

**Politics and Sociability in a Transcultural Context: The Diplomatic Milieu in Istanbul during the Long Eighteenth Century**

**Veranstalter:** Pascal Firges, German Historical Institute Paris; David Do Paço, Sciences Po Paris

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**Bericht von:** Lennart Gard, Freie Universität Berlin

The workshop took place at the German Historical Institute under the direction of DAVID DO PAÇO (Paris) and PASCAL FIRGES (Paris) and explored the mechanisms of diplomacy in a transcultural context: It focussed on the social life of the diplomatic milieu of Istanbul from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Thus, it aimed at collecting further evidence for the centrality of this city in the European diplomatic system. Besides that, it highlighted the role of the various „intermediaries“, „brokers“, and „proxies“ diplomats had to rely on in their day-to-day work, as well as the multiple interactions between the diplomatic milieu and its social environment. In his introductory remarks, David Do Paço emphasized the relevance of an agency-centered approach to diplomatic history because it takes into account the importance of second-row personnel and the interrelatedness of sociability and political negotiations.

The first panel, chaired by BERNARD HEYBERGER (Paris), was concerned with external perspectives on the diplomatic society of the Ottoman capital. In the first presentation, RAHUL MARKOVITS (Paris) used a single event – the participation of the Indian traveller Ahmed Khan in a French procession to the Topkapı Palace in 1796 – as a prism through which he examined the competition for influence between France and Britain in the Ottoman Empire. Besides that, his case study showed how imperial and individual interests were interconnected. As Markovits demonstrated, the French supported Khan in order to impress the sultan and to discredit the British who had conquered Khan's Muslim region of origin. Moreover, the case of Khan, whose success was based on the false assertion that he was of princely origin, also points at the weak spots of imperial informa-

tion networks and identification procedures at the end of the eighteenth century.

In the second presentation, FERAS KRIMSTI (Oxford) examined how Ottoman and Venetian processions were depicted in the travelogue of Ḥannā ṭ-Ṭabīb, a physician from Aleppo (1764/65). On the one hand, Krimsti pointed out that this text was a source of counter narratives, as Ḥannā was neither part of Istanbul's society nor of its diplomatic circles. On the other hand, he argued that to a large extent, Hanna's account parallels descriptions of ceremonies in Ottoman protocol registers. In this perspective, the text shows that the public actually understood the messages the ruling elites wanted to convey with these events.

INDRAVATI FÉLICITÉ (Paris) chaired the second panel in which CHRISTINE VOGEL (Vechta) and HOUSSINE ALLOUL (Antwerp) explored „Sociability and Transcultural Practices of Friendship“. Their presentations also expanded the timespan under consideration in the workshop, as the former examined practices of friendship in French diplomatic sources from late seventeenth-century Istanbul, while the latter discussed the embeddedness of Belgian diplomats in Istanbul's social milieus of the nineteenth century.

Vogel drew on the example of the relation between the French diplomat Pierre Girardin and the Ottoman official Morali Hasan to explore the limits of cross-cultural friendship. Although Girardin's comprehensive correspondence books show that the two considered each other as intimate friends, they only met once in person. Friendships like theirs heavily relied on intermediaries of lower social status, who initiated contacts and kept them alive for their superiors. Still, material analyses of gift exchange practices show that friendships like the one between Hasan and Girardin should not be reduced to mere professional relationships: Contacts among officials were based on the exchange of long-lasting and valuable goods which should show superiority and establish dependency. Hasan and Girardin, on the contrary, only sent each other consumer goods in order to strengthen their personal bonds.

In the nineteenth century, close relationships between foreign diplomats and locals

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were far from being an exception, as HOUSINE ALLOUL demonstrated in his presentation. As he proved through various examples, friendships between Belgian diplomats and members of the Ottoman bureaucracy were not uncommon. The same holds true for marriages between members of the diplomatic corps and local women. According to Alloul, the question of whether essentialist categories such as „mixed marriages“ still offer an adequate approach for future research needs to be addressed. However, even though the intimate social environment of diplomats often transcended national boundaries, true transculturality was hardly to be achieved. Boundaries of class, race, gender, and religion remained highly influential among the diplomatic corps. On top of that, public authorities, both in Western Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, tried to restrain these relations in multiple ways, formally as well as informally.

The two last panels, chaired by PASCAL FIRGES and DAVID DO PAÇO reiterated and developed the key aspects of interpersonal relations, practices of transcultural sociability, and politics in the context of the diplomatic milieu in Istanbul.

MARIYA AMELICHEVA's (Washington, D.C.) case study dealt with the early period of Russian diplomatic representation in Istanbul, prior to the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774). Her presentation shed light on the multiplicity of challenges foreign diplomats of newly established missions had to face. Firstly, they found themselves at the lower end of an established hierarchy of precedence. Additional pressure could arise from temporary envoys of higher social stand, sent by their countries of origin in order to circumvent the order of priority. Above that, new missions could not rely on pre-existing networks of intermediaries. When trying to establish these ties, they always risked being manipulated by the Ottoman administration or by other embassies, as those offering intermediary services often maintained direct or indirect contacts with several political actors. Thus, Amelicheva's presentation offered valuable perspectives for research on the particular agency of intermediaries in Istanbul's diplomatic milieu.

In the following presentation, MICHAEL TALBOT (London) combined the study of diplomatic culture with a quantitative approach. He could show that the activities of the English embassy in Istanbul are to a large extent mirrored by the financial records of the Levant Company, as this commercial organisation was responsible for financing Britain's diplomatic endeavours in the Ottoman realm. These records point to the paramount importance of gift-giving in the relations with the Porte. But not only do the records give insight into gift exchange on formal occasions, they also account for the multiplicity of small presents made on a daily basis in order to maintain social relations. Working with this kind of source material can thus contribute to a deepened understanding of the Ottoman economy of gift-giving.

FLORIAN KÜHNEL (Göttingen) took a closer look at the position of ambassador's secretaries. Just like Michael Talbot, he drew on examples from the British embassy. While it is true that secretaries provided the heads of diplomatic missions with professional expertise, they should not be considered as the incarnation of a new type of rational governance as described by Max Weber. Instead, Kühnel advocated a closer examination of individual careers. In this sense, he could show that secretaries' social networks were of ambivalent use for their superiors: Success depended on these relations. Yet, certain contacts with members of the Ottoman society could also conflict with official policies.

In the last presentation of the day, CHARALAMPOS MINAOGLOU (Athens) retraced how the first Prussian envoys in the Ottoman Empire created a local network in the years after the establishment of a Prussian embassy in Istanbul in 1755. One of the particular features of the Prussian diplomatic activities in the Ottoman Empire was the comparatively high reliance on Greek intermediaries. But on the whole, the Prussian network in Istanbul was far from being atypical. Above all, Minaoglou questioned whether the embassy's network on the Bosphorus was of high value for the Prussian state, while its financial benefits for its members were fairly obvious.

PASCAL FIRGES's concluding remarks and the following discussion offered perspectives

for future research. Additional parameters will have to be taken into consideration: for example, the question of how confessional boundaries structured transcultural interactions merits further attention. Moreover, comparative analyses need to show to what extent observations regarding the situation in Istanbul apply to other hubs of the diplomatic network as well. All in all, the workshop demonstrated the advantages of applying an agency-centered approach to the transcultural socio-political context of the diplomatic milieu in Istanbul.

### Conference Overview:

#### *Introduction*

David Do Paço (Paris)

#### *Section I: External Perspectives*

Chair/Commentator: Bernard Heyberger (Paris)

Rahul Markovits (Paris): Only a Pawn in their Game? An Indian Prince in the Istanbul Diplomatic Milieu (1795–1796)

Feras Krimsti (Oxford): Appropriating Courtly Protocol: Processions of Istanbul's Janissaries and European Ambassadors from the Perspective of an Eighteenth-Century Traveller from Aleppo

#### *Section II: Sociability and Transcultural Practices of Friendship*

Chair/Commentator: Indravati Félicité (Paris)

Christine Vogel (Vechta): Making Friends and Building Confidence in Transcultural Diplomatic Settings: Practices of Friendship in French Diplomatic Sources from Late Seventeenth-Century Istanbul

Houssine Alloul (Antwerp): 'Transculturality' Restrained? Foreign Diplomats and their Social Milieus in Late Ottoman Istanbul

#### *Section III: Ambassadors and their Ottoman Interlocutors*

Chair/Commentator: Pascal Firges (Paris)

Mariya Amelicheva (Washington, D.C.): Newcomers: Russian Diplomats in Constantinople

Michael Talbot (London): Gifts and Sociability in Ottoman-British Relations in the Eighteenth Century

#### *Section IV: The Agency of Subordinates*

Chair/Commentator: David Do Paço (Paris)

Florian Kühnel (Göttingen): The Glue of the Diplomatic Milieu: Secretaries and their Personal Entanglements in Istanbul

Charalampos Minaoglou (Athens): The Prussians Gaining Agents, Intelligence and Influence in Constantinople (1755–1806)

#### *Conclusion*

Pascal Firges (Paris)

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