

OFFICIAL VISITS FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE MING DYNASTY

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the official visits from the Ottoman Empire to the Ming dynasty in China over a 195-year period, spanning from 1423 to 1618. It primarily draws on original texts from two official Chinese history books: the *History of the Ming and Veritable Records of the Ming*. The author concludes that there were 14 official visits from the Ottoman Empire, with the reigns of Emperor Sulaiman I of the Ottoman Empire and Emperor Shizong of the Ming dynasty marking the most cooperative era between the two powers. The article details two incidents concerning the tributary activities, including the “1543 Frontier Incident” involving the Ottoman Empire’s delegation to China and its resolution. It also examines the opposition to the Empire’s paying tribute, which arose among some Ming court officials during the 1520s, under the Jiajing reign, and their rationale. The final section discusses some key aspects of the Empire’s visits: the delegations’ routes and journey durations to China; the tribute items and rewards from the Chinese throne; the influence of delegations from Turfan and other Central Asian countries accompanying the Ottoman’s delegations to China; and the residency of certain Turkish envoys in China.

Keywords: Ottoman China Relations, Ming Dynasty, Ottoman Empire, Turfan

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I. INTRODUCTION

Research results regarding the historical diplomatic exchanges between the Ottoman Empire and the Chinese Ming Dynasty seem limited. I found only one article specifically on this topic, entitled “The Diplomatic and Cultural Relations between the Ottoman Empire and China in the 16th-17th Centuries,” written by a Turkish researcher, Gürhan Kirilen.¹ He provides a statistic of 9 recorded delegations during the reigns of Emperors Shizong (r. 1522-1567) and Shenzong (r. 1573-1620), sourced from Chinese historical texts, which I will also reference in the following narrations. Concerning the Ottoman’s official relationship with the Chinese Ming dynasty, I believe that Chinese source literature, including both official and unofficial documents, warrants further exploration. In this paper, I will primarily utilize two official books, supplemented by some unofficial sketchbooks, to delve more broadly into this topic.

II. THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND CHINESE MING DYNASTY

The Ming dynasty, which ruled China from 1368 to 1644, succeeded the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). It was the last imperial dynasty in China to be ruled by the ethnic Han Chinese. Initially, the Ming capital was located in Nanjing; then, it was relocated to Beijing in 1421 by the third emperor of the dynasty, where it stayed until the dynasty’s end. The Ottoman Empire, which had been growing for a century by the time the Ming dynasty was founded, established Constantinople (now Istanbul) as its capital in 1453, a status it retained until 1922.

Due to the considerable distance between the two empires, no major conflicts such as wars existed. Diplomatic relations were initiated in 1524, facilitating regular communications between the Ming dynasty and the Ottoman Empire. These diplomatic interactions are documented in the official Chinese dynastic histories.

Regarding the term to refer to the Ottoman Empire, when the Arabs met the Byzantine Greeks, the latter, being the heirs of the Roman Empire, called themselves Romaioi (Romans); so that the Arabs called the people “the Rum” (see Qur’an, xxx), their territory “the land of

the Rum,” and the Mediterranean “the sea of the Rum.”² Initially, Arab authors in Syria and Egypt used the term “Atrak” (Turks) to differentiate the Ottomans from the Mamluks, who were previously known as Jarkasiyya or Shirakasa (Circassians). However, they soon started using “Rumi” (plural Arwam) to refer to Ottomans and “Rum” to denote both Anatolia and the Ottoman Balkan provinces. This shift in terminology reflects the changing political landscape and the integration of the Ottoman identity into the region.³

In China, the earliest title to refer to present-day Turkey can be traced back to a Song dynasty work titled *Lingwai Daida* (嶺外代答), which translates to *Representative Answers from the Regions beyond the Wuling Mountains*. Completed in the thirteenth century, this geographical treatise by Zhou Qufei detailed the geography, history, social customs, and economy of southern China during his time.⁴ It also included descriptions of overseas states, reaching as far as Africa and southern Spain. When describing a city in Asia Minor, Zhou Qufei used the term “Meilu-gudun” (眉路骨惇), which was a transliteration of the Arabic term “Mulhidun.” This term originally referred to those considered heretical by Islamic standards, possibly because Istanbul had been the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, which did not follow Islamic practices. The term likely originated from Arab merchants who traveled to China. Although other contemporary texts used different Chinese characters to denote the same location, the pronunciation remained consistent, all referring to what is now known as Turkey.

Following Zhou Qufei’s *Representative Answers*, Zhao Rukuo’s *Records of All Barbarian Countries* stands out as another significant work, completed in 1225. Zhao Rukuo was the first to use the term “Lumei” (蘆眉), which is typically translated as “Rum,” to refer to Asia Minor and its surrounding regions. The English translation “Rum” is commonly used to denote the historical term in Chinese texts corresponding to present-day Turkey. This term gained widespread acceptance during the Ming Dynasty. For instance, Shen Maoshang’s (慎懋賞) *Extensive Records of Foreign Countries from Four Directions* (四夷廣記), written in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, employed “Lumi” (魯密) to denote Turkey, which was a variant of “Lumei” (蘆眉) in different Chinese characters. In historical texts of the Ming dynasty, such as the *History of the Ming* and *Veritable Records of the Ming*, the Ottoman Empire, centered in what is now Turkey, was referred to as “Lumi” (魯迷) or “Roumi” (肉迷). These terms are believed to have been derived from “Rum,” which itself is thought to have originated from “Roman,”

1 The author also mentions the existence of an abundance of blue and white porcelain preserved in Topkapı Palace. This is indeed a fact, which might be attributed to official exchanges through emissary visits, but mainly, I think, came from commercial exchanges, given that present-day Istanbul was one of the final destinations for both the overland and maritime silk roads.

2 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th edition), vol. 19, p. 726.

3 Bruce Masters. *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918*, p. 13. For the details of references please see the list at the end of this article.

4 Zhou Qufei, *Lingwai Daida* [completed 1178 CE], scroll 3, “Dashi countries,” p. 100.

reflecting the historical use of Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, situated in the region now known as Turkey.

Direct person-to-person communications between the Rum and the Ming Dynasty are well-documented. For instance, a stony tablet erected in the fifth year of the Hongzhi reign (1493) in present-day Nanjing, contains an inscription that commemorates the throne-issued construction of two Jingjiao-mosques in the city south of the Yingtian-*fu* seat (Nanjing). This inscription provides evidence of the interactions between individuals from the Rum and the Ming dynasty. The statement on “Inscription Commemorating the Imperial Construction of the Two Worship Halls of the Jingjue Mosque in the Southern Part of Yingtian-*fu* [Nanjing] of the Yangtse-South” states:⁵

Upon the establishment of the Ming dynasty in Nanjing by Emperor Taizu, individuals such as *Yibulajin* [Ibrahim] and *Makeludin* [Makruddin] were affiliated to China and have since enjoyed the benefits bestowed by the imperial court. ...In the 21st year of the Hongwu reign [1388], *Yibulajin*, *Makeludin* and others, originally from the Rum in the Western Regions, participated in the conquest of Jinshan and Kaiyuan [both becoming part of Nanjing today] under the command of the *Song Guo Gong* [Prince of the Song Kingdom].⁶ They subsequently adopted Chinese nationality. Emperor Taizong highly valued their conversion and awarded them with satins, fine silks, and other gifts. The Ministry of Rites was tasked with their relocation, moving their families from Yongping-*fu* [in today’s southwestern Shandong province] to the capital [Nanjing]. The imperial court also authorized the construction of two mosques for their religious practices and allocated five houses near the mosque’s minaret for *Makruddin* and his people. This arrangement was made to ensure that their descendants could learn and uphold the teachings of the True Scriptures [Koran]...

Ma Mingda first mentioned the above-mentioned historical event. Ma wrote that, the book *Bianzheng kao* (*Studies on the Frontier Administrations*) provides detailed directions for

5 See his article “Ming and the Osman Turkish Empire,” in *Journal of the Wuyi University*, Vol. 12, no. 1 (2010), pp. 70–71. The original inscription is included in Wu Yiye, ed., *Draft of the History of Nanjing Hui People and Islam*, 396–397.

6 The Duke of the Dong Kingdom was an honourable title bestowed during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang, founder of the Ming dynasty, upon Feng Sheng. Feng Sheng was from Dingyuan, Anhui. Feng Sheng practiced martial arts in his youth and later joined Zhu Yuanzhang to resist the Yuan Dynasty. Due to his outstanding military achievements, he was rewarded such a title.

the journey. The text outlines a route that begins at the Jiayu Pass in Gansu Corridor, continues through Turfan and Hami in today’s Xinjiang, traverses cities in Central Asia, passes through several cities in West Asia, and finally reaches the Rum, mentioning a total of 78 cities along the way. These details likely originated from Chinese merchants of the time who sought to trade with the Rum.⁷ These Turkish people’s settlement in Nanjing, although associated with the emperor, were originally not official envoys from the Rum. This article, however, will discuss the official visits recorded in dynastic books; the source literature is mainly from two official dynastic books.

The first book, *The History of the Ming*, was compiled by the succeeding Manchu Qing dynasty’s authority. The compilation process began in 1679 and concluded in 1739, involving a vast team of scholars. This extensive work comprises 332 scrolls (chapters). Another significant historical record is the *Veritable Records of the Ming*, which meticulously documents the chronological events of the Ming emperors, including daily occurrences throughout the dynasty’s duration. This collection totals 2,606 scrolls, with each emperor’s set compiled posthumously to serve as the official history of their reign. The sheer number of officials and scholars involved in the compilation precludes listing individual names.

According to *History of the Ming*, “the Rum is located at a considerable distance from China. In the third year of the Jiajing reign [1524 CE], the Rum began paying tribute to China, presenting lions and rhinoceroses.”⁸ Furthermore, when discussing the “Mecca Kingdom,” the text also mentions the Rum: “Tianfang [Mecca], situated in the ancient Junchong regions [Arabic area], ... In the twenty-second year of the Jiajing reign [1543 CE], its envoy arrived in China to pay tribute alongside the Kang Kingdom,⁹ Turfan,¹⁰ Hami,¹¹ and Rum. Subsequently, it continued to pay tribute every five to six years, uninterrupted, until the Wanli reign (1573–1620 CE).”¹²

It is essential to clarify the concept of “paying tribute” within the context of historical Chinese diplomacy. Initially, this term referred to visits from subordinate or protectorate states to their sovereign authority. However, the Chinese tributary system was a complex network of

7 The original source is from Chen Dachang, *Bianzheng kao* (*Studies of the Frontier Administrations*), scroll 8, “Xiyu zhuguo (countries in the West Regions).” pp. 589–618. I counted the place names in between; there are ninety odd of them, but some do not use “city.”

8 See *History of the Ming*, scroll 332, Biographies (no. 220), Western Regions (no. 4): Rum. p. 8,626.

9 It corresponds to today’s Kazakhstan.

10 It is situated in Xinjiang today.

11 It is situated in Xinjiang today.

12 See *History of the Ming*, scroll 332, Biography (no. 220), Western Regions (no. 4): Mecca. p. 8,624.

trade and diplomatic relations that extended between China and its tributary states, as well as other foreign countries. The system's origins trace back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), with the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) representing another zenith in China's history, including its tributary and foreign trade relations. The system was inherently "China-centred," shaping China's foreign policy and trade objectives for over two millennia, aiming for economic and cultural dominance in East Asia until the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). Through this system, China established itself as a central political and cultural authority not only within East Asia but also in regions far beyond.

Unlike other tribute systems worldwide, the Chinese model was characterised by political relationships that were largely mutually beneficial economically, as the participating states maintained political autonomy or independence. China reciprocated with "gifts" or currency to these tributary countries, embodying a strong Confucian ethos that emphasized the civilizing influence of virtue and gift-giving on "less civilized" foreign peoples. This system facilitated regular economic and cultural exchanges. This mindset positioned China as expecting other rulers to acknowledge the supremacy of the Chinese court, a sentiment reflected in official records, despite the practical equality of bilateral relationships.

III. VISITS FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE MING DYNASTY

My article delves into the historical interactions between two significant powers, drawing upon available records. While it is likely that additional sources remain undiscovered, the current documentation allows the author to ascertain the frequency of the Ottoman Empire's diplomatic missions to China. Based on the analysis, the *History of the Ming* documents 7 such visits, while the *Veritable Records of the Ming* records 14 instances, 7 of which overlapped those already noted in the former. Consequently, a total of 14 visits are confirmed over the 195-year period between 1423 and 1618 CE.

I will first list these instances of visits to the Ming court. It is important to note that the Chinese lunar calendar is a complex system; the dates provided in this article, along with their corresponding Gregorian calendar dates, have been derived from a calendar-conversion website and confirmed by me. Next, if both books describe the same event, I combine the relevant excerpts pertaining to the Ottoman's visits under each number. They are as follows:

1. On the *renzi* day of the second month of the twenty-first year in the Yongle reign [March 12, 1423], envoys from the Rum, *Hazhi* 哈只 [Hajj], *Aheima* 阿黑馬 (Ahmed),¹³ arrived to pay tribute, bringing lions, rhinoceroses, and local products. The throne gave a decree that the Ministry of Rites receive them with a banquet and provide return gifts.¹⁴

2. On the *dingmao* day of the eighth month of the first year in the Hongxi reign [September 12, 1425], envoys from the Rum, including *Hazhi* (Hajj), *Aheima* (Ahmed), and *Maheimu* 馬黑木 [Muhammed] from *Qi'erman*,¹⁵ arrived to pay tribute with local products.¹⁶ On the *wuyin* day [September 23, 1425], the throne bestowed gifts to *Hazhi*, *Aheima*, and *Maheimu*. These gifts included currency, silks, and lavish gold-threaded robes, commensurate with their titles.¹⁷

3. On the *wuxu* day of the first month of the second year in the Xuande reign [February 5, 1427], envoys from the Rum, including 火者乞 [Hocam Qi]¹⁸ with other members, arrived to pay tribute with local products.¹⁹ On the *dingsi* day [February 24, 1427], the throne awarded gifts to the envoys from the Rum and other countries, totaling one hundred and four people; the gifts included currency, varying on their ranks.²⁰ On the *jihai* day of the seventh month [August 5, 1427], the throne appointed the envoy from *Qi'erma* [Kerman], *Huoze Husilao* 火者忽思老 [Hocam Husilao], as Commander of Thousand-Households, the envoy from the Rum, *Hazhi* [Hajj] and *Aheiman* [Ahmed], as Vice-Commanders of Thousand-Households. They were also presented with official caps and belts.²¹

4. On the *guichou* day of the second month of the eighth year in the Xuande reign [March 20, 1433], envoys from the Rum, including Vice-Commanders of Thousand-Households *Hazhi* [Hajj], *Aheiman* [Ahmed], and *Daohalie* 導哈烈, along with envoys from other countries, visited

13 Here "Hajj" is simply a title for his real name. Originally, "hajj" refers to a Muslim who has paid his pilgrimage to Mecca. As there is no punctuation in classic Chinese documents, it seems to be logical that the two words should be referred to one man, viz., "Hajj Ahmed." However, they were two men here: the former was called "Hajj" (maybe he had such a title), but unfortunately the real name had been dropped; and the latter was "Ahmed." We can know this through a text in "scroll 128" in *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong* (pp. 2,556–57) when Chinese throne conferred different titles upon them. (See 5 below.)

14 *Veritable Records on Emperor Taizong*, scroll 256, p. 2,369; and *History of the Song*, scroll 17: Annals on Emperors (no. 17): Emperor Shizong (no. 1), p. 219. "Rum" 肉迷 in *Veritable Records on Emperor Taizong* is mistakenly written as "肉速."

15 *Qi'erman* 乞兒蠻 may be Kerman province of Iran today. See Xie Gui'an, "Huairou yuan ren: guoshi *Mingshilu* dui Xiyu Hui Hui jizai de jiazhi quxiang," in *Journal of Beifang University of Nationalities*, no. 2 (2015): 34.

16 *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong*, scroll 7, p. 184.

17 *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong*, scroll 8, p. 205.

18 "Hocam" is a title to address a man for respect, originally meaning "teacher."

19 *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong*, scroll 24, pp. 630–31.

20 *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong*, scroll 24, p. 647.

21 *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong*, scroll 29, pp. 762–63.

the Ming court. The throne promoted them to Assistant Commanders [fourth-level court official] and bestowed upon them titles accompanied by “imperial mandates” 誥命.²²

5. On the *wuwu* day of the fourth month of the tenth year in the Zhengtong reign [April 30, 1445], the throne promoted the titles of the envoys from the Rum and other countries and appointing them as Assistant Commanders; *Hazhi* and *Aheiman* were elevated to Vice Commanders as well as Commanders of Thousand-Households, with *Hazhi* also receiving the rank of Assistant Commander.²³

6. On the *yiwei* day of the fourth month of the third year in the Jiajing reign [May 3, 1524], Ryukyu paid tribute [to the Ming court].²⁴ The Rum and Hami²⁵ paid tribute, offering items such as lions, rhinoceroses, corals, jades, and other goods.

7. On the *gengshen* day of the fifth month of the twenty-second year in the Jiajing reign [June 18, 1543], envoys from the Turfan, *Kang*,²⁶ Mecca, Hami, and Rum, dispatched by their *Sudan Mansuer* [Sultan Mansour] and rulers, arrived to pay tribute with horses and local products. The throne welcomed them with a banquet and bestowed gifts upon them, as was the usual practice.²⁷

— **Remark:** next year, the “1544 Frontier Incident” occurred, involving ninety members of this delegation from the Rum. These members, who were stationed at the Gansu frontier while another portion of the delegation was in the capital, Beijing, were forcefully conscripted into the local military by a frontier authority to participate in battles against a local rebellion. Unfortunately, nine of them died.²⁸

8. On the *renchen* day of the seventh month of the twenty-seventh year in the Jiajing reign [August 22, 1548], envoys from the Turfan, *Kang*, Mecca, Hami, and Rum came to pay tribute, presenting horses and local products. The throne received them with a banquet and bestowed gifts upon them, as was the usual practice.²⁹

9. On the *jiashen* day of the fourth month of the thirty-third year in the Jiajing reign [May 15, 1554], envoys from the Rum, along with the envoys from the Turfan and Kang, came

to pay tribute with local products. The throne received them with a banquet and awarded them gifts, as was the usual practice.³⁰

10. On the *dingchou* day of the third month of the thirty-eighth year in the Jiajing reign [April 12, 1559], envoys from the Rum, along with the foreign rulers 藩王 (and envoys) from the Turfan, Tianfang (Mecca), Kang Kingdom, Rum, and Hami, known as Sultan 蘇壇, Shamu 沙目, *Zufa'er* 祖法爾 [Zufar],³¹ and others, came to pay tribute with horses, camels, and local products. The throne received them with a banquet and awarded them gifts, as was the usual practice.³²

11. On the *guiyou* day of the sixth month of the forty-third year in the Jiajing reign [July 10, 1564], the Rum and other Western Foreign [kingdoms] 西番 dispatched envoys to pay tribute with lions.³³

12. On the *jisi* day of the fourth month of the fourth year in the Wanli reign [May 4, 1576], the ruler or heads, including the sultans of the five countries of the Turfan, Mecca, Kang, Rum, and Hami, who were known as *Maheima* 馬黑麻 [Muhammed], Ali 阿力, *Buba* 卜把 [Murat], and *Du'er* 都兒, dispatched their envoys, including *Huozhe Haxin* [Hocam Hassim, or Hacam and Hassim] and others, to pay tribute with horses and local products. The throne received them with a banquet and awarded them gifts, as was the usual practice.³⁴

13. On the *gengzi* day of the tenth month of the ninth year in the Wanli reign [November 5, 1581], the rulers of the five countries of the Turfan, Mecca, Kang, Rum and Hami, dispatched their envoys to pay tribute with horses and local products. The throne received them with a banquet and awarded them gifts, as was the usual practice.³⁵

14. On the *wuxu* day of the fourth month of the forty-sixth year in the Wanli reign [May 3, 1618], the envoys from the Turfan, Mecca, Samarkand, Rum and Hami came to pay tribute with local products and horses.³⁶

30 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scrolls 409, p. 7,136.

31 Zufar was a country's name, but it was recorded here together with the envoys' titles such as Sultan, Shamu, and others.

32 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scroll 470, pp. 7,896–97; and *History of the Ming*, scroll 18, Annals of Emperors (no. 18): Emperor Shizong (no. 2),” p. 246.

33 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scroll 535, p. 8,686; and *History of the Ming*, scroll 18, Annals of Emperors (no. 18): Emperor Shizong (no. 2),” p. 249.

34 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shenzong*, scroll 49, pp. 1,122–23.

35 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shenzong*, scroll 117, pp. 2,201–02; and *History of the Ming*, scroll 20, Annals of Emperors (no. 20): Emperor Shenzong (no. 1),” p. 267.

36 “Scroll 568” in *Veritable Records on Emperor Shenzong*, p. 1,0684; and *History of the Ming*, scroll 21, Annals of Emperors (no. 18): Emperor Shenzong (no. 2),” p. 292.

22 *Veritable Records on Emperor Xuanzong*, scroll 99, p. 2,234.

23 *Veritable Records on Emperor Yingzong*, scroll 128, pp. 2,556–57. The titles of *Hazhi* seem confusing; the original text is presented in this way.

24 It is the present-day Okinawa of Japan.

25 It is in the eastern part of the present-day Xinjiang.

26 It is in today's Samarkand, Kazakhstan.

27 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scrolls 274, p. 5,378.

28 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scrolls 282, p. 5,485; and *History of the Ming*, scroll 332, Biographies (no. 20), p. 8,627.

29 *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scrolls 338, p. 6,175.

Additionally, there was a false delegation in the name of the Rum, which arrived at the Ming court in 1526. It cannot be added on this list. I will address it in the following context.

IV. TWO INCIDENTS CONCERNING TRIBUTARY AFFAIRS: THE IMPERSONATION INCIDENT IN 1526 AND THE CASUALTY INCIDENT IN 1543

There were two incidents concerning the Rum's payment of tribute to China. For the sake of convenience, I have titled the first one the "1526 Impersonation Incident," which occurred due to the strong allure of profit for certain corrupt officials and some foreign merchants who pretended to be the envoys from the "Rum;" they arrived in China to "pay tribute" in order to exchange their goods for currency and other treasurable things with the Ming court. They arrived on October 31, 1526, which was the *jihai* day of the ninth month in the fifth year of the Jiajingera. The delegation from the "Rum," led by *Baihawuding* 白哈兀丁 and others, offered their gifts to the Ming court. These gifts consisted of two lions, rhinoceroses, coral, jade, and other regional items. The delegates reported that the combined value of these items, along with the costs for their seven-year trip back, as claimed, totaled 23,000 Liang of gold.³⁷ The *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong* records such incidents:

On the *dingwei* day of the first month of the sixth year in the Jiajing reign [February 9, 1527], envoys from the Rum, *Huozhe Haobading*, *Alie* [Ali], and others came to present tributes such as lions and rhinoceroses among other gifts, and they also requested additional rewards. Upon their arrival, they attempted to bribe Zhang Lian 張連, a local commander of One-Hundred-Households who was escorting them, and Hu Shishen 胡士紳, an interpreter of the interpreter-clerk of the *Honglu-si* [Court for Dependences], but they were refused. Consequently, a memorial was submitted stating that "*Huozhe Haobading* and *Alie*, along with their sons, brothers, and servants, falsely claimed to be the official envoys of various countries. They had to first bribe the officials in charge of pacifying the barbarians to gain entry. While [some of] the actual envoys of

³⁷ *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scrolls 68, p. 1526; and *History of the Ming*, scroll 17, Annals of Emperors (no. 17): Emperor Shizong (no. 1), p. 221. The latter book states that the visit occurred in 1527, which may have been the time when the throne received the delegation in Beijing.

these countries were detained at the border [and have not been sent away home]. These foreigners possess an insatiable nature, [always] requested that the rewards should be promoted. A request had been made to the Ministry of War to send officials to distribute the rewards to those detained at the border regions and to send a document to Gansu [administration] to admonish the officials responsible for pacifying the barbarians." The Translation Bureau of the Ministry of Rites could not accept [this proposal], and they suggested bringing the case to the judicial authorities. Then, they arrested and punished Zhang Lian. The emperor ordered the postponement of the inquiry. He sent a palace steward and an officer of Thousand Households to meet with the local defense officials [in Gansu] to verify the facts and report back [to the throne].³⁸

The above citation states that "while the actual envoys of these countries were detained at the border." This could be due to their lack of funds for the return journey, or they desired to trade the gifts received from the Ming court for currency, or because of their unspecified security concerns posed by regional military and political entities along the route back to their homelands. Additionally, it clarifies that "the actual envoys of these countries" were not those whom the false delegation impersonated, as it would be foolish for the swindlers to do so.

The discrepancy in handling the false delegation's bribery case, where Hu Lian was arrested and punished while Hu Shishen was not, can be clarified by examining contemporary records. According to Yan Congjian's *Records of General Conditions of Various Foreign Countries*, Hu Shishen's memorial to the throne provides crucial details. He recounted that upon the so-called envoys' arrival in the capital, they offered him twenty-five *liang* of silver as a "first-meeting gift." Hu Shishen declined, stating, "Our emperor is wise, and I dare not accept it; moreover, you have come from afar with much difficulty, and I cannot bear to accept your gift."³⁹ He promptly sent them away. The memorial to the throne continues that, the next day, these foreigners approached Zhang Lian, the accompanying commander of Hundred-Households, and Ding Cheng, the clerical aid, with a letter in their native script, again requesting that Hu Shishen accept the silver. Hu Shishen stood firm, instructing them to adhere to the imperial rules and emphasising his commitment to integrity. His actions were met with the foreigners' appreciation.⁴⁰ This account from Hu Shishen's memorial explains

³⁸ *Veritable Records on Emperor Shizong*, scroll 72, p. 1, 641.

³⁹ *General Conditions of Various Foreign Countries*, scroll 8: "The *Halie* Kingdom," p. 500.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

why he was not penalised like Hu Lian. It demonstrates his unwavering adherence to ethical standards and the respect he commanded from the foreign delegation, which likely contributed to his favorable treatment in the case.

This memorial, which was included in Yan Congjian's book, informs modern readers more about the impersonation instances, which were reminded by Hu Shisheng of the throne. He pointed out that this false diplomatic delegation comprised fourteen envoys; through recent inquiries, he had learned that *Lulunla Rushelazhi* [Lürenla Rüşeraci] was the younger brother of *Lumi Ali* [Lümü Ali?]; *Huozhe Yisu* [Hocam Yisu] was Ali's cousin; *Huxie Yi* [Hussiny?] was Ali's son; and *Jilie'er Hewoduxin* [Jiller Rahduşin?] was Ali's servant. Now, each of them falsely claims to be the chief envoy, and each claims to be sent by different tribal kings. How could father, son, brother, and servant each belong to different kings? Moreover, how could they be separated by distances of three to four hundred *li* or even one thousand *li*? Hu Shisheng believed the reason for this was that they had been at the border for three years, and some Chinese officials responsible for pacifying the barbarians had led them into colluding with bribes.⁴¹

In this long memorial recorded by Yan Congjian, the devoted official Hu Shishen also mentioned another similar event the previous year. He stated that he also noticed that a man from the Hami Guard named *Huli Maheima* [Hülimahemed?] pretended to be sent by the *Zhongshun* Prince's [Prince of Loyalty and Obedience] mother.⁴² He was accompanied by a Uyghur. The commander of Hundred-Households, Jin Hai 金海, once told Hu Shilshen: "The *Zhongshun* Prince's mother and wife were both seized by Turks during the Zhengde reign [1506–1521], and they each committed suicide by hanging themselves with bowstrings." An official document was sent from the border to the capital, and there was a record of this event in the Ministry of War, which gave the record that it had been a long time since there was a prince in Hami. So Hu Shishen interrogated how the border officials could not know about this! Yet in their reports to the court, they also claimed that the messenger had been sent by the *Zhongshun* Prince's mother. If it weren't for bribery on a massive scale, how could they dare to deceive the emperor and violate the law to such an extent?

The Turfan was among the numerous states within the "Xiyu" or Western Regions. Merchants often infiltrated formal delegations from other countries or falsely claimed to

be envoys with forged credentials. An illustrative case involves the 1524 Rum's delegation to China, where an official from the Ministry of Rites, Xi Shu, reported: "Recently, the Turfan has launched several incursions into our frontier. Frontier officials have discovered that the Rum delegation's roster includes individuals from the Turfan. These people are crafty and deceitful. It is advised to either expel them or punish them for espionage."⁴³ The emperor heeded this advice and ordered frontier officials to conduct an investigation. This incident was a prime example of Turfan individuals deceitfully posing as members of the Rum delegation.

In brief, the impersonation incident in the Rum's name in 1526 was obviously one of the considerable cheating events plotted by some merchants from the local kingdoms in present-day Xinjiang and adjacent Central Asian regions. Regarding this event, no detailed records of how these corrupt frontier officials were punished are available. Still, Yan Congjian gave a summary that "afterward, officials became more aware of the law and did not accept bribes from foreigners. Foreign envoys also dared not to make excessive requests or demands."⁴⁴

The second incident for the sake of convenience, I have titled the "1543 Frontier Incident." This incident was directly related to the Rum's diplomatic mission to China, during which some members of the delegation died, despite the period being ostensibly "good." However, it appears not to have disrupted the two powers' cordial relations. The Frontier Incident took place when the Rum delegation was visiting China, and it is first mentioned in the *History of the Ming*, in the biography of the official Zhang Rong.

Zhan Rong, courtesy name Renfu, hailed from Shanhai Guard.⁴⁵ In the fifth year of the Jiajing reign, he became a provincial graduate. In the 22nd year [1543 CE], he was appointed as the provincial Right Surveillance Commissioner of Gansu province. At that time, envoys from the Rum who had come to pay tribute to the Ming Court, numbering over 90 individuals, were residing in Gansu province; however, the regional defence commander, Yang Xin, coerced them into fighting against the enemies, resulting in the death of ten percent of their number. Zhan Rong stated in his memorial to the throne: "These people came to China on a mission of goodwill, yet they were treated as mere weapons. This has marred the friendship of those from afar; moreover, it has exposed China's weakness." The throne issued a decree to strip Yang Xin of his position and

41 Ibid.

42 Considering the time period, this Prince of Zhongshun (忠順王) should be *Baiyaji* (Bayajid), a Mongol ruler over the Hami Kingdom, and the title was conferred by the Ming court. He inherited his father's title in 1505 when his father died.

43 *History of the Ming*, scroll 332, Biographies (no. 220), Western Regions: "Rum." p. 8,627.

44 Yan Congjian, p. 501.

45 *Shanhai wei* [Mountains and Seas Guard] is one part of Liaoyang City, Liaoning Province.

ordered the bodies of the deceased to be placed in coffins and returned to their native country. The foreign parties greatly appreciated this gesture.⁴⁶

This matter appeared serious because some of the delegation members died due to the mistake of a regional military general. After hearing the report, the Chinese emperor immediately issued a decree ordering the local officials to deal with the aftermath of the incident. The *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong* speaks more clearly about the matter:

On the *guihai* day of the first month in the 23rd year of the Jiajing reign [February 26, 1544], Ma Neng, a former captured rebel but presently a commander of Hundred-Households [of the Song dynasty], suggested to regional defense commander Yang Xin that they force the delegation members from the Rum and other tributary countries, consisting of 90 people who were [temporarily] waiting at the frontiers [for the envoys who had gone to Beijing], to fight against [local] rebellious enemies. *Xieyi*, Ali, and six others died in battle. Zhan Rong, the provincial governor and Censor-in-chief, reported to the Ministry of War that “the Muslim foreigners have cut off their relationships with the powerful [Western Regions’] Hu countries⁴⁷ and have converted to China. We should treat them with benevolence and appreciation to maintain [our] dignity and spirit. Yang Xin simply listened to Ma Neng and forced them to fight the rebels in the frontier regions, which is a provocation to incite hatred; he has committed a crime. The general regional commissioners, such as Huang Qi 黃綺 and Liu Zhen 柳禎; the commissioners Shi Bin 石鑛 and Zhao Wan 趙琬; the commander of Thousand-Households, Sun Ren 孫仁; and the commander of Hundred-Households, Shalifuding 沙力撫丁; were unable to prevent the matter before it occurred nor able to remedy the matter afterward. They should all be punished accordingly.” The throne ordered that Yang Xin be removed from his position, Ma Neng and the others be arrested and punished according to their crimes, and that the deaths of *Xieyi*, Ali, and others were tragic. The local officials were instructed to provide funeral fees, send them back to their native country, and convey a letter from the throne to their emperor, reporting that the criminals had been punished and the innocent people comforted.⁴⁸

This was a significant and somber episode in the annals of diplomacy between the Ming dynasty and the Ottoman Empire. Despite the gravity of the situation, the integrity of Ming officials and the imperial court’s earnest engagement ensured a commendable resolution to the crisis. This incident stands out as a singular occurrence in the diplomatic exchanges between the two empires, highlighting not only the seriousness with which such matters were handled but also the occasional discord that could arise between local frontier officials and their superiors within the Ming government. Fortunately, no source shows that the event affected the following exchanges between the two powers.

V. OPPOSITION TO TRIBUTE PAYMENTS FROM THE RUM

The tribute items from the Ottomans included lions, rhinoceroses, corals, pearls, and jades, which were frequently mentioned. Alongside these, there were also “local products,” the specifics of which were not detailed in the records. However, other contemporary sources reveal that these included animals such as camels and dogs, a fact I will elaborate on in subsequent sections of this article. It’s easy to surmise that transporting such animals was no small feat, necessitating large and numerous delegations when they were included. In contrast, without such cumbersome creatures, the delegation could afford to be smaller. As for the corals, jades, and other portable “local products,” these were quite common and widely appreciated.

These gifts often sparked debates among court officials. The first two instances of such disputes occurred during the Jiang reign in 1524 and 1526, leading to opposition from some officials regarding their acceptance. The tribute of 1524 marked the first from the Ottomans during Emperor Shizong’s Jiajing reign and the resumption of tribute relations after a 37-year hiatus, leaving many officials unfamiliar with the significance of the Ottomans.

Regarding the 1524 tribute, initially, the delegation was detained at the border by Chen Jiuchou 陳九疇, the provincial governor of Gansu and censor-in-chief, who allowed only ten members to proceed to Beijing. Subsequently, the minister of the Ministry of Rites, whose name remains undocumented, voiced his opposition, stating, “The tribute articles included lions, rhinoceroses, and similar creatures, whose maintenance costs are exorbitant. As for the corals and jades, they offer no relief from hunger or cold; what, then, is their purpose? I therefore urge Your Majesty to command the frontier officials to reject

46 *The History of the Ming*, scroll 200, Biographies (no. 88): “Biography of Yang Rong 詹榮.” p. 5,288.

47 “Hu” is a term to refer to any “barbarian” people and their countries around China.

48 See *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong*, scroll 282. p. 5, 485.

such items and to escort the foreign envoys out of our territory.”⁴⁹

Subsequently, another official, Zheng Yipeng 鄭一鵬, also voiced his dissent. The original text does not specify the time, but another book does, and the contents are similar, confirming that Zheng Yipeng also commented on the 1524 tribute. The *History of the Ming* mentions this in his biography:

Yipeng was a man of integrity and the most outspoken among the remonstrance officials...the Rum had presented tribute in the form of lions, rhinoceroses, western dogs, western horses, pearls, jades, and the like.⁵⁰ Yipeng cited the historical precedent of Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty, who closed the Yumen Pass to refuse tributes from the Western Regions, suggesting that the current emperor should instruct the frontier generals to consider actual circumstances when rewarding foreign tributary envoys and then send them back to their countries, thereby discouraging further tribute journeys to the capital. This approach, he argued, would enhance the emperor’s reputation for great virtue by demonstrating that he does not covet treasures from afar. However, the emperor did not heed this advice. Shortly thereafter, Zheng Yipeng prostrated himself at the royal palace in protest against the “Great Ritual” plan⁵¹ and was consequently punished by being flogged with a heavy stick in the court.⁵²

In the “*Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong*,” this opposition is repeated, but with more detailed reasons:

On the *yiwei* day [of the fourth month of the third year in the Jiajing reign] [April 28, 1525 CE; July 1, 931 Hijra], . . . the foreign king of Rum dispatched envoys to present tribute, including lions, rhinoceroses, western dogs, western horses, and the like. Frontier officials reported this matter, which was then brought to the Ministry of Rites for deliberation on its acceptability. Zheng Yipeng, the supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for Revenue, advised: “The Rum is not a regular tributary country to

49 See *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong*, scroll 47. p. 1,209.

50 The “Western dogs and Western horses” refers to breeds of such kinds of animals different from those from China.

51 The “Great Ritual” was intended to build an extensive worship complex; this required burdensome taxes from the people. “Flogging with big stick in the court” was a punishment only in the Ming dynasty, imposed upon the officials by the emperor in the court.

52 *The History of the Ming*, scroll 206, Biographies (no. 94): “Biography of Zheng Yipeng.” p. 5,437.

the Ming, and in the past, your Majesty has always released such animals. These are not native creatures; only foreigners can rear them. Accepting such gifts will incur national expenses, while refusing them will enhance the emperor’s reputation for great virtue. As for the corals and jades, they are of no use in alleviating hunger or cold. What purpose do they serve? The relevant department should discuss this matter.”⁵³

However, Emperor Shizong disregarded his counsel and accepted the gifts, perhaps viewing this as an inaugural tribute from the Rum to his reign.

Following closely on the heels of the 1524 tribute, the second offering arrived in the Jiajing reign in 1526, lasting until 1527, which was a false delegation, as I discussed above. But in the beginning, court officials were not aware of the impersonation. Zhang Lu, first a censor in the court, voiced his opposition. The demands for rewards by the Rum delegation were significantly higher, amounting to 23,000 *liang* of gold. An explanation for this is offered by *Baihawuding*, as documented in a contemporary work titled *Records of General Conditions of Various Foreign Countries* by Yan Congjian.

According to Yan Congjian’s record, *Baihawuding* [Bahaettin?], the false “envoy from the Rum,” expressed his sentiments, stating that he had journeyed far from home for a decade to present this tribute. He requested that he be rewarded in accordance with the standards set for the Kang Kingdom. He further explained, “Today, I received four bolts of silk as a reward for the rhinoceroses, which is insufficient for me to consider returning home.” He added, “The prince of my land commissioned me to acquire lions and rhinoceroses from the Wala Kingdom,⁵⁴ an endeavor that cost 20,000 *Liang* of gold, inclusive of the journey’s expenses. By the time I reached the Ming dynasty’s frontier, I had already incurred a debt of 3,000 *liang* for the animals’ sustenance. Therefore, I earnestly seek an increase in the reward.”⁵⁵

The *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong* also contains a passage detailing the stance taken by Zhang Lu and another official, Liu Mu, who served as a supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for Rites. At this juncture, the members stationed at the frontier had already received their rewards but continued to press for additional compensation. In response,

53 *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong*, scroll 38. p. 0,975.99.

54 The Wala people were actually a Turkic people, but they resided in the Altai Mountains ruled by the Mongols and became acculturated with the Mongols, so they were also known as the “Wala Mongols.” They were called the *Xiegasi* (should be an ancient branch of “Kirgiz”) during the Tang and Song dynasties, and by the Ming dynasty, they migrated to the Junggar Basins in present-day northern-Xinjiang. See Ding Qian, *Mingshi ge waiguo zhuan dili kaozheng*, p. 32.

55 See *Records of General Conditions of Various Foreign Countries*, scroll 15. p. 499.

Zhang Lu and Liu Mu argued that the delegation's primary mission was to pay tribute, a task entrusted to them by their emperor. Offering tribute was meant to demonstrate sincerity and integrity towards the Ming. Yet, their persistent demands for rewards transformed the act into a merchant-like transaction, thereby undermining the very essence of their mission.

The Ministry of Rites then explained to them that the process of accepting the tribute was already in motion, making it challenging to return the items at this stage. They suggested that refusing similar tributes in the future might be more feasible.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the throne issued a decree stating that rewarding foreign delegations was a gesture of respect for their long journey. The method of rewarding could potentially follow the precedents set during the previous Hongzhi reign (1470–1505). These words served to reassure the officials who had voiced their opposition and helped to quell the disputes. However, the specifics of the Hongzhi reign's practices remain unclear to us.⁵⁷

The intense debates surrounding these tributes from the Rum during the Jiajing reign can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the unique nature of the tribute items—particularly the exotic animals like lions and rhinoceroses—posed challenges. The high cost of maintaining these animals, coupled with the Ming officials' lack of knowledge on how to care for them, contributed to the controversy. Additionally, some members of the delegation may have demanded excessive rewards, further fuelling the disagreements.

Next, the Rum was not traditionally recognized as a tributary state by the Ming. When the Rum envoys first arrived in 1524, an official from the Ministry of Rites, Xi Shu, noted that the Rum was not listed in the Institutions, casting doubt on the authenticity of the envoys. Despite this, the delegation was received but treated as if they were from one of the “listed tributary countries.” The assertion that “the Rum is not a regular tributary country [to the Ming]” underscores the infrequency of diplomatic exchanges between the two empires, in contrast to China's more regular interactions with neighboring countries like Korea and various Southeast Asian kingdoms. In fact, even as late as the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), Turkey remained relatively unknown to most Chinese.

Further insights into how such tribute-related disputes were resolved can be gleaned from a contemporary work, the *Huang Ming shifa lu* (*Records of the Imperial Ming Institutions*), which offers invaluable information on this facet of the Ming-Rum relations:

⁵⁶ See *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong*, scroll 68, p. 1,563.

⁵⁷ See *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizong*, scroll 68, p. 1,563.

The throne issued a decree to the local defence commanders stating that [henceforth,] the Rum could pay tribute once every five years. Regarding the lions and rhinoceroses, the Imperial Household Department would be responsible for their breeding...and five foreign individuals knowledgeable about these animals would be retained to oversee their care. This decree established that the Rum could send tribute missions once every five years, with no more than ten individuals allowed to accompany each mission to the court. The acceptable tribute items were specified as jades, corals, pearls, diamonds, colourful textiles, lynx hides, colourful porcelain water-bottles, antelope horns, and bird-feather clothes.⁵⁸

This source literature does not provide the time when the throne gave such a decree. I believe it should be the second time the false “Rum delegation” paid tribute to China in the Jiajing reign (1526 CE). First, the false delegation's visit caused even more fierce disputes and chaos among the officials than the first; and next, the so-called envoy from the Rum, *Baihawuding*, pledged to the throne to enlist the Rum into “tributary countries” with reference to the Kang Kingdom; therefore, Emperor Shizong had to issue such a decree finally. However, due to the eventual exposure of the impersonation, we do not know if such a decree became really applicable to the real Rum afterwards.

VI. DISCUSSION ON FOUR SUBTOPICS CONCERNING THE VISITS FROM THE RUM

The subject of the Ottomans' visits to China is rich with fascinating details, particularly concerning the delegations' travel routes and the duration of their journeys to China. The delegations embarked from West Asia, crossed Central Asia, and entered through what is now Xinjiang. They then traveled through the Gansu Corridor into the heartland, finally reaching Beijing. Except for the last stretch to the capital, the delegates essentially traced the path of the ancient Silk Road.

There are several subtopics to discuss. The first subtopic to discuss concerns the journey time. A round trip between the Rum and China generally should take about three years; I presumed this based on Zhou Qufei's record that a single trip from Guangzhou to the Persian

⁵⁸ *Records of the Imperial Ming Institutions*, scroll 81, Xirong: “Rum.” Xirong, or “West Rong,” which refers an ancient tribe in West China; gradually, it came to refer to any foreign ethnic minorities in the West.

Gulf required one year.⁵⁹ Considering that the Rum was even further from China and taking into account the travels to China by land, I made such a deduction. Upon arrival at the Gansu frontier, most of the delegation would usually be retained in the frontier region, with only a chosen few allowed to continue to Beijing. Those who remained were hosted as “guests” by the local military and administrative officials.

Secondly, I will examine the emperors from both sides. There are six Ottoman emperors who dispatched delegations to China and four Chinese emperors who received these delegations. The delegations were received in Beijing. “Table II” lists the emperors who dispatched delegations and those who received them:

Table I: The Emperors Who Dispatched and Received the Delegations

Time Receiving a Delegation	Ottoman Emperor Who Dispatched the Delegation	Chinese Emperor Who Received the Delegation
1423	Muhammed I (r. 1413–1421), or Muhammed II	Emperor Taizong
1425, 1426, 1427, 1433	Muhammed II (r. 1421–1444)	Emperor Xuanzong
1524, 1546, 1548, 1554, 1559, 1564	Suleyman I (r. 1520–1566)	Emperor Shizong
1576	Selim II (r. 1566–1574), or Murat III (r. 1574–1595)	Emperor Shenzong
1581	Murat III	
1618	Mustafa I (r. 1618–1622)	

Remark: Perhaps Mohammed I and Selim II did not dispatch any delegations to China, but Mohammed II, Suleyman I, and Murat III did. Mustafa I was the last emperor to do so, and he only sent a delegation once.

One should notice that the listed years and the emperors who dispatched delegations do not exactly correspond to the actual reigns of the Ottoman emperors; this discrepancy accounts for the journey, which was said to have taken one and half years from the Rum to China (the real duration requires further study). There are two periods of discontinuity: the first spans 91 years, from 1433 to 1524, that is, between the reigns of Murad II and Suleyman I; the second lasts 37 years, from 1576 to 1613, during the reign of Murad III.

⁵⁹ *Lingwai daida*, scroll 3, “Maritime trade of overseas foreign merchants,” pp. 126–27, in which it states, “When all the barbarous countries come to China, they can spend one year to complete a round trip; only the Tazi needs two years to complete [a round journey].” Tazi referred to the Caliphate with Baghdad as the center.

It is evident from this table that Ottoman Emperor Suleyman I and his Chinese counterpart, Emperor Shizong, engaged in the most frequent communications. Over the 40-year period between 1524 and 1564, there were six instances of tribute exchange. This indicates a significant level of mutual understanding and cooperation between the two emperors, a topic that warrants further investigation. However, it is undeniable that Suleyman I’s reign was one of the most prosperous in the Ottomans’ history, often referred to as “the peak of Ottoman Grandeur” (1520–1566), marked by expanded territories and robust national power. Similarly, in China, Emperor Shizong’s reign was the longest of the entire Ming dynasty, spanning 45 years, during which the empire was both wealthy and stable.

The maritime route from China to West Asia was less accessible during the Ming dynasty compared to the preceding Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. In those earlier periods, numerous merchants from Persia, Arabia, Turkey, and various Central and Southeast Asian countries had utilised these sea routes extensively. However, the Ming dynasty’s foreign policy, established by its founding emperor Taizu, was designed to bolster the regime’s political stance and counter Mongol threats. To achieve this, maritime trade was restricted, a policy that became a fundamental and enduring aspect of the dynasty’s approach to governance. Consequently, the Ming dynasty’s foreign policy was characterised by conservatism and passivity. As a result, maritime journeys were not a viable option for the Ottomans’ delegations.

The second subtopic concerns the tribute items and the rewards bestowed by the Chinese. I have reviewed all the texts referenced in the sources and compiled a table to present the information clearly, as depicted in Table III.

Table II: Article of Tributes and Rewards

Article of Tributes	
Animals	lions, rhinoceroses, Western horses, Western dogs, and camels
Treasures	corals, pearls, jades, and diamonds; knives and files
Local products	colourful textiles, lynx hides, colourful porcelain water-bottles, antelope’s horns, and bird-feather clothes
Awards of the Tributes	
Currency	gold (normally much higher than the real values of the tributary articles)
Gifts	silks, satins, and lavish gold-threaded robes
Titles of positions	official banquets; titles of positions at various levels in name, or in practice (residing in China)

The tribute lists from the Rum repeatedly reference “lions” and “rhinoceroses.” These animals are not indigenous to Asian Minor itself. However, acquiring such creatures would have been feasible considering the Ottoman Empire’s territories extended into North Africa.

The “local products” listed in the table incorporate items that the throne specified in his 1526 decree as future tribute offerings from the Rum, as documented in the *Huang Ming shifa lu* (*Records of the Imperial Ming Institutions*). If the envoys from the Rum had not previously presented such tribute items, the throne would not have been aware of these specific articles to include in the decree. However, these items are not mentioned in the *History of the Ming* or *Veritable Records of the Ming*.

The manner of reception and the rewards were standardized, with envoys typically receiving more in return than the value of their tribute. This was rooted in China’s Confucian values, where emperors and officials adhered to such ideals of demonstrating “benevolence and kindness” toward “barbarian countries.”

Thirdly, the Reception of the Ottomans’ visits. The envoys who reached Beijing were accorded a reception that included a banquet and reciprocal gifts, a practice often referred to as the “usual practice” in the *Veritable Records of the Ming*. However, the specifics of this “usual practice” remain unclear. There was a distinction in how envoys from “listed tributary countries” and those from “unlisted tributary countries” were received. The former were subject to fixed regulations governing tribute intervals, the number of delegation members, and the types of tribute items.

Chinese emperors typically reciprocated with generous rewards to envoys and their entourages, often exceeding the value of the tribute received. This practice of generosity was not exclusive to the Rum. Still, it extended to all tributary states, which was why numerous countries sought to reduce the intervals between tribute missions throughout the dynasty.

Fourthly, a subtopic focuses on the delegations from the Turfan and other Central Asian countries that accompanied the Rum’s delegations to China. The delegations from the Rum were frequently, if not invariably, accompanied by delegations from allied countries such as Mecca, Kang, Turfan, and Hami. This practice reflected the routes they took and highlighted the amicable relations between the Rum and other Islamic states. Indeed, the Ottoman Turkish Empire’s sphere of influence included these countries, having inherited the mantle from the former Arab Empire, which once dominated Central Asian territories.

However, due to geographical and political factors, these countries’ relations with China were sometimes strained. Merchants from these regions exploited the Chinese tributary

system to conduct trade with China, a practice that predated the Ming dynasty, originating in the Tang and Song eras.

The fifth subtopic delves into the Rum envoys who remained in China. A number of these envoys were retained in the country, with the initial reasons for this being a subject of further investigation. It is evident that the Chinese court had specific uses for them, a practice that also occurred during the preceding Song dynasty. Modern researcher Ma Jianchun, in his article, references one such individual from the Jiajing reign, *Duosima*, who had been an official responsible for weaponry in the Ottoman Empire. It was *Duosima* who introduced the “Rum-blunderbuss,” a type of long gun, to China.⁶⁰ This account suggests that there were indeed members of delegations who stayed in China, and their contributions warrant further research.

An example of this is recorded on the *wuwu* day of the 4th month of the 14th year in the Zhengtong reign (April 30, 1449), when the throne elevated assistant commander Ahmed to vice commander and commander of Thousand-Households Hajj to assistant commander. This entry does not mention any new delegation from the Rum. Moreover, the names “Hajj” and “Ahmed” had surfaced twice prior to this date: once on September 11, 1368, and again on August 5, 1427. It is plausible that these two individuals were envoys from the 1427 Rum delegation who had been living in China for 22 years and were promoted due to their accomplishments. If this hypothesis holds true, the references to “Hajj” and “Ahmed” in 1429, 1433, and 1449 would pertain to the same individuals.

These above five subtopics represent the questions that arose for this author after examining the original texts related to the Rum in the *History of the Ming* and the *Veritable Records of the Ming*. However, there are undoubtedly more issues to explore, which may necessitate additional sources for further elucidation.

In the conclusion of this article, I will present the perspective of researcher Ma Yi regarding the term “Rum,” which I initially discussed and translated into Chinese as “Rumi,” acknowledging its multiple origins. However, Ma Yi’s findings introduce a novel interpretation that challenges the traditionally accepted understanding of this term. He argues that “Rum” has alternative designations in Chinese, each with distinct characters but identical pronunciations, which, if correct, would contradict my article and numerous prior studies on the subject.

Ma Yi posits that the “Rumi” does not refer to the Ottoman Empire, as commonly

⁶⁰ Ma Jianchun, “The entrance, production and application of the Rum-blunderbuss during the Jiajing and Wanli reigns in the Ming,” in *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Studies*, no. 4 (2007): 73.

believed, but rather to a region in the present-day eastern Arab Peninsula. This assertion is supported by a map in *Zhifang waiji* (*Records of Territories beyond the Tributary Countries*) by Julio Aleni, an Italian missionary who resided in Ming China. Aleni's work indicates that the "Rum" was also used by Arabs to refer to the "Roman people" in the medieval period, based on their location east of the Mediterranean.

Furthermore, Ma Yi distinguishes between the Chinese characters "鲁迷" (lǔ mí) and "鲁密" (lǔ mì), suggesting that the former refers to the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula (belonging to Oman today), the latter denotes a location in Central Asia, possibly near Samarkand. It is important to note that neither of these places is historically documented within the Ming dynasty, and the Ottoman Empire never paid tribute to China.

Despite these assertions, Ma Yi's theory remains a minority view within academic circles and lacks substantial evidence. He suggests that the delegations from the "Rum" were merely merchants who exploited the prestigious name "Rum" to enhance their trade prospects in China.

While I present Ma Yi's opinion here for consideration in future research, the identification of the "Rum" with the Ottoman Empire continues to be the prevailing view among scholars.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article examines the official diplomatic visits from the Ottoman Empire to the Chinese Ming dynasty throughout the 195-year period from 1423 to 1618. The primary sources utilised are the original texts from two authoritative Chinese historical works: the *History of the Ming* and *Veritable Records of the Ming*. The latter is a compendium of chronicles detailing the daily events during the reigns of the 15 Ming emperors.

A total of 14 official visits from the Ottoman Empire are documented. The article presents detailed accounts of the 7 visits recorded in the *History of the Ming* and all 14 visits listed in the *Veritable Records of the Ming*. Some entries in the latter source are more detailed reiterations of those found in the former.

The article underscored the era of Emperor Suleiman I of the Ottoman Empire and Emperor Shizong of the Ming dynasty as a period marked by significant cooperation. It offers a comprehensive analysis of the Impersonation Incident in 1526 and the Casualty Incident in 1543 and their resolutions. Additionally, it delves into the opposition from certain Ming court

officials to Rum's tribute-paying efforts in the 1520s during the Jiajing reign, discussing their rationales and how these disputes were ultimately resolved through an imperial decree.

The concluding section of the article explores five sub-topics related to the visits from Rum: the journey routes, the "local products" offered as tribute, the Ming's receptions, the individuals from Turfan and other Central Asian countries who accompanied Rum's delegations; and lastly, the focuses on Rum envoys who remained in China.

Given that the sources are exclusively Chinese, the portrayal of these visits is inevitably influenced by China's emphasis on documenting relevant historical events. Incorporating supplementary sources in other languages would enrich the narrative with unexpected truths and alternative perspectives. The author anticipates the discovery of additional sources to illuminate this historical interaction further.

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