

## MATERIAL CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

### DIPLOMACY AND GIFTS IN CONSTANTINOPLE: THE BOOK OF ACCOUNTS OF BAILO PIERO BRAGADIN (1524–1526)

OVIDIU CRISTEA\*

“Every gift is edged”  
Steven Erikson, *Memories of Ice*

Writing about Ottoman-Venetian relations means confronting an overwhelming bibliography written in different periods and dealing with various categories of sources. The challenge is not easy. For instance, the Venetian *relazioni* as one of the main sources for the reconstruction of Ottoman-Venetian political affairs were approached in different ways by scholars from Leopold von Ranke’s era until the present day. Considered for a long time as the document *par excellence* for the history of diplomacy, the Venetian final reports were subsequently viewed as a distorted mirror which reflected in a very subjective way a different culture. However, in recent scholarship they were, once again, reconsidered. Many scholars argued that, despite their inherent subjectivity, the *relazioni* are still a very valuable category of sources which cover multiple and various aspects of the Ottoman Empire’s history.<sup>1</sup>

This change of perspective in approaching the sources was doubled, in the last decades, by a radical transformation of the historiographical field. The traditional approach, focused on political and military history, was more and more challenged as historians began to understand the diplomatic activity as a complex tool mixing negotiation, information gathering, communication, representation and performance. The diplomatic encounters between representatives of the *Serenissima* and the Porte, respectively, make no exception.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *The Turkish and Spanish Empires in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and Beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup>*, transl. by Walter K. Kelly, Philadelphia, 1845, pp. IX–X; Ugo Tucci, *Ranke and the Venetian Document Market*, in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. by J.M. Iggers, G.G. Powell, Syracuse, 1990, pp. 99–107; Gino Benzoni, *Ranke’s Favorite Source: The Relazioni of the Venetian Ambassadors*, in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. by J.M. Iggers, G.G. Powell, pp. 11–27; Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*, Rome, 2013, pp. 91–98; Eric Dursteler, *Describing or Distorting the Turk? The Relazioni of Venetian Ambassadors in Constantinople as Historical Source*, in “Acta Histriae,” 19, 2011, 1–2, pp. 231–248; Filippo de Vivo, *How to Read Venetian Relazioni*, in “Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et réforme,” 34, 2011, 1–2, pp. 25–59.

<sup>2</sup> See Eric Dursteler, *Describing or Distorting the Turk?*, pp. 231–248; Filippo de Vivo, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–60; both studies have an excellent historiographical overview. See also Ovidiu Cristea,

In contrast with the traditional historiography which understood diplomacy as a game of power between major political actors, recent studies emphasized the important role played by “minor” and “secondary” actors such as dragomans, spies, informants, servants in the diplomatic activity and in the configuration of the networks of influence.<sup>3</sup> Seen as a flexible web submitted to frequent and various changes, the diplomacy is analysed today from various perspectives, paying special interest to the ceremonial and gift-giving practices, languages, rhetorical strategies, gestures and emotions in a quest for a proper understanding of the process of negotiations in the past.

The following pages will focus on the gifts usually offered by the Christian ambassadors to the sultan and to the most important members of the *divan*, and more precisely on a Venetian case from the first decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The topic has been approached frequently by historians using the large amount of data included in the documents written by, for or around the Venetian bailo in Constantinople such as: letters, reports, and *relazioni*. My case study is based on a slightly different source, namely a register of accounts kept by the bailo Piero (Pietro) Bragadin during his mission in Constantinople (1524–1526).<sup>4</sup>

Before his appointment to the most prestigious diplomatic position of the Serene Republic, Piero Bragadin had a troubled political career. In 1498<sup>5</sup> and, again, in 1518<sup>6</sup> he was banished from the right to be elected in one of the public offices in the city due to a serious family debt and to his involvement in some shady matters. In the latter case he seemed to have counterfeited some documents to prove that he was appointed as *savio di Terra ferma*.<sup>7</sup> He was absolved each time and was able to resume his political career.<sup>8</sup>

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*Giocare con una palla di vetro: Venetian Perceptions on Ottoman Power (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.)*, in *The Image of the Other: Memory and Representation of the Neighbourhood and the World*, Târgoviște, 2018, pp. 333–351. For a detailed analysis of the sources of the history of diplomacy see Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict. Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350–1520*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 49–66.

<sup>3</sup> E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire. Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul*, Ithaca, London, 2012; Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire. Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth Century Mediterranean World*, London, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The document is preserved in Archivio di Stato, Venezia (hereafter: ASV), Secreta, Archivio Proprio Costantinopoli (hereafter: SAPC), Fascicolo spese, Piero Bragadin bailò, contabilità, 1524–1526; for general information concerning Bragadin’s election and mission see Maria Pia Pedani, *Elenco degli inviati diplomatici veneziani presso i sovrani ottomani*, Venice, 2000, pp. 22–23. In the following pages I used the Venetian form of the bailo’s first name.

<sup>5</sup> He was condemned for ten years together with his brothers Alvise and Hieronimo for *parole usade in caxa sua* against Nicolò Zorzi da San Moisè; see *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, vol. I, ed. by F. Stefani, Venice, 1879, col. 1015.

<sup>6</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXVI, Venice, 1889, cols. 316–317.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, col. 322. As a result, he was banished from the Major Council for the next year and his election from any office was forbidden for the next three years. He also paid a fine of 50 ducats.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. XXVIII, Venice, 1890, col. 19.

Pardoned in 1503 for his first condemnation, the following year he was elected captain of galleys of Barbary; true to his previous record, even in this position he provoked a ‘mess’ (*garbujo*).<sup>9</sup> Twelve years later, in September 1515, Piero was questioned by the *Quarantia criminal* about a sapphire pawned to the Jew Anselmo.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his tumultuous career, Piero Bragadin was rehabilitated and appointed as bailo in Constantinople on 11 October 1523<sup>11</sup> after his predecessor, Andrea Priuli, died on 18 July 1523 of the plague which broke out in the Ottoman capital. For various reasons, Bragadin delayed his departure for Istanbul until March 1524<sup>12</sup> and arrived at his destination on 25 April.<sup>13</sup> From the period of his mission only a small part of his reports survived, namely those written between 25 May and 6 December 1524, while others together with his final *relazione* read to the Venetian Senate on 6 June 1526, after his return in the lagoon, were lost and preserved only in an abridged form in Marino Sanudo the Younger’s *Diarii (Journals)*. Thus, his book of accounts is a rare original document from the period of his activity in Constantinople; it is preserved today in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, fund Archivio Proprio Costantinopoli, busta no. 1. The document is written on paper in the Venetian dialect by a contemporary hand and its significance lies with the detailed information concerning the ordinary and extraordinary expenses made in the Ottoman Empire for the honour of the Republic. The text raises a few methodological problems. There is little doubt concerning the accuracy of the data included as every expense had to be verified and approved from time to time by the Council of Twelve, the “governing body” of the Venetian merchants in Constantinople.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally, however, certain details are missing, and we can thus gain only an imperfect estimate of the total amount of money spent by the Republic’s representative. Furthermore, in many cases, we do not know the context of a specific expense; in other words we know who received a certain gift or amount of money but the reason is unclear.

Moreover, the line of separation between what we may consider today as a gift and what may be labelled as bribe is blurred. One may define as gift a reward

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. V, ed. by Federico Stefani, Venice, 1881, cols. 945, 1041.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. XXI, Venice, 1887, cols. 114–115; the case was reopened in 1519 due to new evidence. More exactly one of the testimonies proved to be false; *ibidem*, vol. XXVI, cols. 339–341.

<sup>11</sup> For his election *ibidem*, vol. XXXV, Venice, 1892, cols. 76–77.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, col. 202. In November 1523, the Venetian government sent a letter to the Venetian ambassador in Constantinople, Pietro Zen, instructing him to announce to the Porte the election of a new bailo. He was also instructed to explain that the new Venetian representative was forced to postpone his departure due to the winter season (*per la invernata non pol venir*).

<sup>13</sup> *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 13 (*sub voce*); online version [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-bragadin\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-bragadin_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (consulted on 15.03.2019). Piero’s brothers were absolved in 1503; see *I Diarii*, vol. IV, ed. by Nicolò Barozzi, Venice, 1880, col. 732, while Piero later, in April of the same year (*ibidem*, vol. V, col. 20).

<sup>14</sup> I use the expression of Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Baltimore, 2008, p. 41.

for a service already rendered and as bribe a stimulant for a forthcoming benevolence, but such a clear cut dichotomy has no correspondence in the day to day Venetian-Ottoman contacts in Constantinople. This is why in the following pages I used the term gift as a generic description of all sorts of “voluntary” donations and favours to various Ottoman officials.

The book of accounts starts with a brief notice stating that, on 28 May 1524, the Council of Twelve approved the expenses and the gifts offered by the bailo Bragadin during a special event, probably his solemn audience to the sultan. According to Sanudo, who quotes the bailo’s report of 20 May, Bragadin brought the presents and kissed the hand of the sultan on 25 April.<sup>15</sup> The note in the register of accounts states that the bailo submitted, as usual, the requested information to the members of the Council of Twelve “*Per non esser occorso far spese salvo le ordinarie per honor Il Excellentissimo Baylo messer Piero Bragadin ha convocato il Consiglio di XII per metter parte come e consueto e chiarir tute quelle particolarmente parte da esser poste a conto della Illustrissima Signoria nostra et parte a conto de Cotimo et per honor.*”<sup>16</sup>

It should be underlined that among the members of the Council – in fact in the first position – appears the illegitimate son of doge Andrea Gritti, *ser* Alvise Gritti, a very influential person in the entourage of the grand vizier Ibrahim pasha, but who, as a member of the Venetian community, was involved in various activities in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>17</sup> As the text indicates, the Council of Twelve considered the expenses of Bragadin to be justified and in accord with the interests of the Republic (*ben e necessariamente fatte*). This appreciation is followed by the names of the councillors who approved the total costs<sup>18</sup> and by a detailed list of the gifts presented to the sultan and most important dignitaries. All of them received textiles,<sup>19</sup> a type of present deemed highly valuable by the members of the Ottoman

<sup>15</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXVI, Venice, 1893, col. 412.

<sup>16</sup> ASV, SAPC, busta 1, fol. 1r. For honour as symbolic capital in the Ottoman Empire see Hedda Reindl-Kiel, *East is East and West is West, and Sometimes the Twain Did Meet. Diplomatic Gift Exchange in the Ottoman Empire*, in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies: State, Province and the West*, vol. II, ed. by Colin Imber, Keiko Kiyotaki, Rhoads Murphey, London, N. York, 2005, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> The bibliography on Alvise Gritti is substantial but many works concern his role in the Hungarian-Ottoman relations. For the present topic see especially Aurel Decei, *Aloisio Gritti au service de Soliman le Magnifique d’après des documents turcs inédits (1533–1534)*, in “Anatolia Moderna/Yeni Anadolu,” III, 1992, pp. 1–103 (who deals with a following period); Elvin Otman, *The Role of Alvise Gritti within the Ottoman Politics in the Context of the “Hungarian Question” (1526–1534)*, M.A. thesis, Bilkent University Ankara, 2009, especially pp. 59–107; I was unable to consult the Ph.D. thesis of Suzan Ayşe Yalman, *The Life of Alvise Gritti (1480–1534) in the Ottoman Empire*, Harvard University, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> *Ser* Alvise Gritti; *Ser* Marco Loredan; *Ser* Francisco Morosini; *Ser* Lorenzo Belochio; *Ser* Piero Valaresso; *Ser* Gaspar Bassalu; *Ser* Zuan Mocenigo; *Ser* Piero Diedo; *Ser* Zuan Nani; *Ser* Hieronimo Valier; *Ser* Philippo de Baron; *Ser* Picardo di Medici.

<sup>19</sup> Hedda Reindl-Kiel, *East is East*, p. 118 used the term “textilomania”; see Luca Mola, *Venetian Luxury Gifts for the Ottoman Empire in the Late Renaissance*, in *Global Gifts: The Material*

elite. As expected, the sultan Suleyman the Magnificent received the most precious ones and the largest number, no less than six pieces. Among the gifted fabrics there were the following: a piece of crimson velvet lined with gold (*veludo cremesin alto basso doro*), a piece of crimson velvet (*veludo pian cremesin*), a piece of crimson silk satin (*raso cremesin*), a piece of damask *lionado* (colour of the lion), a piece of scarlet cloth (*scarlato de cento*) and a piece of purple cloth (*pavonazo de cento*). Three of the aforementioned gifts – the crimson silk satin, the scarlet cloth and the purple cloth along with a special type of velvet are to be found among the gifts offered to the grand vizier, *Frenk* Ibrahim pasha and to two other important members of the divan, Mustapha pasha and Ajas pasha. The main difference consists in the numbers: the grand vizier received two pieces of each item, while the other viziers only one. It seems that the velvets were of different colour. In Ibrahim pasha's case is mentioned *veludo Colorado veste due*, while Mustapha pasha and Ajas pasha received a *veludo lionado*, which means velvet in the colour of a lion.<sup>20</sup>

These differences suggest that the number and quality of gifts offered was strongly related to the Ottoman hierarchy. The sultan was the only one who received two special types of velvet and a total of six different categories of textiles. By contrast, each vizier received four and the only other dignitary who enjoyed a similar gift was *il magnifico capitano de Gallipoli*, but his inferior status in respect to the members of the divan is mirrored by a subtle change. The velvet offered to Ibrahim, Mustapha and Ajas pasha was replaced by a piece of damask *lionado*. The other seven dignitaries included in Bragadin's list received only one piece of textile: damask *lionado* for the most important ones (the *capugi basi* and the *cavus basi*), a simple scarlet cloth in the case of Caydar celebi, the first scribe of the Porte, as well as for the other subordinates of the viziers.

This well-defined hierarchy of gifts seems related to the Venetians' concern to pay the deserved respect to all Ottoman dignitaries. Any alteration of the well-established order could cause serious inconveniences. For instance, when in 1525 Piero Bragadin offered Mustafa pasha a lantern (*fano*) estimated at 1,000 ducats, the gesture strained (or, at least, this is what the bailo declared in one of his *dispacci*) the relations with the other viziers.<sup>21</sup> The information is mentioned by Sanudo, who, unfortunately, provides no other details. He simply comments that, in

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*Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia*, ed. by Zoltán Biedermann, Giorgio Riello, Anne Gerritsen, Cambridge, New York, 2018, pp. 56–87; for a more focused discussion on textiles as a gift see Hedda Reindl-Kiel, *The Empire of Fabrics: the Range of Fabrics in the Gift Traffic of the Ottomans*, in *Inventories of Textiles – Textiles in Inventories. Studies on Late Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*, Göttingen, 2017, pp. 143–164.

<sup>20</sup> ASV, SAPC, fol. 1r. For comparison see the lists of gifts offered by another bailo in 1599: Luca Mola, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXIX, Venice, 1894, col. 429: “scrive che il fanò donato a Mustafa bassa ha zenerà odio con li altri bassa.” Evidently this is what Bragadin says about the matter. We have no other source to verify his statement. See also *ibidem*, vol. XL, Venice, 1894, col. 24.

the future, it would be better to offer such lavish donations in a more discrete manner. If Sanudo's conclusion is correct, one may assume that the extraordinary favour showed towards Mustapha was interpreted by the other members of the *divan* as a distortion of the "normal" hierarchy. It was an infringement on the etiquette and implicitly an indirect blow to the other viziers' honour.<sup>22</sup>

This list of ordinary presents offered during the solemn reception of the bailo was doubled by a shorter one which included extraordinary gifts. As the book of accounts mentioned, this appendix was to be kept secret (*da esser tenuti secreto come conforto lo ambassador, per bon rispetto*)<sup>23</sup> as it includes some members of the grand vizier's family (his parents and his son) and of his household (the *protoghero*, a sort of superintendent of Ibrahim pasha). Along with this list of ordinary and extraordinary gifts, expenses were occasioned by several other necessities. Piero Bragadin mentions 250 *akce* (*aspri*) paid in Cattaro for the repairs of the galley which transported him from Venice to Constantinople; this amount also covers the money paid to those who unloaded and then loaded again the cargo on the ship. There were also 300 *akce* for the sanjakbey of Montenegro, who invited Bragadin at dinner and who recommended the bailo to the grand vizier. Finally, the document included a payment of 200 *akce* for those who unloaded and carried the gifts in Constantinople.<sup>24</sup>

To these occasional expenses, Bragadin added 2.292 *akce*<sup>25</sup> spent on the occasion of the solemn audience with the sultan and during the meeting with the members of the *divan*. The highest amount of money was directed to the guards of the sultan (449 *akce*) and to the *cavus* (336 *akce*). It is worth noticing that, at some point, the document underlined that some small Ottoman officials were dissatisfied with the grant of 30 *akce* and that, consequently, the bailo was forced to double the sum. In the end other important amounts of money were spent for various subordinates of the Porte. For instance, Ibrahim pasha's *protoghero* and some *capizi basi* received 336 *akce* each. Other 386 *akce* were directed to the entourage of Mustapha pasha and a similar amount was paid to Ajas pasha's household. Even the household of the captain of Gallipoli received 193 *akce*. All these gifts were exceeded by far by a secret amount of no less than 5,600 *akce* allocated to *messer* Halibei (probably Ali bey), the main dragoman of the Porte. His special status in Venetian eyes is reflected by the gifts offered by the bailo on the occasion of the wedding of one of Halibei's nephews: a vest of crimson velvet, a vest of crimson silk satin, one of scarlet cloth and one of purple cloth plus a certain amount of money.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Hedda Reindl-Kiel, *East is East*, p. 114: "In the Ottoman Empire, however, gifts were, as I said, a part of the person's honour and hence an essential element of etiquette (...) In Ottoman eyes, Western Barbarians lacking the appropriate knowledge about suitable behaviour obviously had to be educated."

<sup>23</sup> ASV, SAPC, fol. 1v.

<sup>24</sup> For all the gifts offered on the occasion see Appendix I.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXVII, Venice, 1893, col. 486: "Baylo li apresentatione una vesta di veludo cremexin, una di raxo cremesin, una di scarlato di cento, una di panno paonazo di cento et dette a

The book of accounts makes a clear difference between items presented as gifts and various amounts of cash offered on special occasions. It seems that the higher members of the Ottoman elite received precious cloths or other luxury objects while money was reserved to lesser officials. Also it is easy to notice the special importance given by the Venetian government to the grand vizier, Ibrahim pasha. His benevolence was considered of higher importance due to his status as a favourite of the sultan. Therefore, offering gifts not only to the grand vizier but also to his family and household was part of the Venetian strategy to gain Ibrahim's benevolence. Such a strategy was well planned by Bragadin and the Venetian government even before the departure of the new bailo towards the Ottoman capital. As Marino Sanudo pointed out in his *Diarii*, in February 1524, Bragadin received from his superiors the freedom to spend the necessary amount of money for the "common good" (*bene publico*). He was instructed to find "panni d'oro, di veludo alto basso, raso, scarlato etc. per mandarli a Embrain bassa, iusta la richiesta fatta, costerà circa ducati 2000."<sup>27</sup>

Once in Istanbul, Bragadin paid special attention to the grand vizier's wedding, carefully described in a letter of Piero Bragadin to his son. Despite the "private" character of the document, Bragadin's son was instructed to give a copy to Marino Sanudo to include it in his famous *Diarii*. Moreover, in the next days, the letter was read in the Venetian *Collegio* (the main executive body of the Republic) at the special request of the doge Andrea Gritti.<sup>28</sup>

According to Bragadin's detailed relation, the reception was more than a marriage ceremony. Instead a festival was organised on the Hippodrome, and its splendour astonished the Venetian representative. People from all walks of life participated, from the sultan himself to the poor and beggars.<sup>29</sup> There was food for everyone, games, challenges, horse races, fireworks *che durono lungamente con fuogi di varie sorte*, and the sultan remained until the morning to watch them. Among other things, Bragadin mentioned the marvellous tents installed on the Hippodrome: one of the sultan (*quello del Gran Signor*), one that was used by Uzun Hassan before the battle of Baskent (11 August 1473), one of Shah Ismail taken by sultan Selim I, and one of the Mamluk sultan, al-Ghuri (*sultan Elgauri*), captured by the same Selim I during his conquest of Egypt. The splendour of these

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quelli lo vene a invidar ducati ..... [omission in the text]." See also ASV, SAPC, fol. 3v: "li fo presentada una vesta de veludo cremesin, una de raso cremesin, una de scarlato de cento, una de paonazo de cento monta." The total amount (omitted by Sanudo) was 6,925 *akce*. For a comparison with the gifts offered by the bailo Giovanni Moro on occasion of a wedding of a grand vizier's daughter see Luca Mola, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXV, cols. 454–455.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. XXXVI, col. 505: "el il Doxe volse far lezer pieno Collegio la letterà di le feste fate a Constanlinopoli per le noze de Embrain bassa, che'l Baylo la mandò a suo fiol aziò me la desse, e data tolsi la copia e li aricordai la mostrasse al Serenissimo."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, cols. 505–507.

pavilions was astounding, and Bragadin noted that their richness and the beauty were impossible to put into words: “*Quanto siano di ricchezza e di magnificentia et bellezza bisogneria cum el penello in longo tempo farlo, et si haveria fatica per la gran superbia et valuta è in quelli.*”<sup>30</sup> The wonderful presents received for the wedding are, in turn, dutifully mentioned by Bragadin although some of them, mounted on mules, were impossible to see. There were ten well-dressed (*ben vestidi*) slaves carrying golden vases in their hands, followed by ten janissaries carrying golden clothes, silks and exquisite furs. Behind them, there were 40 horses, 40 mules and 40 camels (*gambelli*) loaded with gifts.

Some entries in Bragadin’s register support the idea that Ibrahim pasha received special attention from the Venetians in the following period. On 10 September 1525, the Council of Twelve approved another list of gifts offered, this time, exclusively to the grand vizier.<sup>31</sup> Once again the document mentions clothes of various fabrics, whose combined value amounted to a total of 33,235 *akce*.<sup>32</sup> Bragadin justified this extraordinary expense by two reasons. One of them had to do with the victorious return of Ibrahim pasha from Syria and Egypt after eleven months and 7 days, while the other was related to the favour showed by the grand vizier towards the Venetian subjects on various occasions.<sup>33</sup> Ibrahim pasha was considered a key factor in Venetian strategy, as during his absence the incidents between the subjects of the two powers almost brought Venice and the Ottoman Empire on the verge of war.<sup>34</sup>

With one exception – Marc Antonio Pisani in place of Philippo de Baron – the Council of Twelve was composed in September of the same members who had previously approved the money spent in May 1525. Once more, the Council concluded that the expenses were *ben et necessariamente fatte*. However, there were 7 votes for, 1 against and no less than 5 undecided – a result which could suggest that several members had doubts concerning Bragadin’s initiative or maybe

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, col. 505.

<sup>31</sup> ASV, SAPC, fols. 6v–7r: “Convocato per el Excellentissimo messer Piero Bragadin dignissimo Baylo Consiglio di XII nel qual fo messe la sopraditta spesa per apresentar al Magnifico Imbrhai bassa nel qual intervenero li infrascripti et fo messa la infrascripta parte. Ser Alvise Gritti, Ser Piero Valaresso, Ser Zuan Mocenigo, Ser Lorenzo Belocchio, Ser Marco Loredan, Ser Marc Antonio Pisani, Ser Zuan Nani, Ser Gaspar Basalu, Ser Francesco Morosini, Ser Piero Diedo, Ser Hieronimo Valier, Ser Picardo de Medici.”

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix II; for a comparison see *I Diarii*, vol. XL, col. 125, where Sanudo mentions that upon his return to Istanbul the grand vizier received presents estimated at 700 ducats, including a golden vest, others of crimson velvet, silk and purple clothes. At the rate 1:51 ducat/*akce* used by Bragadin in his book of accounts, the amount mentioned by Sanudo (700 ducats) is close to the real one (653.43).

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>34</sup> A similar conclusion in Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, p. 128. The Venetians consider Ibrahim “as a key to their successful balancing act between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans in the 1520s and 1530s.”



considered the amount spent as excessive. Either way, we ignore whether the reasons were related to the total costs or to the prospective efficiency of such a lavish gift.

On this latter point it is worth mentioning that the intervention of Ibrahim pasha in some events that occurred before his departure for Egypt was decisive or at least was judged in these terms by Bragadin. In June 1524, several slaves escaped on a Venetian ship and the matter was solved only by Ibrahim pasha's intervention. The episode is mentioned in a *dispaccio* from 9 July, when the bailo underscored the role played by the grand vizier. Eventually, Ibrahim's diplomatic skill saved the members of the crew from a severe punishment<sup>35</sup> and averted reprisals for Venice.

In the same month another *dispaccio* (included in an abridged form in the *Diarii* of Marino Sanudo) mentioned several other incidents which tensed the relations between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the departure of Ibrahim pasha for Egypt, scheduled for the beginning of autumn,<sup>36</sup> was deplored by the bailo, who considered the grand vizier a "great friend of our Republic" (*gran amico de la Signoria nostra*) and his absence harmful to Venetian interests. Bragadin took care to mark the event with a warm gesture of friendship. He expressed his feelings by "*le piu dolze et humane parole et abrazamenti et humane parole e tochar de man basandoli la spala et tocharsi testa con testa*" and by a gift consisting of "*cere, zuchari et confetti marzapani et biscotelli fatti con zucaro et aqua ruosa*." The bailo added that he intended to say more things but his heart was so afflicted by the grand vizier's departure that he was unable to add a single word.<sup>37</sup>

Such a setback for the Venetian network in Constantinople was compensated by the bailo's attempt to develop good relations with other two members of the divan: Ajas pasha and Mustapha pasha. The latter gained special importance after the vizier's appointment as governor of the Ottoman capital during the sultan's long stay in Adrianople.

Ajas pasha seems to have had a certain taste for cheese.<sup>38</sup> On various occasions he received a great piece of such product as a gift from the Venetian bailo. One can find some traces of such fondness in Marino Sanudo's *Diarii*. An

<sup>35</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXVI, col. 512.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. XXXVII, col. 27. According to a report from 19 October, the departure took place on 30 September (*ibidem*, col. 29). On 13 October, the sultan left in his turn the capital for Adrianople, taking Ajas pasha with him.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, cols. 271 and 275. "li disse che'l geolgeva dir molte cose, ma che el suo cuor era tanto ingropato per la sua partita che'l non le poteva dir." Bragadin's sentence provoked hilarity in the Council of *Pregadi*.

<sup>38</sup> Eric R. Dursteler, 'A Continual Tavern in My House.' *Food and Diplomacy in Early Modern Constantinople*, in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed. by Machtelt Israëls, Louis A. Waldman, Cambridge, 2013, p. 169 quotes a situation from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The sultans and other Ottoman dignitaries had a special fondness for Piacentine cheese.

entry from July 1524 mentions “a large piece of cheese” (*una peza grande di formazo*) offered by Bragadin after a fruitful dialogue with Ajas pasha.<sup>39</sup> This piece of information seems to be confirmed by the bailo’s book of accounts, which mentions a piece of cheese sent on June 1524 to Ajas pasha along with all sort of sweets.<sup>40</sup> The lack of concordance between this entry and Sanudo’s *Diarii* is easily explained by the time gap between the event and the moment when Bragadin wrote down his report. The cheese as a “diplomatic tool” (more correctly as a way to gain benevolence) was so important in Bragadin’s mind that he risked embarrassing himself in front of his superiors.

In December 1524, Sanudo qualifies the letters sent from Constantinople on 29 October as being ridiculous; in them Bragadin complained about the lack of response at his previous demands of cheese. The bailo was so keen to obtain the necessary amount of the product that his complaints against his own government provoked roars of laughter among the Venetian senators. The doge himself laughed so loudly “that he covered his eyes with his sleeve.”<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the cheese seemed to be much praised by the Ottoman members of the *divan*, and the sultan himself had a soft spot for it. According to a letter of Bragadin from April 1525, resumed by Sanudo, the bailo asked Mustapha whether “the Sultan would enjoy a piece of sweet cheese as a gift.” The vizier answered affirmatively and added that the sultan would certainly appreciate the present more than anything else because “he enjoyed eating cheese very much.”<sup>42</sup> The pasha’s reply points to another issue. Apart from the intrinsic value of a present, what can be said about the relation between the donor, the choice of the gift and the receiver? In other words, did the donor pay attention to the beneficiary’s preferences? Or the choice of the item was more related to a certain trend, to a specific value associated by the Ottoman elite with a gift?<sup>43</sup>

The answers are far from straightforward. We know that in certain situations a vizier asked for a specific gift: Mustafa, for instance, demanded a lantern and a clock,<sup>44</sup> but we ignore how frequent such a situation was. Usually, the members of

<sup>39</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXVI, col. 485: “insieme [*i.e.* Bragadin and Ajas] contraseno gran amicitia, el zonlo il Baylo a casa, li mandò a donar certo presente di una peza granda di formazo e altro che li fo molto aceto.”

<sup>40</sup> ASV, SAPC, fol. 2r: “a di 22 di stesso per uno presente fatto al M<agnifi>co Ajax bassa et mandatogelo al suo giardino, confetti, marzapani et una pezza de formazo granda et spese feceno li dui dragomani per portar el presente.”

<sup>41</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXVII, col. 283: “et il Serenissimo, di tanto rider li veniva, si messe la manega al viso.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. XXXVIII, Venice, 1893, col. 163: “Et rasonando li disse esso Baylo s’il Signor havia piacer che lui donase do peze di formazo dolce. Lui disse de si che li piaceva summamente piu che presente li potesse esser fatto, peroche li piaceva manzar formazo.” To please the sultan the bailo sent the “modest gift” (*piccolo presente*) to Adrianople as a “sign of reverence.”

<sup>43</sup> Hedda Reindl-Kiel, *East is East*, pp. 117–118.

<sup>44</sup> *I Diarii*, vol. XXXIX, col. 429.

the divan received precious textiles on solemn occasions and when the Venetian bailo was in desperate need of their support. Nevertheless, on usual occasions they could receive cheese, sweets or even wine, although such a product was theoretically forbidden for the Muslims. Thus, on 20 April 1525 Bragadin mentioned 1,875 *akce* spent for 3 barrels of wine offered between the beginning of his mission and the aforementioned day to the viziers, *chiaussi* and the dragoman of the Porte.<sup>45</sup> A similar expense is mentioned again on 7 September when the wine cost 2,500 *akce*.<sup>46</sup> It may be concluded that textiles, cheese, sweets, wine and money were the usual gifts during Piero Bragadin's mission in Constantinople.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes they were offered day by day, sometimes on different occasions such as official or private ceremonies.

The gifts were a mandatory ingredient for each diplomat in Constantinople in the quest for achieving his mission's goals. In the Venetian case, one may ask how the Republic's representatives managed to create their network of influence in Constantinople and how the gifts shaped on short and long term the relations between the bailo and the Ottoman officials.

On this point I consider that Piero Bragadin's book of accounts could rather mislead than offer valuable data. Each Venetian representative, or at least most of them, tried to impress their government and to show how effective their diplomatic activity was. I am not arguing that their reports are only rhetorical exercises or that the facts presented were intentionally distorted<sup>48</sup>; my argument is that sometimes we have only a vague idea on topics such as the relations between the bailo and the dragomans, the struggle for power among the Ottoman elite, the hidden meaning behind the dialogues between the political actors or the amplitude, costs and function of the Venetian networks in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, if we consider the relations between the bailo and the Ottoman dignitaries, the *dispacci* draw somehow a static image based on the final result of a negotiation. Evidently, the diplomatic activity in Constantinople must be seen as a dynamic process which involved a permanent confrontation between different strategies. The Ottoman political aims, for instance, were not identical for each group struggling for the sultan's favour. A bailo had to confront a complex political reality and had to find a way between and among the Ottoman factions to achieve the Venetian aims.

In addition to these difficulties another one should be taken into consideration. If we focus exclusively on gifts, it is hard to evaluate what fraction of the total amount of the bailo's expenses they represented. This issue is complicated even

<sup>45</sup> ASV, SAPC, fol. 4v: "adj di stesso (*i.e.* 20 June 1525) per vin despensato a bassa, prothogeri, chiaussi et al Magnifico messer Halibei Dragoman et altri de conto che a menudo seria molte come metteno li altri bayli, botte tre dal principio fino a questo di ducati 12 ½ la bota monta ..... aspri 1875."

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, fol. 6r: "Et per vino dato a bassa, prothogeri, chiaussi et al Magnifico messer halibei et al Cadi grande et capizi de la porta et altri ..... aspri 2500."

<sup>47</sup> For a comparison see Eric R. Dursteler, 'A Continual Tavern in My House,' p. 169.

<sup>48</sup> I already stressed my views in Ovidiu Cristea, *Giocare con una palla di vetro*, pp. 333–351.

more by the way each payment was registered in the book of accounts and, furthermore, by a detail already mentioned here. It is problematic to draw a clear cut separation between a gift and a bribe. Along with the items offered to Ottoman dignitaries, the scope of the bailo's actions included all sorts of deeds related to the diplomatic activity even though at a first glance they may seem mundane. Eric Dursteler, for instance, underscored the importance of banquets and conviviality in the diplomatic activity of the Venetian officials.<sup>49</sup> The feasts were an excellent opportunity to strengthen the prestige of a foreign sovereign by spending large amounts of money on tasty and exotic meals, to strengthen friendship ties or to make new friends among the upper and lesser Ottoman dignitaries and, last but not least, to gather intelligence *i.e.* the essential ingredient of the diplomatic game.<sup>50</sup> During a feast organized by Ajas pasha in 1536, the bailo Nicolò Giustinian was able to gather some clues on the vizier's attitude towards Venice and on an alleged Ottoman plan to invade Southern Italy.<sup>51</sup>

Piero Bragadin seems to have applied this "gastronomic strategy" generously, as his book of accounts lists the amounts of money spent for a lunch or a dinner in honour of different Ottoman dignitaries. On 27 August, for instance, the bailo paid 100 *akce* for *uno pasto* in honour of the dragoman Halibei and another Turk who was a former ambassador of the sultan in Venice.

Overall, such enterprises were a part of day to day diplomatic activity and they highlight the significance of "lesser" characters in the complicated game of power between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Despite its inherent limitations, Piero Bragadin's register is a useful historical document, as beyond the accounts, it provides a balanced view on the expenses of diplomatic activity in extraordinary as well as in day to day circumstances.

<sup>49</sup> Eric R. Dursteler, 'A Continual Tavern in My House,' pp. 166–171.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166. In the Romanian historiography, the importance of the banquets as a political weapon was underlined by Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Gesta Dei per Stephanum Voievodam*, in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine*, Putna, 2004, pp. 397–402; Ștefan S. Gorovei, Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior. O istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare*, Sfânta Mănăstire Putna, 2005, pp. 340–343; Maria Magdalena Székely, *La célébration de la victoire en Moldavie à 1518*, in "Classica & Christiana," 10, 2015, pp. 329–352.

<sup>51</sup> ASV, Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci. Lettere di Ambasciatori-Constantinopoli, busta 1, doc. 128: "alli 12 che mi attrovai col S[ign]or Ayasbassa [*sic!*] al suo zardino, sicome per le publice li dinoto (...) uno mio servitor (*todesco che gia fu servitor del secretario Rosso et poi del vedoa*) si attrovo a parlamento con uno delli schiavi del ditto Bassa *de natione alemana* et e di quelli che li porta li piatti del manzar et sic a servir fino chel Bassa manza, il qual gli disse come hanno havuto molto per male del [omission in the original] sia tagliati a pezzi quelli della fusta et li suggionse sapi che questo bassa e gran nimico della Signoria de Venetia et interloquendo ragionando che questo Signor turco ad ogni modo vuol passar in Puglia imaginandosi di prender tutta Italia, ha ditto de donarla al Re di Franza suo fratello (*ha ditto son certo che venetiani non ne vorano lassar passar et nuj anderemo a prender prima Venetia et poi si potra haver paura piu di tutto il mondo*)."<sup>51</sup> The fragments are emphasised in the original manuscript. The document is analysed in Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor. Știri și război în sec. XV–XVI*, Târgoviște, 2016, pp. 165–166.

## APPENDIX

## I

*Fascicolo spese, Piero Bragadin bailo, contabilità 1524–1526* (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, fund Archivio Proprio Costantinopoli, busta no. 1).<sup>52</sup>

Die 28 maij 1525, Per non esser occorso far spese salvo le ordinarie perho il Ex<cellentissi>mo Baylo messer Piero Bragadin ha convocato il Consiglio di XII per metter parte come e consueto et chiarir tute quelle particolarmente parte da esser poste a conto de la Ill<ustrissi>ma S<ignori>a nostra et parte a conto de Cotimo et per ho<nor>.

Landerà parte che li Infrascripti presenti ordinarij et extraordinarij et molte altre spese fatte per il bisogno publico et de la Nation siamo per questo Consiglio aprobate come ben e necessariamente fatte: nel qual Consiglio interuenero li Infrascripti

Ser Aluise Gritti	Ser Piero Valaresso	Ser Zuan Nani
Ser Marco Loredan	Ser Gaspar Bassalu	Ser Hieronimo Valier
Ser Francisco Morosini	Ser Zuan Mocenigo	Ser Philippo de Baron
Ser Lorenzo Belochio	Ser Piero Diedo	Ser Picardo di Medici

De parte 13 [*sic!*], de non 0, non sinceri 0

Presenti portati da Venezia come qui sotto appar li quali sono sta apreatati

Al gran Signor

Veludo cremesin alto basso doro .....l. 14

Veludo pian cremesin.....l. 14

Raso cremesin .....l. 14

Damaschin lionado.....l. 14

Scarlato de cento .....l. 5

Pavonazo de cento.....l. 5

Al Magnifico Imbrhai bassa<sup>53</sup> et come begliarbei de la Grecia

Veludo colorado veste due.....l. 28

Raso cremesin .....l. 28

Scarlato de cento veste due .....l. 20

Pavonazo de cento veste due.....l. 20

Al Magnifico Mustafa bassa

Veludo lionado.....l. 14

Raso cremesin .....l. 14

Scarlato de cento .....l. 5

Pavonazo de cento vesta una.....l. 5

Al Magnifico Ajax bassa<sup>54</sup>

Veludo lionado.....l. 14

Raso cremesin .....l. 14

Scarlato de cento .....l. 5

Pavonazo de cento.....l. 5

<sup>52</sup> I have tried to preserve both the form of the manuscript and its original orthography.

<sup>53</sup> Ibrahim pasha.

<sup>54</sup> Ajas pasha.

Al Magnifico Capitano de Galipoli	
Raso cremesin .....	l. 14
Damaschin lionato.....	l. 14
Scarlato de cento .....	l. 5
Pavonazo de cento.....	l. 5
Al Capizi bassi de la porta	
Damaschin lionado.....	l. 14
Al Chiaus bassi de la porta	
Damaschin lionado.....	l. 14
Al prothogero de li Capizi de la porta	
Scarlato de cento .....	l. 5
Alli quatro prothogeri de li bassa	
Scarlato de cento vesti quatro .....	l. 24
//fol. 1 verso	
Al prothogero del Capitano de Galipolj	
Pavonazo de 80, vesta una .....	l. 5
A Caydar celebi primo scrivano de la porta	
Pavonazo de 80, vesta una .....	l. 5
A Scander chiaus da la porta per expedir li presenti al commercio et per accompagnar alla porta	
Scarlato de 80.....	l. 5
fin qui li soprascripti presenti sono ordinarij	
Al padre del Magnifico Imbrhai bassa	
Veludo colorado.....	l. 14
Alla madre	
Veludo colorado.....	l. 14
Al fiol	
Raso cremesin .....	l. 14
Al prothogero	
Pavonazo de 80 .....	l. 5
Da esser tenuto secretti come conforto lo ambassador, per bon rispetto	
Per trazer li presenti de galia et le robe del Mag<nifi>co Imbrhai bassa quando quando <sup>55</sup> le galia dete Carena a catharo per discargar et Cargar per fitto de Cassa et farle Guardar.....	aspri 250
Per uno presente fatto al vayvoda del sanzaco de Montenegro che mo porto presente per pasha alcuni capreti et stete a disnar et a Cena in Zuchari, confetti et Cere che cussi conforto el Rector.....	aspri 300
Per uno schiavo tolto alli Dardaneli et presente fatto al castellan acio el facesse bona compagnia alla galia guora rimata Ij et accompagnatone fino a Galipoli.....	aspri 230
Contadi alli compagni de la galia et a bastasi per discargar le ditte robbe et a quelli de Commercio .....	aspri 200
Spese fatte per el bassar la mano al Sig<n>or et nella visitation de li Magnifici bassa et altri come particolarmente se dichiara	
Alli capizi de la guardia del Signor secondo usanza ducati otto veneziani val ...	aspri 448
Alli chiaussi ducati sei veneziani val .....	aspri 336

<sup>55</sup> Word repeated in the manuscript.

Alli Massalazi ducati tre doro et aspri 25 val .....	aspri 193
Alli Merteri .....	aspri 30
Alli Sacha .....	aspri 20
Alli Solachi .....	aspri 30
Alli sanciasi .....	aspri 25
Alli seirmen .....	aspri 25
Alli Tornazi .....	aspri 25
Al scrivan de li presenti .....	aspri 40
Alli Capizi di fora .....	aspri 40
Alli peini .....	aspri 15
Alli capi di sermen .....	aspri 30
Et per non se contentar de quelli sono giunti alti trenta .....	aspri 30
Alli sacrizi .....	aspri 25
.....	aspri 2292
//fol. 2 recto	
Per restro del altro lai .....	aspri 2292
Al protoghero del Mag<nifi>co Imbrhai bassa et come beglerbei de la Grecia ducati 6 venetiani val .....	aspri 336
Alli capizi bassi del ditto bassa et begliarbei [ <i>sic!</i> ] ducati sei de oro venetiani val ....	aspri 336
Alli capizi del ditto bassa et begliarbei .....	aspri 100
Alli soprascripti homini et macieri et altri de la corte del M<agnifi>co Mustaffa bassa .....	aspri 386
Alli soprascripti homini de la corte del M<agnifi>co Ajax bassa .....	aspri 386
Alli soprascripti de la corte del Capit<an>o de Galipoli .....	aspri 193
Per barche in piu fiate per portar li presenti alla Porta et alli bassa et cortesie ....	aspri 206
Alli Trombetti di Imbrhai bassa .....	aspri 100
Alli Trombetti de li bassa .....	aspri 100
Al Trombeta del Capitano de Galipoli ducato uno doro val .....	aspri 56
Al gianizaro del subassi de Pera che me vene alla staffa per uno par de calce secondo usanza .....	aspri 54
Al Magnifico messer Halibei dragoman per ordine del Excelentissimo Consiglio di X come fece il mio p<rede>cessor da esser tenuto secreto, ducati cento doro venetiani val .....	aspri 5600
Per uno gianizaro che stete continuamente in galia per boni rispetti come fece il mio predecessor .....	aspri 300
Per el spazo de ditta galia alla et altre cortesie si come fece il mio predecessor .....	aspri 943
Per far dui proclami, uno in Costantinopoli et laltro in Pera per far ritornar li homini che erano fugiti per el garbuglio di schiavi, assicurati per el gran Sig<n>or et datoli la fede ducati doi doro caraymiti val .....	aspri 102

## II

(fols. 6 verso – 7 recto)

† 1525 adj 7 Septembre

Il Excellentissimo Baylo. Sono per el passato balotade in questo Consiglio tute le spese si ordinarie come extraordinarie che fino alhora erano occorso a far; et essendone da lhora in qua occorso far de le altre a commodo et beneficio de la nation nostra, per honor.

Landra parte che tutte le spese fatte da di 15 april 1525 fin questo giorno siano per questo consiglio laudate et approbate come ben et debitamente fatte da esser poste parte a conto de la Illustrissima Signoria et parte a conto de cotimo.

De parte – XI

De non – 2

Non sinceri – 0

† 1525 adj X Settembre

per pichi 13 alto basso d'oro pavonazo a aspri 700 el picho .....	aspri 9100
per pichi 14 ½ alto basso cremesin a aspri 320 el picho .....	aspri 4640
per pichi 13 veludo cremesin a aspri 250 el picho .....	aspri 3250
per pichi 13 veludo verde a aspri 150 el picho .....	aspri 1950
per pichi 13 veludo alexandrin al ditto presio .....	aspri 1950
per pichi 13 veludo lionado al ditto presio .....	aspri 1950
per pichi 13 raso cremesin a aspri 110 el picho .....	aspri 1430
per pichi 13 damaschin cremesin a aspri 115 el picho .....	aspri 1495
per pichi 13 damaschin rovan a aspri 75 el picho .....	aspri 975
per pichi 13 raso colorado a ditto presio .....	aspri 975
per pichi 5 scarlato de cento a aspri 250 el picho .....	aspri 1250
per pichi 5 scarlato de cento a aspri 210 el picho .....	aspri 1050
per pichi 4 ½ scarlato de cento a ditto presio .....	aspri 945
per pichi 4 ½ scarlato de cento a ditto presio .....	aspri 945
per pichi 5 pavonazo de cento a aspri 140 el picho .....	aspri 700
per pichi 4 ½ pavonazo de cento a ditto presio .....	aspri 630

† 1525 adj X Settembre

Convocato per el Excellentissimo messer Piero Bragadin dignissimo Baylo Consiglio di XII nel qual fo messe la sopraditta spesa per apresenter al Magnifico Imbrhai bassa nel qual intervenero li infrascripti et fo messa la infrascripta parte.

Ser Alvise Gritti	Ser Marco Loredan	Ser Francesco Morosini
Ser Piero Valaresso	Ser Marc Antonio Pisani	Ser Piero Diedo
Ser Zuan Mocenigo	Ser Zuan Nani	Ser Hieronimo Valier
Ser Lorenzo Belocchio	Ser Gaspar Basalu	Ser Picardo de Medici.

Il Excellentissimo Baylo. Essendo giontto il Magnifico Imbrhai bassa el qual e stato mesi XI et giorni 7 fuora in la Soria et in lo Egipto cum armata come la persona del Signor et havendo fatto tute quelle demonstration verso la nation nostra che a tuti sono note et e stato apresentato da quelli consuli honoratissimamente e conveniente cosa che essendo luj in gran gratia del Signor et etiam per esser stafatte a questi giorni molte querelle (?) alla porta si per la galia del Signor presa in Cipri da corsari et in Corphu et in altri diversi rechiami et ultimamente per le fuste abandonate da Bostan rais et condute per el Magnifico proveditor de larmata a Napoli et per honorarlo et per haver el favor suo da justo bassa per honor.

Landra parte che le soprascripte robe presentate a lui et alla sua porta da esser poste a conto de la Illustrissima Signoria siano per questo Consiglio confirmate et approbate come ben et necessariamente fatte.

De parte – 7

De non – 1

Non sinceri – 5



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DIPLOMACY AND GIFTS IN CONSTANTINOPLE: THE BOOK OF  
ACCOUNTS OF BAILO PIERO BRAGADIN (1524–1526)

The study of the diplomatic relations between Venice and the Ottoman Empire was done by using a vast and multifarious category of sources: the reports of the Venetian ambassadors and baili at Constantinople and their final accounts, chronicles, letters etc. From this point of view, the use of a book of accounts seems, at first sight, not only unusual, but also quite odd. However, the book of accounts of bailo Piero Bragadin (1524–1526) may shed some light on the relations of the Venetian official with the Ottoman dignitaries from the perspective of the gifts he offered and their costs. The analysis of the document presents a rigorous hierarchy of gifts, mirroring the official Ottoman hierarchy. Aside from the official reception, gifts seem to have been an irreplaceable part in the daily relations between Venice's representative and the Ottoman dignitaries, and their adaptation to the tastes and practices of the later was a sure way to gain their support. In addition to the robes of velvet, silk and other precious fabrics, offered at various ceremonies, the most appreciated gifts in daily relations were sweets, cheese, wine and money (for the less important officials). Although the borderline between gift and bribe is thin in the light of the analyzed document, the data it provides allows a more precise understanding of the leverage used by Venetian diplomats to solve their litigations with the Porte.

**Keywords:** Venice; Ottoman Empire; diplomacy; Piero Bragadin; book of accounts