames) at Poland’s Central Archives of Historical Records is the second-largest such collection in the world—after Venice (21 documents from 1479–1733). The treaties stored at the Central Archives of Historical Records are exceptional, as Poland from the beginning of modern
times often “renewed” its international peace treaty (awarded unilaterally by the sultan—ahdnname), while the ahdnames for Venice placed an emphasis on commercial relations and the welfare of merchants.

Meanwhile a rarity of world class is the letters of the sultan’s consort Hasseki Hürrem (Roxelana) to King Sigismund II Augustus from 1548–1549, as well as the letters of her daughter with Suleiman, Mihrimah, sent to Poland (AR II no. 69/15). They are unusually valuable, and moreover the earliest and most numerous.

The collection from the Central Archives of Historical Records deserves attention also because of the large number of documents and the diversity and styles of writing and languages (from the times of Bayezid II and the beginning of the era of Suleiman I, there are also documents written at the Latin and Italian chancellery).

6.2 Integrity

The Turkish section belongs to the fond of the Royal Archives of Warsaw. It contains original documents, created over a period of more than 300 years in the sultan’s chancellery, as well as documents from Poland’s royal chancellery concerning relations with Turkey that are linked chronologically and thematically (e.g. missions) or formally (translations). This fond survived the Second World War without loss.

This section of the Royal Archives of Warsaw, currently comprising almost 1,500 documents, has maintained its integrity despite numerous adverse events.