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The Polish Network of an Ottoman Pasha: Ilyash Kolchak Pasha, his Polish Secretary, and Connected History¹

**Polska sieć kontaktów osmańskiego paszy:
Iljasz Kołczak Pasza, jego polski sekretarz
i historia powiązana**

Abstract

This article explores the cross-border networks that emerged along the Ottoman–Polish border in the early eighteenth century through the case of Ilyash Kolchak Pasha and his Polish secretary, Piotr Pawłowski. Drawing on a unique corpus of Polish-language correspondence preserved in Russian and Ukrainian archives, it reconstructs how Hotin functioned not merely as a fortress but as a logistical, postal, and diplomatic hub. Kolchak – a Bosnian-born Ottoman border governor fluent in Polish – used his position and linguistic skills to cultivate a dense web of relationships with nobles, clergy, soldiers, diplomats, and merchants on both sides of the border. As his secretary, translator, and intermediary, Pawłowski operated his own smaller but vital network of nobles, Tatars, Armenians, Hungarians, and diplomats, enabling everyday exchanges of letters, goods, and

¹ This text is based on my dissertation. It is also a fruit of a long cooperation with Dariusz Kołodziejczyk and a goodbye to Kolchak Pasha and his archive.

intelligence. The article argues that this border was not a rigid civilizational line but a corridor of brokerage, social infrastructure, and mutual dependence. It challenges state-centric and Huntingtonian civilizational binaries by foregrounding intermediaries and their networks as constitutive forces in early modern borderlands. The Ottoman–Polish border emerges as a zone of structural entanglement, where imperial systems overlapped, and trans-imperial actors like Kolchak and Pawłowski shaped political, commercial, and cultural exchange.

Keywords: Ilyash Kolchak Pasha, Piotr Pawłowski, Ottoman–Polish border, cross-border networks, intermediaries.

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje sieci transgraniczne powstałe na pograniczu osmańsko–polskim w pierwszej połowie XVIII wieku, skupiając się na postaci Iljasza Kołczaka paszy oraz jego polskiego sekretarza Piotra Pawłowskiego. Na podstawie unikalnego zbioru korespondencji w języku polskim, zachowanej w archiwach rosyjskich i ukraińskich, rekonstruuje on funkcjonowanie Chocimia nie tylko jako twierdzy, lecz także jako węzła logistycznego, pocztowego i dyplomatycznego. Kołczak – bośniacki karierowicz i osmański pasza, biegły władający polszczyzną – zbudował rozległą sieć relacji z polską szlachtą, duchowieństwem, żołnierzami, dyplomatami i kupcami. Pawłowski, jego sekretarz i tłumacz, prowadził własną sieć kontaktów z Tatarami, Ormianami, Węgrami i dyplomatami, pośrednicząc w codziennym obiegu listów, towarów i informacji. Artykuł dowodzi, że granica osmańsko–polska nie była sztywną linią podziału cywilizacyjnego, lecz korytarzem pośrednictwa, infrastrukturą społeczną i przestrzenią współzależności. Przeciwstawia się państwozentrycznym i „huntingtonowskim” ujęciom historii, ukazując znaczenie pośredników i ich sieci kontaktów w kształtowaniu kontaktów politycznych, handlowych i kulturowych. Pogranicze osmańsko–polskie jawi się jako strefa strukturalnych powiązań, w której systemy imperialne nakładały się na siebie, a aktorzy tacy jak Kołczak i Pawłowski współtworzyli transimperialną rzeczywistość XVIII wieku.

Słowa klucz: Iljasz Kołczak Pasza, Piotr Pawłowski, granica osmańsko–polska, sieci transgraniczne, pośrednicy.

In April 1734, a curious episode unfolded on the southern border of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. A Catholic priest named Stanikowski penned a letter to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha, the Ottoman governor of the fortress town of Hotin, warning him of an impending Russian invasion. The priest, seemingly unconcerned by confessional divides, not only relayed military intelligence but also reminded Kolchak Pasha

of his earlier promise—made under “the wing of His Gracious protection”—to shelter him and members of his household.² It is a moment that sits uncomfortably with Samuel Huntington’s enduring and oft-critiqued thesis of the “Clash of Civilizations.” Huntington’s theory, premised on deep-rooted, immutable divides between civilizational blocks – Christian and Muslim, Western and non-Western – struggles to account for such instances of interreligious solidarity and political pragmatism. Yet, as this article will demonstrate, such entanglements were not exceptional but rather indicative of a broader pattern of cross-border networking, brokerage, and interdependence that characterized life along the well-connected Ottoman–Polish border in the early eighteenth century.

This article focuses on the cross-border network of Ilyash Kolchak Pasha and his Polish-language secretary, Piotr Pawłowski. Kolchak, a mercenary of Bosnian origin, had lived on the Ottoman–Polish border since the 1720s. In the early 1730s, he rose to become governor of Hotin, a fortified outpost and key node in the empire’s border management. Pawłowski was a Christian from the Commonwealth who served as Kolchak’s Polish secretary – a go-between who mediated diplomacy, negotiated relationships, and moved with fluency across cultural lines. Their partnership, forged in a zone of uncertainty and political ambiguity, tells us much about how borders were navigated and how survival often depended on those willing to bridge divides.³

Hotin itself, perched on the northern edge of the Ottoman world, was much more than a military fortress. Restored in the early eighteenth century, it had become a thriving outpost – part depot, part relay station, part diplomatic switchboard. As this article illustrates, Hotin served three overlapping roles. First, it acted as a courier hub, connecting nobles and ecclesiastical figures in the Commonwealth with Istanbul and the Crimea. If a letter needed to move quickly and securely from Lwów or Kamieniec Podolski to the imperial capital, it often passed through Hotin. Second, the town operated as an information node, where rumours, intelligence, and formal reports flowed in from Russia, Poland–Lithuania, and the Ottoman heartlands – colliding, confirming, or correcting one another. And third, Hotin functioned as a marketplace, drawing merchants and

2 Letter of Priest Stanikowski to Ilyash Kolchak of Hotin, Mielnica, 21 IV 1734, see: *Turecki pasza i szlachta: korespondencja osmańskiego gubernatora Chocimia Iliasa Kołczaka paszy ze szlachtą Rzeczypospolitej z lat 1730–1739*, eds. Mariusz Kaczka, Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (Narodowy Instytut Polskiego Dziedzictwa Kulturowego za Granicą Polonika, 2020), 339.

3 On Kolchak Pasha and his career, see: *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 83–96, 47–48 (on Pawłowski).

traders who came for Ottoman goods: food, textiles, horses. These roles – logistical, informational, commercial – are discernible in the correspondence networks Kolchak and Pawłowski cultivated.

As Lindsay O'Neill argues, “the eighteenth century was awash with letters.”⁴ In the British Atlantic, correspondence stitched together the empire. In early New England, as Kathrine Grandjean has shown, letters moved along routes cut through violence, fear, and uncertainty.⁵ On the Ottoman frontier, too, letters were the lifeblood of diplomacy and daily life. Historians of science have used them to study “how human communities make and remake knowledge.”⁶ Bruno Latour’s “actor-network theory,” with its call to “follow the actors themselves,” has reshaped how we think about circulation and connection – but rarely has that framework been applied to Ottoman studies.⁷ And yet, the world of Kolchak and Pawłowski was a brokered one, deeply layered with go-betweens: translators, letter-carriers, petitioners – those who lived between languages, and between loyalties.

Indeed, Kolchak and Pawłowski’s network approximates what social scientists call “a small-world network”: one in which dense local clusters are linked by long-range connections, producing surprisingly short paths between distant nodes.⁸ These were networks of practical utility, but also ones of fragile trust, navigated by go-betweens who operated – often literally – between a rock and a hard place.⁹ With his Polish secretary at his side, Kolchak was able to bridge the Ottoman and Polish worlds and

4 Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 9.

5 Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage: The Communications Frontier in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 217. For her book, Grandjean built a database of 3,000 letters from early New England, which constituted the basic source for her book.

6 Paula Findlen, “Introduction – Early Modern Scientific Networks: Knowledge and Community in a Globalizing World, 1500–1800,” in *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World*, ed. Paula Findlen (London–New York: Routledge, 2019), 9.

7 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12; John-Paul A. Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

8 *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning, and Narrative in Microhistory*, 1st ed. *School for Advanced Research Advanced Seminar Series*, eds. James F. Brooks, Christopher R. N. Decorse and John Walton (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008).

9 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Some Afterthoughts,” in *The Brokered World*, eds. Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj, and James Delbourgo (Sagamore: Science History Publications, 2009), 429–440.

postal systems, tapping into overlapping communications infrastructures. Nobles from Lwów or Kamieniec Podolski routinely entrusted their letters to Ottoman postal networks when they needed reliable delivery to Istanbul or the Crimea. In this way, Hotin became not only a strategic military fortress, but a postal and diplomatic hinge between two worlds that were, in fact, deeply intertwined.

Following Kolchak's network, we can unsettle the analytical binaries that have long structured early modern historiography: empire and periphery, Islam and Christendom, subject and agent.¹⁰ The Ottoman-Polish frontier – so often depicted as a zone of confrontation in jingoistic national historiographies – emerges here as a connective tissue: elastic, porous, and peopled by actors whose loyalties were negotiated rather than certain.¹¹ What we see in Kolchak's correspondence is not the anomaly of coexistence but its daily structure, hard to prove in the past without formidable archives. The courier routes out of Hotin did more than deliver mail; they routed trust, recalibrated power, and built a kind of inter-imperial civility, and border friendship.

This border was not an edge but a connecting node – one that complicates the geopolitical grammar of both Ottoman and Polish historiography. Kolchak's career, and Pawłowski's role within it, force us to abandon the idea of the border as a line to be defended and instead understand it as a corridor of brokerage and knowledge transmission. Kolchak and Pawłowski were not merely imperial agents; they were infrastructural actors in a much wider story of circulation of people, goods and ideas.

The implications are historiographical as much as historical. Despite the global turn, early modern studies remain haunted by state-centric frameworks and analytical stovepipes. We still default to imperial cores when mapping sovereignty, communication, or reform.¹² But Kolchak's

10 The dichotomy Christian–Muslim appears rarely in historiography and mostly in encyclopedic entries, see for instance: Mario Apostolov, *The Christian–Muslim Frontier: A Zone of Contact, Conflict and Co-Operation* (London–New York: Routledge, 2010); David Thomas, John A. Chiesworth, *Christian–Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History Volume 8. Northern and Eastern Europe (1600–1700)* (BRILL, 2016), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=4715142> (access: 17.12.2025).

11 For a similar argument, see: Luca Scholz, *Borders and Freedom of Movement in the Holy Roman Empire*, First edition, Studies in German History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 166 (on uncertainty in border regions); Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 48–68.

12 Perhaps with formidable exceptions such as: Ali Yaycioğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

frontier resists such gravitational pull. It demands a historiography of the periphery rather than the center – of those minor but critical figures who, like Pawłowski, stitched imperial systems together. What if, instead of looking at Istanbul, one could write Ottoman history from the periphery of Hotin – for instance, by studying its social fabric and interconnectedness in a micro-historical perspective?

Such connected history, then, is not simply about recognizing contact. It is about decentering imperial self-narration by restoring visibility to the intermediaries who sustained alternative orders of mobility, legitimacy, and knowledge. The Ottoman-Polish border, through the lens of Kolchak's network, becomes a proving ground for a more entangled epistemology: one that privileges bottom-up processes and actors in the past over polities. To recover that world is not only to reframe the eighteenth-century borderlands – it is to rethink how we write the history of empires and multiethnic states.

Kolchak's network within Poland-Lithuania

The best example of an Ottoman borderland network that formed a small world of its own is that of Ilyash Kolchak Pasha – a Bosnian-born mercenary who rose to become the Ottoman governor and commander of the fortress and administrative district of Hotin. In the 1720s, while still serving as a janissary commander, Kolchak – who sometimes wrote in Polish in shorthand – facilitated the exchange of information between Abdi Pasha, then-governor of Hotin, and Polish-Lithuanian nobles. His mediation helped arrange audiences for Crown Hetman Sieniawski's envoys at Abdi Pasha's divan.¹³ In 1721, Pylyp Orlyk, a Cossack hetman under Ottoman protection, passed incognito through Hotin on his way to Istanbul and reached Abdi Pasha through Kolchak's mediation.¹⁴ Kolchak's ability to act as a go-between rested on his knowledge of Polish and familiarity with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Kolchak communicated, translated, and negotiated across cultural divides while preserving a complex identity. Outwardly Ottoman, he carried Moldavian and Polish elements of his identity beneath the surface.

13 Letters of Ilyash Kolchak Pasha to Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski, Grand Crown hetman, in Hotin, 1721–1722, BC, ms. 5855, No. 1884–1885.

14 *Dijarij Get'mana Pilipa Orlika=Diarjusz Hetmana Orlika=Le Journal de l'hetman Orlík*, Praci Ukrains'koho Naukovoho Instytutu 17, ed. Jan z Tokar Tokarzewski Karaszewicz (Warszawa: 1936), 17.

Such intermediaries – literate, fluent, attuned to multiple worlds – could rise high. At the height of his career, Kolchak himself became governor of Hotin and built an expansive web of informers inside Poland–Lithuania, involving close to a hundred people. Two recently discovered manuscripts – one preserved in Ukraine, the other in Moscow – offer a rare window into this world. They contain Kolchak’s Polish-language correspondence and illuminate the depth of Ottoman–Polish connectivity.¹⁵ When Russian forces captured Hotin in 1739, they took Kolchak to Moscow along with his entire archive. Today, his Polish letters lie among twenty-seven bound volumes in the archive of the Russian Empire’s Ministry of Foreign Policy. Based on some 2,000 pages of material, it is possible – if incompletely – to sketch the contours of Kolchak’s network. How did an Ottoman border governor, fluent in Polish and well-versed in local cultural codes, forge ties with the Polish–Lithuanian nobility?

Though Kolchak could write in Polish, he relied on a Polish secretary named Piotr Pawłowski to handle his correspondence. Pawłowski drafted replies, copied outgoing letters, and managed the Latinate side of the archive that operated mostly in Polish and Latin. A go-between par excellence, he was deeply embedded in Poland–Lithuania and maintained both financial and personal ties with the local nobility. Over the years, Pawłowski built a network of his own, often acting as mediator when nobles petitioned Kolchak for minor matters. Still, his influence remained tethered to Kolchak’s authority.

Kolchak, for his part, did not need translators. His fluency in Polish meant that nobles felt at ease visiting Hotin. In 1734, Michał Potocki, Palatine of Volhynia, forwarded his brother’s letters to Kolchak and promised “he will come to talk with Your Lordship and will have the honor to bow [in front of You] in Hotin.”¹⁶ Carl von Löseken, a German officer in Polish–Lithuanian service, wrote to inform Kolchak that a friend of his had arrived and wished to pay respects to Kolchak. “If You do not take it amiss,” he added, “[I will send him] with my wife and other ladies, and they will greet You.”¹⁷ The women, as he noted, also hoped to shop in Hotin. During the Russian invasion of the Commonwealth, Potocki even sent his wife – and their silver and jewelry – to Kolchak’s fortress

15 Mariusz Kaczka, *Pashas and Nobles: Paweł Benoe and Ottoman-Polish Encounters in the Eighteenth Century*, Ph.D. dissertation (European University Institute, 2019), 76.

16 Letter of Michał Potocki to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Satanów, 16 III 1734, in *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 316.

17 Letter of Carl von Löseken to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Okopy Św. Trójcy, 3 IX 1733, in *Ibidem*, 260.

for safekeeping.¹⁸ Polish nobles wanting to visit and talk with the pasha frequently appear on the pages of his correspondence. Perhaps the best example of the personal meetings between the pasha and Polish nobles is contained in the letter of a grieving father:

Because my weak health put me to bed for a few weeks, I could not greet Your Lordship, My Great Pasha and personally tell you about my despair. Now, with this humble missive, I report that my son of young age, taken by frivolous behavior, bathed on horseback in the Dniester River. When he tried to cross over to the Polish side, just next to the rocks on the Polish side, he drowned, and I cannot even find his body. The inhabitants of this village called Nasłowcz are afraid of Your Lordship's anger. Because of that, I report personally to Your Lordship about my despair and that he drowned by accident and was not killed by anyone. Moreover, when I had this honor of greeting Your Lordship in person, You warned me not to cross over to the Polish side to my estates, and I love every order that You give me.¹⁹

In the end, the letter's author – who lived in Ilyash Kolchak' estates during a Russian invasion of Poland – adds that the pasha had told him in person about the dangers of crossing the river and returning prematurely to Poland–Lithuania. Thus, it seems that it was quite common for Polish nobility to cross the border, walk through the streets of the Ottoman city-fortress of Hotin, and shop there. Noblemen and noble-women also sought shelter in the pasha's estates in 1733 and 1734 when the Russian army entered Poland–Lithuania. In-person encounters between the Polish–Lithuanian nobility and Kolchak went smoothly thanks to his proficiency in Polish, Polish culture, and the language of friendship.

Ilyash Kolchak Pasha's networking extended well beyond these everyday encounters in part due to his official standing as governor of Hotin. As a rule, military officers and border judges formed the core of Ottoman pashas' networks, as most correspondence arose from minor conflicts. To provide an example, in 1737, Florian Schylling, commandant of Kamieniec Podolski, informed the pasha that an Ottoman merchant called Mustafa had arrived in this Polish–Lithuanian border city to sell oranges and lemons. Mustafa, however, did not behave according to the cultural expectations held for a Muslim merchant and instead acted

18 Letter of Michał Potocki to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Warszawa, 2 XII 1735, in *Ibidem*, 407.

19 Letter of Wojciech Popławski to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Nasławcz, 9 VI 1735, in *Ibidem*, 393–394.

“against modesty, custom and his faith” by getting drunk at the local tavern. Unfortunately, this was not the end of the story as, at midnight, the delinquent harassed a young Polish noblewoman in her house. In the end, the city’s guard imprisoned Mustafa, but Schylling freed him for the sake of “conserving [...] the neighborly friendship.²⁰” What is uncommon in Kolchak’s example is the friendliness and frequency of many of his exchanges. Kolchak’s manuscripts of Polish correspondence suggests that all the most important Polish–Lithuanian commanders dispatched a letter per week to the Kolchak, and if they failed to do so, they felt obliged to excuse themselves. Kolchak also maintained friendly quotidian encounters with ordinary border soldiers. The finest example of this is the fact that Polish soldiers stationed at the Ottoman border used to ask Kolchak for wood from his forests to heat their homes or build their houses.²¹

The pasha’s network included ordinary nobles. As the pasha’s manuscripts indicate, ordinary nobility was often in cordial contact with Ilyash Kolchak. An example which illustrates this is Józef de Campo Scipio, Kolchak’s regular correspondent.²² Originating from the Polonised Italian Scipio family, he engaged in regular correspondence with the pasha and provided him with political and military information from Poland–Lithuania. In return, Kolchak informed Scipio of the situation in the Ottoman Empire and updated him on the Ottomans’ progress in their wars with Persia. Scipio used the Ottoman state couriers (called *ulak*) to dispatch his correspondence throughout the Ottoman Empire with the pasha’s support which strengthened their bond. The pasha’s fortress at Hotin acted as a local FedEx and was an important hub at the northern-most pivot of the ‘right-hand road’ (*sağ kol*) connecting Istanbul to Crimea and the north-east, and thus Scipio’s letters might have arrived in Istanbul in only six days.²³ In this way, Scipio could and did exchange letters with the French ambassador in Istanbul, marquis de Villeneuve.²⁴

20 Letter of Florian Schylling to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Kamieniec Podolski, 24 IV 1737, in *Ibidem*, 436.

21 *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 105.

22 Henryk Palkij, “Józef Scipio (zm. 1743),” in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXXVI (Warszawa–Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Historii PAN, 1995).

23 Colin J. Heywood, “Some Turkish Archival Sources for the History of the Menzilhane Network in Rumeli During the Eighteenth Century (Notes and Documents on the Ottoman Ulak, I)” *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Dergisi: Beşeri Bilimler* 4–5 (1976–1977): 40–41, 51, fn. 22.

24 Letter of Józef Scipion to marquis de Villeneuve, in Kamieniec Podolski, 13 III 1734, Centralnyi Dierzavnyi Istorichnii Arkhiv Ukrainii m. Kyiv (henceforth: CDIAUK), fond 254, opis 1, ms. 597, ff. 19v–r (copy in Scipion’s hand).

This is how Kolchak's small-world network functioned while tapping into an Ottoman and – *in extenso* – global network.

In some cases, the Ottoman pasha played the role of patron to Polish-Lithuanian noblemen, noblewomen, and even clergy. In 1734, Russian troops entered Poland-Lithuania to support Friedrich Augustus II of Saxony's candidacy for the Polish crown. Consequently, Kolchak began receiving a large volume of petitions from Polish-Lithuanian nobility asking for protection and shelter on his estates. The administrative district under the protection of Ottoman troops was a refuge for Polish nobles in times of trouble. Consequently, Stanisław Jabłonowski, Starost of Czechryń in the triple Ottoman-Polish-Russian borderland, fled to Hotin with his wife and entire court and asked for shelter in one of the pasha's villages.²⁵ Entire noble families crossed the border while waiting for the situation in Poland-Lithuania to improve. Perhaps surprisingly, even Catholic priests from the borderland received Ottoman protection when they requested it.²⁶ However, the pasha's network reached beyond the Ottoman-Polish-Russian borderland and included diplomats.

Kolchak's small-world network passively coexisted in the large, complex, global and diplomatic networks of the Ottoman Empire. One of the pasha's Polish correspondents was the French envoy extraordinary at the Polish-Saxon court, marquis de Monti. Monti was likely aware that Kolchak's secretaries were able to correspond in Ottoman Turkish, Latin, or Polish, but not French.²⁷ In the same manner as Scipio, Monti used the pasha's couriers to dispatch news and letters from Poland-Lithuania to the French ambassador in Istanbul, marquis de Villeneuve. These letters are preserved today in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.²⁸ As his letter books demonstrate – Villeneuve used different ways to send letters to Monti, but most of them passed through the hands of Ilyash Kolchak.²⁹ Small gifts smoothed the exchange of letters between Monti

25 Letter of Stanisław Jabłonowski to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Dłużek, 6 VII 1735, in *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 395.

26 Letter of Priest Stanikowski to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Mielnica, 21 IV 1734, in *Ibidem*, 339.

27 In one of the letters conserved in Moscow, marquis de Villeneuve asks Piotr Pawłowski, Kolchak's secretary to write not in Polish, as he was unable to find reliable translators from Polish, but in Ottoman Turkish, Latin or Italian, see: marquis de Villeneuve to Piotr Pawłowski, in Constantinople, 23 IX 1735, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 386v.

28 'Lettre reçues de M. de Monty, ambassadeur en Pologne (1731–1733)', Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth: BnF), Département des Manuscrits, Français ms. 7196.

29 'Lettres au Roi, au cardinal de Fleury et à M. de Monty, ambassadeur en Pologne (1728–1737)', BnF, Département des Manuscrits, Français ms. 7177, f. 337r: "Partie le 28 novembre 1733 par de courrier tartare au Pacha de Choczim."

and Villeneuve. In December 1734, Monti conveyed information from Poland-Lithuania to the pasha in a letter with an enclosed golden snuff box.³⁰ Indirectly, Monti promised pasha the grace of his master by stating that he “informed about all of that My Lord, His Majesty the King [Louis XV – M. K.] and about the friendship, with which you support the entire French nation.”³¹ Ilyash Kolchak Pasha’s network encompassed not only the direct borderland but also diplomatic centers such as Istanbul and Paris. The pasha’s network not only included French diplomats but also Polish diplomats on their way to and from Istanbul.

In Kolchak’s correspondence, we find letters from all the diplomats who passed by and through Hotin. It seems evident that Polish diplomats to Istanbul, who as a rule passed through Hotin, exchanged letters with Ilyash Kolchak. Their frequency, however, and chronology suggest that diplomats kept corresponding with Kolchak years after their return to Poland and provided him with news – in the form of both printed and handwritten newsletters. In exchange, Ilyash Kolchak furnished them with passports, forwarded their letters to Poland–Lithuania or Istanbul, and functioned as a link between Warsaw and Istanbul. This exchange involved not only information but also goods. In November 1734, Polish resident in Istanbul, Jan Stadnicki, dispatched to Poland “five Turkish horses” and asked Kolchak for his protection and passports.³² In the same manner, Jan’s father, Józef Stadnicki, sent additional servants to Istanbul to his son and asked pasha for passports and protection.³³ Senders accompanied their letters with small gifts, dominated by silver, gold, and other luxury objects. Some of the letters suggest the sender’s striking familiarity with Kolchak’s family. Józef Sierakowski, envoy extraordinary on duty from 1732 to 1733, for instance, adds a postscript in almost every letter with familiar greetings for the pasha’s younger brother and son.³⁴

30 Letter of marquis de Monti, French envoy extraordinary in Poland to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Gdańsk, 10 XII 1733, in *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 280. Letter of marquis de Monti, French ambassador in Poland to marquis de Villeneuve, French ambassador in Istanbul, Gdańsk, 10 XII 1733, BnF, Département des Manuscrits, Français 7196, ff. 297v–299r.

31 Letter of marquis de Monti, French envoy extraordinary in Poland to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Warsaw, 6 VI 1733, in *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 242–243.

32 Letter of Jan Stadnicki, Polish resident to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Pera, 19 XI 1734, in *Ibidem*, 383–384.

33 Letter of Józef Stadnicki, Castellan of Biecz to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, at the castle in Niemirów, 9 VIII 1733, in *Ibidem*, 256–257.

34 Letter of Józef Sierakowski to Ilyash Kolchak Pasha of Hotin, in Żabcze, 18 VII 1733, in *Ibidem*, 252.

Kolchak's network was, in essence, a small-world: a planet with its own orbit, and trailing satellites. The most vital of these was the network built by his secretary, Piotr Pawłowski.

Traitor, trickster and translator: the network of Piotr Pawłowski, Ilyash Kolchak's Polish secretary, and connected history

The story of Piotr Pawłowski is emblematic of the very fabric of connected history: it anchors abstract theories in lived experiences. Far from being a marginal character, Pawłowski's activity demonstrates how minor figures – secretaries, translators, postal intermediaries – functioned as the sinews of cross-cultural diplomacy, commerce, and intelligence.³⁵ He was not a passive conduit but an active broker between Catholic nobles, Muslim pashas, Tatar intermediaries, and Armenian merchants. The letters he received and sent did more than communicate – they constituted a social infrastructure that enabled the daily operation of border life in this early modern Ottoman-European borderland.

Through Pawłowski's eyes, we can see the Ottoman–Polish border not as a hard divide, but as a permeable membrane, a contact zone where social, political, and commercial flows created hybrid networks. His exchanges with Lipka Tatars, Hungarian and Cossack exiles, and even French diplomats reinforce the point that the early modern world was not only interconnected but also multilingual, multicultural, and full of individuals who navigated multiple allegiances.³⁶ The tension between loyalty and treachery in Pawłowski's final flight – first fleeing Kolchak, then revealing himself as a Russian agent – mirrors the ambiguity of identity and allegiance in frontier diplomacy. His life makes visible the dense web of affiliations, pressures, and motivations in early modern borderlands.

In this sense, Pawłowski's as much as Kolchak's world refutes Huntington's “Clash of Civilizations” not by idealizing interconnectedness,

³⁵ This was raised recently by Florian Kühnel, who in his prolific study focuses on secretaries rather than diplomats, see: Florian Kühnel, *Diplomatie als kollektive Praxis: Botschaftssekretäre und diplomatischer Alltag im frühneuzeitlichen Istanbul*, Frühneuzeit-Forschungen, Bd 29 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2024).

³⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia” *Modern Asia Studies* 31/3 (1997): 735–762; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

but by showing a form of pragmatic coexistence, where relationships were forged out of necessity, convenience, and mutual benefit, even amid underlying rivalries. People like Pawłowski did not wait for official diplomacy to shape their actions. Instead, they acted ahead of it, creating informal routes for letters, gifts, gossip, and goods, routes that often mattered more than formal alliances or declarations.

Connected history, therefore, provides the right lens through which to read this kind of archival microhistory of networking. It shifts the spotlight from grand narratives to granular interactions, revealing how small-world networks – often overlapping, sometimes conflicting – built up the scaffolding of early modern cross-border relations. Figures like Pawłowski and Kolchak give connected history its empirical grounding and demonstrate that even seemingly peripheral actors played central roles in maintaining and shaping trans-imperial dynamics.

Piotr Pawłowski was the secretary and translator of Ilyash Kolchak Pasha. He handled the pasha's correspondence, made translations and copies of letters, and oversaw the Latinate section of the Hotin archive. Likely a petty noble from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Pawłowski had sought a better life in Ottoman service on the borderlands. Having already served in the fortress before Kolchak's governorship, he developed his own network of correspondents. Polish–Lithuanian nobles routinely addressed Kolchak and Pawłowski in separate letters, often enclosed in the same envelope. If no letter was sent directly to Pawłowski, those written to Kolchak typically included a postscript greeting him – sometimes apologizing for the absence of a separate message. Still, Pawłowski's network reveals a more quotidian web of exchanges than that of Kolchak. His correspondents often included Lipka Tatars stationed in Hotin or Armenian merchants traveling between Poland–Lithuania and Ottoman provinces, including the capital.³⁷

In the eighteenth century, Hotin served as a local marketplace for the Polish–Lithuanian nobility, who had a taste for oriental textiles, food-stuffs, and horses. This is clearest in Pawłowski's correspondence, where petty requests were more often addressed to him than to the pasha. In 1733, for example, the provincial noble Lastek Cieński sent Pawłowski a list of desired items. He asked him to influence Kolchak Pasha to provide a horse, a tent, Ottoman travel bottles, and a spear. He also requested “pink, elderflower, and orange sherbet from the pasha's kitchens, at least

37 Basic info on Pawłowski, see: *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 97–98.

four jugs, and tobacco, but only the good kind.”³⁸ On another occasion, Jan Kamieński asked Pawłowski for bags, a horse (promised by Kolchak as a gift), and a tent. He also sought Pawłowski’s help in dealing with Hotin’s Bosnian and Greek merchants.³⁹ Jan Świrski, the regional chief justice, wrote to his “beloved Pawłoś,” asking him to procure and send “six *okkas* of coffee, but only the best-quality green one, [...] two *okkas* of bar soap, two pipe stems, and about two *okkas* of tobacco, but only the good one.”⁴⁰ These are only the most vivid examples. Such requests – for goods, favors, and introductions – formed the everyday substance of Pawłowski’s correspondence. He was often asked to act as a go-between, smoothing access to the pasha’s favor.

Trade also generated debts, often settled with Pawłowski’s mediation. In June 1732, he received two letters from Daniel Elewterowicz, an Armenian merchant from Lwów, who was searching for his brother’s debtors in the fortress of Akkerman. Elewterowicz, well-versed in Ottoman administration, noted that the local pasha had only two *tuğs* (horsetails) and likely could not send a personal emissary. He suggested that a *buyuruldu* (written order) from Kolchak Pasha might be required. Though the outcome remains unknown, it is clear in the preserved collections that Pawłowski frequently intervened in matters of debt.⁴¹

Hotin also served as a kind of early modern FedEx, as nobles turned to Pawłowski to forward letters into Ottoman territory or Crimea. In March 1734, Michał Potocki, Palatine of Wołyń, wrote to Pawłowski, saying, “I do not want to trouble His Lordship, the Pasha, but I am asking Your Lordship to send this letter” to Crimea.⁴² It is unsurprising, therefore, that Stefan Jan Melkonowicz – an official in the Crown Postal Service – was on friendly terms with Pawłowski. In December 1743, Melkonowicz apologized for not visiting him while in Hotin, and added a personal

38 Letter of Lastek Cieński to Piotr Pawłowski, from Solec, 15 III 1733, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 122v.

39 Letter of Jan Kamieński to Piotr Pawłowski, from Turzyń, 24 VI 1732, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, ff. 80v–81r.

40 Letter of Jan Świrski to Piotr Pawłowski, from Kamieniec Podolski, 14 VI 1729, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, ff. 305v–306v. One *okka* was slightly less than 1.3 kg.

41 Letter of Daniel Elewterowicz to Piotr Pawłowski (mistakenly addressed as Pawliński), from Lwów, 2 VI 1732 and from Lwów, 4 VI 1732, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, ff. 76v–79v.

42 Letter of Michał Potocki to Piotr Pawłowski, no place, 30 III 1734, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 248v (asking to forward the letter to one of the Mirowicz brothers, Fedor or Ivan). See also another letter in the same manner asking Pawłowski to forward correspondence to the Crimean khan, letter of Michał Potocki to Piotr Pawłowski, in Satanów, 24 III 1734, *Ibidem*, f. 253v.

note: concern over the progress of Pawłowski's daughter's education.⁴³ In October 1733, dispatch rider Antoni Łążyński sent a letter to Pawłowski from his route to Istanbul. It included a long note of thanks for earlier assistance, and a postscript written by Jan Stadnicki, the Polish–Lithuanian resident in Istanbul.⁴⁴ Stadnicki offered advice on how to forward letters to Poland more efficiently and greeted Pawłowski's wife – evidence of personal familiarity. Through Pawłowski's network, we glimpse how the Ottoman postal system was quietly used by Europeans within the Ottoman Empire.

Hotin, as revealed through these letters, also functioned as an information hub. Ottoman borderland governors were expected to gather transborder intelligence. Much of this responsibility fell to their secretaries, who compiled, translated, and dispatched reports. An especially telling example comes from Pawłowski's exchanges with Lipka Tatar officers serving in either the Crown army or the Hotin garrison. The Lipkas – Muslims long settled in the Commonwealth – used their position between cultures to provide valuable information. Ismail Aga Józefowicz, a Tatar in Ottoman service, had relatives in the Crown army. He addressed Pawłowski directly in disputes and forwarded his kinsman Aleksander Józefowicz's reports on the military situation in Poland–Lithuania. These letters, under Pawłowski's auspices, were entered into the Hotin archive.⁴⁵

If Kolchak's network was a small-world, Pawłowski's was perhaps an even smaller one – but deeply embedded within the first. His letters overlapped with the pasha's and relied on his authority. Pawłowski corresponded frequently with Ádám Jávorka, a Hungarian émigré who moved between the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Crimea, and Poland–Lithuania.⁴⁶ Jávorka wrote in Latin, often adding greetings in Polish to Pawłowski's wife and sons.⁴⁷ Another curious case is Grzegorz Orlik, son of the exiled

43 Letter of Stefan Jan Melkonowicz to Piotr Pawłowski, in Kamieniec Podolski, 3 XII 1736, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 416v.

44 Letter of Antoni Łążyński, dispatch rider to Istanbul to Piotr Pawłowski, in Istanbul, 6 X 1733, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, ff. 153v–r.

45 See letter of Aleksander Józefowicz to Ismail Aga Józefowicz, in Międzybóż, 22 I 1734, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 231v. See also a letter by Ismail Aga Józefowicz to Ali Aga Rudnicki, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 428v, which is also conserved in the Hotin archive.

46 *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 500.

47 See letters of Ádám Jávorka to Piotr Pawłowski, in Żwaniec, 11 I 1737, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 231v; in Brzezany, 23 V 1732, f. 72v; in Jarosław 3 I 1733, ff. 104v–r (postscript in Polish greeting Pawłowski's wife and sons); in Czarnokozienice, 20 III 1734, f. 252v; in Czarnokozienice, 30 III 1734, f. 263v; in Bakhchysarai, 15 III 1736, ff. 399v–400r (incipit in Polish).

Cossack hetman Pylyp Orlyk.⁴⁸ Writing from the Crimean Khanate, Orlik addressed Pawłowski in Polish but apologized: “Have patience with my Polish – for in truth, through long wanderings in foreign lands, I have forgotten my own language” – Orlik added.⁴⁹ The French ambassador in Istanbul, marquis de Villeneuve, also wrote to Pawłowski, politely requesting that he use Turkish in future letters, as it was easier to find someone trustworthy to translate them into French, Italian, or Latin.⁵⁰ All three men asked Pawłowski to forward their messages or provide information – an indication of his centrality in this diplomatic mesh.

Pawłowski was a typical early modern figure: a trickster, translator, and traitor. Secretaries and translators in the service of local Ottoman governors were often formidable sources of information for foreign powers, as they had direct access to knowledge and military intelligence. Deceptive and frequently disloyal, these figures could sell their services to the highest bidder, all while maintaining the appearance of a loyal, humble, and “invisible technician” of diplomacy – an unacknowledged servant whose labor quietly sustained the wheels of international communication.⁵¹ This seems to have been precisely the case with Piotr Pawłowski. In February 1738, he fled to Poland-Lithuania, where he was arrested by local authorities. Shortly thereafter, Russian representatives intervened, revealing that Pawłowski had been operating as their agent while serving alongside Kolchak Pasha. They demanded his release.⁵² Whether he ended up in chains or turned to Russian service remains unknown, but his story reflects the complexity of local networking and diplomacy – a world marked less by rigid allegiance than by negotiation, improvisation, and entanglement across borders.

Conclusion

What Kolchak’s and Pawłowski’s world urges us to consider is not only the porousness of state borders in the early modern world, but the

48 Emanuel Rostworowski, “Grzegorz Piotr Orlik h. Nowina,” in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXIV (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Polska Akademia Nauk, 1979).

49 Letter of Grzegorz Orlik to Piotr Pawłowski, in the camp near Kauszany, 7 IX 1734, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, ff. 342v–343v.

50 Letter of marquis de Villeneuve to Piotr Pawłowski, Constantinople, 23 IX 1735, AVPRI, fond 26, ms. 2, f. 386v.

51 Steven Shapin, “The Invisible Technician,” *American Scientist* 77/6 (1989): 554–563.

52 *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 99.

methodological limits of our historical categories. Too often, connected history has served as a polite corrective – a way to soften binaries with exceptional studies without dismantling them. But what if, instead of merely connecting Islam and Christendom, center and periphery, subject and state, we viewed these categories themselves as historical outcomes of the very entanglements we are studying? The Ottoman–Polish border was not a line between two discrete worlds, but a zone of coexistence, where identities were shaped through interaction, dependence, and betrayal.

Pawłowski's movements – across borders, across allegiances – underscore this. He was not a marginal exception but a nodal actor, integral to the operation of trans-imperial infrastructures. His role as Kolchak's secretary was not a mask for espionage; espionage was built into the system. Pawłowski's desk in Hotin was a point of convergence for Ottoman governance, Polish nobility, and Russian intelligence. If we follow Latour's exhortation to "follow the actors themselves," Pawłowski does not merely link allegedly disconnected empires – he embodies their relational logic.

This, in turn, invites a sharper critique of connected history as a genre. Too often, its language remains curiously antiseptic, celebrating movement, networks, and circulation without confronting the ambiguous economies and asymmetries of power that made such movement possible. Kolchak's and Pawłowski's world was not a cosmopolitan utopia in a globalized world without borders. It was at times violent, precarious and uncertain whilst also real and inhabited. It forces us to reconsider whether connection is an interpretive goal or simply a starting point. In this light, the Ottoman–Polish border becomes a case not of anomalous cooperation, but of structural entanglement, one stretching over centuries and generations.

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