

Discuss the reception of European diplomats at the Ottoman Court between 1535 and 1720.

There is a letter in the State Papers, Foreign sent by William Harborne, English Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (1583-88), to Sir Francis Walsingham in late 1584. In the letter, Harborne relates the story of the death of the Ottoman Beglerbey (governor) of Tripoli and the subsequent killing of his son by two Venetian galleys, in response to which the Sultan talked of invading Candia (Heraklion). According to Harborne, 'I think the sore will be salved by money, for he [the Sultan] demands 100,000 ducats (said to be the deceased Bey's present) due to him, and as "a staff is easily found to beat a hound" he must be credited.'¹

Between 1536 and 1720, the donation of money and luxury goods to the Sultan, often during Sultanic audiences at the Court, was one of the best ways to maintain strong diplomatic relations with the Porte (the government of the Ottoman Empire; the Court).

This leads me to the first strand of my argument. Both European powers and the Ottomans had reasons to maintain healthy diplomatic relations with each other. For both sides, strong trading links were central. Geopolitics was also important. England needed a strong ally against Spain – which Harborne labelled the "head of the idol-worshippers" – and found it in the Ottomans.² In return for Ottoman anti-Hispanic overtures, England supported the Ottoman cause against the Holy Roman Empire. Venice also forged and maintained strong alliances with the Ottomans, mainly for mutually beneficial commercial reasons. When the Ottomans negotiated with the Holy Roman Empire both powers were

¹ Harborne to Walsingham, 7 December 1584, Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Cambridge University, Vol. 19, p. 181.

² Harborne quote taken from W. Hale, 'Introduction: the Historical Background', in W. Hale and A. İhsan Bağış (eds.), *Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations: Studies in Diplomatic, Economic and Cultural Affairs*, Michigan: The Eothen Press, 1984, p. 1.

motivated by the desire to resolve the ongoing conflict between them. The first strand of my argument, then, is that pragmatic mutual self-interest underlay the conduct of Ottoman-European diplomatic relations at the Ottoman Court during our period.

The second, complementary strand of my argument is that Orientalist interpretations are misplaced when applied to the interaction of European diplomats with the Ottoman Court in our period. Orientalist interpretations tend to view the Orient through a prejudiced, negative and antagonistic lens. I will argue that, far from having a mutually antagonistic relationship, European diplomats and the Ottoman Court cooperated in remarkable harmony. Many European diplomats were indeed in awe of what they saw at the Court, but tended to praise Ottoman traditions and Court culture rather than to hold Orientalist prejudices about what they saw.³ When they criticised Ottoman customs or rulers, it was often simply to inject balance into their analyses. Indeed, a different kind of Orientalism, a positive appreciation of all things Turkish – *Turquerie* – swept Europe during our period, contributed to in part by the writings of European diplomats in Constantinople.

This two-pronged argument will be interwoven with the essay's successive themes. The main corpus of the essay will be split into three parts. The first part will consist of a discussion of the motivations driving diplomatic relations between European powers and the Ottoman Court and of how the diplomatic situation could impact upon the lives of diplomats at the Porte. I will show the centrality of pragmatic mutual self-interest as the motivating factor behind the establishment of diplomatic relations. It underlay the trading relationship

³ The tone and content of the works of diplomats such as Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq and Paul Rycaut and of English Ambassador Edward Wortley Montagu's wife Mary Wortley Montagu reflects this. See O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), London: Eland Publishing Ltd., 2001; P. Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1971; and M. Wortley-Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, M. Jack (ed.). London: Virago Press, 1994.

between European powers and the Ottomans. It also underpinned the geopolitical relationship and interreligious relations between these powers. Furthermore, I will show that diplomatic alliances were largely characterised by a spirit of friendly cooperation rather than what Ezel Kural Shaw calls ‘a feeling of Europe versus the Turk, or one culture in contrast to another.’⁴

The second part of the essay will look at the nature of diplomats’ audiences at and experiences of the Court. This will focus upon gift giving, ceremonial, personal audiences with the Sultan and diplomats’ perceptions of Ottoman Sultans. I will show how pragmatic mutual self-interest lay at the heart of the diplomatic relationships at Court and I will also show how antagonism is far less evident than European appreciation for the Court in the primary literature. The third part of the essay will examine issues of gender in relation to the reception of European diplomats at the Ottoman Court, focusing upon the relationships between European diplomats and Ottoman women at the Court and between European diplomats’ wives and Ottoman women at the Court. Here, I will show that pragmatic mutual self-interest led European men to shun Ottoman women and vice versa, for fear of offending the moralities and traditions of the period, but that their interest in each other often led them to meet furtively. The one European primary source written in our period by a female discussing the Ottoman Court that I have come across (Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Letters*) shows that its author was able to meet Ottoman women openly. This was a

⁴ E.K. Shaw, ‘The Double Veil: Travelers’ Views of the Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries’, in E.K. Shaw and C.J. Heywood, *English and Continental Views of the Ottoman Empire, 1500-1800: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, January 24 1970*, Los Angeles: University of California, 1972, p. 25.

way of solidifying Ottoman-European diplomatic friendships. Lady Mary's letters are strikingly honest, not Orientalist.

For my investigation, I have utilised a range of sources. Published primary sources used encompass English and French sources, and Venetian and Habsburg sources in translation. A lacuna in my research is the lack of Ottoman primary sources available in English translation. I located two useful sources available in translation: Volume I of Mustafa Naima's (1655-1716) *Annals* and Volume I of Evliya Çelebi's (1611-1682) ten-volume *Book of Travels*. The former, which has much to say about Ottoman diplomatic and military developments as well as about the character of Sultans and religious interrelationships, was more useful than the latter, which focuses upon descriptions of Ottoman functionaries, architecture and provinces.

I have utilised a wide range of published primary sources. They include diaries, such as those of Thomas Dallam (c.1575-c.1630), who was attached to the English Embassy, Antoine Galland (1646-1715), secretary to the French Ambassador in 1670-75, and Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrowitz (writing in the 1590s), who accompanied a Habsburg delegation to the Porte. I have studied descriptive accounts of Constantinople's Seraglio (the principal location of the Court), such as those of Ottaviano Bon (1552-1623), a Venetian Bailo (diplomatic representative to the Porte), and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689), an antiquarian. I have also investigated travel literature, exemplified by John Sanderson (writing 1584-1602) and Guillaume Grelot (writing mid 1600s), which is less useful for writing about the Court than diaries and accounts of the Seraglio. Paul Rycaut's (1629-1700) work on the Ottoman polity provides useful information on Court receptions. Demetrius Cantemir (1673-

1723), Prince of Moldavia, who sided with Peter the Great against the Ottomans, writes in a remarkably balanced style, without Orientalist prejudices. I have also utilised the letters of English Ambassadors such as William Harborne (c.1542-1617) and Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644), of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (c.1689-1762), wife of English Ambassador Edward Wortley Montagu (1678-1761), and of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522-91), Ambassador of Ferdinand, King of the Romans (later Ferdinand I, Holy Roman Emperor), which give revealing insights into European views of the Ottomans.

The Calendar of State Papers, Foreign furthers our understanding of the dynamics of Anglo-Ottoman and Ottoman-European relations in our period. While I am aware of the limitations of this shortened and often paraphrased version of the State Papers Foreign, it provides us with a useful insight into diplomatic developments and realities in our period.

Many of the primary sources are remarkably consistent and complement each other in their analyses. Sources may be unreliable when they discuss elements of Court life with which their authors are particularly unfamiliar, such as the Harem (the women's quarters).

I have examined a range of secondary sources. They have provided me with rich information on the history of Constantinople (Philip Mansel's book was particularly useful), the history of the Ottoman Empire (Stanford Shaw and Alan Palmer provided much information on this), and, perhaps most saliently, Ottoman-European diplomatic and trade relations (a range of texts) and the history of the Seraglio (John Freely).

Pragmatic mutual self-interest underlay diplomatic relations with the Court. Trading and commercial concerns lay at the heart of this. Italian states had been trading with the

Turkoman Emirates and the Byzantine Empire for centuries.⁵ After 1453, the Italians continued to maintain their strong commercial ties with the Levant. The French set up a permanent Embassy to the Porte in 1535, followed by the English in the 1580s. Goods in demand in Europe such as soda ash, used for making soap and glass, medicinal drugs, currants and other fruits and raw silk could be obtained from the Ottoman Empire. For the Ottomans, trade gave added value to their goods and provided an influx of wealth to the Empire. The powerful Levant Company had a major role in furthering England's trading interests in Turkey. Until the nineteenth century, it was responsible for the payment of England's 'consuls, ambassadors, and other officials' in the Levant.⁶ Diplomats went to the Court seeking favourable trading conditions, granted through 'capitulations' (effectively Sultanic privileges). A series of capitulations were granted to the French in 1569 after their diplomatic efforts at Court, and similar capitulations were granted to the English in 1580.⁷ Harborne had instant success at Court at his first Sultanic audience, gaining for the English a preferential customs tariff of three per cent, two per cent less than that paid by other foreigners.⁸ By the early seventeenth century, French trade with the Ottoman Empire was believed to comprise half of all their maritime commerce, and numerous European powers had strong trading links with the Porte, facilitated by their diplomats at Court.⁹ Interrelations

⁵ D. Goffman, 'Negotiating with the Renaissance state: the Ottoman Empire and the new diplomacy', in V.H. Aksan and D. Goffman (eds.), *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 62.

⁶ J.T. Bent (ed.), *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, London: Chas. J. Clark, 4, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C., 1893, pp. xix-xx. See also P. Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924*, London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., 1995, p. 113.

⁷ See 'A Latin rendering of the privileges or letters of the most potent Mussulman Emperor Sultan Murad Khan at the request of Elizabeth, etc. confirming peace and alliance', 7 June 1580, Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Cambridge University, Vol. 14, p. 284, item 305, which gives some of the detail of the 1580 capitulations, the rest of which may be found in the State Papers Foreign at Kew.

⁸ S. Skilliter, 'William Harborne, the First English Ambassador 1583-1588', in W. Hale and A. İhsan Bağış (eds.), *Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations*, p. 23.

⁹ P. Mansel, *Constantinople*, p. 114.

between Ottomans and Europeans trading with the Porte were overwhelmingly positive. The powers set aside religious differences to focus on mutual self-interest.¹⁰

Major powers also sent diplomats to the Court for political reasons. To maintain good commercial relations, pragmatic mutual self-interest led France, England, Italy and the Ottoman Empire to work in near-constant allegiance in 1535-1720. There were tensions between the Ottoman Empire and the neighbouring Holy Roman Empire, with frequent disputes over land and the status of religious minorities, and major wars in, for example, 1593-1606 and 1683-1697. Imperial diplomats such as Busbecq and Frederic Kregwitz were received at the Ottoman Court to find diplomatic solutions to the conflict. This was in the interests of these two powers, but often diplomacy failed. Nevertheless, antagonism is not always evident in Habsburg literature. Busbecq praises Ottoman institutions and the Grand Vizier (the Sultan's chief minister) Roostem Pasha.

International relations also played a role in determining the living conditions of European diplomats. Living conditions were good when the international situation was good. Sultanic audiences were a rare occurrence for visiting diplomats. More commonly, time would be spent in Pera, a suburb of Constantinople favoured by European diplomats. They could spend much of their time as they wished. As numerous primary sources show, when not engaged in official business, diplomats could, for example, spend their time visiting gardens and islands, catching fowl, conies and oysters, exploring Constantinople and collecting antiquities.¹¹ This gave the diplomats an opportunity to engage with Ottoman

¹⁰ Eric R. Dursteler makes this argument convincingly, focusing on Venice, in E.R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, esp. pp. 1-21.

culture, leading to the emergence of *Turquerie*. Diplomats developed a profound affinity with Ottoman culture, and European Embassies sponsored artists to paint Europeans in Ottoman dress. The Sultan extended his influence over the diplomats by using Court revenues to provide for their upkeep in Pera. According to Venetian Bailo Ottaviano Bon, ‘all Ambassadors..., all, I say, lie at the charges of the Grand Signor [the Sultan].’ He adds that a daily sum of aspers (a Turkish currency denomination) and a large daily quantity of food is given to all Ambassadors who are in favour with the Sultan and his Court.¹² Baron Wenceslas, Kregwitz’s secretary, notes this as well. Diplomatic relations were more effective, to the mutual benefit of Ottomans and Europeans, when diplomats were able to lead their lives as they wished. Only when the diplomatic situation became highly strained, would the Ottomans resort to punishing diplomats, as Busbecq and Baron Wenceslas discovered.¹³ Two Persian Ambassadors were even executed, although this fate never befell a European Ambassador.¹⁴

European diplomats in Constantinople were given a strong degree of autonomy and many privileges through the granting of capitulations.¹⁵ Their situation largely mirrored that of the *millets*, or non-Muslim religious communities, of the Ottoman Empire, who were given

¹¹ A. Galland, *Voyage à Constantinople (1672-1673), Tome Second*, C. Schefer (ed.), Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002, p. 59, pp. 140-41; W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrowitz*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), London: Bell and Daldy, 186, Fleet Street, 1862, pp. 82-84.

¹² O. Bon, *A Description of the Grand Signor’s Seraglio, or Turkish Emperours Court*, J. Greaves (ed.), London: the Castle in Fleet-street by Ram Alley, 1650, p. 33; W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), p. 67.

¹³ See W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), p. 104; and O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), pp. xii and 53, relating to the house arrest suffered by these two Habsburg diplomats. For an account of Baron Wenceslas’s dreadful period of incarceration during part of the Austro-Ottoman War of 1593-1606 see W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), pp. 124-193.

¹⁴ P. Mansel, *Constantinople*, p. 190.

¹⁵ D. Goffman, ‘Negotiating with the Renaissance state’, in V.H. Aksan and D. Goffman (eds.), *The Early Modern Ottomans*, p. 72.

religious freedom in exchange for obedience to the Ottoman state. It was perhaps a proto-extra-territoriality for the diplomats. In the primary source literature, only Baron Wenceslas is a conspicuous hater of the Muslims, but then he was a member of a Habsburg delegation imprisoned by the Ottomans during a major war between the two powers. Ottoman chronicler Mustafa Naima calls Christianity a 'vain religion', but he adds that his hatred was aimed primarily at 'the ungracious Pope of Rome'.¹⁶ The Ottomans often favoured Protestants like the Dutch and English over Catholics, with their Habsburg connotations. In general, however, religious coexistence led to harmonious Islamo-Christian interrelations, the pragmatic mutual self-interest of maintaining strong shared trading ties superseding religious concerns.

Audiences at the Ottoman Court were the apogee of European diplomats' missions to the Porte. Gift giving was an important way for diplomats to create, maintain and strengthen diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Court, and thus can be intrinsically linked to the pragmatic mutual self-interest thesis. Ottoman courtiers would give gifts in return. A great many primary sources describe the act of gift giving at the Court by European diplomats, providing a vivid and useful wealth of primary knowledge to the historian. Gift giving was a formal part of Sultanic audiences. Gifts were usually presented to the Sultan by a foreign Ambassador after he and his retinue had ceremonially entered the Court and dined with high-ranking courtiers there. Gifts given at just one audience could be numerous and of substantial monetary value. They could include large quantities of silver plate, candlesticks, garments of satin or cloth of gold, ready money, ornate clocks and even live animals such as spaniels and

¹⁶ M. Naima, *Annals of the Turkish Empire, from 1591 to 1659 of the Christian Era, Volume I*, C. Fraser (trans.), London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1832, p. 299.

bloodhounds. Cited below are numerous descriptions of gift giving.¹⁷ The goodwill of Sultans could often be gained through gift giving and lost if another power donated a finer array of presents. In 1599, English Ambassador Henry Lello realised this. Under Lello, the English had secured capitulations from the Sultan, having donated an array of luxury gifts to him, but a subsequent present of 6,000 sequins from the French Ambassador caused the capitulations to be revoked and conferred upon the French.¹⁸ If gifts, when anticipated, were not given, disaster could result. The Ottomans expected an annual donation of gifts from Ambassadors resident in the Porte. When Kregwitz, citing Ottoman hostility against Croatia and Hungary, refused to comply with this, the Grand Vizier quarantined him and his train in their Pera residence.¹⁹ Gifts would also be given to departing Ambassadors by the Sultan and by courtiers such as the Grand Vizier. These could be substantial. Busbecq, for example, received three ‘fine horses’ and ‘a really beautiful robe interwoven with gold’, among other gifts, when he left Turkey for Vienna for the final time.²⁰ Diplomats like Busbecq loved receiving these Ottoman gifts and helped propagate the *Turquerie* craze.

Ceremonial during Court audiences at the Seraglio was spoken of with awe by European diplomats. They dressed in fine outfits for such occasions, to provide the Court

¹⁷ For selections of elaborate gifts given by various foreign diplomats see S. Skilliter, in W. Hale and A. İhsan Bağış (eds.), *Four Centuries of Turco-British Diplomatic Relations*, p. 21; J.T. Bent (ed.), *Early Voyages and Travels*, pp. x, xiii and, in ‘Master Thomas Dallam’s Diary’, 63; W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), pp. 57 and 64; O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), pp. 41, 90 and 155; ‘The presents made to the Grand Signor and others the chief of his Court by the English Ambassador in Constantinople the 24th April, 1582’, 24 April 1582, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign*, Vol. 15, p. 658, item 705; ‘Intelligence from sundry places’, 12 July 1580, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign*, Vol. 17, p. 552, item 577 (in the addenda section); D. Cantemir, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, N. Tindal (trans.), London: A Millar in the Strand, 1756, p. 384; M. Naima, *Annals*, Vol. I, pp. 445 and 466; and P. Rycout, *Ottoman Empire*, pp. 83-4, 86, and 91.

¹⁸ J.T. Bent (ed.), *Early Voyages and Travels*, p. xiv.

¹⁹ W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), p. 104.

²⁰ O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), p. 155.

with an impression of their wealth and power, and therefore of the imperative of maintaining good diplomatic relations with them. Such receptions were grand affairs, the diplomats progressing through the first two courts of the Seraglio until they reached the Gate of Felicity, whereupon they would enter the third court and be given ‘a plentiful dinner’.²¹ Diplomatic accounts of the progression through the Seraglio paint the palace as a place of power, majesty and obedience. Several primary sources talk of the sense of Sultanic authority that is felt when, in the second court, diplomats witness the silent, still and obedient ranks of supposedly thousands of janissaries (elite Ottoman soldiers) and sipahis (cavalrymen), the military protectors of the Sultan, which make the Sultan seem powerful in the minds of the diplomats before they have even met him. Baron Wenceslas states that ‘two or three thousand janissaries’ were ‘standing as quiet as if they had been hewn out of marble’.²² Roe states that he ‘observed a great state in all things, especially a dead silence in the [second] court, and every man in his order’, adding that there were ‘4000’ men lined up there.²³ Bon talks of the ‘many spahees [sipahis] and janissaries’ who ‘stand in orderly ranks’ in the second court during diplomatic receptions, putting on ‘a very goodly shew’,²⁴ and Galland is also struck by ‘[le] nombre et...la magnificence des différents officiers de cavalerie’ in the second court.²⁵ Busbecq is equally struck by the grand ceremonial of the Sultan’s court at Amasya, declaiming of it in flowing and awestruck terms: ‘Now come with me and cast your eye over the immense crowd of turbaned heads’.²⁶ Diplomats were in awe of the Court, and they were

²¹ P. Rycout, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 84.

²² W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), pp. 59-60.

²³ T. Roe, *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe in his Embassy to the Ottoman Porte from the year 1621 to 1628 Inclusive (Containing...)*, S. Richardson (ed.), London: Samuel Richardson, 1740, p. 37.

²⁴ O. Bon, *Grand Signor’s Seraglio*, J. Greaves (ed.), p. 28.

²⁵ ‘the number and the magnificence of the different cavalry officers’ (my translation); A. Galland, *Voyage à Constantinople, Tome Premier*, C. Schefer (ed.), p. 270.

²⁶ O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), p. 40.

also excited by it. Busbecq even suggested, in his typical love for the institutions of the Orient, that the Habsburgs ought to emulate the Ottoman Court within their Empire.

Dinners were equally grand, and stunned Ambassadors. They were a crucial part of Ottoman-European Court diplomacy, and provided an opportunity for European diplomats to discuss affairs with Ottoman courtiers. They were thus an integral and pragmatic way of generating a mutually beneficial relationship – commercial, political, religious – between European powers and the Ottomans. Dinners cost ‘a thousand Crowns’ each (£250 at the time), according to Bon.²⁷ Ambassadors were fed an ‘abundance’ of ‘meat’, such as was usually given to the Sultan himself.²⁸ They sat with the most eminent courtiers – the Grand Vizier and the Chief Pasha (a high-ranking minister). Other prominent courtiers sat on other tables. Several diplomats stated that 200 men served the food and drink. These sources are so often in accord with each other that they appear reliable. Rather than being Orientalist, they paint a positive image of Court ceremonial and conviviality. The diplomats’ gushing language is testimony to a genuinely awestruck response to the grandeur and scale of the Court. This sensationalist tone may also have been intended to generate a sense of wonder in potential readers.

After dinner, diplomats were led to the Audience Chamber, or *Arz Odası*, by the *Capee Aga* (Chief Chamberlain). At the Chamber’s door, two Pashas took the Ambassador (one Pasha for each of his arms), and then other diplomats, to kiss the hem of the Sultan’s sleeve. The substantive part of the audience then began. Diplomats presented gifts, petitions,

²⁷ O. Bon, *Grand Signor's Seraglio*, J. Greaves (ed.), p.29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

and letters from their rulers to the Sultan, and the Sultan might also provide the diplomats with letters for European rulers, these diplomatic exchanges being employed to further the mutual self-interest of the powers concerned. Diplomats were expected to show great deference to the Sultan, complying fully with protocol, even wearing Ottoman dress during audiences, which many did enthusiastically, as a mark of mutual respect. Dragomans (interpreters) were used to ensure that there were no communication problems barring the achievement of a mutually agreeable outcome to the audiences. Diplomats' rhetoric employed superlatives to please the Sultan and thus to gain favourable capitulations from him. Harborne called the Sultan "the most august and benign Caesar", Galland talked of the Sultan and Grand Vizier in similarly hyperbolic terms.²⁹ The Audience Chamber is always, and thus probably accurately, described as richly-endowed with fine satin and splendid furnishings: 'couvertures très riches',³⁰ in the words of Tavernier, were thrown over the cushions – 'embroidered with Gold and Jewels'³¹ – upon which the Sultan sat, written of as producing 'a glorious shew' for visitors by Bon.³² The Sultan sought to preserve an air of superiority during audiences, leaving most of the talking to be done by his Grand Vizier, only grumbling when he felt displeased by the demands of diplomats.³³

Diplomats' accounts of Sultanic power varied. Many European diplomats were in awe of the 'Majesty...and terror', as English diarist John Covel put it, of Sultans.³⁴ Thomas

Dallam, an English organ-maker who came to the Court to present an organ to the Sultan,

²⁹ Harborne quote from S. Skilliter, in W. Hale and A. İhsan Bağış (eds.), *Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations*, p. 22; A. Galland, *Voyage à Constantinople, Tome Premier*, C. Schefer (ed.), p. 67.

³⁰ J.B. Tavernier, *Nouvelle Relation de l'intérieur du serrail*, Rouen, 1713, p. 99.

³¹ P. Rycout, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 85.

³² O. Bon, *Grand Signor's Seraglio*, J. Greaves (ed.), p. 5; see also A. Galland, *Voyage à Constantinople*, C. Schefer (ed.), pp. 268-270.

³³ O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), p. 39.

³⁴ J. Freely, *Inside the Seraglio: Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul*, London: Viking, 1999, p. 168.

was overawed by the Sultan.³⁵ Busbecq likens the Sultan to ‘a thunderbolt’ and ‘a lion’, but he also notes that the image of the Sultan might not reflect the reality of his power.³⁶ Other Europeans, like Cantemir, might criticize certain Sultans such as Murad IV (1623-40) for ‘drunkenness’, Ibrahim (1640-48) for excessive ‘lust’, or Mehmed IV (1648-87) for an ‘immoderate love of hunting’.³⁷ Venetian Bailo Gianfrancesco Morosini was sufficiently unimpressed by Murad III (1574-95) to simply say of him that he was ‘weak’ and ‘a bit fat’.³⁸ English historian Richard Knolles (late 1540s-1610), dismissed Sultan Mehmed III (1595-1603) as ‘of no great spirit’.³⁹ Busbecq admired the piety of Suleiman I,⁴⁰ Cantemir that of Suleiman II (1687-91),⁴¹ and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was impressed by the ‘charity’ and ‘praying to God’ of the Grand Vizier and his wife in 1718.⁴² Some Sultans were criticised for impiety. Venetian diplomatic reports claimed that Murad III did not leave the Seraglio for Friday prayers for two years.⁴³ Knolles saw Mehmed III as impious.⁴⁴ Clearly, Sultans could be either praised or criticised for their human characteristics, which is why the European literature offers differing opinions of Sultanic power, prejudiced Orientalist interpretations being rejected in favour of individual analytical approaches. Sultans were viewed by diplomats as akin to other important European rulers. Like European rulers, Sultans could be related to through diplomacy. Like European courtiers, Ottoman courtiers

³⁵ T. Dallam, ‘Master Thomas Dallam’s Diary’, in J.T. Bent, *Early Voyages and Travels*, p. 69.

³⁶ O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), p. 161.

³⁷ D. Cantemir, *Othman Empire*, pp. 249, 254 and 349.

³⁸ J. Freely, *Inside the Seraglio*, p. 82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁰ O.G. de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, E.S. Forster (trans.), p. 43.

⁴¹ D. Cantemir, *Othman Empire*, p. 379.

⁴² M. Wortley-Montagu, *Turkish Letters*, M. Jack (ed.), p. 87.

⁴³ J. Freely, *Inside the Seraglio*, p. 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

could be engaged with on a human level through cultivating friendly relations at dinners and Court negotiations, furthering the interests of both Ottomans and Europeans.

It was highly unusual for male diplomats to meet Ottoman women at Court, or in Ottoman society, as the moralities and traditions of the day demanded separation of the sexes.

Diplomacy was largely a game of men. However, some females at the Ottoman Court (particularly the Sultanas, the mothers of Sultans) had great power in affairs of state. Some diplomats, like Paul Pindar, secretary to English Ambassador Henry Lello, and later Ambassador to the Porte himself (1611-1619), realised the power wielded by women and met the Sultana in 'hir garthen [garden]' in the Seraglio in order to give her a £600 coach as a gift, a way of strengthening Anglo-Ottoman friendship.⁴⁵ However, European diplomats would usually only meet Ottoman women through more furtive means, which they were often keen to do. Diplomats were aided by individuals at Court. Dallam, with the help of his Ottoman dragoman and a low-level Ottoman official, witnesses thirty unveiled women in the Harem through a grate. Baron Wenceslas is also helped to meet unveiled Ottoman women, doing so in a well-hidden Ottoman garden, aided by a janissary assigned to him by the Court.⁴⁶ Dallam is struck by the beauty of the women. They remind him of beautiful European women, a strikingly un-Orientalist observation, but one common among European diplomats.⁴⁷ Male accounts also speak of life inside the Harem. The sources give us a good insight into life at the Harem, but, because European diplomats were not able to enter the Harem, there are some contradictions in their accounts. In the sixteenth century, for example, Greek historian

⁴⁵ T. Dallam, in J.T. Bent (ed.), *Early Voyages and Travels*, p. 63.

⁴⁶ W. Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas*, A.H. Wratislaw (trans./ed.), p. 98.

⁴⁷ T. Dallam, in J.T. Bent (ed.), *Early Voyages and Travels*, p. 74.

Theodore Spandounes spoke of a ceremony in which the Sultan would choose a woman from the Harem with whom he desired to spend the night by throwing a handkerchief in her direction, whereupon the woman would pick it up with a bow and kiss the hem of the Sultan's robe.⁴⁸ Rycaut relates this tale as well.⁴⁹ Tales such as this were often related as fact by unreliable male authors. Lady Mary came to the conclusion that this particular ceremony was fictitious, that 'the story of the handkerchief, so firmly believed among us, has not a syllable of truth.'⁵⁰ She had the advantage of meeting numerous female Ottoman courtiers on many occasions and of discussing such stories. Thus, she is probably more reliable than the male diplomats, whose accounts of women at the Ottoman Court were often based merely upon received knowledge. Even if accounts of the secretive Harem written by male European diplomats might sensationalise, Lady Mary was able to break down gaps in understanding that did persist. Much of the European literature on the Harem from our period is in fact accurate and not written in the vein of Orientalism. While acknowledging and being intrigued by the foreignness of the Harem to European Court culture, male diplomats made an effort to engage with Ottoman women at Court and were intrigued by them on a human level.

Lady Mary was not the only European woman to accompany diplomats to the Porte. Thomas Roe took his wife to Constantinople,⁵¹ and Lady Mary herself acknowledges the prevalence of 'Christian ambassadresses' in Constantinople in 1717.⁵² Lady Mary's only

⁴⁸ T. Spandounes, *On the origin of the Ottoman Emperors: II*, D.M. Nicol (trans./ed.), Cambridge, 1997, pp 112-113.

⁴⁹ P. Rycaut, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ M. Wortley-Montagu, *Turkish Letters*, M. Jack (ed.), p. 132.

⁵¹ See M. Strachan, 'Roe, Sir Thomas (1581-1644)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23943>, accessed 24 Sept 2010].

⁵² M. Wortley-Montagu, *Turkish Letters*, M. Jack (ed.), p. 67.

encounter with the Sultan was when she and the French Ambassadress witnessed him in procession to Friday prayers from her Pera residence: '[the Sultan] stop[ped] under the window where we stood and...looked upon us very attentively'.⁵³ However, Lady Mary's many encounters with prominent Court women had a role in strengthening the mutual friendship between England and the Porte and it was in both powers' self-interest that their diplomatic interrelationship was amicable. Lady Mary dines with the Grand Vizier's wife and with the Sultana Hafise, a favourite of the late Sultan Mustafa II (1695-1703). Lady Mary gives the historian an invaluable and unique portrait of Ottoman courtiers' wives. At a number of dinners with Ottoman Court women, Lady Mary is able to relate to Ottoman women not as part of a foreign 'other' but as friends and equals. She speaks of 'the magnificence of [the Sultana's] table', of her respect for the Grand Vizier and his wife and of her friendship with the Sultana.⁵⁴ With free conversation between Lady Mary and the other female guests and no separation of the guests according to rank, these dinners are more informal than those given to male diplomats, but both the male and female dinners were held because it was in the pragmatic mutual self-interest of European powers and the Ottomans to do so.

The paucity of Ottoman primary sources available in translation is perhaps the greatest limitation that this essay has encountered. It would have also been interesting to consult other European sources, such as Polish and Russian sources, but these are not readily available in translation. Further research into Ottoman-European interrelationships at the Ottoman Court

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

could, therefore, investigate the sources of a broader range of European powers. It could also look at the issues explored in this essay over a wider timescale. Nevertheless, I have grounded my essay in an exploration of the most crucial European sources of the early modern period available in translation. Where possible, I have studied Ottoman sources, to give greater scope to my work. This should hopefully allow the narrative and argument in my essay to merge into a coherent whole, illustrating key ideas relating to the interrelationship of Ottomans and Europeans at the Ottoman Court in the early modern period.

Orientalist interpretations of Ottoman-European interrelationships at the Ottoman Court in the period 1535-1720 are misplaced and anachronistic. Pragmatic mutual self-interest can help explain why European diplomats were despatched to and received by the Ottoman Court. Europeans and Ottomans often shared trading and political concerns, and European diplomats went to the Court to attempt to reach mutually satisfactory outcomes. Their success in these negotiations could play a major role in determining their lifestyle while in Constantinople. The mutually cooperative rapport between many Europeans and Ottomans in our period helps to explain why diplomats were sent to Constantinople. Rather than being locked in an antagonistic relationship, Ottomans and Europeans cooperated well with each other. Italian traders had for centuries found the Levant to be a friendly and profitable place to do business. In our period, other European powers took advantage of this clement commercial climate, and as more powers became intimately intertwined with the Ottomans, political concerns grew in importance. Diplomats usually found that living conditions in Constantinople were pleasant, and that the Ottomans could coexist with other peoples

remarkably harmoniously. Only when the diplomatic situation deteriorated would diplomats' living conditions suffer.

Court audiences took place for reasons of pragmatic mutual self-interest. All aspects of Court receptions were intended to solidify diplomatic friendships and agreements, from the giving of gifts to Court dinners. European diplomats were often in awe of what they saw at the Court, but they wrote about their experiences much as they might write about splendid European Courts, seeing the opulent decor and fabulous ceremonial of the Ottoman Court as a magnificent attack on their senses but not as part of a contemptible 'other'. In fact, diplomats tended to praise the Court, diffusing their love of the Orient among contemporaries.

European diplomats were seldom able to see Ottoman women at the Court or in Ottoman society. Indeed, European diplomats were sent to the Court to engage in formal diplomacy, which was the preserve of men. European diplomats were interested in Ottoman women despite the rigid gender boundaries of the Court, and might try to meet with them covertly, showing a wish to engage with Ottoman women on a human level. European women and Ottoman Court women could engage with each other, an effective and socially acceptable way of strengthening diplomatic friendships. As this could take place overtly, it was possible for European women to build friendships with Ottoman women.

'Because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.'⁵⁵ This investigation has shown that in fact European diplomats were able to treat with the Ottoman Court in a free and open manner. They looked squarely at the Court just as they

⁵⁵ E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978, p. 3.

might at the Courts of Elizabeth I or Charles V. We have seen that relations between European diplomats and the Ottoman Court were remarkably equable. For some two hundred years they were sustained by a strong mutual self-interest, producing much that was beneficial to both sides.

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