

Diplomacy¹

Disputable paradigms

For most of the twentieth century, scholars of international law shared a common belief that the natural setting in which the international diplomacy had developed was a world composed of sovereign states, whose mutual relations were regulated by the rule of equality and reciprocity.² A standard narrative, epitomised in the classic work by Garret Mattingly, attributed the rise of modern diplomacy to Renaissance Italy, whose rulers, emancipated from the universalistic claims of German emperors and disenchanted with the popes whose involvement in mundane politics had deprived them of religious charisma, developed a system of mutual relations that was based on the principle of equilibrium. This system, so the narrative goes, was then adopted by the whole of Europe, and finally by the entire world.³ Special attention was also devoted to the Peace of Westphalia (1648) which had reportedly established the rule of sovereignty in European politics, and sovereignty had become the foundation stone for the development of international relations.

The above paradigm was so much prevalent that scholars of non-Western societies, instead of challenging its very foundation, sometimes endeavoured to present the subjects of their research as fitting in the dominating matrix, as if only that could render them valid and worthy subjects of historical enquiry. To invoke one example, in a volume entitled *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?*, published in 2004, Nuri Yurduşev argued that Ottoman diplomacy had been less *Islamic* and less *imperial* than it had often been assumed, as if being Islamic and imperial were something unbecoming, unfitting to the criteria of the modern world.⁴

As the matter of fact, in the most populous region of the globe, namely East Asia, which boasted of some major human inventions and an advanced technology and civilisation, international relations were long regulated not in accordance to the rule of reciprocity, equality and sovereignty, but in accordance to the Chinese tributary system, even though weaker partners –such as Chosŏn Korea or Tokugawa Japan– knew how to use this system to their advantage.⁵

¹ Chapter 12 from the Cambridge History of International Law, Vol. VIII, Part II: International law in the Islamic World during the Ottoman Era (1453-1923).

² Cf. the introductory remarks by Randall Lesaffer to the first volume of the present edition.

³ Garret Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1955). The belief that Italy was the cradle of modern diplomacy is still present, albeit in a more nuanced form, in a recent monograph by Isabella Lazzarini; see Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict. Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015).

⁴ Nuri Yurduşev, 'The Ottoman attitude toward diplomacy' in Nuri Yurduşev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004) 5-35.

⁵ Cf. Evelyn Rawski, 'Sons of Heaven: the Qing appropriation of the Chinese model of universal empire' in Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) 233-49; Evelyn Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia. Cross-Border Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Kenneth Swope, 'Deceit, disguise, and dependence: China, Japan, and the future of the tributary system, 1592-1596', *The International History*

More ironically, Andreas Osiander and several other authors have recently challenged the popular image of the year 1648. To quote Osiander: ‘the accepted IR narrative about Westphalia is a myth’ and this narrative –‘purportedly about the seventeenth century– is really a product of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century fixation on the concept of sovereignty’.⁶ The practice of measuring disparate global phenomena by comparing them to European standards has also recently been challenged by Martti Koskenniemi in an interview under a telling title: ‘We do not need to always look to Westphalia’.⁷ Numerous studies by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger have demonstrated that long after Westphalia, the *ius precedentiae* was still observed in Europe. The symbolic hegemony of the Habsburg emperor survived well into the Napoleonic era, while the kings of England and France hardly regarded lesser rulers as peers, notwithstanding the latter’s official claims to full sovereignty.⁸ Any historian specializing in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe knows that equality between states has always been a fiction and differences between the equals and the more equals have been openly formalized by the existence of such bodies as the Concert of Europe or the permanent memberships of the League of Nations and the UN Security Council. Quite recently, the language adopted by the administration of Donald Trump has reminded us that the imperial and hegemonic discourse is far from being extinct in the modern world.

Hence, before we set up to describe the Ottoman diplomacy, we have to keep in mind that unequal relations have been rather a rule than an exception in medieval, early modern as well as modern times and the partners of diplomatic exchange enjoyed different levels of sovereignty. An emperor could maintain diplomatic relations with other emperors, but also with kings, dukes, republics, towns, and other communities such as nomadic tribes, Orthodox monasteries or chartered merchant companies. The difference between a fully sovereign state, a client, a tributary and a subject was often blurred and this rule did not only apply to the Ottoman world. It was quite universal.⁹

From the humble beginnings to the conquest of Constantinople

The entry of the Ottoman *beylik* on the political scene of Asia Minor around 1300 did not initially herald a new era. Ottoman rulers had first to assert their independence vis-à-vis the Seljuks, the Ilkhanids, and the Palaiologoi, who had all once claimed the lands on which Osman and Orkhan built their state. In

Review, 24 (2002) 757-82. On the Chinese tributary system, see i.a., John King Faibank and Ssu-yü Têng, ‘On the Ch’ing tributary system’, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 6 (1941) 135-246; John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K’ang-hsi, 1666-1687* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press 1984); James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar. Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1995).

⁶ Andreas Osiander, ‘Sovereignty, international relations, and the Westphalian myth’, *International Organization*, 55 (2001) 251-87, at 251.

⁷ Alexandra Kemmerer, “‘We do not need to always look to Westphalia...’ A conversation with Martti Koskenniemi and Anne Orford”, *Journal of the History of International Law*, 17 (2015) 1-14, at 7-8.

⁸ Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, ‘Die Wissenschaft der feinen Unterschiede. Das Präzedenzrecht und die europäischen Monarchien vom 16. Bis zum 18. Jahrhundert’, *Majestas*, 10 (2002) 125-150.

⁹ Cf. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, ‘What is inside and what is outside? Tributary states in Ottoman politics’ in Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević (eds.), *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2013) 421-32.

these initial years, Ottoman diplomacy did not differ from that of neighbouring Turkic states although Orkhan was soon to display extraordinary skills in striking alliances and conducting dynastic policy. By marrying Teodora, a daughter of a pretender to Byzantine throne John Kantakouzenos, and entering the Byzantine civil war, Orkhan not only secured first territorial spoils on the European side of the Dardanelles, but also introduced into his court the imperial lustre associated with his Greek consort and her retinue.

Dynastic marriage became a hallmark of Ottoman dynasty also in the following generations. As many as seven princesses peopled the harems of Orkhan's four descendents: Murad I (r. 1362-89), Bayezid I (r. 1389-1402), Mehmed I (r. 1413-21) and Murad II (r. 1421-51). Four of these princesses originated from Islamic dynasties, the Germiyanids, the Aydnids, the Dulkadirids and the Jandarids, while three were Christian – two Serbian and one Bulgarian.¹⁰ Due to the scarcity of sources, we do not know much about the circumstances of these marriages, yet it is safe to assume that their arrangement required sophisticated diplomatic ceremonial, even if Ottoman grooms could at times further marriage proposals by barely veiled military threats. Foreign princesses added to the splendour of Ottoman household, they also acted as cultural brokers between their native milieus and the Ottoman dynasty when it extended its rule onto their homelands. Exemplary in this aspect is the role of Mara Branković, a daughter of Serbian Despot George Branković and a wife of Sultan Murad II. In 1444, when the Ottoman state faced the encirclement by European Crusaders and the bey of Karaman, she played an active role in negotiating a peace between her husband and her father.¹¹ In her later years, after Serbia had been fully incorporated into the Ottoman realm, she extended patronage over Orthodox monasteries, especially Chilandar on Mount Athos, smoothening their adjustment to Ottoman rule and at the same time securing at least partial recognition for the new dynasty in the eyes of its Christian subjects.¹²

During the violent reign of Bayezid I, the Ottomans abruptly replaced diplomacy with outright military aggression, yet the dramatic fall of the sultan in result of the battle of Ankara (1402) taught his sons to return to subtler means in their conduct of foreign policy, especially as they were looking for external allies in fighting each other while their position vis-à-vis the Timurids, the Byzantines, and even the Venetians was often that of the weaker party.¹³

It is only with the consolidation of Ottoman rule in the Balkans and Asia Minor under Murad II that the Ottomans became true masters in their dealings with neighboring powers. By defeating the Christian coalition at Varna, in 1444, Murad also paved the way to the conquest of Constantinople, effected by his son nine years later.

¹⁰ M. Çağatay Uluçay, *Padişahların kadınları ve kızları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi 1992) 5-17.

¹¹ Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978) 28.

¹² Aleksandar Fotić, 'Despina Mara Branković and Chilandar: between the desired and the possible' in *Huit siècles du monastère de Chilandar. Histoire, vie spirituelle, littérature, art et architecture* (Colloques scientifiques de l'Académie serbe des sciences et des arts, vol. XCV, Classe des Sciences historiques, vol. 27, Belgrade 2000), 93-100, at 99. On the attitude of non-Muslim subjects towards their Ottoman rulers, see i.a. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'The "Turkish yoke" revisited: the Ottoman non-Muslim subjects between loyalty, alienation, and riot', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 93 (2006) 177-95.

¹³ Dimitris J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid. Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2007) xii, 55-6, 65, 126-9.

At the height of Ottoman universalism (1453-1699)

It is hard to overstate the importance of the conquest of Constantinople for the Ottoman self-perception. By assuming the official title of the *kayser-i Rum* ('Caesar of Rome'), Mehmed II consciously elevated his position as well as that of his descendants over all other monarchs in Europe, especially as the Ottomans were to refuse this title to their main rivals in the West, the Habsburgs, until the seventeenth century, or even later.¹⁴ It is worth remembering that the Ottoman imperial ideology was coined in cooperation with the sultan's Christian advisors recruited from among his Greek, Serbian and Italian subjects, and this cooperation is perfectly visible in the preserved Ottoman documents issued in Greek, Serbian, Italian and Latin, addressed to non-Turkish and non-Muslim audiences, where the sultan is alternatively referred to as *basileus* (*βασιλεύς*), *tsar* (*цар*), and *imperator*.¹⁵ The propaganda was also effective beyond the Ottoman borders. While the Italian Renaissance authors looked at the Turkish *Gran Signore* with a mixture of fear, fascination and awe, in the Polish early modern vocabulary the title of emperor was applied only to two foreign monarchs: the 'Christian emperor' (*cesarz chrześcijański*) in Vienna and the 'Turkish emperor' (*cesarz turecki*) in Istanbul, and the only differentiating qualifier was the adjective.¹⁶

Already in 1453, the Genoese inhabitants of Galata and Pera, two European quarters of Constantinople, submitted to the Ottoman rule while their legal autonomy, religious freedom and the right to practice trade in Ottoman domains were guaranteed by the sultan's privilege.¹⁷ Roughly at the same time, in the years 1453-4, Venice renegotiated its treaty with the sultan and agreed to continue to send an annual tribute for Lepanto and her possessions in Albania, which had already been established in 1430, in return for the right to maintain a merchant colony in Constantinople and a permanent representative at the sultan's court, the *bailo*.¹⁸ After the Ottoman-Venetian war of 1463-79, a new peace had to be bought with territorial concessions, a huge monetary contribution and the raise in the annual tribute to 10,000 ducats.¹⁹

Interestingly, both the status of the Genoese merchant colony within the sultan's realm and the Ottoman external relations with the Venetian Republic, which still constituted a considerable naval power, were regulated with the same type of instruments, known as '*ahdnames* ('oath-letters') in Turkish

¹⁴ Halil İnalcık, 'Mehmed II' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., vol. 6 (Leiden and London: Brill 1991) 978-81; Markus Köhbach, 'Çasar oder imperator? – Zur Titulatur der römischen Kaiser durch die Osmanen nach dem Vertrag von Zsitvatorok (1606)', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 82 (1992) 223-34.

¹⁵ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'Khan, caliph, tsar and imperator: the multiple identities of the Ottoman sultan' in Bang and Kołodziejczyk, *Universal Empire*, 175-93, at 181-8.

¹⁶ Kołodziejczyk, 'Khan, caliph, tsar and imperator', 191.

¹⁷ Louis Mitler, 'The Genoese in Galata: 1453-1682', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (1979) 71-91; Halil İnalcık, 'Ottoman Galata' in Halil İnalcık, *Essays in Ottoman History* (Istanbul: Eren, 1998), 275-376.

¹⁸ Hans Theunissen, 'Ottoman-Venetian diplomatics: the '*ahd-names*. The historical background and the development of a category of political-commercial instruments together with an annotated edition of a corpus of relevant documents', PhD thesis (the later version published in 1998 in *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies* was subsequently removed), Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht (1991), 117, 122-3. The Italian text of the treaty of 1454 is published in Samuele Romanin, *Storia documentata di Venezia*, vol. 4 (Venice: Pietro Naratovich tipografo editore 1855) 528-35.

¹⁹ Theunissen, 'Ottoman-Venetian diplomatics', 129-31.

and as *capitolazioni* ('capitulations') in Italian, whose form and wording suggested that the sultan treated their recipients as his proper subjects. Here we can see the foreshadow of Ottoman imperial universalism that would become prevalent in the subsequent century. Before it could materialise, however, the empire had to stand one more test when its security and position vis-à-vis Christian Europe was put in danger and the sultan had to adopt a humbler position in his foreign policy.

After the death of Sultan Mehmed II, the reign of his son Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) was challenged by the latter's younger brother, Djem, who found refuge first in Mamluk Egypt, and then in Rhodes. Transferred by the Hospitallers to France and then handed over to Pope Innocent VIII upon the latter's request, Djem became a precious asset in the hands of European rulers and a great threat to the stability of his brother's rule. No wonder that Bayezid kept sending his trusted agents to France and Italy in order to make sure that his brother would be kept in custody, even though it was to cost the Ottoman treasury dearly. In 1483, the *subaşı* of Lemnos named Hüseyin, probably of Greek origin and related to the Palaiologoi family, arrived in Rhodes with the impressive sum of 40,000 ducats designed for the expenses related to the 'hosting' of the sultan's brother. From Rhodes, Hüseyin travelled to France as the sultan's special envoy to Louis XI, yet the French king refused to receive him for the reason that he was a Muslim.²⁰ At one moment Bayezid was so desperate that he offered Charles VIII, the successor of Louis XI, to deliver Jerusalem from the Mamluks and hand it over to the French. After Djem was transferred to Rome, Bayezid sent his trusted agent named Mustafa, a *kapucu başı* at his court, and in 1491 the sultan and the pope made a direct contract: in return for a handsome bribe paid in annual instalments, Innocent VIII promised to keep Djem in custody thus rendering him innoxious for the Ottoman state.²¹ Until the exiled prince died in 1495, many more Ottoman agents, official as well as secret, had been dispatched by Bayezid II to Italy in order to inquire about his brother's whereabouts and possibly arrange for his assassination. The sultan's highly intensive diplomatic activity in that period is today reflected by documents held in the Topkapı Palace Archives.²²

The triumphs of Selim I (r. 1512-20) over the Safavids and the Mamluks, and the victorious campaigns of Sultan Suleyman (r. 1520-66) in the Mediterranean, Hungary and Iraq certainly went to the heads of Ottoman rulers and statesmen. Ebu's-su'ud, the famous mufti and Suleyman's adviser, asserted that by the virtue of his deeds his patron could rightfully assume the title of caliph, even though he did not descend from the Quraysh tribe and was not related to Prophet Muhammad.²³ In result of palace renovations and studious changes in court ceremonial, the reception of foreign envoys turned into a solemn performance whose principal aim was to exalt the sultan's glory and emphasize his visitors' subordinate position. To quote a present-day scholar: 'Süleyman no longer rose to honor ambassadors,

²⁰ Nicolas Vatin, 'A propos du voyage en France de Hüseyin, ambassadeur de Bajazet II auprès de Louis XI (1483)', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 4 (1984) 35-44, at 37.

²¹ Halil İnalcık, 'A Case study in Renaissance diplomacy: the agreement between Innocent VIII and Bayezid II on Djem Sultan', *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 3 (1979) 209-30.

²² Nicolas Vatin, 'Itinéraires d'agents de la Porte en Italie (1483-1495). Réflexions sur l'organisation des missions ottomanes et sur la transcription turque des noms de lieux italiens', *Turcica. Revue d'études turques*, 19 (1987), 29-50.

²³ Colin Imber, *Ebu's-su'ud. The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1997) 104-6.

he did not allow them to sit in his presence, nor did he even address a single word to them'.²⁴ If there was any business to be discussed, it was done outside the audience chamber.

In the sultan's solemn documents, the Ottoman court was similarly presented as radiating with a divine splendour. Suleyman assumed the lofty title of the God's shadow on earth (*zillu'llah fi'l-arz*) and, in a later instrument sent to the Polish king in 1623, the Ottoman court was referred to as 'our court, the refuge of sultans and the seat of felicity which feeds the lips of the Caesars of the epoch and is thronged by the mouths of the Khusraws of the age'.²⁵ In result of chancery reforms introduced by Mustafa Celâlzade, who in 1525 became the head scribe (*re'isu'l-kuttâb*) in the service of the grand vizier and later on advanced to the post of *nişancı*, Ottoman sultans no longer issued documents in 'infidel' scripts and languages, but almost exclusively in the Arabic script and in Ottoman-Turkish. Solemn documents sent to foreign rulers, which theretofore had rarely exceeded one meter in length, could measure several meters in length under Suleyman and his successors, not because their text was so long, but because the document's very size was intended to impress the recipient.²⁶

In their relations with Venice, the Ottomans gradually transformed their instruments of peace from bilateral agreements into unilateral instruments issued at the sultan's will, as if Venetians were his subjects. The latter instruments assumed the form of 'diplomas' (*nişans*), and hence Hans Theunissen has coined the term '*nişanization* process', which he dates to the period from the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth century.²⁷ In the second half of the seventeenth century, the same process can be observed in the Ottoman-Polish relations, coinciding with the aggressive Ottoman policy in Eastern Europe under the tenure of the grand viziers from the Köprülü household.²⁸ The unilateral character of Ottoman documents that regulated mutual relations was still more evident in the instruments sent to Ottoman vassals: Ragusa, Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia. Yet the fact that the term '*ahdname*' can also be found in these instruments, albeit with uneven frequency,²⁹ further demonstrates that in the Ottoman eyes the difference between a vassal and a foreign ruler was at best blurred as both could be treated as the sultan's subjects. Viorel Panaite regards the reign of Suleyman as a watershed and argues that precisely in that period Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania entered as tributaries the Ottoman symbolic internal sphere referred to as the sultan's 'well-protected domains' (*memalik-i mahruse*).³⁰ Yet

²⁴ Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power. The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press 1991) 102.

²⁵ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century). An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill 2000) 14, 396; cf. Kołodziejczyk, 'Khan, caliph, tsar and emperor', 182.

²⁶ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 35-6, 39-41.

²⁷ Theunissen, 'Ottoman-Venetian diplomacies', 253-255. On the ambivalent position of Venice between an Ottoman tributary state and a competing Western rival, cf. Alexander H. de Groot, 'The historical perspective of the capitulatory regime in the Ottoman Middle East from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries', *Oriente Moderno*, n.s., 22 (2003), no. 3 = *The Ottoman Capitulations: Text and Context*, edited by M. H. van den Boogert and K. Fleet, 575-604, at 587.

²⁸ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 8-10.

²⁹ Sándor Papp, 'The system of autonomous Muslim and Christian communities, churches, and states in the Ottoman Empire' in Kármán and Kunčević, *The European Tributary States*, 375-419, at 395-412; Lovro Kunčević, 'Janus-faced sovereignty: The international status of the Ragusan Republic in the early modern period' in Kármán and Kunčević, *The European Tributary States*, 91-121.

³⁰ Viorel Panaite, *Ottoman Law of War and Peace. The Ottoman Empire and Its Tribute-Payers from the North of the Danube* (2nd revised edn., Leiden and Boston: Brill 2019) 291, 348, 377.

from a formalist point of view also the rulers in Venice, Vienna, Cracow and Vilnius, who sent annual payments to their Muslim neighbours, could be regarded as Ottoman tributaries. The Polish-Lithuanian rulers did so indirectly, sending yearly instalments to the Crimean khan, yet the latter was an Ottoman vassal and referred to these levies as *djizya* and *kharadj* in his internal correspondence with the sultan. Arguably, the royal payments to the khan could serve the Ottoman Muslim lawyers as a handy legal excuse when, in 1533, their lord Sultan Suleyman resolved to conclude a ‘permanent’ peace with King Sigismund I of Poland. Such a peace –which was to last almost a century, renewed by the sultan’s and the king’s successors– was only legally permitted to a Muslim ruler when his Christian ‘infidel’ counterpart agreed to pay a tribute.³¹ This example reveals that Ottoman universalism, depicting the sultan as the ultimate lord of all mankind, did not merely reflect the Ottoman megalomania. It could also be used to bend the exigencies of the Muslim law and serve pragmatic exigences of Ottoman foreign policy, which sometimes found it expedient to ally with one ‘infidel’ monarch against another one.³²

The consolidation of the empire also resulted in the cessation of interdynastic marriage. Beginning with the reign of Mehmed II, the Ottomans no longer saw neighbouring rulers as peers and preferred slave concubines to legal wives as the former did not carry with them the political aspirations of their families. Although a concubine could also enjoy a high personal status, this status solely derived from her union with the ruling monarch, and especially from her motherhood of a future sultan.³³ Yet the absence of interdynastic marriage did not imply the lack of female diplomacy as some consorts and mothers of Ottoman sultans are known to have maintained correspondence with foreign courts, especially their female members. Hence Hürrem Sultan, a Ruthenian captive from Poland who became the beloved wife of Sultan Suleyman, maintained diplomatic correspondence with Bona Sforza, the queen of Poland, with Izabella Jagiellon, Bona’s daughter and the queen of Hungary, and with women from the Safavid dynasty. Nurbanu, a Venetian captive and the mother of Murad III, corresponded with the French queen Catherine de Médicis, and Safiye, a slave of Albanian origin and the mother of Mehmed III, corresponded with Queen Elisabeth of England.³⁴ In a letter to Isabella, today preserved in a Latin translation, Hürrem invoked female solidarity by stressing the fact that both she and the Hungarian queen originated from biblical Eve, and expressed her strong belief in Ottoman universalism by adding that they both served the same man, namely the Ottoman sultan.³⁵ The fact that Suleyman

³¹ Kołodziejczyk, ‘What is inside and what is outside?’, 427-30; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, ‘La Res Publica polono-lituanienne était-elle le vassal de l’Empire ottoman?’ in Anna Parzymies (ed.), *Studies in Oriental Art and Culture in Honour of Professor Tadeusz Majda* (Warsaw: Dialog 2006) 125-36.

³² Alexander de Groot likewise observes that by blurring the difference between the sultan’s subjects and non-Christian foreigners, the capitulations granted to Western European merchants that contained elements of legal fiction should be considered ‘a splendid product of the pragmatic legal thinking of the Ottomans’; see de Groot, ‘The historical perspective of the capitulatory regime’, 603.

³³ Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem. Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993) 28-32, 38-41.

³⁴ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 219-28; Leslie Peirce, *Empress of the East. How a European Slave Girl became Queen of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books 2017) 223-5, 251.

³⁵ *Filia charissima, Utraque nostrum ex una matre Eva nat[a]e sumus et genitae ex una massa, et amb[a]e servimus uni homini*; see Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa, BOZ 2053/XXIII (Teki Górskiego, T. 23), fol. 201r.; also available at <https://polona.pl/item/teki-gorskiego-t-23.ODM3NDc4Nw/412/#info:metadata>. On this letter, cf. Andrzej Dziubiński,

relied on Hürrem in some delicate diplomatic matters provoked a Polish noble from Izabella's retinue to comment in a letter sent to Ferdinand Habsburg that 'contrary to the Turkish custom, [the sultan] employs his wife as a woman in order to contact another woman'.³⁶ Soft diplomacy was also employed when on the accession of the new Polish king, Sigismund Augustus, Hürrem sent him a letter along with a few small gifts: two pairs of drawers along with shirts and waistbands, six handkerchiefs and a face towel.³⁷

As we can see, Ottoman universalism coincided with a highly pragmatic attitude towards diplomacy and foreign relations. Theatrical effects associated with the Ottoman court ceremonial and the splendour and pomp reflected in imperial documents went hand in hand with the practice of real politics. Having identified the Habsburgs as their archenemies in Europe, the Ottomans entered alliances with Poland and France, cemented with the agreements of 1533 and 1536 concluded by Suleyman with Sigismund I Jagiellon and Francis I Valois.³⁸ Contrary to some lasting stereotypes, the Ottomans did not limit themselves to receiving foreign embassies, but also sent their proper envoys, at least to neighboring countries. A present-day reader may be surprised by the cordial tone of some letters exchanged between Istanbul and European courts. In 1539, Sultan Suleyman invited the kings of Poland and France to attend the circumcision ceremony of his two sons and the wedding of his daughter, and three years later King Sigismund I of Poland suggested in a letter to the archbishop of Gniezno that one should invite Suleyman to the wedding of the royal son.³⁹ Such invitations were only formal and the invited rulers did not venture to visit the other party, yet solemn embassies provided with fitting gifts were exchanged in order to cement mutual friendship. This very fact suggests that at the Polish court the Ottoman sultan was regarded as a full member of the 'family of monarchs' and not as a hostile barbarian.

Even in its relations with more distant countries, in which the Porte contented itself with receiving foreign envoys and granting them unilateral privileges, unilateralism did not preclude an active diplomacy. Commercial privileges were consciously used by the Porte as a tool of foreign policy, so it is no accident that the first western European nations, after Venice and France, granted capitulations that enabled their merchants trade in the Ottoman domains, were the English (1580) and the Dutch (1612) – two Protestant enemies of the Spanish Habsburgs. The Ottoman rationale was clearly pronounced in the privilege of Murad III, which stated that English merchants would be treated equally with the subjects

Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie w latach 1500-1572 w kontekście międzynarodowym (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2005) 151-2; Peirce, *Empress of the East*, 223-4.

³⁶ Dziubiński, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie*, 152.

³⁷ [...] *iki çift don ve gönlek uçkuriyle ve altı dane destimal ve bir dane el yüz makraması*; for the facsimile and description of the letter, written in 1549 in Istanbul, see *Distant Neighbour Close Memories. 600 Years of Turkish-Polish Relations* (Istanbul: Sabancı University/Sakıp Sabancı Museum 2014) 126.

³⁸ For the Polish-Ottoman agreement of 1533, see Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 117-8. The French-Ottoman agreement of 1536 was never formally confirmed by the sultan, yet it formed the basis for political and military cooperation in the western Mediterranean, while the presence of French merchants in Ottoman domains was regulated by an earlier document from 1528; see Michel Tuchscherer, 'Le renouvellement des privilèges de la Nation des Français et des Catalans à Alexandrie en 1528' in Michel Tuchscherer and Maria Pia Pedani (eds.), *Alexandrie ottomane 1, Études alexandrines 19* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale 2011) 15-41, at 25.

³⁹ Dziubiński, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie*, 129, 148.

of 'France and Venice and Poland and the other kings who display sincere friendship towards our exalted threshold'.⁴⁰ By applying the Most-Favoured-Nation clause in regard to their friends,⁴¹ and by imposing trade sanctions against their enemies, the Ottoman sultans were thus fully compatible with the politicians of our times.

In his acclaimed study on the practice of toleration in early modern Europe, Benjamin Kaplan observes that 'contrary to the progressive schema of the Whig interpretation, toleration declined sharply in Europe in the wake of the reformations, and for the next two centuries, from around the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth, it remained deeply problematic for a majority of Christians'.⁴² Ottomanist scholars have recently observed a similar phenomenon in 'their' empire so it is legitimate to speak of Ottoman confessionalisation that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Originally aimed at strengthening the Ottoman Sunni identity in the face of the Shiite challenge coming from Safavid Iran, this confessionalisation was also embedded in internal social dynamics and linked with state building, urbanisation, and bureaucratisation.⁴³ Initiated during the reign of Suleyman, the process gained a new dynamics in the seventeenth century with the rise of the Kadızadeli puritan movement whose proponents called for a strengthened Muslim orthodoxy and a more rigid adherence to the Sharia. The ascent of Vani Mehmed (d. 1685), a Muslim preacher who became an advisor of Sultan Mehmed IV and his two grand viziers, Ahmed Köprülü and Kara Mustafa, spelled the symbolic end of Ottoman syncretism. Vani argued that Muslim rulers were in no need of spiritual assistance from their Christian subjects and condemned the former practice of communal prayers, in which the Muslim imams and Christian patriarchs, assisted by their flocks, together prayed for the victories of Ottoman troops or a relief from plagues. According to Vani Mehmed, such practice blurred the line between true believers and those of only tolerated faiths and undermined the primacy of Islam.⁴⁴ This new attitude was also visible in Ottoman foreign policy and the haughty attitude of Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa towards European envoys became proverbial. According to Maria Pia Pedani, the parallel roles of two religious preachers – Sheikh Vani Mehmed and Padre Marco d'Aviano – and their respective influence at the Ottoman and Habsburg courts should be regarded as symbolic for the spirit of Muslim-

⁴⁰ *França ve Venedik ve Leh ve sa'ir 'atebe-i 'ulyamıza 'arz-i ihlas eyleyen kırallar*; see Susan A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578-1582. A Documentary Study of the First Anglo-Ottoman Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977) 86, 233.

⁴¹ Alexander de Groot dates its first application to 1740, when the French capitulations contained the clause that all privileges granted before to Venice were deemed to be included; cf. de Groot, 'The historical perspective of the capitulatory regime', 603. Yet, as we have seen, it had already been applied by the Porte much earlier.

⁴² Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press 2007) 47.

⁴³ Cf. Tijana Krstić, 'State and religion, "Sunnitization" and "confessionalism" in Süleyman's time' in Pál Fodor (ed.), *The Battle for Central Europe. The Siege of Szigetvár and the Death of Süleyman the Magnificent and Nicholas Zrínyi (1566)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2019) 65-91.

⁴⁴ Madeline C. Zilfi, 'The Kadizadelis: Discordant revivalism in seventeenth-century Istanbul', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 45 (1986) 251-69, at 263-5.

Christian confrontation in the era of the second siege of Vienna (1683) and the ensuing war between the Holy League and the Ottoman Empire that lasted until 1699.⁴⁵

Paradoxically, the seventeenth century brought a *détente* in the Ottoman relations with Safavid Iran – the very neighbour who had initially contributed towards the Ottoman confessionalisation. Whereas in the sixteenth century, the relations were extremely hostile and Ebu’s-su‘ud argued that killing Shiite ‘heretics’ was more important than killing any other group, after the treaty of Qasr-e Shirin (alternatively called after Zuhab) of 1639, *de jure* hostility turned into *de facto* acceptance, to quote a present-day scholar.⁴⁶ During the Ottoman war against the Christian coalition of 1683-1699, the shah’s refusal to join the sultan’s enemies even earned him an elevation in the Ottoman universalist hierarchy from a merely royal to a ‘junior-imperial’ rank.⁴⁷

The Ottoman sultans’ control of the Muslim holy cities and their patronage over the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, paired with their proclaimed role of the champions of Islam in the struggle against Christian ‘infidels’, caused that their caliphal aspirations were generally acknowledged among Sunni Muslim rulers from Central Asia to East Africa and from Morocco to Sumatra, at least in the form of lip service.⁴⁸ Yet there was one notable exception. When the Great Mughals firmly established their rule in India, they elaborated their own universalism, first under Akbar and then under his successors whose very names –Jahangir (‘World Seizer’) and Shahjahan (‘King of the World’)– pointed to their universalist ambitions. Sultan Murad III was deeply frustrated by the fact that Akbar extended his symbolic patronage over Mecca by sending alms and sizable caravans of Indian pilgrims that included ladies from his household, who in addition prolonged their stay in the Hijaz without seeking Ottoman authorisation.⁴⁹ The most visible symbolic confrontation took place in 1690, when an Ottoman embassy arrived at the Mughal court with a letter, in which the Ottoman sultan demanded assistance against his European enemies by invoking his authority of the caliph. Aurangzeb was so much incensed that he not only refused his assistance, but he decided not to send a return embassy to Istanbul. The Ottoman-Mughal relations improved only in the eighteenth century when both states felt endangered by the expansion of Nadir Shah and were ready to compromise on their universalist ambitions.⁵⁰

The Ottoman ambivalent attitude towards the place of their ruler in the world order finds an illuminating example in the following case: In 1680, Ottoman and Polish commissioners demarcated

⁴⁵ Maria Pia Pedani, ‘I due volti della storia: padre Marco d’Aviano e lo *şeyh* Vani Mehmed *efendi*’, *Metodi e Ricerche*, n.s., 14 (1995) 3-10.

⁴⁶ Ernest Tucker, ‘From rhetoric of war to realities of peace: the evolution of Ottoman-Iranian diplomacy through the Safavid era’ in Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (eds.), *Iran and the World in the Safavid Age* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris 2012) 81-9, at 82-83, 87.

⁴⁷ Selim Güngörürler, ‘Fraternity, perpetual peace, and alliance in Ottoman-Safavid relations, 1688-1698: a diplomatic revolution in the Middle East’, *Turcica. Revue d’études turques*, 50 (2019) 145-207, at 147, 150.

⁴⁸ On the Ottomans’ presence in the Indian Ocean and their early relations with the sultanate of Aceh, see Giancarlo Casale, ‘“His Majesty’s servant Lutfi”: The career of a previously unknown sixteenth-century Ottoman envoy to Sumatra, based on an account of his travels from the Topkapı Palace Archives’, *Turcica. Revue d’études turques*, 37 (2005) 43-81; Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010).

⁴⁹ Naimur Rahman Farooqi, *Mughal-Ottoman Relations. A Study of Political and Diplomatic Relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, 1556-1748* (2nd edn., Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli 2009) 118.

⁵⁰ Farooqi, *Mughal-Ottoman Relations*, 65-9, 201.

the common border after the war fought in the years 1672-6. A copy of the protocol of demarcation, drafted in Polish and signed and sealed by Polish commissioners, was handed over to their Ottoman peers, while a copy in Ottoman-Turkish, signed and sealed by Ottoman commissioners, was handed over to their Polish partners.⁵¹ If judged merely by this fact, the above procedure seems to have reflected full bilaterality and reciprocity in the Ottomans' relations with their northern neighbours. By demarcating their border with Poland, the Ottomans seemed to recognize the limits of their power as well as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the neighbouring non-Muslim state.

Yet at the same time, the Ottomans produced a second copy of the protocol of demarcation, which was entered into the survey register (*tahrir*) of the province of Podolia that had been conquered from Poland in 1672 and whose borders were demarcated in 1680. This copy differed from the one given to the Poles in one important detail. It contained a religious preamble that referred to Sultan Mehmed IV as the 'father of victories and *ghazas*', stressed the temporary character of all human borders, referred to the Poles in quite unflattering manner as 'giaours [who,] having perverse ideas and hostile to the manifest faith, flee consistently and incessantly from their solid castles, fortresses, and forts', and quoted a saying (*hadith*) of Prophet Muhammad which promised that sooner or later all the cities of unbelievers would be open to Muslims.⁵² Hence at the same time, the Ottomans were able to apply the pragmatic policy of reciprocity and bilateralism in their foreign relations, and use the hegemonic language of unilateralism when addressing domestic audience.

A very similar strategy was adopted by the Porte in 1699, after Ottoman troops had suffered numerous defeats in the long war against the Christian coalition. According to Viorel Panaite, precisely this war forced the Ottomans to reformulate their concept of the holy war and put more stress on the defensive rather than offensive nature of the *djihad* and *ghaza*.⁵³ The treaty of Karlowitz has been regarded in historiography as a symbol of the new era in political relations between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire. According to Colin Heywood: 'congress diplomacy, which had evolved rapidly in Europe after the end of the Thirty Years' War was for the first time applied to a settlement involving an Islamic state'.⁵⁴ Indeed, the negotiations held at the neutral territory between the belligerent armies resulted in eight instruments of peace, exchanged between the Ottoman delegation and the representatives of the Habsburg Empire, Venice, Poland-Lithuania, and Russia. Yet this procedure was followed by a lengthy process of ratification in which the Porte endeavoured to save the image of the sultan as an invincible imperial ruler, at least in the eyes of his subjects. The instruments exchanged at Karlowitz were formally declared as only temporary and for the Ottomans, it was the sultan's solemn documents that constituted the ultimate instruments of peace. Shaped in the form of traditional

⁵¹ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 61-6, 152-3, 545-80.

⁵² Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (ed.), *The Ottoman Survey Register of Podolia (ca. 1681)*. Defter-i Mufassal-i Eyalet-i Kamanıçe, pt. 1: *Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2004) 454, 495; cf. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'Between universalistic claims and reality. Ottoman frontiers in the early modern period' in Christine Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World* (London and New York: Routledge 2012) 205-19, at 212.

⁵³ Panaite, *Ottoman Law of War and Peace*, 40, 62.

⁵⁴ Colin Heywood, 'Karłowica' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., vol. 4 (Leiden and London: Brill 1973) 657-8.

'ahdnames, these documents presented the sultan as a benevolent universal ruler, who conceded to restore the peace only upon seeing the suffering of the poor subjects of both sides, and upon being implored by the English and Dutch mediators as well as his own grand vizier.⁵⁵ Although its effectiveness must have been limited even in regard to Ottoman subjects, this strategy revealed that the notion of Ottoman universalism was still alive, albeit the Porte resorted to its vocabulary while at the same time employing more pragmatic tools of foreign policy.

Towards an integration with the Western system: enchantment and dismay (1699-1920)

The year 1699 should not be regarded as the absolute threshold in regard to the Ottoman changing attitude towards international relations. On the one hand, long time before that date the Ottomans are known to have applied bilateral, pragmatic principles when negotiating truces with foreign powers, to invoke the truce with Spain of 1578 or with the Habsburg Empire of 1606. The agreement with Spain remained valid for many years even though it was never ratified by any of the two rulers who did not wish to compromise themselves by formally acknowledging the peace with their respective 'infidel archenemy'.⁵⁶ The agreement of 1606, negotiated at Zsitvatorok by the Habsburg and Ottoman plenipotentiaries and recorded in Hungarian, Turkish and Latin copies, was formally ratified only in 1612, yet it was regarded as legally binding already upon its conclusion as it effectively terminated the war.⁵⁷ Many more instruments of this type, negotiated on the battle field and referred to as *temessüks* in Ottoman Turkish, have been preserved in the Polish archives.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the Ottoman universalism did not disappear altogether with the pacification of 1699 and the refusal to treat the other party as an equal partner was not unheard of in the later period. It is worth stressing that haughty and 'uncivilized' behavior –to use the wording typical for European Enlightenment– should not be only attributed to the Ottoman side. In the years 1687 and 1730, when the Porte twice wished to send embassies to London with the notification of imperial accessions, it was the British side which prevented their departures.⁵⁹ In 1718, the treaty of Passarowitz which ended the Austro-Ottoman war of 1716-18 was commemorated by a medaille which could serve as a telling example of 'Habsburg humanitarianism': it depicted Emperor Leopold who signed the treaty with the blood of a killed Turk whose severed head served as an inkpot.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'Between the splendor of Barocco and political pragmatism: the form and contents of the Polish-Ottoman treaty documents of 1699', *Oriente Moderno*, n.s., 22 (2003), no. 3 = *The Ottoman Capitulations*, 671-9, at 676.

⁵⁶ Susan Skilliter, 'The Hispano-Ottoman armistice of 1581,' in Clifford E. Bosworth (ed.), *Iran and Islam (in memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1971) 491-516 (the bilingual instrument studied by the author, in which the sultan and the Spanish king are in fact treated on equal footing, is a renewal of the agreement of 1578).

⁵⁷ Gustav Bayerle, 'The compromise of Zsitvatorok', *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 6 (1980) 5-53.

⁵⁸ On the Polish-Ottoman agreements of 1595, 1617, 1621, 1634, 1672 and 1676, which only later were confirmed by the sultan's formal *'ahdnames*, see Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 51-4.

⁵⁹ Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations, 1661-1805. Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 2017) 50-1.

⁶⁰ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'Der Karlowitzer Vertrag (1699) aus polnischer und osmanischer Sicht: Repräsentation und damalige Bewertung' in Henning Jürgens (ed.), *Repräsentationen des Friedens im vormodernen Europa* (Mainz: IEG 2021) 4-5 [forthcoming].

Yet the trend towards reciprocity in mutual relations was clearly visible in the eighteenth century. It is also reflected by the rising frequency of such terms as *mu'ahede* ('a mutually concluded covenant'), *mübadele* ('exchange of embassies'), *tavassut* ('mediation'), or even *Avrupa mevazinesi* ('the European balance') in the Ottoman diplomatic vocabulary of the period.⁶¹ Whereas sending Ottoman embassies abroad before 1700 had been less uncommon than it has been admitted in earlier literature, the eighteenth century brought a substantial rise in their numbers. Moreover, the envoys were now required to submit travel accounts that contained descriptions of the visited countries, their government, economy and society.⁶²

After Karlowitz, Ottoman delegates participated in peace congresses at Passarowitz (1718), Nemirov (1737), Belgrade (1739), and several others, so the Ottomans' direct involvement in the European diplomacy and their engagement in the Western concept of international law had predated by many generations the Treaty of Paris (1856), which formally granted them full membership in the Concert of Europe under Article 7.⁶³

In the eighteenth century, the Porte no longer treated capitulations as special favours awarded to its allies and began to extend commercial privileges onto all willing parties, friend and enemy alike, including Austria (1718), Sweden (1737), Russia (1739/1774), The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1740), Denmark (1756), Prussia (1761), and Spain (1783).⁶⁴ The new practice sowed the seeds of future abuse since the European powers began to extort new unilateral privileges and extraterritorial status for its protégés without offering anything in return, yet at least until 1800 the Porte still kept the system under control.⁶⁵

In 1798, Napoleon landed in Egypt and the Ottomans for the first time faced an invasion of a West European power with which they did not share contiguous borders. In 1807, Britain followed suit and the first war broke out between the two states. In a recent study of the British-Ottoman relations, Michael Talbot observes 'the shift from commercial interest to imperial aggression' throughout the long eighteenth century. No longer happy to conform to the conventions of Ottoman diplomatic culture,

⁶¹ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 167, 614, 649, 651, 657; Güneş Işıksel, 'Capitulations' in François Georgeon, Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein with Elisabetta Borromeo (eds.), *Dictionnaire de l'Empire ottoman* (Paris: Fayard 2015) 220-1; Norman Itzkowitz and Max Mote (eds.), *Mübadele. An Ottoman-Russian Exchange of Ambassadors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970).

⁶² Faik Reşit Unat, *Osmanlı sefirleri ve safaretnameleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 1968); Caspar Hillebrand, 'Ottoman travel accounts to Europe. An overview of their historical development and a commented researchers' list' in Bekim Agai, Olcay Akyıldız, Caspar Hillebrand (eds.), *Venturing Beyond Borders – Reflections on Genre, Function and Boundaries in Middle Eastern Travel Writing* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag 2013) 53-74, at 57, 60-3.

⁶³ Cf. Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, 'The emergence of the idea of "international law" in the Ottoman Empire before the Treaty of Paris (1856)', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50 (2014) 233-251; Güneş Işıksel, 'Ottoman diplomacy' in Gordon Martel (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, vol. 3 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2018) [11](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154.dipl0207)

⁶⁴ Halil İnalcık, 'İmtiyâzât' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., vol. 3 (Leiden and London: Brill 1971) 1178-89, at 1185-6. The subjects of the Habsburg emperor were authorized to conduct trade in Ottoman domains already in 1547. In 1617, Sultan Ahmed I issued an *'ahdname* that even granted them access to the Black Sea. However, this instrument had remained a dead letter and the first working set of commercial privileges was granted to Austria only in 1718; see Viorel Panaite and Radu Dipratu, 'A forgotten capitulation (*'ahdname*): the commercial privileges granted by Sultan Ahmed I to Emperor Matthias in 1617', *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, 58 (2020) 51-90.

⁶⁵ Maurits H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System. Qadis, Consuls and Berathlis in the 18th Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2005) 97.

British diplomats and policy makers abruptly departed from the old customs and were more prone to resort to violence.⁶⁶ Hence in less than a decade, the Ottomans learned that apart from their traditional European rivals –Russia and Austria– they also had to beware of other European states.

Facing the European imperialism, Ottoman statesmen spent much of the nineteenth century on looking for a Western ally who would protect the integrity of their state in exchange for special privileges. Since the sixteenth century, France had been the traditional Ottoman ally in Europe, yet France lost much of the confidence it had enjoyed in Istanbul due to the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 when it allied with Austria and Russia – the traditional Ottoman archenemies, then by the French Revolution and execution of Louis XVI that alarmed the sultan’s court, the Napoleonic invasion of 1798, and finally, by its support for the Greek uprising in the 1820s and the occupation of Algeria in 1830. Great Britain also dismayed the Ottomans by its declaration of war and the invasion of Egypt in 1807, and by its support for the Greek uprising. Yet after 1830, fearing the strengthening of Russia in the north and the rise of Muhammad Ali –the ambitious pasha of Egypt– in the south, Paris and London resolved to protect the Porte against its enemies. The apex of the ‘honeymoon’ in Ottoman-Western relations came during the Crimean War (1853-6), when the Porte successfully repelled Russian invasion, assisted by French, British, and Italian troops, and was formally admitted to the Concert of Europe according to the Treaty of Paris (1856).

The French humiliation in the war against Prussia (1870-1) and the subsequent Franco-Russian rapprochement changed the geopolitical situation. For a time, Britain remained loyal to its alliance with the sultan and diplomatically supported the Porte during the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-8, yet this support was far from unconditional and had to be paid with Cyprus and the sultan’s tacit consent for the British military presence in Egypt. In these circumstances, Bismarck’s German Empire became the main Ottoman ally after 1878 and remained so –notwithstanding some shifts and hesitations– until the WW1.

Yet it would be erroneous to perceive the late Ottoman Empire solely as a passive victim on the lookout for outside protection. In a recent essay, Umut Özsü observes that ‘notwithstanding the all-too-familiar nineteenth-century rhetoric of the “sick man of Europe,” the Ottoman Empire was a powerful and ambitious imperial actor, one with deep-seated and multi-faceted investments in international law’.⁶⁷ During the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), panislamism became a handy tool of Ottoman foreign policy that could be effectively used against Western imperial powers in North Africa, the Red Sea region, the Indian Ocean as well as Central Asia.⁶⁸ Ottoman consulates established in Bombay,

⁶⁶ Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations*, 12, 212, 215.

⁶⁷ Umut Özsü, ‘Afterword: Ottoman international law?’ in Lâle Can, Michael Christopher Low, Kent F. Schull, and Robert Zens (eds.), *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2020) 238-45, at 245.

⁶⁸ To quote Cemil Aydın: ‘[w]hereas European public opinion saw the Ottoman Empire as the “sick” man of Europe, Muslims in India and Southeast Asia saw it as the civilized leader of the global Muslim community, representing their dignity and equality in a globalizing imperial world order’; see Cemil Aydın, ‘Globalizing the intellectual history of the idea of the “Muslim World”’ in Samuel Moyn, Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press 2013) 159-86, at 167. Ismail Hakkı Kadı stresses the local agency of the Hadhrami and Southeast Asian Muslims in maintaining and developing contacts with Istanbul even before the Hamidian era. He also revisits and discusses the very term ‘panislamism’ (or ‘pan-Islamism’) in its colonial context; see Ismail Hakkı Kadı, ‘The Ottomans and Southeast Asia prior to the Hamidian era: a critique of colonial perceptions of Ottoman-Southeast Asian interaction’, *Proceedings of the British*

Karachi, Batavia, or Singapore not only protected local businesses managed by Ottoman subjects and provided local Muslims with necessary papers required for the pilgrimage to Mecca, but also served as nodes of information and propaganda that were very much feared by the local colonial authorities.⁶⁹ The Ottoman lands provided refuge for Islamic thinkers persecuted by local regimes, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, and offered education for foreign students coming from the French Maghreb, British India or Russia. In the case of the Russian Muslims, most of whom were Turkic speakers, the subversive potential of panislamism was further strengthened by panturkism, introduced by the new Ottoman regime on the eve of the WW1. The echoes of the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 also planted the seeds of Pan-Asianism in some Ottoman minds, yet this movement did not find a sufficient appeal before the empire's demise.

To sum up, the diplomats of the late Ottoman Empire were ready to trade its former universalist aspirations for the admission to the European state system. Initially this policy seemed effective and brought an apparent success in 1856, yet in the following decades it turned out that although the Ottomans accepted the European norms, they were not recognized as peers by the European powers. This was best visible on the example of capitulations which privileged foreigners on the Ottoman soil to the degree that would have been unacceptable in any European state, and yet any Ottoman attempts to change this system met with violent protests abroad. Finally, the Porte abolished the capitulations in 1914 when it had nothing to lose as it soon found itself in the armed conflict with Britain, France and Russia anyway. After the lost war, the treatment of the Ottoman Empire by the victorious powers of the Entente was harsher than of any other Central power,⁷⁰ and this fact best proved that the Ottomans had never been treated on an equal footing. The humiliation was sealed by the Porte's consent to accept the conditions of the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) which also spelled the end of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1944, when criticized by the British ambassador for Ankara's passiveness during the WW2, Turkish Foreign Minister Numan Menemencioglu recounted a tale attributed to Nasreddin Hodja. When asked where should one stand during a funeral ceremony, the Hodja reportedly answered that it did not matter as long as one was not in the coffin.⁷¹ This story tellingly illustrates how traumatic the experience of the last days of the Ottoman Empire must have been for the Turkish elite members who later served in the Kemalist Republic. They remembered that once invited to the European table, the Ottomans found themselves in the role of the main course, hence they hesitated a lot when being invited again.

Academy, 200 (2015) = *From Anatolia to Aceh. Ottomans, Turks and Southeast Asia*, edited by A.C.S. Peacock and Annabel Teh Gallop, 149-74.

⁶⁹ Jeffery Dyer, 'Pan-Islamic propagandists or professional diplomats? The Ottoman consular establishment in the colonial Indian Ocean' in Can, Low, Schull, and Zens, *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law*, 171-95, at 172-3; Jan Schmidt, 'Pan-Islamism between the Porte, the Hague, and Buitenzorg' in Jan Schmidt, *Through the Legation Window, 1876-1926. Four Essays on Dutch, Dutch-Indian and Ottoman History* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut 1992) 49-143; for a general background, cf. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris 1999).

⁷⁰ Admittedly, the territorial losses suffered by Hungary were proportionally larger, yet Hungary retained more sovereignty on its remaining territory than the Ottomans did on theirs.

⁷¹ Selim Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy During the Second World War. An 'Active' Neutrality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) 184.

Diplomatic actors

In the early centuries, it seems that there was no formal hierarchy between different Ottoman diplomatic agents – couriers who simply carried the sultans' messages and proper envoys entitled to discuss their contents. Almost any trusted court functionary could be selected for a mission so one can hardly speak of professional diplomats. Moreover, we know nothing of the existence of formal full powers and credential letters.⁷² The fact that due to secrecy and security reasons the most delicate issues were often discussed orally and have left no or little trace in the archives does not make the task of a present-day historian easier.⁷³ The differentiation between 'great envoys' (*büyük elçi*) and 'small envoys' (*küçük elçi*), extant in Ottoman vocabulary already in the seventeenth century, rather reflected the hierarchy of the incoming European envoys who were titled in Latin *nuntius* (alternatively *magnus legatus* or *magnus orator*) and *internuntius*, respectively.⁷⁴ European residents at the Ottoman court were referred to with the term *kapu kethüdası*,⁷⁵ the very same title that also applied to the agents of Ottoman provincial governors or of the tributary rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia, whose patrons tasked them with residing at the sultan's threshold. In the eighteenth century, one more category was added, namely that of a 'middle envoy' (*orta elçi*), apparently on the request of several Polish envoys, who successfully persuaded the Porte to raise the provisions for their upkeep (*ta'yin*), even though the size of their retinues and the value of the gifts that they brought did not entitle them to a more prestigious title of 'great envoys'. This issue was related to the custom prevalent in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, including the Ottoman Empire, Iran, Poland-Lithuania, Russia, and the Crimean Khanate, according to which foreign envoys were provided with free food and accommodation by the hosting state. In the Ottoman Empire, these provisions, delivered partly in kind and partly in cash, were known as *ta'yin* and their amount depended on the status of a foreign envoy.⁷⁶

In regard to Ottoman agents, although no formal hierarchy existed, a historian who tries to reconstruct the position and rank of a given envoy is in no way powerless. For instance, Süleyman Baltaoğlu, the envoy sent by Murad II to the Hungarian court in the summer of 1444, is depicted in an Ottoman chronicle as a man of stature, who proudly asserts his diplomatic status and denies when asked

⁷² Işıksel, 'Ottoman diplomacy', 8.

⁷³ On the role of oral communication in the late seventeenth-century British-Ottoman relations, see John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities. Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013) 221-3. Oral communication played an even greater role in the foreign relations of Safavid Iran; cf. Stanisław Jaśkowski and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'Some comments on the Carmelite manuscript from the National Library in Naples containing the correspondence of Shah 'Abbas' in José Cutillas Ferrer and Óscar Recio Morales (eds.), *Eastern Europe, Safavid Persia and the Iberian World. Frontiers and Circulations at the Edge of Empires* (Valencia: Albatros 2019) 165-180, at 177, 180.

⁷⁴ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 172, 530, 597.

⁷⁵ Cf. Merlijn Olon, "'A most agreeable and pleasant creature'?" Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Paşa in the correspondence of Justinus Colyer (1668-1682', *Oriente Moderno*, n.s., 22 (2003), no. 3 = *The Ottoman Capitulations*, 649-69, at 668.

⁷⁶ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 173-4, 181. The practice of providing by the host for the costs of an incoming foreign embassy had been also prevalent in Renaissance Western Europe, yet it had been gradually renounced during the early modern era; cf. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 31; Yurduşev, 'The Ottoman attitude toward diplomacy', 28.

whether he came as a merchant, discusses political matters with King Vladislaus, Palatine John Hunyadi and Serbian Despot George Branković, and finally receives their oaths to honour the newly concluded peace.⁷⁷ Agents sent by Bayezid II to Italy and France in order to negotiate the fate of his runaway brother must have also enjoyed great trust of the sultan, even if it was not always expedient to display their elevated status as that could ruin their missions' confidentiality. Also Selim I is known for having sent prominent men abroad. Only in one year, following his conquest of Egypt in 1517, he sent two subsequent embassies to Venice in order to assure that doge and the Senate that he wished to maintain their former capitulations and to arrange a new payment of their tribute.⁷⁸ In the following centuries, differentiation between full-fledged diplomats, *ad hoc* agents and couriers simply tasked with the delivery of their patron's correspondence was becoming more visible. Having studied the Ottoman-Safavid relations in the years 1639-1722, Selim Güngörürler observes that whereas Ottoman diplomats, referred to with the titles of *elçi*, *resul*, or *sefir*, were typically mentioned by name in the official correspondence and their credentials also invoked their authorization to orally report the matters that were not touched upon in the writing, agents whose sole task was to deliver a given letter were not referred to with such generic titles, and often their names were not mentioned at all.⁷⁹

The older view, sometimes still encountered in secondary literature, that the Ottomans did not send diplomats abroad, is no longer tenable. This misconception resulted from the fact that in the Anglocentric world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars often focused on the Anglo-Ottoman relations, and indeed Ottoman diplomats rarely ventured to England before 1793. Yet, as we have seen above, the Porte was ready to send envoys even thus far, but the planned Ottoman embassies to London of 1687 and 1730 were prevented from coming by the British diplomats stationed at Istanbul.

Philip Mansel estimates that in the years 1384-1600, as many as 145 Ottoman envoys were sent to Venice alone.⁸⁰ Ottoman envoys also travelled to Poland-Lithuania, perhaps no less frequently, since a Polish historian identified twenty-two Ottoman missions that had been dispatched to that country solely in one decade, in the years 1576-86.⁸¹ The intensiveness of Polish-Ottoman relations in the sixteenth century is further confirmed by İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, who observed that 'no other foreign state sent envoys to the Porte as often as the Polish kings'.⁸²

Most of these envoys were merely messengers (*çavuşes*) who delivered the letters of Ottoman sultans and other dignitaries to the addressees. Yet we find among them personages who can undoubtedly be called diplomats. Said Beg born as Jan Kierdej, kidnapped as a child in the battle in which his father

⁷⁷ Halil İnalçık and Mevlüd Oğuz (eds.), *Gazavât-i Sultân Murâd b. Mehmed Hân. İzladi ve Varna savaşları (1443-1444) üzerinde anonim Gazavâtname* (2nd edn., Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 1989) 35.

⁷⁸ de Groot, 'The historical perspective of the capitulatory regime', 591.

⁷⁹ Selim Güngörürler, 'Diplomacy and political relations between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran, 1639-1722', PhD thesis, Georgetown University (2016), 39-40.

⁸⁰ Philip Mansel, *Constantinople. City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (London: John Murray 1995) 193.

⁸¹ Kazimierz Dopierała, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski z Turcją za Stefana Batorego* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1986) 170; cf. Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 181-2.

⁸² *Hiç bir ecebî devlet Leh kıralları kadar sık sık elçi göndermemiştir*; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 2: *İstanbul'un fethinden Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'ın ölümüne kadar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 1949) 471.

was killed by the Turks, became a ‘specialist in the Polish affairs’ at the Ottoman court and travelled eight times in embassies to Poland in the years 1531-43, acting as intermediary not only between the sultan and the king, but also between their wives.⁸³ Ibrahim Beg, a former Polish captive born as Joachim Strasz, who apart from Polish and Turkish knew Latin, Arabic, German and Italian, not only served as dragoman at the Ottoman court, but was sent in embassies to Frankfurt (1562), Warsaw (1564) and Lublin (1569).⁸⁴ Precisely at the same time, an Ottoman courtier named Lutfi travelled to Sumatra, maintaining contacts between the Ottoman court and the court of Aceh.⁸⁵

‘Regional experts’ not only travelled to the respective countries, but also oversaw the relations of their rulers with the Porte. In the years 1630-1656, the correspondence between Istanbul and Moscow passed through the hands of Zulfikar Agha, a Tatar dragoman who not only mediated between the Porte and the Kremlin, but also wrote to the tsar himself. In the years 1640-1656, only three letters sent from Istanbul to Moscow were issued on behalf of the Ottoman sultans, four on behalf of the grand viziers, whereas no less than twelve letters were written by Zulfikar Agha.⁸⁶

Dragomans, recruited from among foreigners as well as Ottoman non-Muslim subjects, especially Greeks and Levantines, further rose in importance at the end of the seventeenth century. At the same time, the role of the chief Ottoman dignitary responsible for the conduct of diplomatic activity was gradually adopted by the head of the grand vizier’s chancery titled *reisü’l-küttab*, or alternatively *reis efendi*. In the years 1698-9, the Ottoman delegation to the congress of Karlowitz was headed by two personages: Mehmed Rami, the *reisü’l-küttab*, and Alexandros Mavrokordatos, the chief dragoman from a Greek Phanariot family.⁸⁷ In 1737, at the congress of Nemirov where the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman delegates tried to end the current war with the mediation of the Polish grand hetman, the Porte was again represented by the *reisü’l-küttab* – Münif Mustafa Efendi.

The Ottoman envoys sent to foreign countries in the eighteenth century were typically titled –in a descending order– pashas, efendis and aghas, and the most important and prestigious missions were performed by pashas and efendis. One innovation introduced in that period was the already mentioned requirement that upon return the envoys submit written reports on their embassies (*sefaretname*), including the descriptions of visited countries.⁸⁸ Perhaps the most influential was the report by

⁸³ Zygmunt Abrahamowicz, ‘Kierdej Jan – Said bej’ in *Polski Słownik Geograficzny*, vol. 12 (Wrocław-Warsaw-Cracow: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich 1966-1967) 424-5; on the correspondence between Hürrem Sultan and Bona Sforza, see above.

⁸⁴ Jerzy S. Łątka, ‘Strasz Joachim’ in *Polski Słownik Geograficzny*, vol. 44 (Warsaw and Cracow: Societas Vistulana 2006-2007) 203-6.

⁸⁵ Casale, “‘His Majesty’s servant Lutfi’”.

⁸⁶ Mikhail S. Mejer and Sagit F. Faizov, *Pis'ma perevodchika osmanskikh padishakhov Zul'fikara-agi tsariam Mikhailu Fedorovichu i Alekseiu Mikhaïlovichu, 1640-1656. Turetskaia diplomatika v kontekste russko-turetskikh vzaimootnosheniï* (Moscow: Gumanitariï 2008) 56.

⁸⁷ Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, ‘The Reisülküttab and Ottoman Diplomacy at Karlowitz’, unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University (1963); Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, ‘Ottoman diplomacy at Karlowitz’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 87 (1967) 498-512.

⁸⁸ Thirty-one reports from the embassies sent in the eighteenth century, plus two reports from the seventeenth century and nine reports from the early nineteenth century are listed in Unat, *Osmanlı sefirleri ve sefaretnameleri*.

Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi from his embassy to France in the years 1720-1721.⁸⁹ Another leading Ottoman diplomat of the period was Resmi Ahmed Efendi, who composed reports on his embassies to Vienna (1757-1758) and Berlin (1763-1764), and participated in negotiations with Russia that led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynardja of 1774.⁹⁰ Recently, a hitherto unknown report resurfaced in the Süleymaniye Library, related to the mission of Ibrahim Müteferrika, the founder of the first Ottoman printing press, who in December 1736 was sent with a confidential mission to Poland, where he held talks with Hetman Józef Potocki in his residence in Nemirov that led to the future peace congress convened in 1737.⁹¹

By the eighteenth century, it had become customary that Ottoman envoys traveled to neighbouring, and even more distant countries with the formal announcements of the accession of a new sultan, and sometimes even attended coronations of foreign monarchs.⁹² Ottoman diplomatic agents were often provided with full powers to conduct negotiations and conclude preliminary agreements, even though these agreements were subject to the sultan's final authorization. For instance, in 1634 an Ottoman *müteferrika*, Shahin Agha, was sent to Poland in order to negotiate a peace agreement with Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski. The negotiated clauses were recorded in an instrument, issued by Shahin Agha and handed over to the hetman. Then, these conditions were confirmed by Murtaza Pasha, the Ottoman border commander and Shahin's superior, who also issued his own instrument and sent it to Poland. Finally, the peace was confirmed by Sultan Murad IV in a solemn imperial *'ahdname*.⁹³

The notion of delegation of power had been present in Muslim societies since the Middle Ages. It is perhaps best reflected in the formal title of 'absolute deputy' or 'absolute proxy' (*vekil-i mutlak*) that was used by grand viziers in their documents.⁹⁴ The heads of military campaigns and prominent border commanders were at times provided with blank documents (*beyaz*) corroborated with the sultan's monogram (*tuğra*), which gave them free hand to persuade and bribe local power-holders by awarding them privileges and incomes on behalf of the Ottoman monarch.

A group of dignitaries who played an especially significant role in the Ottoman foreign policy were governors of border provinces. In the east, the governors of Erzurum, Diyarbekir, Van, Baghdad and Basra maintained transborder communication with the Safavid court, Safavid border commanders, and with the local Kurdish, Turkmen and Arab tribal leaders. In the south, the governors of Sana'a

⁸⁹ Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West. France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987). An eighteenth-century French translation of the envoy's report by Julien-Claude Galland has been published by Gilles Veinstein; see Mehmed efendi, *Le paradis des infidèles. Un ambassadeur ottoman en France sous la Régence*, edited by G. Veinstein (Paris: Maspéro 1981).

⁹⁰ For his biography, see Virginia Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700-1783* (Leiden: Brill 1995).

⁹¹ The report is discussed and published along with other relevant documents in Erhan Afyoncu and Ahmed Önal, 'İbrahim Müteferrika'nın Lehistan Elçiliği ve Bilinmeyen Sefaretnâmesi', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 48 (2016) 105-42.

⁹² Yurduşev, 'The Ottoman attitude toward diplomacy', 29.

⁹³ Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 138-9, 436-57.

⁹⁴ For instance, this title appears in the Ottoman instrument of the Treaty of Hotin, negotiated with the Poles in 1621, issued on behalf of Grand Vizier Dilaver Pasha. Its conditions were later confirmed by Sultan Mustafa in his *'ahdname* issued in 1623; see Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 382.

oversaw the activity of Indian and European merchants whose ships called to Yemeni ports and negotiated with the Zaydi imams whose loyalty towards the sultan was often disputable.⁹⁵ In the west, the governors of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers often led quite independent policy and concluded separate treaty agreements with the European powers, with or without the consent of the Ottoman sultan. In the north-west, the governors of Bosnia maintained contacts with Venice while those of Buda oversaw transborder communication with the Habsburgs.⁹⁶ Finally, in the north, the governors of Caffa (Kefe) and Azov (Azak) were responsible for the contacts with Muscovy,⁹⁷ while the governors of Očakiv (Özü kal‘esi) maintained communication with Poland-Lithuania. In the eighteenth century, this role was taken over by the governors of Hotin, who were charged with developing an extensive intelligence network and maintaining regular contacts with correspondents in Poland-Lithuania which also served to obtain information on the developments in Central Europe and Russia.⁹⁸

In 1793, the Porte opened its first permanent embassy abroad, in London. This choice was caused by the outbreak of the French Revolution which negatively influenced the traditional Ottoman-French amity. Soon after, Ottoman embassies were also established in Berlin, Vienna and Paris. In 1802, their activity was temporarily suspended or rather limited by the replacement of ambassadors with dragomans as *chargés d'affaires*, for the reason of financial constraints and somewhat disappointing results of the first missions. Yet in 1834, the Ottoman diplomatic activity abroad was fully revived under Mahmud II. Additional diplomatic posts were established by Mahmud's successors in Athens, Tehran, Stockholm, St Petersburg, Turin (later moved to Rome), Brussels and Washington in the years 1840-1867.⁹⁹ Having lost confidence in Greek dragomans, suspected of having sympathized with the Greek uprising of the 1820s, the Porte began training native Muslims as foreign languages translators and in 1833 the Bureau of Translation (*Tercüme Odası*) was formally opened. Then, in 1836 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Umur-i Hariciye Nezareti*) was established with the former *reisü'l-küttab* (*reis efendi*) at its head, now renamed as the minister of foreign affairs.

By these moves, the Porte had finally 'caught up' with Europe in regard to the organization of its foreign policy and the professional training of its diplomatic agents. However, one should not fetishize the former differences. The reliance on dragomans of Greek, Levantine and Armenian origin

⁹⁵ Cornelis G. Brouwer 'Under the watchful eye of Mimī ibn 'Abd Allāh. The voyage of the Dutch merchant Pieter van den Broecke to the court of Dja'far Bāshā in Sana'a, 1616', *Itinerario*, 9 (1985) 42-72; Kołodziejczyk, 'Between universalistic claims and reality', 213-5; Salih Özbaran, *Yemen'den Basra'ya sınırdağı Osmanlı* (Istanbul: Kitap yayınevi 2004).

⁹⁶ For a sample of transborder correspondence between Ottoman and Habsburg provincial dignitaries posted in Hungary, see Ludwig Fekete, *Türkische Schriften aus dem Archive des Palatins Nikolaus Esterházy 1606-1645* (Budapest: Königliche ungarische Universitätsdruckerei 1932).

⁹⁷ Andrii Zhyvachivskiy, 'The governors of Kefe and Azak in Ottoman-Muscovite relations in the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries and the issue of titulature', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 115 (2017) 211-34.

⁹⁸ On the Ottoman provincial archive of Hotin, captured by Russian troops in 1739 and today preserved in two parts in Moscow and Chernihiv, which contains over 3,000 documents and letters in Ottoman-Turkish as well as in Polish, see Mariusz Kaczka and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *Turecki pasza i szlachta: korespondencja osmańskiego gubernatora Chocimia Iliasza Kolezaka paszy ze szlachtą Rzeczypospolitej z lat 1730-1739 / A Turkish Pasha and Polish Nobles: The Correspondence of Ilias Kolchak Pasha, the Ottoman Governor of Hotin with Polish-Lithuanian Nobility, 1730-1739* (Warsaw: Narodowy Instytut Polskiego Dziedzictwa Kulturowego za Granicą Polonika 2020) 65-112 (English Introduction).

⁹⁹ Ömer Kürkcüoğlu, 'The adoption and use of permanent diplomacy' in Yurduşev, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 131-50.

who often had their own agenda and conflicting loyalties was not specific to the Ottoman diplomacy. English, Austrian, Polish and Russian diplomats in Istanbul constantly complained that they had no reliable translators fluent in Turkish, and in the case of the US diplomacy this phenomenon lasted till the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ Also a permanent embassy did not guarantee that a resident diplomat would obtain reliable information. Ömer Kürkçüoğlu recalls an amusing story that one month after Napoleon's landing in Egypt Seyyid Ali Efendi, the Ottoman ambassador in Paris, still assured his superiors in Istanbul that France only wanted to occupy Malta and learned about the French real designs only after his government informed him to that effect.¹⁰¹ Yet a similarly amusing event had occurred a century and a half earlier, when Giovanni Soranzo, the Venetian bailo in Constantinople, kept assuring his government in the first half of 1645 that the Turks planned to invade Malta. Only in June, when the Ottoman invasion navy was ready to set out, Soranzo admitted that perhaps its real aim was Crete, but it took him another month, after he had been detained and then released, to discover the truth and deplore 'Turkish perfidy' in his following dispatch sent to the Signoria.¹⁰² If an experienced diplomat like Soranzo, who could rely on the network of local informants that the Venetians had built for centuries, allowed to be fooled by the Turks, perhaps our judgment of the Ottoman ambassador in Paris should be less harsh.

Throughout the entire early modern period one can identify highly competent Ottoman officials who can be called professional diplomats *avant la lettre*. Seasoned provincial governors who collected transborder information as well as envoys who travelled several times to the same country being fluent in its language, customs and political culture, provided the Ottoman government with necessary knowledge and served with their expertise in cases of conflict.

Ottoman diplomacy and international law

Most scholars agree that Islamic law should be regarded a common law system since it accepted local custom unless it violated Quranic prescriptions.¹⁰³ Secular law, consisting of customary and sultanic law, had been integrated within the Muslim religious law by Ebu's-su'ud and other Ottoman lawyers, who created 'legal fictions which satisfied pious aspirations without upsetting legal reality'.¹⁰⁴ In result, the law practiced in the Ottoman empire was a complex system that incorporated Quranic prescriptions, interpretations by Muslim medieval jurists, sultanic decrees and local custom. The fact that the Ottomans adhered to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, yet at times they resorted to the rules of the Shafi'i school (for instance at burial ceremonies), and the Ottoman practice of international law was heavily influenced

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Heath W. Lowry, *The Story Behind Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Istanbul: The Isis Press 2001).

¹⁰¹ Kürkçüoğlu, 'The adoption and use of permanent diplomacy', 136.

¹⁰² See the reports by Giovanni Soranzo from 11 June and 19 July 1645, Venice, Archivio di Stato, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al Senato, Costantinopoli, filza 127, fols. 513v, 621r.

¹⁰³ Cf. Boğaç Ergene, *Local Court, Provincial Society and Justice in the Ottoman Empire. Legal Practice and Dispute Resolution in Çankırı and Kastamonu (1652-1744)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2003) 203-4, with further references to the works by Lawrence Rosen.

¹⁰⁴ Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650. The Structure of Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2002) 244.

by the writings of two great Shafi'i scholars, al-Mawardi (d. 1058) and al-Qalqashandi (d. 1418), reveals that their legal system was anything but fossilized and allowed a pragmatic diplomacy.

In this subchapter, only one aspect of international law will be addressed that is directly relevant for diplomacy, namely the inviolability of the person of an ambassador. According to common knowledge, this rule, formulated by Hugo Grotius (1625) and reinforced by his successors, including Emerich de Vattel (1758), 'became a cornerstone of an increasingly universalist European "law of nations"'.¹⁰⁵ Yet we must remember that also in Europe this rule was respected only when two parties regarded each other as legitimate legal bodies. If the other party was labelled as 'rebel', 'heretic', 'savage' or –to use the present day vocabulary– 'terrorist', then its representatives, even when waving white flags, could expect imprisonment or even execution with no regard to their claimed diplomatic status.

When in 1454 Mehmed II agreed that a Venetian bailo could dwell in Constantinople, he set the foundation of the system of resident embassies that was still in its infancy in Europe. The fact that three decades later, Louis XI of France refused to receive the sultan's envoy on the pretext that he was an 'infidel' demonstrates that in that time the Ottomans were much more tolerant and open minded than Western Europeans. Admittedly, under Selim I the Ottomans were extremely harsh in their dealings with Safavid envoys and public executions of the shah's emissaries became commonplace.¹⁰⁶ Yet the reason was that the sultan did not acknowledge the shah's rule as legal and regarded him as a heretic punishable by death. If we recall the methods applied by sixteenth-century Europeans in quelling the Anabaptist rebellion in Münster or the later Dutch Protestant Rebellion, the Ottoman cruelty appears less unique.

Perhaps the most dramatic events in the history of Ottoman diplomatic relations with Europe occurred in the mid-seventeenth century. After the Ottomans invaded Crete in 1645, Bailo Giovanni Soranzo was put under house arrest, yet he managed to continue his work for four more years. Only in 1649, he was thrown into jail and his dragoman Giovanni Antonio Grillo was strangled. Moreover, the Venetian extraordinary ambassador sent after Soranzo, Giovanni Cappello, was imprisoned in 1653 and held until his death in 1662.¹⁰⁷ The Ottoman cruelty can be partly explained by the fact that Grillo was an Ottoman subject while Venice was regarded a tributary state, so the Ottomans could explain their repressions as a due retribution for treason.

As the matter of fact, Ottoman universalism was hardly compatible with the idea of diplomatic immunity since the sultan could claim suzerainty over each king and authority over each human being. The incompatibility between two universalisms –of the Ottoman 'prosperous padishah of the inhabited portion of the earth' (*sa'adetli padişah-i rub '-i meskun*) and of the French 'Sun King' (*le Roi Soleil*)–

¹⁰⁵ Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations*, 45.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, *Les Ottomans, les Safavides et leurs voisins. Contribution à l'histoire des relations internationales dans l'Orient islamique de 1514 à 1524* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut 1987) 105-10, 227-8.

¹⁰⁷ Paolo Preto, 'Le relazioni dei baili veneziani a Costantinopoli', *Il Velcro*, 23, nos. 2-4 (1979) 125-30, at 128; Eric R. Dursteler, 'The bailo in Constantinople: crisis and career in Venice's early modern diplomatic corps', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 16 (2001) 1-30, at 18.

became manifest in the 1670s, when the French ambassador, Marquis de Nointel, was twice publicly humiliated for trying to break the rules of Ottoman ceremonial. In 1671, he refused to bow his head low enough in front of the sultan and in effect was pushed so strongly that he fell. Then in 1677, he attempted to move his stool so that it be placed on the equal level with the sofa of the grand vizier, and in effect the latter let him thrown out of his palace.¹⁰⁸

Yet with the passage of time, Istanbul had become a relatively safe place for foreign envoys who were no longer treated as hostages responsible for the behaviour of their royal patrons. It is illustrative to compare the fates of two Habsburg embassies that were separated by less than a century. In 1593, when an Ottoman-Habsburg war broke out, Friedrich von Krekwitz, the imperial envoy, was put to jail and held in such sorry conditions that he died soon after, while his retinue members were sent as slaves to serve on Ottoman galleys, to be released only in 1599.¹⁰⁹ Yet when another Habsburg-Ottoman war broke out in 1682, the Habsburg envoy Albrecht Caprara was temporarily arrested, but he was treated gently and released even before the Ottomans besieged Vienna, although the war was to last seventeen more years.¹¹⁰ From the late seventeenth century on, a foreign envoy could be assigned a shabby lodging and the food rations for his retinue members could be diminished as the sign of the Porte's displeasure, or at most he could be put under house arrest, but usually that was the worst that he could expect.

In the eighteenth century, only Russian envoys were still locked up on the outbreak of mutual conflicts, yet these detainments were usually brief, the envoys were not mistreated and were permitted some degree of comfort.¹¹¹ The longest detainment of Petr Tolstoï in the years 1710-13 was apparently not pre-planned since the Porte initially wanted to release him after a few months.¹¹² The detainments of Russian envoys during the wars of 1735-9 and 1768-1774 were very brief, and only the detainment of Iakov Bulgakov during the war of 1787-92 lasted over two years.¹¹³

In their letters addressed to the Ottoman governor of Hotin in the 1730s, Polish correspondents invoked such terms as *jus gentium* or 'the due justice between all the nations', and they apparently believed that this vocabulary was familiar to the addressee and its use was effective.¹¹⁴ In 1745, during the War of the Austrian Succession, the Porte displayed its fluency in the language of international law

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, 'Semiotics of behavior in early modern diplomacy: Polish embassies in Istanbul and Bahçesaray', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 7 (2003) 245-56, at 252; Olnon, "'A most agreeable and pleasant creature'", 658-9.

¹⁰⁹ *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrowitz. What he saw in the Turkish metropolis, Constantinople, experienced in his captivity, and after his happy return to his country, committed to writing in the year of our Lord 1599*, transl. Albert H. Wratislaw (London: Bell and Daldy 1862).

¹¹⁰ Johann (Giovanni) Benaglia, *Ausführliche Reiß-Beschreibung von Wien nach Constantinopel und wieder zurück in Teutschland, auch was sich merckwürdiges dabey zugetragen, deß Hoch-Gebornen Grafen und Herrn, Herrn Albrecht Caprara etc.* (Frankfurt: Wagner 1687).

¹¹¹ Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations*, 51-2.

¹¹² The passport for Tolstoï, issued by Sultan Ahmed III in June 1711, is today preserved in Moscow; see Kaczka and Kołodziejczyk, *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 74.

¹¹³ On the return of Alekseï Veshniakov through Poland to Russia in 1736, see Kaczka and Kołodziejczyk, *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 422-3; on the detainment of the Russian envoys in 1768 and 1787-9, see Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations*, 51-2.

¹¹⁴ See the letters by Stanisław Antoni Świdziński from 5 March 1734 and 19 July 1734 in Kaczka and Kołodziejczyk, *Turecki pasza i szlachta*, 309, 361.

when it proposed its mediation between Paris and London upon seeing that the French and British vessels extended their privateering towards the Ottoman coastal waters, affecting the safety of Ottoman subjects.¹¹⁵

One can fully concur with Mustafa Serdar Palabiyık, who argues that the translation of Emerich de Vattel's *Law of Nations* into Turkish (1837) and the Ottoman formal entry to the Concert of Europe (1856) should not be considered as the beginning of Ottoman participation in the international world order.¹¹⁶ It was rather the final merger of the two systems that had interacted since the Middle Ages. In many aspects, the Ottomans had practiced the 'European international law' and had been fluent in its vocabulary several centuries before the Treaty of Paris. The very term 'European international law' is justifiable only in so far as it takes into account the Ottoman contribution towards its early development and sophistication.

Further reading

-Yalçınkaya, Mehmed Alaaddin, 'Kuruluştan Tanzimat'a Osmanlı Diplomasi Tarihi Literatürü', *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 1 (2003) 423-89.

¹¹⁵ Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations*, 198; Palabiyık, 'The emergence of the idea of "international law" in the Ottoman Empire', 238-9.

¹¹⁶ Palabiyık, 'The emergence of the idea of "international law" in the Ottoman Empire', 234-5, 242-8. The author provides a rationale why only two out of the four books of Vattel's treatise were translated.