



BRILL

JOURNAL OF EARLY  
MODERN HISTORY 19 (2015) 245-259

*Journal of*  
Early Modern  
History

brill.com/jemh

# Afterword: Intermediaries, Mediation, and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in the Early Modern Mediterranean

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## Abstract

This essay thematizes the important contributions of the current volume to the study of non-ambassadorial diplomatic intermediaries in the early modern Mediterranean. It further suggests how attending to particular modalities of mediation, e.g. archiving and translation, might shed new light on processes of political, ethnolinguistic, and confessional boundary-making.

## Keywords

Mediation – commensuration – translation – archives

The current volume joins a small but growing number of recent publications which have heeded John Watkins' plea to revisit and retheorize premodern

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\* Acknowledgments: My former and current research assistants Dr. Gulay Yilmaz, Dr. Murat Yaşar, Dr. Sarah Loose, Ted Adamo, Mehmet Kuru, and Giovanna Licata have greatly contributed to the larger project of which this essay forms part. Our ongoing conversations about transcribing, translating, and summarizing archival materials have taught me much about the processes of translation and mediation discussed below. I also thank participants at forums at the University of Michigan, Central European University, the Folger-Shakespeare Library, the University of Toronto, UCLA, and Stanford University where portions of this work were presented in various forms. Special thanks to Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić for accompanying this project for a very long time and for providing thoughtful suggestions on the current iteration. Finally, I thank Alejandro Paz for humoring this non-linguistic-anthropologist's foray into unfamiliar territory, and for acting as a delightful dragoman throughout the journey. The usual caveats apply.

“relationships *between* and *among* polities.”<sup>1</sup> It does so, moreover, by jumping into the not-so-calm waters of the Mediterranean, where the deep-seated legacies of Orientalism have engendered a division of academic labor uncondusive to engaging simultaneously the historiographical and methodological concerns of Europeanists, Ottomanists, and North Africanists. Attending to the Mediterranean as a *locus classicus* of early modern cross-confessional diplomacy, however, is very fitting: Watkins’ 2008 programmatic statement points to the importance of the strife of confessionalization, as well as the continuous engagement with the Ottomans, in the forging of the category of “Christendom.”<sup>2</sup> In numerous ways, the articles in this collection help further disaggregate “Christendom” as an analytical category, underscoring the differing socio-religious-cum-diplomatic presuppositions, institutions, personnel, and practices of various polities. These articles thus both highlight the roles of specific groups and individual actors within and across polities and allow us to re-envision a shared assemblage of diplomatic knowledge—much of it embodied and practice-oriented rather than enshrined in prescriptive literature—that crossed several confessional, linguistic, and geopolitical lines.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond interrogating the Eurocentric assumptions of some older historiographies, the much-vaunted “new diplomatic history” has also prompted historians to attend to a broader cast of characters than in previous accounts of early modern diplomacy. These new characters do not fit neatly into Mattingly’s model of a secular and increasingly professionalized Renaissance diplomatic corps.<sup>4</sup> No longer focusing primarily on aristocratic ambassadors in courtly finery writing in school Latin about matters of high politics and grand strategy, practitioners of the new diplomatic history have sought to capture the important role of “lesser” diplomatic personnel, sites of knowledge production, genres of diplomatic correspondence, and forms of mediation. As this collection of essays and others have made clear, mediation performed by non-ambassadorial agents of various kinds can hardly be treated as “white noise” to be cancelled out in order to distill the supposedly pure voices of state-sanctioned representatives. Such forms of non-ambassadorial mediation

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1 John Watkins, “Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2008): 1.

2 *Ibid.*, 2-3.

3 For a powerful explication of a shared set of diplomatic practices between Europe and North Africa, albeit in a slightly later period, see Christian Windler, “Diplomatic History as a Field for Cultural Analysis: Muslim-Christian Relations in Tunis, 1700-1840,” *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 1 (2001): 79-106.

4 See Watkins, “Towards a New Diplomatic History,” 3.

must be brought into sharp relief as loci of diplomatic activity in their own right, as core elements of cross-confessional diplomacy warranting careful analysis as to their particular forms of authorization.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Gürkan offers us a panoramic view of the kinds of non-ambassadorial diplomatic intermediaries in early modern Istanbul, including dragomans, Jewish financiers, women of the imperial palace, and what he calls “small-scale go-betweens,” emphasizing both their range of backgrounds and institutional spaces and the alliances and factions between them. Grenet attends to the role of French royal dragomans (diplomatic interpreters) in mediating between visiting Ottoman and North African emissaries and a range of French institutions and locales, not all of them metropolitan and courtly. In Planas’ piece, Christian captives seek to position themselves (admittedly with only partial success) as intermediaries between the Habsburg crown and a North African rebelling grandee. For Van Gelder, Dutch renegades-turned-corsairs are instrumental in mediating between sometimes hapless Dutch ambassadors and the North African Ottoman provinces. That said, not all mediation can be pinpointed to specific sociological groups—in White’s essay, for example, mediation is multi-layered and multi-nodal, involving various Venetian and Ottoman office holders, as well as various genres of texts, most fundamentally the *şeyhülislam*’s fetva. Here, a specific genre itself becomes a nexus of mediation, a point I will return to.

As Krstić cogently argues, the point of these studies taken collectively is not to “fill the gap” by adding yet another group of diplomatic practitioners to the historical record. Instead, the specificity and complexity (sociological, confessional, and ideological) of the setting at hand are brought to bear on our analysis of the particularities of mediation work. This marks an important departure from an earlier historiographical generation’s focus on prescriptive diplomatic literature and a legalistic understanding of the rules and regulations governing diplomatic engagement. In the case Krstić elaborates, Moriscos’ implied religio-confessional transformation in the wake of the 1609 official expulsions helps explain how this group came to play a specific role in Ottoman claims to universal monarchy.

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5 On other significant varieties of early modern mediation, see Ellen M. McClure, *Sunspots and the Sun King: Sovereignty and Mediation in Seventeenth-Century France* (Urbana, 2006); Paul McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham, 2007); cf. Kathryn Reyerson, *The Art of the Deal: Intermediaries of Trade in Medieval Montpellier* (Leiden, 2002). On mediation as a core property of Ottoman statecraft, see Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, 2008).

Collectively, then, these essays underscore the potential centrality of non-patrician intermediaries to a rethinking of early modern courtly diplomatic engagement. The challenge is not simply to show that such intermediaries facilitated diplomatic interaction and permeate the historical record but to consider *how* their interventions mattered, how particular modalities of mediation helped draw and redraw political, ethnolinguistic, and confessional boundaries. One resultant line of inquiry may thus focus on intermediaries' family background, education, spatial location, sociological positioning, and so on, to explore how differing trajectories informed specific interventions. Another line of inquiry may shift our focus away from particular actors (as important as broadening the category of "intermediaries" may be) to instead thematize mediation as something that actually happens *between* actors, using various techniques, rather than just something that certain people in certain positions do. Combined, these lines of inquiry may allow us to outgrow the Orientalist paradigm that sees Europe as self-constituting and to displace a binary opposition between "Europe" and its "Others," which in some sense these intermediaries themselves have bequeathed to the historiography.

Attention to the sites of mediation, however, must be qualified by the caveat that "context" is inherently co-emergent with "text": that is what historians have ultimately come to consider as relevant for the interpretation of particular diplomatic engagements is not a pre-determined, inert "backdrop," but has been shaped at least in part by those very engagements and their outcomes. Here, diplomatic practitioners' own articulation of their positionality is of vital importance. As Van Gelder shows, it is prudent to hold in check our certitude about the primacy of certain axes of identity (e.g. confession) and instead consider how the very categories of early modern confessionalization emerged through, *inter alia*, diplomatic encounters "across" what in retrospect seem like natural, indisputable boundaries. In other words, we must not take as a priori that the "interstitial" actors that are the focus of this volume necessarily understood themselves or were even understood by their contemporaries, as interstitial boundary-crossers, let alone as inherently "subaltern." Indeed, the notion that religion was a primary axis of identification for all early modern subjects across all domains of activity is repeatedly challenged by this volume. The papers underscore how "religion" was always already entangled with, and at times subsumed or bracketed by, other parameters of belonging and other strategies of sociopolitical boundary marking.

Several recent studies have explored the co-emergence of political and confessional boundaries with new forms of early modern diplomatic sociability. As David do Paço shows, well into the eighteenth century Habsburg-Ottoman diplomacy was premised on intellectual familiarity thanks to myriad forms of

sociability enabled by physical proximity, namely the significant presence of members of the Ottoman commercial-cum-political elite in Vienna and elsewhere in Habsburg lands.<sup>6</sup> In an argument that parallels Grenet's, Do Paço emphasizes the frequency of Ottoman diplomatic missions to Vienna. Such "unremarkable," quotidian presence fundamentally undermines the notion of radical difference between separate civilizations presupposed by many commentators.

What's more, this familiarity, which may well be extended to other courtly settings in the broader Mediterranean, calls into question the assumption that any particular group of formal intermediaries was indispensable for diplomatic communication. It underscores the notion that all inter-imperial communication is mediated, whether or not it involves official, self-professed intermediaries. The pervasiveness of mediation-work, when coupled with the familiarity that is evident in many (though by no means all) early modern Mediterranean diplomatic encounters, begs the question of the specific interventions performed by particular kinds of intermediaries. It requires that we attend not simply to intermediaries as sociological "facts" but to specific practices of mediation in their manifold dimensions. In my own work I have shown how the translation techniques of Venetian-born, Istanbul-based dragomans who were systematically trained in secretarial and notarial arts differed from those of an Istanbul-raised, Venetian-based and ad-hoc trained dragoman. I have also suggested how status-conscious, deeply endogamous Istanbulite dragomans sought to fashion themselves as honorary members of a cultivated Venetian elite. They did so, in part, by invoking signs of Ottoman alterity while at the same time intimating their deep familiarity with the intricacies of Ottoman society.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to broadening the canvas of who and what can productively be considered diplomatic intermediaries, an equally important contribution of this volume is to prompt us to consider why the postulated "cross" in cross-confessional is always already premised on a "trans" semiotic activity. According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, early modern courtly encounters

6 David Do Paço, *L'Orient à Vienne au dix-huitième siècle* (Oxford, forthcoming 2015).

7 E. Natalie Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 4 (2009): 771-800; E. Natalie Rothman, "Self-Fashioning in the Mediterranean Contact Zone: Giovanni Battista Salvago and His *Africa overo Barbaria* (1625)," in *Renaissance Medievalisms*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto, 2009), 123-43.

were the crucial site for the forging of mutual perceptions and representations in Eurasia. This naturally implied a prior recognition of at least a crude parallel morphology, where the societal agents involved in the encounter saw each other's societies as possessing somewhat similar political systems, dominated by rulers with courts, which in turn possessed systematic rules and conventions... that had to be deciphered and eventually translated and rendered commensurable.<sup>8</sup>

Put differently, Subrahmanyam is suggesting that any successful courtly (including diplomatic) act of communication already presupposed the parties' ability to recognize certain organizational similarities, and thus presume that features of social order could be commensurated. To be sure, a similar notion is implicit in the work of an earlier generation of scholars, who have shown (albeit mostly without fully unpacking the analytical implications) the strong affinities between sixteenth-century Ottoman and Habsburg diplomatic ritual practices.<sup>9</sup> The growing historiographical recognition (among Ottomanists, at least) of widespread familiarity between certain early modern Ottoman political elites and their European counterparts has had radical implications for the master narrative of Ottoman history. Previous generations of scholars envisioned early Ottoman society as a bellicose, nomadic frontier chieftaincy engaged in a series of successive clashes with Christendom. In contrast, current scholarship emphasizes the fabrication of early Ottoman history as a retroactive act (or series of acts) undertaken by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century courtly elites in the context of deliberate projects of imperial myth-making. These projects themselves unfolded through intense competition and at times cultural synergy with the Ottomans' neighbors.<sup>10</sup>

8 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), xiv.

9 See, for example, Andrew Hess' pioneering "The Battle of Lepanto and Its Place in Mediterranean History," *Past and Present* 57 (1972): 67-70. On the mutual imbrication of Habsburg and Ottoman courtly ritual, see Gülru Necipoğlu, "Sultan Süleyman and the Representation of Power in a Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry," *Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (1989): 401-27.

10 See, inter alia, Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley, 2003); Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite: Ibrahim Pasha and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Suleyman (1516-1526)" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2007); Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman, eds., *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge, 2007); Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2010); Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early*

In this light, similarly to “context,” commensurability must be treated not as a simple “precondition” or a given fact but as an ideological stance that needed to be repeatedly substantiated and sustained through the labor of specific kinds of intermediaries. One question we might pose to the essays in this volume collectively, then, is the ways in which their featured intermediaries, whether official or self-appointed, posited the boundaries of—and relationship between—the units they purported to mediate, or put differently, what kinds of (in)commensurabilities they sought to bring to the fore.

One way of probing further the question of how intermediaries themselves articulated ideologies of (in)commensurability is to consider the prevalence and centrality of what linguistic anthropology calls “metapragmatic discourse” in diplomatic writings, or discourse that explicitly characterizes practices (including but not limited to discursive practices), without necessarily determining their social meaning. For example, we can consider the extent to which diplomatic writings from Istanbul inherently and recursively not only referred to the prior exchange of text artifacts, but sought to evaluate such artifacts’ authenticity based on their conformity to certain evolving standards.<sup>11</sup> Such writings’ attendant scribal, translational, and editorial techniques make salient how all text is embedded in specific material forms, such as letters, copybooks, envelopes, or scrolls, and imbued with authority and authenticity precisely by virtue of this proper embedding and compliance with specific formal conventions (seals, dates, proper epithets, and so on).<sup>12</sup> For early modern diplomatic personnel and their interlocutors, in other words, there was no easy distinction between form and content, making it necessary to repeatedly, almost compulsively enumerate the varied types of official documentation obtained from or sent to the other party as a key mechanism of self-validation. This process created both a metapragmatic terminology and specific formulations of commensuration. The recurring references to records obtained from local officials doubtless served to authorize the specific truth claims made based on the purported authenticity of such record. They also lent authority to the

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*Modern Ottoman Empire* (Palo Alto, 2011); Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington, 2013).

- 11 For an introduction to this analytic concept, see Michael Silverstein, “Metapragmatic Discourse and Metapragmatic Function,” in *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, ed. John A. Lucy (New York, 1993), 33–58.
- 12 On Ottoman epistolary (*inşâ*) manuals’ emphasis on opening and closing formulas and other formal and stylistic concerns, see András J. Riedlmayer, “Ottoman Copybooks of Correspondence and Miscellanies as a Source for Political and Cultural History,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 61, no. 1/2 (2008): 201–14.

diplomatic staffer himself as fluent in the workings of officialdom “on the other side.”

Such metapragmatic commentary was inevitably enmeshed in a broader set of textual practices. Early modern Mediterranean diplomacy provided the institutional framework (and catalyst) for the production of both authenticated documents and a set of evaluations of similar documents obtained from host governments or other (provincial) chanceries. This inherently entailed the copying, redaction, translation, annotation, collation, classification, and archiving of myriad types of documents. In fact, for diplomatic personnel the “production” and “evaluation/authentication” of diplomatic records were never simply parallel but rather deeply entwined processes. An essential dimension of diplomatic practice, in other words, was the effort to approximate emergent scholarly modes of textual criticism, which had themselves evolved around the same time from humanistic techniques of documentary authentication.<sup>13</sup> Early modern diplomacy, then, at least in its Mediterranean contexts, bore great affinity with “diplomatics,” as the science of evaluating documents’ authenticity based on intrinsic qualities of textual artifacts rather than their place of provenance or preservation came to be called by the late seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> These two modes of “practical” textual analysis were closely bound with bureaucratic statecraft, lending them further legitimacy as elite forms of knowledge production. Their prestige was no doubt buttressed by the specialized expertise required for their performance in a European context, where the command of Ottoman and North African diplomatic protocol, let alone competence in the official languages of Ottoman statecraft, were relatively rare skills acquired by only a small cadre of professional intermediaries.<sup>15</sup>

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13 On the little-studied linkages between shifting early modern European archival practices and contemporary scholarly methods of proof see, most recently, Randolph C. Head, “Documents, Archives, and Proof around 1700,” *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 4 (2013): 909-930. Also Filippo De Vivo, “Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice (1400-1650),” *Archival Science* 10, no. 3 (2010): 231-248.

14 For a brief overview of the history of diplomatics, see Luciana Duranti, “Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science,” *Archivaria* 28 (1989): 7-27. Pace Duranti any connection between diplomatics and diplomacy is purely etymological.

15 Despite his emphasis on the general polyglottism of the early modern Istanbul diplomatic milieu, Dursteler cites only four European ambassadors who reached some level of literacy in Ottoman, namely the Venetian Giovanni Battista Donà, the French Gabriel d'Aramon and François Savary de Brèves, and the English Edward Barton. See Eric R. Dursteler, “Speaking in Tongues: Language and Communication in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Past & Present* 217, no. 1 (2012): 62-63. While many more European ambassadors were multilingual in other Mediterranean languages, their lack of command of



Diplomats' evaluation of the authenticity of Ottoman documents was therefore a precondition for their own further documentary activity. It was the interdependency between these practices which ultimately resulted in the fusion of multiple perspectives, authorial voices, and genres that could no longer be neatly designated as belonging squarely on either side.

To illustrate the mutual imbrication of Ottoman and European (specifically, Italianate) diplomatic genres let us consider a couple of examples. In 1608, Alessandra Borisi née Piron found herself embroiled in a legal dispute with a trustee of the Islamic pious endowment of Galata, a suburb of Istanbul, over ownership of a house in that district. Alessandra, the daughter of a distinguished local Catholic family, descendants of Genoese settlers in the wake of the Fourth Crusade, claimed the house had been in her family's possession for hundreds of years. In contrast, the trustee insisted that the house was nobody's property and therefore belonged to the endowment. Fortunately for Alessandra, the district's previous *kadı* and imperial archive keeper both testified that the property was hers. They even provided her husband with a document of ownership to that effect.

We learn about these events from two records in the *Ecnebi defterleri* or "Registers of Foreigners" in the Ottoman Prime Minister's Archives in Istanbul.<sup>16</sup> Each volume in these registers was ostensibly dedicated to dealings with the subjects of a particular foreign sovereign. It itemized in summary fashion sultanic decrees (*hükm*) directed at certain Ottoman government officials, ordering them to take specific action in favor of said foreign subjects. While rarely made explicit in the rescripts, the decrees had been issued in response to official petitions by foreign representatives. Therefore, while rhetorically emphasizing the sultan's sovereignty to force compliance with his laws throughout his imperial domains, the cumulative effect of the *Ecnebi defterleri* as a series is more ambiguous. It underscores the degree to which sultanic sovereignty entailed not only the ongoing accommodation of foreign groups' interests,

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the language of the Ottoman imperial chancery seems profound and pervasive. At the same time, given the philological and antiquarian interests of quite a few early modern European diplomats at the Porte, to say nothing of the training of embassy employees in secretarial and notarial textual practices, the relationship between diplomacy and diplomatics certainly warrants further consideration. On the philological pursuits of early modern Mediterranean diplomats, see Alexander Bevilacqua and Helen Pfeifer, "Turquerie: Culture in Motion, 1650-1750," *Past & Present* 221, no. 1 (2013): 75-118. See also: Alastair Hamilton et al., *The Republic of Letters and the Levant* (Leiden, 2005).

16 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri, *Ecnebi Defterleri* (hereafter: BOA, ED) 13, fol. 28, p. 56, item 244 (undated, but ca. July, 1608); fol. 34, p. 67, item 313 (14 [18] Cemaziyelahir 1018 AH=Sept. 18, 1609).

but, in fact, the challenge of negotiating the very jurisdictional boundaries between “Ottomans” and “foreigners.” For implicit in the accommodation of their requests was a recognition of foreign representatives’ authority to claim certain subjects as their own in the first place. Such accommodation also acknowledged their compliance with a system that understood the very act of petitioning as an expression of submission to the sultan’s law. The records cited above were issued at the behest of the Venetian bailo, whose interest in the case had to do with the identity of Alessandra’s husband: Marcantonio Borisi (ca. 1570-1622) was his grand dragoman, and thus a person of significant power not only within the consulate but more broadly in the city’s political and diplomatic circles.<sup>17</sup>

Our second case concerns the death of an anonymous “Frankish” (that is, non-Ottoman, European Christian) merchant in Istanbul around the year 1674, whose burial the Venetian bailo Giacomo Quirini (in Istanbul 1670-1675) petitioned to hold in the church of St. Francis in Galata. A copy of the petition’s summary (in Ottoman Turkish) was annotated by the district’s deputy ordering the civil administrator of Galata to investigate whether the request was customary and, if so, to grant it.<sup>18</sup>

This copy forms part of a series within the bailo’s archives, classified somewhat cryptically as *Carte turche*, or Turkish Charters. The roughly 2,000 Ottoman sultanic proclamations and other official decrees and missives copied in this series are all provided with facing Italian translations that were produced, and usually signed, by the bailo’s dragomans in Istanbul shortly after the records had been procured. These pairs of copies and translations are laid out in dozens of bound fascicles now kept in the Venetian State Archives.<sup>19</sup>

17 On the Borisi family, see Savo Marković, “Barski Patricijski Rod Borisi U Prošlosti: Jadran, Evropa, Mediteran,” *Povijesni Prilozi/Historical Contributions* 28 (2005): 71-105.

18 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Bailo a Costantinopoli (hereafter: ASve, BaC), b. 252, 10, fol. 87. The translator, Giacomo Tarsia, was a seasoned dragoman who had been in Venetian service since 1670. Giacomo was the son and younger brother of several previous Venetian dragomans and, incidentally, the great nephew of Marcantonio Borisi. Among other works, Tarsia completed in 1675 an Italian translation of a chronicle by the Baghdadi Ottoman historian Hasan Vecihi (1620-1661). Tarsia’s autographed translation, the 360-page *Successi dell’Impero Ottomano*, is preserved in the Marciana library in Venice (MSS It. VI 84 [6053]). On Giacomo’s earlier career, see inter alia ASve, Collegio, Risposte di dentro, b. 61, unpaginated (Jan. 21, 1663 m.v.); Inquisitori di Stato, b. 418 (December 22, 1668).

19 ASve, BaC, bb. 252-262. For a catalogue and content summaries of the first three boxes in this series based on both the Ottoman and Italian materials, see Serap Mumcu, *Venedik Baylosu’nun Defterleri. The Venetian Baylo’s Registers (1589-1684)* (Venice, 2014). This col-

Organized chronologically and spanning the period 1589 to 1785 (with some notable gaps), these fascicles seem to have been used both for training apprentice dragomans and as a proper archive intended to serve as a reference point for later diplomats.

The overarching logic of the *Carte turche* as an archive was more than simply to record Venetian-Ottoman official transactions. In a sense, it can be read as a metapragmatic commentary on Ottoman chancery practice. After all, the document discussed above aims to reproduce not the bailo's original petition to the Ottoman government but rather an Ottoman summary/rescript thereof, along with its Ottoman scribal annotations, and thus to open a window onto the inner workings of the Ottoman chancery, reminding us of the social life of official documents, their ongoing use and reuse.<sup>20</sup>

The particular forms of serializing copies of Ottoman records in the *Ecnebi defterleri* and the *Carte turche* are worth dwelling on. In the former case, the "Venetian" volumes of the Ottoman Registers of Foreigners recompiled into a discrete series of documents that had been produced initially on a range of issues and in a variety of contexts, simply due to their roots in a Venetian request. Similarly, the *Carte turche* collated records emanating from the Ottoman imperial center, but at the direct behest of a Venetian representative—paradigmatically the bailo—and directed primarily at the sultan's not-so-obedient servants, provincial governors, and other officials throughout the empire.<sup>21</sup> In other words, taken as a whole, both series reaffirm an Ottoman metropolitan perspective on the empire as an orderly, rule-based, hierarchical system of government, where orders are issued from the top down. At the same time, both serve as a constant, nagging reminder of the limits of the sultan's rule. His repeated admonitions and the personalized

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lection should not be confused with the better known archival series of *Documenti Turchi* which was created in the nineteenth century based on Ottoman (and other "Oriental") official documents sent to Venice over the centuries. See Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, *I documenti turchi dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia* (Rome, 1994); Maria Pia Pedani and Alessio Bombaci, *Inventory of the "Lettere e scritture turchesche" of the Venetian State Archives, Islamic Manuscripts and Books* (Leiden, 2010).

- 20 On the social life of documents see, especially, Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj* (Chicago, 2012); Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley, 2012); Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham, 2014).
- 21 On the *Ecnebi Defterleri* in general, and the so-called "Venetian" volumes pertaining to both Venetian and Ragusan affairs in particular, see Suraiya Faroqhi, "The Venetian Presence in the Ottoman Empire (1600-1630)," *Journal of European Economic History* 22 (1986): 345-84; Daniel Goffman, *Britons in the Ottoman Empire 1642-1660* (Seattle, 1998).

nature of his appeals to specific individuals to conform to his laws underscore the very real challenges of early modern sovereignty.

What we have here, however, is not a mere reflection of metropolitan Ottoman logic and perspective in a Venetian archive. Both the *Ecnebi Defterleri* and the *Carte turche*, precisely in their (re)constructed seriality—the ways in which they extracted specific documents from the ongoing flow of imperial correspondence and collated them in new archival series—highlight the degree to which Venetian mediation triangulated Ottoman practices of governance. By creating a discrete archival series out of Ottoman sultanic missives that originated in Venetian requests, these archives make analytically salient the role of Venetian institutions, genres, and personnel in shaping Ottoman statecraft.

The two cases discussed above are far from unique or especially revealing. In fact they—and the archival traces through which they reach us—are completely ordinary, part of the long and virtually unbroken web of textual mediation between Ottoman and various European chanceries from the second half of the fourteenth century and throughout the early modern period. In the case of Ottoman-Venetian diplomacy, this web encompassed not only the two capitals but extensive borderlands in the Adriatic and Aegean and virtually all major commercial hubs in the eastern Mediterranean, most of which had by that point a significant Venetian commercial presence and consular representation. Such a web covered by necessity a wide range of topics, from imperial grand strategy to the personal plight of individual subjects, and involved various levels of government, from the sultan and doge down to tax collectors, naval officers, and village headmen, as well as private merchants, brokers, translators, and missionaries.

These nodes in a much thicker web of Ottoman-Venetian textual mediations are thus analytically useful not so much by themselves but as entry points into the entangled, thoroughly trans-imperial history of diplomacy and its attendant documentary practices. Beyond the evident mutual imbrication of Venetian and Ottoman officialdoms in early modern Istanbul that these two vignettes showcase, another crucial point to highlight here is the importance of the probative and metapragmatic qualities of diplomatic writing, as evinced by the great array of types of official records these cases invoked. Marcantonio Borisi's quest to secure written testimonies from Ottoman officials to substantiate his wife's property rights and bailo Quirini's petition for an official sultanic decree to authorize the burial of a deceased merchant in a Galata church both seem to speak to Venetian concerns about Ottoman documentary instability (the concept of textual drift comes to mind here), where oral proclamations are deemed deficient. Yet, upon closer investigation, these two

cases underscore keen familiarity with Ottoman written evidentiary practices, enmeshed in an elaborate official vocabulary for various genres of documentation, which Venetian diplomats were aiming to master and reproduce in their translations, whether by peppering their texts with foreign loanwords (e.g. *buirurdi* for *buyruldu*, decree or commanded) or by commensurating to existing Venetian chancellery genres (*commando* for *firman* or edict, *registro* for *kaydın* or record, and *capitolationi* for *ahdname-i hümayun* or imperial charter).

My two vignettes speak to the density of Ottoman-Venetian diplomacy and the resultant familiarity among diplomatic personnel and government bureaucrats on both sides. At the same time, it is important to recognize that similar registers of Ottoman chancery records with facing translations were produced by virtually all major foreign embassies at the Porte from the late sixteenth century onwards. Now scattered across numerous private and state archives in France, the UK, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Italy, and elsewhere, these copybooks and the further textual production they spawned doubtless facilitated the circulation of Ottoman records (in copies and translations) among various metropolitan publics. Yet despite their evident significance and relative ubiquity at the time, these copybooks have so far received only sporadic scholarly attention, more often than not as “sources” to be mined for empirical content, rather than as a unified genre whose prevalence bears on our understanding of early modern Mediterranean diplomacy and on our very notions of “encounter,” “translation,” and, indeed, “archives.”<sup>22</sup>

As the discussion above already suggests, the translations in these copybooks warrant careful consideration. Whether in the choice to provide (or withhold) interpretive glosses on certain Ottoman cultural matter, or, more mundanely, whether to preserve Ottoman nomenclature or render it commensurate with

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22 I consider these issues in my research in progress, tentatively entitled *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Making of the Levant*. Some representative specimens of such copybooks beyond the Venetian archives can be found in British Archives, State Papers 105/216 (“Firmans, concerning the trade and diplomatic representation of English merchants”); British Archives, State Papers 110/88 (“Letter book of Sir William Trumbull, resident ambassador to Turkey”); Bibliothèque Nationale, Turkish MS 130; John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, MS Turkish 45 & 46. Among the few extant studies of such copybooks, see Colin Heywood, “A Letter from Cerrah Mustafa Pasha, Vali of Tunis, to Sir William Trumbull (AH 1099/AD 1688),” *Electronic English Library Journal*, 1993; “A Buyuruldu of AH 1100/AD 1689 for the Dragomans of the English Embassy at Istanbul (Notes and Documents on the English Dragomanate, 1),” in *The Balance of Truth. Essays in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Lewis*, ed. Çigdem Balim-Harding and Colin Imber (Istanbul, 2000), 125-44; Jan Schmidt, *A Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts in the John Rylands University Library at Manchester* (Leiden, 2011).

Italianate forms, the copybooks' (shifting) translation strategies may lend further insights on varying conceptions of the boundary between European political elites and their Ottoman counterparts. At the same time, it is worth recalling that beyond their intended effects on their readers' perceptions of Ottoman alterity or familiarity, translation strategies also served to index the translator's mastery of the intricacies of Ottoman statecraft. This, coupled with the all-but-universal practice of stripping the Ottoman copies of many of the features that would have marked them as "official" by Ottoman standards (e.g. tuğras, epithets, salutations), results in a thoroughly "mixed" genre which potentially erodes the clear separation between what was properly "over there" and "right here," highlighting the inherently multilayered, trans-imperial nature of the ostensibly "authentically Ottoman" documentary forms which the copybook claims to reproduce. Part of what seems significant and still not very well-understood about this quintessential diplomatic procedure is precisely its deeply trans-imperial dimension: that is, how perspectives and voicing structures from the textual practices of one side got picked up and rearticulated through the official genres of the other in a series of laminations whose traces are partially effaced.

Which takes us back to the place of mediation in diplomatic transactions. Against the binary opposition of "source" and "target" texts, or the a-priori demarcation of polities, practices, or textual conventions, the documents discussed above underscore in their multidirectional circulation and ongoing repurposing the extent to which trans-imperial diplomatic personnel played an active role in defining what ultimately came to be understood as distinctively Ottoman (and distinctively non-Ottoman) genres.

As the above discussion suggests, ferreting out Mediterranean diplomacy's multiple layers of trans-imperial textual entanglements is particularly fraught from a methodological point of view. For what is feasible—if challenging—in the context of colonial "encounter," where the two parties can be presumed, at least heuristically, to operate under distinct epistemes,<sup>23</sup> becomes exceedingly difficult when we consider the ongoing interactions between various Mediterranean ethno-linguistic and socio-religious groups, which far predated

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23 Hence the genealogy of notions of incommensurability, see Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 4. See also Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900* (New York, 2007).

the existence of any properly “Venetian,” “Spanish,” or “Ottoman,” political orders.<sup>24</sup>

The quest for pure origins and lines of influence in the making of the Ottoman Mediterranean was rightfully decried by Cemal Kafadar two decades ago as the scholarly equivalent of masculine sexual bravado.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the current resurgence of interest in early modern Mediterranean diplomacy offers an opportunity to think about the textual mediations at its core as involving simultaneously multiple levels and scales—neither wholly “local” nor “foreign,” neither just about protocol and ceremonial nor exclusively shaped by malleable personal patronage. As a set of practices of mediation, diplomacy inherently concerned itself with commensurating and rearticulating conceptual vocabularies. Such a lens focuses on the mechanisms, institutions, genres, and personnel that worked out the boundary between conceptions and practices of sovereignty and diplomacy, which were interactionally and reiteratively co-constituted. Such mediations and calibrations are essential to pay attention to because they allow us to get beyond the impasse of “radical alterity” and “clash of civilizations” and hopefully to put to rest the idea that “East” and “West,” “Islam” and “Christianity” have continuous and autonomous histories, untouched by the efforts of those who so ardently sought to operate “across” and “in between” them.

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24 On chancery practices as circum-Mediterranean rather than fully locatable to distinct sites, see John E. Wansbrough, *Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean* (Richmond, Surrey, 1996).

25 Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, 1995), 24–5.