



A Book at Lunchtime

Chapter Two

Is There A Diplomat In The House?

Welcome to the second virtual chapter of *A Book at Lunchtime*, in which I ask you to imagine yourself seated in the Library for a presentation devoted to books of particular relevance to the history of the Club.

Members who attended the first session made some helpful comments that my colleagues and I have tried to address. We have re-arranged the chairs so that those sitting near the windows are not in a draught, and moved the position of the projector screen so that it's visible to latecomers, standing near the entrance to the Library. Champagne is now available from the cash bar, and there is a seating plan for those who have booked for the set lunch in the Coffee Room. Subhash has those details, and you will find place cards on the tables. Please do not switch these around behind our backs, as it could potentially result in anaphylactic shock for those with dietary requirements.

I see that Emeric is making a throat-cutting gesture, which usually means, 'that's enough housekeeping. Get on with it'. Well, gentlemen, thank you very much for joining me today for our second chapter, entitled 'Is There A Diplomat in the House?' If you were to ask that question in this Club at any point during the last two hundred years, many hands would shoot up, and most of them would belong to the

most distinguished members of the diplomatic service. The Travellers Club owes its origins to Lord Castlereagh's vision for a peaceful co-operative future of Europe. Since his time, the membership of the Club has been dominated by diplomats, and it was fitting that Lord Hurd, former diplomat and Foreign Secretary, was chosen to write the preface to the bicentenary history. He did so in the form of a virtual walk from the Foreign Office to the Club, noting landmarks of interest on his way to lunch in the Coffee Room.



Staffordshire figure of Demosthenes, ca.1810, © Victoria & Albert Museum

In 2010 Douglas Hurd's *Choose Your Weapons* was published. It's a study of the role of the British Foreign Secretary during two centuries of successes and failures, in which Hurd pays tribute to Castlereagh's talent for quiet negotiation and compromise. According to Lord Hurd, the rules of diplomacy remain the same today, namely to listen as carefully as you speak; to speak from a background of knowledge; to study the character, the background and motives of those with whom you deal, and to form your own judgement of your interlocutor.

As Demosthenes observed in the fourth century B.C., ambassadors have no battleships at their disposal; their weapons are words and opportunities. It is no surprise that the standard textbook on diplomatic practice was written by a member of the Club. Sir Ernest Mason Satow's *Diplomatic Practice* was first published in 1917, some ten years after a most distinguished career in the foreign service. At the age of eighteen, Satow joined the staff of the British Legation in Japan, and went on to serve in Bangkok, Montevideo, Rabat and Peking in the aftermath of the Boxer uprising. It was Satow's final posting, for which he earned the GCMG for his contribution to the agreement signed between China and the Western powers in 1901. He stayed on as head of the Peking legation during the turbulent years of the Russo-Japanese War, returning to London 'to plant



cabbages' – and also to establish his reputation as a leading authority on the history and culture of Japan. Incidentally, Satow's bookplate from his days at the British Legation in Yedo (Tokyo) is thought to be the first Western-style bookplate used in Japan.

The current edition of Satow's *Diplomatic Practice* was published in 2016, updated by Sir Ivor Roberts to reflect the changes that have occurred in diplomacy. The examples cited include the exponential growth in the use of emails and text messages for interaction between governments - a striking development from the days when communication technology consisted primarily of the 'hotline' to prevent nuclear war. Roberts also includes the comparatively recent rise in the threat of terrorism to diplomats and their missions.

For centuries Constantinople had a reputation for being the most dangerous diplomatic post. It was also one of the most important, and numerous members of the Travellers Club made their name in the foreign service during their time at the British Embassy in Pera, on the hill overlooking the Golden Horn and the Sultan's palace.

Anglo-Turkish diplomatic relations date from 1583 when Sultan Murad III and Queen Elizabeth I signed a treaty, comprising twenty-two articles, or capitulations, defining the rights of English subjects in the Ottoman Empire, and specifically granting subjects of the Queen of England full freedom of trade in the ports of the Levant. As a reward for his part in negotiating the treaty, William Harborne, a merchant in the currant trade, became the first British ambassador to Turkey.

The full text of the treaty with Murad III is recorded in *The principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, a monumental collection of early travel literature, collated and edited by Richard Hakluyt, pictured below in a stained glass window in Bristol Cathedral. Hakluyt's book has been described as the prose epic of the modern English nation, and Hakluyt himself as the great



Elizabethan chronicler of England's overseas expansion. Indeed the book opens with a catalogue of some 150 'ambassages'. It was first published in a single volume in 1589, and an expanded edition in three volumes appeared in 1600. It is unquestionably the most important collection of English travel literature ever published, and

helped to promote trade and discovery on a global scale. The Travellers' library has a copy of the 5-volume reprint of 1812, which contains material not included in the two editions to appear in Hakluyt's lifetime. It was acquired in 1851, and is described in Sir Almeric FitzRoy's history as 'a work of great importance to the particular interests of the Club and of vast bulk'.

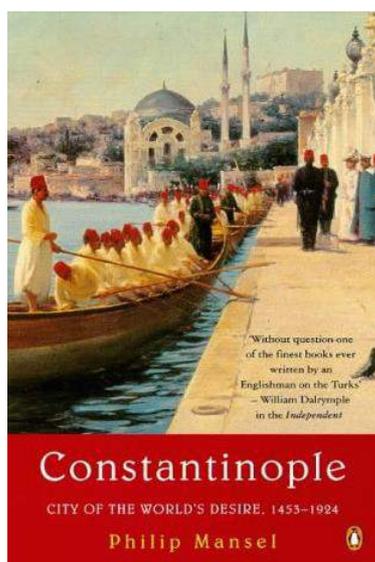
A rarity itself, the reprint is limited to 325 copies, and was last displayed in 1996 in the presence of Sir Edmund Hillary, during an exhibition in the Library to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Hakluyt Society.



The Hakluyt Society was founded in 1846 for the purpose of printing and circulating rare accounts of voyages and travels. The Club became a member in 1847, and over the years the Library has amassed an almost complete collection of the Society's publications, bound in distinctive blue

cloth, embossed with a gilt vignette of Magellan's ship, the *Victoria*.

Philip Mansel's magisterial study of Constantinople explains the Ottoman attitude to foreign ambassadors in the 'city of the world's desire'. In short, there was no diplomatic immunity in Constantinople. As Suleyman the Magnificent described it to François I, ambassadors were hostages, responsible to the Sultan for the good behaviour of the monarch who had sent them. For example, if the Sultan discovered that a foreign government was surreptitiously helping an Ottoman enemy, its ambassador would be imprisoned in Yedikule, the Fortress of the Seven Towers.



Sir Paul Rycaut served as Private Secretary to the Earl of Winchilsea's embassy to Constantinople in the mid-1660s. He later served as Consul in Smyrna for the Levant Company, and became a great authority on the complicated workings of the Ottoman bureaucracy. The Library has a copy of his book *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, first published in 1666. Unfortunately the bulk of the edition was destroyed by the Great Fire

of London, making the book a considerable rarity. Samuel Pepys made a note in his copy of Rycaut's book that he regarded it as a memorial of the disaster. It is also the book that inspired Lord Byron to visit the Levant.

Rycaut's book is full of acute observations and practical advice for his compatriots in Turkey. In general the English enjoyed a somewhat privileged position in the eyes of the Ottoman Sultans, who regarded England as a remote but great power. It is lavishly illustrated, including portraits of the Sultans. Here is Mehmed IV, whose negotiations with King Charles II hinged on the promise of a regular supply of Turkish figs.



Sultan Mehmed IV, the present Emperor of the Turks, aged 23 years, Anno 1666

Apart from important trade connections, the Ottomans respected England as the supreme maritime power, 'which makes it, though divided from all parts of the world, yet a borderer on every country, where the Ocean extends'.

According to Rycaut, a cheerful expression and courage in argument is the only manner in which to deal with Turks. He stresses the importance of accurate and trustworthy interpreters for those unable to master the language, and urges the authorities to 'breed up a seminary of young Englishmen, of sprightly and ingenious parts'. Britain lagged behind the Habsburg and French foreign services, which both trained young men, the *SprachKnaben* and *Jeunes de langue*, to act as official interpreters. In Constantinople, the English depended well into the nineteenth century on the services of a handful of trusted families in the Greek community in Constantinople to serve as 'dragomans'.

The arrangement worked well enough until the beginning of the Greek War of Independence in 1821. In the spring of that year, violence broke out against the Turks in the Peloponnese. News of the uprising reached Sultan Mahmud II, and on the Saturday before Easter, Patriarch Gregory V was seized during a service in the patriarchal church in Constantinople, and hanged with three archbishops and two chaplains. Panic spread throughout the Greek community in the city. Entire families flocked to the British Embassy, where they encamped on the lawn with the few household belongings that they had managed to carry with them. Others were forced to make simple shelters amongst the bushes in the grounds. The Revd Robert Walsh describes the astonishing scene in his excellent account of two tours of duty to Constantinople as Embassy Chaplain, first with Lord Strangford in 1821, when he had to handle the Greek problem in the garden. Strangford was a founder member of the Club.



Among the refugees, Walsh discovered a talented artist, a native of Corfu by the name of Pizomano. While most of the Greeks were 'lying prostrate in despair', Pizomano was put to work painting portraits of the embassy staff. 'Not knowing how long we might keep our head', explained the Chaplain, 'we thought

it a good opportunity of sending some representation of what they were, as memorials to our friends at home'. Pizomano's highly accomplished portrait of Robert Walsh appears as the frontispiece to the latter's book, *A Residence at Constantinople*, 1836.

Robert Walsh's book includes delightfully gossipy descriptions of the members of the diplomatic corps in Constantinople at the time. He portrays the Habsburg representative as 'fonder of female society than the anxious details of diplomacy', and Nils Gustaf Palin, the Swedish ambassador, as 'profoundly learned in antiquities and hieroglyphics, but altogether unacquainted with the men and things of the world for the last two thousand years'.

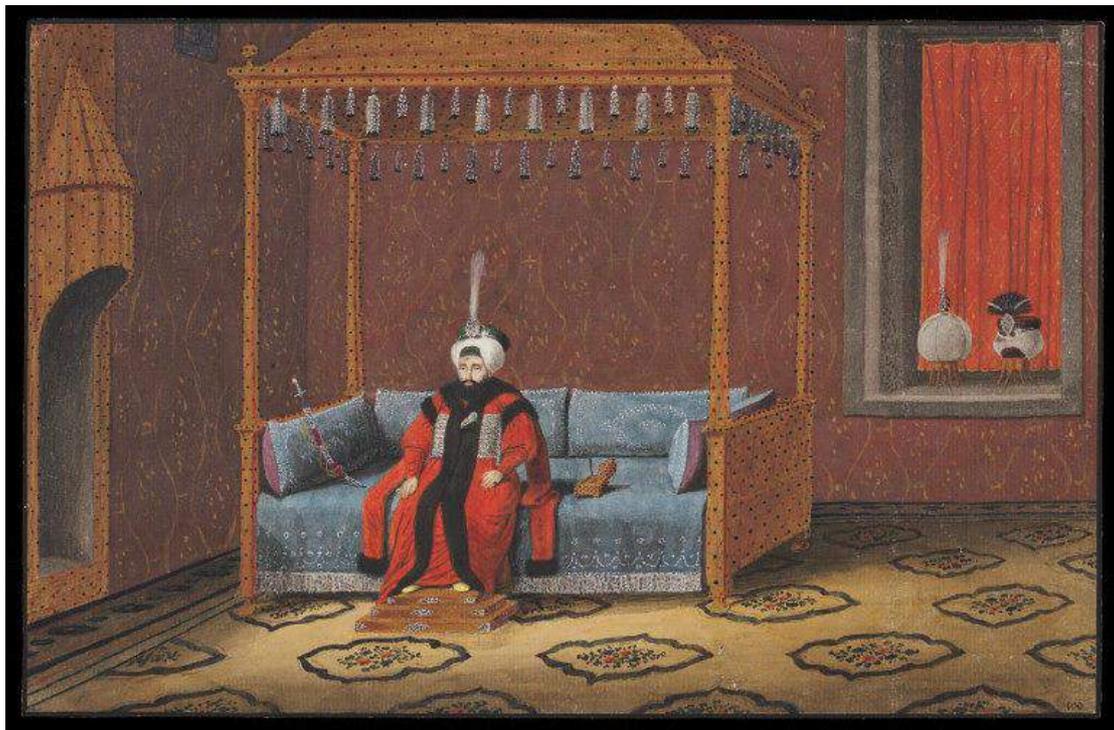


The view from the British Embassy across the Golden Horn
to Topkapi, the Sultans' palace in
James Dallaway, *Constantinople Ancient and Modern*, 1797

Ambassador Palin's predecessor, Ignatius Mouradgea D'Ohsson was an Armenian Catholic Swedish subject, who began his career as an interpreter in Constantinople. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the Ottoman Empire is singled out for praise in James Dallaway's survey of the literature on the subject in *Constantinople Ancient and Modern*, of which there is a handsome copy in the Library.

Stratford Canning (later Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe) was without doubt Britain's most notable ambassador in Constantinople during the nineteenth century. A founder member of the Club, Stratford Canning's portrait hangs in the Secretary's Office. Canning began his long diplomatic association with the Sublime Porte as Secretary to the embassy from 1808 until 1810. In 1826 he returned to Constantinople as ambassador, a post that he occupied three times. In fact he came to be known as 'the Great *Elchi*', the Turkish word for ambassador.

During Canning's first visit to Constantinople, he hired a local artist to make a pictorial record of the numerous scenes that captured his interest. Apart from architectural landmarks, and picturesque views, the artist was granted permission to paint Sultan Mahmud II, enthroned, with two of his imperial turbans on display. The identity of the artist is unknown, but the style of the portrait is interesting for its combination of the conventions of Turkish miniature painting and European perspective.



© Victoria & Albert Museum

At the time of this portrait, C.R.Cockerell of Bassae-Frieze fame was in Constantinople, and a frequent guest at the British Embassy, where Lord Byron was staying. Byron and his travelling companion, John Cam Hobhouse, a founder member of the Club, were at the outset of

their journey in the Levant, on which they carried a travelling firman bearing Sultan Mahmud II's seal. On their return, Hobhouse published an account of the journey, which includes this image of the imperial seal, or *tuğra* of the Sultan.



A Journey through Albania, and other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia, 1813

The *tuğra* of Mahmud II on Byron's travelling firman (illustrated) was created by Mustafa Râkım, the Sultan's calligraphy teacher, and one of the great names in the history of Islamic calligraphy. The *tuğra* was the Ottoman equivalent of a sovereign's signature or

seal in other cultures. The calligraphic emblem consists of the Sultan's name, patronymic, and the invocation 'the ever-victorious', written in a distinctive shape. The Ottoman Imperial Council of State employed calligraphers to inscribe the *tuğra* at the head of a range of documents, which were written in *dîvânî*, a script reserved for official papers. It is thought that the calligraphers were never allowed to leave Topkapi Palace for fear that they might be kidnapped and forced to write the imperial emblem on forged documents. They were certainly required to take an oath stating that they would never use their skills outside the Council.

It was during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II that the Ottoman diplomatic service underwent some radical changes. As the Greeks were no longer trusted, they could not be employed for their valuable linguistic skills. Shortly after the outbreak of the war of independence, the Sultan established the Translation Bureau, a minor office that developed into one of huge political influence and prestige within the Ottoman bureaucracy. A Foreign Ministry was created and, in 1834, permanent missions were established abroad.

However the threat to foreign envoys of maltreatment, and even incarceration in the Tower of the Ambassadors, continued until 1837. The prison formed part of Yedikule, the Fortress of the Seven Towers, which was partly built into the massive Byzantine land walls along the Sea of Marmara.



The Fortress of the Seven Towers in *Voyage en Morée, à Constantinople* by François Pouqueville, who was imprisoned there in 1799-1801



© Musée dans le château de Versailles

For a period during the Napoleonic wars, the entire French legation in Constantinople was imprisoned. One of its members, the dashing François Pouqueville, was amongst the prisoners in Yedikule from 1799 to 1801. The Library has a copy of his beautifully-illustrated book, *Voyage en Morée, à Constantinople*, which contains one of the best accounts of the Tower of the Ambassadors, and reveals some of the tricks that helped Pouqueville to survive the ordeal.

The book was published in 1805, after his return to Paris, where he met the artist Henriette Lorimier, who painted Pouqueville's portrait against a Levantine background. They fell in love and lived happily ever after. And that, gentlemen, is all we have time for today.



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Virtual Bibliography

Richard Hakluyt

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=aeu.ark:/13960/t7kp8sp2c&view=1up&seq=6>

Paul Rycaut

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435075055426&view=1up&seq=7>

Robert Walsh

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James Dallaway

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John Cam Hobhouse

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François Pouqueville

<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/pouqueville1805ga>

All the above books are present on the shelves in the Library