

## Dragomans' Careers: Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829

[Alexander H. de Groot](#)

### The French Revolution and the Levant

International relations underwent great changes in the Levant as a result of the policies of France after the Revolution of 1789. The French Republic and the Empire of Napoleon disturbed long established political relations and brought about a reversal of alliances and conflicts. Great Britain's role expanded from a mainly commercial presence into a dominant political influence. Holland which, while a republic, had been able to maintain, at least formally, the status of a great power, declined to a power of the second rank at best, with a reduced commercial importance in the Levant.

Anglo-Dutch relations in the Ottoman Empire dated back to the formative period of the expansion of the two countries in the Mediterranean world in the sixteenth century. England established its position by the grant of privileges, the so-called capitulations of May 1580. Dutch merchants were granted a capitulation for their group privately in 1598. The Dutch Republic as a whole acquired its capitulations in July 1612. Commercial rivalry with the English and other nations had been one of the factors which had brought the Dutch to the southern and eastern Mediterranean in the first place - to the Levant and Barbary, the Middle East and North Africa under Ottoman rule.

Rivals in trade, the English and the Dutch had tended to be friends and allies in their struggle with the common foe, Roman Catholic Spain and Habsburg power, enemies they shared with the Ottomans. The presence of the two leading Protestant powers was welcomed for that reason by the Sublime Porte, as well as on account of their commercial importance and naval potential.

A major change in Anglo-Dutch relations occurred with the proclamation of the Batavian Republic in 1795. The Dutch then became a client state of France, Great Britain's enemy. In 1806 the Napoleonic Kingdom of Holland was created, and in 1810 Holland was annexed by Napoleon and remained an integrated part of the French Empire until 1814. The old commercial rivalry became linked with political hostility at home as well as in the Levant.

As a rule social and cultural relations between the Dutch and the English in the Ottoman lands were not broken off by political upheavals. Life in Istanbul and the other so-called Factories of the Levant, the trading centres visited by West European merchants ever since the time of the Crusades ( *scali* in Italian, *Echelles du Levant* in French, *Schalen van de Levant* in Dutch ), remained, as always, based upon the implicit and explicit solidarity of western expatriates in an eastern land, of western Christians ('Franks') in a Muslim ('Turkish') environment deemed hostile, at least in a moral sense. On a more concrete level the English and the Dutch both had the legal status of capitulatory powers in the Ottoman domains. They shared most legal, fiscal and economic privileges granted to them as recognized friends of the 'Grand Signior', the Ottoman Sultan. They lived in the same neighbourhoods of the same towns. Plying their trade on the same quaysides, they had to confront the same Ottoman authorities, the same *cadi*, customs officers and tax farmers, on matters of common interest. In some places the English and the Dutch continued to share the same consulate - for instance

in Barbary, Egypt, the Dardanelles, Salonica and Zante.

In the late eighteenth century, however, a new political division occurred between the Frankish communities, the so-called 'nations'. On the one side there were the French with their client states and allies - Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Spain, as well as the former republics of Venice (until 1797) with its territories along the Adriatic shore and its island possessions such as the Ionian Islands, Genoa (until 1797) and Ragusa (which was annexed in 1806, although it was in fact a tributary Ottoman territory up to that date). On the other were the states that joined the coalitions against France: Great Britain, the Emperor (Austria), Prussia, Naples ('The Two Sicilies') and, at times, Russia.

An interesting side effect of the split in western solidarity in Istanbul was that, by remaining neutral, the Sublime Porte could benefit from the advantage of a new balance of information about European international relations and policies. This was the time of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) and Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), who inaugurated the era of Ottoman reform. During the rule of Selim III Ottoman diplomacy was set on a new footing and the principle of reciprocity in bilateral political as well as commercial relations was introduced. Embassies, legations and consulates were established in western capitals - in London, for example, an embassy was founded in 1794 and in Amsterdam a consulate in 1804. At the Porte the office of the Reis-Efendi, originally that of the Reis ül-Küttab or secretary general of the government, developed into a ministry of foreign affairs. The Sultan convened an advisory council on European affairs, its members familiarizing themselves with matters by reading European newspapers such as the Journal de Francfort. This new approach already bore fruit during the negotiations of the Peace of the Dardanelles in 1808-1809. The British plenipotentiary Robert Adair had to digest the fact that his Ottoman counterpart, Mehmed Emin Wahid Efendi, turned out to have much more recent information than he on international events in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

The main source of political information for the Porte, however, remained the foreign diplomats resident in Istanbul, who competed in providing the latest news and commentaries, needless to say in their own interest. The vehicles of this stream of information were the dragomans, in fact usually the 'first dragoman', the main political adviser of any ambassador, and, on the receiving end, the 'Grand Dragoman', the dragoman of the Porte who was the right-hand man of the Reis-Efendi. The foreign diplomats resident in the Ottoman lands usually stayed too short a time to be able to set up an informers' network of their own. The dragomans, locally established as they were, profited from the existing collegial and family networks, the result of generations of intermarriage and social intercourse among the small number of Levantine Roman Catholic Latins, Uniate Greeks and Catholic Armenians who, by this time, had more or less been able to monopolize the important dragoman positions in all embassies, ousting their Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Gregorian Armenian competitors. Such, at least, was the case in the Ottoman capital. In the other factories of the Levant, such as Aleppo, Cyprus, Izmir, and Salonica, the Latin dragomans' monopoly did not obtain and Greek Orthodox (that is to say 'Greeks', Slavonians and 'Arabs'), Gregorian Armenians and Jews held the position of protégés and active dragomans.

### The embassies

A short survey of the ambassadors of Great Britain, Holland and - for comparative

---

1. Allan Cunningham, Edward Ingram ed., Anglo-Ottoman Encounters in the Age of Revolution. Collected essays, Vol1 (London 1993), pp.103-43, esp. 116.

purposes- France should illustrate the point. The French embassy ranked first in Ottoman Protocol because the French had been seen as the sultan's oldest European friends ever since the alliance concluded in 1534 resulted in a permanent French embassy in 1535. The break with this age-old diplomatic tradition by revolutionary France in 1798 caused the great upheaval and lasting change in diplomatic relations which raised the British embassy to its position of prominence in Istanbul.

First, the British embassy. Eleven British diplomatic representatives succeeded each other at the Sublime Porte in this period, from about 1785 to 1829. Sir Robert Ainslie arrived in 1776 and remained until 1794, an exceptionally long tenure, even for that time.<sup>2</sup> He was succeeded by Robert Liston, who arrived in May 1794 and left in November of the following year.<sup>3</sup> Spencer Smith, secretary of embassy, acted as chargé d'affaires from 1795 to 1799 and formed local attachments by marrying the younger daughter of the Imperial Internuncio (a diplomatic rank equivalent to that of ambassador), Philipp Baron Herbert von Rathkeal (a descendant of an old Roman Catholic Scottish family long since emigrated and former dragoman in the same embassy).<sup>4</sup>

The Earl of Elgin (renowned for the 'Marbles' he took back to London) was ambassador from November 1799 to January 1803, when his secretary, Alexander Straton, remained as chargé d'affaires. The next ambassador, William Drummond, resided at the Porte from May 1803 to January 1804. He was followed by Charles Arbuthnot, who served as ambassador from 1804 to 1807. On 29 January of that year, however, he was ordered to break off diplomatic relations. The Sultan had declared war on Russia, at that time an ally of England in the coalition against Napoleon. There ensued a state of hostility between the English and the Turks who had entertained peaceful relations uninterruptedly since 1578. The rupture was formally ended by the arrival of Robert Adair as ambassador after his successful negotiation of the Peace of the Dardanelles. He stayed from 1809 to 1810.<sup>5</sup>

Adair's successor and former secretary of embassy only ranked as a minister-resident. This was Stratford Canning, the future Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe (1852), who was, in later years, to become the most famous and most influential British ambassador ever to reside on the shores of the Bosphorus. Appointed again, with the rank of envoy, from 1825 to 1829, he was ambassador from 1832 to 1833 and from 1841 till 1857.<sup>6</sup> In 1812 he was succeeded by Sir Robert Liston, who had been knighted in the meantime and remained ambassador until 1820, with a short leave of absence in 1816 when Bartholomew Frere was chargé d'affaires. From 1820 to 1824, the years of the Greek Revolt, Viscount Strangford was ambassador.<sup>7</sup>

The chronicle of the Dutch diplomatic representation in Istanbul offers a somewhat different picture. On 24 August 1785 the last ambassador appointed by the States General of the Republic of the United Provinces arrived at the Sublime Porte, Baron Frederik Gysbert

---

2. Ali Ihsan Bagis, *Britain and the Struggle for the Integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Sir Robert Ainslie's Embassy to Istanbul 1776-1794* (Istanbul 1984), pp.23-130.

3. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, pp.51-130.

4. William St Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles* (London 1967, 1983 2)), pp.202.

5. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, pp.103-143.

6. *Ibidem*, pp.144-187.

7. *Ibidem*, pp.188-232.

van Dedem van de Gelder.<sup>8</sup> Despite a number of interruptions and absences he was not to leave for good until 1808. During his leave from 1793 to 1796 two chargés d'affaires were appointed together, Jan Pieter Panchaud, a Dutch Levant merchant long established in the Ottoman capital and Dr. Rodolphe Braggiotti, a medical doctor and an expert on Ottoman state institutions, first dragoman of the embassy since 1667 and a member of an old Izmir family of dragomans. In 1799 the Porte, under pressure from the British, then in a state of war with the Dutch who had in the meantime been transformed into the Batavian Republic (1795-1806), ordered the Dutch embassy to be formally closed, a momentous event after two centuries of unbroken diplomatic relations. The Turks softened the blow by allowing the two principal dragomans to stay in function and the ambassador to reside in Bucharest, the capital of the Ottoman tributary principality of Walachia and thus still within the borders of the Sultan's domain. The significance of this diplomatic formula was that the Porte did not intend an irrevocable and formal severance of relations.

Sure enough, without having been recalled home, Van Dedem was back in 1802. During his leave of absence from 12 September 1803 to 23 June 1807, François Testa, chancellor of the embassy and dragoman since 1766, had acted as chargé d'affaires. From August 1806 to June 1807 the Dutch ambassadorship was usurped by the forceful French ambassador General Sebastiani. Upon his return Van Dedem was duly accredited by the King of Holland, Louis Napoleon. After Van Dedem's final departure Gaspard Testa, secretary of embassy and the younger brother of François Testa, was appointed chargé d'affaires on 26 December 1808. Gaspard Testa had begun his career in the Dutch service as *jeune de langues* (apprentice dragoman) in 1776. After Holland had been annexed to the French Empire the embassy was closed from 1810 to 1814. In 1813, upon receiving the news of the restoration of the House of Orange with the return of the Hereditary Prince of Orange as 'Sovereign Prince', Gaspard Testa took the initiative of reopening the Dutch embassy and negotiated his provisional recognition as protector of the Dutch and their interests in the Ottoman territories. He was formally appointed chargé d'affaires again in 1814 by the government of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands. At the same time he held the posts of treasurer, chancellor and second dragoman.<sup>9</sup> From 1825 till 1829, finally, Holland was again represented at the Porte by a full ambassador, Hugo Baron van Zuylen van Nijvelt. Gaspard Testa was appointed to succeed him, but only with the rank of minister-resident. He died at the age of seventy-seven on 16 April 1847. King William I had made him a baron as a reward for his long and loyal services just before he died.

Finally, the French. The active and aggressive policy of the French Republic and the empire of Napoleon in the Levant gave the French embassy in Istanbul a central position in all diplomatic activity involving the Ottoman Empire. The succession of French diplomatic representatives is a reflection of the state of their home government and of its highly fluctuating policies.<sup>10</sup>

From 1784 to 1792 the French ambassador to the Porte was Auguste Count Choiseul-

---

8. Jan Schmidt ed., *Per Koets naar Constantinopel. De Gezantschapsreis van Baron van Dedem van de Gelder naar Istanbul in 1785*, (Zutphen 1998) (=Werken Linschoten-Vereeniging XCVII).

9. J.G. Nanninga ed., *Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Levantschen Handel*, vol.4, 1765-1826, pt.2, ('s-Gravenhage 1966), pp.206 n3, 811 n11.

10. Jean-Louis Bacque-Grammont, Sinan Kunalp et Frédéric Hitzel, *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536-1991) et de la Turquie en France (1997-1991)* (Istanbul-Paris 1991), pp.37-56.

Gouffier. He was actually the last royal appointee of the ancien régime in this post. Continuing his duties during the early years of the Revolution, he refused to obey his recall after he was charged by the revolutionary tribunal in Paris, but resigned from the Porte and took refuge in Russia. The French 'nation' opted for the republican government of France in November 1792, in spite of the advice of the Porte. Finding themselves legally leaderless and consequently with the risk of losing their capitulatory privileges, the French chose a provisional chief from their midst. This was the retired dragoman Antoine Fonton who resigned in the following year when he found himself out of sympathy with the Jacobin enthusiasm of the majority of the 'nation' he had to protect - the 'Tree of Liberty' had actually been planted in the gardens of the Palais de France on 25 January 1793. After his resignation he acquired protection from the Imperial ambassador.<sup>11</sup> In April efforts were made by the former French dragoman Joseph Fonton to get Choiseul-Gouffier recognized as ambassador of the Dauphin or of the emigrated princes, the two brothers of Louis XVI. After some hesitation the Porte decided against this and preferred to remain neutral with regard to internal French questions.

On June 6, 1793 citoyen Descorches (the former Marquis Marie-Louis Descorches de Sainte Croix) arrived as an envoy extraordinary appointed by the Conseil Exécutif to prepare the way for a full ambassador of the new regime. He had to travel overland and incognito for fear of being taken prisoner or worse by the many enemies on the way. During the one year of his stay a second French chargé d'affaires turned up, having been appointed by the minister of foreign affairs. Citoyen Etienne-Félix Hénin was a staunch Jacobin. He committed himself to acting against his colleague who, although a competent patriot and propagandist of the revolutionary ideals, had a more moderate nature and was therefore less appreciated by the French extremists in Istanbul. Descorches was appointed full ambassador at a later date, in 1797 when he was actually living in France. He never could reach his post because of the crisis in Franco-Ottoman relations incurred by Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt and Hénin consequently stayed on until 1795.

On 12 April 1795 there arrived the envoy extraordinary and minister-resident Raymond Verninac. This diplomatist negotiated the Porte's recognition of the republican government of France and made futile efforts to conclude a treaty of alliance. He left Istanbul in 1797. General Annibal Jean-Baptiste Aubert-Dubayet, till then minister of war, was appointed ambassador by the Directory and arrived overland on 2 October 1796, bringing with him a company of horse artillery to demonstrate to the reforming sultan the advantages of an alliance with France. He died suddenly on 17 December 1797. General Jean-François Carra-Saint Cyr, another military member of the embassy subsequently appointed consul-general in Bucharest, a vital point for the exchange of political and military intelligence between Istanbul and the western capitals at the time, took over as chargé d'affaires.

After his departure on 1 July 1798 Pierre Ruffin, the senior member of the national dragoman corps which had received its training at the Ecole des Jeunes de Langues in Paris, was appointed chargé d'affaires in his turn. He had been active as a dragoman since 1752 and had now become the (French) 'Nestor of the Orient'. It was Ruffin who had to bear the brunt of Ottoman indignation at the French attack on Egypt. Soon after his appointment the Porte predictably declared war on France and once more pursued the traditional policy of imprisoning or interning the enemy ambassador, his 'embassy family' and all the 'nation'

---

11. E. de Marcère, Une ambassade à Constantinople. La politique orientale de la révolution française, 2vols. (Paris 1927), vol.1, p.35.

living within the borders of the Ottoman domains. Ruffin and some leading French personalities were incarcerated in the infamous castle of the Seven Towers in Istanbul which had been used for the same purpose in the past.

Peace was restored in 1802. The First Consul then appointed his former companion-at-arms from the Italian campaigns, General Brune, ambassador to the Porte. Brune arrived by sea on 6 January 1803, escorted by a naval division of eight sail intended to create the right impression once more. He left on 12 December 1804, however, in protest at his failure to obtain recognition by the Grand Signior (in Turkish: *padishah*) of the Emperor Napoleon's new title, to be rendered in Turkish as *imparator ve padishah*.

The ensuing interim period saw the arrival of Napoleon's favourite orientalist adviser and dragoman whom he learned to appreciate during the Egyptian Expedition, Pierre Amédée Jaubert (1779-1847), who came to announce to the sultan the accession to the imperial throne by the Emperor of the French on 12 April 1805. The new ambassador, General Count Horace Sebastiani, arrived on 10 August 1806. During the attack by the British fleet in February-March 1807 the ambassador, assisted by the other military members of his staff and some of the ambassadors of France's allies (although not by his Dutch colleague), successfully organised the defences of the Ottoman capital. After the fall of Sultan Selim III in 1807 Sebastiani asked to be recalled and requested an active command in the army. He left on 26 April 1808. His secretary of embassy, Florimond Marquis de Latour-Maubourg, stayed on as *chargé d'affaires* until 1812.

From 1812 to 1814 General Antoine François Andréossy was ambassador. Pierre Ruffin once again became *chargé d'affaires* in 1814 and 1815. This time he was again appointed by a king of France, but upon receiving the news of Napoleon's landing in the south of France (1 March 1815), the old man rallied to the Emperor and recognized Napoleon's appointee, his old student and colleague Jaubert, as the diplomatic representative of France. The effect of this initiative was Ruffin's instant dismissal from the diplomatic service by the King's minister of foreign affairs, Talleyrand, and his substitution as *chargé d'affaires* by the royalist Matthieu Deval, a dragoman and another former pupil of Ruffin's.

Louis XVIII's ambassador to the Porte, the Marquis de Rivière (a former royalist rebel who had fought in the Vendée and had been condemned to death but had had his sentence commuted to life imprisonment by Napoleon twelve years previously), exercised his function from 4 June 1816 until his recall in 1820, when he brought the Venus of Milo to Paris. After a short interval during which Count Viella was *chargé d'affaires*, the Marquis de Latour-Maubourg returned to Istanbul, this time as full ambassador. He stayed from 1821 until he was recalled in 1823 after a protocollary conflict with the Porte. From 1824 to 1831 the ambassador was General Count Guillemot, a man with some previous experience of the Levant as a diplomatic observer of the Turco-Russian armistice negotiations at Slobosia in August 1807. He too was recalled in disgrace for showing too much personal initiative in handing a note to the Sublime Porte asking the Ottomans to keep an army ready to intervene on behalf of France in a Russo-French war he deemed to be imminent.

This brief survey shows that French diplomacy in Istanbul was subject to a great number of political and personal vicissitudes. Contrary goals were pursued within a short period of time. The French dragomans must often have had a hard time in explaining away the actions of their employers. The result was a severe strain on their loyalty and, between 1793 and 1814, there was many a change of status when a French protégé (*barattair*) or dragoman opted for the protection of another capitulatory power or even for direct Ottoman subjecthood (styled 'Ottoman protection' in the contemporary sources).

## Anglo-Dutch Relations in Istanbul 1785-1829

Neither Holland nor England had pursued many active policies in the Ottoman world until the the period under discussion. The unprovoked French military invasion of Ottoman Egypt and Syria in 1798 was the event that propelled the Ottoman Empire into the centre of the ongoing international conflicts of European policy. It entailed a direct and lasting British political interest in the area and consequently marked the beginning of the complex involvement with Russia's aggressive policy in the Middle East and Central Asia throughout the nineteenth century, the 'Great Game'.

A common Anglo-Dutch political interest in the Levant was merely a modest part of the tradition of mediation between the Sultan and his European enemies, the Emperor of Austria and the Czar. The Ottoman government still regarded the Dutch Republic as a major power and thus as a suitable mediator. Reminding the authorities of the successful mediations of 1699 and 1718, the Dutch ambassador informed the Porte on 8 November 1789 that the States General were ready to mediate, together with Great Britain and Prussia, in order to end the war between the Ottomans and the Russians and Austrians (1787-1792). At first the Porte refused this offer. Then, in October 1790, Ambassador Van Dedem, like his English colleague, was invited by the Grand Vizier to attend the peace conference at Sistova and to act as mediator between Sultan and Emperor. In the end, however, Van Dedem, to his great mortification, did not go, for the States General had appointed his colleague in Vienna and predecessor in Istanbul from 1778 to 1784, Reinier van Haeften van Ophemert. Nevertheless Van Dedem had to lend his colleague the services of his junior dragoman, François Testa, for the duration of the conference at Sistova in 1791. The British government appointed Sir Robert Keith as its plenipotentiary and with him the Dutch diplomat had to cooperate closely.<sup>12</sup>

The repercussions of the French Revolution had by now been noticed in Istanbul. In 1793 the new regime dispatched an extraordinary envoy and modern style propagandist, and the majority of the French 'nation', together with a number of the members of the English and Dutch 'nations', turned Jacobin. The Dutch ambassador, Van Dedem, had long sympathized with the French revolutionary ideals. He was known at home as a so-called 'Patriot', a francophile politician.<sup>13</sup> Before his appointment as ambassador he had been a prominent member of the States General, but in 1785 he had thought he should abandon the scene of domestic politics. His ambition was to be Dutch ambassador in the United States of America. This favour was denied him by his political rivals in The Hague, however, and he was offered the embassy at the Porte instead. His French sympathies came to the fore after the departure of the royalist French ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier in 1792.<sup>14</sup>

The British chargé d'affaires Spencer Smith qualified his Dutch colleague as 'a vile

---

12. ARA, Legatiearchief Turkije (LAT), number 806 [Van Dedem to States General of 29-8, 8-10, 12-10-1790]; ARA Collectie Van der Spiegel, number 172 [Van der Spiegel to Van Haeften of 19-8-1790].

13. [E. Lecky-de Dedem ed.], *Memoires du general Baron de Dedem de Gelder 1774-1825*, (Paris 1900), 5-7 (the memoirs of the ambassador's son Anthony Boldewijn van Dedem (1774-1825)).

14. ARA Collectie Van Dedem van de Gelder (Aanwinsten 1931), numbers 41-51 ( Journals kept by François Testa) *id.* 8-12, 9-12, 29-12-1792.

revolutionary character and incorrigible apostate' in 1799.<sup>15</sup> In another despatch Ambassador Liston called him a Jacobin as well as many Britons, the Spanish Envoy and the Swedish counsellor of legation and dragoman. This last personality was, of course, the famous dragoman and future Swedish envoy of Catholic Armenian origin, Muradca Tosunyan (Mouradgea d'Ohsson in French), who had returned recently from Paris where he had been engaged between 1787 and 1790 in supervising the production of his famous Tableau général de l'Empire Ottoman, the folio edition of which is one of the most splendid works ever produced on the history of the Ottoman state institutions. At the transformation of the Dutch republic into the Batavian Republic in 1795 Van Dedem, known for his French sympathies, was retained in his post by the new government. Anglo-Dutch relations could obviously not prosper in such circumstances. In the domain of commerce the old rivalry subsisted. As of old, Dutch enterprise followed the English at a distance. Competition was evident from Van Dedem's negotiations at the Porte in 1802 when he endeavoured to gain effectively the privilege of navigation in the Black Sea which had already been granted to the Dutch on paper in their first capitulation of 1612. In this matter he was following the initiatives of the British and the French.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the Napoleonic era, in 1814, the new government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands instructed its chargé d'affaires at the Porte, (again) Gaspard Testa, to cooperate with the British ambassador, (again) Liston. This was a dubious policy in view of the old commercial rivalry of the two states in the Levant. The British hardly put themselves out to help their junior ally and competitor in trade.

In 1815 Testa, who had already reopened the Dutch embassy, was also formally recognized by the Sublime Porte as the representative of the new Netherlands government. The Sultan, however, did not as yet acknowledge the heir of the Stadtholders of the Dutch Republic as King of the Netherlands. The Dutch trusted that their oldest ally would help them in this diplomatic matter, but Ambassador Liston appeared to suffer the delay of this solution with great equanimity. When, on 20 November 1815, the Second Peace of Paris was concluded between France and the Allied Powers, the Reis-Efendi made a démarche in favour of the Dutch. The British chargé d'affaires also took some supportive steps in 1816, but the Porte still did not change its mind. At the time the Dutch and the English were united in real political friendship, evidence of which was their combined action before Algiers on 27 August 1816, when an Anglo-Dutch fleet bombarded the city. The Levant, however, appeared to be a different, closed circuit, as it always had been in the history of European diplomatic relations. In the end it was the Russian ambassador Stroganoff who successfully intervened in 1818 to assist the Dutch who had become his special friends since the marriage of the Dutch heir-apparent, the Prince of Orange, with the Grand Duchess Anna Pawlowna, sister of the Czar. The Porte issued the ferman notifying the recognition of the title of the King of the Netherlands in November 1818. The affair was handled by the respective dragomans,

---

15. Norman Daniel, Islam Europe and Empire, (Edinburgh 1966), 86 ( citing Spencer Smith to Lord Minto ( at the time minister in Vienna ) d.d. 25-8-1799 in Minto Papers no. 121 in National Library of Scotland MSS and id. to id. 25-8-1798 in Records Foreign Office. General Correspondence before 1906: Original Correspondence Turkey 1780-1905 F.O.78, no.19 Public Record Office London).

16. Nanninga, op.cit., pt 1, pp.197-8 (1775), 378, 381 n2 (1786), 435, 447 n2, 528 (1793), 663, 672 n2 (1803); Kemal Beydilli, 'Karadeniz'in Kapalılığı karşısında Avrupa küçük Devletleri ve 'Miri Ticaret Tesebbüsü', in BELLETEREN LV/S. 214 (Ankara 1991), pp.690,706,722-728; Alexander H. de Groot, The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic (Istanbul-Leiden 1978), pp.122, 304.

Franchini of Russia and Giustiniani of Holland.<sup>17</sup>

During the years of the Greek Revolt, from 1821 to 1829, Anglo-Dutch friendship could manifest itself once more in a positive sense. At times the relations between the Porte and the three philhellenic powers, Russia, France and Great Britain, became very strained. Recurrent conflicts incurred the frequent absence of the British and Russian ambassadors, and the temporary closure of the three embassies. On such occasions the Dutch ambassador stepped in to represent the interests of Great Britain and the two other powers at the Sublime Porte.<sup>18</sup>

The revolutionary changes taking place in Europe between 1785 and 1829 were reflected in Istanbul and elsewhere in the Levant by the vicissitudes in the careers of the dragomans serving the embassies and consulates of the western powers. These years were also the early period of Ottoman reform, of the westernization of state institutions and diplomatic usage. The sultans Selim III and Mahmud II gave the impetus to this process of modernization. Consequently changes occurred in the nature of the relations of the Ottomans with the capitulatory powers. The Porte gradually began to reinterpret the purport of the capitulations and to insist upon the reduction of the numbers of foreign protégés and the introduction of the principle of reciprocity in its foreign relations. These were developments which affected the character and the scope of the work of the dragomans.

Another result of the revolutionary changes in international relations in Europe was the disappearance of some of the oldest established capitulatory powers and the consequent closure of their embassies and consular posts. The end of the Republic of Venice in 1797 brought about a major alteration in the diplomatic landscape of the Levant. Venice was the oldest capitulatory power of all. Until the end the Serenissima had maintained its extensive network of Levantine consulates. The embassy in Istanbul, headed by the Bailo, remained a prime centre of information on the affairs of the Ottoman Empire and its friends or enemies - two categories which were always difficult to distinguish. Poland also fell away in 1795 and its ambassadors disappeared from Istanbul. The Republic of Genoa, another ancient holder of capitulatory privileges, was transformed out of all recognition and ceased sending representatives to the Ottoman capital. The Ottoman tributary republic of Ragusa also used to appoint consuls and dragomans in the Levant and maintained a representative at the Porte whose position, for all practical purposes, was similar to that of his colleagues of sovereign states. Its annexation by the French empire in 1807 left another void in the *corps diplomatique* of Istanbul. The French annexation of Holland and Tuscany, the transformations in countries such as Spain and Naples, all had consequences for the foreign 'nations' and their protégés in Ottoman territory.

The disappearance of so many sovereign states and their representations in Istanbul also entailed a general alteration in the conditions of employment of the dragomans concerned. Only in some exceptional cases were 'dynasties' or branches of great dragoman families spared a change in the protected status of their members. Dragomans frequently moved from one protector to one or more different protectors in this period. Sometimes we even see that a particular dragoman saved his position by reverting to what is called 'Ottoman

---

17. Ludy Giebels, 'De Erkenning van de Koningstitel van Willem I door de Hoge Porte 1814-1819' in A.H. de Groot ed., *Het Midden-Oosten en Nederland in Historisch Perspectief*, (Muiderberg 1989), pp.101-122.

18. B.J Slot, 'De diplomatieke Betrekkingen tussen Nederland en het Osmaanse Rijk' in H. Theunissen et al. eds., *Topkapi en Turkomanie*, (Amsterdam 1989), p.16.

protection' in the contemporary records, that is simple Ottoman subjecthood. The survival of the family and its network always appears to have counted most when opting for a new status. There was no national allegiance in the modern sense of the term among native subjects in the Ottoman world until the second half of the nineteenth century. The collectivity of the dragomans seems already to have existed informally or even partially, a prelude to developments of the late nineteenth century when the diplomatic arena of the Ottoman capital was practically ruled by the authority of the so-called 'Dragomans' Conference' which imposed a uniform and collective application of the capitulations on the Ottoman government.<sup>19</sup>

### The Dragoman Dynasties

A small number of families living in the Ottoman capital for generations already dominated diplomatic life in Istanbul on a local level. They were 'Latins', in other words Ottoman subjects obedient to the Roman Catholic Church. Their origins were 'Frankish', West European, mainly Italian (Venetian and Genoese), and their ancestors had settled in the Levant in the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, residing in the trading centres of 'European and Asiatic Turkey', on the islands of the Archipelago, such as Mitylene, Scio, Naxos, Milo, Syra, and above all in the Ottoman capital. The so-called Levantines mixed freely with later newcomers from the west. 'Frango-Perotes' was another name for them, their favoured place of residence being Pera, next to the centre of trade, Galata. These were the quarters of Istanbul where most Franks resided - Ottoman natives as well as foreigners who included all the western ambassadors with their families and staff. Then there were the immigrants belonging to the Uniate Roman Catholic Churches of the East, Greeks and Armenians, who joined them by way of business association and marriage. According to a contemporary observer who was himself a member of this class 'Pera was a colony involving all kinds of political intrigues, quite outside the purview of the blind Sublime Porte'. A centre of political intelligence and commercial information, it was certainly a place where agents were often double or triple agents working in an environment characterized by multiple family links.<sup>20</sup>

The more hospitable embassies had a better chance of obtaining the information and services they needed from their Levantine associates. Thus the French embassy, headed by the chargé d'affaires Latour-Maubourg (1808-1812), had an advantage over the British one of Adair. The Russian embassy possessed an alternative network of informants. The Orthodox Greek religion linked it with the local Greek aristocracy established around the patriarchate of the Orthodox Church (the Phanar palace in the centre of old Istanbul), and thus referred to as the 'Phanariots'. From among these families the Porte recruited its principal dragomans, the Dragoman of the Porte (the 'Grand Dragoman'), the Dragoman of the Fleet (serving the admiralty), and the rulers ('despot', 'hospodar') of the two tributary principalities, Walachia and Moldavia. According to the aforesaid contemporary Levantine observer, himself a member of the Pisani dynasty of Latin dragomans at the time in the service of the Russian embassy, the Phanariots ended up by being more pro-Ottoman than pro-Russian. Their Ottoman status gave them more freedom of action than would an all-out allegiance to Russian

---

19. S.G. Marghetich, *Etude sur les fonctions des drogman des missions diplomatiques ou consulaires en Turquie* (Constantinople 1898 = repr.ed. Istanbul 1993), pp.32-36.

20. Boris Mouravieff, *L'alliance russo-turque au milieu des guerres napoléoniennes* (Neuchatel 1954), pp.233, 238-240, 299.

protection or even Russian nationality, although Ottoman freedom might sometimes end in the summary execution of a luckless official.

The most effective intermediary agents were the Levantines 'in Frankish dress', the members of the great dragoman families. Our Levantine spokesman gives the following panorama of Perot society:

- 'Kiriko [Chirico], formerly the representative of Ragusa at the Porte, a merchant whose brother is Russian consul-general in Bucharest and had previously been a dragoman in the service of the French Embassy. He has one son in French, and one in Russian, service.

- Madame 'la générale' Pisani [i.e. the mother of our spokesman whose husband, employed in the Russian diplomatic service, ranked as general in the bureaucratic hierarchy], a good hostess, a leading figure in society, and pro-Russian.

- Mesdames Fonton, great hostesses but unpopular with the French embassy [because almost all dragomans of this great family opted for Russian protection as a result of the revolutionary upheavals in the French 'nation'].

- the keeper of the English inn at Büyükdere [a village on the Bosphorus where many summer residences of the ambassadors and the Levantine families were situated], a man of Greek origin educated in England, formerly in English service, but now a Russian agent.

- the Franchini brothers, French dragomans, the most prominent spies of Pera, very devoted [Eugene and Antoine Franchini began their career as dragomans of Venice. In 1797 they went over to French protection and entered French service. Later in 1816 one of them passed into Russian service as dragoman].

- Baron Hübsch [senior], the envoy of Denmark and Saxony, a respectable old man born and bred in Pera [merchants and bankers of long standing, running the Galata-based firm of Hübsch and Timoni], and a personal friend of Sultan Selim. A good conversationalist, he had a low opinion of the Ottoman potential and now stands under the direct influence of the French embassy but would prefer to have back his former independence.

- Baron Hübsch [junior], his eldest son, ambitious, pro-French, indiscreet, spreading rumours among the embassies. Both Hübsches have access to highly placed Ottomans, such as the Grand Admiral [the title Baron Hübsch von Grossthal was conferred upon Friedrich Hübsch by the Emperor Joseph II in 1782, 'Grossthal' being the rendering of the toponym of Hübsch Senior's summer resort, Büyükdere].

An even fuller picture of the diplomatic scene of the period, which reflects the state of the corps diplomatique in Istanbul before the upheaval of Dutch diplomatic relations under the influence of French revolutionary policies, can be gained from a list of the guests of the Dutch ambassador and Baroness van Dedem at a dinner and ball at the 'Palais de Hollande' in honour of the Polish ambassador Count Potocki on 5 May 1790. It was provided by one of the dragomans 'at the late hour of 17 hours 30'.<sup>21</sup>

---

21. 'Count Choiseul-Gouffier and son; Sir Robert Ainslie; Niccolo Foscarini, the bailo of Venice; son and daughter of the hosts; Colonel Baron Friedrich von Knobelsdorff, the Prussian minister [to be the son-in-law of Van Dedem after 8 January 1791]; Count Wilhelm Moritz Ludolf, the minister of Naples; Count Boulogny [senior], the minister of Spain; Casimir and Felix Potocki, sons of the guest of honour; Colonel Baron Georg Joseph von Brentano, Swedish military attaché; Baroness Ruffrey, wife of the French consul at Enos; Pietro Zaguri, Venetian nobleman and senator; thirteen Polish noblemen of the embassy; Schianoski, counsellor of the Polish embassy; Bartolomeo Pisani, secretary of the British embassy; Antonio Quirini, secretary of the bailo; Picqot, secretary of the Prussian minister; Count Giacomo Marini, secretary of the minister of Naples [married to a daughter of the former imperial dragoman Franz Baron Thugut, Austrian Chancellor of State from 1794 to 1800 and father-in-law to be of the Dutch

## Changes in dragomans' careers. Selected cases

An analysis of the changes in employment of the dragomans in Istanbul since 1793 based on the composition of the various embassy staffs would be highly repetitive and confusing. It is therefore better to give a limited number of illustrative cases of leading dragoman dynasties. This analysis will be presented per family or family branch, covering the period from 1785 to 1829. The families selected for the wide extension of their networks are the Testas, of Genoese origin, established in Istanbul since before 1453; the Pisanis, originating from Scio (Chios, the former Genoese trading colony), and Venetian Crete, in Istanbul since about 1669; the Fontons, of French origin, established in Pera since about 1686; and the Chaberts, likewise of French origin, living in Istanbul since about 1660.

Members of the Testa family were serving as dragomans in the embassies of the Emperor, France, Venice, Prussia, Tuscany and Holland. Bartolomeo Testa (1723-1812) served the Imperial embassy as dragoman for about sixty years and may be considered the founding father of an Austrian national branch of the family, providing dragomans and subsequently career diplomats for the service of the Empire in the nineteenth century. His wife, Thérèse Fonton, was a daughter of the French dragoman Pierre Fonton. Bartolomeo Testa received an Austrian knighthood in 1783 and was made a baron by Emperor Francis II in 1803, which is how these Testas became naturalized in the modern sense of the word. His sons were all Austrian dragomans: Henri (1763-1789), dragoman in the Austrian army, and Gaspard (1777-1814), a *jeune de langues* (*Sprachknabe*). Henri's son Barthélemy (1788-1849) was a dragoman and diplomat. Of Gaspard's sons Barthélemy (1804-1859) was dragoman and counsellor of legation in Florence; Henri (1807-1876) was dragoman and then minister-resident in Hamburg and envoy in Athens; and Ignace (1812-1873) was chancellor and chargé d'affaires of Tuscany in Istanbul.

The Dutch branch was founded by Giacomo (Jacques) Testa (1725-1804), married first to Lucia Fonton and then to Marie Cingria. He was first dragoman of Holland. His sons François (1765-1826) and Gaspard (1707-1847) succeeded him in that capacity. Both François and Gaspard were chargés d'affaires at times - an appointment of great significance to dragomans, for it meant their entry into the regular diplomatic service of the country for which they were working. Gaspard Testa crowned his career by becoming minister-resident and hereditary baron in the Kingdom of the Netherlands which entailed the naturalization of his descendants as Dutchmen. His sons, François, Dominique and Emile, were dragomans and then career diplomats in Dutch service. Remarkably enough, another son, Paul, was appointed Ottoman consul in Brussels. This seems to imply some sort of 'turkification' and the reversal of the original protection by the Dutch.

Other Testas descended from a François Testa (1717-1787) who was the physician of the French school for *jeunes de langues* in Pera. His wife was a born Fornetti (a long established Levantine family of dragomans of France). His descendants included Charles (1753-1827), who was second dragoman of the French embassy and later passed into Swedish

---

dragoman Gaspard Testa]; Colonel Von Goetze, a Prussian military attaché and secret agent; Colonel Maret, French military attaché; Rodolphe Braggiotti, First Dragoman of the Dutch embassy; François Testa, chancellor and former dragoman of the Dutch embassy; (Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, the minister of Prussia could not attend) - [why the Imperial *internuncio* did not attend is not mentioned]. ARA Collectie Van Dedem van de Gelder (Aanwinsten 1931), nos 54-60 (Journals kept by François Testa 1792-1793); ARA *idem* (Aanwinsten 1913), no 9 (Journals kept by Gaspard Testa 1790, 1792).

service. His sons became dragomans of Sweden and of Austria and Tuscany, their careers showing the familiar Levantine-cosmopolitan and non-national pattern of the *ancien régime* in Istanbul.<sup>22</sup>

The marriage connections creating and maintaining the Testa family network include the following names of well-known dragoman dynasties : Fornetti (France), Fonton (France, Russia), Fleurat (France), Dantan (France), Marini (Naples), Salzani (Naples, Holland) and Duzoghlu (France, Russia - a Catholic Armenian family). In the next generation we have Boscovitch (Ragusa, Prussia), Pisani (Venice, England, Russia), Hübsch (Denmark), Fonton again, Dane (Venice, England), Stuermer ( Austria), Beneveni (Ottoman Latins from Ragusa) and Testa (Holland and other branches). In the third generation we find the names of Chabert von Ostland (France, Austria, England), Chirico (Ragusa, England, Russia) and Giustiniani (Ottoman Latins, originally Genoese from Chios [Scio]).

According to the English ambassador Robert Adair, the Pisanis were 'an ancient and honourable family', but according to another ambassador, Stratford Canning, they were 'mongrels'.<sup>23</sup> The Pisani dynasty of dragomans was well established in Istanbul. They allied themselves with the leading Frango-Perot families such as the Testas, as well as with French families which came to Istanbul during the eighteenth century - the Chaberts and the Fontons, for example.

The Pisanis provided dragomans for the British embassy. Since the time of Henry Greville, ambassador from 1761 to 1765, they served eleven ambassadors in unbroken succession. The exceptions were one who worked for the *Reis-Efendi*, in other words for the Ottoman foreign office, in 1777, and Nicoló Pisani (1743-1819) who was first dragoman at the Russian embassy. Stefano Pisani (d. 1797) died as first dragoman of the English embassy. His brother Bartolomeo (d. 1826) was dragoman as well as treasurer and secretary, and rose to the position of chargé d'affaires under Lord Elgin, thus entering the regular diplomatic service in 1799. Antonio, Frederick and the *giovane di lingua* Etienne (1823-1834) belong to later generations, as does Count Alexander Pisani (1802-1886).

The Pisani family network was based on marriages connecting them with prominent dragoman dynasties such as Crutta (attached to the embassies of Poland, France and England), Fonton, Timoni ( an 'English' family of Venetian-Perot origin), Hübsch, Klezl (an Austrian dragoman family flourishing in the nineteenth century), Chabert, and, albeit only on a couple of occasions, Testa. Has the rarity of their connections with the Testa family anything to do with the long established Anglo-Dutch commercial rivalry in the Levant? Up to the period of revolutionary change here under discussion the main task of both embassies was, after all, the promotion of trade.

During these years of changing diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire and between the European powers themselves upheavals occurred in the allegiance of the Pisanis. Since 1782 or even earlier Pisanis began to serve as dragomans in the Russian embassy, and a truly Russian branch of the dynasty developed.<sup>24</sup> Nicoló Pisani was first dragoman from 1782

---

22. Marie de Testa and Antoine Gautier, 'Les drogmans au service de la France au Levant' in *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* (Paris 1991), pp.7-101; *idem*, 'L'origine des dynasties de drogmans' in *Le Bulletin* (INALCO, Paris Octobre 1992), pp.3-12.

23. Allan Cunningham, *Eastern Questions in the nineteenth Century. Collected Essays. Vol. 2*, Edward Ingram ed., (London 1993), pp.1-22.

24. Nora Seni, 'Dynasties de drogmans et levantinisme à Istanbul' in Frederic Hitzel ed., *Istanbul et les langues orientales* (Paris, etc. 1997), pp.161-169.

to 1793, his son Paul (1786-1873) succeeding him. At the end of his career his rank in the Russian bureaucracy was 'actual councillor of State' and his function director of the commercial chancellery in Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> A Matthieu Pisani served as dragoman in 1812. In 1790 the Prussian envoy to the Porte, Von Diez, already qualified these Pisanis as 'Russes de coeur et d'âme'.<sup>26</sup>

Members of the Fonton dynasty were dragomans of the French embassy and consulates in the Levant. Antoine Fonton (1724-1802), first dragoman in 1771, retired honourably with the title of honorary secretary of embassy in 1785. As the senior member of the embassy staff at the time of the revolutionary crisis which split the French 'nation' in 1792, he was chosen by the Jacobin majority to be the provisional head, the legal head being the ambassador Choiseul-Gouffier who had been deposed by the majority. Fonton resigned his post as early as 1793 and settled in a private capacity in Pera where he remained until his death, having opted for Imperial protection. Jean Joseph Fonton (1747-1832) became 'drogman du palais' in 1780. From 1785 to 1790 he was adjunct to the first dragoman Fornetti and then gained the same rank himself. He resigned in 1793 and left the French for Russian protection. In 1795 he became a dragoman in the Russian embassy where he too rose to the first rank in 1802 and was employed as a plenipotentiary in the negotiations to end the Russo-Turkish war (1809-1812) which resulted in the Peace of Bucharest. The Czar rewarded his services with the grant of the title and bureaucratic rank of councillor of State (equivalent to the rank of general) and his family thus joined the Russian service nobility, becoming Russian nationals in the modern sense of the word. During his career he was assisted by his cousins Pierre (1764-1831(?)) and Antoine. In his previous career Pierre had been chancellor of the French embassy until 1793. In 1806 he rose to be second dragoman of the Russian embassy. He too was entrusted with diplomatic work at a high level. His sons, Félix-Antoine and Gaspard, followed him in Russian service. Gaspard Fonton, however, again became a French dragoman in 1816. Both Joseph and his nephew Pierre married daughters of the Ragusan-Latin Beneveni family of dragomans and physicians in Pera. The Fonton network includes further alliances with the dragoman dynasties of Pisani (twice), Testa (four times), Dantan (twice), Hübsch von Grossthal (twice) and Alléon.<sup>27</sup>

The last of our Levantine dynasties, the Chabert family, was of French origin and produced, besides dragomans, apothecaries, physicians and jewellers. Apart from their original status of French protégés, the Chaberts, by marrying into Catholic Armenian families as well as into leading Levantine ones, sometimes preferred to remain under direct 'Ottoman protection' as Latin subjects of the Sultan pursuing independent professional careers. Like members of the Beneveni family, they sometimes served as court physicians to the Sultans, a function in many respects equivalent to that of a high class dragoman, as is evident from a number of cases in the eighteenth century. In our period Catherine Chabert (1725-1793), a French protégée, married Count Wilhelm Moritz Ludolf, the minister of the King of the Two Sicilies (- Naples -), who himself had a successful dragoman's career behind him. Of their children Wilhelm (Guillaume) succeeded his father as Neapolitan envoy at the Porte; Wilhelmine married the French ambassador Count de Saint Priest, Choiseul-Gouffier's

---

25. *Almanach de Gotha pour l'année 1848* (Gotha 1847), pp.646-647.

26. J.W. Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, 8 vols. (Gotha 1840-1863), vol.6, p.757 n.1.

27. M. and A. Gautier, 'Jean-Joseph Fonton (1747-1832).I. Au service de la France' and II. Au service de la Russie' in *Le Bulletin* (INALCO, Paris Avril 1994), pp.45-81; *ibidem* (Novembre 1994), pp.37-74.

predecessor at the Porte; and the younger son, Charles, later became Imperial envoy in Stockholm and Copenhagen. Jean-Joseph Chabert (1727-1789), brother of Catherine, was first in Polish service and subsequently became dragoman of the Two Sicilies in about 1750. He married a Catholic Armenian, Lucie Tomagian. Their sons were dragomans of France, Naples, Poland, Great Britain and Austria. One of them, Thomas (1766-1841), became a distinguished Austrian orientalist. Having completed his dragoman training at the Oriental Academy of Vienna, he was appointed professor at his old school and an oriental interpreter in government service in Lower Austria. He worked together with the famous orientalist and historian of the Ottoman Empire Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), who himself began his career at the Vienna Oriental Academy and was thereupon employed as Sprachkna and subsequently as a dragoman and embassy councillor in the Ottoman Empire from 1797 to 1807. Together with the Austrian dragoman Franz von Dombay (1758-1810), they founded one of the earliest learned international orientalist journals, the Mines of the Orient, which appeared in Vienna from 1809 to 1818. Thomas Chabert was ennobled by the Emperor, and he and his male descendants were able, from 1840 onwards, to call themselves 'Chabert Ritter von Ostland'. His two sons were dragomans attached to the Imperial embassy in Istanbul. Another brother of his was a dragoman in the service of Poland.

Jean-Joseph's son Charles Chabert (1762-1819) first worked as dragoman of the French embassy and then held the same post at the consulates of Rosetta and Acre, after which he passed into the service of the Two Sicilies. The other son, François, was director of the Polish Oriental Academy in Pera (where he had been trained himself) from 1792 to 1795. On the closure of the embassy and the academy he took up employment as dragoman in the British embassy. He became first dragoman in 1824, when he succeeded his brother-in-law Barthélemy Pisani, and he retained his position until 1855. A younger brother, Antoine, was jeune de langues at the French embassy in 1790. Robert Chabert (1809-1856), son of François and Beatrice Pisani, was jeune de langues of England and dragoman from 1824 to 1853. His brother George (1811-1861) was giovane di lingua and dragoman of the Sardinian legation. Their sister Marie Chabert married the Russian dragoman, F. Chirico (1812-1832), who was a member of the originally Ragusan family which provided dragomans for the French, English and Russian embassies.<sup>28</sup>

### Some concluding remarks

Did the Levantine dragomans and their families suffer as much as the other elites living in an age of revolution and political change in the Ottoman lands between 1785 and 1829?

Or did the dragomans' cosmopolitan and international living and working conditions, the fact that they formed a social group which - collectively at least - was serving many masters at the same time, make it possible for them to absorb the shocks generated by the political and military confrontation between the European Powers in the Levant? These well-connected dragoman dynasties may well have compensated for the new and far-ranging 'renversement des alliances' incurred by the aggressive policies of revolutionary France since 1793 with their long established tradition of creating a network by marriage alliances covering all the warring parties in their world. Like other great families, they never put all their eggs in one basket but

---

28. A. Gautier, 'Thomas von Chabert-Ostland (1766-1841), orientaliste autrichien et sa famille' in Le Bulletin (INALCO, Paris Octobre 1997), pp.67-90.

always changed or divided their allegiances and services, moving from one power to one or more different powers at one time in order to safeguard their dynastic and individual interests. The frequency of such shifts is another indication of the indispensable character of the Levantine dragoman in the relations of the capitulatory powers with the Sublime Porte. We see from the personnel records of the embassies and legations in Istanbul that this continued to be the case until the second half of the nineteenth century, despite efforts to exclude the Levantines altogether because of what the diplomats of the time regarded as their inherent unreliability.

It is thus understandable that the history of the dragomans should have suffered from the nationalistic attitudes of the nineteenth century which overlooked their multinational, or rather, cosmopolitan, 'prenational', character, by insisting on the study of the lives and careers of French dragomans, for instance, as distinct from the Austrian, English or Dutch ones. But then such purely national careers were indeed becoming more frequent in the course of the nineteenth century, as has been shown in this paper.

The difficulty of grasping the complexity of the multiethnic, multireligious, multicultural and multilingual Ottoman historical reality of the past remains an obstacle to a proper understanding of the situation of the original dragomans. Those western and Middle Eastern historians of today who limit their studies to the agents (dragomans and other protégés, *barattaires*) of one particular foreign power are guilty of a false historiographical approach. They ignore their political, juridical and social status which implied that these middlemen were not subjects of the states employing them but Ottoman subjects. They were only seemingly binational because of the status they had acquired of protégé of a foreign capitulatory power. But this status had, after all, to be granted by the Ottoman Porte upon the request of the foreign ambassador concerned.<sup>29</sup>

The dragoman families were interrelated across all European national boundaries, irrespective of their original descent. It is therefore historically meaningless to try to establish their single national standing, to define them as foreigners, as westerners or orientals, or as native Ottomans. Historians should take the Levantines as they were.<sup>30</sup>

---

29. Dominique Séraphin-Vincent, 'Du drogman barataire au drogman français (1669--1793)...' in F.Hitzel ed., *op.cit.* (Paris 1997), pp.141-152; Livio Amedeo Missir, 'Une aristocratie "inclassable": Les drogmans' in *ibidem*, pp.153-159; Alexander H. de Groot, 'Protection and Nationality. The Decline of the Dragomans' in *ibidem*, pp.235-255.

30. Hans-Jürgen Kornrumpf and Jutta Kornrumpf, *Fremde im Osmanischen Reich 1826-1912/13* (Stutensee 1998), p.x.