

Viewing the Anglo-Boer War with Turkish sources

By Halim Gencoglu

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Abstract

The Anglo-Boer War was the last great campaign between Afrikaners and English people in South Africa. The result of this war affected the destiny of nations in the region but also determined the political and economic relations with the British Empire. This great campaign was widely reported in the western media but also in many other countries such as Turkey. Due to political challenges with the British Empire, the Ottoman Empire observed the Anglo-Boer War but also supported the Afrikaners. Two Turkish intellectuals wrote books about Anglo-Boer War but also several Turkish journalists reported the War from the beginning to the end. More importantly the Ottoman Government sent a military attaché to South Africa, lieutenant colonial Aziz Bey who stayed in Pretoria for three months and reported the war to the Ottoman Government. For many reasons, Turkish newspapers and officers were interested in the Anglo-Boer War. This presentation aims to reveal the effects of the Anglo-Boer War in the Ottoman Empire in the light of the Ottoman archival documents.

Paper / notes

In this paper, I discuss how Turkey approached the Anglo-Boer war and their main interest in this war at the tip of Southern Africa. Why did the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid take the side of the Boers in the war? In order to decolonise historiography in South Africa, I offer Turkish sources for African history, providing a Turkish perspective on the Anglo-Boer war.ⁱ

Bernard Lewis stated that it is not possible to write about African history without considering Ottoman sources as well.ⁱⁱ The Ottoman presence on the African continent, particularly in the northern part, lasted about four hundred years, from 1517 to 1922. Yet, the use of Turkish archival sources for African historiography by most historians in African universities is still scarce due to the language barrier.ⁱⁱⁱ

As alternative sources, Turkish archival data can help scholars bring a new dimension to African studies. The Turkish archives, situated at the Ottoman State Archive in Istanbul, hold many cultural, sociological and historical records, all of them official documents.^{iv}

Apart from that, Ottoman historians, travelers and intelligence officers have bequeathed interesting written records such as memoirs and official reports. As for other parts of the African continent, Turkish primary and secondary sources have not been extensively used in researching the history of South Africa. In this presentation, I provide data from the Ottoman archives regarding the Anglo-Boer War in order to highlight untapped historical sources for South African history. Ottoman primary and secondary sources can be used for South African historiography as alternative sources.^v

Additionally, some Ottoman Turkish scholars and intellectuals bequeathed remarkable studies that can enrich our knowledge of the history of South Africa. As far as it is known, the first Ottoman book on South Africa was written by Omer Lutfi Effendi and published in Istanbul in 1866. Omer Lutfi Effendi came to Cape Town in 1863 with his uncle Abu Bakr Effendi who was professor of Islamic theology. He was sent to South Africa by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Aziz Khan upon the request of Queen Elizabeth, in order to resolve the religious disputes among Muslims at the Cape. Abu Bakr Effendi established an Islamic theological school at the corner of Bree and Wale Streets and wrote the first religious catechism, *Beyan ud Din* in the Afrikaans language using Arabic script. His nephew Omer Lutfi stayed for four years and went back to Istanbul in 1866, where he wrote his memoir entitled *Ümit Burnu Seyahatnamesi*. This book was translated in an abridged version by Ahmed Kavakçı and published by a local Muslim O. Nacar in Cape Town in 1991.^{vi} Omer Lutfi Effendi mentioned his educational activities at the Cape with his uncle and explained the main religious issues caused by antagonism between Imams promoting their self-interest. Omer Lutfi's memoir is regarded as the first Ottoman written book on South African history.^{vii}

The eldest son of Abu Bakr Effendi Ahmet Ataullah became the first Black politician of South Africa. He established a school in Kimberley. He regularly informed the Ottoman Government about the Diamond Rush, which had resulted in the development of certain cities such as Kimberley, and had greatly stimulated the development of business and economic activities in Natal and the Transvaal in South Africa. His wife Muhsine was the sister of Dr. Abdullah Abdurrahman who was a well-known politician in Cape Town. Ahmet Ataullah Effendi sent several letters to the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid Khan and recommended certain investments to him in Kimberley. This allows us to understand the excitement the Diamond Rush caused in the world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.^{viii} Ottoman novelist Omer Seyfettin mentioned the Transvaal War in his book, stating, "what was the sin of Transvaal for all these struggles, of course it's only diamonds, what a pity".^{ix}

Ahmet Atallah Effendi played a crucial role in the Muslim history of South Africa. When he attempted to join the Cape Parliament, his first enemy was Cecil John Rhodes. Rhodes changed the electoral system in order to keep Effendi out of parliament, although his candidature in Cape Parliament caused much excitement among Muslims in London. It is noteworthy that, as a Muslim man, he was regarded as Cape Malay and like other South African Muslims, Malays held a disadvantaged position in nineteenth century South Africa. A British military attaché in the Ottoman Empire, Henry Felix Woods, reported an interesting dialogue between Sultan Hamid and Cecil John Rhodes, which indicated the tension between two:

Cecil Rhodes paid one short visit to Constantinople. I saw him on his return and he was rather pleased with his reception by the Sultan who, some months afterwards, in response to the request I presented on his part, sent him from Asia, as he wanted them for his park at Groote Schuur, some fine specimens of the Angora goats, the exports of which were strictly forbidden. I was very much amused, however when referring to his interview with the Sultan, he said, 'You know, I nearly missed it. I was kept waiting so long. Why? What do you think? There was a yaller man who was taken before me - a yaller man, you know, in my country cleans my boots. I very nearly gave it up and came away.' This "yaller man" was the great Mohammedan Malay Prince, Maharajah of Johare".^x

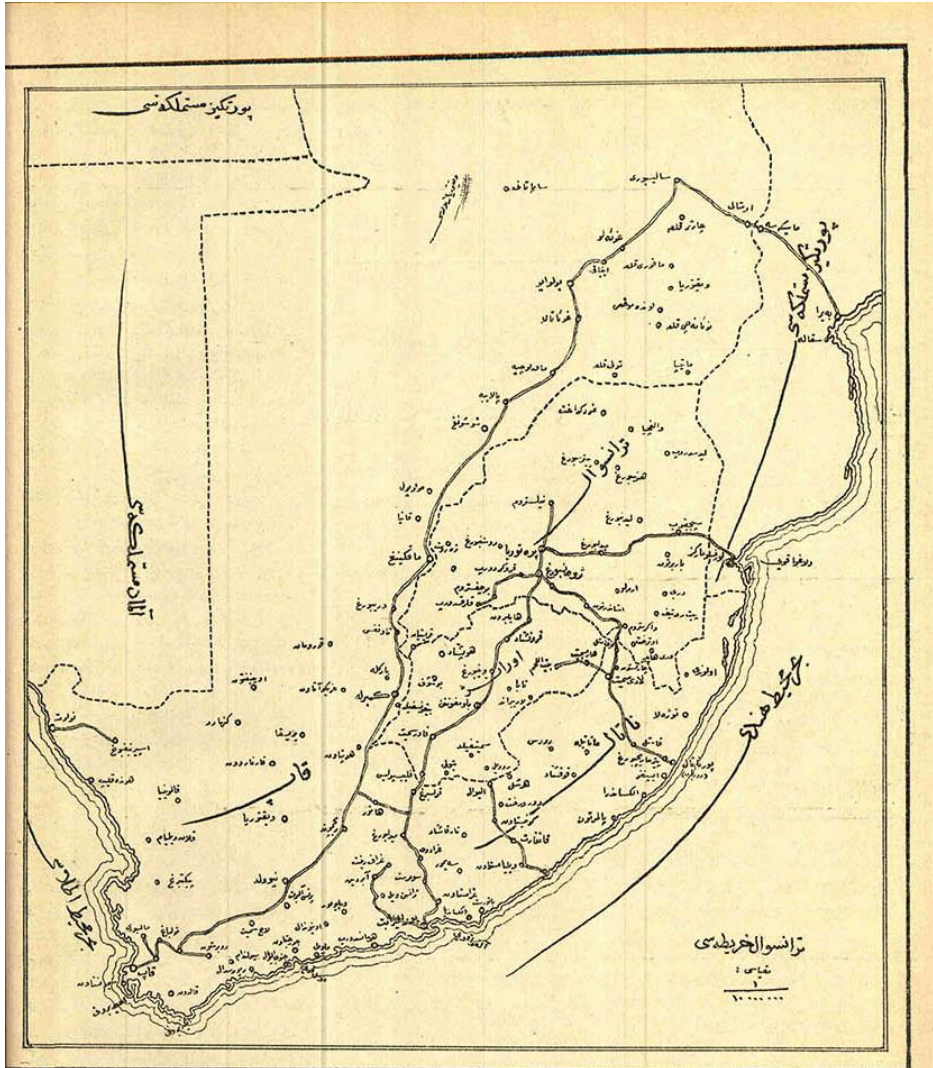
Henry Wood concluded his words with, "I am afraid that Rhodes was not a man who possessed much reverence for high rank." Rhodes wanted to order Angora goats from Turkey but due to strained relations with the Ottoman Empire, he got them from the Maharajah of Johare who had been gifted these by the Sultan himself. What is interesting here is that Cecil John Rhodes humiliated the Maharajah, but also Malay Muslims in South Africa. For this reason, Sultan Abdul Hamid, as the Caliph of the Muslim world did not show any sympathy towards Cecil John Rhodes. It is apparent that the Boers had the same attitude to Cecil John Rhodes as Sultan Abdul Hamid did. When Cecil John Rhodes died, the Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Burger*, reported,

The major news from the Cape in the past month is that Cecil John Rhodes died on the 26th of March. The news of Rhodes's death spread like wild fire through the republican commandos. One would find it difficult to identify any burgher who mourns his passing away. Indeed, the general reaction among the Boers is that it is a pity that he did not pass away somewhat earlier. This harsh sentiment is understandable if one considers that most Boers regard Rhodes together with Milner and Chamberlain as being jointly responsible for this disastrous war. We heard that one Burgher yesterday evening at the time of the commandos' religious service expressed his true feelings with regard to instigators of the war when he addressed the Lord with the greatest piety as follows in his prayer, 'Dear God, we have been informed that you have gathered

Mr Rhodes to you. We would like to remind you that Mr Milner is still here on earth.^{xi}

The most important reason for the Ottomans supporting the Afrikaners over the British was that the British Empire had already occupied Egypt, and established a railway from the Cape to Cairo in order to colonize Africa. Due to this, Ottoman foreign relations with the British Empire were already problematic. According to some Ottoman statesmen, the British occupied the land of the Afrikaners only to extract resources and control the continent.^{xii}

Despite the geographical distance from Turkey, Turkish intelligence followed up on the news from Western and African newspapers about the Transvaal War and informed Turkish readers about it. Two important books in Ottoman Turkish were also written regarding the Anglo-Boer War by two Ottoman intellectuals in 1900. The founder of Albania, Ottoman diplomat Ismail Kemal Bey wrote the *Transvaal Question* from a Muslim point of view and published it in Cairo in 1901. Ismail Kemal Bey's book was translated into French and Arabic but interestingly became a forgotten source in Turkish academic spheres. Ismail Kemal Bey emphasized the sociological aspect of the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. As a writer, it is easy to see that, in contrast with other Ottoman statesmen, he was supporting the British Empire, from which he later got support when he established Albania in 1912. In spite of being biased, his book contains remarkable information from an outside perspective.^{xiii}



کاملًا حاوی اولدیفندن یالکز طالبانه دکل بونی تنع ومطالعہ ایدہجک بک چوق والدہلرہ ویدرلرہده فوائد عظیمہ تأمین ایدہبیلیر .

چوقوقلر مملکتک امیدآتیبی اولدیفنه کوره کندیلری حسن صورتله تعلیم ایتک وفضیلتہ ناموسکارلہه آلیشدربرق بزم ایچون الک مقدس وظیفہلردندر ، بونی هیمز بیلیرز . مع مافیہ چوقوقلمزی تعلیم

وتریہ ایچون قلبلمزدهدی ارزو حسن یتہ نہ درجه مقرون اولورسه اولسون بوبادہکی قواعد اساسیہ دن غافل بولوندجہ هیچ بر نمره نافعہ به دسترس اولق احتمالز بوقدر .

بوسبیلہ اصول تعلیم وتریہ حقتده هیچ اولمازسه هرکسجه بیلمنہمی ازم اولان قواعد اصلیه بی جامع بر کتابه اولرمزک بک بیوک احتیاجی واردی .

اصول تعلیم وتریہ حقتده کی وقوف واختصاصاری نشریات کزیده لرله تعیین وتآید ایدن عایشه صدیقہ خاتم اقدینک یکی اثرلی ایشته بو احتیاجی ازاله به کافل اولدیفنی ایچون کندیلرینه عرض تشکرات ایدر وکتسابلری چوقوق والدہلرینه ، چوقوق بدرلرینه ، چوقوق مرہبہلرینه ، حاصلی هرکسه توصیه ایتیبی وجیبه دن عد ابلہرز .

A map of South Africa in an Ottoman newspaper, 1900, showing also the Transvaal and Cape Colony.

In the same year, an Ottoman general Mahmud Pasha also wrote about the Anglo-Boer War in a book entitled *Cenubi Afrika Muharebesi*, published in Istanbul in 1901. This book attempts to offer the translated text of Mahmud Mukhtar Pasha for readers. His book must be the first study detailing observations and analyses of the war conditions from a political perspective. Mahmud Muhtar Pasha stated that the most important reason for the South African War was to gain control over mining, and according to him, the British Empire was in Africa only for this reason. Ottoman

commander Mahmud Pasha's opinion reflected the general view of Turkish people about the Second Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. Mahmud Pasha indicated in his book that the Boers had an advantage over the British, because of their lifestyle in South Africa.

Boer people are used to this kind of weather and therefore, they are not affected as English people are in the region. Some bad weather even affects animals and epidemics killed many horses in the English army. No antidote has as yet been discovered for this horse epidemic. The same epidemic affects donkeys less than horses. If horses recover from this plague, they don't sicken again. Boers know how to look after their horses, but the English bring special grooms from outside. The most important concern among English horseman is how to protect their horses in the army.

Referring to the Anglo-Boer War, Mahmud Muhtar Pasha stated, "Two acrobats cannot walk on the same tightrope." In addition, according to Mahmud Pasha, "The Boers have taken a considerable number of prisoners, which has put the English in a weak situation but still no one can guess the result of the South African War at this stage", to indicate the politics behind the Transvaal War.^{xiv}

On the other side, there was a group called the Young Turks who supported the British Empire in order to show their opposition to the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid. The Young Turks even wrote a letter to congratulate the British Empire and submitted it to the British Consulate in Istanbul in 1902.

Furthermore, by 1899, the Ottoman Empire had sent the Ottoman Military Attaché of Washington, Aziz Bey, to South Africa in order to observe the war. He arrived in Pretoria in November 1899 and stayed in the region for a few weeks. His photo with other military attachés is held at the Cape Archives Repository. Additionally, some Ottoman military journals mentioned the animosity between Afrikaners and English, but due to political influences in the Ottoman government, military journals might have given selective comments depending on the recent political situation. This said, these developments caused an awareness among Turkish intellectuals of the colonial interest in the Anglo Boer War.^{xv}



Ottoman Military Attaché Aziz Bey in Pretoria as an observer, 1900. He is in the back row standing, second from right. His Queen's South African silver medal with three bars indicates that he was present as an observer (a dangerous position) in at least three important engagements or campaigns: The capture of Johannesburg, the battle of Diamond Hill and the campaign in the Cape Colony.

CONSTANTINOPLE, Feb. 17.—Aziz Bey, military attache to the Turkish Legation in Washington, has been appointed by his Government to follow the operations of the British forces in South Africa.

The *San Francisco Call* Vol. 87 No. 80 18 February 1900

Apart from these sources, a Dutch volunteer Verloren van Themaat stated that a Turkish man Marco Sava fought in the Boer army against the British. However, according to Turkish archival sources, Marco Sava was a criminal from Albania who ran away to Egypt. Then somehow, he made his way to South Africa in 1899 and was involved in the Anglo-Boer War against the British Empire.^{xvi} Because Albania fell within the Ottoman Empire he falsely stated that he was Turkish.

Numerous Ottoman newspapers such as *Servet'i Funun*, *Mecmua-i Funun*, *Şevval*, or *Sebil Ur Resat* gave space to news on the African continent in their columns but no specific study was written until the Second Anglo-Boer War about South Africa.^{xvii} For instance, Ahmed Cevdet wrote an interesting article for an Ottoman Journal and

analyzed the financial outcome of the Anglo-Boer War for the British Empire. There was another important reason for the Ottoman government to show interest in the Second Anglo-Boer War at the tip of Southern Africa. Ottoman Sultans were holding Islamic power through the Caliphate, namely the religious leadership of the Islamic World. Ottoman Caliph Abdulhamid wanted to know how Muslims were affected by the Anglo-Boer War and what he could do for them as the Head of the Islamic world.

۲۰۰ صحیفه روت فون نومرو ۴۸۱



ترانسوال محاربه‌سنة عايد : برانكايژ بطاربه‌سنگ سوق .

انمار مطبوعات

— كين نسخه‌دن مايمد وختام —

آلانبايك ترقيات تجاربه وصناعيه‌سى — انكايژ فونولوسرلينك راپورلرى —
 — آلمانريك اسباب زفاهينى — ايمراطورلىق ، تفكيكات عسكريه ، اصول
 حمايه — صلح وسربستى مبادله — تربيه‌تك تاثيرى — فنك تايمين
 ابتدئى منافع — تجارت مكتبلرى — السنه اجنيه — سيار تجارت
 مامورلى — آلمانريك مناسبات تجاربه‌دهكى طرز حركتلىرى — ميستر
 جوته‌چيرلين — حيات سياسيه‌سى — نطقلىرى — طبيعى .

ايكى سنه صوكره مقام اقتداره كين لورد سولسبهرى چيرلينه
 مستعمرات نظارتى تكليف ايتيش وچيرلين بوخدهنى مع المنونيه
 قبول ايله‌مشدر . اسكى رادفالك شيمدى « Tory » محافظه كار
 فرقه‌سنة اتسانبدهكى اسبابى تجرى ايدمجهك دكان مقصدمن چيرلينك
 افكار سياسيه‌سنده يكدبكرينى ولى ايدن صفحات تكلمانى كوستر مكدرد .
 چيرلين حال وزمانه كورده دون برستش ايتدكرينى بوكون ازمك
 ارزو ايدن كيمسه‌لردندر : ۱۸۸۵ ده بيرينفامده فرانسسه ايله
 مملكتنك اتفاقه فوق‌العاده اهميت وبردبكتى ، ايكى حكومت معظمه
 بيننده سعادت وسلامت عموميه ايجون دائم صلح ومسالتك جايكبر
 اولماسى لازم كله جكتى سوليلين ميستر جوته‌ك شوووك زمانلرده
 فرانسسه به قارشى قولادبغى لسان مقابسه ومحا كه ايديلير ايسسه
 آرادىكى فرق عظيمه حيرت ايتمك ممكن اولماز .

چيرلينك مستعمرات نظارته كيمسى اوروياده وياختاصه
 فرانسده حسن تاثير حاصل ايتمه‌مشدر . واقعا موسيو چيرلينده
 ۱۸۹۵ دن برى ، دولتر بيننده جازئ اولان اصول سياسيه‌تك
 هيچ برينه رعيت ايتبه‌رك منحصراً خارجيه نظارتنك دائره
 صلاحيتده بولوتق لازم كلن مسائل معظمه سياسيه‌تك هيسته
 مداخله ايتمكده در .

اساساً انكلمترده نظار يارلنتونك خارجنده امور خارجيه
 دائر كمال سربستى ايله استعمال لسان ايدلر . وا كترى سفرا
 طرفدن بونطقلر موجب شكايات اولور . چيرلين انكايژريك بوعدت
 قديمه سياسيه‌سى افراط درجه‌ده تطبيق ايدبور . اوروييا حكومات
 سائر سنده عمومينه نظار ايتجنده باش وكيل ايله خارجيه ناظرندن
 ماعداسى سياست خارجيه‌ده دائر صورت علنيه بيان فكر ومعالله
 ايتج . خلاف اصول حركت ايدنلرك ايتسى گون سقوطين واقعدر
 مثلا اون سنه اول ايتاليا ماليه ناظرى موسيو سميت دودا وپرلين
 بر ضياقتده اووستريا بولتيقه‌سنة دوقونه‌جق ببولده اداره اقداح
 ايتمكله موسيو قراسى كنديلينى درعقب عزل ايتشدى .

فرزته‌لرك اكرتيلسى ، قارلرلينك اعصابى هيچ ، نجسارنى
 تجريك ، حيرتلىرى ايجباب ايدمجهك شيلر تجرى ايدلر .
 چيرلينك بولتيقه‌سى بولره بك مشاهدرد . عددى مع‌التأسف
 بك زياده اولان آيتقارى بر قات دها آيتقلاشديره‌جق صورته

The Transvaal War in the Ottoman newspaper Servet-i Funun, 1899

Conclusion

The Anglo-Boer War was the last great confrontation between Afrikaners and the British in South Africa. The results of this war affected the destiny of nations in the region but also determined the political and economic relations with the British Empire. This great campaign was widely reported in the Western media but also in many other countries such as Turkey. Due to a political challenge directed against the British Empire, the Ottoman Empire viewed the the Anglo-Boer War as a neutral observer but also supported the Afrikaners. Two Turkish intellectuals wrote books about Anglo-Boer War, and several Turkish journalists reported the war from the beginning to the end. More importantly, the Ottoman Government sent a Military Attaché to South Africa, Lieutenant Colonel Aziz Bey who stayed in Pretoria for three months and reported on the War to the Ottoman Government. For many reasons, Turkish newspapers and officers were interested in the Anglo-Boer War. This presentation aims to reveal the impact of the Anglo-Boer War for the Ottoman public sphere in the light of Ottoman archival documents.

ⁱ Gencoglu, Halim (2018) "A note on the Significance of Turkish Archives for South African Historiography", (Quarterly Bulletin of The South African Library). Volumes 1-60, Cape Town

ⁱⁱ Lewis, B. (1954) "Studies in the Ottoman Archives--I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 16(3), pp. 469–501.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gençoğlu Halim (2018) *Ottoman traces in southern Africa: the impact of Turkish emissaries and Muslim theologians*. 1. edn. Osmanbey, İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık (History, 220).

^{iv} Wittek, P. (1954) "Bernard Lewis: Notes and Documents from the Turkish Archives. a Contribution to the History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. (Oriental Notes and Studies, No. 3.) 52 Pp., Ix Pls. Jerusalem: The Israel Oriental Society, 1952," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 16(1), pp. 196–196. doi: 10.1017/S0041977X0014385X.

^v Lewis, B. (1954) "Studies in the Ottoman Archives--I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 16(3), pp. 469–501.

^{vi} Omer Lutfi Effendi and Kavarcı, Y. Z. (1991) *A travelogue of my journey to the Cape of Good Hope*. Cape Town, South Africa: AL-Khaleel Publications.

^{vii} Ömer Lütfi and Yorulmaz Hüseyin (1994) *Ümitburnu seyahatnâmesi : yüz yıl önce güney afrika*. 1. Baskı edn. İstanbul: Ses (Ses tarih ; Seyahatnâmeler, 6. 4).

^{viii} Gencoglu, H. (2014) "The First Muslim Politician of South Africa: Ahmet Ataullah Bey, 1865-1903," *New Contree: a journal of historical and human sciences for Southern Africa*, No. 69, P. 93-119.

^{ix} Ömer Seyfeddin, Küçük Demet, Aslan, H. and Frankfurter Buchmesse (2008) (2007) *Selected stories of Ömer Seyfettin*. 1st edn. İstanbul: Profil Yayıncılık (Turkish literature, 02).

^x Woods, H. F. (1924) *Spun yarn : from the strands of a sailor's life afloat and ashore. Forty-seven years under the ensigns of Great Britain and Turkey*. By Sir Henry F. Woods, aide-de-camp for some years to the late Sultan Abdul Hamid. London: Hutchinson.

^{xi} Burger (Newspaper: Cape Town) (1965) *Die Burger 50 jaar 1915-1965 ...: bylae tot Die Burger Vrydag 23 Julie 1965*. Kaapstad: *Die Burger*.

^{xii} In 1896, President Paul Kruger complained about the honorary Turkish consul Mr. Bettelheim and he was arrested and sent back to Turkey. See, Kruger, P. and Bergh, J. S. (2017) *Paul Kruger: toesprake en korrespondensie van 1881-1900*. P. 421, Eerste uitgawe edn. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis.

^{xiii} Avlanlyalı İsmail Kemal (1900) *Transval me'selesi*. Mısır: Matbaa-yı Osmaniye. Available at: INSERT-MISSING-URL (Accessed: October 29, 2019).

^{xiv} Mahmut Muhtar (1900) *Afrika-yi cenûbî muharebesi*. Kustantiniye: Matbaa-yi Ebüzziya. Available at: INSERT-MISSING-URL (Accessed: October 29, 2019). P. 28

^{xv} Gençođlu Halim (2018) Güney afrika'da zaman ve mekân : ümit burnu'nun umudu osmanlılar. 1. Baskı edn. Osmanbey, İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık (Libra Kitap, 242. Tarih ; 229).

^{xvi} Ver Loren van Themaat, H. B. (1903) Twee jaren in den Boerenoorlog, met portret van Danie Theron en drie van het oorlogsterrein. Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink.

^{xvii} Subhi İsmail and Fuad, M. (1910) Salname-i servet-i funun, 1326.