

Early modern Istanbul as a center of diplomacy
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Soon after Constantine the Great transformed the small Greek colony that Byzas founded, the *Byzantion*, to the city of Constantine, *Constantinopolis*, Roman authority collapsed in the West, leaving Constantinople as the center of the civilized world. As the capital of what Western historians would later call the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople appeared as a center of attraction for merchants, travelers, pilgrims, diplomats and myriad types of go-betweens. A religious as well as an administrative center and the largest city of the Mediterranean basin, the *Nea Roma* has benefitted extensively from the prestige that the imperial court bestowed upon it. The “New Rome” was also the new *caput mundi*, the “head” of the world whose imperial grandeur cast a spell on foreigners who marveled at its monuments such as Hagia Sophia, the Hippodrome and countless majestic palaces and churches, whose court culture and protocol overcame foreign envoys and whose distinct culture, complex social composition, and eastern ways aroused as much suspicion as curiosity among its visitors.

The city itself was an instrument of persuasion frequently utilized by the Byzantines. Coming from the “barbarian” world where no city could equal Constantinople neither in size, nor in beauty, grandeur and pomp, official visitors were intentionally guided through the city and exposed to the effects of the city’s large monuments, beautiful landscape, well-fortified walls, disciplined soldiers, busy ports, and well-ordered society that fostered the image of a rich and powerful empire. This worldwide image building should have produced handsome results; it was for a good reason that for centuries Western Europeans referred to the city as *Nea Roma*; Slavs called it *Tsargrad*, the City of Caesar, and Scandinavians and Icelanders simply knew it as *Miklagard*, (also *Mikligardr* or *Micklegart*), the Great City.

In order to enhance this imperial affect, elaborate court rituals were developed to instill awe in foreign envoys. It should not be hard to imagine the extent to which foreign envoys were impressed in the face of sophisticated palace protocol and complex ceremonies as well as many other inventions such as the hydraulic machinery that elevated the imperial throne as the visitors approached. It was all part of an imperial strategy¹ and the issue of how foreign visitors should be received was of utmost importance in a palace where ceremonial procedures were strictly codified in a 10th century book entitled *Περὶ τῆς Βασιλείου Τάξεως - De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*.² The fact that the authorship of the book is attributed to the Emperor himself demonstrates the importance of palace protocol in Byzantine Constantinople.

¹ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 124-129.

² *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, ed. J. Reiske, (Bonn: Weber, 1829), pp. 679-692.

Leaving the city's Roman and Byzantine past behind, let us move to the early modern period when it evolved from a center of attraction to a center of diplomacy.

Two concomitant trends shaped the destiny of early modern capitals. On the one hand, the rise of administrative-bureaucratic structures made these cities something more than just the ruler's place of residence; thanks to quasi-autonomous institutions that increasingly became independent from the ruler's household, they appeared as capitals of gradually centralizing polities. On the other hand, the establishment of resident diplomacy throughout 15th and 16th centuries made these capitals centers of diplomacy and espionage.

The emergence of Constantinople/Istanbul as a center of diplomacy should be studied within this framework. On the one hand, the Ottoman Empire was slowly yet decidedly changing in nature as it evolved from a march principality, wherein the figure of the Sultan was not much more than a *primus inter pares* and centrifugal powers repeatedly proved themselves beyond the control of the central government, to a centralized state run by a professional cadre of bureaucrats in the capital. Istanbul itself was a part of this state-building process. Its conquest, reconstruction and repopulation was part of a careful plan by Mehmed II, who eliminated the traditional powers of opposition and took the centrifugal powers such as the *akıncı* leaders under the close control of central governments. Istanbul was the new capital of the Ottomans, and just like it provided the Roman Emperors with a clean sheet eleven centuries ago, it gave the Ottoman dynasty the opportunity to distance themselves from the traditional forces of Ottoman society and help them build a new power base and enhance their imperial prestige. Even though occasionally Edirne continued to host the imperial court for centuries to come, the heart of the new state, i.e., its imperial institutions and the enlarged bureaucratic mechanism, was to remain in Istanbul.

Just around the same time, certain global developments resulted in the establishment of the practice of resident diplomacy. While in the past sovereign powers used to negotiate with each other and settle their differences through envoys and diplomats that were sent on *ad-hoc* missions, only to return once their mission was over, resident diplomats were started to be dispatched to foreign capitals in the second half of the 15th century in order to establish permanent diplomatic links and reliable channels of communication between two powers. Even though there were sporadic precedents as early as the 13th century, the practice of sending resident ambassadors first emerged in Northern Italy among city states such as Florence, Milan and Venice in order to keep the fragile Peace of Lodi (1455) in effect through constant negotiations between its signatories. The practice rapidly expanded throughout Europe in a matter of decades.

Long before the spread of this new practice, Constantinople had already been hosting resident representatives of foreign powers during the Byzantine era. An important port city at the crossroads of several trade routes, it hosted a sizeable community of merchants mostly from Genoa, Venice, Florence and Ragusa that resided in Galata/Pera, an autonomous Genoese colony facing Constantinople on the other side of the Golden Horn ruled by a Genoese governor named *podestà*. When the Ottomans conquered the city, the Genoese lost no time in handing the keys of the Galata fortress to the Ottoman Sultan and becoming his protected subjects, the *zimmi*; their *Magnifica Comunità* would survive, if not thrive, under Ottoman protection for centuries to come. While these became Ottoman subjects, other foreigners flocked to Galata/Pera, chief emporium and clearinghouse for foreign goods. Some such as the Venetian merchants trading within the city walls were also transferred there. Apparently, the Ottomans realized the financial and strategic benefits of allowing European merchants in the city even though they still regulated this presence with strict restrictions stipulated in imperial capitulations (*'ahdname*).

These foreign merchants were organized according to their “nations” (from Latin *natio* stemming from *natus*, referring to people who were “born,” i.e., *nati* in the same place) and each nation of merchants had a governing body headed by a consul. As in these early years of resident diplomacy, there was no clear distinction between the figure of an ambassador and that of a consul, i.e. the representative of a foreign merchant community, the Ottomans conducted their diplomacy with these the consuls. The intertwined relation between trade and diplomacy should not be underestimated as merchants played pivotal diplomatic roles in key moments. For instance, it was a Venetian grain merchant, Andrea Gritti (later’s *Doge* of Venice (o. 1523-1538)), who signed the treaty which ended the Ottoman-Venetian War of 1499-1503.³ Without his connections on both sides of the conflict, such a peace could hardly be negotiated. Similarly, it was not a diplomat but a merchant, William Harborne, who established the regular diplomatic contact between England and the Ottoman Empire in 1578. Hired by a number of English merchants seeking to trade in the Levant, Harborne first obtained trading capitulations from the Ottoman Sultan and then appeared as the first resident English ambassador in the payroll of the Levant Company.⁴ However, in the time period between two examples, a distinction between a merchant and an ambassador seemed to have emerged for it should not only be his discontent of seeing an English ambassador receiving good treatment in Ottoman capital that prompted the French ambassador to be scandalized when Harborne’s man referred to his master as “ambassador.” He could not hide his feelings: “What ambassador? Your master is a merchant and not an ambassador.”⁵ Harborne may have fallen short of Jacques Savary de Brèves’s standards for a proper ambassador; nonetheless, his diplomatic function as the representative of the English crown in the Ottoman capital cannot be disputed. Moreover, the French ambassador was no less related to commercial circles; French ambassadors’ expenses were partly burdened by Marseille’s Chamber of Commerce (16.000 *livres* out of 52.000, or %31 in 1678).⁶

Same capitulations also regulated the residence of these foreign officials in the heart of the Empire. It should be remembered here that at the dawn of early modern diplomacy, rulers at first showed a disinclination to accept representatives of other foreign powers residing in their capital. For instance, even though the Duke of Milan sent a resident diplomat to France in 1455, he refused to allow a French representative in Milano fearing that he may engage in espionage and seek to intervene in the Duchy’s internal affairs. The Ottomans seemed to share such a concern at the beginning, as evidenced by the fact that they restricted the Venetian bailo’s sojourn in Istanbul first to one year in the capitulations of 1503 and three in 1513.⁷ Their suspicion led them to resort to harsher measures as well. They expelled the Venetian bailo Girolamo Marcello in 1492, for example, because he was sending information to his government.⁸

³ For details of his mission, see. *Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana*, Mss. Italiani, VII. 878 (8652), Andrea Gritti, *Copialettere*.

⁴ S.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).

⁵ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli (hereafter SDC), fil. 23, c. 181v (16 April 1586).

⁶ Archives Nationales, B¹ 377, dated 1678 quoted by Robert Mantran, *17. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında İstanbul: Kurumsal, İktisadi, Toplumsal Tarih denemesi*, trans. M. Ali Kılıçbay and Enver Özcan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1990), vol. II, p. 153, fn. 32

⁷ H. Theunissen, “Ottoman-Venetian Diplomats: 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”, *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies* (1998), 1/2, pp. 391, 397.

⁸ *Annali Veneti dall’anno 1457 al 1500 del Senatore Domenico Malipiero*, ed. Francesco Longo (Firenze: Gio. Pitro Viessieux, Editore-Editore, 1843), vol. I, pp. 141-142.

While there were only Italian merchant communities and their consul/ambassadors in 15th century Istanbul, soon others followed suit and set up shop in the Ottoman capital. One important factor was further consolidation of central governments which resulted in the emergence of larger and stronger states that devoured their smaller neighbors, the resources of which were no match for new requirements of the Military Revolution and bureaucratization. With fewer actors in international politics, diplomacy became even more important thanks to the Mediterranean and European-wide struggle waged by two imperial powers that rose to unprecedented prominence in early 16th century on both halves of the Mediterranean basin, the Ottomans in the East and the Habsburgs in the West.

This imperial rivalry forced political actors to take sides and engage in diplomatic maneuvering. Throughout the 16th century, European states set up resident diplomatic missions in the Ottoman capital. France sent a permanent ambassador in 1535, to be followed by the minor branch of the Habsburgs dynasty, the Austrian Habsburgs in 1547 and England in 1583. Others followed suit: Netherlands in 1612, Russia in 1700, Poland sometime after the Treaty of Carlowitz (1699), Sweden in 1737 and Prussia in 1761. In addition to these permanent ambassadors, Istanbul hosted countless *ad-hoc* diplomatic missions not only by sovereign powers such as Poland, Persia, and Morocco, but also by vassal states such as Ragusa, Moldavia, Wallachia and Crimea. The fact that the Ottomans saw no difference between a diplomat of a sovereign state and that of a vassal and used the same term, *ilçi*, for both, exposes their perception of their empire and capital as the center of the world.

Even though extant archival documentation makes it easier to trace the activities of permanent European embassies in Istanbul, we should note that ambassadors from the Muslim world also visited the Ottoman capital. Following the Ottoman conquest, Muslim diplomats from the Mamluks, Akkoyunlus and several other Muslim states poured into the city on a wide range of diplomatic missions. While the Mamluks were the most important diplomatic actors in the region in the 15th century, they were soon to be replaced by the Safavids. As early as the reign of Bayezid II, Safavid ambassadors encountered interesting ceremonies in the Ottoman capital. As both states were obsessed with pomp and splendor, their arrival in Istanbul became a curious public spectacle. The issue of how to reciprocate these diplomatic missions of “armies” of diplomats with strange presents and colorful attire worried the minds of the Ottoman bureaucrats, while the cost of such diplomatic overtures was a constant financial burden on Ottoman coffers. Strikingly, the Ottomans treated Safavid ambassadors just like European ones, as seen in the miniatures where Safavid ambassadors were forced to bow down in front of the Sultan by two gatekeepers. It goes without saying that in the golden age of the empire, Istanbul hosted a number of other Muslim diplomatic missions coming from a large geography stretching from the Western Mediterranean to Central Asia and Indian Ocean, from the Kipchak Steppes to Central Africa. One should add to these envoys those coming from Ottoman vassals and dependencies. Moreover, as Istanbul was gradually recognized by the Sunni world as the seat of the Caliphate, it added a religious flavor to the city’s status of a center of diplomacy.

Thus, Istanbul emerged as a cosmopolitan center of diplomacy, hosting a number of diplomatic missions and hundreds of diplomatic personnel attached to resident foreign ambassadors. It was only natural that such presence would lead to state regulation as well as the development of elaborate court rituals, established diplomatic mores and ceremonials that resonated the city’s long-yearned glorious past during the heyday of the Byzantine Empire.

It has long been suggested by a Eurocentric historiography that the Ottomans were not part of European diplomacy. A corollary of this suggestion is that they did not feel themselves bound by the practice of *pacta sunt servanda*, a statement which was further backed by centuries-long tradition of negative representation of Ottomans as the “other”, uncivilized and

lawless barbarians from the East whose existence was antithetical to that of Christian Europe. Recently, however, such biased statements were called into question. Studies in Ottoman as well as European archives can easily reveal that the Ottomans took their diplomatic obligations very seriously and strove to act within the not-so-clear confines of legal and acceptable diplomacy of the time. This sense of responsibility explains go-betweens' frequent rounds between foreign diplomats and Ottoman dignitaries. When an ambassador of a nation that was protected by a Sultan's *'ahdname* (capitulations) felt the need to correct a wrongdoing his compatriots had suffered during their sojourn in the Ottoman Empire, most of the time he found recourse that solved the problem based on relevant capitulation articles, or if there was none, on traditions, mores and precedents.

The arrival and departure of ambassadors was as much a state ceremony as a public spectacle with crowds filling the streets of Istanbul in order to watch with curious eyes these foreign diplomats and their retinue. It was customary for an ambassador to send a messenger beforehand to inform the authorities of the date of his arrival and ask for permission (*ruhsat*) to enter the city. Once granted permission, the ambassador would proceed in quite majestic fashion, escorted by a cavalry regiment and accompanied by his ambassadorial staff, the leading merchants of his nation trading in the city, and the representatives of other embassies. However, when this entrance became too pompous, as was the case in 1616,⁹ it could result in a negative reaction among the proud Istanbulites. On the other hand, neglect of a proper ceremonial reception on behalf of the Ottomans could be taken as a sign of insult by the ambassadors. When Ottoman officials tried to rush the Austrian ambassador to appear before the Sultan, the former protested vehemently stating that an ambassador of his stature should not be treated with "insistence and lack of respect", (*ibrâm ve terk-i hürmət*) and refused to take his sovereign's present to Topkapı Palace on a rainy and muddy day without the usual pompous parade and the public spectacle (...*bir küşâde günde müretteb alay gûne cem'iyyetle varıp hedâyâsı dahi müte'addid kimseler yediyle gidip tantana-i mâlâ-keâm arz-ı ihtîşâm etmek merâsimi*).¹⁰

The pinnacle of such ceremonial moments was the reception of foreign ambassadors by the Ottoman Sultan. After the extensive renovation of Topkapı Palace in the 1520s, several ceremonial changes were introduced, demonstrating the complex relation between palace protocol and architecture on the one hand and between diplomacy and imperial propaganda on the other. Just like their Byzantine predecessors, the Ottomans strove to impose their pomp, splendor, and architectural magnificence upon foreign ambassadors whose first experience in the Ottoman palace was to be dragged through the courtyards with their arms secured on either side by two gatekeepers and then to appear in front of the Sultan, being forced to stand at all times without being able to directly communicate with the Sultan.¹¹ It was in this first meeting that the ambassador submitted the present he brought for the Sultan and when he and his entourage were given a robe of honor (*hil'at*). They also ate together with leading Ottoman dignitaries before being received by the Ottoman Sultan who sat on a throne, keeping silent or only uttering a few words, while viziers passed to each other the letter that the ambassador brought for the Sultan. Such strict court etiquette imbued with Sultan's

⁹ Adam Werner, *Padişahın Huzurunda: Elçilik Günlüğü, 1616-1618*, trans. Türkiş Noyan Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2011), p. 58.

¹⁰ Mehmet İpşirli (ed.), *Tarih-i Naîmâ* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2007), vol. III, p. 1017.

¹¹ Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, And Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1991).

immobility, secretiveness and venerating silence was meant to reinforce what Ottomans considered as Sultanic dignity.¹²

Established ceremonies imposed a strict hierarchy on foreign diplomats. For instance, The Ottoman chronicler Naima records that traditionally the French ambassador was given prominence (*tekaddüm ü tasaddur*) over other ambassadors because the French King was for a longer time in a friendship of “a clean heart” (*hulûs-ı bâl*) with the Ottoman Sultan.¹³ Moreover, according to an Ottoman *kanunname* from 1676, a Muslim diplomat (*ehl-i İslam ilçisi*) was treated more respectfully during ceremonies than his Christian counterparts: while the Grand Vizier and other high officials received an incoming Muslim ambassador by standing up as soon as he entered through the gate of the Imperial Council, everybody remained seated during the reception of a Christian ambassador (*kefere ilçisi*); furthermore, it was a custom that the Grand Vizier went to the “ablution room,” *abdesthane*, beforehand, only to welcome the Christian ambassador coming out of it. While the Muslim diplomat sat on the *Nişancı*’s table (*suffe*), his Christian colleague sat on a stool (*iskemle*). The two were only equal (*ale’s-seviyye*) while eating with the Grand Vizier. The hierarchy was not only determined by the diplomat’s religion. The same source tells us that Ragusan and Transylvanian ambassadors were not served food in the palace and that the Ragusan ambassador left the palace even without “sitting” (*hiç oturmaz*) as opposed to his Transylvanian colleague.¹⁴

At times, the Ottomans did more than just impress foreign ambassadors; they also carefully staged mise-en-scènes in order to convey a diplomatic message to them. For instance, in 1616, while the Austrian ambassador and his retinue entered the second courtyard of the Topkapı Palace for the first audience with the Sultan, two men on camels entered the courtyard, carrying big drums. Then followed the Ottoman soldiers, five Iranian captives enchained to each other and a hundred men each carrying on a rod three to five severed Iranian heads stuffed with hay.¹⁵ As they took their place on the left side of the *Babü’s-saade*, the entrance to the third courtyard, they should have left a lasting impression on the entire Austrian mission. The idea was not only to stage a show of force, but also to engage in disinformation by convincing the Austrian ambassador of Ottoman successes in the Eastern front where in fact the Sultan’s armies were failing miserably.

It was a common practice that the Sultan provided for foreign ambassadors and their households who were theoretically his guests in the Empire. This was a reiteration of the Sultan’s grandeur and benevolence since accepting food was a sign of allegiance and recognition of the ruler’s sovereignty, as proven by the symbolic meaning hidden in Janissaries’ *kazan kaldırmak*, i.e. turning their cauldron upside down and refusing to eat food from the Sultan’s hand, an act which they used to demonstrate their discontent. An Ottoman official, *mihmandar*, accompanied foreign diplomatic missions during their entire journey to and fro Istanbul, making necessary arrangements for their lodging and provisioning in cooperation with local authorities. The Sultan regularly provided these ambassadors and their retinues with food, fuel, and fodder for animals as well as presents and gave them allowances

¹² Pál Fodor, “Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman Ruling Elite and the Formation of the Grand Vizieral *Telhis*,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47 (1994), p. 80; Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 102-103; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, “Semiotics of Behaviour in Early Modern Diplomacy: Polish Embassies in Istanbul and Bahçesaray”, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 7/3-4 (2003): 245-256.

¹³ İpşirli, *Tarih-i Naîmâ*, vol. II, p. 379.

¹⁴ Ahmet Arslantürk (ed.), *Abdurrahman Abdî Paşa Kanunnâmesi* (İstanbul: Metamorfoz Yayıncılık, 2012), pp. 36-7.

¹⁵ Werner, *Padişahın Huzurunda*, pp. 61-2.

with which they could meet their expenses. It should be noted that such allocations continued to be paid even when the ambassadors were incarcerated during wartime.¹⁶

For foreign ambassadors' service, the Sultan appointed a small regiment composed of janissaries, named *yasakçı*, whose duty was to ensure the safety of ambassadorial households on the one hand and keep a close eye on their activities on the other. Given that it was the ambassadors themselves who paid these janissaries' salaries and that a good reference from an ambassador on behalf of the Ottoman authorities would mean a promotion for them, these *yasakçıs* were not troubled when circumstances required them to turn their head the other way and even, at times, to be accomplices.

Even though the arrival and departure of ambassadors as well as their first and last audiences were subject to strict codes, this ceremonial frenzy was only the tip of the iceberg. Ambassadors behaved in a more relaxed environment as they frequently negotiated with leading officials; they frequently visited Ottoman palaces, hosted Ottoman dignitaries, presented them with gifts and engaged in social activities with them. Surprisingly, they even engaged in dealings with other members of the Ottoman dynasty that were in the capital. Imperial women were in all sorts of dealings with European ambassadors, asking favors for their protégés in foreign countries and commissioning presents, clothes and artistic works through intermediaries. Surprisingly, ambassadors even dared to contact male members of the dynasty, risking at times the Sultan's discontent. For instance, when the Venetian bailo Lorenzo Bernardo wanted to send his secretary to Manisa for an audience with the crown prince Mehmed, the governor of the city, the Grand Vizier warned him that the Sultan Murad III, jealous of his son, could take this the wrong way. The fact that the bailo insisted that such correspondence between ambassadors and Ottoman princes were only natural as there were precedents proves that a diplomatic tradition with its rules and customs were already developed in the late 16th century Istanbul. Murad III argued that he himself had never been a party to such correspondence while he was the crown prince and prevented the bailo from communicating with his son. Nonetheless, prince Mehmed's majordomo (*kahya*) in Istanbul contacted the bailo and reported his master's satisfaction with him.¹⁷ The bailo should be content with this answer as such satisfaction was to be an important asset if the crown prince succeeded his father one day.

While an ambassador occasionally traveled between his residence in Pera and the city in order to negotiate matters of importance, most of the time, it was his secretary, translator (*dragoman*, a distorted version of the Arabic word *tercüman*) or some other go-between who made rounds between Ottoman officials and foreign ambassadors. The fact that with a few exceptions none of these ambassadors was versant in Turkish increased the importance of translators in daily conduct of diplomacy between European ambassadors and Ottoman dignitaries. While the Ottomans employed renegades with necessary linguistic capabilities in their palace as *Divan-ı Hümayun tercümanı*, ambassadors employed their own dragomans. In spite of early (and futile) Venetian attempts to train dragomans among their own subjects, in the end, most ambassadorial dragomans came from Istanbul's local Christian community.

Capitalizing on their local and trans-imperial connections and thanks to their familiarity with Ottoman court etiquette and diplomatic protocol, these dragomans became agents of daily diplomacy, demonstrating not only their diplomatic skills, but also entrepreneurship by mediating between different cultures and promoting their own interests

¹⁶ ASV, Senato, Archivio Proprio Costantinopoli (APC), fil. 5, cc. 177r (1 August 1551), 197r (1 September 1551). For instance, the imprisoned Austrian ambassador's daily allowance was increased from 5 *akçe* to 15 *akçe* per diem in 1551, because it was "the duty of great rulers to keep them well." Ibid., cc. 212v-213r (22 September 1551).

¹⁷ ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 557r-557v (16 August 1585) and 599r-600r (30 August 1585).

and agenda. They were the ones who followed the court when it was transferred to Adrianopolis, the ones who negotiated minor issues with Ottoman officials, and the ones who went back and forth between the embassies and Ottoman palaces. An ambassador relied on his dragomans while negotiating with the Ottomans to such an extent that, in the words of the bailo Lorenzo in 1585, he had to “speak with others’ tongue, hear with others’ ears, negotiate with others’ brain.”¹⁸ Repeating exactly the same phrase, two years later the same Bernardo would report how the French ambassador’s dragoman chose not to translate his master’s words properly in order not to offend the Grand Vizier; as he was a “Turk” and thus an Ottoman subject, he feared some misfortune would fall upon him. He was able to escape the Grand Vizier’s wrath, but the French ambassador dismissed him from his service after becoming aware of the situation.¹⁹

European travelers repeatedly accentuated Galata’s Frankish or European character, a statement repeated by modern scholarship as well.²⁰ The “Golden Horn,” an inlet of the Bosphorus, even though only 750 meters across at its widest, was still an effective divider between Istanbul and Galata as there were no bridges and transportation was realized by means of small boats whose numbers exceeded 15.000 in the 17th century.²¹ At this point we have to accentuate the existence of a large Muslim presence in Galata. In addition to Muslims who chose to live on the right bank of the Golden Horn, many Muslims who would like to taste some of its sinful pleasures away from the vigilant eyes of the Istanbulites, frequently visited the city.

The presence of European embassies contributed significantly to this Frankishness. While non-resident diplomats that arrived for ad-hoc missions were housed in private palaces and houses,²² resident European diplomats resided in the vineyards of Pera, *vigne di Pera*, outside the city walls atop the hills above Galata. The only exception to this rule was the Austrian ambassador who was forced to live in the *Elçi Hanı* within the city walls, on *Divan Yolu* and close to *Çemberlitaş*, in order to keep the ambassador, according to Michael Heberer, a slave in 16th century Istanbul,²³ under close surveillance. Heberer should be right given that a quarter century later the Ottoman Grand Vizier would threaten to relocate all European ambassadors within the city walls in order to keep them under close surveillance.²⁴ Other European embassies were located in Pera within walking distance to each other; ambassadors preferred the tranquility of Pera to Galata’s hectic atmosphere and chaotic port.

The fact that embassies were located in close proximity to each other facilitated cooperation and communication so much so that there was even a secret door between the Venetian and French embassies which was kept open with both sides’ consent, *per consento commune*, when relations between French ambassadors and Venetian baili was amicable. This was not the case in 1585 when the French secretary and *chargé d’affaires* had the door closed

¹⁸ ASV, SDC, fil. 22, c. 273r (6 December 1585).

¹⁹ ASV, SDC, fil. 25, cc. 161v-162r (15 April 1587).

²⁰ Mantran, *17. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında İstanbul*, vol. I, p. 71.

²¹ Ibid.

²² For instance, in 1634, the Polish ambassador was housed in *Tekfur Sarayı*, the former Byzantine Palace of the Porphyrogenitus. İpşirli, *Tarih-i Naîmâ*, vol. II, p. 780. Three years later, the Safavid ambassador would stay in *Davud Paşa Sarayı*. Ibid., p. 857. The Indian ambassador who arrived in 1656 first stayed in Üsküdar for a couple of days in a house that belonged to local notables, *ayans*. He was then transferred to the palace that once belonged to Koca Siyavuş Pasha within the city walls. Ibid., vol. IV, pp. 1670-1671.

²³ Michael Heberer von Bretten, *Osmanlı’da Bir Köle: Brettenli Michael Heberer’in Anıları: 1585-1588*, trans. Türkis Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2003), p. 311.

²⁴ Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 26.

much to the Venetian bailo's chagrin.²⁵ With or without a secret passage between embassies, a vivacious social life among diplomats developed over time. Ambassadors paid regular visits to each other and talked about the rumors they overheard, the negotiations they undertook with the Ottomans and their opinions on the political and military events of the time. These gatherings could take numerous forms from simple dinners to lavish parties, from outdoor sporting activities to promenades in the gardens. Embassies also provided shelter for well-connected travelers that arrived in the Ottoman capital.²⁶

European ambassadors were not an exclusive social group. Even though their interactions with the Ottoman population in general merit further scholarly research that would dissociate exotic tales narrated in European accounts from the facts of life, there is enough information shedding light on some aspects of social encounters between Ottoman dignitaries and European ambassadors. Just like any important European city of the time, Istanbul provided several venues for social encounters among the political and diplomatic elites. First of all, the prominent place that renegades attained in Ottoman administrative and military hierarchy helped the establishment of social links that crisscrossed civilizational and confessional boundaries. For instance, the Calabrese Grand Admiral Uluç Ali negotiated intimately with Venetian baili, speaking in Turkish as well as in his native Italian,²⁷ while his successor Uluç Hasan Pasha (or Hasan *Veneziano* as Europeans knew him) was childhood friends with the Venetian bailo Lorenzo Bernardo whose house he used to go to play "ball" (*palla*).²⁸

However, cross-confessional social encounters were not only limited to those between Europeans and renegade Ottomans. Foreign diplomats and Muslim-born Ottomans regularly engaged in contact with each other, demonstrating us the fluidity of stark boundaries that were long assumed to have been divided the Mediterranean basin into two irreconcilable antithetical blocks between Christianity and Islam. The usualness of such contacts across confessional and civilizational barriers not only displays the cosmopolitan nature of early modern Istanbul, but also challenges the Orientalist historiography that presented Ottoman and Islamic society in general as a static entity with no interest in interacting with the Western world.

High-ranking Ottoman dignitaries regularly joined European ambassadors in private dinners²⁹ and hunting expeditions,³⁰ attended banquets and parties that took place in Galata/Pera under the auspices of European ambassadors, participated in philosophical colloquies, and engaged in discussions on current affairs, politics, religion and books.³¹ The few ambassadors who mastered Turkish language could use their linguistic skills to their great advantage not only during their diplomatic negotiations with the Ottomans, but also in cross-confessional social circles. For instance, thanks to his linguistic skills, the French ambassador François Savary de Brèves was reported to establish close friendship with several high-

²⁵ ASV, SDC, fil. 21, c. 38r (20 March 1585).

²⁶ A. H. de Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic: A History of the Earliest Diplomatic Relations, 1610-1630* (Leiden/Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1978), 199.

²⁷ Emilio Sola Castaño, *Uchalí: El Calabrés Tiñoso, o el mito del corsario muladí en la frontera* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2011), pp. 68, 366. It should still be stated that this aged Calabrese renegade was experiencing difficulties while expressing himself in Italian.

²⁸ AGS E 1417, fol. 41, 62 and 109 (1583). ASV, SDC, fil. 30, no. 38 (20 January 1590) quoted by Antonio Fabris, "Hasan 'il Veneziano' tra Algeria e Costantinopoli", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 5 (1997), 52, fn.5.

²⁹ ASV, SDC, fil. 23, c. 186r (12 April 1586).

³⁰ de Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic*, 51-2.

³¹ Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 178. Also see. ASV, SDC, fil. 57, cc. 208r-208v (16 May 1603); fil. 32, c. 138v (8 October 1590).

ranking *‘ulama* such as the “*mollas*” of Süleymaniye and of Hagia Sofia as well as members of Ottoman bureaucracy such as the “Secretary of the Sultan,” or *Nişancı*.³²

These social encounters between European ambassadors and high level Ottoman officials enabled both sides not only to familiarize with each other, but also to exchange ideas, opinions, and information. Such encounters were by no means strictly social and exchanges were less than innocent. Each side tried to learn something valuable from the other side, giving as little in exchange for as much as possible. European ambassadors employed several ruses to that effect. For instance, in order to gather information from his Turkish visitors, Austrian ambassador Bartholomäus Petz abused the intimacy of such social encounters by getting them drunk while he himself was drinking a special non-alcoholic formula that had the color of wine.³³ Money was also a useful tool. While it was an established custom that European ambassadors gave Ottoman officials several presents in exchange for political favors, they occasionally crossed the line between an acceptable present and an outright bribe and between a favor one could ask and that one should not.

Such contacts exposed the Ottoman elite to Western influences to a certain extent. As ambassadors often provided Ottoman dignitaries with presents and rare European products in exchange for political favors, a close look at what the Ottomans requested from these ambassadors would reveal their taste in European art. To name a few examples that demonstrate diplomacy’s crucial role in cultural transfer between Europe and the Ottoman Empire: In 1568, Piyale Pasha requested the Venetian bailo to procure him an organ which he intended to utilize not only for himself, but also for Sultan Selim II, *per servitio anco di quella M^{ta}*. Such requests carried so much diplomatic importance that when the safe transfer of Piyale’s organ forced delays, the Venetian Senate was cautious enough to regularly update the influential vizier and the imperial son-in-law.³⁴ It is impossible to know how such Western style musical instruments were used in Ottoman palaces at exactly the same time when a classical musical tradition was being developed in Istanbul;³⁵ however, the intermediary capacity of European diplomats is obvious. It was not only music as a form of Fine Arts that aroused the interest of the Ottoman elites. Ten years later, at the request of the Venetian bailo, Sokollu enfranchised one of his slaves, a painter, with the proviso that he later return to offer his services to the Grand Vizier. When the painter did not keep his word, it fell on the new bailo’s shoulders to find a competent replacement.³⁶

Diplomats played an active role in the shaping of the “Image of the Turk” in Europe with their writings on the Ottoman Empire and the Ottomans. Apart from a number of widely read travelogues and memoirs, there was a widespread circulation of regular reports in which the ambassadors summarized their tenure. Such texts not only prepared future diplomats who would serve in Istanbul, but also informed the European public of Ottoman political and military structures, culture, and society through the lenses of these short-term visitors. The most influential of such texts were the Venetian *relazioni* which the Venetian diplomats were

³² Viorel Panaite, “A French Ambassador in Istanbul, and his Turkish Manuscript on Western Merchants in the Ottoman Mediterranean (Late 16th and Early 17th Centuries),” *Révue des études sud-est européennes*, 42 (2004), p. 124.

³³ W. Sahm (ed.), *Reinhold Lubenau Seyahatnamesi: Osmanlı Ülkesinde, 1587-1589*, trans. Türkis Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012), vol. I, pp. 252-3.

³⁴ ASV, Senato, Secreta, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, , reg. 3, cc. 109v (26 June 1568), 116r (24 August 1568), 118r (18 September 1568), 124r (8 January 1568, m.v.), 131r (5 February 1568, m.v.); reg. 4, c. 7r (21 May 1569).

³⁵ Cem Behar, “The Ottoman Musical Tradition,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 393.

³⁶ ASV, SDC, fil. 12, c. 166r (3 August 1578).

obligated to present in writing to the Senate by a law promulgated in 1425.³⁷ Even though they were written only to be read in the Senate, these *relazioni* were popular readings among the European literati and published over and over again starting from the late 16th century. They also left an indelible mark on modern European imagination of the “East” given that as soon as they were collected and compiled in the first half of the 19th century, prominent historians such as Leopold von Ranke, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall and Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen used them extensively in their *opera magna*.

Apart from such impressionistic works, diplomatic personnel produced more extensive treatments of all things Ottoman and thus ensured a profound cultural transfer between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire. They gradually reached a sufficient level of expertise on Ottoman culture so as to produce, as early practitioners of Orientalism, important works on which European scholars later built their studies, the most groundbreaking example of which is *Della Letteratura de’ Turchi*, written on Ottoman literature by the curious Venetian bailo Giambattista Donado.³⁸ Apart from ambassadors, other ambassadorial staff participated in such production as well. Among the early modern examples of Orientalist literature, one can find works created by Europeans working in embassies such as Pietro Businello, the bailate secretary and the author of *Lettere informative* (1746),³⁹ or Giambattista Toderini, the renowned Venetian philosopher who spent five years in Istanbul as the preceptor of bailo’s son, curiously strolling through the city’s bookshops, libraries and archives, socializing with Ottoman intellectuals who satisfied his curiosity regarding Ottoman culture, only to pen upon his return his internationally acclaimed three-volume work on Ottoman literature named *La Letteratura Turchesca*.⁴⁰ There were also important works produced by Ottoman subjects working for foreign embassies. For instance, Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson (Muradcan Tosunyan), an Istanbulite Armenian Catholic and the dragoman of Swedish embassy, wrote the famous *Tableau général de l’Empire Othoman*, a seven-volume taxonomic work of late 18th century Ottoman government as well as Islamic and Ottoman law.⁴¹ Finally, the two groups occasionally collaborated as was the case with *Cicogna Codex 1971*, a manuscript that was “assembled in the bailo’s house in the early 1660s through collaboration between a Venetian diplomat and his dragomans, Ottoman miniaturists, and European draftsmen.”⁴² The importance of such works in shaping European perception of the East is evident from the speed with which they were translated to other European languages, especially at the dawn of the Modern Era, in late 18th century. While *Letteratura Turchesca* was translated into French and German in three years, *Tableau général*’s translations or partial translations shortly appeared in a number of languages, including Russian.

³⁷ Before 1425, Venetian diplomats were still required to present their relazioni to the Senate, but they could do so orally. *Oratores in reditu dent in nota ea quae sunt utilia dominio* declared a law promulgated in 1268; sufficed it to submit some notes regarding important things that would be beneficial for the government. Armand Baschet, *Les Archives de Venise, Histoire de la Chancellerie Secrète*, (Paris: 1870), pp. 346-7.

³⁸ Venezia, Per Andrea Poletti, 1688; Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni Editore, 1975), p. 351; Mustafa Soykut, *Image of the “Turk” in Italy: a History of the “Other” in Early Modern Europe, 1453-1683* (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 2001), Chapter 6.

³⁹ Pietro Businello, *Lettere informative delle cose de Turchi riguardo alla religione et al governo civile, militare, politico, et economico*, manuscript in Biblioteca Universitaria di Padova. Preto, pp. 442-50.

⁴⁰ Venezia, presso Giacomo Storti, 1787; Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, pp. 525-533

⁴¹ Paris, (1788-1820). Also see. Carter Findlay, “Mouradgea D’Ohsson (1740-1807): Liminality and Cosmopolitanism in the Author of the *Tableau Général de l’Empire Othoman*,” *The Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 22/1 (Spring 1998): 21-35; Kemal Beydilli, “Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson (Muradcan Tosunyan): Ailesi hakkında kayıtlar, “Nizâm-ı Cedîd”e dâir lâyihası ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğundaki siyasi hayatı,” *Tarih Dergisi* 34 (1983-1984): 247-324.

⁴² E. Natalie Rothman, “Visualizing a Space of Encounter: Intimacy, Alterity and Trans-Imperial Perspective in an Ottoman-Venetian Miniature Album,” *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, XL (2012): 39-80, here 43.

In short, Istanbul (including Galata/Pera) functioned as an “urban middle ground,”⁴³ between European diplomats and their households on one hand and the Ottoman elite and Istanbulites on the other. Adding its own complex social structure and cosmopolitan urban culture to what Europeans brought from their homelands, this *caput mundi* served as a contact zone, an arena of interaction, exchange and encounter. This cross-civilizational and cross-confessional contact not only dictated European perceptions of the “East,” but also affected Ottoman society. For sure, diplomacy is just one element in the equation, but it is an important one given close relations between European diplomats and the Ottoman elite. Moreover, the presence of European diplomats provided Ottomans with a profound awareness of what was going in Europe, a window through which they could conceive the world around them. Istanbul’s particular position as “center of diplomacy” should have compensated for Ottomans’ lack of permanent embassies in Europe, a factor which was used by modern historiography to support the widely held assumption that Ottomans did not develop an interest in developments in foreign lands, societies and cultures.

In addition to their diplomatic responsibilities, ambassadors were also required to take care of their “nation” in Istanbul, not only by protecting their trade and representing them before the Ottoman authorities, but also by adjudicating their disputes, officially endorsing their commercial transactions, redeeming them from slavery, and presiding over their elected bodies if there were any. While such a wide range of responsibilities located the ambassador at the center of his own community, he was also very important in the eyes of the larger Christian community in Galata. In order to maintain his (and his ruler’s) prestige and integrity, the ambassador was forced to display a carefully crafted public image by attending religious ceremonies such as the Sunday mass, organizing feasts and banquets, and participating in all sorts of communal activities.

Istanbul was a battleground of power and prestige between different embassies just like other European capitals. Ambassadors and their retinues constantly competed and quarreled not only in the Ottoman palace for diplomatic and political purposes but also in Galata/Pera for the honor and prestige of the sovereign they were obligated to represent. One recurring point of contention was the issue of precedence which our modern mind should not so easily ridicule when dealing with the early modern world where honor and prestige could be pretexts for war and peace. To give a long but illuminating example: When the Ottomans honored the English ambassador too much, an offended French king who felt such an honor should only be reserved for his own ambassador decided to call his ambassador back, leaving the secretary in charge of the French embassy in Constantinople. The French sensitivity regarding the issue of precedence resurfaced short after in 1585. The secretary/*chargé d'affaires* devised a scheme in order to increase his standing among the diplomats in Istanbul, in spite of the fact that as a secretary he ranked below any ambassador in the Ottoman capital. He showed up on a Sunday at the Church of St. Francesco in Galata an hour before the mass and took the seat that was traditionally reserved for the Venetian bailo as the occupant of the oldest ambassadorial post in Istanbul. In spite of the bailo’s efforts, it proved impossible to remove the intransigent secretary who took the matter as far as having his men threaten the bailo’s men. When an official ambassador, Jacques Savary de Lancosme, arrived and took charge of the mission, he lost no time in taking up the same issue which caused much confusion and scandal a year ago. The problem could only be solved through the mediation of the minister priest of S. Francesco: two “equal stools” were made for each ambassador located in the same part of the Church. The French ambassador continued, however, to come up with stratagems to push the bailo to an inferior seat; apparently “equality” was not what he set his

⁴³ Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, Chapter Six.

sights on.⁴⁴ In July 1587, he would engage in a similar confrontation with the Austrian ambassador. He was even prepared for an armed clash as he sent 60 armed Frenchmen in order to defend the seat he intended to steal; it was only the Austrian ambassador's pacific behavior that prevented disastrous consequences.⁴⁵ When he tried again a few weeks later, the Periot's locked the doors of the Church of St. Francesco, leaving the French ambassador helpless on the street in front of "infinite Turks and people who were watching him, not without a smile on their faces, banging on the door."⁴⁶ Such behavior was certainly irresponsible, exposing Periot's religious autonomy and the Church of St. Francesco to Ottoman intervention. When the Grand Vizier Siyavush Pasha heard that the French ambassador was still trying to enter the Church through the window of the adjacent monastery, he ordered that the Church be closed, threatening to turn it into "either a mosque or a tavern to sell wine," not an empty threat in those days when the Ottomans had just confiscated the seat of the Orthodox Patriarchate,⁴⁷ the Pammakaristos Church, in order to convert it into a mosque.⁴⁸

It was not only the figure of the ambassador who frequented the streets of Galata and Istanbul. Ambassadors entertained large retinues, which in the Venetian case were dubbed as their "family," *famiglia*, composed of secretaries, personal assistants, accountants, chaplains, doctors, majordomos, dragomans, apprentice dragomans, several other servants and even a Muslim language teacher, *hoca*.⁴⁹ One of ambassador's responsibilities was to protect his "family" who lived under the same roof with him from the vices of a cosmopolitan capital on the other side of the frontier where traditional mechanisms of social discipline were simply lacking. One current problem was to prevent any instances of conversion among the ambassadorial retinue, more specifically among its younger members. It was true that such conversions were enthusiastically encouraged by the Ottoman authorities. It should be noted, however, that this threat was as much perceived as real; in a cosmopolitan city like Istanbul that hosted a large number of non-Muslim households, the spiritual dangers that awaited young and inexperienced Europeans in the Ottoman capital should not be exaggerated. Conversion of a member of the ambassadors' entourage could also create far-reaching security problems. For instance, when in 1564 one of the apprentice dragomans, *giovani di lingua*, converted to Islam, he helped Ottomans to learn the Venetian cipher.⁵⁰ In spite of baili's expressed discontent, this *giovane di lingua* named Colombina served in the Ottoman chancellery for many years; in 1578 the Ottomans even considered sending him to Venice on a diplomatic mission, causing much protest and scandal on behalf of the Venetians.⁵¹

Apart from spiritual dangers, there were also moral issues at stake. Incidents of all sorts of moral turpitude ranging from gambling to thefts, brawls and even murders created numerous problems, not only for relations between European states and the Ottomans,

⁴⁴ ASV, *SDC*, fil. 21, cc. 35r-47r (20 March 1585); fil. 23, 150r-151r, 156r-156v (12 April 1586).

⁴⁵ W. Sahm (ed.), *Reinhold Lubenau Seyahatnamesi: Osmanlı Ülkesinde, 1587-1589*, trans. Türki Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012), vol. I, pp. 407-410; ASV, *SDC*, fil. 25, cc. 534r-534v (5 August 1587).

⁴⁶ ASV, *SDC*, fil. 25, cc. 573v-574v (20 August 1587).

⁴⁷ ASV, *SDC*, fil. 26, cc. 16r-17r (2 September 1587).

⁴⁸ Even though the confiscation of the monastery took place in 1587, the mosque was completed in 1591 and named as Fethiye Camii in honor of conquests in the Persian front. Semavi Eyice, "Fethiye Camii", *Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 12, pp. 459-460.

⁴⁹ Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, Chapter One.

⁵⁰ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere Ambasciatori*, b. 3, fol. 55; Christiane Villain-Gandossi, "Les Dépêches Chiffrées de Vettore Bragadin, Baile de Constantinople (12 Juillet 1564 – 15 Juin 1566), *Turcica*, X (1978), p. 77; Maria Pia Pedani, *In Nome del Gran Signore: Inviati Ottomani a Venezia dalla Caduta di Costantinopoli alla Guerra di Candia* (Venezia: Deputazione Editrice, 1994), p. 42.

⁵¹ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti Secrete*, reg. 11, cc. 154v (24 March 1578), fil. 20, 24 March 1578.

provoking Ottoman intervention in internal affairs of ambassadors' household and creating all sorts of diplomatic scandals, but also for relations between the local people and foreign diplomatic personnel in the city who were theoretically under the protection of the Sultan.

Alongside formal diplomacy, Istanbul was also a venue for secret diplomacy. It was natural that diplomatic activity intensified espionage in capitals; but there were a couple of reasons that rendered Istanbul more fragile in the face of foreign information gathering efforts and spy infiltration. First of all, it was not hard to find informants in the Ottoman capital. European diplomats used their connections in the Ottoman palace, especially but not only among the renegades within the Ottoman administrative and military structure, in order to gather sensitive information. The presence of several Venetians in strategic administrative and military positions during the closing decades of the 16th century can easily demonstrate our point. The bailo was no short of compatriots in Istanbul: the omnipotent Chief White Eunuch of the Palace, Gazanfer Agha, the Ottoman Grand Admiral Hasan Veneziano, another eunuch Ömer Agha, originally from the Venetian island of Zara, certain influential women in the Ottoman palace with whom he had regular contact via intermediaries and a good number of key Ottoman officials who held key positions as governor-generals, governors, and commanders.⁵² Secondly, Istanbul's cosmopolitan social fabric paved the way for free exchange of information. Unlike other European capitals, it was an easy target, a Mecca for spies in European governments' employ. The Ottomans could only do so much in terms of controlling the exchange of information between countless foreigner visitors and communities of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds that resided in this gigantic early modern city. The Ottoman capital, an administrative and trade center, was also a "center of information."

Ambassadors played an important role in conducting secret diplomacy for their sovereigns; it was for a good reason that they were dubbed as honorable spies, *honorable espions*.⁵³ They recruited spies, procured informants in key positions in the Ottoman administrative and military structure, made necessary payments, gathered and processed information and then sent them in cipher by means of couriers to their governments. Occasionally, they themselves acted as spies, keeping each other under close surveillance, striving to capitalize on social acquaintances and use official visits for laying their hands on classified information. Moreover, they closely watched enemy spy activity and informed their governments of Ottoman spies who left Istanbul for gathering information in Europe or spies in the employ of other European powers gathering information in Istanbul. Finally, these ambassadors strove hard to maintain a strong image for their sovereigns and tried to manipulate the Ottoman perception of their governments. Thus they engaged in disinformation and became a part of the Ottoman decision-making process.

Even though ambassadors played a pivotal role in leading intelligence networks, their presence was not a *sine qua non* condition. Even those European powers that did not have a resident ambassador in Istanbul employed a number of spies, relying mostly on go-betweens that traveled between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean. One good example would be the Spanish intelligence network in Istanbul, operational after the 1560s, which was composed of entrepreneurial go-betweens who convinced the Catholic King of the value of their services. These Christian merchants and renegades in the Ottoman Navy and the Arsenal not only regularly provided Madrid, Messina and Naples with information regarding political and military developments in the Ottoman

⁵² Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, "Veneziani a Costantinopoli alla fine del XVI secolo", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 15 (1997): 67-84; Eric Dursteler, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁵³ The term was coined by François de Callières, a writer and a diplomat in Ludovican France. *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains* (Amsterdam: La compagnie, 1716), p. 30.

capital but also engaged in several clandestine operations such as torching the Arsenal and the Ottoman fleet, securing by means of bribes the defection of prominent Ottoman grandees to the Spanish side and arranging the assassination of key political figures acting against Spanish interests in the Ottoman capital.⁵⁴

In light of the numerous types of formal, informal, and covert exchange that took place in the Ottoman capital, Constantinople/Istanbul must be seen as a center of diplomacy and espionage as much as it was an administrative and trade center. Countless diplomats as well as their households and the spies they employed contributed to the city's imperial grandeur and multicultural character. Their presence definitely determined Pera's "Frankish" character, while their activities helped bridge the cultural differences between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe.

⁵⁴ Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Espionage in the 16th century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean go-betweens and the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry" (Ph.D. Diss., Georgetown University, 2012), Chapter Five.