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**“AND THIS WAS NO SMALL SERVICE THAT HE DID...”:  
ROBERT BRANCETOUR’S MISSION TO THE SAFAVID EMPIRE**

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For the first time in scientific historiography, an attempt is made to shed light on one of little studied issues in the history of the European-Safavid relations – to study in detail the diplomatic mission of the Englishman Robert Brancetour, who was delegated in 1529 as an envoy of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to the Safavid court and was one of the first significant attempts to involve the Safavid Empire in a military-political alliance with western European states. The object of study in this article is “*no small service*” that Brancetour did to the whole Christendom, i.e. his activity aimed at involving the Safavids in an anti-Ottoman coalition and mainly at encouraging the Shah to take active military actions against the Ottoman Empire, which was one of the main enemies of many European states and posed a real threat to their existence. Brancetour’s mission to the Safavid Empire, initiated by such a powerful European empire as the Holy Roman Empire, proves how strategically significant for the ruling circles of Europe states was the participation of the Safavid Empire in an anti-Ottoman campaign, and also testifies to its important role in the political history of not only the Muslim East, but also the Christian Europe. In addition, along with the coverage of the role of the Safavid Empire in the military and diplomatic history of early modern Europe, in particular in the political triangle “European

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states – Ottoman Empire – Safavid Empire”, the present study is of great scientific importance also because it examines the attitude of the English authorities, of which Robert Brancetour was a subject, to *anti-Ottomanism* policy of European states, especially of the Habsburgs. Based on a detailed analysis of contemporary sources, diplomatic correspondence particularly, for the first time in scientific historiography it was supposed that one of the main reasons of English crown’s desire to arrest Brancetour was the fear of the British authorities that the Habsburg-Safavid alliance, namely their joint struggle against the Ottoman aggression, which was the main goal of Brancetour’s diplomatic missions to the Safavid court, could become a serious obstacle to the implementation of their policy of strengthening royal power in England, which found itself in difficult political conditions on the continent.

**Keywords:** Robert Brancetour, Habsburg-Safavid relations, Shah Tahmasp I, Charles V, Henry VIII, *anti-Ottomanism*, diplomatic mission, 1529

## 1. Introduction

The rise of the Safavid Empire at the beginning of the sixteenth century marked significant changes in the geopolitics not only of the Middle East, but of Europe as a whole. Due to its growing power shortly after the emergence in the early sixteenth century, the Safavid State ceased to be *terra incognita* in Christian Europe and turned into a potential significant political partner for European states on a geopolitical scene (see: [Matthee 2013, 9]). Consequently, the rise of the Safavids led to an intensification of its diplomatic and commercial interactions with the West, marking a turning point in the history of East-West relations. Moreover, the rise and rule of the Safavid Empire coincided with the expansion and strengthening of the Ottoman Empire which became the great enemy of most European states and one of the Safavids’ bitter political and economic rivals. For the West the Safavids became the only power capable to stop the Ottoman’s expansion in Europe. As a result, the heads of the main European states sent their representatives to the Safavid shahs with the aim to explore the possibilities of the formation of an alliance against the Ottomans and to persuade the Safavids to cooperate in their common fight against the Ottoman Empire. Robert Brancetour was one of such European delegates sent to the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I.

Although the Safavid Empire and its history has been studied by many historians, yet it has unstudied or little studied issues that still

need a more detailed examination. Robert Brancetour’s diplomatic mission to the Safavid Empire is one of them. Lack of information about the relationship of the Safavid Empire with the states of the West in the official chronicle, theological treatises and diplomatic correspondence of the Safavid court greatly complicates studying the history of bilateral relations between them. Despite the fact that a significant number of new research appeared in recent decades, nevertheless Robert Brancetour’s diplomatic mission to the Safavid court in 1529 as an official representative of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, which is the research object of the present study, has not been an object of a special study and so far is one of the unstudied or at least little-known topics in the history of international relations of the early modern period, though Brancetour’s “*no small service*” that he did presented a great political and strategic significance to the states of both Christian West and Muslim East. Therefore, it is not surprising that Robert Brancetour, in particular his mission to the Safavid Empire, which, as noted by S. Subrahmanyam, “...was the first significant attempt to involve the Safavid Iran [the Safavid Empire] in an alliance with western European states” [Subrahmanyam 2011, 82], was one of the main topics in the royal correspondence between the heads of various European states, statesmen and diplomats in the 1530s.

The aim of this paper is to determine significance and to examine the role and the aftermath of Brancetour’s mission for the further development of geopolitical situation in the region by investigating contemporary source materials, in particular the royal and diplomatic correspondence. The study examines the political conjuncture in Europe before Brancetour’s dispatch in 1529 that forced Emperor Charles V to seek for an alliance with the Safavids, the history of Brancetour’s transformation from English King Henry VIII’s *bete noire* into a man of Habsburg Emperor Charles V’s inner circle. In addition, particular attention was paid to the political reasons of the dissatisfaction of the authorities of Tudor England, of which Robert was a subject, with his mission to the Safavid court, which coincided in time with the policy of strengthening royal power and the reformation of the English Church by King Henry VIII, as well as to Anglo-Safavid relations in the context of European *anti-Ottomanism*, the manifestation of which was the diplomatic mission of Robert

Brancetour, whose arrest by the British authorities could ruin the plans of the Habsburgs to involve the Safavid Empire in the anti-Ottoman alliance.

## **2. *Anti-Ottomanism* and the political triangle “European states – Ottoman Empire – Safavid Empire”**

Before proceeding directly to the coverage of the diplomatic activities of Robert Brancetour as the ambassador of Emperor Charles V to the Safavid Empire, attention should be paid to the political situation in the international arena of the region in previous years and in particular to study what role the Safavid Empire played in the political triangle “European states – Ottoman Empire – Safavid Empire”. It is well known that both the Ottoman and the Safavid Empires were ones of the most powerful empires of the early modern period, they were the so-called “*gunpowder empires*”, which played a significant role in the political history of not only the Muslim East, but also Christian Europe. Accordingly, the political ambitions of each of them made inevitable a confrontation between them that lasted for centuries. The policy of expanding territories and the influence of the Ottoman sultans in the European region forced the European monarchs to look for ways of rapprochement with both the Ottomans and the Safavids, often setting them against each other. The Safavid Empire, in its turn, was also interested in forming an anti-Ottoman alliance.

In July 1524, Charles V received the Safavid ambassador, delegated by Shah Ismail I, whose main goal was to achieve the conclusion of an anti-Ottoman alliance. However, the time factor played a role in the unsuccessful outcome of the Safavid mission. At that time, Charles V was not interested in a joint war with the Safavids against the Ottomans. Due to the employment of Charles V in a confrontation with the king of France, the Italian wars, complicated relations with England, the emperor could not reciprocate the Shah and take part in hostilities against the Ottomans. Moreover, the aggression against the Ottomans could be regarded by Pope Clement VII as strengthening the imperial position in Italy. Besides, according to D. Stokes, religious prejudices also affected: “Charles may also have had religious qualms to allying with a non-Christian power; he told his brother that he was loath to negotiate a settlement with the Turks [the Ottomans] because of their religion” [Stokes 2014, 35]. It should be noted that

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after the death of Shah Ismail I, subsequent ascension to the throne of Shah Tahmasp I and, mainly, the addressing by the Shah of a letter to Emperor Charles V with a proposal for a joint attack on the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman-Safavid relations deteriorated significantly, as evidenced by the threatening letters of Sultan Suleiman addressed to the Shah Tahmasp I (for more details, see: [Nəcəfli 2014, 182–184]). In addition, the Safavid empire was torn apart by feudal anarchy that occurred there after the death of Shah Ismail I in 1524; the situation was also complicated by the difficult economic conditions in the country [Efendiyev 1981, 69–74].

However, the political picture soon changed. Subsequent events forced Charles V to follow the principle “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”. So, in December 1525, the French ambassador arrived in Istanbul and insistently demanded an immediate action by the Sultan against Emperor Charles V, both from the sea and on land. After the assassination of King Louis II by the Ottomans at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526, which would have made it much easier for the Ottomans to seize the lands of Central Europe, Charles V, realizing the scale of the real threat, changed his strategy and was forced to seek an alliance with the Safavids [Cutillas 2018]. At the end of 1528, the next Safavid ambassador arrived at the Spanish court. The subsequent conclusion of the Peace of Cambrai in August 1529 between France and the Habsburgs, the siege of Vienna by the Ottoman army, the news of the defeat of the Ottoman army by the Safavids created favorable conditions and proved the need for the formation of an anti-Ottoman coalition by Charles V, in which the main striking role was assigned to the Safavid Empire. The emperor sought to persuade the Safavid Shah to show unity and attack the Ottomans on the western spurs of his empire, thereby the Ottomans would be forced to fight on two fronts, which in turn would weaken the offensive power of the latter towards Europe. In addition, during this period, Ottoman-Safavid relations also escalated. The bone of contention between the two empires was the desire of each side to own Arabian Iraq. In 1528, as a result of a rebellion against the Safavids, the ruler of Gulharan, Nohud Sultan, known as Zulfugar bey, captured Baghdad, handed over the keys to the city to the Ottomans, expressing his submission to the Sultan, for which he paid with his life, and in June 1529 after a long siege Shah Tahmasp I managed to recapture Baghdad

[Şah Təhmasibin... 1996, 21–23]. Thus, the mission of Robert Brancetour was dictated by the time itself, and the Habsburg-Safavid alliance could be beneficial to both sides. In addition, as Y. Makhmudov notes, “The defeat in the Battle of Chaldiran clearly showed Shah Ismail that it was possible to defeat the Ottoman Empire only by dividing its armed forces into two fronts – European and Eastern...” [Makhmudov 1991, 148].

In addition, Brancetour’s mission to the Safavid state, initiated by such a powerful European empire as the Habsburgs, proves that for the ruling circles of Europe, the Safavid Empire was a recognized strong actor in the system of international relations. As D. Stokes notes, “In later years, the power differential between Europe and the East would be different, but during the centuries in question, it was possible for the two to enter into a relationship of mutual cooperation rather than one of domination and exploitation” [Stokes 2014, 1]. Besides, it is well known that the states of Europe considered the Safavid Empire the only real force capable of stopping the further offensive of the Ottoman Empire, which turned into a serious threat to their existence. Note that during the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times, European states actively pedaled the myth of a savior from the East, a certain legendary ruler of a powerful Christian state outside Islamic lands – Prester John, who would have to join the Christian rulers of Europe in the fight against the Muslim army, i.e. Ottoman Empire. This Prester John for the states of Europe could be the Safavid Shah. As D. Stokes emphasizes, “Even when the story was no longer believed, the myth still exerted its influence on Europeans’ perception of Asia, and it kept them hoping for an ally in the East. The Safavids would become one in a series of countries to be courted as the embodiment of this ‘Saviour from the East’” [Stokes 2014, 26]. Indeed, since the time of Shah Ismail I, the Safavid court has witnessed many diplomatic missions, including the de Balbi-Brancetour mission, seeking to establish allied relations against the Ottomans.

It should be mentioned that the desire of Emperor Charles V to conclude an alliance with the Safavid Shah became the object of controversy among the political circles of Europe. The question arose whether it was legitimate to sign alliances with Islamic states. The French political philosopher Jean Bodin defended King Francis I’s

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trade agreement with the Ottomans in 1536, alleging that Emperor Charles V did the same with the Safavids through Robert Brancetour. The Spanish diplomat and historian Juan Antonio de Vera y Figueroa, in his biography of Charles V, stood up for the emperor, arguing that these two pacts differed from each other, because the alliance concluded with the Safavids was not directed either against the Pope or against the Catholic prince, but against the Ottoman court, the greatest enemy of the church (for more details, see: [Cutilass 2018]).

### **3. Robert Brancetour as an imperial envoy in the court of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I**

The story of Robert Brancetour’s unexpected rise to be an imperial agent in the court of the Safavid Shah is interesting enough. In 1529, Emperor Charles V sent, as his ambassador, Jean de Balbi, Prince of Rhodes, through the Ottoman lands to the Safavid Shah with the aim of urging the latter to take military actions against their common enemy, the Ottoman Empire, which would coincide with the campaign of the emperor himself. Charles V intended to attack the Ottomans simultaneously from two directions: from the northwest and southeast. And the attack from the latter direction was assigned precisely to the Safavid army.

How strategically important it would be for the European ruling circles to convince the Safavid Shah to act in a timely manner against the Ottoman Empire, is evident from the letter sent by de Balbi to the emperor from Aleppo dated August 30, 1529. In the letter, de Balbi describes the complex military and political situation, which he witnessed on the way to the Safavid Empire: “Was obliged to stop in that city, being unable to proceed on his journey to Persia [Safavid Empire] on account of the frontiers swarming with Turks [the Ottomans], ready to attack the Sophi [Shah Tahmasp I], who by this time has invaded the dominions of the Turk [Sultan Suleiman] and taken several of his towns”, he was forced to stop in Aleppo. Further, the letter shows how favorable de Balbi considered the prevailing conditions to attack the Ottoman Sultan by the Safavid Shah: “Part of Syria has revolted against Sultan Solyman... Has written from Dalzanto (the island of Zante), advising the arrival at Modon of about 50 galleys of the Venetians, and 15 more of the Turk [the Ottomans], the crews of which were expecting news of His Majesty being soon in Italy and

taking up arms against the Turk [Sultan Suleiman], in which case they will all revolt, inasmuch as all the Turkish [Ottoman] forces in Syria are, as above stated, in front of the Sophi [Shah Tahmasp I] [Calendar of Letters... 1879, Vol. 4, Part 1, 125]. Then, de Balbi reports that he had only 10 days left to reach the destination, i.e. to the Safavid Empire. However, a letter from de Balbi to Emperor Charles V dated February 17, 1530 indicates that the former failed to reach the Safavid Empire by the planned time. From this letter it follows: "Was obliged, when almost on the frontiers of Persia [the Safavid Empire], to retrace his steps from fear of the Turks [the Ottomans] who guard the passes. Attempted then to cross the desert to La Baserre (Basra); but found the road too long and impracticable in his present state of health. God, however, has inspired him for the Emperor's service, for he has lately made the acquaintance of a Venetian gentleman, Andrea Morezin (Morosini) by name, who has kindly procured him some trusty guides knowing the country well. Hopes to be at the Court of the Sophi [Shah Tahmasp I] in about a month. Will take his departure on the 26<sup>th</sup> in company with the English gentleman [Robert Brancetour], who, after he is gone, will report on the doings of the Sophi [Shah Tahmasp I], and any other thing that may interest His Imperial Majesty" [Calendar of Letters... 1879, Vol. 4, Part 1, 260]. So, despite the fact that by the end of August 1529 de Balbi reached Aleppo, however, in February 1530, having almost reached the Safavid border, he was forced to turn off the path due to difficult desert conditions and health problems. J. Scarisbrick suggests that on the way back to Aleppo de Balbi met Robert Brancetour [Scarisbrick 1961, 170], with whom he went further to the Safavid Shah. Brancetour entered the Ottoman lands using a passport issued in the name of Morosini, for which the latter paid with his life and was executed by the Ottomans. De Balbi explained to Brancetour the significance of the upcoming mission, not only for the emperor, but for the entire Christian world. As J. Scarisbrick points out, "To have been ready to undertake this arduous journey is surprising enough, especially as Balbi had not apparently disclosed the true purpose of the enterprise" [Scarisbrick 1961, 170].

If for Emperor Charles V Robert Brancetour was the object of respect and honor, but for the English King Henry VIII he became the



object of hatred and anger. For four years Brancetour was in the retinue of the Catholic Cardinal Reginald Pole, the Bishop of London, expelled from England, who, as “the main engine of papal policy”, was entrusted with the execution of the bull of Pope Paul III of December 17, 1538, on the excommunication of King of England Henry VIII, and who also had to negotiate with the opponents of England – Emperor Charles V and King of France Francis I. Brancetour was suspected of participating in the “Exeter conspiracy” in 1538 as an agent of Pole, whose goal was to overthrow the English king Henry VIII and replace him with Henry Courtenay, the Marquess of Exeter [Scarisbrick 1961, 165–167]. In addition, Brancetour was also accused of inciting English subjects in Spain to oppose the English crown. Besides, Brancetour was also the uncle of “young Rice”, who was executed in 1531 on charges of conspiring against King Henry VIII [Froude 1858, 453].

As early as March 1538, the English government, accusing Brancetour of having connections with *mauvais sujets* (scoundrels, by which they mean connections with Cardinal Reginald Pole, as well as suspicion of participating in the abovementioned “Exeter conspiracy”), invited him to repent to King Henry VIII and in response to the mercy of the king even enter his service, to which Brancetour expressed a decisive refusal, pointing out that he had been a subject of another emperor, Charles V, for many years, and wanted to remain him [for more details, see: Letters and Papers... 1892, Vol. 13, Part 1, 271, 402–403]. As a result, on April 28, 1539, the English Parliament accused Brancetour of being aware of a recent uprising in the north of England, as well as of inciting foreign princes to war with England. So, as J. Froude notes, “This man, having been by assiduity of treason, to assume the more interesting character of a political refugee” [Froude 1858, 453].

Apparently, the meeting of Shah Tahmasp I with de Balbi and Brancetour took place in the summer of 1530 in Khorasan (most likely in Herat), at a time when the former was engaged in a war with the Uzbek khans, which is clear from the letter of the Shah addressed to the emperor. Although there is practically no information in the sources about the meeting of Robert Brancetour with Shah Tahmasp I, the surviving Spanish version of the Shah’s response letter indicates

that the Shah warmly received Brancetour and responded positively to the emperor's proposals in his letter, transmitted to the Shah by Brancetour. Shah Tahmasp I's letter to Emperor Charles V testifies to the great significance for the Shah of the mission of Robert Brancetour to the Safavid Empire. So, from the surviving letter of the Shah, it follows:

“God is pure and great. Powerful King of the world, fortunate, resourceful, just and famous Lion of the Sea, great lord and Emperor Don Carlos [Charles V], may God grant you what you wish. After making infinite wishes [for your well-being], I make it known how Roberto Bransetor [Robert Brancetour] your servant came to me with a message and his arrival greatly helped settle our friendship. He is a noble person. He let me know what you had written and sent so that it was shown that we were united, and I have driven away from me those who were not [a part of this], and each day our friendship will grow and its opponents will weaken. At the time they [de Balbi and Brancetour] arrived, I was making war in Coraçon [Khorasan] and with God's help I was able to defeat, kill and destroy all of the kings and great captains who were more than two hundred thousand men, and I settled the government as I wanted. After this, I returned to Tabriz. Concerning what you wrote and sent me, your messenger carries back the reply and may it please God that its sign will soon become clear. For the sake of friendship, we should always write and send messengers and may it be such that the Moors [the Ottomans] are kept in their place, and you should keep me advised of all the news there may be. May the honor of the world ever accompany you” (quoting from: [Subrahmanyam 2011, 83]).

#### **4. Aftermaths of Robert Brancetour's mission to the Safavid Empire**

Despite the fact that, as J. Cutillas points out, the alliance was not concluded, there are rumors about a possible “invasion” of Charles V into the Persian Gulf. Rumors originate from a letter of Aloigi di Giovanni of Venice (Roncinotto Luigi). In his work *Viaggio di Colocut*, he testifies that during the mission of 1529, 1500 soldiers with artillery arrived in the Persian Gulf, led by an ambassador, to help the Shah in the fight against the Ottomans, though there is no documentary evidence confirming this fact. In addition, the Spanish chronicler

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Francisco Lopez de Gomara testifies that in 1534 Shah Tahmasp I had military assistance in the form of the Spanish army and artillery [see: Cutillas 2018].

However, unlike J. Cutillas, S. Subrahmanyam emphasizes the ineffectiveness of the letter of Charles V to the Safavid Shah, which led to nothing but the murder of the unfortunate Andrea Morosini by the Ottomans, and claims that “No real alliance was to be had with the Safavids, and the idea of the encirclement of the Ottomans remained a chimera” and the Habsburgs revived the project again in the 1560s [Subrahmanyam 2011, 83].

After completing his “mission”, it was extremely dangerous for Brancetour to return back along the same road, especially since the Ottomans were already on the alert and, as J. Scarisbrick notes, “...May well have understood now the genesis of the recent Persian [Safavid] attack” [Scarisbrick 1961, 171]. Approximately in the middle of 1531, Brancetour decided to return by an alternative route on a Portuguese ship – the recently discovered by the Portuguese sea route through the Persian Gulf to Portugal, rounding the Cape of Good Hope. Thus, by the will of fate, Robert Brancetour became not only the first Englishman to visit the Safavid Empire, but also the first Englishman to see the eastern coast of Africa and the Cape of Good Hope (see: [Aubin 1961; Scarisbrick 1961, 171]). Upon his return to Portugal in 1532, Brancetour met with the emperor and told him about the success of his meeting with the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I. As a result, Brancetour was included in the emperor’s retinue and accompanied him on further visits.

Although information about how Brancetour’s audience with Shah Tahmasp I went is rather scarce, the diplomatic correspondence of subsequent years, as well as the fact that in the next ten years Robert Brancetour was a part of closest entourage of Emperor Charles V himself, testify to its success. Thus, from a letter from King Henry VIII to Bishop Ghinucci of Worcester, Benet, the English ambassador in Rome, and Cassalis, the English ambassador to the Papal Court, dated October 2, 1531, it is clear that the mission of Robert Brancetour to the Safavid Shah did not pass without leaving a trace. In this letter, the English king testifies that “The rumour of danger from the Turks [the Ottomans] is baseless, and we hear that he [Sultan Suleiman] has already sustained great defeats from the Sophy

[Shah Tahmasp I], also that letters have been sent from the Great Master of Rhodes that the Turks [the Ottomans] have no intention against us. It is a mere ruse” [Letters and Papers... 1880, Vol. 5, 219]. Letters from the imperial ambassador in Rome, Miçer Mai, dated May 26, 1531, also testify to the successful completion of negotiations between Brancetour and Shah Tahmasp I:

“News recently come from Hungary and confirmed by the Venetians, state that the Sophi of Persia [the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I] has completely routed the Turk [Sultan Suleiman]” [Calendar of Letters... Vol. 4, Part 2].

The sources even contain information about the participation of Robert Brancetour in the Safavid army against the Ottomans. Thus, a letter from Winter to a member of the Privy Chamber, Sir John Russell, dated April 7, 1533, states: “It is said here that an Englishman named Robt. Brensetur [Robert Brancetour], who made his fortune in Venice, was sent by the Emperor to ‘the king of Sophye’ [Shah Tahmasp I], and is now his chief captain against the Turk [Sultan Suleiman]” [Letters and Papers... 1882, Vol. 6, 147]. In addition, Winter even predicts a bright future for Robert in the case of a successful completion of his enterprise: “Every one says that if he speed well in this battle, he can be no less than a duke” [Letters and Papers... 1882, Vol. 6, 147].

Moreover, the dialogue that took place in January 1540 in Paris between Emperor Charles V and the politician, diplomat from England in Italy and France Sir Thomas Wyatt, who arrived in Paris specifically on behalf of the King of England Henry VIII and whose main task was to convince the emperor to extradite the English “rebel” and “traitor to the English crown” in accordance with the terms of the agreements signed between England and the Holy Roman Empire, is a direct evidence of the success of the mission of Brancetour to the Safavid Empire in 1530 and testifies how valuable Robert was to the emperor.

##### **5. “*And this was no small service that he did...*”: strategic significance of Robert Brancetour’s mission to the Safavid court**

Despite Wyatt’s demand to immediately hand over Brancetour to England, Emperor Charles V refused and retorted that even “...If he [Brancetour] was in the Tower of London, ... he would never consent

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so to charge his honour and conscience” [Froude 1858, 456]. Despite all the efforts of Wyatt to denigrate Robert Brancetour in the eyes of the emperor, the latter did not change his attitude towards Robert. On the contrary, from a letter from Cardinal Farnese to Paul III of March 6, 1540, it becomes clear that Charles V soon sent Brancetour to Rome with Cardinal Pole to await further orders (see: [Letters and Papers... 1896, Vol. 15, 123]). Obviously, the “further orders” should be understood as the next dispatch of Brancetour to negotiate with the Safavid Shah, which was mentioned by the emperor himself in a conversation with Wyatt. Another mission of Brancetour to the Safavid Empire on behalf of Emperor Charles V took place in 1537 [Gracia Hernan 2016, 70]. In one of diplomatic letters to English King Henry VIII, dated January 7, 1540, it was reported that Emperor Charles V was planning again to send Brancetour one or two more times to the Safavid court (see: [Scarisbrick 1961, 172]).

Wyatt’s letter to Henry VIII dated January 7, 1540 contains information about an interesting dialogue between the former and Emperor Charles V. Thus, from the letter it follows:

“Had access to his Majesty [Charles V], along with Tate, on Twelfth Even after dinner, who, after reading the King’s letters and hearing their credence, asked who the rebel was. Said, Brancetour. Ah, quod he, Robert? That same Sir, quod I. I shall tell you, quod he, Monsieur l’Embassadour, it is he that hath been in Perse [Safavid Empire]. As he saith, quod I. Na, quod he, I know it by good tokens; for when I sent the knight of the Rhodes, he of Piemont [Jean de Balbi], with charge to the Sophi [Shah Tahmasp I], through Turkey [the Ottoman Empire], he fell sick, and this man [Brancetour], for the love he knew between the King and me, helped him; and in conclusion, when he saw he should die he opened his charge unto this man [Brancetour] and told him what service he should do to me and to all Christendom, if he would undertake it. And he did so and it seemed true, for the King of Perse [Shah Tahmasp I] the same time did invade, and he [Brancetour] went about the tother way by the sailing of the Portygalles and brought me sure tokens of the man, as well what money I gave him as other things. And this was no small service that he did; and I have had him follow me this 10 or 12 years in all my voyages, in Africa, in Province, in Italy, and now here...” [Letters and Papers... 1896, Vol. 15, 15]. Wyatt’s demand to extradite Robert to

England even aroused the wrath of Emperor Charles V. In anger, the emperor asked Wyatt: “Would you [think] that I should consent to the destruction of a man who followeth me, upon my word, that yet for his service I have not rewardid, but hold hym in hope and gyven hym somewhat to relieve hym? And I assure yow that it were no small service, if I go, as ye know I have purposid ons or twice, in to Levant, to send hym again into Perse [Safavid Empire]” [quoted from: Scarisbrick 1961, 172]. As H. Abid Masood notes, “...This surprising episode allows us to locate the origins of England’s interest in Persia [the Safavid Empire] as early as the reign of Henry VIII” [Abid Masood 2011, 2].

It should be noted that for almost a whole year, preparations were made at the state level to detain Brancetour. In a letter addressed by Henry VIII to the French King Francis I dated March 8, 1539, the former not only asks Francis I to inform him of Robert’s arrival in France, to refuse him an audience, “...But also arrest the said Pole, Branceter [Brancetour], Throgmorton, and other traitors whom the bp. of Hereford our ambassador with you shall name, and send them hither [to England] as the treaties between us [England and France] require...” [Letters and Papers... 1894, Vol. 14, Part 1, 182]. In a letter, Henry VIII expressed the hope that the emperor would also abide by the treaties. However, as history has shown, the king’s expectations were in vain. How “important” the arrest of Robert Brancetour was for the English crown is evident from the letters Wyatt sent to King Henry VIII and Cromwell, dated December 16 and 30, 1539, respectively [see: Letters and Papers... 1895, Vol. 14, Part 2, 256, 289–290]. Wyatt convinces the king of the need to detain Brancetour: “...and [I] assure your Majesty it were for your service greatly to have him [Brancetour]” [Letters and Papers... 1895, Vol. 14, Part 2, 256].

However, Wyatt’s attempt to arrest Brancetour on January 3, 1540 in Paris was not as easy as the former had hoped, because during the arrest, Robert told the police that he was a subject of Emperor Charles V, what radically changed the situation, because the matter directly concerned the emperor himself. As J. Froude notes, “Wyatt imprudently affected to consider that the affair belonged rather to the police than to the government...” [Froude 1858, 454]. In the end, Robert was released.

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It should be noted that the Brancetour case almost caused a deterioration in interstate relations between France and England. The indignation of the English ambassador Wyatt at the release of Brancetour from arrest and, as a result, his accusations against the king of France, Francis I, that this act of the king is an act against God, dishonorable, unjust and contrary to treaties, led to the fact that Francis I demanded that the English ambassador to France be immediately recalled and replaced with a more prudent and wise one [for more details see: *Letters and Papers...* 1896, Vol. 15, 39]. In addition, in response to the emperor’s refusal to extradite Brancetour to England, Wyatt called Charles V “ungrateful” to Henry VIII, to what the emperor replied that he could not be ungrateful, for a superior could not be ungrateful to an inferior, what, as D. Potter points out, revealed “His ultimate aims of universal domination” [Potter 2011, 39].

## **6. England, the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation and Robert Brancetour’s mission to the Safavid Empire**

Robert Brancetour’s mission to the Safavid Empire, as A. Pagden and S. Subrahmanyam point out, was “the first clearly documented visit by an English trader to sixteenth-century Asia, albeit with a political rather than strictly commercial mission in mind” [Pagden and Subrahmanyam 2011, 289]. Although Brancetour was sent to the Safavid court as an official representative of the Habsburg Empire, the fact that he was a born Englishman and subject of England, it is very important to study the position of the English authorities in regard to his diplomatic activity in the Safavid Empire, since, as an examination of contemporary sources showed, a strong desire of the English crown to arrest Brancetour could be a reason of the failure of his enterprise in the Safavid Empire and, consequently, could cause great harm to the Christendom, leaving the European states alone face to face with the Ottoman threat.

Wyatt’s aforementioned letter to King Henry VIII is also of great interest to us. It testifies to the awareness of both Thomas Wyatt and King Henry VIII about the role of the Safavid Empire in the context of the ongoing geopolitical processes, in particular the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation, which was closely followed in all European courts, including England, because at that time, the Safavid Empire seemed

to be the only power capable to resist the Ottoman Empire, which turned into an object of fear for the ruling circles of almost all European states. Not only the outcome, but any change in the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation could affect the overall configuration of political forces in the international arena of the region. The proof of this is the letter of Pope Clement VII, addressed to Henry VIII on January 4, 1532, i.e. 8 years before Wyatt's mission to Charles V, in which the Pope, in horror, describes the active military preparations of the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman for the "expedition against Christendom" planned to be realized in the spring of 1533, which the Sultan himself intended to lead, and diligently tries to convince England to join the anti-Ottoman alliance, expressing fear for the emerging peaceful relations between the Ottoman and Safavid empires. Moreover, the Pope operates with the good deeds of the king's ancestors on the path of preserving Christianity, reminding him of his title of "Defender of Christianity". From the letter it follows:

"Solyman [Sultan Suleiman] is so linked by a new friendship with the Sophy, King of the Persians [Shah Tahmasp I], that whilst waging this war he will have nothing to fear. ... These things compel us to fear that one time or another the catastrophe will take place... We have already wasted two years representing and admonishing in vain. The enemies of Christ [the Ottoman and Safavid Empires] are agreed to combat the Faith, and our people cannot agree to defend it; so let us place the neck under the yoke, and accept Mahomet instead of Christ" [Calendar of State Papers... 1871, 312].

This letter of Pope Henry VIII also helps to shed light on the reasons for the ambivalent attitude of Western states towards the Safavid Empire during that period. As H. Abid Masood emphasizes, "The English and larger Christian attitude towards Persia [the Safavid Empire] in the first half of the sixteenth century can thus be characterized as balanced between hope and fear" [Abid Masood 2011, 3]. Western countries closely followed the development of relations between the two great empires of the Muslim East. The development of events between the Ottomans and the Safavids, whether positive or negative, directly affected the geopolitical situation in Europe itself, whose states lived in fear of becoming another victim of the Ottoman expansion policy. Undoubtedly, the maintenance of tense relations between the two Muslim empires, their constant involvement in active



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hostilities against each other was in the interests of the ruling circles of European states. It is not surprising that during the active phase of the Ottoman conquests in the European direction, the Safavid court turned into a destination of frequent diplomatic missions of European states, the main purpose of which was to assure the Safavid Shah of their readiness to provide him with the necessary assistance in the fight against their main enemy – the Ottoman Empire. As H. Abid Masood points out, “Robert Brancetour’s visit to Persia [the Safavid Empire] was the result of just such an initiative by the Holy Roman Emperor” [Abid Masood 2011, 3]. Undoubtedly, to convince the Shah in the readiness of European ruling circles to provide the necessary assistance in the fight against the Ottoman Empire was implied by Charles V in his letter to Henry VIII under the words “Brancetour’s order to Sophie”.

In addition, the analysis of the royal diplomatic correspondence revealed the inconsistency of the ingrained concept of the emergence of England’s interest in the Safavid Empire only in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and even then within the framework of the state’s trade and economic policy. A study of the correspondence of the ruling circles of England showed that England monitored the progress of the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation and, as H. Abid Masood notes, “...The English had a clear understanding of the role Persia [the Safavid Empire] might play in the balancing of power in early modern world from the 1530s and 1540s” [Abid Masood 2011, 14].

A letter from the English ambassador in the court of Charles V, Richard Sampson, to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, dated August 16, 1524, in which the latter describes in detail the reception by the emperor of the Safavid ambassador on July 2, 1524, proves that England watched closely the development of Ottoman-Safavid relations as far back as the 20s of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Sampson even emphasizes the low voice of the Safavid ambassador: “He spoke his message in such a low voice that the Emperor could scarcely hear it; which was the wisest point that Sampson saw in him, as the message was the simplest he ever heard, and more worthy of silence than speech” [Letters and Papers... 1875, Vol. 4, 254].

From the letter one can feel Sampson’s obvious dismissive attitude towards the Safavid ambassador: “He spoke in Italian, but so low that both the Emperor and the Chancellor had to bow down their

heads to hear him, and he would not rise from his knees though the Emperor commanded him, more like a suppliant than a prince's messenger. ...His message was this: As the Emperor is called emperor of Almain, he went thither to find him, but found his brother, and came hither from him. Here he paused, as though he had no more to say; and the Chancellor bade him show the Emperor his credence, and what his master intended. He then said that his master had not and would not have any peace with the Turk [Sultan Suleiman], who keeps no promises, but makes peace with one to obtain his purpose from another, and so deceives all men. At these words he kissed the Emperor's knee and departed. Does not think the words were spoken as well as he has written it. They say it is more than a year since he was with his master. His person is as simple as his words... The ambassador of Sophia [the Safavid Empire] has since said that his patrono [already late Shah Ismail I] intended to have advanced against the Turk [Sultan Suleiman] last April, and that if the Emperor will attack him on this side, he will not desist. This augments the estimation of his message but little, as there is no knowledge, as yet, of any attack on the Turk [Sultan Suleiman]" [Letters and Papers... 1875, Vol. 4, 253–254].

The interest of the English court in the Safavids, in particular in Ottoman-Safavid relations, did not disappear even in the 30s of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by a letter from Hawkins to Henry VIII dated July 16, 1533, in which the former, briefly informing the king about all the latest news of the geopolitical situation in the region, also paid attention to the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation, determining the success of the Safavid Shah in the fight against the Ottomans with the mission of Robert Brancetour: "The Sophy [Shah Tahmasib I] has taken Trebizonde. An Englishman [Robert Brancetour] in the Emperor's court four years ago went to the Sophy to provoke him to war upon the Turk [Sultan Suleiman]" [Letters and Papers... 1882, Vol. 6, 370].

Of great interest is also the text of the letter of Eustace Chapuys, Ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in England, addressed to the emperor dated September 15, 1533. This letter demonstrates the awareness of Henry VIII and his entourage about the current geopolitical situation in the region, including the Ottoman-Safavid conflict. The aspirations of Emperor Charles V to incite the

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Safavid Shah against the Ottoman Sultan became the subject of special discussion in the royal court, which is no coincidence, because it was at this time – in 1533 – that messages were sent to England about the diplomatic activities of Robert Brancetour.

So, the letter tells about a dinner attended by Eustace Chapuys, the English Duke of Norfolk and others, during which one of the guests mentioned that “...The Turk [Sultan Suleiman] was hindered by the Sofi [Shah Tahmasp I], and that you [Charles V] had done a great good to Christendom by finding means of moving the said Sofi [Shah Tahmasp I]...”, to which the duke immediately replied that “...there were Christian princes who had greater intelligence with the Sofi [Shah Tahmasp I] than Your Majesty [Charles V]”, to which Chapuys replied that “...Your Majesty had no jealousy, but great pleasure at the intelligence of other princes with the Sophy [Shah Tahmasp I], which was much more praiseworthy than having it with the Turk [Sultan Suleiman], Barbarossa, or the king of Fez” [Letters and Papers... 1882, Vol. 6, 470], which, as H. Abid Masood notes, “...is a key element of early modern conceptions of Safavid Persia [Safavid Empire]” [Abid Masood 2011, 4]. Note that the mentioned “means of moving the Sofi” assumed none other than Robert Brancetour, sent by the emperor to Shah Tahmasp I in order to persuade him to launch military operations against the Ottoman Empire. As can be seen from the letter, having good relations with the Safavid Empire was even an object of obvious royal envy in England. According to H. Abid Masood, one of the major trajectories in the conceptions of the Safavid Empire in early modern England was *anti-Ottomanism*, without which the former was unimaginable: “In their anti-Ottomanism, the European Christians and Safavid Persians [the population of the Safavid Empire] had a common feature which allowed them to identify each other as allies” [Abid Masood 2011, 5]. In addition, H. Abid Masood also claims that “The episode of Brancetour in the 1530s, as well as the voyages of the agents of the Muscovy Company in 1560s and 70s and the later ‘travailes’ of the Sherley Brothers in late 1590s, all had the underlying assumption of Persian [Safavid] anti-Ottomanism as their driving force and inspiration. This shows the resilience of this conception of Persia [the Safavid Empire] in the English imagination in the sixteenth century and it crops up again and again throughout the century” [Abid Masood 2011, 7]. However, we allow

ourselves to disagree with this opinion, because in the case of Brancetour it is inappropriate to talk about the *anti-Ottomanism* of England in relation to the Safavid Empire, because Robert ended up in the Safavid Empire as an envoy of the Habsburg emperor, and not the English crown. In the case of Anthony Jenkinson, although he was sent to the Safavid Empire in the most difficult socio-political situation, at a time when Protestant England found itself in a state of *pariah* on the continent, the driving imperative of the ruling circles of England in the desire to establish bilateral relations with the Safavids was not the desire to create an anti-Ottoman alliance, but the establishment of trade relations; in the case of the Shirley brothers, *anti-Ottomanism* took place, but not from England, but from the Safavids themselves, who sent them to European courts in order to create a coalition against a common enemy – the Ottoman Empire.

It is well known that the English King Henry VIII, as Professor J. Brotton notes, was fascinated by the Islamic world, which, apparently, was subsequently “transferred” to his daughter, the future Queen of England Elizabeth I, who became famous as “Sultana Isabelle” for her active relations with the states of the Islamic world. The contemporary sources contain interesting information that Henry VIII and his retinue could appear in public dressed in Ottoman attire. Thus, *Hall’s Chronicle* says that as early as 1509, Henry VIII arrived at Parliament at Westminster “appareled after Turkish [Ottoman] fasshio [fashion]” [Hall’s chronicle... 1809, 513]. The Reformation brewing in England, the split between Catholics and Protestants contributed to the formation of the foreign policy of the Tudors. It was not surprising that Henry VIII adhered to a neutral position on the formation of an anti-Ottoman alliance, which subsequently even led to the conduct of a special “Muslim policy” by Queen Elizabeth I, and modern scholars began to call Tudor England the “Orient Isle”. The maintenance of peaceful relations by English Crown with one of the most powerful empires of the period, the Ottoman Empire, which was waging wars with her enemies, with whom England’s relations only deteriorated over the decades, was a manifestation of the diplomatic tactics of the English authorities. As J. Brotton emphasizes, “For many English Catholics and Puritans such alliances were an abomination; to a number of statesmen and merchants they represented profit and made military sense” [Brotton 2016]. Undoubtedly, the

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English crown was well aware of the benefits of maintaining peaceful relations with the Ottoman Empire in difficult social and political conditions for England. According to J. Brotton, “In an age when the Ottoman Empire was regarded as the world’s most powerful and successful military machine, the possibility of an Anglo-Ottoman alliance was viewed with genuine alarm in Spain and Italy as a direct threat to Catholic hegemony in Europe and the Mediterranean” [Brotton 2016]. Thus, the Ottoman expansion towards Central Europe served the interests of King Henry VIII. The Ottoman threat drew the attention of the Catholic states of Europe away from Protestant England, thereby unwittingly contributing to Henry VIII’s efforts to reform the English church, for the European states made practically no real efforts to stop Henry. It was the Ottoman threat and the siege of Vienna by the Ottoman army in 1529 that did not allow the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Charles V and Pope Clement VII to distract Henry VIII from his desire, after almost 20 years of marriage, to break the marriage ties with his wife Catherine of Aragon, who was the aunt of Emperor Charles V, which in turn led to a whole pleiad of actions to reform the English Church:

- in 1533 the English Parliament passed *the Act in Restraint of Appeals*, which put an end to the authority of the Pope in England, who opposed the divorce of the king;
- in 1534 *the Act of Supremacy* was passed, proclaiming Henry VIII the head of the English Church;
- in 1536 *the Ten Articles* were published, which determined the rules of the independent English Church.

After excommunication of Henry VIII by Pope Paul III in January 1539 in Toledo Emperor Charles V and King Francis I concluded an agreement on the impossibility of further alliances with Henry VIII, which, in view of the Ottoman advance into Europe, was the highest measure that the European monarchs could undertake against England in the given difficult conditions.

It should be noted that King Henry VIII was concerned about the rapprochement of the Habsburgs with France, against which England, together with the imperial army, acted during the Italian wars. The possible alliance of the emperor with the Ottoman Empire posted a danger to England. In both cases it could turn out badly against England itself, because would untie the hands of continental authorities.

Therefore, attacking the Ottoman Empire by the Safavid Shah, as Charles V counted on so much sending de Balbi-Brancetour's mission to negotiate with Shah Tahmasp I, was unprofitable for England. As the Duke of Norfolk himself admitted in a conversation with the ambassador of Emperor Charles V, Eustace Chapuys in 1530, "I tell you candidly that last year, when the King [Henry VIII], my master, refused your application for help against the Turk, his reason was that he did not wish the Emperor to become more powerful than he is, or to help his elevation in any way, as he himself would have nothing to gain, but much to lose by it" [Calendar of Letters... 1879, Vol. 4, Part 1]. Moreover, in the diplomatic circles of European states there were rumors that King Henry VIII and the French King Francis I were in the same league with the Ottoman Sultan [Letters and Papers... 1882, Vol. 6, 147].

Therefore, it is not surprising that in the 1520–1530s the English crown was not interested in joining the anti-Ottoman coalition, ignoring in every possible way the proposals, and sometimes pressure, of European monarchs and the Pope. Perhaps one of the principal reasons for the ardent desire of King Henry VIII to arrest and punish Robert Brancetour was the dissatisfaction of the former with his diplomatic mission to the Safavid Empire, which, if the latter and the European monarchs successfully acted as a united bloc against the Ottomans, could negatively affect the policy and situation of England and destroy the king's plans to strengthen his royal power.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study of the diplomatic mission of Robert Brancetour to the Safavid Empire in 1529, delegated there by the Emperor of the Habsburg Empire Charles V with the aim of involving the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I in a military-political alliance against the "war machine" – the Ottoman Empire, which was considered at that time one of the most powerful empires of the early modern era, whose policy of expanding its influence endangered the existence of many states of Europe, and besides, which was one of the main political and economic rivals of the Safavid Empire itself, made a significant contribution to the study of the history of European-Safavid relations, in particular Habsburg-Safavid relations, since the mission of Brancetour up to the present day has been one of the little-studied issues.

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The detailed analysis of the royal and diplomatic correspondence revealed how important and vital Robert Brancetour’s mission was for the whole Christian world at that moment. Emperor Charles V called his help “*no small service*” that he did for the emperor himself and to all Christendom. Robert Brancetour is mentioned in almost every second diplomatic letter of the 1530s – early 1540s, concerning the Ottoman threat, and he was not only mentioned, but praised as a person, who managed to incite the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I to oppose the Ottoman Empire and to take military actions against the Ottomans. Thus, it was obvious that the Safavid Empire performed a crucial function in the *anti-Ottomanism* policy of European states and its significance in political triangle “European states – Ottoman Empire – Safavid Empire” was great. No wonder that Shah Tahmasp I was considered by his European counterparts a certain legendary savior from the East – Prester John, who will save the Christendom from the Ottoman threat.

Special attention was paid to the attitude of English Crown to Robert Brancetour’s mission to the Safavid Empire, of which he was a subject. Based on the examined diplomatic letters it was revealed that English authorities were in an adverse position in relation to the possible Habsburg-Safavid anti-Ottoman alliance. For the first time in scientific historiography, it was supposed that English King Henry VIII’s hostile attitude to Robert Brancetour was based not only on his personal wrath and hatred for him, but also on serious political reasons. While most of the European states lived in fear of becoming the next victim of the Ottoman expansionist policy, England was not threatened. Being in difficult political situation, English authorities were busy with strengthening their positions. Strengthening the power of the Emperor Charles V, who was one of the main political rivals of Tudor England in the region, by eradicating the Ottoman threat with the help of the Safavid Empire, did not meet the interests of England. Therefore, it is not surprising that the English authorities were so firm in their desire to arrest Robert Brancetour. The aspirations of Emperor Charles V to incite the Safavid Shah to launch military actions against the Ottoman Sultan became the subject of special concern, and “greater intelligence with the Sofi” of any European state as well as having good relations with the Safavid Empire was even an object of obvious royal envy in English royal court.

Thus, a deeper study of such issue of European-Safavid relations as the diplomatic activity of the Englishman Robert Brancetour as the ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, sent to the Safavid court in 1529, which has not received due scientific attention, not only will help to shed light on little studied issues of Habsburg-Safavid relations, but also will contribute to the study of the systems of relations “West-East” and “Christendom-Muslim World”.

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*Л. Кафар-заде*

**“І ЦЕ БУЛА ЗНАЧНА ПОСЛУГА, ЯКУ ВІН НАДАВ...”:**

**МІСІЯ РОБЕРТА БРАНСТУРА**

**У СЕФЕВІДСЬКУ ІМПЕРІЮ**

Вперше у науковій історіографії зроблено спробу висвітлити одне з малодосліджених питань історії європейсько-сефевідських відносин – детально вивчити дипломатичну місію англійця Роберта Бранстура, – посланця імператора Священної Римської імперії Карла V, делегованого у 1529 р. до двору Сефевідів. Ця місія була однією з перших серйозних спроб залучити імперію Сефевідів до військово-політичного союзу із західноєвропейськими державами. Об’єктом дослідження цієї статті є “значна послуга”, яку Бранстур зробив усьому християнському світу. Йдеться про його діяльність, спрямовану на залучення Сефевідів до антиосманської коаліції і головним чином на заохочення шаха до активних воєнних дій проти Османської імперії, яка була одним з основних ворогів багатьох європейських держав і становила реальну загрозу їхньому існуванню. Місія Бранстура в імперію Сефевідів, ініційована такою могутньою європейською державою, як Священна Римська імперія, доводить, наскільки стратегічно значущою для панівних кіл європейських держав була участь імперії Сефевідів у антиосманській кампанії, а також свідчить про її важливу роль у політичній історії не тільки мусульманського Сходу, а й християнської Європи. Крім того, поряд із висвітленням ролі імперії Сефевідів у військовій та дипломатичній історії ранньомодерної Європи, зокрема у політичному трикутнику

“Європейські держави – Османська імперія – імперія Сефевідів”, стаття має наукове значення ще й тому, що в ній досліджується ставлення англійської влади, підданим якої був Роберт Бранстур, до антиосманської політики європейських держав, особливо Габсбургів. На базі детального аналізу історичних джерел того часу, зокрема дипломатичного листування, вперше у науковій історіографії висувається припущення, що однією з головних причин бажання англійської корони заарештувати Бранстура було побоювання британської влади, що Габсбурзько-Сефевідський союз, а саме їхня спільна боротьба проти османської агресії – що було основною метою дипломатичних місій Бранстура при дворі Сефевідів – могла стати серйозною перешкодою для реалізації їхньої політики зміцнення королівської влади в Англії, яка опинилася у складних політичних умовах на континенті.

**Ключові слова:** Роберт Бранстур, габсбурзько-сефевідські відносини, шах Тахмасп I, Карл V, Генріх VIII, антиосманізм, дипломатична місія, 1529 р.

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