

Bart Severi

Diplomats from the Low Countries in Istanbul:

Astuteness, Pragmatism and Professionalization in Habsburg-Ottoman Diplomacy of the Sixteenth Century

Abstract: European diplomacy was still in its infancy in the sixteenth century. The legal concepts of extraterritoriality and immunity were yet to be developed. However, caused by its enormous military and economic advancement in the Mediterranean and Southeastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire became a full actor in the geopolitics of early modern Europe. Through diplomacy, both the Ottoman sultan and the Habsburg emperor sought compromises and signed treaties, while keeping their formal claims intact towards the outside world. The Habsburg rulers appointed six men from the Low Countries as diplomats to the Sublime Porte. Based on original archival research, this article sheds new light on the innovative role these diplomats have played in the maturation of Habsburg diplomacy and of diplomatic practice itself and in the scientific advances in archeology and botany.

Samenvatting: Hoewel de vroegmoderne Europese diplomatie nog steeds in haar kinderschoenen stond in de zestiende eeuw, werd ze door zowel Europese landen als het Ottomaanse rijk gebruikt als middel om een antwoord te bieden op geopolitieke vraagstukken. In de propaganda hielden beide partijen het beeld over de vreemde andere intact; in Istanbul werden diplomatieke onderhandelingen gevoerd die vaak wars waren van de klassieke vooroordelen. Zes mannen uit de Lage Landen vervulden een diplomatieke opdracht bij de Hoge Porte in Habsburgse dienst in de zestiende eeuw. Dit artikel biedt nieuwe inzichten in de soms innovatieve rol die zij speelden in de professionalisering van de vroegmoderne diplomatie, de volwassenwording van de Habsburgs-Ottomaanse diplomatie en de wetenschappelijke doorbraken in archeologie en plantkunde.

Belgian historiography has spent relatively little attention to the relations of the Low Countries with the Ottoman Empire in the early modern age. Of all aspects, the activities of diplomats have most often been the focus of research. From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, mainly biographical works succinctly described some of their diplomatic and private activities, from Sanderus' *De scriptoribus flandriae libri tres* to the *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale* of the late twentieth century. Some 450 years later, Ogier de Busbecq has consistently remained the most well-known of them, largely thanks to his botanical contributions and his pleasantly readable *Turkish Letters*, a partially fictionalized account of his Levantine travels that is being translated into modern languages up to this day and that has inspired a writer of young-adult fiction.¹ Several of his colleagues, on the other hand, remain quite unknown.

¹ O. de Busbecq, *Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, "Tyrkiske breve"* (Copenhagen, 2010); the same, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq: Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562* (Baton Rouge, 2005); W. Spillebeen, *Busbeke of de thuiskomst* (Louvain, 2000).

In more recent times, some studies focusing on iconographic and art historical aspects of Dutch diplomats to the Sublime Porte have been published, such as for example on Pieter Coecke van Aelst's drawings or Melchior Lorck's woodcuts.² The diplomatic missions to the Porte of Gerard Veltwijck, one of Busbecq's predecessors, have also been researched in quite some detail.³ On the whole, perhaps surprisingly, very little original archival research was conducted, thereby not fundamentally adding new insights to this chapter in history.

This stands in stark contrast with Dutch historiography on the matter. The study of Dutch-Ottoman relations and of Ottoman language, history and culture has been deeply incorporated in the curriculum and research programmes of universities. Additionally, archival institutions have created a substantial awareness of relevant primary sources in their possession. Looking only at the past few years, academic researchers have published articles on the image of the Turks in seventeenth-century Dutch newspapers, the Dutch trading community in Izmir and Dutch travel accounts of the Levant.

The difference between Belgian and Dutch historiography is easily explained – perhaps too easily. Since the early seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was granted diplomatic and economic privileges by the Ottoman sultan. They earned the right to keep permanent ambassadors to the Porte and Dutch merchants were allowed to trade and build factories in Ottoman ports.⁴ Evidently, the Southern Netherlands did not have those privileges and therefore did not have state-issued diplomatic missions, in the aftermath of which a wide array of cultural and economic activities could have developed.

But this explanation is not acceptable for the sixteenth century. In that era, men from the Low Countries, from Comines to Amersfoort, played a substantial role in Ottoman-Habsburg relations that, almost entirely, remains underresearched – even neglected. Consequently, we are not aware of the influence of these men on the professionalization of Habsburg-Ottoman diplomatic practice, of their share in the innovations of Dodoens and other botanists, of the many Flemish artists and scholars that accompanied them on their journeys and so on. This article sheds exciting new light on six men from the Low Countries that left a firm imprint on early modern diplomacy. It is based on original archival research in the Belgian State Archives, the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv and the Vatican Library.

Bright young scholars

The provenance of the early modern diplomat was diverse. Individual identity was not linked to territory but to loyalty to a monarch. It is not surprising, then, that the diplomats of the Habsburg Empire came from all corners of Habsburg territory.⁵ For the missions sent to the Levant, candidates were chosen from mainly three regions: the Italian principalities, Southeastern Europe and the Low Countries.

² A. Born, 'The Mœurs et Fachons de faire des Turcs. Süleyman and Charles V: Iconographic Discourse, Enhancement of Power and Magnificence or Two Faces of the Same Coin?' in: H. Karner et al (eds), *The Habsburgs And their Courts In Europe, 1400–1700* (Palatium e-Publications 1) (2014) 283-302. <http://www.courtresidences.eu/index.php/publications/e-Publications> (August 10th 2015).

³ B. Severi, 'Denari in loco delle terre... Imperial Envoy Gerard Veltwijck and Habsburg Policy towards the Ottoman Empire, 1545-1547', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 54 (2001/2-3) 211-256; A. Servantie, 'Ambassadeurs de Charles Quint auprès de Soliman le Magnifique', *Anatolia Moderna*, 9 (2000) 1-46

⁴ I.H. Kadi, *Ottoman and Dutch Merchants in the Eighteenth Century* (The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage 50) (Leiden, 2012) 18.

⁵ M. A. Ochoa Brun, 'Die Diplomatie Karls V. Karl V. in der Diplomatie der Renaissance' in: A. Kohler (ed), *Karl V. 1500-1558. Neue Perspektiven seiner Herrschaft in Europa und Übersee* (Zentraleuropa-Studien 6) (Vienna, 2002) 181-196, specif. 187-189.

Corneille de Schepper (1533 and 1534) and Gerard Veltwijck (1545 and 1546-47) were sent by Charles V to the Porte – the former not officially representing the emperor. Ogier de Busbecq (1555-62) was the imperial resident envoy to the Sublime Porte. He was succeeded by Albert de Wijs (1562-69), who had acted as a delegate some years earlier.⁶ After de Wijs' untimely death in 1569, Charles Rijm (1570-74) became the next envoy residing in Istanbul. Lastly, Rijm's brother-in-law Philibert of Brussels brought the yearly tribute to the sultan in 1574. To my knowledge, these six were the only men from the Low Countries that traveled to the Ottoman Empire in an official diplomatic capacity.⁷

As was the case throughout early modern Europe, they had been recruited from the monarch's councils, private servants and public administration.⁸ De Schepper and Veltwijck were both working at the Privy Council in Brussels. As a 'special servant', Busbecq was attached to Ferdinand's court, receiving a stipend for his scholarly work.⁹ Rijm was a councillor in Luxembourg in the service of Philip II of Spain and was lent to Emperor Maximilian II for an assignment in the Levant.

Years before their mission, almost all had studied law at various universities in Europe – the most common education for the early modern diplomat.¹⁰ De Schepper, Busbecq, Rijm and probably Veltwijck were graduates from law faculties of mostly Italian universities.¹¹ After graduating, they developed into bright, young scholars and attracted the attention of bishops, princes and other dignitaries that often added them to their entourage. Veltwijck, who was researching ancient biblical texts in Rome and Venice and published a Hebrew critique of the Kabbala, came into contact with French humanist Georges d'Armagnac who added him to his suite.¹² Later, during a mission of d'Armagnac to the Habsburg court, he was noticed by Cardinal de Granvelle and recruited. At 22, de Schepper wrote an astrological treatise, giving him the necessary publicity to attract the attention of the Danish court. Two years later, he joined the Habsburg side during a Danish diplomatic mission to the Emperor.¹³

The perfect candidate – the perfect diplomat

Early modern monarchical power was personified by the ruler. The diplomat was his direct representative. His social status should reflect the noble descent of the monarch, humanistic treatises on diplomacy contended. The diplomat, then, should be treated as if he were the monarch, because the latter's honour was at stake. Therefore he would have to be equally

⁶ It has been stated that de Wijs was present in Istanbul in 1547, together with Veltwijck. I have found no proof thereof. K. Holter, *Ogier Ghiselin von Busbeck und seine vier Briefe aus der Tuerkei* (Institutarbeit. Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung) (Vienna, 1935) 81.

⁷ Several Dutchmen traveled along as secretary to the envoy or as a scholar. They will be mentioned *infra*.

⁸ G. Richardson, *Renaissance Monarchy: The Reigns of Henry VIII, Francis I and Charles V* (London, 2002) 59-61.

⁹ Z. von Martels, 'On His Majesty's Service. Augerius Busbequius, Courtier and Diplomat of Maximilian II' in: F. Edelmayer and A. Kohler (eds) *Kaiser Maximilian II.: Kultur und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert* (Wiener Beiträge zur Geschichte der Neuzeit 19) (Vienna, 1992) 169-181, specif. 172; D. J. Jansen, 'The Instruments of Patronage. Jacopo Strada at the Court of Maximilian II: A Case-Study' in: Edelmayer and Kohler, *Kaiser Maximilian II.*, 182-202 specif. 183.

¹⁰ Ochoa Brun, 'Die Diplomatie Karls V.', 193.

¹¹ One might assume Veltwijck had a law degree, since the Privy Council only counted jurists amongst its members. J. Lefèvre, 'Le Conseil privé, son personnel et ses archives', *Archives, Bibliothèques et Musées de Belgique*, 27 (1956) 3-25, specif. 4.

¹² H. de Vocht, 'Andreas Masius (1514-1573)' in: *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati, IV* (Studi e Testi 124) (Vatican City, 1946) 1-17, specif. 12.

¹³ H. de Vocht, (ed), *John Dantiscus and his Netherlandish Friends as revealed by their correspondence. 1522-1546* (Humanistica Lovaniensa 16) (Louvain, 1961) 388-389.

reputable as his monarch.¹⁴ In reality, to be appointed as a diplomat to the Sublime Porte, more mundane qualities were deemed important.

Previous experience in arduous negotiations was paramount; inexperienced men were simply not considered by the Habsburg kings and emperors and their advisors. Immediately before his appointment as envoy to the Porte, Veltwijck had represented emperor Charles at the turbulent *Landtag* in Tyrnau, where Hungarian magnates had openly threatened to ask for the sultan's protection against Charles. Because Veltwijck handled matters very well, the emperor considered him extremely suitable for the job.¹⁵

Having considerable language skills was considered not less important. In Busbecq's patent of nobility Ferdinand showed his deep appreciation for his language skills.¹⁶ According to his predecessor de Schepper, Veltwijck owed his first appointment to his extensive language skills.¹⁷ Thanks to his studies at the *Collegium Trilingue* in Louvain and his research in Rome, Veltwijck was fluent in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac.¹⁸ His peers called him one of the greatest hebraists of his time. The usefulness of mastering ancient languages may seem strange to the modern reader. But their scholarly travel companions considered it one of the key qualities of a diplomat.¹⁹

Of all languages, Latin remained rooted as the official diplomatic language in Europe deep into the second half of the sixteenth century, although it was gradually supplanted by French and, at the Austrian court, German. Trained humanists, like Busbecq, de Wijs and Rijm, almost invariably corresponded in Latin from Istanbul. Knowledge of the Ottoman language or of the inner workings of the Porte did not become a criterion until deep in the sixteenth century Habsburg diplomatic practice professionalized.

Busbecq summed up Rijm's qualities to prove his suitability for the job: he was foreseeing and modest, he enjoyed good social status, he was proficient in the arts and law and he was not too old.²⁰ With these words, he painted an adequate profile of the sixteenth-century Habsburg diplomat to the Ottoman Empire: ca 35 years old, unmarried, proficient in languages and experienced in European state affairs. De Schepper, Veltwijck, Busbecq, de Wijs, Rijm and Philibert all fitted that description immaculately.

In the first four decades of Habsburg permanent diplomatic representation in Istanbul, diplomats from the Low Countries occupied the position of the resident envoy during 21 years in total. In the years before, De Schepper and Veltwijck were each appointed for two crucial missions that laid the foundations of the permanent representation.

¹⁴ G. V. McClanahan, *Diplomatic Immunity: Principles, Practices, Problems* (Washington, 1989) 28-29; E. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New Approaches to European History) (Cambridge, 1997) 121-122; G. R. Berridge, 'The Theory and Practice of Negotiation in the 17th and 18th Centuries', *Quaderni di scienza politica*, 11 (2004/2) 315-331, specif. 320-321.

¹⁵ Letters of Veltwijck to Charles V (Vienna, December 11th & 15th, 1544 and Prague, January 8th 1545). K. Lanz (ed), *Correspondenz des Kaisers Karl V. aus dem Königlichen Archiv und der Bibliothèque de Bourgogne zu Brüssel* (Brussels, 1998), part 2, 419-423, 423-424, 424-426; Charles V to Jean de Saint-Mauris (Brussels, April 1st 1545). C. Weiss (ed), *Papiers d'état du cardinal de Granvelle* (Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France 48) (Paris, 1841-1582) part 3, 109.

¹⁶ Z. von Martels, 'On His Majesty's Service. Augerius Busbequius, Courtier and Diplomat of Maximilian II' in: Edelmayer and Kohler, *Kaiser Maximilian II.*, 172.

¹⁷ De Schepper to John Dantiscus (Binche, June 12th 1546). De Vocht, *John Dantiscus*, 389.

¹⁸ His knowledge of Greek and Latin is confirmed by his travel companion Nicander of Corcyra: *Le Voyage d'Occident*, P. Odorico (ed.) (Toulouse, 2002), 18-19.

¹⁹ A. Thevet, *La Cosmographie de Levant*, F. Lestringant (ed) (Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance 203) (Geneva, 1985) 77, 278; B. Picard, *Das Gesandtschaftswesen Ostmitteleuropas in der frühen Neuzeit. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Diplomatie in der ersten Hälfte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts nach den Aufzeichnungen des Freiherrn Sigmund von Herberstein* (Wiener Archiv für Geschichte des Slawentums und Osteuropas 6) (Graz-Vienna-Cologne, 1964) 162.

²⁰ Busbecq to the Duke of Alva (s.l., [before September 1569]) Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHA) Turcica I, 25 Konv. 3, fol. 158r, specif. 158r.

Throughout the century, there was a chronic shortage of suitable candidates for diplomatic missions to the Porte. Together with the fact that their employers were genuinely contented with them, this resulted in multiple or lengthy assignments. As mentioned above, de Schepper and Veltwijck each fulfilled two assignments. The plan to send Veltwijck a third time was in the final stages before it got cancelled.²¹

The resident envoys Busbecq, de Wijs and Rijm each stayed in Istanbul for an average of seven years. No other Habsburg ambassador in the sixteenth century – not even the pioneer Malvezzi – stayed as long as them. After seven years, Busbecq felt he was no longer able to negotiate effectively with the Porte. A new ambassador, he wrote to Emperor Ferdinand, was necessary.²² Several years later, Busbecq was asked once again to travel to the Levant. He refused the appointment, though, and referred to his poor health.²³ His successor de Wijs was deemed too inexperienced. But lacking alternatives, his temporary appointment slowly grew into a permanent one, that only ended with his death seven years later.²⁴ He was buried in Pera, the northern neighbourhood of the Ottoman capital; the epitaph on his tombstone reminded readers of his activities as imperial *orator* in the city.²⁵ The same reemployment tactics were applied to Rijm as well. His residency would not last for more than three years, the emperor assured him. After some years, Rijm quite aggressively reminded Maximilian of his promise and demanded in vain to be allowed to return home.²⁶

Diplomatic astuteness and pragmatism

Their mental stamina was tested daily by Ottoman dignitaries. Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Paşa once tried to incite an argument between the catholic Rijm and his protestant Habsburg colleague David von Ungnad. Sokollu provokingly showed them a banner of the Knights of Saint-John and asked them about their faith. Rijm, however, cleverly dodged the questions and avoided escalation.²⁷ A clear mind and a witty response would also defuse precarious situations. During negotiations in the *Divan*, Veltwijck was asked by Grand Vizier Rüstem Paşa by what right Ferdinand claimed the Kingdom of Hungary. He simply referred to Ferdinand's election as king by the Hungarian representatives. Rüstem answered that the sultan had conquered the kingdom by the sword, to which the diplomat quipped: 'We, Christians, apply the *ius electivum* rather than the *ius belli*'. Veltwijck, who had a law degree, was sensible enough to spare his further legal counterarguments for a letter to Ferdinand. Consequently, the legal fencing during the negotiations remained just that.²⁸

²¹ Richard Morysine to the Privy Council (Augsburg, June 9th 1551). *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Edward VI (1547-1553)*. W. B. Turnbull (ed) (Calendar of State Papers. Foreign) (London, 1861) 126.

²² Busbecq to Ferdinand (Istanbul, April 29th 1562) HNSA Turcica I, 15 Konv. 2, fols. 119-122, specif. 121r.

²³ Von Martels, 'On His Majesty's Service', 176; idem. *Augerius Gislenuus Busbecquius. Leven en werk van de keizerlijke gezant aan het hof van Süleyman de Grote* (Dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1989) 313-314.

²⁴ Maximilian to Ferdinand (Linz, April 28th 1562). HNSA Turcica I, 15 Konv. 2, fols. 108-109, specif. 108r; Ferdinand to de Wijs (Prague, June 3rd 1562) ibidem, Konv. 3, fols. 203-205, specif. 203r; Ferdinand to Maximilian (Prague, June 4th 1562) ibidem, fols. 206-207, specif. 206v; de Wijs to Maximilian (Istanbul, July 20th 1562) HNSA Turcica I, 16 Konv. 1, fols. 13-14, specif. 13r; the same to Ferdinand (Istanbul, July 20th 1562) ibidem, fols. 15-16, specif. 15r.

²⁵ Giovanni Mauri della Frata's description of Pera (1631) Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vaticani latini, 6427, fols. 147-192, specif. 176v.

²⁶ Rijm to Johann Trautson (Istanbul, April 11th 1574) HNSA Turcica I, 30 Konv. 2, fols. 147-150, specif. 148r-v; Maximilian II to Rijm en David Ungnad (Vienna, May 31st 1574) ibidem, fols. 270-279.

²⁷ J. Vermeulen, *Sultans, slaven en renegaten: de verborgen geschiedenis van het Ottomaanse rijk* (Louvain, 2001) 244.

²⁸ Veltwijck to Ferdinand (Edirne, February 20th 1547). *Austro-Turcica 1541-1552. Diplomatische Akten des habsburgischen Gesandtschaftsverkehrs mit der Hohen Pforte im Zeitalter Süleymans des Prächtigen*, K. Nehring et al (ed.) (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten 95) (Munich, 1995), 132; the same to the same (Vienna, Juli 28th 1546). HNSA Turcica I, 6 Konv. 4, fols. 65-66, specif. 65r-v.

Newly arrived diplomats quickly learned from their European colleagues in Istanbul that it was customary to congratulate Ottoman dignitaries and the sultan with the birth of a child, a promotion or even a victory over Christian armies.²⁹ Utter pragmatist Albert de Wijs saw nothing wrong in the custom and tried to benefit from it: he congratulated sixth vizier Mustafa Paşa with his appointment and offered him gilded beakers if he would advocate the Habsburg cause with the grand vizier.³⁰

De Wijs' pragmatism was also evident in other matters. Since the battle of Szigetvár (1566) he greeted Sultan Selim II and his suite when the latter passed his residence every Friday on his way to the Süleymaniye mosque. In a subtle manner, the Sublime Porte forced the Habsburg envoys to participate in public rituals where their subordinate position was clear to all spectators. After de Wijs' death, the grand vizier himself asked the *chargés d'affaires*, who gladly accepted, to continue greeting the sultan. Some weeks later, Rijm arrived as the new leader of the Habsburg delegation. He was unaware of this custom – most likely de Wijs deliberately did not mention this in his correspondence. Rijm, however, felt this habit could not be reconciled with the reputation of the emperor and stayed inside the next Friday morning, looking through the window, while his *famiglia* greeted the passing dignitaries outside. That same night, the dragoman made very clear that the Porte took great offence in this attitude.³¹ Since Rijm developed an excellent understanding with the Porte in the following years, one can safely assume that he adapted his predecessor's habit.

Neutral grounds

While the rhetoric in European *turcica* and in Ottoman *fetihnames* was biased, prejudiced and hostile, both the diplomats and the Ottoman dignitaries used a linguistic register that was neutral, pragmatic and even friendly. Prejudices were not beneficial to diplomatic relations, whereby the goal was to search for the middle ground. The daily interactions with the viziers, the dragomans and the many other officials during their long stay, not seldomly led to an amicable yet professional mutual understanding. Busbecq's flattering descriptions of the viziers can be read in both his *Turkish Letters* and his official correspondence. While traveling back to Vienna, Philibert of Brussels had a pleasant conversation with a cheerful Mahmud Bey, the dragoman who accompanied him. Mahmud offered a toast to the emperor's health with a jug of beer ('because he does not drink any wine', Philibert later clarified without a hint of irony). Promptly, the envoy did the same for the accession of Sultan Murad III.³²

Those diplomats who had the ability to develop a *modus vivendi* during their stay, could count on the benevolence of the Sublime Porte. Others, like Franz Zay and Antun Vrančić, had become increasingly frustrated with the Ottoman government (and with their own failures to resolve the matter). Consequently, the classic prejudices of the untrustworthy and barbaric Turks were abundantly present in their letters to Vienna.³³

It is quite clear that Veltwijck, Busbecq, de Wijs and Rijm could count on the professional appreciation of the viziers, largely thanks to their pragmatism. For them, life in Istanbul

²⁹ Zay en Vrančić to Ferdinand (Istanbul, November 1st 1553) HNSA Turcica I, 10 Konv. 2, fols. 83-87, specif. 83v; their letter to the same (Istanbul, November 16th 1555) HNSA Turcica I, 12 Konv. 2, fols. 165-172, specif. 165r.

³⁰ De Wijs to Maximilian II (Istanbul, Januari 29th 1569) HNSA Turcica I, 25 Konv. 2, fols. 53-54, specif. 53r.

³¹ Attachment to the report of Edoardo de Provisionali (Istanbul, February 20th 1570) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 1, fols. 161-164, specif. 163v; the same to Maximilian II (Istanbul, June 18th 1570) *ibidem*, Konv. 2, fols. 113-128, specif. 122r.

³² Philibert to Maximilian II (Bratislava, Februari 12th 1575) HNSA Turcica I, 31 Konv. 1, fols. 118-119, specif. 118r-v.

³³ Zay en Vrančić to Ferdinand (Istanbul, November 20th & 27th 1553) HNSA Turcica I, 10 Konv. 2, fols. 126-130, specif. 126r, 129v.

could be rather pleasant. Grand Vizier Rüstem repeatedly asked for the reappointment of 'Yerardo' in the following years.³⁴ According to a Venetian informant of the emperor, Rijm, like his predecessor de Wijs, was revered at the Porte.³⁵ Matters were different for de Schepper, with whom the sultan was disgruntled because he had no full imperial mandate. Each time he left the *arz odası* (audience room) of the Topkapı Palace, long rows of janissaries awaited him on the courtyard, hurling loud insults.³⁶ First imperial envoy Veltwijck, on the other hand, gained great respect at the court, as he and his Habsburg colleague noted.³⁷ The sultan even bestowed upon him the honour of giving him an elaborate answer during his audience – extremely rare in a time where Süleyman remained more and more silent during diplomatic encounters.³⁸

Employing a neutral linguistic register was beneficial to the diplomatic cause. It avoided unnecessary conflicts and allowed participants to focus on the technical issues. As said, the diplomats from the Low Countries are exemplary in this respect. One of the few times Rijm spoke harshly about his hosts was during his house arrest – imposed because the imperial tribute had not yet arrived. The envoy asked the Porte to take his bad health into account but, he wrote in a letter to Maximilian, 'the Barbarian' refused his request.³⁹

Researching the Habsburg diplomatic correspondence in this century, it is striking to notice that the classic prejudices only surfaced during problematic situations, systematically shifting the blame on to the Ottoman dignitaries and, *a fortiori*, the Turks. Nevertheless, some envoys could not shed their prejudices during their stay. Since Ungnad's arrival, who had joined Rijm in Istanbul, the tone of their correspondence changed dramatically. Each and every letter they sent to Vienna contained these prejudices, while they were absent in the previous years.⁴⁰

Yet one should not assume the amiability was not superficial – it was professional. Throughout the sixteenth century, the legal position of the diplomat was precarious at every European court – and more so in Istanbul. Although the Ottoman Empire should be considered as a full actor in early modern European geopolitics, diplomats were daunted by such an appointment. Right before his second appointment, Veltwijck wrote: 'Every day, this task seems more and more dangerous'.⁴¹ De Wijs openly wondered whether he could stand up to the pressure of this undertaking.⁴² Rijm had similar concerns; he, like Veltwijck, felt obliged to accept the assignment for the benefit of the empire and Christendom.⁴³ Both in private and official letters, most diplomats referred to the real cause – the victory of Christianity over Islam. Shortly after his second departure, Veltwijck expressed his conviction that a good result of his appointment would strengthen his personal faith. After his return,

³⁴ Veltwijck to Ferdinand (Esztergom, August 16th 1546) HNSA Turcica I, 6 Konv. 4, fols. 71-82.

³⁵ Advice of Andrea Bon to Maximilian II (s.l., [ca May 1573]) HNSA Turcica I, 29 Konv. 4, fols. 188-195, specif. 188r.

³⁶ J. W. Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches in Europa* (7 parts, Gotha, 1840-1863) part 2, 815.

³⁷ Niccolò Sicco to Ferdinand (Istanbul, September 7th 1545). *Austro-Turcica*, 75.

³⁸ Veltwijck to Ferdinand (Edirne, December 18th 1546). *Austro-Turcica*, 128. On Süleyman's silent attitude during audiences, see P. Fodor, 'Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman ruling Elite and the Formation of the Grand Vizierial telhîs', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 47 (1994/1-2) 67-85, specif. 68.

³⁹ Rijm and Ungnad to Maximilian II (Istanbul, June 9th 1574) HNSA Turcica I, 30 Konv. 3, fols. 35-38, specif. 36v.

⁴⁰ Compare their jointly written letter to Maximilian II (Istanbul, September 21st 1573 and *ibidem*, June 9th 1574) (HNSA Turcica I, 29 Konv. 3, fols. 153-156 and 30 Konv. 3, fols. 35-38) with for example Rijm's letters to the same (Vienna, April 17th 1570 and Istanbul, Juli 15th 1570) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 2, fols. 16-17 and 26 Konv. 3, fols. 199-261.

⁴¹ Veltwijck to Ferdinand (Vienna, Juli 28th 1546) HNSA Turcica I, 6 Konv. 4, fols. 65-66.

⁴² De Wijs to Maximilian (Istanbul, Juli 20th 1562) HNSA Turcica I, 16 Konv. 1, fols. 13-14, specif. 13r.

⁴³ Rijm to Maximilian II (Brussels, September 3rd 1569) HNSA Turcica I, 25 Konv. 3, fols. 143-144, specif. 143r; *idem* to *idem* (Vienna, April 17th 1570) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 2, fols. 16-17, specif. 16v-17r.

he wrote to the President of the Privy Council and the Council of State of the Low Countries: 'Unfortunately we have not yet obtained victory'.⁴⁴

Negotiating without intermediaries

As early as the mid-forties of the sixteenth century, the Habsburg Empire started working on alternatives for the dragomans of the Porte. Two distinct approaches were taken: forcing the Porte to allow them to use the more independent Levantine dragomans and training *giovanni di lingua* to become Habsburg interpreters – unknown facts until now. Thus, long before the systematic education of *Sprachknaben* in Istanbul in the seventeenth century and the founding of the *Orientalische Akademie* in Vienna in the eighteenth century, Habsburg diplomats in Istanbul already succeeded in becoming less dependent on third parties with regard to translation and interpretation. Veltwijck, de Wijs and Rijm each played a defining role in this aspect of a maturing diplomacy.

Compared to their Venetian or French peers, the Habsburg diplomats to the Porte were quite gullible in their first century of diplomatic relations. For many decades they confided in the dragomans – although being Ottoman and appointed by the sultan – without realizing their duplicity.⁴⁵ Slowly, however, the distrust grew in the second half of the century and countermeasures were taken. The first trace of these measures was in the summer of 1546. A Habsburg agent in Ragusa proposed to open secret negotiations with the viziers 'amotis arbitris', without intermediaries. He suggested to hire a Florentine merchant who spoke Ottoman to assist during the talks.⁴⁶

The next year, Veltwijck proposed to go one step further. He succeeded in convincing Ferdinand of the value of permanently hiring Levantine dragomans in Istanbul. He had just returned from the Ottoman capital and wanted to aid his former secretary Malvezzi – the first resident envoy – against the schemes of head dragoman Yunus Bey.⁴⁷ Veltwijck's man was indeed recruited the next year. But because he continued to work for the French embassy and was not well-regarded by the grand vizier, his services were discontinued shortly afterwards.⁴⁸

In the following decades, de Wijs and Rijm persisted in using Levantine dragomans that could gain them independence of the Porte and the Venetian and the French embassy. But they encountered continuous resistance by the Porte, who rightly felt the influence of their own dragomans was threatened. Nevertheless, the Habsburgs were successful in forcing the Porte to accept the presence of their own dragomans during official talks. Which resident first succeeded herein is not known. Already in the spring of 1570, shortly after de Wijs' death, two Levantine dragomans of the Habsburgs were present during the audience of a delegate with the grand vizier. The head dragoman of the Porte was equally present.⁴⁹ Upon arriving that same year, Rijm, like his immediate predecessors, recruited two dragomans in Pera. By systematically using his own interpreters, he succeeded in diminishing the influence of the head dragoman of the Porte. For example, he daily sent his own

⁴⁴ Veltwijck to Ferdinand (Esztergom, August 16th 1546) HNSA Turcica I, 6 Konv. 4, fols. 71-82, specif. 71r; idem to Lodewijk van Schore (Augsburg, September 3rd 1547) HNSA Turcica I, 7 Konv. 2, fols. 129-130, specif. 129r.

⁴⁵ J. Matuz, 'Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen', *Südost-Forschungen. Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte, Kultur und Landeskunde Südosteuropas*, 34 (1975) 26-60.

⁴⁶ Michele Bucignulo to Ferdinand (s.l., Juli 13th 1546) HNSA Turcica I, 6 Konv. 4, fols. 48-52, specif. 49r.

⁴⁷ Report of a meeting with Veltwijck ([Augsburg?, before December 7th 1547]) HNSA Turcica I, 7 Konv. 2, fols. 187-188, specif. 187v.

⁴⁸ Report of Justus de Argento (s.l., April-May 1548). *Austro-Turcica*, 249.

⁴⁹ Report of Edoardo de Provisionali and Anselm Stöckl (Istanbul, Februari 20th 1570) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 1, fols. 117-130, specif. 118v.

dragoman to the viziers to exchange positions or to request an audience. He also used him to translate a letter from the sultan to the emperor into Italian, instead of depending on the often wilfully faulty translations of the Porte's own dragomans. That way, he forced his own dragoman upon the Porte. Grand Vizier Mehmed Paşa tolerated his presence in the *Divan* and even sent documents to both Rijm's dragomans and the head dragoman of the Porte.⁵⁰

The importance of this realization should not be underestimated. To have trustworthy dragomans at one's disposal meant that inserting small but meaningful differences in translated treaty texts by the Porte's dragomans, as Busbecq had uncovered in the mid-fifties, could be avoided more easily. Rijm had shown clear vision and excellent skills in attaining this goal. His predecessor de Wijs' efforts are less documented but are certainly substantial.

But de Wijs and Rijm went even further. Presumably, de Wijs was the first Habsburg envoy in Istanbul to decide to train young boys to become dragomans. Educating one's own translators – instead of using the dragomans appointed by the sultan or the Levantine dragomans of Pera – proved to be, in the centuries to come, the main cause of the decline of the great dragoman dynasties.⁵¹ The fact that the roots of this detrimental evolution lay in the sixteenth century is well-researched: the Venetians in 1551, the French in 1559 and the Polish in 1569 decided to send young country-men to their respective embassies in Istanbul to be trained in the Ottoman language.⁵² Unknown is the fact that the Habsburg emperor had made a similar decision around 1570. De Wijs advised the emperor to send two or three young boys to Istanbul with each new envoy, to be trained by a local *hoca* or teacher. Only after his death in 1569 was this brought into practice partially, although de Wijs had already been training local slaves. Upon arriving in Istanbul, his successor Rijm met a young Spaniard that, as a young boy, had been trained by de Wijs in the Ottoman language. That boy would be working as a dragoman for the Habsburgs until 1608. Rijm himself added four young slaves to his household and had them trained by a *hoca*.⁵³

Travel companions

Until 1548 the Habsburg delegation did not have a fixed residence in Istanbul. Diplomats therefore took with them all necessary personnel on their journey to the Porte, such as couriers, stableboys, a tailor, a barber, a goldsmith, cooks and physicians – amounting to around 40-60 persons. Not much research has been conducted on whether some of these employees originated from the Low Countries. An exception is William Quackelbeen, a physician who accompanied Busbecq in 1555. The diplomat also needed a secretary – his

⁵⁰ Rijm to Maximilian II (Istanbul, Juli 15th 1570) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 3, fols. 199-253, specif. 239r, 241v, 244v; Rijm and Ungnad to the same (Istanbul, September 21st 1573) HNSA Turcica I, 29 Konv. 3, fol. 153-156, specif. 154v-155r.

⁵¹ A.H. de Groot, 'Die Dragomane 1700–1869. Zum Verlust ihrer interkulturellen Funktion' in: M. Kurz et al (eds.), *Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie. Akten des internationalen Kongresses zum 150-jährigen Bestehen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Wien 22.-25. September 2004* (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung. Ergänzungsband 48) (Oldenbourg-Vienna, 2005) 471-488.

⁵² I. Palumbo Fossati Casa, 'L'École vénitienne des „Giovani di Lingua“' in: F. Hitzel (ed.), *Istanbul et les langues orientales. Actes du colloque organisé par l'IFEA et l'INALCO à l'occasion du bicentenaire de l'École des Langues Orientales. Istanbul 29-31 Mai 1995* (Varia Turcica 31) (Paris-Istanbul, 1997) 109-122. M. Gautier and A. Gautier, 'Un précurseur de l'École des jeunes de langues en 1558, Jean de la Vigne', *Bulletin de l'Association des Anciens Elèves de l'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales*, (1996/May) 3-5. D. Kołodziejczyk, (ed.), *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century). An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents* (The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage 18) (Leiden-Boston-Cologne, 2000) 178-179.

⁵³ Anselm Stöckl to Maximilian II (Istanbul, November 12th 1569) HNSA Turcica I, 25 Konv. 4, fols. 58-61, specif. 60v-61r; idem to Sinckmoser ([Istanbul], 1569) ibidem, Konv. 2, fols. 151-154, specif. 151r-v; Rijm to Maximilian II (Istanbul, Juli 15th 1570) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 3, fols. 199-261, specif. 203v.

scribe, confidant and, when need be, chargé d'affaires. He was often chosen by himself amongst his acquaintances. Veltwijck chose Matthew Laurijn, a financial official in the States General of the Low Countries and son of a famous humanist from Bruges. He was appointed immediately before Veltwijck's departure.⁵⁴

Almost always, many scholars traveled along as well. They were usually young, well-educated men that were erudite and somewhat adventurous. Above all, they were financially strong, whether thanks to personal capital or a patron. These companions were responsible for their own expenses; they brought along their own servants, horses and carriages.⁵⁵ For a short time, Veltwijck stayed in Venice at Hurtado de Mendoza's, the imperial ambassador, while preparing for his first mission. By coincidence, a young Zeelandic student, Hugo Favolius, saw an old fellow-student in Veltwijck's suite and asked to accompany them on their journey to the Levant. Favolius' task, if any, is unclear. But some years after his travels, he published a Latin epic poem, lauding the diplomat's actions in an extremely favourable manner.⁵⁶

Nicander Nucius of Corcyra, a Greek scribe, also accompanied Veltwijck on his first assignment to the Porte. Nicander was one of many scribes employed by Hurtado de Mendoza, collecting and copying ancient manuscripts. He offered his services to Veltwijck, who accepted. Traveling to the Levant, then, was a unique opportunity to Nicander and his employer. Collecting manuscripts was one of the favourite activities of the diplomat's travel companions. During his travels in the Levant, Nicander copied a large number of manuscripts.⁵⁷

Sometimes artists were present in the diplomat's entourage. The best-known example in the sixteenth century was the Danish Melchior Lorck, who portrayed Busbecq as a diplomat. Most famously, he drew a panoramic view of Istanbul, which was exhibited in the library of Leiden's university after his death. It is still present in its collection up to this day.⁵⁸ Years before, Pieter Coecke van Aelst had accompanied de Schepper. He originally intended to make sketches for mural tapestries. After his death, the sketches were published by his widow.⁵⁹ Yet these examples remained exceptions in this century. From the seventeenth century onwards, European ambassadors in Istanbul commissioned portraits of themselves and their diplomatic activities. Traces of sixteenth-century artists portraying Habsburg envoys remain rare.

The suite of voluntary travel companions was not a fixed unity. Some decided to remain behind or take another route, like Favolius who traveled to the Aegean isles during Veltwijck's first stay in Istanbul. They were often added to the suite by chance. Yet Veltwijck once called them 'mes amis'.⁶⁰ Some joined a diplomatic suite multiple times, like the Fleming Henry Piermont who had traveled with Busbecq, Kaspar von Minckwitz and Rijm to Istanbul.⁶¹

Scholarly activities in Istanbul

⁵⁴ De Schepper to John Dantiscus (Binche, June 12th 1546). De Vocht, *John Dantiscus*, 387.

⁵⁵ Picard, *Des Gesandtschaftswesen*, 63.

⁵⁶ H. Favolius, *Hodoeporici Byzantini Lib. III. Ad illustrissimum D.D. Antonium Perrenotum Cardinalem Granuellanum* (Louvain, 1563) fol. 7v-11v.

⁵⁷ N. Nucius, *Voyages*, J.-A. de Foucault (ed.) (Nouvelle collection de textes et documents) (Paris, 1962) 11-13.

⁵⁸ O. de Busbecq, *Legationis Turcicae epistolae quatuor. Vier brieven over het gezantschap naar Turkije*, M. Goldsteen and Z. von Martels (eds.) (Hilversum, 1994) 67.

⁵⁹ Wunder, 'Western Travelers', 118-114.

⁶⁰ Veltwijck to Charles V (Ragusa, June 30th 1545). Lanz, *Correspondenz*, part II, 453-455, specif. 454.

⁶¹ Petition of Rijm (s.l., [ca. Februari 10th 1570]) HNSA Turcica I, 26 Konv. 1, fols. 59-70, specif. 64v-65r.

The interest that his scholarly companions took in the antiquities of the Near East was often shared by the diplomat himself.⁶² Classically trained, he too often actively searched for artefacts, of his own accord or instructed by the emperor or a friend. A notable example is the discovery of the Monumentum Ancyranum, carrying the *Res gestae divi Augusti*, by Busbecq, who transcribed parts of it in his *Turkish Letters*. De Wijs and Rijm, however, serving under Maximilian II and Rudolf II, were obliged to cater to the alchemic interests of these emperors, occasionally sending them capsules of *terra lemna*, bezoars and other gems.⁶³

Busbecq's botanical interests are, again, best-known. After French scientist Pierre Belon, he was the second European to describe the tulip. Possibly, he sent tulip bulbs to friends in Europe. But the other Habsburg diplomats had botanical expertise too. Rijm, for example, sent Busbecq 'some sour roots and a handful of flower bulbs and seeds'. After his return he promised to send more.⁶⁴

Perhaps even more than Busbecq, Veltwijck was responsible for supplying several famous botanists and physicians with formerly unknown roots and herbs. He had befriended Rembert Dodoens and the Portuguese Amatus Lusitanus, who both acknowledged the diplomat's contributions in supplying them with new specimen. Dodoens dedicated *De frugum historia* – a precursor to the *Cruydeboeck* – to him. Not only during his stay in the Levant did Veltwijck collect botanical specimen. He also put his botanical knowledge into practice on the Italian peninsula, the Alpes and 'other parts of the world'.⁶⁵ In his first edition of *De humani corporis fabrica*, Andreas Vesalius called him the 'best trained botanist' of his time. Some years later, he credited Veltwijck once again in his treatise on the Chinese root.⁶⁶ It is likely that Veltwijck had published a botanical study: English herborist William Turner referred in 1562, seven years after Veltwijck's death, to his opinion on *Barbarea vulgaris*, a biennial herb that we now know as bittercress.⁶⁷ The herb was originally native to Anatolia. Therefore, it is conceivable that, considering his botanical merits, it was first described or imported by Veltwijck.

An imperial point of contact in Istanbul

Although the Habsburg resident envoys did not have full diplomatic rights at the Sublime Porte, Christians in the Ottoman Empire often flocked to the Habsburg residence, pleading their case with the diplomat. Extraterritoriality was only formally granted in the seventeenth century (and was not widely accepted at sixteenth-century European courts either). Yet in reality the residence offered shelter to people who originated from Habsburg territories or offered their services to the emperor. Even before the Habsburg representatives had a fixed residence (the *Nemçe Hanı* or *casa de Austria*, as it was called by either parties in Istanbul), their lodging became an important point of contact. Both Christians and Muslims came to Veltwijck's house during lunch or supper to plead their case.⁶⁸ Shortly afterwards, a fixed

⁶² A. Wunder, 'Western Travelers, Eastern Antiquities, and the Image of the Turk in Early Modern Europe', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 7 (2003/1) 89-119.

⁶³ De Wijs to Maximilian II (Istanbul, April 23rd 1569) HNSA Turcica I, 25 Konv. 2, fols. 129-136, specif. 134v.

⁶⁴ Rijm to Maximilian II (Istanbul, October 12th 1573) HNSA Turcica I, 29 Konv. 4, fols. 31-32, specif. 32r.

⁶⁵ R. Dodoens, *De Frugum Historia, Liber unus. Eiusdem Epistolae Duae, Una de Farre, Chondro, Trago, Ptisana, Crimno, & Alica. Altera de Zytho, & Cereusia* (Antwerp, 1552) 2-3; J.O. L[eibowitz], 'Amatus Lusitanus', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2 (1971) 795-798.

⁶⁶ A. Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (Basel, 1543) 2v; C.D. O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels, 1514-1564* (Berkeley, 1964) 19, 31, 275.

⁶⁷ W. Turner, *A New Herball*, G. Chapman and M. Tweddle (eds.) (Cambridge, 1995) 67.

⁶⁸ Report of Veltwijck ([Augsburg?, before December 1547]) HNSA Turcica I, 7 Konv. 2, fols. 187-188, specif. 187r.

residence was obtained, after which even more people of all sorts and conditions found their way to the *casa de Austria*.

Mostly, these were slaves and prisoners of war. The Habsburg diplomats had often been given instructions to obtain the release of certain, notable prisoners as part of the wheeling and dealing of diplomatic negotiations. Surprisingly, perhaps, the residents also bought the freedom of slaves of their own accord. Unfortunately, they often made large debts in the process. Busbecq spent a fortune on freeing Italians and Spaniards who were captured at Djerba in 1560. Already during his stay in Istanbul he was forced by his creditors to pay off his debts. After his return, he tried for years to reclaim the money from the *Hofkammer*. Eventually, both Emperor Maximilian II and King Philip II reimbursed him.⁶⁹ A decade later De Wijs even asked his secretary to help cover expenses.⁷⁰

Typical diplomats?

In many other aspects of the Habsburg-Ottoman diplomacy did the diplomats from the Low Countries also play a substantial role: preparing a mission, passing on knowledge to newly appointed diplomats, fortifying the information-gathering networks, gaining a strategic advantage by deliberate disinformation, solving the structural financial shortages in Istanbul and so forth. While these are the subject of a forthcoming monography, the above has clearly demonstrated the value, the skill and the lucidity of the diplomats from the Low Countries, serving under Habsburg kings and emperors in the Ottoman Empire. One could see them as typical: they fitted the average description of a sixteenth-century Habsburg diplomat to the Porte perfectly. Yet, thanks to their very long state of service and their actions and innovations in the field, they were largely responsible for the shaping of that very image. More importantly, they had a lasting impact on diplomatic practice itself. Although not all of their initiatives fell through, several did, thereby laying the foundations of rights, privileges and customs that were often only formally recognized in the next century.

⁶⁹ Martels, 'On His Majesty's Service', 174-176. See also Michael Černović to Ferdinand (Istanbul, March 5th 1562) HNSA Turcica I, 15 Konv. 2, fols. 52-57, specif. 56v.

⁷⁰ Anselm Stöckl to vice-chancellor Johann Ulrich Zasien (Istanbul, May 29th 1569) HNSA Turcica I, 25 Konv. 3, fols. 16-17, specif. 16r.