AN OTTOMAN PROTOCOL REGISTER

CONTAINING CEREMONIES
FROM 1736 TO 1808: BEO SADARET DEFTERLERİ 350 IN THE PRIME MINISTRY OTTOMAN STATE ARCHIVES, ISTANBUL

Edited with an introduction and annotations by
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IBRAHIM PASHA OF EGYPT FUND SERIES
The BEO 350 protocol register is preserved among the Sublime Porte Archives series (Babıali Evrak Odası) of the Prime Ministry Ottoman State Archives (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Devlet Arşivi: BOA) in Istanbul. The manuscript bears a possession record, dated 1220/1805, by a certain Mehmed Medhi, treasurer at the office of protocol. The register (defter) comprises a variety of ceremonies held on different occasions from 1736 to 1808.

A quick glance at the register will reveal to the experienced reader that, generally speaking, it is far from being systematically organized. Moreover, it is primarily concerned with accession ceremonies, funerals and, most of all, the reception of foreign envoys. Yet such is the nature of most Ottoman protocol registers, many of which are either records kept by the office of protocol, or lists compiled according to the personal inclinations of a protocol officer. Therefore, one should keep in mind that this register does not reflect every type of ceremony held at the Ottoman court. Registers displaying a larger variety of ceremonies do exist, but, truth be told, my decision to work on this particular defter was prompted by a personal interest in Ottoman diplomatic ceremonial. Then again, this is only one of the many registers that refer to such ceremonies.

Consequently, the introduction to this edition focuses primarily on the reception ceremonies held for foreign envoys. Diplomacy was, and still is, a very flexible matter. There was always room for special treatment of some envoys, for better or for worse. Alliances between two states could result in special attention, indulgence, favor, and pomp being bestowed upon envoys. On the other hand, the reception of envoys arriving in times of political tension or conflict could take the form of a struggle for power and prestige. Therefore, it is often difficult to integrate the many exceptions and singularities that characterize diplomatic ceremonial into a coherent and orderly account of some comfort to the reader.

I became interested in Ottoman protocol registers while working on my doctoral dissertation on Ottoman court ceremonies in the nineteenth century. Although the introduction is, unsurprisingly, inspired by my earlier work on the subject, I have further developed many of my previous ideas, and have tried to propose several new interpretations for our understanding of Ottoman imperial ceremonies. That being said, this volume should first and foremost be considered as the annotated and critical edition of a protocol register, with a synoptic listing of all the major ceremonies described in it. To this I have added a number of appendices and indexes which, I hope, may be of some use for further studies on the topic.

I have chosen to translate into English the technical Ottoman terms used in the introduction and in the synoptic lists of ceremonies. The original terms are on many occasions given in parentheses. The reader is also advised to refer to the ‘Key to the Technical Terms’ for a complete list of the original terminology.
PREFACE

As is briefly discussed in the introduction, ceremonies contribute, albeit modestly, to the validation of a regime’s political legitimacy and to its smooth functioning. When trying to determine the relationship between ceremonial rites and political power, the lofty symbolism of ceremonies needs to be interpreted with great care. Thus, detailed descriptions such as those found in protocol registers are extremely valuable, indeed indispensable, for a solid interpretation. I discuss some of the problems of protocol registers and the limitations of their use for such analytical purposes in the introduction.

Over fifty protocol registers are known to exist today in the archives and libraries, covering a period from the mid-seventeenth century down to the beginning of the twentieth century, and with descriptions of almost every kind of ceremony. It is my hope that this edition will bring to the attention of students of Ottoman history the fruitful uses to which protocol registers can be put in order to increase our understanding of Ottoman court ceremonial.

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INTRODUCTION

CEREMONIES: WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?

The sovereignty of a ruler is projected through sets of symbols and actions encoded in various elements of daily life with which the ruled come into regular contact. The ultimate purpose of these symbols and actions is to draw popular attention to the ruler and create an aura of sovereignty and authority around him or her. Thus, buildings bearing imperial inscriptions, or stories and legends designed to promote the image of the ruler or dynasty convey highly symbolic messages. In much the same way, ceremonies too are performances of symbolic nature. In Clifford Geertz’s words, it is only through such a complex set of symbolic images and acts that “majesty [can] be made.”

Naturally, in a monarchical system, ceremonies revolve around the very person of the ruler. In fact all the symbolism that is fed into the lives of the people constructs the image of both the monarch and the monarchy. Ceremonies have always been a favorite way of exhibiting political power, for, when effectively employed, they nearly always produce the desired results, and appeal simultaneously to people of diverse backgrounds and intellectual levels. Besides displaying the power and stability of a regime, which is certainly one of the primary goals of the ceremonies, the symbols involved also serve to reveal the ideological basis, world-view, and objectives of the regime to the targeted population. Therefore, when examined thoroughly and read between the lines, ceremonies can offer clues as to a regime’s self-definition.

The intended messages lie encoded in the various components of ceremonies. The venue and the ceremonial route, including eventual halts are likely to provide a careful observer with very significant clues. Similarly, the study of the objects used in ceremonies presents a rich terrain for historical exploration. For example, the choice of a specific sword for the girding ceremony — say, the Caliph ‘Umar’s sword — has several symbolic implications that still await to be decoded. Moreover, the identity of the participants in the ceremony, their whole attire, from headgears to garments, their position throughout the ceremony, and, not least, their mode of conveyance all impart a mass of information on the structure and self-perception of the ruling elite.

When ceremonies revolved around one particular individual, most commonly the ruler, a set of readily discernible distinctive signs were always evident. Such individuals were often distinguished from the other participants in the ceremony by their costume, their isolated or somehow unique position, or by a particular mode of transportation. Indeed, it would have been impossible to differentiate the ruler from other officials without such distinctions. Carrying out the ceremonial role designed for him, the ruler virtually cloaked his mortal flesh in the purportedly sacred garments of

his office. He thus came to be regarded by his subjects, his intimate circle, and particularly, the palace staff, as embodying within himself the sanctity of his office. Thus was majesty created.

However, the achievements expected of ceremonies were not limited to producing an ‘aura of sovereignty.’ Not only was majesty created, but it was also presented to the people to be recognized as such. In a pre-modern monarchy such as the Ottoman State, the entire set of ceremonial regulations served the crucial purpose of securing popular acceptance of the ruler — what we shall call the legitimacy of the ruler. Of course, political legitimacy was secured not only through ceremonies, attended as they were by only a fraction of the population. Nevertheless, one of the key components of sovereignty in a monarchy, namely, the majestic image, was indeed constructed to a considerable degree through ceremonial representations. Without these performances, the rule of the monarch would lack a great deal in magnificence, which would in turn lead to a diminished popular acceptance.

Furthermore, ceremonies maintained and reinforced the hierarchy within the ruling apparatus by delineating power relations between individuals. Imperial majesty required the strict observation of hierarchy at all times, and the master of protocol (teşrifâtî) was responsible for arranging and setting the hierarchical order among the officials during the ceremonies. It was not unheard of for officers of the state to disagree about the eminence of their positions in the ceremony. The reason, for example, that the religious holiday congratulation ceremonies with the grand vizier were conducted before those with the sultan, as explained by one master of protocol, was that the former was a practice run for the latter. The officials would, so to speak, first rehearse their positions in the ceremony with the grand vizier, thus preventing the risk of an unwelcome surprise during the ceremony with the sultan. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that protocol registers were kept in as much detail as possible: they were essential tools for maintaining order during ceremonies. Therefore, it is not unusual to come across information such as the following, which notes a minute change in the procedure for welcoming a sheikhulislam:

It is observed in the [previous] protocol registers that from the earliest times, when the sheikhulislam came to the Sublime Porte, […] the grand vizier would come to welcome him at the top of the stairs. But ever since the year forty-three (1143/1730), supremely gracious and benignant grand viziers have met them instead at the stirrup stone, since the aforementioned eminences also dismounted there.

Since ceremonies incorporate complex symbolism, small variations in procedure may acquire profound significance. Such nuances can provide clues to the regime’s

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2 Inspired by Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*.
3 See ‘Abdullah Nâ‘îî’s account of the dissatisfaction of the professors (müdderris) and senior clerks of the palace (hâçegân) regarding who would occupy a more eminent position during the procession, *Qavânîn-i teşrifât*, TTK, Y 49, 204b-205a.
4 BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 360, 17b (1125/1713); quoted in Filiz Karaca, *Tanzimat dönemi sonrasında Osmanlı teşrifat müessesesi*, 90.
changing self-perception or shed light on existing tensions within the official hierarchy. In order to interpret the highly symbolic language of ceremonies, one must first establish not only how ceremonies were performed, but also how and why certain changes and deviations may have been introduced in their practice.

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING CEREMONIES

Ceremonies, by their very nature, are not fixed and unchanging performances. Although a particular ceremony may have kept the same name throughout the centuries, it may have been subjected to a number of changes in time. Although unintended variations or mistakes were less likely to happen in a ceremony performed every week, less frequent ceremonies were more vulnerable to the effect of time. The longer the interval between the performances of a ceremony, the more likely it could be for changes to occur or adjustments and amendments to be made. For instance, the ceremonies for the accession and girding of the sword of Ottoman sultans occurred only upon a change of ruler and were thus sometimes separated by decades. Even masters of protocol were hardly able to organize such ceremonies without consulting protocol registers.

That some aspects of ceremonies were incorrectly performed is reflected in several of the Ottoman protocol registers.\(^6\) The changes resulted from a variety of factors, ranging from sheer negligence on the part of the officials responsible for organizing the ceremonies\(^7\) to personal interference with ceremonial procedure by the sultan or other high-ranking officials.\(^8\) The terminology relating to this matter reflects the diversity of possible causes. For example, adjustments might be made ‘due to the exigencies of the times and conditions’ (*ber-muqtežä-yi vaqt u hāl, hasb el-zamān*),\(^9\) or could be explicitly justified by ‘politics’ (*hasb el-politiqa*), whenever strategic considerations required that parts of a ceremony be modified, as, for example, during a visit of an envoy under critical circumstances.\(^10\) An unintended instance of improper conduct during a ceremony was identified as ‘outside of ceremonial procedure’ (*ḥāric ez–resm*), a ‘deviation from protocol’ (*gayr ez-teşrifāt*), or ‘contrary to procedure’ (*ḥilāf-i usūl*) in the records.\(^11\)

The fact that necessities and political strategies are recorded as motives for changes and modifications indicates that some of these adjustments were intentional. Yet, the fact remains that some of the changes came about by inadvertence. Are we to understand, then, that such ‘accidental’ changes in the rituals signified a general

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6 For example, BEO 350, |69|: “But it was an ancient custom that all the aforementioned individuals should be present in their courtly attire. This point was overlooked.” Cf. BEO 350, |110|, |61|.

7 Cf. BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 352, 12a, ~1210/1796: From the official memorandum of Teşrifati Mehmed Na‘īm: “Owing to negligence on the part of those in the protocol service in the past years, [...] ceremonies were executed in violation of the rules.”

8 For examples interference on the part of the sultan and the director of the imperial chancery, cf. BEO 350, |89| and |149|.


10 BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 362, 2-8.

11 Cf. BEO 350, |88| and |121|, |125|, |149|, cf. BOA, Kamil Kepeci 676, 185b.
carelessness on the part of the participants? In truth, they may or may not. If an unplanned change in ceremonial ritual occurred on more than one occasion, it could probably also mean that a certain mindset had gradually developed that made this modification acceptable or even necessary. Let us suppose, for example, that comparing the accounts of two subsequent accession ceremonies, we discover that, during the latter ceremony, some of the viziers paid homage without kissing the sleeve of the sultan’s garment. What are we to make of this fact? If we are indeed able to ascertain the permanence of this change in ritual from then on, we can comfortably surmise that it may constitute an important clue regarding the Ottoman concept of sovereignty. We would thus be witnessing an example of a ‘natural’ way by which such changes occurred, through the adaptation of the ceremony to a new perception of the concept of sovereignty.

The registers were of crucial importance to Ottoman protocol and ceremonies since the Ottoman ceremonial tradition was largely determined by old protocol registers serving as precedents. One of the most important tasks of the ceremony officials was to monitor whether or not ceremonies followed ‘precedent.’ The first sources consulted for this purpose were earlier protocol registers and records. One often comes across accounts in protocol registers stating that monetary allowances were apportioned ‘by comparison with previous examples,’ that various ceremonies were organized ‘by comparison with precedent,’ or that protocol registers were ‘consulted’ repeatedly. It is therefore safe to assume that precedent constituted the foremost reference for Ottoman ceremonial officials when determining ceremonial procedure.

The power and significance of precedent was known to foreign envoys as well. An interesting dispute described in the register presented here sheds light onto the practical application of ceremonial precedent. Prior to his reception at the Sublime Porte by the grand vizier on September 13, 1790, the Venetian ambassador claimed that he was entitled to the gift of a horse. The office of protocol, however, apparently knew no such custom and officials were unable to find a single record on the matter. So they asked the imperial army officers whether they had any records of such a gift ever having been bestowed. A memorandum from that office, also included in the manuscript, explained that they, too, had examined the records of the receptions of the former Venetian ambassador held on May 18, 1756, and May 15, 1757, but had come across no mention of such a gift. Although the Venetian ambassador was confident that he was going to receive a horse after the reception ceremony, the argument of the Ottomans was unambiguous: no precedent for the gift of a horse could be found.

12 For a few examples, see Defter-i teşrifât-i hümâyûn, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, Ms. or. quart 1462, 98b: “Previously, upon the accession to the throne of the Prussian King [Frederick William II] in 1201 [1786], a minister who had come on behalf of the new king and taken up residence in the Ottoman state was given a payment based on precedent (emşâline qyâş ilet) [...]” BEO 350, |23|: “When it became certain that on that day the aforementioned envoy would set out from Ayastefanos and arrive at the mansion in Galata which had been assigned [to him], a comparison with [...] precedent [was made as to how to conduct the ceremonies to receive him] (sâbülaşına muqâyeseye);” BEO 350, |73|: “That [it] was in this way, when the existing protocol registers were consulted (defârî-i teşrifâtadan mevcut olanlara mûrâca’at olunduqda).” Cf. BEO 350, |77|, |87|: “As the Swedish envoys have been presented with a horse by the grand vizier since earlier times, this time, too, [...] a horse was given [to him].”
in any protocol record. Frustrated, the ambassador nevertheless insisted on the gift, urging the ceremony officers to double-check the records. They did so, and a record was indeed found in the end: one footnote, so to speak, from November 6, 1757, mentioning that the former Venetian ambassador was presented with a horse on behalf of the grand vizier after his reception at the Sublime Porte. In light of this precedent, the ambassador was eventually presented with a bedecked horse.

Along with regular ceremonial procedure, deviations were also recorded. One might suppose that the description of a ceremony with deviations would thereafter bear the potential of becoming a precedent for later ceremonies, and indeed, unless otherwise noted, the description of a ceremony in a protocol register automatically rendered it legitimate in all respects. Having said that, it should nevertheless be noted that the potential consequences of such entries were limited. These variations were merely a potential cause of gradual change. The danger, as it were, was known to the ceremony officials as well, and they obsessively made note of irregular conduct during the ceremonies.

The detail with which the protocol registers were kept, and in particular the notes added regarding any deviations from the norm, demonstrate how effectively the office of protocol functioned as guardian of the status quo. Indeed, along with noting any violations of protocol, it was the master of protocol’s responsibility to actively prevent them from occurring. In his task of overseeing the proper distribution of gifts, for example, the master of protocol had to make sure that the robe of honor given to a lower-ranked official was not too expensive, or, conversely, not too inexpensive. It is easy to deduce from the tone in which these notes were written — one of exhortation against such infractions — that the ceremony officers were of a conservative mindset. In a protocol register from 1797, for example, the following record appears after an enumeration of the gifts presented to a French general:

But all [the presents] were given contrary to the rules of protocol. It has been recorded here [in the register] as a warning that each one of them was given with a reason on the aforementioned date and that it was in violation of protocol and that they were [only] intended as [extra] gifts. In other words, it was not consistent with protocol. Let there be no mistake. Let this not be repeated as custom!\(^{13}\)

Paradoxically, some of these notes in the records seem to have occasionally found another, albeit narrower, use in the office of protocol, which was accustomed to the potential proliferation of such deviations. Being aware of previously occurring exceptions, ceremony officials made a note of past violations of protocol with the intention of adjusting the flexibility of ceremonial procedure in the future. A striking illustration of this mechanism is manifested in the following note, which was appended to a description of the unusual execution of a portion of the ceremony for the reception of an envoy. The ceremony officer wrote: “Recorded here to make this

\(^{13}\) _Fransız eşçleriniň merâsini haqqında 3 numerolu defter-i teşrifâdan muhrec vêgâ’îq-i resmiyye-i mühime_, Türk Tarih Kurumu Kütüphanesi, Y 581, p. 36 (1211/1797); see BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 352 for the original register. A few similar notes of warning can be found in the register published here, e.g., BEO 350, [146] and [110].
matter known and to be considered as precedent (*sābuq*) when needed.”14 Such a note
does not indicate a will to alter ceremonial procedures, nor was it a customary occur-
rence. Rather it simply demonstrates the preparedness of the office of protocol for un-
foreseen circumstances. Since an unpleasant surprise, i.e., an inevitable situation
where a similar deviation was ‘necessary,’ could occur at any time, records of such
deviations from the norm were used to justify the action.

For an example of the practical benefits of records of this latter type, let us move
forward in time to the beginning of the twentieth century. Although it was no longer
the custom to habitually consult eighteenth-century protocol registers when organizing
ceremonies, the power of precedent or ‘ancient custom,’ to use another Ottoman term,
still carried much weight. It was also well known that the best place to seek
ceremonial precedent was a protocol register. Owing to various political tensions,
Sultan Vahideddin (r. 1918-22) was not well-disposed towards the individuals who
traditionally performed the sword-girding ceremony, namely the grand mufti and the
chief of the descendants of the Prophet. When the time came for this particular
ceremony upon his accession in 1918, the sultan had his officials scan the old protocol
registers in search of a precedent (*sābuq bir keyfiyyet*), a previous ‘violation’ of
custom, so to speak, as a way out of the impasse he was facing.15 Ironically, the very
fact that legitimate grounds for the modification of a ceremonial tradition were sought
in a register where violations were noted as such with the express intention to prevent
their future recurrence was a paradox in itself.

RECEPTION OF ENVOYS

A ceremony was always a staged act. A reception of envoys was perhaps even more
so, since its intended audience included not only the ‘home spectators,’ but also out-
side viewers. The actors were more careful to correctly perform their moves and avoid
faux pas, for receptions of envoys not only served ideally to signal the smooth
functioning of bilateral international relations, but also to enhance the prestige of the
states.

It would be misleading to view envoy reception ceremonies as independent of the
states’ foreign policies. The audience of a foreign envoy with the Ottoman sultan or
the grand vizier depended directly on the Ottoman state’s status and position in the in-
ternational arena, and was shaped by several factors, the foreign policy at the time
being the most important one. Alliances between the two states, either existing or in-
tended, could result in the envoys’ receiving special attention, indulgence, favor and
pomp. On the other hand, receptions of envoys arriving in times of political tension
often took the form of a prestige contest. Envoys tried to secure as much favors and
privileges as possible, thereby enhancing the prestige of their own state. Conversely,
the Ottomans employed several ruses to dent the envoys’ standing. Just to mention one
tactic, envoys of important states that the Porte wished to degrade were received si-

14 BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 362, 17 (1245/1829).
INTRODUCTION

multaneously with the envoy of a vassal or of a politically insignificant state.\textsuperscript{16}

To be sure, the bulk of receptions went forward without significant disagreements. Yet again, prestige was hidden in small details. Until the 1815 Congress of Vienna, receptions of envoys involved continuous efforts by the embassies to gain prestige through privileges, both in Europe and in the Ottoman state. Preferential treatment was always considered a privilege, and was acquired either by request from the host state or finessing as a result of \textit{faits accomplis}. When requesting preferential treatment, it was necessary either that the request be based on a precedent from earlier reception ceremonies, or that, the envoy personally ask for a ‘favor’ (\textit{iltimās}) from the grand vizier or some other influential official.\textsuperscript{17} If relations between the two countries were tense, when the guest requested preferential treatment, the host would try his best not to grant it, and a heated correspondence would fly back and forth between the two sides, occasionally to the point of putting the entire mission at risk.

One sometimes comes across notes in the protocol registers to the effect that a dignitary could not attend a ceremony due to his being ‘indisposed’ or suffering from illness. When such an incident occurred during the reception of an envoy, however, the illness was likely to have had ‘diplomatic’ causes. Of course, the envoys themselves were perfectly aware of these situations, which occasionally led to diplomatic tension. In 1775, Prince Nikolai Vasil’evich Repnin, the Russian ambassador extraordinary, arrived at Küçük Çekmece, some 20 km. west of Istanbul, en route to the capital city following the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) that marked the disastrous defeat of the Ottomans by the Russians. According to protocol, on the day of his reception at the court, Prince Repnin was supposed to be welcomed by the chief sergeant-at-arms (\textit{çavuşbaşı}) on the field of Dāvūd Paşa and be accompanied by him to the gates of the city. But the chief sergeant-at-arms had fallen ill. When the grand vizier offered to have the envoy welcomed by the treasurer of the office of protocol (\textit{teşrifâtî kisedârî}), who had been appointed the chief sergeant-at-arms’ deputy, the envoy replied that under these circumstances he would not budge from his camp. Following a prolonged exchange of letters, which even included an offer to have the envoy send his personal physician to examine the chief sergeant-at-arms, the Ottomans were forced to officially appoint a new, temporary chief sergeant-at-arms to welcome the Russian emissary.\textsuperscript{18}

Not surprisingly, tensions of this sort arose in correlation to deteriorating relations between two states. On a similar occasion, for instance, on June 18, 1759, when the Venetian ambassador was presenting a letter of congratulations to the grand vizier at the Sublime Porte, a fairly prominent figure in the ceremony, the director of the imperial chancery (\textit{re’ısül-küttab}), was absent from the ceremony due to illness. But the protocol register makes no mention of any tension arising over this non-attendance.\textsuperscript{19}

Similarly, Ottoman envoys who visited other courts attempted as far as possible to avoid any reverential behavior customary there. They are known, for example, to have

\textsuperscript{17} For example, cf. BEO 350, [22].
\textsuperscript{19} BEO 350, [17].
bargained over such matters as bowing three times in the emperor’s presence, kissing the hem of his garment, and receiving an autographed letter from his hand when taking leave.\textsuperscript{20} Zülfıqar Paşa, who was sent to Vienna in 1688 to announce Süleyman II’s (r. 1687-91) accession to the throne, avoided those protocol rules that he regarded as harmful to the prestige of his state on the grounds that such procedure was not established practice. As his description illustrates, he managed to stay away from those rituals by mere \textit{fait accompli}:

As they [the Austrians] replied proudly and insistently on the matter of bowing three times and kissing the [Emperor’s] hand when we reached the Emperor’s presence with the imperial letter, in order not to impede the settlement of the affairs of the Ottoman state [and] with the intention of behaving in the appropriate way when the time came we did not speak out on this issue but kept quiet. The Emperor [...] was standing on a low dais, which was covered with a Persian rug, next to a chair in front of a table called a \textit{napa\textsuperscript{2}}, with his left hand on his breast and his right hand extended downwards. Among the aghas who were with us, our nephew Mustafâ Beg was walking in front, holding the imperial letter with both his hands at the level of our heads. As he had been instructed earlier, he stopped at three points on our right, while looking down at the floor. We also bowed in reverence and respect for the imperial letter and, when we reached the dais in this way, after taking the imperial letter into our own hands and kissing it, we placed it on the table next to the Emperor and, grasping the Emperor’s outer robe, raised it to our breast and turned around and stood in our place. By making this gesture, we thereby avoided the crude recommendations on which the interpreter had at first insisted.\textsuperscript{21}

Ceremonies surrounding the reception of envoys bring to mind silent movies. Denied open expression of the actual message they wanted to convey, the actors in these ceremonies attempted to express that message through gestures and movements and whatever ‘preferential treatment’ they had managed to finagle. Obtaining such treatment depended on an absolute familiarity with the details of the host state’s protocol and ceremonies. Detailed embassy reports on the reception of envoys were therefore an important source of such information. Envoys to Istanbul reported on their reception ceremonies down to the slightest details. Some of these reports were published in the form of pamphlets, and served as informational sources on practices at the Sublime Porte, for future diplomatic missions of both their own countries and foreign states.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Hammer-Purgstall, GOR, vol. 6, 170.

\textsuperscript{21} One could argue that the account was presented to the sultan, and therefore may not have been an accurate illustration of what really happened at the Austrian court. Even so, what is noteworthy here is the emphasis put on certain rituals, and the plausibility of avoiding them by \textit{fait accompli}. For the text, see, \textit{Sülhnâme}, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, HO 90, 18b-19a.

\textsuperscript{22} A copy of a treatise entitled [Raymond Verninac], \textit{Relation de l’audience d’admission chez le Grand Visir du Citoyen Raymond Verninac envoyé extraordinaire de la République Française près la Porte Ottomane} (Constantinople, [1795]) is found in a register dated 1795 in the Public Record Office, London, FO series no 78. The existence of this pamphlet among the contemporary English documents is proof that the English
INTRODUCTION

The Disputed Parts of the Reception Ceremony

The modern historian’s task presents itself, then, as the establishment of a similar familiarity with the details of the ceremonies, in order to determine what was regarded as a privilege and what was considered disputable. Since Ottoman reception ceremonies for envoys were shaped to a large degree by the influence of their own culture, in order to decode the symbolism behind them one has to first determine and define the indicators of prestige. It is possible to assume that while some of the prestige-making details had parallel codes in the envoy’s native culture, others became crucial only through the many years of friction at the reception ceremonies at the Ottoman court and the detailed reports dispatched by the envoys back to their governments. Certain gestures that might not mean much to an impartial or out-of-context observer may actually have been allowed or tolerated only as a concession to the guest state’s special situation. Insofar as it was possible to convey specific messages to envoys by making certain gestures and deliberately avoiding others, such messages as a whole reflected the prestige of their state.

Certain rituals, gestures and locations during the ceremonies were well-known to the envoys who arrived in Istanbul during the eighteenth century. Others, which may give the impression of humiliation because of their similarity to the ceremonial aspects known to be disputed, were never the subject of disagreement. A telling document about the discontent of the envoys is the 1796 petition submitted to the Sublime Porte by the French ambassador, General Aubert Dubayet, demanding adjustments in certain parts of the reception ceremony. General Dubayet had a special situation. He arrived as the first ambassador of the Directoire with the conviction that his country’s new regime was superior to monarchical regimes. Hence, he did not hesitate to openly demand, in an official petition to the Sublime Porte, ceremonial adjustments that several other envoys had tried to secure by faits accomplis. His request concerned four technical points: the skipping of the habitual reception that was foreseen for envoys at the Kireçşibaşı chamber by the chief sergeant-at-arms after disembarking from the caïque, the position of the chief sergeant-at-arms during the procession, the elimination of the time spent waiting for the exit of the grand vizier from the Sublime Porte, and finally, not being subject to the ritual of being held by the arms by two palace officials when he entered the imperial presence.

The Kireçşibaşı chamber, which was located on the south bank of the Golden Horn somewhere in today’s Sirkeci district, was a place where the envoy had to stop for a while, after disembarking from the caïque and before mounting his horse to head over to the imperial grounds (Plan 1, §). The envoy was ordinarily received there by the chief sergeant-at-arms and offered fruit and beverages. The chamber does not exist today and we know little about its physical aspect and condition in the late eighteenth century.23 As a participant in a reception ceremony in 1828, Charles MacFarlane, a very watchful observer — although writing with a strong disdain towards everything

were indeed aware of the details of Verninac’s ceremony.

23 The records kept by the commander of the imperial gardeners (bostancıbaşı) of the buildings on and around the Bosphorus in 1815 has an entry only on the Kireçşihane pier, see, Cahit Kayra, Erol Üyepazarcı (eds.), İkinci Mahmut’un İstanbul’u: Bostancıbaşı sicilleri, 94.
Ottoman — describes it as a “vile stable-loft of a place.” What we do know is that some thirty years before MacFarlane saw the chamber, Dubayet petitioned the grand vizier and openly demanded not to be received in this chamber during his reception. Instead, he wanted the procession to be assembled immediately. There is reason to believe that the chamber was not an inviting location for envoys. We do not know, however, whether the Ottomans continued to receive the envoys there with the purpose of humiliating them.

The next point of contention was the position of the chief sergeant-at-arms with respect to the envoy when the procession moved forward (Plan 1, ②). Ordinarily the envoy and the chief sergeant-at-arms (or whichever agha was meeting the envoy) would ride side by side, but the Ottoman official was to be to the right of the envoy.24 By doing so, the Ottoman official became, as it were, the focal point of the procession, and the envoy, to the left of him, was merely someone accompanying him. If the procession were to pass through a narrow street, as it sometimes happened in Galata, the Ottoman official proceeded ahead of the envoy.25 Dubayet demanded that either the chief sergeant-at-arms walk to his left or that he be allowed to ride alone in the line.

The French general was not the first envoy to protest the matter. The Austrian Count Ulefeld, who had arrived in Istanbul with a sizable cortege in the summer of 1740, roughly a year after the Treaty of Belgrade, had objected fiercely when the chief sergeant-at-arms set out to ride on his right, since the right side was always considered the place of honor, in both Ottoman and European protocol. The count had not only voiced his displeasure, but had actually moved his horse over to the right of the Ottoman official, and, it seems, the latter did not make a counter-move and

24 Occasionally the chief sergeant-at-arms rode in front of the foreign cortege.
25 ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī, Qavānīn-i tegrīfāt, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 106a.
Fig. 1b. The final leg of the same procession. The sultan is followed by the swordbearer agha. The chief eunuch and the treasurer agha, riding after them, toss coins to the public.

contended himself with riding behind the envoy.26

When the envoy was to be received by the sultan at Topkapı palace, the procession would advance to the area across from the Sublime Porte, in front of the kiosk of processions (alay köşkü; Plan 1, 8). He would then be detained there until the grand vizier came out from the Porte, and was kept waiting as the Ottoman dignitary rode from the Porte to the palace, passing before him. This could take as long as ten to fifteen minutes. Although Dubayet petitioned to be spared only this particular disturbing delay, in actual fact an envoy would ordinarily be made to halt and wait at several points during the ceremony. When the envoy entered the palace gardens following the grand vizier, he would be stopped and made to wait until a sura from the Quran was recited (Plan 1, 8). When he came to the imperial dome (qubbe-i hümâyûn), where he would meet the grand vizier, he would be kept waiting until the grand vizier returned to the room (Plan 1, 9, 8). Before he was admitted into the presence of the sultan, he would again be made to wait for several dignitaries to enter and leave the audience (Plan 1, 9). Finally, before leaving the palace grounds, he would have to wait in front of the imperial bakery (furun-i hümâyûn) for the members of the imperial council to leave (Plan 1, 7).

The ceremony descriptions indicate that acts of reverence, which the Ottomans generally considered inappropriate for a high-ranking official to perform for a lower-ranking one, were also avoided vis-à-vis the envoys. The arrangements, for example, enabled the grand vizier to avoid standing up when he met the envoy. During receptions at the Sublime Porte, the grand vizier ceremoniously entered the audience hall (‘arz odası) with his entourage only after he was informed that the envoy had arrived and already taken his seat there. At the reception in the imperial dome in Topkapı palace, the grand vizier would even go so far as to move from the dome, where he was to receive the envoy, to the chancery hall as soon as he was informed that the envoy was

26 Hammer-Purgstall, GOR, vol. 8, 11.
approaching. He would then reenter the dome a few moments later. In both cases the envoy had to stand up when the grand vizier entered the room. This was the standard procedure for Christian envoys in the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the grand vizier’s move to the next room was reserved to envoys of significant states. Ordinarily he would receive a qapi kethudâsi, an agent who functioned as a diplomatic go-between for some Christian states, simply seated on his sofa, without leaving for the next room or reentering after the envoy had come. However, the higher ranking envoys demanded a more courteous reception. For the grand vizier to stand up in reverence when the envoy entered the imperial dome was clearly out of the question. On the other hand, receiving the envoy while remaining seated was evidently too demeaning. To solve this diplomatic conundrum, the grand vizier would leave the room before the envoy came in and reenter moments later, thereby avoiding both standing up for the envoy and receiving him seated. Moreover, his reentrance gave the grand vizier’s men the opportunity to perform the salutation ceremony when the grand vizier entered the hall. This ceremony was a ritual, performed in a loud chorus by the marshals in the room, which began with a greeting and went on with well-wishing formulas — evidently designed to provoke a sense of awe in the envoy and his entourage.

In addition to this version of the reception by the grand vizier, there existed yet another variant. According to an entry in one protocol register from around 1740, during the reception of an Uzbek envoy who, as we understand from the rather unspectacular ceremonies conducted for him, possessed but little prestige, the grand vizier did not leave the room before the envoy entered. When the envoy approached the grand vizier’s seat, the latter simply changed his position, taking a seat on the cushion. Then coffee and sweetmeats were served to both. The Uzbek envoy’s reception seems to be more respectful than the one conducted for a qapi kethudâsi, but less than that of an envoy of an important state.

Starting around 1815, a new course of action seems to have been implemented for the ritual during the grand vizier’s reception of envoys. Several records indicate that the envoys were now brought in front of the stool on which they were going to be seated and made to stand there until the grand vizier entered the hall. Although the act of waiting was probably not in itself pleasant, it nevertheless allowed the envoy to avoid standing up when the grand vizier entered the room — a change that enhanced the prestige accorded to the envoy.

As to the sultan, needless to say that in the eighteenth century he did not rise to his feet to greet envoys. True, the earliest Ottoman sultans did stand up to honor envoys when they entered the imperial presence, but later on, at a time when Ottoman military power had reached its zenith, Qânûnî Süleyman (r. 1520-66) neither rose to his feet nor permitted envoys to be seated in his presence. This custom seems to
INTRODUCTION

have been maintained until the nineteenth century, at which point sultans started once again to adopt a more courteous attitude toward envoys. Even an authoritarian sultan like Mahmūd II (r. 1808-39), for example, stood up for his meeting with the British ambassador.31 Sultan ʿAbdülmejid (r. 1839-61) caused much astonishment in the Austrian ambassador Anton von Prokesch-Osten by coming down the steps from the upper floor at Dolmabāçe Palace,32 and on another occasion, surprised the American envoy when he did not sit down during the entire audience.33

Another point of dispute was the seat given to the envoy when he was in the presence of the grand vizier. First of all, this was just a stool, as simple as could be, and contrasted sharply with the sofa on which the grand vizier and other Ottoman officials were seated. Moreover, the envoy’s stool was lower than the grand vizier’s seat. Although this infamous stool, which is not featured prominently in any other Ottoman ceremony, remained a perpetual subject of disagreement,34 until the nineteenth century, only a few envoys are known to have been able to avoid it by managing to sit next to the grand vizier or his stand-in, the qāʾimmaqām paşa. For instance, the French ambassador the Marquis de Villeneuve, who signed the treaty renewing the 1673 capitulations, succeeded in doing so in 1728; Charles François Ollivier de Nointel, on the other hand, had been rebuked by the grand vizier Qara Muṣṭafā Paşa in 1670 when he showed reluctance about sitting on the stool.35

Although the envoys themselves generally mention only a stool, the records in the protocol registers actually indicate that there were at least two types of seats on which the envoys could be seated. The better one was a chair (sandalye) with a back and armrests, while the less prestigious one was the aforementioned stool (iskemle), which lacked these basic elements of comfort. The Russian envoy had inquired at his 10 December 1775 reception whether he might be offered a chair, and his chargé d’affaires, a stool. The envoy’s request was granted, most probably due to the Russians’ upper hand at this point, following their recent military victory over the Ottomans.36 Occasionally, both seats would be ameliorated slightly according to the importance of the envoy: a cover might be placed over the stool, or a more ornate chair chosen for the ceremony.37 But no matter which seat was used, it was never well-received by the envoys, and remained an object of dispute well into the first half of the nineteenth century. Captain Adolphus Slade, who witnessed the reception

31 Stanley Lane-Poole, The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, vol. 1, 513.
33 James Boulden, An American Among the Orientals; Including an Audience with the Sultan and a Visit to the Interior of a Turkish Harem, 80.
34 I am aware of two more Ottoman rituals during which stools appear. First, a stool was carried during the processions by the master of the stool (iskemlecibaşığı, or iskemleci-i hâssa) for the sultan to step on while mounting or dismounting; and second, a stool covered with a red cloth was given to the voivodes of Walachia and Moldavia as a symbol of the transfer of power, cf. ʿAbdollâh Nâʾi-li, Qâvânîn-i tâşfât, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 98b-99a.
35 Spuler, “Die europäische Diplomatie,” 184 and 359 respectively.
36 Defter-i tâşfât, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, HO 153, 39a.
37 BOA, Kamıl Kepeci 676, 185a (1239/1824) a gilt (valîdzî) chair for the French envoy, and 185b (1230/1815) a covered (püşûdeltî) stool for the Spanish envoy were used.
ceremony of the English ambassador Sir Robert Gordon in 1833, describes the way the envoy managed to avoid sitting on the stool:

The caimacan [stand-in to the grand vizier] relaxed his unmeaning countenance as his guest [Sir Robert] approached, and motioned to a low stool; but the ambassador disregarding this little assumption of superiority, so consistent with Ottoman etiquette, placed himself on the divan beside him. No notice was taken; the important stool was quietly removed; the dragomans knelt on the carpet beside their respective masters.38

One ritual in particular appears to have aroused deep resentment among the envoys, to judge from numerous discussions of the subject in western travel books. When an envoy was to enter the imperial presence, he and his men were brought in by two palace officials (gapeci or gapetbaşi ağalar), who held them by the arms. Already informed about the custom, Dubayet had asked for advice about how to avoid this custom at his reception ceremony even before leaving France for Turkey.39 Quite determined to have his way on this matter, he placed great emphasis on it in his correspondence with the Sublime Porte, informing the Porte that if anyone so much as touched him while he was entering the imperial presence, let alone hold him, he would consider himself a prisoner. In the event, the Ottomans did make an exception for him, dropping the ritual only on this one occasion.

Envoys and their entourages continued to be carried into sultan’s presence on the arms of palace officials until the nineteenth century.40 But was this ritual really as humiliating as the envoys claimed? Being escorted into an audience on the arms of two palace officials was in reality not a practice reserved to foreign envoys alone. Registers point out that in certain ceremonies prominent officials such as the grand vizier, or even the sultan himself, were borne on the arms of palace officials. The ritual was referred to as bağal–giri.41 The grand vizier was ordinarily ushered in by the chief secretary to the grand vizier in internal affairs (kethudâ beg) and the commander of gatekeepers (gapiciler kethudâsi or kethudâ-yı bevvâbin-i şehriyârî); the sultan by the grand vizier and the janissary agha (yeņiceri aġast).42 The Crimean khan, too, was accompanied by the chief secretary to the grand vizier in internal affairs and the chief sergeant-at-arms.43 Moreover, the protocol registers note that serving in this capacity was considered an honor for the ushers. How are we to understand the ritual?

I would not go so far as to say that the Ottomans did it to ‘honor’ the envoys, but surely from the Ottoman perspective the ritual did not carry any sense of degradation

38 Slade, Records of Travels in Turkey, vol. 1, 163.
39 A. Dry, Soldats ambassadeurs sous le Directoire, 443.
40 The BEO 350 does not explicitly mention that the envoys are escorted in this way. This may be because the ritual was so commonplace that it was not considered to be worth mentioning. It is mentioned in other protocol registers, however; see, for example, TTK, Y 49, 122b, 124a. In general, the audience with the sultan is not described in BEO 350 in as much detail as the other stages of the ceremony.
42 See appendix 5.
43 ‘Abdullah Nâ’îli, Qavânîn-i teşrifât, TTK, Y 49, 36b.
INTRODUCTION

per se. Otherwise, we could not expect the action to have been implemented for the sultan. Although the officials who escorted the sultan and the grand vizier were high-ranking dignitaries, whereas the officials ordinarily charged with bringing the envoys into the audience room were much lower-ranking officials, namely the chief gatekeeper aghas, this fact alone does not appear to have triggered the envoys’ dislike of the custom. In all probability, the envoys felt most of all insulted by the Ottoman officials’ forcing them to bow before the sultan. In any case, apparently as a consequence of the envoys’ resentment, the ritual came to play a critical role in the negotiation of prestige, so that it lost the innocuous significance it may have once had. The practice seems to have experienced two different meanings over time, one within an Ottoman context, and one in foreign diplomatic circles.44

Quite likely, by the turn of the nineteenth century the Ottomans were under significant pressure from the European envoys to discard their disputed ceremonial practices.45 Several travel accounts comment on the “uncivilized manners of the Turks” when referring to the ceremonies around this time.46 As envoy reception ceremonies gradually became standardized in the course of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans too, as we shall see, adjusted to the new rituals, and discarded the ceremonial rituals discussed above.

The Reception Ceremonies

The reception of envoys by the grand vizier or the sultan took place on several occasions. The most common of these was the presentation of credentials when the envoy first arrived or when he was promoted, and the collection of letters for his own sovereign or government when leaving Istanbul. These letters could be either from the sultan (nāme-i hūmāyūn), or from the grand vizier (mekṭūb-i āṣafī), or both. As a rule, the sultan’s letter was handed to the envoys at the Sublime Porte if the envoy was of a

44 The explanations in some European travel accounts tracing the ritual to Murād I’s assassination by a Serbian noble (1389), when the latter allegedly was allowed to enter the presence of the sultan as a deserter and stabbed him to death, need further investigation. For one such account see the section ‘Warum man den Türkischen Kaiser nicht zu nahe kommen darf,’ in Gerhard Cornelius von den Driesch, Historische Nachricht von der Röm. Kays. Gros-Botschaft nach Constantinopel, Große Botschaft nach Constantinopel, 196-197.

45 All of the controversial ceremonial practices discussed above were also avoided by the British ambassador extraordinary Lord Elgin during his reception ceremonies in November, 1799, at the Sublime Porte and Topkapı palace. Elgin also refused to be welcomed at the Kireçbaşi chamber. He then rode alone in his row during the procession to the Sublime Porte, whereas the chief sergeant-at-arms, who rode in front of him, had to ride to the right of another British diplomat. When being received by the grand vizier, Lord Elgin avoided sitting on the stool while waiting for him to enter the audience hall (although he did so during the talks), and did not wait in front of the kiosk of processions for the grand vizier to come out of the Porte on the day of his reception at the palace. He was not held by the arms by two gatekeeper aghas while entering the audience with the sultan, although his entourage consisting of 18 people did submit to this procedure. See BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 353, 14b-17b. Elgin came to Istanbul to conclude an alliance with the Ottomans against the French, who had invaded Egypt in 1798. See the murky political situation and the hectic diplomatic negotiations in Stanford Shaw, Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, 1789-1807, pp. 258-282.

46 See, for example, the account of Charles MacFarlane quoted in this volume from his Constantinople in 1828: A Residence of Sixteen Months in the Turkish Capital and Provinces.
lower rank or if his diplomatic mission was of little importance to the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{47} When a new sultan was enthroned, the Ottoman state either sent out letters with envoys extraordinary to inform the governments with which it had friendly relations,\textsuperscript{48} or these letters were simply presented to their envoys at the Sublime Porte.\textsuperscript{49} Those governments would then send a congratulatory letter (tebrîk–nâme) to the new sultan and this would be another occasion for an envoy to be received at the palace. Less commonly, envoys were received when they needed to deliver a formal declaration of a succession (iḫbâr–nâme) or a letter of friendship (sadâqat–nâme). Envoys arriving after the conclusion of a treaty for the exchange of signed copies of the document (mübâdele-i taşdîq–nâme) would also obtain the right to an audience with the grand vizier or the sultan.

For all such purposes, a reception could take one of three forms in the eighteenth century. The envoy could be received by the sultan at Topkapi palace, or he could be received by the grand vizier at the Sublime Porte, either with due ceremonial (resmen) or informally (bi-lâ–resm).\textsuperscript{50} If he was received by both the sultan and the grand vizier, the audiences took place on different days. The decision about whether the envoy was received at the Sublime Porte, or at Topkapi palace depended to a great extent on the envoy’s state’s own choice. To be sure, an unimportant diplomat would certainly never be received by the sultan. But if the diplomat ranked as an ambassador or a resident envoy, the decision to receive him at the palace generally depended on the nature and quantity of the gifts he presented.

If the envoy brought the customary amount of gifts, he would then be allowed to come to court for an audience with the sultan. If, on the contrary, he arrived in Istanbul empty-handed, he would most likely be received only by the grand vizier at the Sublime Porte.\textsuperscript{51} Whether this reception took place with due ceremonial or informally depended, among other things, on the rank of the envoy. An official reception required that the Ottomans provide certain amenities for the envoy, including a caïque (usually, the chief sergeant-at-arms’ caïque with seven pairs of oars), and caparisoned horses for him and his entourage. A number of Ottoman officials accompanied him during the processions. But if the ceremony was informal, he would have to use his own caïque and supply his own horses. Only the lavishness of these external details distinguished the reception with due ceremonial from the informal one, for otherwise the course of both audiences remained essentially the same.

If the number of Ottoman officials participating in the ceremonies served as a clear indicator of pomp, only an accustomed eye could discern other indicators. The costumes of the officials bore great significance, but the turbans mattered most of all. Higher dignitaries possessed more than one cloak and turban, intended for different

\textsuperscript{47} ‘Abdullah Nâ’ilî, \textit{Qavûnîn-i teşrîfât}, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 98a-b, 101a. Again, exceptions were always possible, cf. BEO 350, \textsuperscript{49} Cf. BEO 350, \textsuperscript{10}.
\textsuperscript{48} Cf. BEO 350, \textsuperscript{13}.
\textsuperscript{49} Cf. BEO 350, \textsuperscript{13}–\textsuperscript{14}.
\textsuperscript{50} The latter term literally means without ceremony, and is used in contrast with resmen (with due ceremonial).
\textsuperscript{51} Rarely, an envoy without gifts would be allowed to come to the palace by a special permission of the sultan. Cf. \textsuperscript{21}.
ceremonial occasions. For example the stand-in to the grand vizier possessed an ordinary turban as well as a ceremonial qallāvī turban, and similarly, the chief sergeant-at-arms possessed a daily turban as well as a more ornate one known as the selimī. These officials donned one or the other turban depending on the nature of the ceremony.\footnote{52} The same held true for the furs and cloaks that they wore, although that rule was less strictly observed.\footnote{53}

Indeed, when reading through the protocol registers, one’s attention is invariably drawn to the enumeration of turbans. It is not hard to deduce that clothing reflected the importance accorded to envoys, as did the saddles and bridles of their horses, so much so that, along with the horses ridden by the Ottoman and foreign officials during important processions, horse guides led a great number of spare horses with extravagant housings and shields. The terminology used for the various saddles, bridles, housings, and caparisons is hard to fathom for the modern reader. The divān-bisâlîh horses, for example, with their highly embroidered trappings, including a decorated harness, saddle, caparison, and stirrup covered with silver and gold, were reserved for Ottoman dignitaries only.\footnote{54}

The difference in the treatment of envoys from various states can be inferred from the ceremonial descriptions in the protocol registers. Several differences, recorded in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century registers in particular, have to do with the reception ceremonies of the envoys of vassal states. The records show that these envoys were of a lower rank than those of other states and accordingly, were supposed to be treated with less pomp and respect. For example, the voivodes of Walachia and Moldavia, two vassal principalities of the Ottoman state, would come to Istanbul to receive the headgear called quqa, an Ottoman standard (‘alem) and a horsetail (tuğ), all imperial insignia that symbolized the conferral of power. The major difference in the reception ceremony by the grand vizier was that the voivodes, after being led in the front of the grand vizier, who received them seated, had to kiss the hem of the vizier’s caftan at least twice during the ceremony, and stand before him with their hands folded in front of them. They also had to kiss the floor when entering the sultan’s audience.\footnote{55} Emissaries of Dubrovnik, who came every third year to present their tribute to the Ottomans, were also received much less respectfully than regular envoys. Although the Dubrovnik emissary was ordinarily allowed to sit on a stool, he was occasionally made to stand before the grand vizier. Then, during his reception at Topkapı palace, no separate banquet was held for him, so that he and his entourage had to eat the food they were provided with on their own.\footnote{56}

Until the nineteenth century, little or no distinction was made between envoys from Muslim and Christian states as far as ceremonies for the presentation of credentials and audiences with the sultan were concerned. To be sure, a categorization of the envoys’ countries according to religion did exist, since the Christian nations were in

\footnote{52} For a regulation concerning which turbans were to be worn at the reception ceremonies of Christian envoys, see, \footnote{149}, also see appendix 1.\footnote{53} See appendix 3.\footnote{54} See appendix 4.\footnote{55} ‘Abdullah Na‘īlī, Qavvānîn-i teşrifât, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 98a-b, 99b-100a.\footnote{56} ‘Abdullah Na‘īlī, Qavvānîn-i teşrifât, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 100b.
fact frequently referred to as such (diyel-i naşārā) in ceremony descriptions. Some favorable variations during the course of the reception ceremony show that some of the gestures which were deeply resented by other envoys were occasionally downplayed for the Iranians, although they were never completely eliminated. For instance, as per the general practice, the Iranian envoy, too, had to wait for the grand vizier to come out of the Sublime Porte, after which he would ride behind the Ottoman dignitary toward the palace for his reception. Unlike the other envoys, however, who were made to wait on horseback in front of the kiosk of processions, the Iranian envoy was sometimes taken inside the Ayasofya mosque and was allowed to wait there until the time of the grand vizier’s approach.

The Crimean khans, on the other hand, were received in the most respectful manner of all, not least because they were not envoys but rulers technically. The khanate, an ally of the Ottomans since the fifteenth century, became even more important for the Ottomans from the mid-seventeenth century on, when the military power of Russia expanded. As Turkish-speaking Muslim rulers, the Crimean khans journeyed to Istanbul at the beginning of their reign in order to obtain the sultan’s approval.

The corresponding ceremonies stretched over several days, during which numerous imperial insignia were presented to the newly-installed khan. Following a banquet outside Istanbul, during which several high-ranking Ottoman officials, including the chief sergeant-at-arms, the commander of the cavalry regiments (sipah agası), the swordbearer agha (silkādār), and the second agha of the stables (mirkhār-i sānī ağa) all kissed the hand of the khan as a sign of respect, the khan made his way to the city in a splendid procession. The khan rode in the same row as, and to the right of, the chief secretary to the grand vizier in internal affairs.

The next day, when the khan was taken to the council hall at the Sublime Porte, he was received by the grand vizier, who waited for him standing in the middle of the hall. They took seats very close to each other. The khan was also taken to the imperial palace to be received by the sultan on the same day, having been presented with an exquisite fur before setting off for the palace. Abdullāh Nā‘īlī, who details the reception ceremonies in a protocol register, describes this reception as taking place

57 For example, cf. BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 353, 10b. Also cf. the index of this edition.
58 ‘Abdullāh Nā‘īlī, Qavānin-i tefrīfāt, TTK, Y 49, 123b. It is also noteworthy that the Ottomans seem to have been, as the chroniclers illustrate, very much concerned with flaunting their scholarly and artistic abilities vis-à-vis the envoys from India and Iran. The Indian envoy Seyyid Hācī Mehmed, a member of the ‘ulemmā, who arrived in Istanbul in 1063/1652, was received by a crowded group of muftis, qadis, etc., and apparently ‘scholarly conversation’ dominated the banquet. Na‘īmā recounts how the Ottomans later were embarrassed when the ‘ignorant’ Zülfiqār Agha was appointed Ottoman envoy to India and spent time with the Indian envoy; see Na‘īmā, Ta’rīḥ, vol. 5, p. 342 ff. See further Rāṣid, Ta’rīḥ, vol. 5, p. 399 ff., 412 ff. for the exceptional reception ceremonies conducted for Murtazā Quluḫān in 1134/1722. During the banquet given in honor of the Iranian envoy, conversation was artfully diverted toward the subject of Ottoman poets’ and calligraphers’ talents and the Ottomans took pains to prove the skill of their artists. Cf. also ‘Abdullāh Nā‘īlī, Qavānin-i tefrīfāt, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 95b ff. and TTK, Y 49, 123a ff. for other Iranian envoys.
59 The summary I provide here concerns the ceremonies performed when the khan had been newly appointed. If the khan had already been given the title and was visiting Istanbul on some occasion, the ceremonies were different. For the ceremonies concerning the Crimean khans, see ‘Abdullāh Nā‘īlī, Qavānin-i tefrīfāt, TTK, Y 49, 34b-42b.
not in the audience room, but at the Topkapısi mansion in the palace gardens — a fact which seems to point to a casual and friendlier reception. There, after a good half-hour of conversation with the sultan, the khan was officially granted the title of Khan of Crimea. He received a headdress faced with fur (qalpaq) that bore two aigrettes (sorguç) on the sides, a precious fur with golden buttons (qapaniçe), a bow (kemân), an arrow (tîr), and a quiver (tîrkeyś). When taking his leave, he also received a bedecked horse (mıźeyyen at) from the sultan. A banner and a standard (sancaq, ʿalem) were also presented to him the next day. Subsequently the khan was received by the sultan one more time before he left Istanbul.

Istanbul witnessed a constant traffic of diplomatic emissaries: ambassadors (bүyük ʾelçi) and resident envoys (muqim ʾelçi) who could potentially obtain an audience with the sultan, provided that they brought sufficient gifts. Most of the envoys in Istanbul in the eighteenth century were resident envoys. Because the mission required a huge budget, commensurate with its prestige, maintaining an ambassador in a city constituted an extraordinary enterprise and was usually not favored. The Venetian envoys had traditionally been called balyos or baylos (< it. bailo), but the term was also occasionally used to describe other envoys. The qapı kethudāst, term which otherwise is used to describe any middleman representing a high-ranked Ottoman bureaucrat and the like, functioned as an agent for the vassal states and was considered as the lowest ranking diplomats in the city.

In addition, one should mention the ambassadors extraordinary and envoys extraordinary, who arrived charged with special diplomatic and political missions. Ambassadors extraordinary who came to Istanbul for the ratification or renewal of a treaty, or to offer congratulations on the sultan’s accession, were designated by degrees of highest, middle or lowest rank (aʾlā, evsat, ednā), in relation to the importance of their missions. Until the end of the eighteenth century, in accordance with contemporary international practice, from the moment an ambassador extraordinary (fevqaʾl-ʾāde ʾelçi) crossed the border into the host state until his departure, all his needs were met by the host state. While the envoys of England, France, Genoa, the Dutch Provinces, and Venice generally arrived in Istanbul by ship, envoys from Austria, Iran, Poland, Russia, Sweden and other countries usually traveled overland. The arrival of envoys by land was costlier to the Ottoman state. If the envoy’s rank was sufficiently high, an official attendant (mihmāndār) was appointed to welcome him as soon as he crossed the border, and all his needs, both en route and later in Istanbul, were met by the state. Ensuring the envoy’s safety on the roads was another important concern, since it would be inopportune indeed if he was murdered by brigands within the boundaries of the Ottoman state. Pirates could also pose a problem for envoys traveling by sea, who were usually met by a mihmāndār in the Dardanelles.

Several janissaries and marshals of the court (çavuşān-ı divân) were assigned to envoys and their entourage during their sojourn in Istanbul. These janissaries were essentially there to ensure the protection of the envoys, even though one protocol

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60 E.g., Filemenk balyosu, BEO 350, 14; and France balyosu, BEO 350, 13; 61 Defter-i tefrîfât, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mixt. 301, 48a. 62 Spuler, “Die europäische Diplomatie,” 176. For the routes followed by various envoys, see, op. cit., 176 ff.
AN OTTOMAN PROTOCOL REGISTER

register from the late eighteenth century claims that this practice was established to prevent envoys from communicating with the locals who might provide them with information about the problems of the Ottoman state. Given that envoys from Europe had access to such information through their dragomans and could even witness certain crises for themselves by wandering in the city, this rationale seems rather naïve. The very detailed reports that resident envoys sent back to their governments constitute sufficient proof that this could hardly have been the case.

An envoy could sometimes be kept waiting for days or even weeks before seeing the sultan. One reason to do so was the desire to leave a mark on the audience by making it coincide with some particularly impressive ceremony due to take place at the palace. One of the most frequent occasions used for this purpose was the gathering of the janissaries to collect their salaries, which all courtiers attended wearing their ceremonial attire. Under more exceptional circumstances, however, envoys were invited to witness more intimidating, but indeed memorable, events, such as the exile, demotion, or even execution of an Ottoman official, or the exhibition of the severed heads of captured brigands — vivid illustrations of the state’s justice at work. While the reception of an envoy on janissary pay-day gave the palace an opportunity to stage an impressive show, the envoys often perceived this event as a privilege and an honor bestowed on them.

A banquet was held at the imperial dome, where the envoy dined in the company of the grand vizier, after which he was offered sweetmeats, coffee, fruit beverages, and incense. After the requisite offerings had been made came the actual moment of entering the sultan’s presence. First, however, the envoy was presented with a robe of honor in front of the old council hall, and then was kept waiting while several Ottoman dignitaries entered and left the audience room, where the audience was to be held. Meanwhile, the gifts he brought were paraded through the forecourt of the audience hall or laid out by the imperial gatekeepers for all to see in front of the gate of the halberdiers with tresses. Then, by permission of the sultan, the envoy and his entourage, the number of which was generally kept between seven and nine, entered the audience. The members of the embassy were brought in, each one of them held under the arms by two gatekeeper aghas. As the party entered the hall, the grand vizier kissed the ground in front of the sultan. If the envoy was going to present his credentials or another letter, he handed it to the commander of the imperial standard, who took the letter with his left hand and passed it to the chancellor (tevârî or nişân-

63 Defter-i teşrifât, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mixt. 301, 48a.
64 The historian Selânikî mentions that the Iranian envoy managed to find out about the shortages in Istanbul by personally wandering around the city in 1598. Selânikî, Tarih, vol. 2, 729.
68 Cf. BEO 350, 18f.
69 The number could vary between five and more than a dozen. In an extreme case, the French ambassador was allowed to enter the audience with an entourage consisting of twenty-one attendants in 1230s/1815f., cf. BOA, Kamil Kepeci 676, 187a.
INTRODUCTION

city) or the grand admiral (qapudan paşa), who also received it with his left hand. At last it reached the grand vizier, who placed the letter next to the imperial throne. Then, the envoy delivered his statement, which was translated by the interpreter of the imperial council (divân tercümânı).

Whether the sultan made a speech at this time or not depended on the status of the envoy. The sultan occasionally inquired about the well-being of the envoy and his ruler. Eighteenth-century protocol registers and envoys’ written accounts indicate that the sultan replied briefly to the short speeches made by the envoys who presented their credentials. Whenever the grand vizier read out loud the sultan’s speech, as he sometimes did, he kissed the floor before and after the recitation. The sultan’s speeches usually included references to the friendship between the envoy’s state and the Ottoman state. Perhaps not in the eighteenth century, but later, in the nineteenth century, it was considered a matter of courtesy for the sultan to additionally make brief inquiries about personal matters, such as the well-being of the envoy’s family. In extraordinary instances, envoys enjoying special status were also granted a fur robe that the sultan himself had worn or a sword he had personally used, together with an imperial decree. These gifts were brought in and presented to the envoy by special officials.

If the envoy was to receive a letter from the sultan, the grand vizier picked it up, after which it passed from vizier to vizier, each of whom raised the imperial letter to the level of their heads out of respect, until at last it reached the envoy himself. After leaving the audience room the envoy proceeded to the middle gate, mounted his horse and waited in front of the imperial bakery for the members of the imperial council to leave. He would then be escorted back to the pier by the marshals (çavuşân) and their secretary and intendant (çavuşlar kâtibi ve emînî).

Changes in the Nineteenth Century

As mentioned above, the needs of envoys extraordinary were met by the Ottoman state from the moment they crossed the border into Ottoman territory. However, even if the envoy was a resident envoy in Istanbul, allowances were ordinarily allocated to him when a congratulatory letter to be presented at the Ottoman court arrived after a change of sultan. Typically the envoy was transferred to a mansion in Galata, and the days for which a ‘new envoy allowance’ would be paid were reckoned from this day on. Unless an extraordinary situation arose, the number of days was generally not to exceed ninety.

Although some European states had already abandoned the allocation of allowances and rations to diplomats earlier, the practice persisted in Istanbul until the end of the eighteenth century. The basic reason for this was a reluctance to alter this long-

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70 For example, see BOA, Kamil Kepeci 676, 179a (1236/1820).
71 Hammer-Purgstall, Staatsverfassung und Staatsverwaltung, vol. 1, 448-449.
72 BOA, BEO Sadaret Dفترleri 355, p. 80-81.
Fig. 2. The British envoy’s reception on 11 October, 1820, at the audience room in Topkapı Palace. BOA, Kamil Kepeci 676, 179. For a similar plan, see Necipoğlu, The Topkapı Palace, 108.

Fig. 3. The audience room at Topkapı Palace. The princes standing next to the sultan are not recorded as having taken part in any of the ceremonies described in this register. Jean-Baptiste Vanmour (1671-1737).
standing custom, but, at the same time, it should be noted that envoys to Istanbul for whom such payments constituted a source of income probably exerted pressure to continue with the practice. Thus when the envoys failed to receive the usual sum, or when they changed their route and were not remunerated accordingly, they petitioned for the difference, citing the example of their predecessors as a precedent. At a certain point, the Ottoman government realized that, compared with what they were paying to the British envoy, the payments made by the British government to the first permanent Ottoman ambassador to London, Yüṣuf Āğā Efendi, did not meet the requirements of reciprocity. As its financial plight made serious budget cuts imperative, the Ottoman state finally rid itself completely of this onerous burden, invoking the excuse of the highly extravagant demands of the Dutch ambassador in 1794. The funds thus saved were transferred to the permanent Ottoman legations then being established abroad.

Until the nineteenth century, ambassadors and envoys were ordinarily permitted to meet with the sultan only once, at most twice.76 After the 1840s, during the reign of Sultan ʿAbdülmecid (r. 1839-61), the sultan gradually became more accessible to envoys. This growing accessibility met the expectations of the modern world, especially in international relations. Even then, it was highly unusual for the sultan to converse with an envoy on any but a political matter, or to have any intercourse with him at all apart from his presentation of credentials. A meeting with the grand vizier on an occasion other than the official reception at the Sublime Porte was possible under some circumstances, for example, when the envoy and the grand vizier needed to discuss political affairs. In such cases, this meeting usually did not take place at the Porte, but rather at a mansion of the vizier’s choosing, where the negotiations could be conducted confidentially (maḥfī ṣohbēt).77 The director of the imperial chancery (the later minister of foreign affairs) would also occasionally receive envoys informally, either at his office or at a pavilion such as the one at Bebek or Küçüksu, and discuss issues relating to international politics.

Later in the nineteenth century, envoys began to meet with the sultan frequently over political issues as well. During ʿAbdülhāmid II’s autocratic reign in particular, the sultan began to meet with envoys quite often, and, given the sultan’s freedom to

74 For example the reasoning behind statements such as “payment to be given again this time since it was given in the past,” should be seen as an expression of this reluctance (muṣahhadāt [...] taʿyināt ṣirāt olmagā ḫo, be de′a ḫa ṣirāt [ṣirāt olmagā]), cf. Defer-i təsrəfāt, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, HO 153, 366, 1775.
76 Spuler’s list contains a handful of envoys who were received twice by the sultan; e.g. Austrian envoys Walter, Graf von Leslie in 1665 (p. 337) and Albrech von Caprara in 1682 (p. 339), etc. The only envoy known to have entered the imperial presence thrice as early as the 17th century is the Austrian Hans Rudolf, Graf von Puchheim, in 1634. The sultan was Murād IV. One of the receptions was conducted in Edirne, “Die europäische Diplomatie,” 334.
77 For example, the Austrian envoy met with the grand vizier at the Çırağan mansion in 1719 before the banquet at the Hüseyin Paşa mansion at Anadolu Hisarı; cf. ʿAbdullāh Nāʾīl, Qavāʾīn-i təsrəfāt, BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 356, 113b. More banquets were arranged for the Austrian ambassador.
78 For example, see Baʿz z muḥarrerāt-i siyāsīye, Türk Tarih Kurumu Kütüphanesi, Ankara, Y 524, Y 528, where detailed minutes of the negotiation are recorded.
make unilateral decisions, such talks became influential in political developments. In
the mid-nineteenth century, not only had the right of envoys to request a meeting with
the ruler of the country in which they were residing become a rule in many courts,79
but eventually even individuals without diplomatic status were able to enter the
presence of the Ottoman sultan more easily.

In sum, the prestige of the envoys and their say in state affairs on the Bosphorus
rose significantly, and in accordance with this development they were treated with
much more respect. By the second half of the nineteenth century envoys could object,
in a manner previously unimaginable, to minor breaches of protocol and could ar-
rogantly seek redress without incurring unfavorable consequences. The French envoy
M. de Vogué, for example, openly objected to the court interpreter in 1872, when he
was not asked to sit during his reception in the imperial presence to bid the sultan
farewell. According to the French newspaper that reported the incident, the envoy was
immediately offered an apology and given a chair to sit on.80

From a simplistic point of view, one significant reason why many ceremonies were
tension-laden by details that hardly make sense to an outside observer was that the
Ottoman protocol governing receptions for envoys was based on established practice
rather than on written international agreements. The situation was of course no
different for Ottoman envoys entering audiences in other courts. It is presumably
impossible to imagine envoy reception ceremonies without any tension, particularly if
political relations were already strained. Yet, one can easily say that the international
codification in the nineteenth century reduced significantly the number of disputed
points in reception ceremonies and thereby eliminated a significant source of
ceremonial conflict.

THE LANGUAGE OF GIFTS AND OFFERINGS

The busy exchange of gifts, and the many occasions for offering refreshments indicate
that gift-giving involved more complex levels of meaning than merely fulfilling the re-
quirements of ‘oriental etiquette.’ Lists of bonuses distributed, gifts bestowed and of-
ferings made fill a considerable number of pages in the protocol registers. When we
take a closer look at these rituals, it again becomes evident that messages were
conveyed in diplomatic ceremonies to a large extent through gestures that were
significant to that specific culture. However, the late eighteenth century, roughly,
would mark the end of the era of culture-specific languages in diplomacy. By the mid-
nineteenth century the details of envoy receptions would be governed largely by
international agreements.

The cultural specificity of the language of offerings and gifts necessarily implies
that they could be meaningful only in their ‘indigenous’ environment. In order for the
significance of such rituals and their details to be conveyed, other details had to be
assembled first to constitute a cultural context that allowed communication between
individuals. In other words, only in the context of Ottoman protocol could such rituals

79 For example, see Rules of Ceremony Approved by the Queen for Her Majesty’s Court, 7.
80 Le Temps, no. 4147, August 20, 1872.
and their details properly convey the significance with which they were endowed. While rice pilaw and saffron-flavored rice were prepared in the palace on reception days for regular envoys, the fact that soup was offered when the voivode of Walachia, a vassal prince, arrived, could convey the desired message only to a person who was privy to this complex set of meanings. Actions that may appear quite ordinary, such as the offering of pipes and coffee to guests at the palace, must therefore be regarded as rituals that had time-honored significance in the context of Ottoman values and were, for that reason, faithfully maintained and followed.

Fig. 4. A banquet at the imperial dome, where the envoy is seen eating in the company of the grand vizier. Giulio Ferrario, *Il costume antico e moderno...* vol. 20 (Firenze, 1827), 4, p. 173 (from *Gravürlerle Türkiye*, vol. 3: *İstanbul* (Ankara, 1996). pl. 268)

81 BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 355, 81. Rice pilaw and saffron-flavored rice were ordinarily prepared on the days when the *galebe divan*, i.e., the special imperial council that assembled with more members than usual, met. Soup was prepared for regular imperial council meetings. Although a *galebe divan* met, among other occasions, when a foreign envoy was received, and also when the voivode of Walachia and Moldavia came to receive certain imperial insignia, soup was served on the latter occasion due to the inferior rank of these vassal princes. Cf. BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 351 68b.
Offering of Refreshments

One of the most frequent sets of offerings for consumption — in various combinations — included sweetmeats, fruit beverages, and coffee, accompanied by incense, rose water, and a napkin. An envoy was ordinarily offered refreshments twice on the day of his reception: first, after he disembarked at the pier and was received by the chief sergeant-at-arms at the Kireçibaşı chamber, or at the Gümürükçı Agha chamber, and second, after he delivered his speech at the Sublime Porte, or, if he was being received at Topkapı palace, after the banquet at the imperial dome following the council meeting.

Among the items offered, however, coffee had a special status. At times coffee alone sufficed as a ceremonial offering. But, more importantly, failing to offer coffee as required was a grave faux pas and an insulting act. If a dignitary was for some reason not offered coffee against common practice, this was explicitly noted in the registers. In the same vein, the omission of this ritual could cause diplomatic tension.

Consider the example of Édouard, comte Pontois, the French ambassador to Istanbul, who was received by Sultan ʿAbdülmecid on October 16, 1841 on the occasion of the end of his mission in Istanbul. The ambassador was initially welcomed by the Ottoman minister of foreign affairs and other high dignitaries at Dolmabahçe Palace. He was supposed to be offered coffee and a pipe while waiting for the audience with the sultan. However, before the coffee was offered, the sultan sent word that he was ready to receive the ambassador and he was therefore ushered into the audience hall. At first, the breach of court etiquette did not strike the ambassador as strange. It was only after he returned to his residence on the Bosphorus that he realized the possible gravity of the missing coffee and pipe, and charged one of his secretaries with looking into the issue. When it turned out that the English envoy, who had also been received the same day, was in fact offered both coffee and a pipe, Pontois immediately sent a diplomatic note to the grand vizier and the minister of foreign affairs. The ambassador was appeased and a crisis avoided only after the Ottoman officials formally apologized to the ambassador, a detailed account of the incident was printed in the French version of the official gazette, and Pontois was presented with the first class insignia of the Order of Glory.

“The serving of coffee is a practice more common than that of the pipe,” correctly asserts Abdolonyme Ubicini, a French expatriate who spent several years in Turkey in the 1850s. It was not customary to offer pipes to the envoys before the nineteenth century, and even then they were only seldom offered. A pipe is recorded to have been offered only on two occasions in the present register, and both times to Ottoman officials entrusted with a duty relating to the sultan: once when the master of the stables (mīrāḥūr-i evvel) took an imperial rescript to the Porte after the new sultan had ascended the throne, and again when the imperial barber (berberbaşı-i şehriyâr) brought a lock of the sultan’s hair as an indication that the sovereign was growing his

82 See for example, BEO 350, |124|.
INTRODUCTION

beard.\textsuperscript{84} Furthermore, offering the pipe depended not only on the rank of the person to whom it was offered, but also on the rank of the person who offered it. Ubicicini further elaborates on the custom:

Oriental etiquette makes a great distinction between the two. Coffee is served to all visitors; the pipe constitutes a privilege commensurate with the rank of the visitor and of the person from whom he receives it. When I went to see ʷAli Paşa, the minister of foreign affairs, at his home in Yeniköy, ‘His Excellency’ had both coffee and a pipe served to me. At the homes of ‘Their Highnesses’ Reşid Paşa and Ahmed Fethi Paşa, I had the right only to drink coffee, but out of politeness both abstained from smoking in my presence.\textsuperscript{85}

Other travelers also elaborate on the ritual of coffee and a pipe.\textsuperscript{86} Charles White, who spent three years in Istanbul in the 1840s, gives a detailed account of the ceremony. According to him, the ritual took the form of a favor conferred condescendingly on a person of lower rank, a required courtesy between individuals of the same rank, or a sign of respect shown toward persons of higher rank. According to standard protocol, the first case involved only coffee and the second both pipe and coffee along with a fruit beverage; the third required not only a fruit beverage, but also sweetmeats and incense in addition to the pipe and coffee.\textsuperscript{87}

Apart from the aforementioned ceremonial offerings, the envoys and their entourage were also offered a meal at the imperial dome. Actually, this meal was an early supper that the members of the imperial council regularly had after their meetings. The specifics of the banquet are not given in the register. It is only recorded that the envoy himself was the only individual from the foreign delegation who ate at the grand vizier’s table. Higher dignitaries of the foreign mission ordinarily sat at the tables of the chancellor and the chief treasurer (defterdār efendi). The rest of the entourage ate together in the antechamber adjacent to the main hall, next to the marble pillars.\textsuperscript{88}

Gifts
When an envoy wished to meet the sultan for the purpose of presenting his credentials, he was expected to bring gifts. The number and value of such gifts determined the eligibility of the envoy to be received by the sultan. In the case of special missions or embassies that followed the conclusion of treaties, the number of gifts was sometimes even specified by an article of the accord.\textsuperscript{89} However, as I pointed out earlier, there was always room for flexibility in diplomacy. We know of a number of

\textsuperscript{84} See, BEO 350, |124| and |126| respectively.
\textsuperscript{85} Jean-Henri Abdolonyme Ubicini, \textit{La Turquie actuelle}, 281.
\textsuperscript{86} Adolphus Slade reports that coffee was served to almost everyone but that the offer of a pipe required equality of status, and that therefore pipes were only seldom offered to guests; Slade, \textit{Records of Travels in Turkey}, vol. 2, 143, 167.
\textsuperscript{87} See how the ritual was conducted outside the palace in: White, \textit{Three Years in Constantinople}, vol. 2, 131 ff.
\textsuperscript{88} Cf. also |153|.
\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Hammer-Purgstall, GOR, vol. 6, 164.
cases in which envoys met with the sultan despite failing to bring gifts in sufficient numbers or of the required value for an audience. For example, prior to his reception by the grand vizier in 1759, the envoy of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies submitted a letter to the sultan asking for permission to come to the palace even though he did not have the required gifts. The justification of the envoy was that a change of king had occurred in his country and that the letter he brought was no more than a letter of friendship. Granting him permission to come to the palace would be a *beau geste* which would please his king very much. The request was sent to the sultan along with a memorandum from the director of the imperial chancellery and the permission was granted by the sultan.\(^90\)

As a critical aspect of diplomacy, the business of gift-giving occasionally escalated into a prestige contest. In 1829, for example, when the Russian plenipotentiary came to Istanbul following Russia’s overwhelming victory in the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828-1829, he felt himself in a position to present gifts of lesser value than was required. The official chronicler Ahmed Luṭfi quotes one of the sultan’s advisors as saying that such precious gifts as the ones the Ottomans sent with their envoy to Saint Petersburg had never been seen. The Russian envoy, on the other hand, brought only a watch, a dagger, and a few squares of fur for the director of the imperial chancellery and the commander-in-chief of the army (*ser-‘asker*). Since the Ottomans had been utterly defeated, they were in no position to openly protest this affront, all the more so since the negotiations were still going on unofficially. Nevertheless, as the Ottomans recognized this slight as the diplomatic ploy it was, the sultan ordered that an excuse be invented and the gifts for the commander-in-chief not accepted (şavuşdurulmasına ira-de buyurulmuşdur) in the words of Ahmed Luṭfi.\(^91\)

The envoys had to bring gifts, but they also received gifts during the receptions. A robe of honor was the most traditional gift that the palace bestowed upon the envoys. A ‘robe of honor’ in English usually stands for a *hil‘at* which represented the continuation of an old tradition in Middle Eastern imperia.\(^92\) The generic term *hil‘at* could actually describe several sorts of outer garments of different qualities corresponding to different ranks. The most precious robes were those lined on the inside with fur that might come from a variety of animals, such as sable or lynx. The cloth material of the robe could also vary in quality, and could be made, for example, from brocade or plain silk. The next most costly robe, called a *kerake*, resembled the first type, but lacked the fur lining. The most commonly given robe of honor was the plain *hil‘at* which was a mantle made of rather ordinary cloth.

Typically the robes of honor would be bestowed — in fact, physically put on the envoys — before they were admitted into the imperial presence, if they were being received at the palace (Plan 1, ➊). The idea behind this was that they could only enter the sultan’s presence attired in such precious, or ‘value-laden,’ garments. In a sense, these costumes conveyed the message that an envoy was worthy of the honor of an

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\(^{90}\) See [21]; cf. also [86].


\(^{92}\) On the tradition of giving the *hil‘at*, see Monika Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Ḥil‘a: Studien zur Geschichte des geschenkten Gewandes im islamischen Kulturkreis*. 

28
INTRODUCTION

imperial audience only if he was clad in a gift from the sultan. The practice was a prerequisite for Ottoman officials too: they had to be dressed in robes of honor before they were led into the sultan’s presence. Until the nineteenth century, only rarely does one encounter envoys allowed to enter the sultan’s presence in European dress alone, without donning an Ottoman ḥil’at. On a reception day, however, not only the envoy and his entourage, but also the Ottoman officials involved in the ceremony, were presented with robes of honor.

A glimpse into the list of gifts exchanged on the occasion of the Venetian ambassador’s reception in 1759 illustrates the gift exchanging process, even though of course the items on the list did vary over time and sometimes from ceremony to ceremony. The said ambassador was received twice over the course of several days in the summer of that year — first by the grand vizier and then by the sultan. Quite a number of robes of honor were handed out after the envoy’s reception at the Sublime Porte by the grand vizier at the end of the month of June. The envoy himself was presented with the highest quality ḥil’at (ḥaṣṣāʾ-ḥaṣṣa). Each member of his entourage received one regular ḥil’at, altogether amounting to thirty-four ḥil’ats. Among the Ottoman officials, the envoy’s guide, the janissary colonel (çorbacı), the two heads of police (‘asbesbaşı and sībaṣ), and two marshals of the court who met him at the pier and accompanied him on his procession to the Sublime Porte received one ḥil’at each, adding up to six. All these ḥil’ats were ceremonially put on their recipients, and four more ḥil’ats were handed over to the members of the office of protocol. A few days later, on July 2, 1759, the ambassador was received by the sultan at Topkapı palace. He presented the following gifts:

- Silver thread lace (ṣirma-kāri) 15 bolts
- Gold threaded brocade (zirbāb) 2 bolts
- Silk brocade (istofa) 1 bolt
- Chinese silk richly embroidered with gold thread (ağr telli ḥṭāyī) 1 bolt
- Gold or silver threaded velvet (tellī qadīfe) 2 bolts
- Simple velvet (sāde qadīfe) 7 bolts
- European brocade (dībā-yī frengī) 14 bolts
- Chinese silk with embroidery in the form of flowers with gold or silver thread (ṣi-çekli ḥṭāyī) 22 bolts
- Satin (atlas) 10 bolts
- Woolen cloth [camlet?] (patūdārī) 2 bolts
- Serge (sāye čuqa) 10 bolts

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93 Cf. the marginal note on BEO 350, 8b: […] if there are [Ottoman] dignitaries who will enter the audience in accordance with the custom, they would be given a robe of honor in order to be admitted in the sultan’s presence.

94 The Austrian ambassador, Graf von Virmond, who arrived in 1719, remains one of the few exceptions. Spuler, “Die europäische Diplomatie,” 190.

95 The Venetian envoy brought mostly clothing at this time, which is not an adequate representation of the variety of the gifts presented to the court. Items such as precious clocks, ornate cupboards, or exotic live animals were among the gifts brought by the envoys to Istanbul.
Three days later, on July 5, 1759, the ambassador sent the following items as gifts to the harem:

An assortment of brocades, Chinese silks and velvets 24 bolts
Small bottles filled with scented water (perfume)
Candles (candleholders?), needle cases, thimbles, artistically made combs
Treacle, musk, soap, vases
A small chest covered with velvet

The gifts were initially brought to the Sublime Porte by the envoy’s interpreters. The grand vizier viewed the gifts and gave his consent for them to be sent to the harem. A delegation consisting of the master of protocol, the reporter (telhiş), the interpreter of the imperial divan, the chief and the second dragomans of the envoy, his private secretary and his treasurer, the guide and a private confidential messenger were dispatched to the harem where they were met by the chief eunuch (dará’s-sa‘âde ağası) and were presented with a һil’at each. In addition, the following bonuses were also granted on the same occasion:

Envoy’s men, 200 ǧuruş
Interpreter of the imperial divan, 100 ǧuruş
Chief interpreter of the envoy, 55 ǧuruş
Second interpreter of the envoy, 55 ǧuruş
Private secretary of the envoy, 100 ǧuruş
Treasurer of the envoy, 100 ǧuruş
Guards, 30 ǧuruş

Another two days later, on July 7, 1759, the ambassador sent gifts to the grand vizier’s family. A group headed by the envoy’s chief dragoman brought eight bowls full of gifts whose specifics are not listed in the register. The delegation received twenty gold coins as bonuses. Also, although it is not recorded for the Venetian ambassador in this register, it was customary for the envoys to give gifts to the members of the office of protocol. 96

Obviously, an ambassador, in accordance with his rank, had to bring more precious gifts than a lower-ranking envoy. On the other hand, the gifts they received in Istanbul amounted only to robes of honor and other articles of similar value. Moreover, there are indications that the gifts of robes of honor were perceived by European envoys as humiliating towards the end of the eighteenth century. The discontent probably stemmed from the aforementioned notion that the envoys were worthy of entering the imperial presence only if dressed in robes of honor. Before setting out on his journey, the French general Aubert Dubayet, who had been appointed ambassador to Istanbul in 1796, wrote to Foreign Minister Delacroix in a letter dated 26 February, 1796:

Before leaving for Constantinople, there is an essential article of the reception ceremony about which I would ask that you request orders from the Directoire. It concerns the caftan that ambassadors are made to wear. The Ottomans attach to it

96 For the customary gifts and amounts of bounties, see: [88].
a notion of vassalage. Must I tolerate this? [...] Must the ambassador of the Republic of France endure this?97

Foreign resentment notwithstanding, the practice continued until the 1830s. What, then, did the envoys and their entourage do with the robes of honor they were given? Ordinarily, the envoy was given a sable fur or a costly ḥil‘at,98 while a few of his men — usually, his interpreter, private secretary and some dignitaries — received less valuable furs and kerakes;99 but the rest were given only regular ḥil‘ats and it seems that many of them were not happy with this gift. Hammer-Purgstall, the Austrian diplomat and orientalist, who was among the entourage of the British ambassador when the latter was received by the sultan in 1799, reflects on the subject in his memoirs. Hammer notes that the various robes of honor could be and were indeed sold by the diplomatic emissary and his entourage to the Armenian and Jewish tradesmen who waited outside the palace. Apparently the tradesmen in turn sold the robes back to the master of protocol with a small profit. Hence, the number of robes of honor recorded in the registers may not reflect the number of robes actually consumed, as many were evidently ‘recycled.’

Hammer also gives the customary prices for the furs and robes, noting that a good quality fur could be sold for up to 3,000 aqçes, whereas a kerake would bring 25 and a regular ḥil‘at only 5 aqçes.100 Considering the prices Hammer lists, the discontent with an ordinary ḥil‘at seems understandable. Nor is it surprising that in 1790 the retiring envoy of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies demanded that his sable fur be sent to him even though he was too old (and probably too sick) to participate in the ceremony at the palace.101 Occasional accounts relating that Ottoman officials, who regularly received ḥil‘ats during various ceremonies, likewise converted their gifts into cash in the same way also exist.102

At any rate, as the nineteenth century unfolded, the discontent over the robes of honor grew, so that the Ottomans decided to abolish the custom altogether. They stopped giving out robes of honor in several steps, gradually switching instead to the European custom of conferring orders. Initiatives aimed at eliminating the practice of attiring envoys in furs and robes of honor first appear in the reception ceremony for the British ambassador Sir Robert Gordon in 1829.103 Two years later a new regulation introduced the practice of giving envoys jewelry and the insignia of orders.104

97 MAE, Correspondence politique, Turquie 193, quoted in A. Dry, Soldats ambassadeurs sous le Directoire, 443.
98 Only rarely did it happen that an envoy was given two furs. The English ambassador Hennage Finch, Earl of Winchelsea, apparently a congenial person who endeared himself to the Ottoman dignitaries, received two furs in 1661, and in addition three English slaves were set free for his sake. Spuler, “Die europäische Diplomatie,” 254.
99 See appendix 2.
100 Hammer-Purgstall, Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben, 47.
101 See BEO 350, [114].
102 For rumors about high officials selling some of the presents they received from the sultan and other officials, see Na‘imā, Ta‘rīḵ, vol. 6, appendix, p. 8.
103 BOA, BEO Sadaret Defterleri 362, p. 6.
104 See Edhem Eldem, Pride and Privilege: A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals and Decorations, for an excellent narrative of the adoption by the Ottomans of this European custom in the nineteenth century.
Although robes of honor figured as the most interesting gifts that the envoys were regularly given, the envoy and some of the dignitaries of his entourage were further presented with colored brocades and colored kerciefs towards the end of the reception ceremonies at the Sublime Porte. We can deduce from the description of these items in the register that they were actually placed down the front of their shirts, a ritual that may appear disconcerting to the modern eye, but, as far as I could determine, nowhere evinced any indication of dissatisfaction. How this ritual came to exist and whether it symbolizes more than meets the eye awaits further investigation.

The most precious gift an envoy could receive was a horse. This occurred rarely, and usually when an envoy of the state in question had traditionally been given this gift. For example, the grand vizier customarily gave the Swedish envoys a horse in the eighteenth century.105 The dispute about the Venetian envoy’s gift of a horse has already been described above. In fact, oftentimes the value of the housings and caparisons of the horses seems to have exceeded the value of the horses themselves, which probably explains why the horses are always mentioned with their caparisons in the registers.

All regulations and politics aside, the rituals of offerings and gifts followed the established ceremonial etiquette of the palace, which required that they be carried out in a certain courtly manner. Writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, the chronicler Ahmed Cevdet cites as an example of ill-breeding the way that Alemdar Muštafa Paşa of Ruse, a usurping grand vizier who was not a court-educated person but had led the coup d’État of 1808, consumed an entire serving of the sweetmeat offered to him rather than politely limiting himself to a single spoonful.106 Such a comment implies that the etiquette was far more complex than is reflected in the rather routine accounts of the protocol registers. The officials keeping these records strictly refrained from making any personal comments. One nevertheless comes across illustrative remarks between the lines of the registers. For example, in an entry for the December 11, 1791, reception of the Swedish envoy, it is noted that additional gatekeepers and janissaries were charged with banning entry to the Sublime Porte to those in the envoy’s entourage who would not be given robes of honor. The reason was that some of the men in the previous envoys’ entourages had acted ‘rudely’ in the presence of the grand vizier during the robe-bestowing ceremony. This account immediately brings to mind the aforementioned disdain for the robes of honor among the diplomatic circles in general. It seems plausible that this resentment may have been the reason that the members of former delegations had felt free to act so discourteously.107

The evolution of conventions relating to offerings and gifts
Certain items in the gift repertoire, and articles among the offerings that were discussed above gradually started losing their significance around the first decades of the

Even after the official announcement that the hil‘at had been abolished (Taqvîm-i veqâyi‘, no. 1, 25 Cemâziye‘l-evvel 1247/November 30, 1831), it was still given on rare occasions, for example, Taqvîm-i veqâyi‘, no. 43, 1 Cemâziye‘l-a♯hir 1248/October 26, 1832.

105 See [87].
106 Cevdet, Ta‘rîh, vol. 8, 311.
107 BEO 350, [84].
INTRODUCTION

nineteenth century. In fact, the traditional symbolic treatment of envoys waned in significance, and a new *lingua franca* of symbols of honor began to acquire currency. Diplomatic honor was now largely divorced from symbols and assignations of rank centered on a single culture, and was instead determined exclusively by commonly perceptible diplomatic values. In our case, the Ottoman tradition of donning fur and headgear in accordance with the rank of envoy, gave way to customs in the European idiom.

Once the transition to the new diplomacy was accepted, the Ottoman state quickly mastered the new code, and the court ceremonies for foreign visitors underwent rapid transformation. The major hurdle for the Ottomans in adopting European-style diplomatic protocol lay in the absence of any tradition of their own in this area. As discussed above in detail, in the Ottoman concept of protocol, precedent figured above all else. Not surprisingly, then, the early correspondence after the changes had been introduced reveals constant references to the old system of values in order to determine equivalents of rank-related symbols in the new system.108

Protocol registers detailing the reception of foreign envoys serve as prime indicators of the ‘globalization’ (or Europeanization) of Ottoman diplomacy. The previously lengthy descriptions of costumes worn and gifts given, so profoundly significant in the olden days, were largely denuded of that significance during the nineteenth century. Instead, the costumes of each person and group were reduced to two types of uniform — the grand and the small (*grandiforme*, *petitiforme*) — and the numerous varieties of headgear, to the fez. When the custom of bestowing robes of honor was abolished, the various ranks began to be indicated instead by orders and decorations. Within a short period of time a number of new orders were instituted and the conferring of orders generated a separate value system on its own. Meanwhile, as the costumes and headgear that had exhibited such variety in the past were thus deprived of their potential for meaningful combination, their descriptions also disappeared from the protocol registers, as part of the transition from one integrated whole of complex symbols to a new set of symbols of European origin.

In conjunction with the adoption of new diplomatic practices, the prestige of foreign envoys also rose at the Ottoman court. When the practice of dressing envoys in robes of honor gave way to the conferring of orders, a conspicuous difference became apparent with this regard. As explained above, the idea behind robes of honor being donned beforehand was that the envoys could enter into the sovereign’s presence only when dressed in the valuable costume that was bestowed upon them by the sultan himself. The orders, on the other hand, were bestowed not before the envoy entered the sultan’s presence, but either during or following the audience. Such gifts were therefore regarded as reflecting the envoy’s inherent and acknowledged honor. This mentality was diametrically opposed to that behind the presentation of furs or robes of honor and thus represented a complete change in attitude.

The variety of dishes served also adapted to the language of the new symbols, so that the serving of rice pilaw and saffron rice accordingly lost its significance. The dishes on the menu at the reception banquets around the end of the nineteenth century

108 For examples, see BOA, İrade Hariciye 173, 175, 185, and 202 (all from 1840).
no longer bore the generally acknowledged meanings, which they had previously carried. In other words, the few dishes with particular significance as a variety of food lost their symbolic value and were instead chosen independently for each banquet. Under the new protocol rules, however, the chosen menu as a whole could convey a meaning (by being mainly French, for example). Indeed, the fact that ʻAbdülhamîd II (r. 1876-1909) served alla turca cuisine to the envoys whom he occasionally invited to the iftâr, the evening breaking of the fast during the month of Ramadan, could in this sense be regarded as an example of a message conveyed by the choice of cuisine.\textsuperscript{109} In the same manner, visitors began to be served breakfast in the morning, a meal previously non-existent in the Ottoman culture of eating. Ceremonies such as the serving of fruit beverages, incense, rose water, sweetmeats and a napkin, which had been customarily offered to envoys for a very long time, were abandoned.\textsuperscript{110} Cigarettes began to be offered in place of a pipe, and the coffee ceremony was gradually simplified.

Along with the gift-giving rituals, the nature of the gifts themselves evolved during the course of the nineteenth century. The gift of a horse, one of the most valuable presents that the palace gave to envoys, disappeared by the nineteenth.\textsuperscript{111} A favorite gift during the period of Mahmûd II (r. 1808-39) was the imperial portrait (tasvîr-i hûmâyûn) in the form of a locket or adorning the lid of an étui.\textsuperscript{112} Likewise, some envoys were also given functional and attractive gifts such as complimentary military uniforms or various photographs — a ‘hot’ item in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{113} In subsequent years, the palace began presenting small gifts such as cigarette boxes for the gentlemen and brooches for the ladies.

**OTTOMAN PROTOCOL REGISTERS**

The entries in the protocol registers of the eighteenth century are of two types: brief annotations of gifts and expenditures on the one hand, detailed descriptions of ceremonies on the other. The distinction reflects the dual responsibility of the office of protocol of the time: to bestow the correct type and number of robes, bonuses, and other gifts, as well as to ensure that ceremonies followed their proper course. All the occasions, therefore, on which bonuses and gifts were bestowed, had to be written down on a daily basis — at least as a brief entry. The act of bestowing a robe of honor was a rather routine-like ritual which did not require a complex organization, and thus was not described in as much detail as the ceremony. Consequently, the first kind of entry takes the form of a short and concise description. The size, number and type of gifts and other expenditures were carefully recorded, with little attention paid to how the ceremonial procedures were actually carried out.

The second kind of entry, on the other hand, includes descriptions of the actual

\textsuperscript{109} Vasif Bey, “Sultan Hamid’in muhafiziydım,” 30.
\textsuperscript{110} White reports in the 1840s that some of these ceremonies were gradually beginning to disappear. *Three Years in Constantinople*, vol. 2, 132.
\textsuperscript{111} For the custom governing the giving of the horse, see *Françe ȅçileri*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Y 581, 14a.
\textsuperscript{112} For example, for the tasvîr Mahmûd II gave to the English ambassador, see John Auldjo, *Journal of a Visit to Constantinople*, 64.
\textsuperscript{113} *Râznâme-i cerîde-i havâdîz*, no. 357, 20 L 1282/March 8, 1866. Given to the envoy of Qoqand.
INTRODUCTION

course of events in the ceremony. These entries were recorded with the date at the top of each ceremony described, and they served the purpose of providing a model or reference for future instantiations of the ceremony. Having said that, an observation is in order at this point: although we make use of these registers primarily as a source of historical information about Ottoman ceremonial procedures, they were kept by the officials for a different purpose — namely, to ensure correct protocol, the observance of hierarchy in the arrangements, and a proper attribution of tasks. The narrative about the course of the ceremonies was, so to speak, a byproduct of the protocol registers. That is why they are called téğrifât defterleri, or protocol registers, and not *rúsûm defterleri, or ceremony registers.

Precisely because of their very nature, the entries in the protocol registers are to a disappointing degree detailed only in matters that concern the hierarchy or division of roles. The order of the participants during the ceremonies, their costumes (which were also rank-related), and the seating arrangements at banquets were all meticulously recorded. Yet nowhere is it explained, for example, how a banquet was actually conducted, what the objects used in the ceremonies looked like, or what kind of food was served — unless the food was also related to the status of the guests. Usually, the registers simply note that “food was served.” Alas, these cultural details, and the physical details of objects that would have been of interest to the modern researcher, were too trivial for the ceremony officials to elaborate on and confusion in these details was not likely to raise hierarchical dispute. In other words, the ‘missing’ details were not tension-laden in terms of protocol.

In the same vein, the registers are completely silent when it comes to any background information or political context that may have played a role in the way the ceremonies were conducted. The reasons and motives, for instance, why an accession ceremony, which was often characterized by a certain degree of tension, would be performed in a hurry; why an envoy was received with extra pomp or why an ambassador brought more extravagant gifts than usual, are never mentioned. Despite the abundant information they contain otherwise, in terms of interpretive comments the registers do not come close to the traditional Ottoman official chronicles, which themselves are generally considered to be rather flawed on such matters. Observations

![Fig. 5. Seating arrangements for a banquet at the imperial dome (1206/1792). BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 355, 8b.](image)
revealing some sort of sentiment on the part of the protocol officials are simply absent from the records. These characteristics of the registers make it difficult for a modern researcher to place the described ceremonies into their context in order to arrive at a meaningful interpretation.

Protocol registers as reference handbooks in separate volumes are scarce until the eighteenth century. Records of ceremonies had been kept previously, but mainly as loose documents. Some *gânûn-nâmes* included ceremonial and protocol regulations, and that by Tevqi‘î ğAbdurrahmân Paşa from the last quarter of the seventeenth century (~1087/1676), focused exclusively on imperial ceremonies. The task was given to Tevqi‘î ğAbdurrahmân by the grand vizier Muştafa Paşa. The office of protocol, which started to function as a separate unit at around the same time
d evidently kept only one register at a time until the end of the eighteenth century. It seems that around the early to mid-eighteenth century, the officials at the office of protocol began to feel the need for a better-organized register to refer to when necessary.

The first known protocol register after the reorganization of the office at the end of the seventeenth century is a compilation by Teşrifâti-zâde Mehmêd bin Ahmed, whose father Ni‘metî Ahmed (d. 1709 or 1710) served as master of protocol for almost three decades. In the preface to his work, Mehmêd bin Ahmed explains his motives for starting a protocol register. It seems the disorganized and confusing situation in the archives of the office of protocol had reached the point where ceremony officials were unable to refer to the records of earlier ceremonies properly. Responding to the need for well-organized and accessible records, Mehmêd bin Ahmed decided to compile the descriptions of ceremonies in a *defter*. His collection begins with a description of the accession ceremony of Sultan Muştafa II upon Ahmed II’s death in 1694 and contains descriptions of several ceremonies from the end of the seventeenth century, along with sections from Luîfî Paşa’s (d. 1563) *Âşaf-nâme* regarding grand viziers. We may suppose that Mehmêd bin Ahmed wrote this register on his own initiative, but it is likewise possible that the compilation was sponsored by a grand vizier or was designed to be presented to one, given the addition of a section on grand viziers written in a style different from that of the other entries.

From the style he used, it is clear that Mehmêd bin Ahmed viewed his compilation as a work of some literary quality, incorporating the stylistic elements of higher level prose in terms of syntax and vocabulary. The work begins with an introduction that explains its motives and purposes, and often includes poems embedded in the descriptions. As we shall see below, the later registers differ significantly from Mehmêd bin Ahmed’s work on these points.

We do not know how extensive a use Mehmêd bin Ahmed’s book found, or whether it really helped the office to function better. What we do know is that, about two

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114 The office was subordinate to the chief treasurer until the end of the seventeenth century and functioned mainly as a financial office. For the history of the institution see Filiz Çalışkan/Karaca’s thoroughly-researched theses: *Osmanlı devletinde teşrifat kalemi ve teşrifatçılık*, MA thesis (Istanbul University, Istanbul, 1989) and *Tanzimat dönemi sonrasında Osmanlı teşrifat müessesesi*, PhD thesis (Istanbul University, 1997).

INTRODUCTION

decades later, another attempt at a compilation was made by ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī Paṣa (d. 1758). This time the work was carried out upon the orders of Sultan Mahmūd I (r. 1730-54). The reasons Nāʿīlī gives for his undertaking are in many ways similar to those of Meḥmed bin Aḥmed. He explains in the preface to his work the difficulties which the ceremony officers had been experiencing in referencing the disorganized and loose documents in the archives, and how the office once again had become almost dysfunctional because of this disorganization.116

Sultan Mahmūd I charged ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī with organizing the earlier documents, binding them together as necessary, and copying them into a separate book to be used as a reference register, which the latter did. The version he compiled was then adorned with Sultan Mahmūd’s imperial monogram, to the effect that this register was to be used as a basis for ceremonies from then on.117 The compilation was finished in 1743, and a copy was kept by the sultan himself.118 Moreover, ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī wrote a lengthy introduction to his compilation detailing the origins, uses, and symbolism of Ottoman ceremonies, and symbols of sovereignty in general. He considered this introduction, entitled Muqaddime-i Qavānīn-i teşrifāt, which seems to be written very much along an Ibn Khaldunian line, as a separate treatise.119

Although ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī did nothing more than compile earlier accounts of actual ceremonies, the book was put to use with the idea that it constituted a norm-setting qānūn-book — hence the title Qavānīn-i teşrifāt (The Laws of Protocol).120 Considering the importance of precedent in the Ottoman ceremonial tradition, this development comes as no surprise. The literary style of the book also reflects this objective. Nāʿīlī uses the simple present tense (aorist) in his descriptions throughout most sections of the book and this stylistic device gives the text a sense of timelessness, reflecting the author’s ambition of elevating these accounts of actual ceremonies to the role of normative texts. In contradistinction to this, the descriptions of ceremonies in daily registers were narrated in the past tense — although finite verbs are scarce — as one would expect them to be, because they were accounts of actual ceremonies.

Several of the registers that were compiled in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries borrowed material from ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī’s compilation and other defters. The later registers marked these compilations as copied from defters that bore the imperial monogram, thereby bringing them into circulation as authorized reference handbooks.121 Although we are not aware of any compilation that was authorized by an imperial tughra other than ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī’s, the fact that some of the descriptions

117 BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defteleri 359; cf. Filiz Karaca, Osmanlı teşrifat müessesi, 74.
118 ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī, Qavānīn-i teşrifāt, TTK, Y 49, fol. 205b. For excerpts see ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī, “Divān-ı hümâyûna ʿilîde teşrifāt,” 249-260.
119 ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī, Muqaddime-i qavānīn-i teşrifāt, Millet Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Müteferrika 51, fol. 1b.
120 The book is generally known under the generic title of Defter-i teşrifāt; but since the introduction is called Muqaddime-i qavānīn-i teşrifāt (see below), I use the Qavānīn-i teşrifāt part of it as the title of the main book. ʿAbdullāh Nāʿīlī also refers to it as such, cf. Millet Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Müteferrika 51, fol. 1b: Qavānīn-i teşrifāt nüṣḫasına bastı muqaddime şekilde bir dîbâce taḥrîr olunup ...
121 Cf. the title page of BEO 350.
of ceremonies in those later registers are not found in Nā‘īlī’s suggests that other such compilations existed. In the meantime, however, the ceremony officials not only used the compilations as a reference tool, but also continued to add entries to them according to their needs, recording ceremonies, distributions of gifts, memoranda regarding disputes about ceremonial rituals, and the like. As a result, the later defters, including the one edited here, BEO 350, contained descriptions of even more actual ceremonies which also came to carry, as expected, a normative quality.

Many stylistic features noticeable in the later registers distinguish them from Mehmed bin Aḥmed’s early to mid-eighteenth century work. First of all, in the later registers, entries for similar ceremonies repeat each other almost identically, unless unusual conduct had occurred. Such a stylistic choice indicates functional rather than literary prose. Moreover, they do not include an introduction of any literary value. Finally, they do not display any of the features regarded as elements of fine Ottoman prose, such as inserting poetry in the text relevant to the content. Hence, the later registers are but bureaucratic products of governmental offices — as one would expected them to be.

At any rate, the need for more systematic records for easy use as reference tools necessitated the compilation of more defters by the ceremony officials, eventually exceeding fifty, the total number of protocol defters known to exist today.122 The officials evidently selected the ceremonies according to their needs, usually from ceremonies spreading over several decades. Although these defters were apparently heavily used, a clear-cut scheme for compiling them did not develop for a long time. Later, in the nineteenth century, defters containing only one type of ceremony were put together. For example, one such register recorded only mevlid ceremonies;123 another included descriptions of weddings and circumcision ceremonies.124 BEO 350, too, contains only some types of the great variety of Ottoman ceremonies.

The registers in the Archives of the Sublime Porte (Biblioteque Evrak Odasi) that have so far been made accessible date mostly from the pre-Tanzimat period (before 1839).125 There may be other registers that have not yet been made accessible to researchers, possibly rendering the following a premature assertion, but it seems that the activity of compiling protocol registers of the ‘reference handbook’ type faded out gradually, after a boom during Selim III’s reign (1789-1807).126 Nonetheless, another

122 The bulk of these documents are located in the Prime Ministry’s Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, but several are to be found in libraries; see the bibliography. Hammer-Purgstall obtained three protocol registers in Istanbul, which are kept today at the Vienna National Library (Gustav Flügel, Die arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der Kaiserlich-königlichen Hofbibliothek zu Wien, vol. 2, 311 (no. 1136); 266-267, vol. 3 (nos. 1834, 1835). Cf. GOR, vol. 9, 244-245.). A curious-minded historian of the Ottoman Empire, Hammer-Purgstall, made extensive use of these registers in his own library, and gave partial translations in his book on Ottoman institutions, Der Osmanischen Reichs Staatsverfassung und Staatsverwaltung (vol. 1, XXI, 434 ff.).
123 BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 354; cf. BOA, BEO, Sadaret Defterleri 361 (1242-1244/1827-1829).
125 The defters numbered 350-367 and 375-378 from among the Sadaret Defterleri series are protocol registers.
126 An unusual register from the second half of the nineteenth century, currently preserved at the Istanbul University Library, contains ceremonies from the reign of ‘Abdü’l’aziz as well as some ceremonies and
INTRODUCTION

attempt, albeit one with unusual motives, is worthy of attention: the Teşrifat-ı Devlet-i 'alîyye or 'Protocol of the Ottoman State' by Es'ad Efendi (d. 1848).

Es'ad Efendi’s endeavor is peculiar in many respects. First of all, he served neither as a master of protocol, nor even as an assistant to one. We can surmise that his only motive in compiling this work was a scholarly one. Most of the ceremonies in Es'ad Efendi’s compilation are from the period between 1800 and 1808. He copied several of the entries from earlier handbooks which were most likely accessible to him during his appointment as the official imperial chronicler (1825-48). Es’ad Efendi’s book is, to be exact, a compilation based on earlier compilations. Although the ceremonies found in the book do not pertain to such ‘ancient’ times as suggested by the title ‘The Protocol of Yore’ (Teşrifat-ı qadîme), under which the compilation came to be known, they were no longer conducted in the way described in the book — hence the ‘of Yore’ in the title. The description of ceremonies, too, bore no functionality whatsoever. Nor did the enumeration of different kinds of turbans or ceremonial cloaks correspond in any way to those actually used for ceremonies of that period. Therefore, the compilation motive was not the same as for the earlier compilers, and the readership was different, too. Es’ad Efendi probably did not expect that his book would eventually attain such fame. He died in 1848 and the book was not published until 1871. This brings up the question as to whether there was perhaps a special motive behind the printing of the book so long after its compilation.

Following the death in 1861 of Sultan ʻAbdülmecid, the pro-western and ultra-modernist sponsor of the Tanzimat, the accession of his brother ʻAbdül’azîz to the throne was cause for much rejoicing among conservative circles. ʻAbdül’azîz was generally believed to be more traditionally inclined. Not that he intended to suddenly reverse any reform project that was underway, but he was undoubtedly annoyed by the authoritative figures of ʻAli Paşa and Fu’ad Paşa, the real driving forces behind the reforms. The paşas, both about fifteen years older than the sultan himself, were immersed in French culture and the reforms were consequently carried out according to the French model. Fu’ad Paşa died in 1869. One year later, France suffered a severe defeat in Sedan at the hand of the Prussians. This shattered the prestige of anything French, not excluding the pro-French ʻAli Paşa, who, by the way, died the following year in France.

However, even before ʻAbdül’azîz was relieved of the burden of the two paşas, the idea of reform and westernization had been encountering serious opposition from the populace. Certain characteristics of the palace and ruling circles pertaining to modern lifestyle, such as western dress, resonated negatively with the people. Exactly at this point in time, probably just before ʻAli Paşa passed away, Es’ad Efendi’s ‘The Protocol of Yore’ went to press at the imperial printing house. Was it a mere coincidence that the compilation of Es’ad Efendi, who had died some twenty years earlier,
was published now? Or, could it be interpreted as an expression of the reaction to the reforms in general? Was the palace giving a populist signal, now that the heyday of the reforms and reformists was over? The answers to these questions await further investigation.

THE BEO 350 PROTOCOL REGISTER

Seven protocol registers are inscribed with the name of their possessor, Mehmed Es’ad Medhi bin Nureddin, a treasurer at the office of ceremonies.\(^{129}\) The dates of the possession records on these manuscripts vary between 1218/1803-04 and 1220/1805-06. Mehmed Es’ad first served as an assistant (yamaq) to the treasurer in the office of ceremonies, starting in 1212/1798, then himself became the treasurer (kisedar) in 1217/1803 and eventually the master of protocol (teşrifâcî). He was relieved of this last office after many years of service, and passed away in 1249/1834.\(^{130}\)

The BEO 350 register edited here is one of the seven defters mentioned above, partly compiled from an earlier register or registers and partly recorded while the ceremonies were being conducted. Although it is noted at the beginning of the defter that the descriptions were extracted from a register authorized by an imperial monogram, they are not identical with the ceremonial descriptions recorded in the sole register that is known today to bear this imperial sign, namely ‘Abdullah Nâ’ili’s work.

While neither the copyist of the manuscript nor its exact compilation date can be determined with certainty from the data at hand, a few assumptions are in order here. Most likely, a decision was made at the office of protocols in the early years of the nineteenth century to reorganize the records. Since the earlier organization of the records came to be outdated after some time, it was not unusual for the ceremony officials to reorganize the information most useful to them into new defters. We have no clear evidence as to who the initiator of this undertaking was or even whether it was initiated by a specific individual.\(^{131}\) Nor is any information available regarding the copyist of the present volume.

We can, however, judge from the handwriting styles and orthographic conventions of the copyists that the entirety of the present volume was not written by one hand. The handwriting changes and becomes sloppy with the entry on folio 58b describing the funeral of Sultan Selim III’s mother Mihrisah Sultan on October 16, 1805 (\([117\]%).

\(^{129}\) Karaca enumerates five others besides BEO 350, which is the volume edited here: Sadaret Defterleri, 353, 355, 356 (this is a copy of ‘Abdullah Nâ’ili’s Qavâyân-i teşrifâî), 436 (all dated 1220) and Konya İzzet Koyunoğlu 14555 (dated 1218; I was not able to view this manuscript), cf. Filiz Karaca, Osmanlı teşrifat müessesesi, 81, footnote 64. Another register that bears Mehmed Es’ad’s name is kept at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. or. quart 1462. The Berlin manuscript also bears another name, a certain Necih Beg, who was apparently a stand-in to the treasurer at the office of ceremonies (possibly to Mehmed Es’ad) and who must have died before February 1806; cf. Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, XIII: Türkische Handschriften, 5, ed. by H. Sohrweide (Wiesbaden, 1981), 126-128.

\(^{130}\) Mehmed Şüreyya, Sicill-i ‘Ugümî, vol. 1, 338; Filiz Çalışkan, Teşrifat Kalemi, 116-117; Filiz Karaca, Osmanlı teşrifat müessesesi, 106.

\(^{131}\) Filiz Karaca, who has researched the protocol registers in her dissertation, comes to the conclusion that Mehmed Es’ad was involved in the compilation process. Filiz Karaca, Osmanlı teşrifat müessesesi, 81.
INTRODUCTION

Although the text in the first part (fol. 1-58) contains very few orthographic errors, the latter part exhibits quite a few of them.\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, some words are spelled differently than in the earlier sections.\textsuperscript{133}

This first part of the manuscript comprises ceremonies ranging from 1739 ([:51:]) to 1803, most of them compiled from earlier registers and documents, and recorded on folios 1a to 58b. The latest date, given with reference to the funeral of Sultan Selim’s sister and the various communications made on that day, is March 11, 1803; hence, it is reasonable to suppose that the transcription of the first part of the manuscript was completed after this date. The entries of March 11, 1803, are recorded on folios 35b to 37b. The subsequent entries on folios 38a to 58b all belong to pre-March 11, 1803, events. They deal mostly with ceremonies dated 1789-1790, but also cover a few ceremonies from the 1750s, and one from 1801. The absence of a chronological order for these entries indicates that the first part of the manuscript must have been finalized after March 11, 1803. Since the entries between folios 27a-42a focus heavily on funerals, the compiler probably chose to include the descriptions of the rites of March 11, 1803, in that section by virtue of the subject matter.

Once its first part was completed, it seems the manuscript was entrusted to Mehmed Esâ’ad for his personal use. The note on the manuscript associated with this event records the date as May-June, 1805. Although Mehmed Esâ’ad’s name is clearly given at the beginning of the volume as the owner of the manuscript (tâ’llâkahû), we are still left with the question as to whether he actually owned it, or whether he merely made an extensive use of it, and possibly kept it among his belongings at his office. The register was an official document and therefore property of the office of protocol. Under normal circumstances, it was not to leave the office archives when its temporary owner was relieved of duty. Did Mehmed Esâ’ad perhaps feel free to claim possession because he was the one who had the manuscript compiled for his own needs? This question will have to remain unanswered at this point, but Mehmed Esâ’ad must have known full well that the register belonged to the office of protocols.

As indicated by the dates of the ceremonies recorded in the second part of the manuscript, i.e., in folios 58b-70b, this particular defter continued to be in use until Sultan Mahmûd II’s ascent to the throne on July 28, 1808. Moreover, from folio 58b on the entries become chronological; hence it is likely that they were taken down as they occurred. The only exception is the very last entry on folio 70b, describing the rites performed after Sultan Ahmed III’s death on June 24, 1736, which was apparently also copied from an earlier register and recorded in conjunction with, and as an extra reference for, the rites to be performed after the death of Muştafa IV and the enthronement of Mahmûd II (1808).\textsuperscript{134} Again, the copyist or copyists of the second part cannot be determined. One might propose that Mehmed Esâ’ad was one of them, since arguably he made use of the register during this time. Although the handwriting styles in the manuscript have distinguishing characteristics and we do have a sample

\textsuperscript{132} For example, the scribe or scribes of the later amendments confused in three places the Turkish suffix –ki with the Persian conjunction ki; cf. 64b: tarafîrandaki; 68a (on the margin): def’aki, and 71a: ardîndaki.

\textsuperscript{133} Cf. haşsete as opposed to haşsete.

\textsuperscript{134} In this later-amended section, there are also isolated uses of certain expressions which appear nowhere else; e.g. hünkârmız referring to the sultan is used here for the first time in the register (71a).
of Mehmed Esad’s handwriting (his possession record), a match between them is difficult to establish. The reason mostly lies in the fact that the scribes of this office had gone through an official training in a standardized writing style. Thus, unless we are dealing with quick personal notes, it is difficult to determine the various hands with certainty.