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# The Captive Self: The Art of Intrigue and the Holy Roman Emperor's Resident Ambassador at the Ottoman Court in the Sixteenth Century

*Robyn Dora Radway*  
Central European University  
*radwayr@ceu.edu*

## Abstract

In 1580-1581, the Austrian Habsburg ambassador to the Ottoman court shared news of a remarkable letter and self-portrait that had arrived from an Ottoman subject in Habsburg captivity. Tracing the scramble for details on the matter and its import for Habsburg-Ottoman diplomacy reveals the structure, contours, and challenges of the Habsburg mission in Constantinople. The article argues that the image and the accompanying letter may be a forgery seeking to place the ambassador and the peace he was to uphold in jeopardy. Instead, the ambassador himself was captive to the factions, rivalries, and shifting loyalties in the borderlands that played out in the diplomatic culture of Ottoman Constantinople. This reveals the possibilities, limits, and ranges of control that early modern resident ambassadors had of their missions.

## Keywords

Ottoman – Habsburg – captive – ambassador – forgery – imperial rivalry – self-portrait – Christian – Muslim relations

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The captive Mustafa supposedly has three different shackles on his legs, his neck and hands are tied together, and he is fastened on all four ends

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\* This article is based on a chapter of my dissertation. I would like to thank my advisors at Princeton University, Anthony Grafton and Molly Greene, for their initial comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank J. Hennings for help with editing and the anonymous reviewers for their advice.

by large chains. At this, I responded that I hope my imperial majesty would not have allowed for such tyranny. One knows what is human and how a soldier must treat those in his captivity, and I am sure his imperial majesty will put an end to this.<sup>1</sup>



## 1 Introduction

On September 3, 1580, the Habsburg ambassador to the Ottoman court, Joachim von Sinzendorff, found himself defending the integrity of his majesty, Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II. After months of negotiating his way through an extremely tense anti-Habsburg climate, this latest accusation threatened to push the Ottomans over the edge and declare war. The regional governor of the southern Balkans (*Beylerbey* of Rumeli)<sup>2</sup> had sent the ambassador a report after the weekly assembly of the ruling council (*divan*) in Constantinople. The report shared news of a letter that had arrived from an Ottoman subject in Habsburg captivity suffering from brutal torture. Accusations of the mistreatment of captives were a perennial thorn in the diplomat's side, and responding to complaints over the behavior of officials from both empires formed the bulk of the resident ambassador's workload.<sup>3</sup> The carefully negotiated peace treaties that had kept the central European borderlands of the two empires free from full scale war between the Siege of Szigetvár (1566) and the outbreak of the Long Turkish War (1593) were under constant pressure. The case of Mustafa, however, would prove more remarkable than business as usual. Four months later, in his report of January 18, 1581, Sinzendorff brought up the topic again, enthusiastically announcing to the Emperor that he had gotten hold of the letter sent by the captive Mustafa to the Porte, which he and his secretaries were including in translation.<sup>4</sup> The cyphered report along with a decoded copy

1 Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 (1580. VII-IX), fos. 101v-102r.

2 Kanijeli Siyavuş Pasha was in Constantinople filling in for Grand Vizier Koca Sinan Pasha, who was away leading troops against the Safavid army at the time.

3 There were weekly complaints about raiding and disrupting the peace on both sides: see for example the summary in Ernst Dieter Petritsch, *Regesten der osmanischen Dokumente im Österreichischen Staatsarchiv: 1480-1574* (Vienna, 1991), 767.

4 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 2 (1581 I-II) f. 43r. For the "original" and the "translation" see HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), fos. 272 and 273 respectively.

made upon arrival was filed in the imperial archive of Turkish affairs in Vienna. So too was the attached translation, along with an Ottoman document purporting to be the original and a small drawing of a man suspended in the air by four chains, legs and arms folded and tied, his grizzly beard and hair framing downcast eyes and a furrowed brow (Fig. 1). The note on the back of the translation labels the image as a self-portrait by the captive sent to Constantinople, and the body of the text refers to the image that Mustafa “painted himself” to show his brothers in faith what had been done to him, so that they may seek revenge.<sup>5</sup>

Both the episode and the detailed surviving documentation are extraordinary. Initially, Mustafa’s letter and self-portrait seem to offer unique documentation of an early modern captive under torture. Tracing the scramble for details on the matter as words loop their way from the ear of the ambassador in Constantinople, to the tongue of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, reaching the pens of the secretaries of his brother Archduke Ernst of Austria, echoing off the floor of the Imperial War Council in Vienna and back again reveals a great deal about the structure of the imperial diplomatic and decision-making apparatus. Upon following this trail and surveying the full range of sources on the captive Mustafa, however, the most compelling story the episode tells has less to do with captivity and more to do with imperial rivalries playing out at the court in Constantinople. Mustafa, this article argues, was a pawn in a power struggle that sought to exploit the incident and redirect the mighty Ottoman sword away from the Persian front in the East, repositioning it in the direction of the Habsburg lands and Europe.

This article follows the scramble for details on Mustafa Çavuş to reveal the contours of diplomatic culture in Ottoman Constantinople around 1580. I argue that the captive self may not in fact be Mustafa Çavuş, but instead the ambassador Joachim von Sinzendorff, helplessly struggling against the chains that bound him to a tangled web of lies, rivalries, and courtly intrigue that dominated Rudolf II’s diplomatic mission in Constantinople under Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-95). The vulnerability of the peace treaty embodied in the figure of Mustafa suspended from heavy chains in a dark dungeon in Vienna was the product of misinformation networks that plagued inter-imperial diplomacy in the early modern world. His image and the accompanying letter may actually be a forgery, a counterfeit seeking to place the ambassador and the peace he was to uphold in jeopardy. In the following pages, I contextualize the plight of Mustafa and Sinzendorff, both in the history of captivity and the diplomatic history of Habsburg-Ottoman relations. As such, the article

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5 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), f. 271.

contributes to a new trend in diplomatic history that seeks to go beyond the study of war and peace and to focus on diplomatic culture and the entanglements of individuals operating across political boundaries.<sup>6</sup> I then go over in detail the nine documents in which Mustafa Çavuş makes an appearance and open up a dual discussion: one on the possibility that the tortured captive Mustafa sent out a letter to his brethren seeking revenge; the other on the possibility that the captive resident ambassador Sinzendorff fell prey to the manipulations of one of a number of power factions (Safavid, Polish, or Transylvanian) in Constantinople seeking to exploit the tangled information networks, as well as loosen Habsburg control of the borderlands to incite the two empires into renewed direct military engagement.

## 2 Captives

The historiography of Ottoman captivity, focusing largely on Mediterranean examples, tends to contrast European efforts to liberate brethren through formal institutions with supposed Ottoman inaction.<sup>7</sup> The Ottoman-Habsburg land borders, in comparison with littoral Mediterranean borders, saw less involvement from formal Catholic institutions and more of a dialogue between imperial agents for the redemption and exchange of captives on both sides. When negotiations dealing with important captives reached an impasse on the local level between Habsburg Vienna and Ottoman Buda, those who could harness the influence of wealthy friends or relatives made certain that the Ottoman central administration intervened.<sup>8</sup> Unusually, the matter of Mustafa

6 Recent historiography on diplomacy has moved away from narrative teleologies of progress within restricted geographies. Practices of writing, translation, mediation, ritual, and information gathering have all come into sharper focus and allowed scholars to de-center Europe while highlighting the complexity of representation in the early modern world. For a review of the burgeoning field of New Diplomatic History see Tracey A. Sowerby, "Early Modern Diplomatic History," *History Compass* 14, no. 9 (2016): 441-56. Ottoman diplomatic history has benefited greatly from this recent trend. See, for example, Enrah Safa Gürkan, "Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, no. 2-3 (2015): 107-28. See also David Do Paço, "Trans-Imperial Familiarity: Ottoman Ambassadors in Eighteenth-Century Vienna," in *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World, c. 1410-1800*, ed. Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (London, 2017), 166-84.

7 Nicolas Vatin, "Note sur l'attitude des Sultans Ottomans et de leurs sujets face à la captivité des leurs en terre Chrétienne (fin XV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles)," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 82 (1992): 375-395.

8 For a discussion of these differences in relation to the Mediterranean, see Pál Fodor, "Maltese Pirates, Ottoman Captives and French Traders in the Early Seventeenth-Century

Çavuş wound up on the floor of the *divan* before making the usual rounds of negotiations in the borderlands.

Exemplary work on ransom slavery between the two empires has outlined various elements of a system dominated by local customary law,<sup>9</sup> but how this customary law regarded individuals embedded in imperial power structures and political rivalries requires further study.<sup>10</sup> A few well documented captivity narratives with accompanying visual sources have been published, and occasionally studied to better understand the captives themselves. This includes the Hungarian nobleman and soldier Ferenc Wathay, who weaves his account of his imprisonment in Galata in the first decade of the seventeenth century throughout an illustrated compilation of lyrics, poetry, and prose.<sup>11</sup> Another subset of captive-narratives appears in the travel logs of embassy members who found themselves imprisoned in Constantinople, such as Vratislav von Mitrovic.<sup>12</sup> From the point of view of Ottoman subjects in Habsburg chains, the best-known example is the early eighteenth-century memoir of Osman Aga on his captivity from 1688 to 1700.<sup>13</sup> All of these men have one thing in common: they wrote book length works about their experiences. To a far lesser extent, the non-literary counterparts have also received attention from scholars. For example, the documentation surrounding the captivity and ransom of Ali Bey of Koppány was used to show how customary law made life in small

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Mediterranean,” in Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth* (Leiden, 2007), 221-233, in particular 228. Called “major captives” in the Hungarian historiography, this involvement on the Habsburg borderlands was primarily through diplomatic pressure on resident ambassadors who would then weigh in on the issue and its consequences in their reports. Thus, Ottoman Turkish archival materials provide only a partial picture.

- 9 Géza Pálffy, “Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman-Hungarian Frontier in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth* (Leiden, 2007), 35-83.
- 10 Suraiya Faroqhi wrote “... research concerning prisoners of war on Ottoman territory, and on Ottoman captives abroad is still in its beginning stages.” Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London, 2006), 135.
- 11 See the facsimile edition Tamás Katona, ed., *Wathay Ferenc énekes könyve* 2 vols. (Budapest, 1976).
- 12 Wenceslas Wratislaw, *Adventures of Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrowitz*, trans. Albert Henry Wratislaw (London, 1862).
- 13 Osman Ağa, *Der Gefangene der Giauren: die abenteuerlichen Schicksale des Dolmetschers Osman Ağa aus Temeschwar*, trans. Richard Franz Kreutel and Otto Spies (Graz, 1962). For a list of other captive narratives of Ottoman subjects in Christian hands, see Cemal Kafadar, “Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature,” *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989): 121-150, here 131-4.

towns along the frontier increasingly more difficult.<sup>14</sup> The documentation on Mustafa Çavuş differs from these narratives: the correspondence makes no reference to a ransom, and the letter seeks not to preserve the story of the individual in captivity but instead to incite prayer and revenge against his captors for their illegal and immoral torture.<sup>15</sup> Word of Mustafa locked in a dark dungeon in Vienna threatened no one more than the ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire in Constantinople.

### 3 Habsburg Ambassadors in Constantinople

Following the fall and tripartition of the Kingdom of Hungary after the battle of Mohács (1526), the Habsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire maintained a more or less constant presence in Ottoman Constantinople.<sup>16</sup> As two of the great land empires of early modern Europe found themselves contiguous neighbors with ever increasing internal conflicts and costly wars on multiple fronts, they moved from open warfare over control of the Hungarian crown towards a maintenance of the status quo secured through renewable treaties, the first of which was signed in 1547. This delicate peace, which the shattered remains of the Hungarian estates continued to resist, lasted until the outbreak of open warfare in 1593. Between the Ottoman settlement in the province of Budin in the 1540s and what would become known as the Long War (1593-1606),<sup>17</sup> the Ottomans and Habsburgs signed eleven peace treaties and the Habsburgs sent twenty-seven tribute payments while working together on an imperial diplomatic and local administrative level to maintain stable and sometimes friendly relations.<sup>18</sup>

14 Ferenc Szakály, "The Ransom of Ali Bey of Koppány: The Impact of Capturing Slaves on Trade in Ottoman Hungary," in Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders: Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 2007), 93-114.

15 Torture, on the other hand, has received attention mostly from legal and literary historians. For an exemplary study, see Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago, 2001).

16 For a nearly complete list of the missions see: Bertold Spuler, "Die europäischen Diplomatie in Konstantinopel bis zum Frieden von Belgrad (1739) 3. Teil," *Jahrbücher für Kultur und Geschichte der Slaven*, Neue Folge, 11, no. 3/4 (1935): 313-66.

17 On the war, see Jan Paul Niederkorn, *Die europäischen Mächte und der "Lange Türkenkrieg" Kaiser Rudolfs II. (1593-1606)* (Vienna, 1993).

18 On these treaties, see chapter one of my dissertation, Robyn Dora Radway, "Vernacular Diplomacy in Central Europe: Statesmen and Soldiers Between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, 1543-1593" (Ph. D. Diss., Princeton, 2017). Compare with the traditional approach to the borderland in Rifaat A. Abou-el-Haj, "The Formal Closure of the Ottoman

The first of these successful treaties between the Habsburgs and Ottomans, signed in 1547, formally established the post of resident ambassador in Constantinople.<sup>19</sup> The position of Habsburg ambassador to the Porte, first held by Johann Maria Malvezzi from 1547 to 1552, became a staple in the cosmopolitan world of agents and representatives that resided in the imperial city. In addition to the resident and his retinue, the Habsburgs continued to send special envoys for the negotiation and signing of treaties, delivery of the yearly tribute (which they called a “present”) and discussions of border violations. This type of special-envoy-based diplomacy was reciprocated by the Ottomans, who regularly sent their own missions into Habsburg lands. Together they created a system that was remarkably flexible and led to decades of stability. Ambassador Joachim von Sinzendorff feared the system could collapse as a result of the appearance of Mustafa Çavuş’s letter on September 3, 1580.

As the sixth Habsburg representative to fill the post, Joachim von Sinzendorff took on typical roles during his three-year term: representative, negotiator, intelligence gatherer, and mediator. Arriving with the yearly tribute on January 1, 1578, he spent his first five months in Constantinople practicing his duties alongside his predecessor David Ungnad,<sup>20</sup> and his last six months training his successor Friedrich Breuner.<sup>21</sup> In the intervening year and a half he was aided by two special delegations: the 1579 tribute paying delegation led by Ulrich von Königsberg to Constantinople and the smaller 1580 delegation led by Wolfgang Eitzing to the regional governor (*Beylerbey*) of Buda to address border violations.<sup>22</sup> A surprising degree of institutional continuity existed across the terms of multiple ambassadors, and it can be attributed not only to their vetting before arrival and period of on-site training but also the presence of long-standing embassy staff. Given the need for highly trained and

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Frontier in Europe: 1699-1703,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89, no. 3 (1969): 467-475.

19 For the Latin ratification of the treaty see *Magyar történelmi okmánytár: a Brüsseli országos levéltárból és a Burgundi könyvtárból*, ed. Mihály Hatvani, (Pest, 1858), 142-48.

20 For his travel log and further documents on the embassy see Andreas Ferus, “Die Reise des kaiserlichen Gesandten David Ungnad nach Konstantinopel im Jahre 1572” (M. A. thesis, University of Vienna, 2007).

21 (Johann) Friedrich Breuner died in Istanbul after falling off his horse on August 19, 1583. For documents relating to his stay see HHStA, Turcica, Karton, 41-49.

22 He had an audience with Beylerbey Kara Oveys Pasha of Buda in March. For documents relating to this mission see HHStA, Turcica 41, Konv. 2 (1580 III-IV), fos. 140-141 and 166-177. These smaller missions are not included in Spuler (see n. 19 above) and have largely escaped scholarly attention. The fact that Ottoman governors also received European delegations is a little-known aspect of Ottoman diplomatic life which my dissertation addresses in greater detail.

linguistically gifted scribes and translators, the careers of the most critical members of the resident's retinue spanned decades.

During Sinzendorff's tenure, he and his staff dispatched an average of four cyphered reports per month. Such correspondence was sent in multiple copies along different routes (one through Buda, the other through Ragusa and Venice) with a great deal of repetition, in case one of the letters went missing. Once they arrived at their destination (Vienna or Prague), local secretaries processed the dispatches: decoding, writing out additional copies, and distributing them. Thus, the imperial archive preserves stacks of report summaries, extended excerpts, and originals addressed to Rudolf in Prague, or Archduke Ernst in Vienna, or directly to various members of the Aulic War Council or *Hofkriegsrat*.<sup>23</sup> Sinzendorff's resulting 150 reports provide details on the ongoing conflict in Persia, changes in imperial administration, troop movements, negotiations, bribes, renegades, and the imperial family. They also contain descriptions of his own meetings with viziers and petitions submitted as well as intelligence on other ambassadors in residence (including the French, Florentine, Moldavian, Russian, Polish, Transylvanian, and the Spanish Habsburg agents). Ambassadors did not limit themselves to imperially sanctioned business. Some served as double agents working for multiple sovereigns at the same time, or stirred controversy locally, as did Joachim von Sinzendorff when he engaged in a bit of Lutheran proselytizing during a meeting with the patriarch and leaders of the Greek Orthodox community.<sup>24</sup>

Most ambassadorial correspondence, however, dealt with recurring complaints about and investigations relating to treaty violations along the Hungarian, Transylvanian, and Croatian borderlands. For Sinzendorff, this included tracking down and prosecuting individuals who had fled their debts, such as the protracted case of the merchant of Debrecen, Máté Szabó, which began in the mid-1570s.<sup>25</sup> It also included calculated reactions to and eventually the submission of a formal apology for the murder of a local governor in

23 On the *Hofkriegsrat* see Oskar Regele, *Der österreichische Hofkriegsrat, 1556-1848* (Vienna, 1949).

24 In the mid to late sixteenth century, it was common for the nominally Catholic Austrian Habsburgs to employ ambassadors that self-identified as Lutherans. This was due to the fact that a significant portion of the courtiers in Vienna were Lutherans. For a report on the talks from April 1580 see HHStA, Turcica, Karton 41, Konv. 2 (1580 III-IV), fos. 214-215 and 220-221. In June of that same year, he denied any such activities, see HHStA Turcica 44, Konv 2 (1581 V-VI), fos. 93-100. In July, his successor Breyner exposed the situation, see HHStA Turcica 44, Konv 3 (1581 VII), fos. 84-89.

25 See *A budai basák magyar nyelvu levelezése (1553-1589)*, ed. Sándor Takáts, Ferenc Eckhart, and Gyula Szekfű (Budapest, 1915), 157. On the merchants and market towns, see Ferenc Szakály, *Mezőváros és reformáció: tanulmányok a korai magyar polgárosodás kérdéséhez*



Ottoman Croatia in an uprising in the 1580s, which the Grand Vizier blamed on a group of soldiers under Habsburg control.<sup>26</sup> These duties were shared with the Ottoman ambassadors to the Habsburgs.<sup>27</sup>

To summarize thus far, by the time the letter and self portrait of Mustafa Çavuş appeared in Constantinople in the late summer of 1580, Habsburg and Ottoman diplomats had been smoothing over the tensions between the two empires for decades. Sinzendorff, his staff, and their experiences serve as representative examples of this well-established post of Austrian Habsburg resident ambassador to the Ottomans in the sixteenth century. Addressing grievances relating to captives which could not be resolved in the borderlands formed a key part of his program of information gathering, negotiating, and reporting.

#### 4 The Captive Self: Mustafa Çavuş as a Captive

The initial inquiry into the matter of the captive Mustafa Çavuş arrived at the Habsburg court in the form of an item of news divulged in Sinzendorff's official report from September 3, 1580.<sup>28</sup> The three-page overview of recent events in Constantinople covered the final audience of the Safavid ambassador with the Sultan, changes in imperial administration since the death of Vizier Mustafa Pasha, and a discussion of the captives sent to Constantinople by the Hungarian frontier governors. It also addressed an Ottoman mission to Transylvania and Poland headed by an Ahmed Çavuş, as well as the latest news on tracking down details of a Hungarian fortress captain in the service of the Habsburgs who supposedly switched his loyalty to the Ottomans.<sup>29</sup> On the last page, before a final word on the return to Constantinople of the much disliked former Pasha of Buda, Sinzendorff brings up a note sent to the embassy

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(*Market Towns and the Reformation: Studies in the Question of early Hungarian Bourgeoisie*) (Budapest, 1995).

26 The *sancakbey* Iskender Bey of Pozsega, today Požega, Croatia. On the apology see the report from December 10, 1580, HHStA, Turcica 43 Konv 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), fos. 151-160.

27 Unat is the only historian to have published an incomplete list of Ottoman ambassadors, which included twelve envoys sent to the Austrian Habsburgs in the sixteenth century. Faik Reşit Unat, *Osmanlı sefirleri ve sefaretnameleri (Ottoman ambassadors and their reports)*, ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal (Ankara, 1968). A handful of studies of extraordinary Ottoman diplomats exist, but the institution of Ottoman *elçi* and its mechanisms in relation to the Habsburgs remains to be explored. For one example, see Karl Vocelka, "Eine türkische Botschaft in Wien 1565," in Heinrich Fichtenau and Erich Zöllner, eds., *Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte Österreichs* (Vienna, 1974), 102-114.

28 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2, (1580 VII-IX), fos. 99-102.

29 Péter Andrásy.

from Kanijeli Siyavuş Pasha, then regional governor of the Southern Balkans (*Beyerbey of Rumeli*):

Siyavuş Pasha sent me a report today on a new captive Turk supposedly being held in Vienna who goes by the name of Mustafa Çavuş and has been in captivity since the siege of Szigetvár [1566]. He complains greatly of human tyranny, for which the viziers called for retribution in the form of similar treatment for many thousands of Christians. I will send this original letter to you as an attachment when I have the opportunity. The captive Mustafa supposedly has three different shackles on his legs, his neck and hands are tied together, and he is fastened on all four ends by large chains. At this, I responded that I hope my imperial majesty would not have allowed for such tyranny. One knows what is human and how a soldier must treat those in their captivity and I am sure his imperial majesty will put an end to this. This letter was carried up and down in the ruling council chamber and greatly offended the community, which I tried my best to calm down.<sup>30</sup>

Upon the arrival of Sinzendorff's report in Prague, Rudolf II responded immediately that he knew nothing of the matter, but would investigate it thoroughly.<sup>31</sup> Though the relevant document does not survive, we can assume he also contacted his younger brother Ernst, who had been in charge of the court in Vienna since 1576. On October 28, 1580, Archduke Ernst responded to Rudolf's request for more information stating that he knew of no person in his dungeons matching Sinzendorff's description.<sup>32</sup> For a few months, Mustafa's name disappears from the correspondence, and the matter, like many others, seems to be left unresolved. The ambassador continues to report on the state of the war with the Safavids and possible peace negotiations, the death of the local governor of Požega, the attempts of Pál Markházy to secure himself the post of Voivode of Transylvania,<sup>33</sup> problems with the regional governor of Bosnia, and preparations for the arrival of his successor as resident ambassador, Friedrich Breyner.

30 HHStA, Turcica 42, Konv. 2 1580. VII-IX., f. 101v.

31 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 (1580 VII-IX), fos. 221-222.

32 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 (1580 VII-IX), fos. 290-291.

33 The Hungarian nobleman would later convert and rule several Ottoman Hungarian provinces under his Muslim name, Ibrahim Bey. For more see Sándor Papp, *Die Verleihungs-Bekräftigungs-und Vertragsurkunden der Osmanen für Ungarn und Siebenbürgen: eine quellenkritische Untersuchung* (Vienna, 2003), 91-107.

Four months after the report in which the captive Mustafa first appeared, Ambassador Sinzendorff wrote on January 18, 1581 that he had obtained a copy of the original letter presented at the *divan*.

I am forwarding the letter sent here by the captive Turk called Mustafa under the attachment marked with the letter P, which he sent admittedly, so that your majesty can also see to it that nothing is taking place against our common laws of war and courtly conduct, while it is unexpected that on your side, someone could hold [to these laws] so little or would imagine dealing in this way. I was also notified that he is supposed to lie captive not in Vienna, but in Ungvár.<sup>34</sup>

Attachment “P” and the two documents filed with it (an “original” in Ottoman Turkish and a drawing) appear in the archive one folder before the report with the following contemporary inscription on the back: “Translation of a letter, from a captive Çavuş, called Mustafa, with a drawing of himself the way he supposedly hung in captivity, which he sent from here to Constantinople.”

The German translation sent by Sinzendorff of the Ottoman letter of Mustafa Çavuş begins with formulaic praises of the Sultan and continues with a narration of how he unluckily encountered a group of non-Muslims and was held captive for a number of years and months in Vienna in a dungeon where he could not tell if it was night or day.<sup>35</sup> After suffering unlawful tortures, which almost caused his death, he decided to reach out and send this letter to his Muslim brethren, along with an image that he had painted himself, hoping that it would catch someone’s eye. He gives his name, and expresses his hope that if someone were to see him in this state, they would have pity on him. The note on the bottom left of the page translates the exterior address: “God have mercy on the person who delivers this figure or image to the Sublime Porte into the hands of the head of the messenger corps (*Çavuş Başı*).” The page ends with a signature: “*Scbeb. Marcus Kerthÿ.*” The Latin term *Scbeb.*, an abbreviation of *scribēbat*, indicates the act of writing or drawing in the imperfect active indicative, but not necessarily authorship itself. Kerthÿ might then be the person assisting Mustafa with writing or the translator.

The accompanying watercolor image of the captive (Fig. 1) was painted by a swift but elegant hand using a delicate under drawing in ink to outline the contours of the captive’s body and face. He wears a simple knee length green kaftan, red hose, and black shoes. His widely-set eyes and distinct nose are

34 Today Uzhhorod, Ukraine. HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 2 (1581 I-II) fos. 36-45, 62-71.

35 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), f. 272.

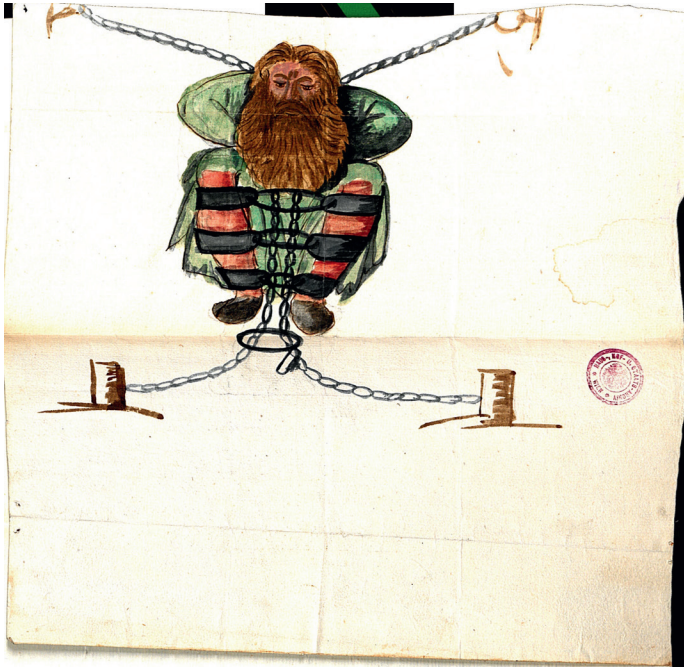


FIGURE 1

framed by a furrowed brow, light brown hair, and a thick beard. The chains, hooks, and stumps used to suspend him were painted free form, creating a compositionally powerful X with the man at its center resembling an oversized insect caught in a spider's web. The sheet of paper is unevenly cut along the top so that half of one of the hooks is missing, suggesting that someone slightly altered the page after it was made. The translation references the image three times. It first appears that the author explains his reason for writing, to show "in what state I am in, I have painted myself, and sent it out to the Muslim community." The author invokes the image again as a visual aid for prayer: "When they see me in this state of misery, they will not forget me in their prayers." Lastly, the self-portrait is mentioned on the exterior address, which references the handing over of the "figure or image" to the addressee.

It remains unclear how these claims to self-portraiture were meant to be understood if the image shows the subject with his hands firmly chained in place near his chest. Though writing utensils and paper were relatively common in prisons (as prisoners were encouraged to seek ransom by contacting family and friends), fine Ottoman paper and colored pigments were more difficult to come by. With a stretch of the imagination, one might read the signature of Marcus Kerthÿ to identify a writing-implement-wielding fellow prisoner who

assisted the bound and helpless Mustafa by putting pen to paper in both instances. This would, however, be highly unlikely in the drawing up of an original letter in the notoriously difficult language of Ottoman Turkish. Kerthý's signature might then be read as the German translator, or even the interlocutor who copied the letter for Sinzendorff. Sinzendorff then had one of his own scribes (likely Ambrosius Schmeisser), identifiable through certain flourishes of the hand which match the rest of the report, transfer the letter once more onto the sheet of paper forwarded with the report.

The translation and image were filed in the archive with a document in Ottoman Turkish purporting to be the original. Closer inspection reveals that it has nothing to do with the translation.<sup>36</sup> The Ottoman letter is addressed to the Holy Roman Emperor (Rudolf II), and announces the capture of a fortress in Persia, the successes of Vizier Ferhad Pasha on the battlefield, and rumors that the Shah was begging for peace. The only detail the two documents have in common is a name: here, the news was delivered by a certain "Mustafa Çavuş." In fact, the Ottoman document contains exactly the same news as a Hungarian letter sent from the regional governor of Buda on November 25, 1586 to Archduke Ernst in Vienna. This Hungarian letter refers to an Ottoman letter from the Porte,<sup>37</sup> and we can therefore assume that the Ottoman letter found with the documents relating to Mustafa Çavuş was filed incorrectly sometime after the sixteenth century. The "real" original was lost, or never existed at all.

Upon receipt of the translated letter, Rudolf II ordered further investigation into the matter in light of the new details.<sup>38</sup> Archduke Ernst complained of the difficulties of accessing information on Mustafa Çavuş, if he was indeed sitting in shackles in distant fortress of Ungvár.<sup>39</sup> The Aulic War Council report from March 8, 1581 ordered further investigations as well, attempting to tease out the details and juxtaposing the plight of Mustafa Çavuş with stories of Christian captives under torture whose noses and ears were cut off.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Sinzendorff returned to Vienna at the end of his term as resident ambassador on August 4, 1581 and continued immediately on to Rudolf II in Prague to discuss his three years of service in person.<sup>41</sup> After his return, the captive Mustafa vanishes from the written records of the ambassadorial archive.

36 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), f. 273.

37 *A budai basák*, 334.

38 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 2 (1581 I-II), fos. 194-195.

39 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 3 (1581 III), fos. 34, 57-58.

40 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 3 (1581 III), fos. 33-77, in particular, 49r.

41 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 44, Konv. 4 (1581 VIII), fos. 2-12.

Many questions remain in relation to these three documents. Where did the image come from? Why was it not addressed in the report, but is central to the translation? Why was the image not mentioned in any of the surrounding correspondence? Who translated the letter, and where did Sinzendorff get it from? Who was Marcus Kerthÿ?<sup>42</sup> Why did Sinzendorff now say Mustafa Çavuş was captive in Ungvár, while the letter clearly states that he was in Vienna? What happened to the original? Was there ever one? In fact, while instructing Archduke Ernst to look into the matter further in February 1581, Rudolf II raised the possibility that the letter was of dubious origins. In the middle of a paragraph heavily laced with words expressing doubt (“supposedly,” “should,” and “according to our Ambassador”), Rudolf and his advisors (Viehauser and Obernburger) wrote a one word sentence: “*contrefaict*.”<sup>43</sup> The word *contrefaire* encapsulated many ideas related to likeness and falsification that were often associated with images and particularly portraiture throughout medieval and early modern Europe.<sup>44</sup> The form of the word used here, coupled with the Latin capitals and expressions of doubt, all suggest Rudolf meant to invoke the secondary less common meaning of the word, the possibility that the letter was a forgery. Though the Habsburg inability to track down a real Mustafa Çavuş tortured in captivity is not enough to discount his existence altogether, a closer look at how the self-portrait and letter fit into their respective genres lend further credence to this possibility.

While the genre of portraiture was not entirely unheard of in the Ottoman Empire, such an image would be unprecedented in the history of Ottoman visual production. Portraiture took a prominent place in certain courtly circles, albeit on much smaller scale and for a different purpose than its early modern European counterpart.<sup>45</sup> Although the Venetian artist Gentile Bellini made the famous image of a seated scribe in the late fifteenth century while

42 While this name does not appear again in the records from the 1580s, there was an active Kertÿ family in Transylvania, some of whom made their way to the Porte in the service of the Transylvanian rulers.

43 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 2 (1581 I-11), fos. 194-195.

44 Archduke Maximilian, for example, used the term “*contrafactur*” in a letter a few months later when discussing the need for a portrait to help identify a spy. Here the term appears in German *kurrentschrift* as part of a sentence, and thus refers to an image. HHStA, Turcica, Karton 44, Konv. 3, fos. 94r-94v. On the history of the term itself, see Peter Parshall, “Imago Contrafacta: Images and Facts in the Northern Renaissance” *Art History* 16 (1993): 554-579.

45 Günsel Renda, “Renaissance in Europe and Sultanic Portraiture,” in Robert Born, Michał Dzięwulski, and Guido Messling, eds., *The Sultan's World: the Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Art* (Brussels, 2015), 37-46.

in Constantinople,<sup>46</sup> portraiture remained a genre exclusively reserved for the males of the Ottoman ruling family in the form of books cataloging the history of the dynasty.<sup>47</sup> A series of exceptions proving the rule are the free form caricatures made by an artist in the court of Sultan Selim II, Haydar Reis, also known as Nigari.<sup>48</sup> European artists also attached to embassies illustrated handheld guides to Ottoman society known as costume books beginning in the 1570s.<sup>49</sup> Such works focus on archetypal costumes and genre scenes. They differ stylistically (types of underdrawings) and technically (paper, inks), and are thus unlikely to be connected to the image discussed here. Mustafa's self-portrait, if authentic, would be entirely unique in the Ottoman tradition.

The German translation of the letter included by Sinzendorff also betrays a few characteristics that point to it being a forgery. The first is the problem of Vienna as his place of captivity. Vienna, the seat of the Archduke of Austria and brother of Emperor Rudolf II had the most well-regulated dungeon on the Ottoman-Habsburg borderland. Archduke Ernst would have been aware, or could have easily found out, if there were ever a prisoner subjected to torture of this nature. The switch to Ungvár in the second letter was a strategic choice. The far-flung town was nominally under Habsburg control, but in the center of a region where the Hungarian captains of fortresses were notorious for ignoring Habsburg orders and switching alliances or entering negotiations with Transylvanian, Polish, and Ottoman officials. Thus, Ungvár served as the perfect distraction typical of forgeries, localized to a faraway place known to exist, but perceived as too distant to verify quickly.<sup>50</sup> Yet, while Sinzendorff's verbal interlocutor changed the story to be more plausible in the second round of information, the text of the German translation still says Vienna.

Word choice in the "translation" also supports the view that it is a counterfeit. Mustafa Çavuş appeals to a violation of "rights" rather than the violation of "custom," which is more commonly referenced in cross border interactions.<sup>51</sup>

46 Münevver Eminoglu, *Ressam, sultan ve portresi* (Istanbul, 1999); and Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, eds., *Bellini and the East* (London, 2005).

47 It was a dynastic history incorporating portraits; grand viziers had a copy, which allowed state officials and the imperial household to be educated in the basic history of the Ottoman dynasty. See Loqman ibn Hosayn al-Ashûrî, *Kiyâfetü'l-insâniyye fî şemâ'il-i-Osmâniyye*, trans. Süheyla Artemel (Istanbul, 1987).

48 See *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, ed. Selmin Kangal (Istanbul, 2000), cat. 30-31 (written by Gülru Necipoğlu).

49 Nurhan Atasoy, "The Birth of Costume Books and the Fenerci Mehmed Album," in Midhat Sertoğlu, ed., *Osmanlı Kiyafetleri: Fenerci Mehmed Albümü* (Istanbul, 1986), 22-30.

50 The myriad of tools available to the forger are discussed in Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, 1990), 50-68.

51 See n. 11 above.

The wording used, “*ungerechten*,” was similar to that used by Sinzendorff himself in his report accompanying the letter: “*kriegs und Ritters Rechten*.” This can be read in contrast to appeals to custom along the borders, which normally use the Hungarian “*az regi zokas zörent*,” or the Latin “*consuetudo*.”<sup>52</sup> The most important divergence here is of course in the language itself. Sinzendorff’s reports were always written in German, while his attachments of translated letters were sent in Italian or Latin. Meanwhile, letters circulating directly in the borderlands were written in Latin, Ottoman Turkish, and from the 1550s onwards, predominantly in Hungarian (which was translated into German on arrival in Vienna). It is strange then, that the translation of Mustafa Çavuş’s Ottoman Turkish letter to the Porte would be translated into German in Constantinople (as opposed to the usual Latin or Italian reserved for translated attachments).

## 5 The Captive Self: Sinzendorff as Captive

If we are correct in calling into question the legitimacy of the letter and thereby the image, then where did it come from and why? What might the motivation have been? Was it an effort to reignite open warfare between the two rival empires? On which level might an intervention have taken place? Was it a forged letter sent to the ruling council to cause a stir? Had Sinzendorff been tricked, and the letter sent directly from the forger to him? In this case, was it Kanijeli Siyavuş Pasha, who had originally sent word of the letter in a summary of the meeting of the *divan*? Was it a fabrication of the translators at the embassy? To answer these questions, we need to delve into the culture of fakes and rumors circulating in Constantinople at the time, as well as the shifting priorities of a new generation of ruling elites at the Ottoman court and their relationships with the Ottoman-Habsburg borderlands.

The early 1580s witnessed a string of imposters and forged letters that made their rounds in Constantinople and the Hungarian borderlands.<sup>53</sup> The forging of documents was not a new phenomenon in the empire, but a series of scandals in the last two decades of the sixteenth century point to a booming “economy of corruption” centered on the falsification of sultanic decrees giving out

52 For the customs of noblemen from the region, see István Werbőczy, *The Customary Law of the Renowned Kingdom of Hungary: A Work in Three Parts Rendered by Stephen Werbőczy (The “Tripartitum”)*, ed. János M. Bak, Péter Banyó, and Martyn C. Rady (Idyllwild, 2005).

53 The Spanish Habsburgs were no strangers to forgeries of these types as well: see Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (London, 2015), 247.



grants of land and revenues.<sup>54</sup> There were problems with authenticity outside the financial sphere as well. Just before the Habsburg Ambassador left for home in March 1581, an individual calling himself the ambassador of a political entity that did not actually exist made Sinzendorff particularly anxious. Benedictus Angelus, identifying himself as the Jewish representative of the ruler of the Swiss nation, was given an audience with Vizier Siyavuş Pasha. In his report on the incident, Sinzendorff refers to the delusions of the oafish fool who introduced himself to the Porte with a story of visions of Ottoman domination over Christianity, and eventually the world. After a series of meetings, Sinzendorff's informants told him, Angelus received a Latin letter allowing the "Swiss" to send an embassy.<sup>55</sup> Following a worried string of correspondence on the matter, the Habsburgs deduced that the man was once a captive held in Austria<sup>56</sup> and was now acting as some sort of a spy. They concluded that the matter would be cleared up upon the return of Sinzendorff from his post.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, in the borderlands, letters written by individuals who claimed to know nothing of their contents (or even by those who had already been dead for years) were circulating.<sup>58</sup> The most important of these episodes was the case of Péter Andrásy, captain of Krasznahorka (today Krásnohorské Podhradie, Slovakia), who supposedly sent an Ottoman official three letters in May 1580 denouncing the German "soup king" (*Suppen könig*) in favor of the Ottoman Sultan, backing his friend Pál Markházy as the new voivode of Transylvania, and handing over to the Ottomans a key stronghold in the strategically and economically important center of the mining region.<sup>59</sup> Investigations into this supposed change of allegiance went on for years after Sinzendorff had left his post. Despite these allegations, Andrásy remained in Habsburg employment,

54 See Pál Fodor, "How to Forge Documents? A Case of Corruption within the Ottoman Bureaucracy around 1590," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 48, no. 3 (1995): 383-389.

55 Robert Anhegger, "Ein angeblicher schweizerischer Agent an der Hohen Pforte im Jahre 1581," *Istanbul Schriften* 11 (1943): 1-23. See HHStA, Turcica, Karton 44, Konv. 1 (1581 IV), fos. 3, 18, 4-14.

56 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 44, Konv. 2 (1581 V-VI), f. 62. Partly published in Anhegger, "Ein angeblicher schweizerischer," IV.

57 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 44, Konv. 3 (1581 VII), fos. 90-97. Partly published in Anhegger, "Ein angeblicher schweizerischer," IX.

58 For complaints about letters "written" by the deceased István Wetskey, see HHStA, Turcica, Karton 41, Konv. 2 (1580 III-IV), fos. 9-10.

59 For copies of these three letters, see HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), fos. 263-270. What was meant by *Suppen könig* is not entirely clear. One of the secretaries reviewing the incoming correspondence in Vienna even underlined the phrase.

albeit with strong ties to the Polish-Transylvanian-Hungarian nobility via a secret alliance.<sup>60</sup> In August 1580, Rudolf II obtained Andrásy's official seal and wanted to compare it with those attached to the letters.<sup>61</sup> The hunt for the original letters continued, and in 1584, then-resident ambassador Eytzing suggested the whole episode was just one big misunderstanding.<sup>62</sup>

The detection of forgeries required a great deal of scribal expertise and ambassadors regularly faced the fact that there were problems of loyalty and trustworthiness among the ranks of their own embassy staff.<sup>63</sup> Sinzendorff continually surveyed and reported on the financial and mental faculties of his secretaries and translators. He employed three main secretaries during his stay in Constantinople: Ambrosius Schmeisser (an elderly man entrusted with encoding letters whom he inherited from his predecessor); Dr. Bartholomaeus Pezzen (a young man who had been in Constantinople for years who would eventually return as ambassador himself); and Philip Hanniwaldt von Eckersdorf (Sinzendorff's personal scribe and butler). The secretaries worked closely with the translators, of whom there were many. Mathias del Faro, a Christian from Galata, had been a translator for the Habsburg ambassadors since the 1550s and would remain in the position until the arrival of ambassador Adam zu Herberstein in 1608. Domenico Zeffi worked for the previous ambassador David Ungnad and had secured his son Augerius (whose Godfather was the second Habsburg resident Ambassador, Busbecq) a place by the side of the Sultan's trusted Jewish doctor and key Habsburg informant, Dr. Salomon. While Zeffi and Faro were the most stable translators, Sinzendorff also employed Aurelio Santa Croce (who was soon locked up in Spain for debts) and Giacomo de Goe (who could not read or write in Ottoman). Additionally, the Ottoman-appointed dragomans played a key role in translation because they were native speakers of German and Hungarian and had grown up in Ottoman captivity. A lack of translators stationed in Vienna and Prague did little to help. Sinzendorff had arrived in Constantinople with an orphan who was to be

60 See Sándor Papp, "From a Transylvanian Principality to an Ottoman Sanjak: The Life of Pál Márkházi, a Hungarian Renegade," *Chronica* 4 (2004): 57-67.

61 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 1580 (VII-IX), fos. 2-11.

62 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 51, Konv. 1 (1584 v), fos. 110-141.

63 Problems with scribal expertise have been studied on the Ottoman side in Christine Woodhead, "Scribal Chaos? Observations on the Post of Re'isülküttab in the Late Sixteenth Century," in Eugenia Kermeli and Oktay Özel, eds., *The Ottoman Empire: Myths, Realities and 'Black Holes': Contributions in Honour of Colin Imber*, (Istanbul, 2006), 155-172.

trained in Ottoman reading, writing, and conversation, in the hopes that the Habsburgs would at last have someone they could fully trust.<sup>64</sup>

Problems emerged regularly, particularly in the ranks of Ottoman-assigned house dragoman. Ali Bey, born Melchior von Tierberg, was a convert with multiple allegiances who had served the Habsburgs in Constantinople since he was made a dragoman in 1571.<sup>65</sup> In September 1578, Sinzendorff complained he was ill tempered, and in October, began questioning his trustworthiness.<sup>66</sup> Suggesting that he delivered news much too quickly,<sup>67</sup> the ambassador sensed the yearly gifts worth over 550 *taller* were simply not enough to encourage the Ottoman subject to act in the interest of the Habsburgs. While Zahirovic suggests that Ali was sincere in his role as an informant for the Habsburgs and was motivated by a connection to his homeland in addition to financial incentives, I am more inclined to agree with Ágoston's argument that Habsburg employed Ottoman subjects; a majority of their "spies," were selectively feeding information to their rivals in the interest of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>68</sup>

During this time, Sinzendorff devoted much of his intelligence gathering efforts to attempting to verify information from within the confines of his residence. Some of the agents he relied on for news are listed in his registers of expenses.<sup>69</sup> Others are cited in his reports, their letters filled with updated news copied into the attachments section of reports, signed only as "undercover person." It was these agents, who connected Sinzendorff with Ottoman environments he would otherwise never have access to, that also made him

64 Johann Christoph Wolzogen is credited as the first in a long tradition of what would eventually become the Oriental Institute. See Franz Babinger, "Die türkischen Studien in Europa bis zum Auftreten Josef von Hammer-Purgstalls," *Die Welt des Islams* 7, no. 3/4 (1919): 103-129, here 103. Wolzogen was an early Habsburg answer to the Ottoman institution of the dragoman, meant to serve as a loyal extension of the ambassador. For more on the later, see E. Natalie Rothman, "Dragomans," ed. Franz Pöchhacker, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (London, 2015).

65 For more on him and other converts, see Tobias P. Graf, *The Sultan's Renegades: Christian-European Converts to Islam and the Making of the Ottoman Elite, 1575-1610* (Oxford, 2017).

66 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 37, Konv 1 (1578 VII-VIII), fos. 150-222.

67 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 37, Konv. 2 (1578 IX-X), fos. 264-300.

68 Nedim Zahirovic, "Two Habsburg Sources of Information at the Sublime Porte in the Second Half of the 16th Century," in Maria Baramova, et al., eds., *Power and Influence in South-Eastern Europe, 16th-19th Century* (Berlin, 2013), 417-423. Gábor Ágoston, "Information, Ideology, and the Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry," in Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman, eds., *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 61-74.

69 For a selection, see *Preis der Diplomatie: Die Abrechnungen der kaiserlichen Gesandten an der Hohen Pforte, 1580-1583*, ed. Tobias P. Graf (Heidelberg, 2016), documents 1-4.

most vulnerable. Sinzendorff regularly accused some of his informants of colluding with a court faction and delivering false information.<sup>70</sup>

## 6 Factions and Rivalries in 1580 Constantinople

As the events discussed above suggest, rumors, forgeries, and problems of trust were rampant in Sinzendorff's Constantinople. Mustafa Çavuş's letter and accompanying self-portrait could easily have been part of these manipulations, and their appearance in 1580 potentially lent support to any of a number of factions in their ongoing power struggles, both internal and external. Within the ruling elite, generational shifts were leading to a fitful shift in policy and practice. Related changes in foreign relations made room for the arrival of new ambassadors and fresh peace treaties to be signed with distant and emerging political powers. The Safavid wars, which had reignited in 1578, were dragging on with no end in sight, and many disgruntled participants were doing everything in their power to bring peace to the region so attention could be concentrated elsewhere. The amorphous Hungarian estates (spread across Ottoman, Holy Roman, Transylvanian, and, most recently, Polish territories) conducted secret meetings to form plans for cohesive actions.

Although Sultan Murad III ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1574, until 1580 his court reflected the character of his father Selim II and his grandfather Suleiman. Beginning around 1580, a new group of court favorites took center stage. Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who had held the post since 1565, was assassinated in 1579, thus bringing to a close one of the longest running vezirates in the empire's history. The office quickly lost its prestige and stability.<sup>71</sup> After falling subject to Murad III's whim, it changed hands eleven times during the course of his twenty-one-year reign. Sokollu's death was followed by the death of the two other remaining viziers from the time of Sultan Suleiman: Şemsi Ahmed Pasha died in April 28, 1580, and Lala Kara Mustafa Pasha died on August 8, 1580 (both while serving as Grand Vizier for Murad III).<sup>72</sup>

70 Such was the case with Ali Bey in October 1578. HHStA, Turcica 37, Konv. 2 (1578 IX-X), fos. 264-300. In November 1580, he accused a messenger of Sancakbey Ferhad Bey of Füle (now Filakovo, Slovakia) of transmitting "*falsch ... berichten*" not only to him, but also directly the Sultan. HHStA, Turcica, Karton 43, Konv. 1 (1580 X-XII and s.d.), f. 98r.

71 For a general treatment see Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York, 2002), 154. Also see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, 1986).

72 The office changed hands so quickly that the Habsburgs had a difficult time keeping up. Rudolf II's letter congratulating Lala Kara Mustafa Pasha on his new post arrived in

With their passing, a new generation of elites rose in the ranks of the vizierate, the harem, and the provincial governorships. Kanijeli Siyavuş Pasha, Sinzendorff's interlocutor was one such rising star. Born in Ottoman Hungary, he carried a penchant for trouble making with him as he rose through the ranks, filling in as temporary Grand Vizier multiple times while Beylerbey of Rumeli before being named to the post himself for eighteen months in 1582 and again for three years in 1586.<sup>73</sup> Sinzendorff maintained continuous contact with Siyavuş during his extended stays in Constantinople. He also attempted to sustain good relations with the rest of Sultan Murad's male favorites, including Kara Üveys, who was the source of a great deal of controversy during his two years as Pasha of Buda.<sup>74</sup> This group of new favorites slowly made way for major changes in the practice and implementation of imperial policy.

The year 1580 saw a great deal of diplomatic activity in Constantinople that would redraw imperial alliances around the world. The Spanish Habsburgs signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans in 1580, thus ending a long period of warfare in the Western Mediterranean. As Philip II consolidated his power on the Iberian Peninsula and concentrated on New Spain, the Ottomans could focus their attentions elsewhere. Sinzendorff regularly reported on the moves of the Spanish agent and sent copies of letters exchanged with Philip II's court. The French ambassador also watched the situation closely. Meanwhile, the Medici and the English crown sent agents attempting to secure safe passage for trade ventures. Sinzendorff observed each of these agents carefully, often from within the walls of his residence using his many proxies as his eyes throughout the city. He obtained copies of nearly every correspondence sent by foreign representatives and transmitted them alongside his own detailed reports and commentaries. Of all these agents, Sinzendorff perceived the Safavid ambassador and his attempts to secure peace on the Eastern borders of the empire as most dangerous for the House of Austria.

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Constantinople a month after the grand vizier had been assassinated. See HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 1580 (VII-IX), fos. 170-173.

73 See J. Schmidt, "Siyawush Pasha Kanizheli," in H.A.R. Gibb et al., eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden, 1986), 9: 697.

74 Üveys' removal from the post was prompted by continual outcries from the Habsburgs about his behavior. For example, he tried several times to annex a group of villages via taxation. For the list of villages, see HHStA, Turcica, Karton 41, Konv. 1 (1580 I-II), fos. 83-86. On the practice of annexing through taxation in general, see Éva Sz. Simon, *A hódoltságon kívüli "hódoltság": Oszmán terjeszkedés a délnyugat-dunántúlon a 16. század második felében* (*The "Occupation" Beyond the Occupation: Ottoman Expansion in Southwestern Transdanubia in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*) (Budapest, 2014).

The highly contentious war with the Safavids reignited in 1578, shattering the quarter century of peace that followed the Treaty of Amasya.<sup>75</sup> The conflict would prove to dominate the agenda throughout the reign of Murad III, and news from the campaign appeared in every one of Sinzendorff's reports as he catalogued the numbers of troops, names of commanders, victories and defeats that kept the Ottoman armies occupied. Yet, in 1580, serious attempts were made by both parties to reverse the course and forge a new peace. Rival factions in Constantinople and misfortunes on the battlefield stalled the talks and the war would drag on for the next decade. At the time Mustafa Çavuş's letter appeared, the Safavid ambassador charged with initiating peace talks met with the interim Grand Vizier,<sup>76</sup> Kanijeli Siyavuş Pasha. Siyavuş's predecessor, the elderly Lala Kara Mustafa Pasha who had been assassinated in the petitions chamber just days before this meeting, had been unwilling to give the Safavid ambassador an audience. Siyavuş, a member of the anti-Habsburg faction, arranged for a final audience for the Safavid embassy in which the formerly-shunned ambassador was showered with gifts.<sup>77</sup> Could it be that the appearance of Mustafa Çavuş was somehow related to these events? Was the document an attempt by the Safavids or Siyavuş Pasha to lend further justification towards a shift in Ottoman martial might away from the Muslim neighbors to the east and reposition the military push towards Christian Europe?

The Safavids were not the only ones interested in redirecting Ottoman attention towards the northwest. An alliance of Hungarian nobles spread across political boundaries was brewing quietly on the sidelines, and a group of families in Habsburg ruled Hungary seem to have been negotiating an alliance with their kinsmen in Transylvania and Poland. No clan was more active in this than the ruling Báthory family in Transylvania. Stephen Báthory, had tried to incite a war between the Ottomans and Habsburgs in the early 1570s while Voivode of Transylvania.<sup>78</sup> In 1580, as King of Poland, he worked together with his younger brother (who had taken his place as Voivode of Transylvania), Christopher Báthory, to form a network of Hungarian nobility with political ambitions. The archives are filled with attempts by Archduke Ernst and Rudolf II to determine

75 Rudi Matthee, "The Ottoman-Safavid War of 986-998/1578-90: Motives and Causes," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 20, no. 1/2 (2014): 1-20.

76 This source lists him as "Hacı Musucazi." The ambassador in question was Zulkadirlu Hacı Maksud Bey. On his mission, see Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-Iran*, 105-6.

77 Aug. 13/20, 1580, HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 (1580 VIII-IX), 12-14, 17.

78 These moves have largely been read by historians as part of efforts to push the Ottomans out of Hungarian lands in the name of Christian Europe. The fact that they spent more time not only cooperating, but also colluding with the Ottomans, and that their brand of anti-trinitarian beliefs fell far from those sanctioned in Rome seem to be afterthoughts.

which of their Hungarian captains along the borderlands switched their loyalties or corresponded directly with enemy potentates. Lists of suspicious names charged with scheming against the Habsburgs were regularly circulated.<sup>79</sup> In July 1580, Sinzendorff got word from one of his informants that there were large scale efforts underway in which Polish and Transylvanian noblemen were attempting to stimulate the Ottomans to attack the Habsburgs. The Ottomans sent Ahmed Çavuş on a mission to Poland and Transylvania in September,<sup>80</sup> while the Transylvanians kept their ambassador Péter Rácz in Constantinople. In 1581, Voivode Christopher Báthory died, putting any plans for an attack on hold. His underage son Sigismund was made the new voivode, with his uncle in Poland controlling his court from a distance until 1586. Could it be that the appearance of Mustafa Çavuş was somehow related to these events? Was the document an attempt by the Báthory, once again, to incite a war between the Ottomans and Habsburgs? The Hungarian estates had already become mixed up in the series of possibly counterfeit letters of Péter Andrassy, captain of Krasznahorka.<sup>81</sup> Could the inability of the Habsburgs to follow up on Mustafa's fate also have something to do with the fact that Christof died in early 1581?

Christof Báthory's death in 1581 had been rumored as early as 1580, when attempts were made by another Hungarian nobleman with close ties to the Ottomans to secure the voivodship and thus rule of Transylvania. Pál Markházy, former captain of Ajnácskő (today Hajnáčka, Slovakia) and his retinue were beginning to cause trouble between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans.<sup>82</sup> Upon hearing rumors of Christof Báthory's death, Markházy sent envoys and then traveled himself to Constantinople to convince the Ottoman sultan to grant him the post.<sup>83</sup> Sinzendorff regarded him as highly suspicious and watched his every move carefully. Many of Markházy's attendants remained in Constantinople and converted to Islam,<sup>84</sup> which he would do himself later in the decade. Was it possible that while Markházy was in residence in Constantinople, he somehow became involved in the creation of a series of falsified documents relating to Mustafa Çavuş to be presented to the Porte? Knowing little about the way the Hapsburg's ran the empire, he originally considered Vienna as the perfect central location to place a captive, only to change his story when he realized that Archduke Ernst could easily refute such a claim.

79 See, for example, HHStA, Hungarica 113, Konv. A (1580, I-VI), fos. 1-2.

80 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 2 (1580 VII-IX), fos. 99-102.

81 See n. 62 above.

82 See n. 63 above.

83 Papp, *Verleihungs*, 91-107.

84 HHStA, Turcica, Karton 41, Konv. 1 (1580 I-II), f. 63v.

## 7 Conclusion: The Captive Ambassador

Sinzendorff was himself a captive in this environment of lies, rumors, false news, impersonations, and counterfeits. As the official Habsburg representative to the Porte, he found himself continually pulled in multiple directions by other agents and Ottoman officials, and sometimes even physically imprisoned in the ambassadorial residence because of the machinations of those around him. In September 1578, Sinzendorff repeatedly complained in his reports that the guards boarded up his windows.<sup>85</sup> Terrified of the possibility that the sultan would throw him into the dungeons in 1580, he prepared his staff. He wrote that his secretary Dr. Pezzen was to accompany him, if possible, and his second secretary Ambrosius Schmeisser was to stay in the residence and burn the cypher with all other important ambassadorial documents.<sup>86</sup>

This would not have been the first time a Habsburg ambassador was imprisoned. Nicolaus Secco, who negotiated a temporary cease fire between Ferdinand I and Sultan Suleiman in 1545, found himself sitting in a cell for short time upon his arrival in Constantinople, blaming the French ambassador Aramon for his unfortunate circumstances.<sup>87</sup> The first resident ambassador of the Habsburgs, Johannes Maria Malvezzi spent a miserable two years in *Anadolu Hisar* and *Yedikule*,<sup>88</sup> while the last resident ambassador of the sixteenth century, Friedrich Kreckwitz, also spent months confined in his own residence at the outbreak of the Long Turkish war in 1593 before being transferred to *Rumeli Hisar*. Residence ambassadors Ungnad and Eitzing both expressed fears of being imprisoned. Scribes, translators, and messengers also frequently found themselves at the mercy of guards in the imperial prisons. When these essential members of his staff were unable to perform their duties, the ambassador himself became crippled.

The resident ambassador Joachim von Sinzendorff's struggles with rival Ottoman factions, deceitful agents, and the rise and fall of attitudes towards the Habsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire were not unique. The appearance of the captive Mustafa Çavuş's letter and self-portrait can be read as evidence

85 HHHStA, Turcica, Karton 37, Konv. 2 (1578 IX-X), fos. 102-109.

86 HHHStA, Turcica, Karton 42, Konv. 1 (1580 V-VII), fos. 171V-172r.

87 HHHStA, Turcica, Karton 6, Konv. 2 (1545 V-XII) fos. 90-91.

88 Ernst Dieter Petritsch, "Die Ungarnpolitik Ferdinands I. bis zu seiner Tribut pflichtigkeit an die Hohe Pforte" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Vienna, 1979), 213-218. *Yedikule* could also serve as a less severe form imprisonment, which Gábor Kármán likens to house arrest in his study of a seventeenth-century Transylvanian ambassador. See Gábor Kármán, *A Seventeenth-Century Odyssey in East Central Europe: The Life of Jakab Harsányi Nagy* (Leiden, 2015), 99-100.



of not only an acute moment of tension between the two great empires in the second half of the sixteenth century, but also as a testament to the stability of relations. Had the letter and image appeared a decade later, it could have been dismissed as a curious element in the rising tensions that led to the Long War. The peace survived the factional rivalries. In 1583, Sinzendorff's successor successfully negotiated another eight-year treaty.<sup>89</sup> The episode is a unique piece of the historical record that helps illustrate how early modern ambassadors like Sinzendorff were helplessly struggling against courtly intrigue and misinformation networks. While it may be impossible to determine for certain the truth behind the rumors, the documents of the captive Mustafa and the possibility of their falsification point to multiple environments of captivity: dungeons in the borderlands, the ambassadorial residence, the Ottoman court, and the historian's early modern archive with its complex mixture of cyphers, languages, paleographies, and mistranslations.

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89 For a copy of Rudolf II's ratification, see HHStA, Turcica, Karton 48, Konv. 3 (1583 IV-VI), fol. 177-180.