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A global perspective on two "oriental" embassies to France in the eighteenth century

By

Anna V. Breidenbach

Abstract

*The following article examines two ambassadorships to France that were received at the court of the ailing Louis XIV in 1714/15 and of the minor King Louis XV in 1720/21. It looks at the formal displays of power and respect during the mission of the Persian ambassador Mohammed Reza Beg and of the Ottoman ambassador Mehmed Efendi. Both ambassadors, perceived as "*oriental*" in the eyes of their hosts, were structured by French protocol that set up rules for the ambassadorial stay. By perceiving diplomacy in its dialectical character, this article assesses the interplay between the requirements of the French court and the reactions and actions of the ambassadors themselves. While the article looks at parallels between the missions, it also suggests that the Persian ambassador's actions as well as his reception in France influenced the Ottoman ambassadorship to France five years later. By comparing the two legations, the presented research takes up a global perspective on the development of diplomacy in early modern times. In so doing, the article aims to contribute to a "new diplomatic history" that moves away from Eurocentrism by taking into consideration the impact of the perceptions of and connections between two* ambassadeurs orienteaux.

About the author

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Introduction

In the 1720s, two books were published in France that became very popular, as they met the European reader's taste for "oriental" culture.[1] In 1721, the Baron de Montesquieu published the *Lettres persannes*, a fictional adaptation of the journey of Mohammed Reza Beg, who came to the French court as an ambassador of the Persian Shah in 1714. Six years later, Germain de Saint-Poullain took this book as a model and published a letter-style book about the adventures of Nedim Coggia, a fictional secretary to the Ottoman ambassador Yirmisekiz Mehmed Efendi, who came to France in 1721.[2]

Imagining what the foreign guests had thought about French customs and culture and thereby experiencing the literary effect of defamiliarization was popular among European readers in the early eighteenth century. Plenipotentiaries from faraway countries frequently aroused the curiosity of those who did not know what life outside their home countries was like. After the success of the *Lettres persannes*, the *Lettres de Nedim Coggia* drew a clear literary line from the Persian to the Ottoman visitor. It followed a successful blueprint – for the readership, both an Ottoman and a Persian visitor to the French court were seen as "oriental", individually different, but still comparable.[3]

Besides the intertextual references between their literary adaptations, the question remains whether a connection can also be seen between the two events themselves. Even though both missions had been highly anticipated and were of great public interest, they still had different aims. While Mohammed Reza Beg's stay in France aimed for the conclusion of a contract between the Safavid Empire and France, Mehmed Efendi's stay was meant to be a symbolic demonstration of Franco-Ottoman friendship, interpreted mainly as the manifestation of a changing Ottoman strategy regarding the "West". As the Ottoman Empire suffered severe military defeats at the end of the seventeenth century, the Sultan and his officials at the Sublime Porte changed their foreign policy from military conquest to the adoption of diplomatic relations and started to open up to "western" culture.[4]

The following article focuses on a revision of this view of the Ottoman mission, suggesting that it cannot be simply understood as merely an adaption to the West. By expanding the perspective regarding the Ottoman mission, this article takes into consideration that it was not only Europe, but also the Safavid Empire that was of concern for the Sultan and his counsellors. This work thus shows that the Ottoman mission and its representation in the *sefaretname*, its official report, was influenced and shaped not only through the requirements of the French court as a host, but also by the Persian embassy that had preceded it. To achieve this, the article is structured into two parts. First, the importance of the geographical setting of the Ottoman Empire as a transit zone between the Persian Empire and France will be outlined, suggesting that diplomatic relations between them were always of concern for the Ottoman Sultan. Leading up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, I will show that Ottoman authorities did indeed know about the Persian ambassador and his reception in France.

Against this background, I will further analyse the course of the ambassadorial stay, comparing Mohammed Reza Beg and Mehmed Efendi. On the one hand, the many similarities between the two missions' diplomatic procedures, due to the protocol determined by the French government, will be stressed. On the other hand, I will show how the ambassadors behaved differently in relation to the French protocol, negotiating between following procedures and acting against them. Special focus will be put upon the tension between the requirements of the hosting state and the interpretation of each guest, perceiving the diplomatic procedures in their "dialectical character". Taking all this into consideration, I will demonstrate that the Ottoman mission can be perceived as a symbolic policy designed to show a friendly inclination towards the French state, while at the same time clearly distinguishing itself from its Persian predecessor.

"European" diplomacy and "oriental" ambassadors

It is important to first explore the "style" of foreign policy in early modern times, which has been subject to classification and, more importantly, hierarchisation regarding the relationships between European and non-European states within historical studies. Traditionally, western scholars have assumed that from the fifteenth until the seventeenth century, a "European" style of diplomacy, namely the institution of the "resident ambassador", had been established, resulting in a tight European diplomatic network following an elaborated protocol.[5] Non-European realms and states were regarded as not taking part in this system.[6]

Since the 1980s, however, two major developments contributed to a more differentiated historical view on the nature of diplomatic relations in early modern times. On the one hand, historians of diplomacy, influenced by new cultural theories, began to envision diplomacy not as a fixed game with firm rules, but as a cultural act evolving in a reciprocal way during the encounters between plenipotentiaries of different states. Historians began to acknowledge that it was only during the latter half of the seventeenth century, after the peace treaty of Westphalia, that certain elements of diplomatic protocol became widely accepted within Europe. By 1700, the institutionalisation of diplomacy was still developing by practice.[7]

Historians today focus on the processual character of diplomatic relations in early modern times and envision the possibilities of different actors to take part in the shaping of diplomatic relations. A "diplomatic protocol" is therefore perceived as a sign system that was developed through an interplay of different actors. Hosting rulers did formulate requirements, but the ambassadors could also shape the rules regarding their reception.[8] It was also through the "widened scope"[9] of postcolonial studies that scholars engaging in diplomatic history began to acknowledge the integral part the relations with those political entities in greater distance to the "European" actors played in the growing practice of diplomacy.[10]

It is in the context of the dominant role France took up during the seventeenth century that a widening of the scope and therefore a global perspective becomes important for the historian working on diplomatic relations in early modern times. During the developing process of diplomacy, France under Louis XIV became a powerful state, dominating the European powers and also developing a growing colonial rule outside of Europe. Therefore, France took a leading role in the development of diplomacy on a global scale. At the court of Louis XIV, a thorough protocol with strict rules for the public acts of diplomacy was established, which soon became a role model for other European courts.[11]

Still, the "*ambassadeurs orienteaux*", as the Ottoman, Persian, but also North African ambassadorships were called in the French court of Louis XIV, were not marginalized in this game.[12] Of course, interactions with ambassadors from regimes regarded as "*orientaux*" did not take place at the same frequency as with plenipotentiaries of neighbouring states. But as "*ambassadeurs*", they were regarded as belonging to the highest of the different ranks of envoys.[13]

In summary, it is important to not perceive a "European diplomatic system" as some sort of container the "*ambassadeurs orienteaux*" would simply adapt to.[14] In the following analysis, the requirements of the French diplomatic protocol will be perceived as a "contact zone" in which plenipotentiaries from different rulers met and communicated, focusing on how the ambassadorships were shaped by different actors.[15]

Sending a Persian ambassador

Mohammed Reza Beg, ambassador to the Persian Shah, came to France in 1714 to obtain the ratification of a treaty between the Shah and the French king. It was designed to secure French support, through vessels and money, against pirates threatening the Shah's rule in Persia. In return, French merchants were to obtain trade privileges in Persia.[16] The treaty can be perceived as the result of a gradual increase of entrepreneurial engagement of French merchants as well as missionaries from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.[17] They travelled to Persia, brought back goods and stories, and pleaded for the support of the French government for protection regarding their missions.[18] One reason for the merchants and missionaries' repeated pleas for support were the dangers of the journey from France to Persia, as well as the insecure status of the foreigners on Persian territory. French merchants were not protected from crimes such as robbery and put themselves in great danger, as the Shahs of the Persian Empire had not adopted a policy of permanent diplomacy, which would allow for residential ambassadors to represent the interests of their subjects.[19]

In this, the location of the Ottoman Empire in between the territories of Persia and France cannot be underestimated – not merely because French and Persian subjects had to cross Ottoman territory to reach the other's shores. It is also important to note that France enjoyed the privilege of a residential embassy at the Ottoman court, a tradition reaching

back to the fifteenth century.[20] The French ambassador at the Sublime Porte as a key figure in the Franco-Ottoman-Persian relationships did not only work for the interests of French subjects on Ottoman soil, but also supported French subjects travelling to Persia. This is recorded in the official "*instructions aux ambassadeurs*" that were given to each ambassador who took up the position at the Ottoman court. As early as the time of Charles de Ferriol, who was ambassador from 1699 to 1709, ambassadors were given the instruction to work for the protection of Christian missionaries going to Persia.[21] Pierre des Alleurs, who came to Constantinople in 1709, worked as a contact person for Mohammed Reza Beg and organised his travel to France.[22] When Louis Usson de Bonnac took up the position in 1716, it was remarked that he could rely on the practice of his predecessors regarding the protection of French subjects travelling to Persia.[23] Here, the tradition of the ambassador at the Porte, working for the interest of French subjects in Persia, is explicitly noted. After the ratification of the treaty of commerce was completed, Louis Usson de Bonnac received further instructions and was asked to make sure that the agreement settled during Beg's stay would be put into practice, to the advancement of French merchants on Persian soil.[24]

It was mostly French merchants that were interested in improving the relations between the French and the Persian State during the seventeenth century. From the perspective of the Persian Savafid Shah, an alliance with powerful France became important only at the beginning of the eighteenth century, as Safavid rule under Shah Hussein (1668-1726) was threatened by rebel groups and pirates.[25] In a treaty that was first signed in the city of Isfahan in 1709, privileges for French merchants trading in the Persian Empire were to be secured in exchange for sending French military vessels as support for the Shah. Although the treaty was brought back to Louis XIV, he did not ratify it immediately.[26] To secure the ratification, Shah Hussein decided to send an ambassador to the French court. He delegated the task of choosing the appropriate candidate to the governors of Erivan, one of his provinces. It was the governor who appointed Mohammed Reza Beg, the *kalender*[27] of the province and third in rank of the provincial government.[28]

Mohammed Reza Beg's coming was announced to the French court in 1712 through Pierre des Alleurs.[29] This French ambassador at the Porte was aware of the dangers Beg would face when he crossed Ottoman soil on his way to France. Officially, the two empires were at peace since 1639, but still they were rivals in a struggle about Islamic hegemony. The Safavid Shahs were the leaders of the Shiites, while the Ottoman Sultans promoted the Sunni form of Islam. Neither side was interested in an alliance or friendly relations– rather the contrary.[30] The Persian and the Ottoman rulers mistrusted each other, as demonstrated in the occurrences during Mohammed Reza Beg's journey to France in 1714.

When Beg crossed Ottoman territory during his travels, he was in contact with Pierre des Alleurs, who advised him to continue his journey by ship from Smyrne to France as fast as possible. But Beg hesitated and even went to Constantinople to meet the French ambassador. There, he was taken as prisoner by the Ottoman authorities, who questioned

him about the purpose of his journey. It was only thanks to Pierre des Alleurs that Beg could leave the prison and continue his journey.[31]

At this point, a remark on the sources concerning the Persian ambassador has to be made. Since no personal record of his travels exist, it is not possible to retrace the personal motivations behind each of Beg's actions. For example, it is unclear why Beg did not continue his travels as fast as possible. The surviving French records only note that Beg insisted upon coming to Constantinople even when he was warned that this could be dangerous for him.[32] It is through the eyes of his hosts and through the perspectives of his companion from Constantinople on, Étienne Padéry, that his actions are recorded. The research presented in this article therefore can only refer to an outside view of his actions and is cautious not to interpret too much upon the motivations attested to him by the French. Still, it is important to know how the French would judge Mohammed Reza Beg as it is this judgement that would be known to Mehmed Efendi later and that he would react to. The self-representation of the Ottoman ambassador therefore has to be seen in relation to what the French had thought of Mohammed Reza Beg, and not what the latter's intention had been.

Étienne Padéry, a Dragoman (interpreter) at the Ottoman court who was sent to France to provide Beg with company and support, wrote of his travels with Beg in a report meant for the French authorities at the Sublime Porte. Padéry was well acquainted with the French language and French culture. He played an important role during the ambassadorship as he was translating between the Persian ambassadors and the French authorities.[33] Padéry joined Mohammed Reza Beg and travelled with him to France after the ambassador had been released from Ottoman imprisonment.

Although the occurrences of Mohammed Reza Beg's journey to France have only been summarized above, his adventures serve to illustrate the tensions in Ottoman-Persian relations that pose an important outset for the comparison of the two embassies. The short imprisonment Beg suffered during his journey indicates a relationship between the Persian and the Ottoman Empire that was marked by suspicion and mistrust at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Sending an Ottoman ambassador

Jumping forward to the Ottoman embassy that was sent to France in 1721, the outset of this mission could not have been more different. The aim of the Ottoman authorities was not the conclusion of a treaty of commerce or about military support. Instead, the mission was designed to reinforce a "traditional French-Ottoman friendship".[34] The ambassador, Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi, was instructed to show interest in French science and culture, and to record his stay in a *sefaretname*, an official account of his journey that was designed to be presented at the Ottoman court and eventually published in print.[35] Indeed, Mehmed Efendi brought back many European inventions, innovations, and ideas.[36] He had

already gained experience on previous diplomatic missions, as he had been present at the negotiations around the Peace Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718. On this occasion, he had been in contact with different European ministers, and he had worked closely with the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha, who was also the driving force behind the organisation of the mission.[37]

By 1716, the Grand Vizier had approached Louis Usson de Bonnac, Pierre des Alleurs' successor as French ambassador at the Porte, with the idea of sending an ambassador to France. The motivation to send an ambassador has been interpreted as a means of "opening up" to the West, a change in Ottoman outer policy at the turn of the eighteenth century. The Ottoman empire had suffered severe territorial losses at the end of the seventeenth century and could not continue with the strategy of keeping outer relations through military conquest. Mehmed Efendi's embassy can be seen as part of this new strategy that was taken up especially by Ibrahim Pasha, to pursue diplomatic relations with other powerful states. Choosing France seemed natural, from the Ottoman perspective, as their relations were traditionally close through the French ambassadorship at the Porte.[38]

Louis Usson de Bonnac also supported the idea of an Ottoman mission to France that would symbolically demonstrate the friendship between the two states. He enjoyed a high reputation at the Ottoman court and was instructed to strengthen the connection to the Sultan, as the Ottoman empire was seen as an important counterbalance to the growing continental power of the Habsburg monarchs. When he took up his post, the power constellation on the continent was shifting. Louis XIV had died in 1715, shortly after he had received Mohammed Reza Beg in the mirror room in Versailles, and the minor King Louis XV was still under the guardianship of his uncle, the Duc d´Orléans.[39]

It is important to note that the ambassadorship was set on a symbolic level. It was planned to demonstrate a friendship between the two powers – a friendship that was important for the French as counterbalance to the Habsburgs, and for the Ottoman government as a support in a time where Ottoman military power was starting to decline. This aim could be achieved through acts that were perceived publicly, and that would be transported throughout the world. Thus, the public diplomatic procedures, that were designed to be seen, perceived, and interpreted by some sort of spectatorship, were the decisive elements through which the success of the Ottoman mission would be tangible.[40] Furthermore, it was important that the ambassadorship would be recorded in the media transporting news throughout Europe, including books that would be written about these events, as well as early newspaper reports.[41] To influence the way that he himself —as well as the empire he represented— would be remembered, Efendi had to take care to be perceived, during the public procedures but also in the media, as an agreeable guest. He complemented this further through his own record that would be published shortly after his stay.[42]

Although Efendi's ambassadorship has been traditionally viewed as an adaption to French customs,[43] I argue that there is a second dimension that must be taken into

account, which played an important role for Efendi's travels and his comportment in France. The difficulty in accomplishing his task was that Efendi would be seen in line with other *ambassadeurs orienteaux* that had come to the French court before. In the past, the visits of those delegates had always been characterised by troubles. The last time an Ottoman ambassador, Süleiman Aga, had come to the French court in 1669, he had refused to receive a letter from the French king that was handed to him while the French king stayed seated on his throne.[44] In his case, but also in the case of Mohammed Reza Beg, the ambassadors had refused to meet the Christian plenipotentiaries standing and did not accept that the French king as a Christian would remain seated during the audience with them, as they were Muslims.[45] All in all, the reports that circulated about the *ambassadeurs orienteaux* stressed the problematic differences in the diplomatic cultures.[46] In relation to Mehmed Efendi, the most recent example of those rather negatively remembered ambassadors to France was Mohammed Reza Beg. He was known as an eccentric figure who did not comply with French customs, rules, and procedures, instead attempting to transgress those rules whenever he could.[47]

The Ottoman government did know about the course, the reception, and the impact of the Persian mission in France. Even though he tried to keep his destination a secret when he crossed Ottoman territory, Mohammed Reza Beg no longer concealed his identity when he safely arrived in Marseille in October 1714, and reports about his reception reached the Ottoman court.[48]

Taking this into consideration, de Bonnac stressed the importance of the Ottoman ambassador distinguishing himself from previous *ambassadeurs orienteaux* who had come to the French court. Against the backdrop of former negative experiences, de Bonnac advised Ibrahim Pasha to therefore choose a delegate who would be able to show himself as being compliant to French customs instead.[49] Mehmed Efendi was given instructions to make sure that he was seen as more cultivated, as open towards French culture, and as an ambassador that would be able to adapt to French customs.[50]

Efendi made a strong effort to distinguish himself from his younger predecessor, Mohammed Reza Beg. By taking the position of the spectator looking at the formalised, public acts of the embassy that were designed to be seen (and read about), it is thus possible to show how Efendi tried to make himself agreeable to the French and thus working for a friendly approximation between France and the Ottoman Empire while at the same time differing and thus distancing himself from the other "oriental" ambassador Mohammed Reza Beg. One can draw this comparison by considering the *sefaretname* that Efendi completed after returning from his journey, together with the accounts about Beg that were kept by French authorities and by Étienne Padéry during his stay.[51] The following will compare the course and the different elements of the diplomatic events between the two ambassadors. While the self-presentation of Mehmed Efendi in his report serves as a source to see how he described his own comportment and attitude, the analysis will show how Efendi distinguished himself in his sefaretname from the way in which Beg's behavior was perceived in France.

Arriving to France

Both Mohammed Reza Beg and Mehmed Efendi first stepped on French soil in Mediterranean port cities – the former at Marseille, on the 21st of October 1714, and the latter at Toulon on the 22nd of November 1720. While Efendi had to go into quarantine for 40 days at nearby Sète because of a recent outbreak of the plague, Mohammed Reza Beg only had to undergo a short examination in the infirmaries.

Immediately upon his arrival, Mohammed Reza Beg's choleric character was noted by the French officials who received him. He successfully resisted a search through his baggage and insisted upon making a great entrance into the city. Although the city officials tried to dissuade his wishes, indicating that this procedure was not according to French customs, Beg overrode the rules of the protocol and made an entrance into the city with three carriages on the 28th of October.[52]

While staying in the city, an Intendant who received Beg organised a multitude of pastimes for the Persian ambassador, including promenades, evening festivities, and sightseeing tours. In return, the Persian ambassador invited many guests into the house that the Intendant had made available for Beg. He entertained his guests with exquisite dinners that cost his hosts a lot of money, thus making himself known to be of extravagant taste and character. Reports about his behaviour soon reached the high officials of the French court.[53]

Some days after Beg's arrival in France, François Pidou de Saint-Olon came to Marseille, to deliver the official greetings of the king, but also to encourage him to start upon his journey to Paris. Beg again insisted upon staying a few weeks longer in Marseille, adding to the high expenses he already had incurred.[54] It was custom not only in France, but also in the Safavid Empire, to cover the expenses for the foreign guest's lodging and upkeep. The height of the expenses granted to a visitor was therefore to be taken as a scale for the deference bestowed upon the guests.[55]

While Mohammed Reza Beg stood out for his strong will and extravagance from the beginning of his stay in France, Mehmed Efendi presented himself in his *sefaretname* as compliant to all the demands of his hosts regarding his arrival in France. He agreed with the requirement of staying in quarantine in the ruins of an old church for 40 days, and he agreed to the French plans about his journey to Paris by boat, on the Canal du Languedoc.[56]

Efendi's report about his entrance into the city of Toulon is remarkable. As he recounts, he took his entrance into Toulon by horse, where he was greeted by the city Intendant. Furthermore, his entrance was accompanied by a procession of marine officers and captains, including a group of marine musicians:

> The troops under armour were arranged by our sides; the marine musicians with their instruments, like trumpets, tambourines, flutes, played, divided into different groups, and some thousand people followed us on the right and on the left side. With this whole suite we arrived at the Jardin du Roi.[57]

It is striking that Efendi was granted the official entrance into the city that Mohammed Reza Beg had to insist upon. Even though one can imagine that the entrance Efendi enjoyed was not a great procession with many carriages, the ambassador presented it to his audience as a testimony of honour.

The Route to Paris – Expenses and Honours

After their respective stays in the cities of their arrival, Mohammed Reza Beg and Mehmed Efendi both began their journeys to Paris. Again, the reports about Beg's behaviour and Efendi's self-presentation show a great deal of difference. It is remarkable that Efendi balanced his account of his compliance with reports upon the high honours that were granted to him.

This was different to Beg, who quarrelled with the French authorities that accompanied him to Paris upon the honours granted to him. Beg insisted upon travelling with a great entourage, including a group of military men, as well as making a great entrance in all cities he passed on his way to Paris.[58] The Marquis de Torcy, who was in touch with Nicholas de Saint-Olon, asked the latter to hinder Beg in his wishes and to prevent him from making his grand entrances into each city, as it was not according to French protocol. But Saint-Olon maintained that due to the strong will of the ambassador, it was very difficult to stop him from carrying out his wishes.[59]

The great expenses that Beg incurred during his journey posed a second problem during the ambassador's journey to Paris. The correspondence between Torcy and Saint-Olon shows that Beg spent far more money than initially intended to cover his expenses for the lodging and food for the embassy. Repeatedly, the French officials tried to limit those expenses and used different strategies, from persuasion to a clear limit of provisions to, finally, a definite end that was put on Beg's stay later in Paris, when he made no sign of leaving after a lengthy stay.[60]

All in all, it is remarkable that Mohammed Reza Beg seems to have tried to cross the financial boundaries granted to him. He may have aimed to position himself as an exceptional guest to France, requiring a surplus of financial support. This view is stressed by Susan Mokhberi, who interprets parts of Beg's behaviour in France as a means of demonstrating the power and the might of his ruler. Requiring more money and thereby transgressing French customs could be, following her interpretation, seen as a public display of power of the Persian Shah.[61] Still, in the eyes of the French, Beg's comportment was merely seen as pretentious; he would forever be remembered as "i*nsolent et extravagant*".[62]

Comparing this to what Mehmed Efendi writes in his *sefaretname* about financial issues, it is striking that monetary concerns are nearly left out completely. Efendi does not mention any needs that could not be met, nor any restrictions upon his expenses. On the contrary, he always stresses how well he was provided for. There is only one remarkable passage in his report that seems worth noting, keeping in mind that the financial support of the oriental ambassadorships seems to have been a delicate subject. At the end of his stay, he complains about not having been granted an extra sum of money to cover the costs for his travels back to Constantinople. In the edition of the *sefaretname* translated by Veinstein, a comment by Bonnac is put into a footnote, remarking that this was an inappropriate complaint. This slight indication makes it possible to see that the report was shaped by an awareness of its public character – there might have been some inconveniences for Efendi that he would not dare to write about in his *sefaretname*.[63] Still, those remarks were very slight and seldom, and Efendi was careful not to endanger his overall praising tone.

Taking into consideration that Beg had to insist upon grand entrances into the cities he passed on his way to Paris, it is remarkable that Efendi repeatedly details the warm welcome that was granted to him when he went to each place. First travelling on the Canal du Languedoc, Efendi praises the Canal as being one of the wonders of the world.[64] From Bordeaux, Efendi continued his journey by horse. Upon reaching Paris, he summarises that:

> In all the cities and fortresses that I passed, there was always a troop of soldiers that would be sent to me in advance and that would meet me already on my route. Once I arrived in the city, the soldiers accompanied me with great pomp to my accommodation, where the grands du pays, as well as the consuls, came to congratulate me upon my happy arrival and brought me fruits and confitures.[65]

The two main features of Efendi's self-representation thus can be seen in his modesty and compliance to French customs, arrangements, and to the French protocol in general. In his report, he openly demonstrates his turning towards French culture and customs. By showing this, he differentiates himself greatly from the conduct that was reported from the Persian ambassador, who did not follow French customs and rules but whose demands went beyond the bounds of the French protocol.

Meeting the "Introducteur"

A very important part of the ambassadorial procedure in France during the reign of Louis XIV, and still under Louis XV, was the meeting of the Ambassador with the *introducteur des ambassadeurs*, an office that was held in high regard at the French court. The introducteur had the task of delivering the official greetings from the king and acting as his highest deputy in regard to the reception of *ambassadeurs*. By meeting the *introducteur des ambassadeurs*, the ambassadors were officially acknowledged as legitimate plenipotentiaries in the rank of *ambassadeur en titre*.[66] By looking at the problems during this meeting that occurred in the case of Mohammed Reza Beg, the careful preparation of the same procedure in the case of Mehmed Efendi can be fully understood.

Both ambassadors met the *introducteur des ambassadeurs*, the Baron de Breteuil, when they reached the chateau of Charenton at the outskirts of Paris, the place where the ambassadors traditionally prepared for their official entrance into the city. In the case of Mohammed Reza Beg, the Baron had already been informed by Nicholas de Saint-Olon, who accompanied Beg, about the difficulties regarding the conduct of the Persian ambassador.[67] It was anticipated that Beg would refuse to greet the *introducteur* standing, because he saw it as undignified to greet a Christian standing. Indeed, Beg remained seated during the meeting. This behaviour would be remembered as Beg's biggest offense and a demonstration of disrespect against his hosts.[68]

Against the background of a diplomatic "faux-pax" in the case of his Persian predecessor, it is clear why Mehmed Efendi's meeting with the officials of the young French King Louis XV prepared for his visit carefully and well in advance. The meeting posed a critical situation where Efendi could show his respect or disrespect for the French. Already the meeting with the envoy who was to guide him to Paris, Sr. de la Baune, was prepared with great care, and was also reported in detail in Efendi's sefaretname. He met him shortly after the end of his quarantine, while he was still in Sète.[69] Sr. de la Baune had written a letter in advance in which he delivered his greetings. In this letter, whose content Efendi openly delivered through his report to his readership, he had asked the ambassador to show him all the appropriate signs of honour required from him, writing "as it is custom to give many signs of honour to those who deliver the royal greetings, in consideration of him who sends them, I ask you to observe this custom regarding my person".[70] Efendi met all those requirements as he rose to his feet, even coming towards Sr. de la Baune and greeting him with "toutes hônnettes possible".[71]

In this situation, Mehmed Efendi was able to demonstrate his inclination towards French customs while clearly distancing himself from the behaviour of the Persian ambassador, which had become the topic of public discussion. The meeting with the *introducteur* was not reported in detail. But Efendi does mention the importance of the office, as well as the numerous times they met at Charenton for the preparation of his entrance into the city.[72]

The entrance to Paris

In preparation for their entries into Paris, the ambassadors continued to follow their respective strategies regarding the protocol set by their hosts. Mohammed Reza Beg, unsurprisingly, continued to cause troubles. He managed to push the date of his entrance into the capital a few days behind the date that had been scheduled by the French court – he justified this with reference to astrological constellations that were more favourable at the latter date – insisting upon choosing a "happy" day for his entrance to Paris.[73] He also contested the French requirements concerning the course of the entrance by insisting upon

entering the city on horseback, instead of taking the royal carriage that was put at his disposal for this occasion.[74]

It seems again ostensible that Efendi's *sefaretname* in contrast delivers a thoroughly smooth preparation for his entrance. Remarkably, he also wished to enter the city by horse, and he did not indicate any trouble from his hosts about this wish.[75] On the contrary, Efendi was provided with a number of horses from the royal stables.[76] To the reader of the *sefaretname*, it seems that some of the wishes that Mohammed Reza Beg insisted upon, and that had been interpreted as insults to the French protocol in his case, were granted to Mehmed Efendi without any trouble.

Concerning the royal audience, the preparation of Efendi's meeting with the king can again be seen in relation to the experiences the French court had already had with Beg. When the latter met Louis XIV in the magnificent Mirror Room in Versailles, he again caused a scandal when he refused to first address the Sun King and instead remained silent.[77] When Efendi's audience with the young King Louis XV, alongside his uncle, the Duc d´Orléans, was prepared, the French officials clearly wanted to prevent an irritation like the one that had been caused by Beg before. The *sefaretname* details how Efendi delivered the instructions given to him in advance of the royal audience. It was agreed that the king would greet him standing (a great honour, as we already know). But in exchange, it was explicitly demanded of Efendi to address the king first and to deliver honourable greetings and expressions of friendship from his Sultan.[78]

After their respective audiences with the French king, both Mohammed Reza Beg and Mehmed Efendi, together with their entourage, stayed in the *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs* for a few months. This was the crucial time to fulfil the purposes of their missions. We can once again perceive a great difference in the conduct of the ambassadors, according to the different purposes of their mission. Apart from when he went to the negotiations, Mohammed Reza Beg rarely left the *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs*. He showed no sign of interest in French culture and lifestyle and instead followed a strict daily routine that was centred around religious practice and banqueting. He invited the Parisians to watch himself eating and thus presented himself to the ever-curious spectators in Paris, who soon talked even more about the extravagances the Persian ambassador enjoyed during his meals.[79] On some evenings, he was also invited to dine with members of the French court. On this occasion, he insisted upon bringing his own food, along with his cook who prepared the meals for him.[80]

Mehmed Efendi's conduct may be perceived as the exact opposite of his Persian predecessor. It is important to remember that it was the purpose of Efendi's visit to reinforce the Ottoman-French friendship and to demonstrate openness for French customs and culture. Thus, it is not surprising that Efendi spent his days visiting all sorts of French institutions, buildings, and cultural events, demonstrating a special interest in French architecture and horticulture. He was curious to learn about new scientific methods and knowledge, and his hosts organised a great number of demonstrations and visits for him.[81]

At the same time, Mehmed Efendi himself caused great curiosity among Parisians, just like Mohammed Reza Beg. On the curiosity of people who watched him take his meals, Efendi wrote, "What they desired most was to watch me eat. […] those manners, which were very new to me, embarrassed me very much, but my compliance made me be patient."[82] We can see in this comment that the public attention Efendi received was something rather inconvenient for him. But it was an opportunity for him to demonstrate his goodwill towards the French to let them observe him, as he himself was invited to get to know French culture. It is against the backdrop of Mohammed Reza Beg openly inviting the Parisians to watch him eat, staging his "oriental" manners in the eyes of the spectators, that we can understand why the people in Paris were so very curious to be present at the Ottoman ambassador's meals. Nevertheless, the Ottoman ambassador notes his disappointment about not having been invited by his French hosts to dine with them:

> For honours in words, they were so very liberal that one could take them for the most devoted people of the world. The proverb could be applied here that says: eat our souls, but do not touch our plates.[83]

Such invitations had been offered to Mohammed Reza Beg, who refused to eat the meals the French cooks prepared. It is therefore possible to assume that in the case of Mehmed Efendi, the French were reluctant to invite him, based on their experience with the Persian ambassador.

Conclusion

At the end of his stay, Mehmed Efendi could look back at a successful mission. The French newspapers were full of praise for his behaviour and described him as an agreeable ambassador. His adaptability was remarked by attesting to his "European taste".[84] When he came back to Constantinople in 1721, he had accomplished his mission of demonstrating friendship and inclination towards the French.

Mohammed Reza Beg also succeeded in fulfilling the purpose of his mission. The treaty of friendship and commerce between the Safavid Empire and France was reassessed and ratified during his stay. He returned to Erivan in May 1717, after he took a route through Russia to avoid having to cross Ottoman territory once again.[85] In his absence, however, the power constellations within the Safavid government had changed. His former protector, the Khan of Erivan, had been replaced, as well as some members of the government in Isfahan. Fearing persecution, Beg poisoned himself shortly after his return.[86] The ratification of the treaty would be obtained by Étienne Padéry, who was nominated as delegate by the French authorities to travel as "*Consul*" to Chiraz in 1719.[87]

The outset of this research has been to investigate how the Ottoman ambassadorship of Mehmed Efendi had been influenced by the Persian ambassadorship of Mohammed Reza Beg. From the analysis of the procedure of both the ambassadorial journeys to France, it is

clear that the embassy of Mehmed Efendi was shaped by its predecessor in several ways. Firstly, the choice of the ambassador at the Porte was influenced by the experiences the French court had (and communicated through its ambassador) with Mohammed Reza Beg. Due to the information and the counsel the French ambassador gave, the Ottoman officials made sure to choose a personality of a "new format", who would be able to present himself as open towards French culture, politics, and science.

Mehmed Efendi was extremely successful at this task. He became known as respectful, cultivated, and open towards French culture, noted often in the reports circulating about him after his stay. But Efendi also made a strong effort in his *sefaretname* to present himself the way he wanted to be perceived in France. He agreed upon a lengthy quarantine and upon taking a different route to Paris to avoid the plague. No quarrels with the French officials he met are mentioned in the report, but instead the mutual courtesy during the different interactions is recorded. It is in the way Efendi described his own comportment that he distinguished himself greatly from Mohammed Reza Beg, who became known as eccentric, choleric, and ignorant towards French culture.

On several occasions, Mohammed Reza Beg questioned the requests of his hosts that were designed to structure the ambassadorial stay. He insisted upon public entrances into the French cities that the French officials tried to avoid, as well as upon keeping a high standard of living throughout his stay, costing his hosts a great amount of money. He also questioned the French protocol by refusing to greet the French officials standing and thus managed to display the power of his ruler through the symbolic acts surrounding the diplomatic meetings. His aim was likely to demonstrate the strength of the Persian ruler by not complying to the conditions and requests of his host. On many occasions, he caused outrage among the French officials who dealt with the "stubborn oriental" ambassador. Indeed, he managed to force his hosts to change their plans and to adapt the procedure according to his own wishes many times. Mohammed Reza Beg could insist upon grand entrances into the different French cities, he could change the date for the entrance to Paris, and he could insist upon entering Paris by horse.

With these examples, the "dialectical character" of the diplomatic protocol in early modern times is clearly shown. The possibility to change the protocol is illustrated by the fact Efendi was granted privileges that Beg had to insist upon. All in all, it seems that the reception of Mohammed Reza Beg influenced the ambassadorship of Mehmed Efendi in two different ways. On the one hand, the actual course of events had been subject to change, but on the other, the self-representation of Efendi was shaped by his desire to distinguish himself from the way his predecessor had been perceived in France.

Beg's and Efendi's diplomatic experiences form a contribution to a "new diplomatic history", taking into account relationships outside of Europe that influenced diplomatic procedures. Not only did French customs shape the ambassadorships that were perceived as oriental, but also these oriental ambassadorships shaped the protocol at the receiving courts and were of concern not only for their hosts, but also for other ambassadors coming

from "oriental" states. A Persian ambassador could manage to change the French protocol and to make a lasting impression in Europe. An Ottoman ambassador coming to France shortly afterwards could present himself as agreeable to French customs, as he was perceived in comparison to his predecessor.

In light of the length of Efendi's *sefaretname*, this article could only highlight some specific places where the relation between the two missions were most clear. A more detailed study of all the stages of these journeys, taking into consideration the communication of the French officials, would give a more precise depiction. The French actors have only been referred to in this article as decisive communicators, delivering their perception of Mohammed Reza Beg and shaping the procedures of both embassies. How and in what detail information about Beg was passed on to Louis Usson de Bonnac, however, remains uncertain. The transfer of knowledge has been anticipated according to the indications given in the existing scholarship, but it would be a fruitful field of research to analyse the structures of communication between the French and the Ottoman court around 1700 in more detail – especially in a time of change for the Ottoman outer policy.

Instead of writing a history of the reception of the Ottoman ambassador Mehmed Efendi in France, 1721, and simply regarding it as an adaptation to French customs and rules, it has been possible to indicate a demarcation against the conduct of Mohammed Reza Beg by looking at the event and its account from a more global perspective. By taking into consideration the impact of Mohammed Reza Beg, it is possible to assess Mehmed Efendi's conduct in France, as well as his self-representation in his *sefaretname*, in a new way.

Notes

[1] Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV´s France* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship, 2009), 6-7.

[2] For the *Lettres persannes* see: Olivier Bonnerot, *La Perse dans la littérature et la pensée française au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1988), 66; for the *Lettres de Nedim Coggia* see: Francois Labbé, "Un Rennais de la République des Lettres: Germain-François Poullain de Saint-Foix (1699-1776)," *Mémoires de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Bretagne* T. LXIII, (1986): 319-327.

[3] Orientalism in early modern France cannot be understood as a centrally organised political force but as a rather vague interest in the culture and in trade with the powers that were perceived as "oriental". These encompassed cultures in the near East but also in North Africa – and Persian and Ottoman culture in particular were compared in the imaginations and depictions of the time. See Ina Baghdiantz Mc Cabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France: Eurasian Trade, Exoticism, and the Ancien Regime* (New York: Berg, 2008), 2-3 and 72.

[4] For this rather traditional view of Efendi's Stay, see Fatma Müge Göcek, "Encountering the West: French Embassy of Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed Efendi: 1720-1721," in *IIIrd Congress of the Social and Economic History of Turkey*, ed. Heath W. Lowry and Ralph S. Hattox (Istanbul, 1990), 79.

[5] Heinz Durchhardt, „Grundmuster der internationalen Beziehungen in der frühen Neuzeit," in *Strukturwandel internationaler Beziehungen: zum Verhältnis von Staat und internationalem System seit dem westfälischen Frieden*, ed. Jens Siegelberg (Wiesbaden: VS Springer, 2000), 80.

[6] J.C. Hurewitz, "Ottoman Diplomacy and the European State System," *Middle East Journal* 15/2 (1961): 141.

[7] Daniel Legutke, *Diplomatie als soziale Institution. Brandenburgische, sächsische und kaiserliche Gesandte in Den Haag, 1648-1720* (Münster: Waxmann, 2010).

[8] On protocol in its dialogical character see: Susanne Schattenberg, „Die Sprache der Diplomatie oder Das Wunder von Portsmouth. Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Außenpolitik," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56, no. 1 (2008): 7.

[9] See for example Natalie Zemon Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and cultural crossings in a global world," *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (May 2001): 190.

[10] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Par-delà l´incommensurabilité: pour une histoire connectée des empires aux temps modernes," Revue d´histoire moderne et contemporaine 5 (2007): 38.

[11] For an overview on France's leading role see Lucien Bely, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

[12] The term is used in this way by the French politician Nicolas de Sainctot, who recorded the different diplomatic customs at the court of Louis XIV. See: *Mémoires de Nicolas de Sainctot (1602-1702) - Tome II* (Paris: 2015), 20.

[13] Concerning the different ranks of envoys see: Francois de Caillière, *De la manière de négocier avec les Souverains. De l´utilité des négociations, du choix des Ambassadeurs & des Envoyez, & des qualitez nécessaires pour réussir dans ces emplois*, A Amsterdam pour la Compagnie, 1716, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k936753.image#.

[14] John Watkins, "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2008): 5.

[15] For the term "contact zone" see: Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession*, 1991, 33–40.

[16] On piracy in the Persian Gulf see for example Jane Hooper, "Pirates and Kings: Power on the Shores of Early Modern Madagascar and the Indian Ocean," *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (2011): 215–42.

[17] Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 120.

[18] Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavid Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 426.

[19] Anne-Marie Touzard, *Le drogman Padéry, émissaire de France en Perse: (1719-1725)* (Paris: Geuthner, 2005), 33.

[20] Jensen De Lamar, "The Ottoman Turks in Sixteenth Century French Diplomacy," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 4 (1985): 451.

[21] *Recueil des Instructions Données aux Ambassadeurs et Ministres de France depuis les Traités de Westphalie jusqu´à la Révolution Francaise, publié sous les auspices de la Commission des Archives diplomatiques au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. XXIX Turquie, par Pierre DuParc* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1969), 166.

[22] Maurice Herbette, *Une ambassade Persane sous Louis XIV. D´après des documents inédits* (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1907), 20.

[23] *Instructions,* 223.

[24] *Instructions,* 239-240.

[25] Lockhart, *Safavid Dynasty*, 450.

[26] Touzard, *Le drogman Padéry*, 71.

[27] Official rank at the Persian provincial courts. .

[28] As "Kalender", Beg had the task of collecting taxes. See: The Marquis de Sade, *Misfortunes of Virtue and other Early Tales*, trans. David Coward (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 1999), 275.

[29] Herbette, *Une ambassade,* 15.

[30] Ernest Tucker, "The Peace Negotiations of 1736: A Conceptual Turning Point in Ottoman-Iranian Relations," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 20, no. 1 (1996): 20.

[31] See Herbette, *Une ambassade,* 17-29.

[32] Herbette, *Une ambassade,* 20.

[33] Anne-Marie Touzard's monograph offers a detailed description of Padéry's life, as he managed to obtain important roles at the French court following his companionship with Beg. He even completed the latter's mission as he went back towards Persia with Beg.

[34] Gilles Veinstein, introduction to his edition of Mehmed Efendi's *sefaretname*: *Le Paradis des infidèles. Relation de Yirmisekisz Calebi Mehmed efendi, ambassadeur ottoman en France sous la Régence* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1981), 25.

[35] On this type of source, see Fatma Müge Göcek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16.

[36] Among them the printing press, which had been forbidden in the Ottoman empire. See Veinstein, *Le Paradis*, 23.

[37] THeinrich Benedikt, „Ibrahim Pascha," *Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas* (München, 1976), 212.

[38] This view is maintained by Göcek, *East encounters West*, 80.

[39] Martin Sicker, *The Islamic World in Decline: From the Treaty of Karlowitz to the Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Praeger, 2001), 50.

[40] On the public elements of diplomacy see for example Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger, "Zeremoniell als politisches Verfahren. Rangordnung und Rangstreitigkeit als Strukturmerkmale des frühneuzeitlichen Reichstages," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschungen* 19 (1997): 94.

[41] Newspapers started to become an important factor at the turn of the eighteenth century. See for example the special issue "Communications revolutions," *German History* 24, no. 3 (2006).

[42] Mehmed Efendi completed his *sefaretname* shortly after his return to Constantinople. It was translated by Julien-Claude Galland in 1721, and again in 1723, into French. It is this version of the

report, which has been edited by Gilles Veinstein in 1981, that this article refers to.

[43] Göcek, "East encounters West".

[44] Veinstein, *Le Paradis,* 23.

[45] Susan Mokhberi, "Finding Common Ground between Europe and Asia: Understanding and Conflict during the Persian Embassy to France in 1715," *Journal of early modern history* 16, no. 1 (2012): 57.

[46] Susan Mokhberi, "Finding Common Ground between Europe and Asia: Understanding and Conflict during the Persian Embassy to France in 1715," *Journal of early modern history* 16, no. 1 (2012): 57.

[47] Herbette cites different contemporary voices in her depiction.

[48] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 37.

[49] Veinstein, *Le Paradis,* 36.

[50] Göcek, *East encounters West*, 10. The author mentions official orders regarding the sending of Mehmed Efendi, which I have not been able to verify.

[51] For a detailed view of Mohammed Reza Beg's account, reconstructed through the surviving French sources, see Herbette, *Une ambassade*.

[52] Herbette, *Une ambassade,* 33-35.

[53] Herbette, *Une ambassade,* 39.

[54] Ibid, 42.

[55] On the Persian diplomatic customs see for example: Ahmad Guliyev, *Safavids in Venetian and European Sources* (Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari, 2022).

[56] Mehmed Efendi, *Le paradis des Infidels. Relation de Yirmisekisz Calebi Mehmed efendi, ambassadeur ottoman en France sous la Régence*, trans. Julien-Claude Galland (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1981), 66-68.

[57] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 65: "Les troups sous les armes étaient rangés à nos côtés; les musiciens de la marine avec leurs instruments particuliers, comme trompettes, tambours, fifres, jouaient, partagés par troupes, et de milliers de personnes nous suivaient à droite et à gauche. Nous arrivâmes avec tout ce cortège au Jardin du Roi".

[58] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 71-74.

[59] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 63.

[60] Regarding the quarrels during the journey, see Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 80. Herbette mentions here that the amount of money granted to an "*ambassadeur oriental"* was fixed in the French protocol to about 300-400 livres per day.

[61] Mokhberi, "Finding Common Ground," 77.

[62] Herbette, 6, citing Saint-Simon in the *journal des Dangeau*, op. cit. t. 15, 273.

[63] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 161. The comments of the French ambassador in the report indicate the few passages where Efendi shed a slightly different light on his stay in France.

[64] Ibid, 76.

[65] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 85: “Dans toutes les villes et forteresses où je passais, on envoyait toujours une troupe de soldats une lieue au- devant de moi. Lorsque j´étais arrivé à la ville, ils me conduisaient en pompe à mon logis, où les grands du pays, de même que les consuls, venaient me féliciter sur mon heureuse arrivée et me portaient des fruits et des confitures”.

[66] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 93.

[67] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 99.

[68] For a detailed analysis see Mokhberi, “Finding Common Ground,” 53-80.

[69] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 70.

[70] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 71: “comme la coutume est qu´on fasse beaucoup d´honneurs aux personnes qui portent un compliment de la part du roi, en considération de celui qui les envoie, je vous prie d´observer cet usage à mon égard”.

[71] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 70, “all honours possible”.

[72] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 90-91.

[73] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 112.

[74] Ibid, 119. It was finally decided that Beg would take the carriage to one of the city gates where he would mount a horse.

[75] *Al-sulwafī tārīkh Kilwa*, 50-51.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Mokhberi, “Finding Common Ground,” 79.

[78] Efendi, *Le paradis*, 95.

[79] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 201.

[80] Ibid, 196.

[81] A great part of the *sefaretname* is dedicated to the description of Efendi’s visits during his stay. See: Efendi, *Le paradis*, 104-152.

[82] Ibid, 94: “Ce qu´ils désiraient le plus était de me voir manger. […] ces manières très nouvelles pour moi me gênaient beaucoup, mais ma complaisance me faisait prendre patience”.

[83] Ibid, 142: “Pour des honneurs en paroles, ils en étaient si libéraux, qu´on les aurait pris pour les gens du monde les plus dévoués. On peut appliquer à cela le proverbe qui dit: Mangez nos âmes, ne touchez pas à nos assiettes”.

[84] Mercure, August 1721, printed in the annex of Efendi, *Le paradis*, 204.

[85] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 326.

[86] Herbette, *Une ambassade*, 327

[87] Touzard, *Le drogman Padéry*, 33.