

An Ottoman envoy in Paris: Süleyman Ağa's mission to the court of Louis XIV, 1669

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Paris'te Bir Osmanlı Elçisi: XIV. Louis'nin Sarayında Süleyman Ağa, 1669

Öz ■ IV. Mehmed 1669 yılında Süleyman Ağa'yı elçi olarak Fransız Kralı XIV. Louis'ye göndermiştir. Fransa ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu arasında bir seri savaşın sonunda gelen bu diplomatik misyonun hedefi geleneksel Osmanlı-Fransız itilâfındaki krizi çözmektir. Her ne kadar bu diplomatik misyonun ardındaki fikir açıksa da, aynı şeyi Süleyman Ağa'nın rolü için söylememiz mümkün değildir. Fransızlar bir büyükelçi beklemekte ve büyükelçi karşılımları için gerekli hazırlıkları yapmış bulunmaktadır; oysa Osmanlı elçisinin statüsü çok daha kısıtlıdır. Bu makale, Osmanlı ve Fransız diplomatik protokolünün karşı karşıya gelmesiyle ortaya çıkan sorunları ve Fransız hükümetinin bu sorunları nasıl çözdüğünü araştırmaktadır. Onyedinci yüzyıl Osmanlı-Avrupa diplomasisinde uygulamada çıkan zorlukların büyük bir kısmını yansıtmakla beraber, elimizdeki vak'a aynı zamanda Fransız ve Osmanlı hükümetlerinin yüksek siyasi çıkarlar adına makul ve pragmatik kalabildiklerinin altını çizmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı – Fransız İlişkileri, Süleyman Ağa, diplomasi, tercümanlar.

In June 1669, the Ottoman Imperial Chancery drew up a letter from Mehmed IV addressed to Louis XIV, announcing the despatch of the first Ottoman diplomatic mission to France in half a century:

'We send to you one of our confidants; he is the most capable and the most esteemed among our servants: Süleyman, the exemplar of illustrious and glorious personages [...] May his glory be augmented with our powerful and magnificent letter on the part of our High, Royal and Sublime Porte.'¹

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1 The letter exists in translation in the French foreign affairs archives; the original Ottoman Turkish document appears not to have survived. Archive des Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Politique Turquie 9, f.327: Mehmed IV to Louis XIV (June 1669).

The 'confidant' in question arrived in Paris in November of that year, tasked with the delivery of the sultan's letter to the king. The mission did not go smoothly, and was marked by a series of misunderstandings culminating in an awkward audience with Louis XIV, which was widely regarded as a fiasco. But the negative aspects of the episode should not be overstated, as the circumstances behind this encounter reveal much about this neglected and misunderstood period in Franco-Ottoman relations, as well as developments in Ottoman-European diplomacy more generally.

During the seventeenth century, the Ottomans did not follow the example of Europeans and refused to establish permanent embassies abroad. This was partly due to the Ottoman worldview, which put Istanbul at the center of the world, with the sultan as king of kings at the highest position in the hierarchy of world's rulers. The Ottoman bureaucracy was underdeveloped as a result. While European states developed rules and protocols of diplomacy and trained diplomats to be sent abroad, the Ottoman approach was usually to delegate the responsibility for international missions to palace officials such as *çavuş* and *müteferrikas*. These figures generally had little knowledge of the finely calibrated rules of European diplomacy.²

While this presented difficulties to contemporaries, it also poses significant problems for historians. One of the main challenges of writing the history of Ottoman-European diplomatic encounters is the lack of Ottoman documents; this is particularly problematic for missions such as this one. Before the second half of the seventeenth century, sultans' envoys were debriefed orally after their return to Istanbul.³ While later Ottoman delegations composed *sefâretnâme* (written reports on delegations abroad) no such document exists for Süleyman Ağa's 1669 mission.⁴ This may be because it was perceived as being relatively insignificant, and no report was therefore commissioned: after all, Süleyman was only supposed to deliver a message to the king and return immediately afterwards.

2 A shift in this approach appeared towards the end of the seventeenth century: Rifa'at A. Abou-El-Haj, 'Ottoman Diplomacy at Karlowitz', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87 (1967), 498-512.

3 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire* (London, 2014), 7.

4 Faik Reşit Unat, *Osmanlı Sefirleri ve Sefâretnâmeleri*, ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal (2nd edn., Ankara, 1987). There is a brief mention Süleyman Ağa's mission and a French depictions of his visit: 18 and passim. The first *sefâretnâme* was written only a few years earlier, in 1666, by Kara Mehmed Pasha following his embassy to Vienna shortly after the Treaty of Vasvar (1665). *Ibid.*, 47-48.

The lack of Ottoman documents mean that we have to rely instead on the European, and in this case French, sources.⁵ Süleyman Ağa's mission to France generated significant interest at the French court and in society more generally: this has left not only a number of detailed memoranda in the French foreign affairs archives which describe what happened; there are also memoirs of several of those present, the correspondence of other ambassadors who were present, and French newspaper accounts. Of course, each of these present their own problems to historians: for example the official record of ceremonial events was often manipulated for political ends and cannot be relied upon to give a true picture of what occurred.⁶ Up to now Süleyman Ağa's mission to France has mainly been studied from the perspective of its cultural impact on the Parisian elites. Not since the late nineteenth century has the mission been studied from a diplomatic angle; works of that period are often marked by islamophobia: the French historian Albert Vandal, for example, described Süleyman's dominant characteristics as, 'religious fanaticism, fiery pride... and above all, mistrust of infidels'; his prayer rituals meanwhile were a 'complicated pantomime'.⁷ As a result of both historical neglect and scant evidence, therefore, little is known about Süleyman Ağa or those who travelled with him.

These difficulties are offset to some extent by recent developments in historical method, which have revealed how fruitful the study of such encounters can be if we use existing sources in new ways. The history of international relations has become more concerned of late with individuals and organizations involved in shaping foreign policy, as well as an interest in incorporating the perspectives of two or more governments into one and the same study.⁸ Newer approaches also highlight the importance of mediators between the two polities (for example interpreters and dragomans). This article therefore aims to provide more information on these aspects of Süleyman Ağa's mission.

The arrival in late 1669 of an official Ottoman delegation was an unusual occasion – while the Ottomans had sent several such envoys to the French court

5 As Ethem Eldem put it, 'documents composed by Frenchmen or other non-Ottomans may provide vital information on Ottoman subjects who came to France': Ethem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1999), 61.

6 See for instance Giora Sternberg, *Status interaction at the court of Louis XIV* (Oxford, 2014)

7 Albert Vandal, ed., *L'Odyssée d'un ambassadeur: Les voyages du marquis de Nointel (1670-1680)* (Paris, 1900), 23, 27.

8 Faroqi, *Travel and Artisans*, 3-4.

during the sixteenth century, the last one had arrived in 1618, reflecting the waning of the Franco-Ottoman entente under the Cardinal Ministers.⁹ By the time Louis XIV assumed personal control of his government in 1661, the two former allies appeared to be on a collision course. The Bourbon monarchy in France had a heightened sense of its status in Europe at this time; as such the king was determined to get recognition of his equal standing from the sultan. The French kings had long claimed this parity, insisting in diplomatic correspondence with the Ottomans on the use of term *empereur* (or *padişah*) to refer to the king, rather than *roi* (or *kral*). Up to this point, however only the Holy Roman emperors had been granted imperial recognition by the sultan.¹⁰ The resurgent Ottoman Empire during the early Köprülü era, meanwhile, was not characterised by a willingness to compromise with or adapt to European practices, and the Porte continued to employ a so-called 'unilateral' approach to diplomacy.¹¹

The 1660s was a particularly troubled period in Franco-Ottoman relations. The decade witnessed—for the first time in nearly 300 years—the armies of the king of France and the Ottoman sultan facing each other in battle. This happened at Saint Gotthard in Hungary in 1664. Just prior to this was an amphibious expedition against Algiers at Djijelli, where the French tried to establish a North African military outpost. And later on in the decade the French sent two separate expeditions to Crete to help the Venetians. These military encounters were accompanied by a related upsurge in turkophobic or 'crusading' sentiment, spurred on by government propaganda.¹²

Unsurprisingly, this resulted in a period of tension in the diplomatic sphere. The French ambassador Jean de La Haye had been imprisoned in Istanbul in 1658, on charges of spying for the Venetians, and Louis XIV did not send a replacement

9 Gérard Poumarède, 'Les envoyés ottomans a la cour de France: une présence controversée' in Lucien Bely, ed., *Turcs et turqueries (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 2009), 63-95. The Venetian archives suggest that unofficial representatives may have visited France in the intervening period: according to Maria Pedani, 'in 1652 an interpreter and a janissary reached Venice and then proceeded to France'. Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, 'A seventeenth century Muslim Traveller in Paris', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 13 (1995), 227-36 at 229.

10 This had been granted by the Treaty of Zsitvatorok of 1606. Gustav Bayerle, 'The Compromise at Zsitvatorok', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980), 5-53.

11 George R. Berridge, 'Diplomatic Integration with Europe before Selim III' in Yurdusev, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 114-130.

12 Phil McCluskey, "'Les ennemis du nom chrestien": Echoes of the crusade in Louis XIV's France', *French History* 29 (2015), 46-61.

until 1665: pointedly, Louis chose La Haye's son, Denis, for the role. Furthermore the commercial situation in the Levant turned decisively against French interests in the later 1660s. The Ottoman authorities frequently requisitioned the ships of French merchants to carry men and munitions to Crete. Often these vessels were then intercepted and seized by the Maltese corsairs, who preyed on Ottoman shipping. In February 1668 the Porte demanded compensation from the French ambassador for the lost cargoes on the grounds that many of the Knights of Malta were in fact French, telling the ambassador that: 'the French are worse enemies than our enemies' and 'the French are all corsairs'.¹³

During the summer of 1668, the Porte ordered restitutions from the French for losses caused by the Maltese corsairs, threatening to put the French consul in Izmir, his dragomans, merchants and the owners of French vessels into prison.¹⁴ In protest, Louis XIV recalled his ambassador.¹⁵ By this stage Louis had probably lost confidence in La Haye anyway; in his *mémoires* he explained that the grand vizier's personal enmity towards La Haye had proved the main impediment to improving relations with the Ottomans.¹⁶ The king also revealed later that year that he decided 'to recall his ambassador from the Porte in order to make them afraid of what his intentions might be'.¹⁷ Yet the Ottomans remained firm, and continued to use the issue of the Maltese corsairs to block any talk of new capitulations (these had not been renewed since 1604).¹⁸ By the spring of 1669, the French felt they had to intensify the pressure, and the king sent a fleet of four warships to Istanbul to collect his ambassador, and also to display French naval prowess to the Porte.¹⁹

13 AAE CP Turquie 9, f.37: La Haye to Lionne (18 May 1668).

14 AAE CP Turquie 9, f.49: La Haye to Lionne (18 July 1668).

15 AAE CP Turquie 9, f.69: Louis XIV to La Haye (5 August 1668).

16 Louis XIV, *Mémoires for the Instruction of the Dauphin*, ed. Paul Sonnino (London, 1970), 183-6.

17 'Mémoire pour servir d'instruction au Sieur Président de Saint-André s'en allant ambassadeur ordinaire à Venise (1668)', in *Recueil des Instructions données aux Ambassadeurs et Ministres de France*, vol. XXVI: *Venise*, ed. Pierre Duparc (Paris, 1958), 60.

18 AAE CP Turquie 9, f.153: La Haye to Lionne, (April 1669). In theory the capitulations were renewable at the accession of every new sultan, but this had lapsed after 1604. Géraud Poumarède, 'Négocier près de la Sublime Porte, Jalons pour une nouvelle histoire des capitulations franco-ottomanes' in Lucien Bely, ed., *L'Invention de la diplomatie* (Paris, 1998), 71-85.

19 Archives Nationales de France, Archives de la Marine, B²8, f.34: Louis XIV to d'Almeras (15 April 1669). This was on the advice of La Haye: Archives Nationales de France, Archives Etrangères B1 376 f.19, 'Memoire de M. l'ambassadeur de Constantinople sur la decadence de commerce du Levant et des raisons et moyens d'y remédier' (March 1669); f.22, La Haye to Colbert (9 April 1669).

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It was in this tense atmosphere, in April 1669, that the sultan summoned La Haye to his hunting lodge at Larissa. Audiences between Ottoman sultans and foreign ambassadors were rare events; many ambassadors would only meet the sultan once during their term of office. It appeared, therefore, that the Porte's stance was shifting. The absence of the grand vizier on Crete (he was personally directing the siege of Candia) may have worked in France's favour in this respect: Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed's personal dislike of Denis de la Haye was well known. Negotiations were handled instead between La Haye and the kaymakam (Kara Mustafa Pasha). It became clear that the Porte was still not prepared to renew the French capitulations; yet nor did they wish to see a full breakdown in relations. Instead they reached a compromise whereby the sultan would choose 'une personne considérable' from among his officials to deliver a letter to Louis XIV to assure the king of his friendship and to request the assurance of his.²⁰ The French warships anchored in Istanbul would escort the Ottoman envoy to France. La Haye, meanwhile, would be required to remain in post, and the Porte made it clear that they would await the prompt return of the messenger before making any decision on the capitulations.²¹

This idea may have been La Haye's originally, and had been discussed in his correspondence as early as June 1668.²² The Ottomans did occasionally send out such envoys for various reasons, one of which was the continuance of peaceful and friendly relations.²³ As a gesture of goodwill it was not out of keeping with Ottoman policy to France up to that point. The Ottomans were well aware of the double politics of Louis XIV, as is clear from the ambassador's reports.²⁴ However, self-interest seems to have been sufficient motivation for them to preserve the long-standing accord with France.²⁵ This would explain the relative clemency of

20 AAE CP Turquie Supplement 7 f.318, La Haye to Lionne, (9 April 1669).

21 Ibid.; AN AE B1 376 f.37, La Haye to Colbert (12 June 1669).

22 AAE CP Turquie 9, f.43: La Haye to Lionne, 10 June 1668. Rumours circulated (probably originating from Provençal merchants in the Levant) that La Haye was personally bankrolling Süleyman to the tune of 3,000 *écus*. AAE CP Turquie Supplément 7 f.348, Matharel to Matharel (30 June 1669).

23 Bülent Arı, 'Early Ottoman Diplomacy: Ad Hoc Period' in A. Nuri Yurdusev, ed., *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (Basingstoke, 2004), 36-65 at 48.

24 AN AE B1 376 f.19, 'Memoire de M. l'ambassadeur de Constantinople sur la decadence de commerce du Levant et des raisons et moyens d'y remédier' (March 1669); f.30, La Haye to Colbert (April 1669).

25 Kenneth Setton, *Venice, Austria and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA, 1991), 223.

the Porte in the 1660s in spite of France's duplicitous behaviour. French merchants and shipping were by this stage crucial to the Ottoman economy and the movement of goods within the Empire.²⁶ Whereas the sixteenth century alliance between France and the Ottomans had been based on shared geopolitical concerns, the new relationship which developed from the late seventeenth century and which went on to flourish through the eighteenth century was far more commercially and economically-driven.

The mission was clearly ad hoc and hastily arranged. As the commander of the French fleet had orders to set sail by mid-June, this left little time for the Ottomans to prepare either the messenger or his entourage – his suite only numbered between twenty and thirty, and he had little in the way of baggage (this should be compared to the Ottoman delegation to Vienna in 1665/6, which numbered nearly 300).²⁷ The choice of envoy also seems to have been a very last-minute decision. It was thought that the kaymakam had been in favour of sending either Mehmet Ferenc Bey, a Greek renegade, or the kapıcıbaşı, with a larger delegation.²⁸ However it appears that shortly before the fleet was due to leave, an instruction from the grand vizier arrived, insisting on a simpler mission to deliver the sultan's letter.

Ultimately the choice fell upon a man by the name of Süleyman Ağa. Little is certain about his identity, though the honorific *Ağa* ('master' or 'elder') was a title given to senior officers in the military and in the Topkapi Palace.²⁹ Fortunately, however, the comte de Matharel, a senior officer on board the French vessel on which Süleyman Ağa was escorted to France, wrote a long letter to a relative, providing important information on the envoy's background and characteristics. He was Bosnian; he was from the *bostancı*³⁰ of the Topkapi Palace, and his role

26 Archives Nationales de France, Archives de la Marine B7205, f.72, 92, Arvieux to Colbert (1669).

27 AAE B1 376 f.37-42, La Haye to Colbert, 12 June 1669; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits Françaises 14118, 'Relation de ce qui s'est passé a la réception de Soliman Aga Mustapharaca envoyé par Sultan Mahomet Han Empereur des Turcs en 1669'; Ekkehard Eickhoff, *Venedig, Wien und die Osmanen: Umbruch in Südosteuropa 1645–1700* (Munich, 1970), 222-27; Karl Teplý, 'Evliyâ Çelebi in Wien', *Der Islam* 52 (1975), 125-131, at 127.

28 AAE CP Turquie Supplément 7 f.340, Matharel to Matharel (30 June 1669); Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires du chevalier d'Arvieux, envoyé extraordinaire du Roy à la Porte*, ed. by Jean-Baptiste Labat, 6 vols (Paris, 1735), IV, 124.

29 Gustav Bayerle, *Pashas, Begs, and Effendis: A historical dictionary of titles and terms in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul, 1997), 2.

30 Literally, 'gardener'. The *bostancı* were initially recruited via the *devşirme* system, forming a

was currently *müteferrika* (meaning 'miscellaneous [duties]'). As such he was a member of the elite mounted personal escort of the sultan, who accompanied him everywhere, cleaned his room, and made his bed; these individuals received orders only from the sultan who often used them for special missions.³¹ Matharel added that Süleyman Ağa passed commands between the sultan and the grand vizier, which suggests that he may have held the position of *vezir karakulağı*, one of the *Bostancı-Haseki* who delivered correspondence between sultan and grand vizier.³² He may have held another senior palace position: accounts of Süleyman's physical appearance describe him as bearded; according to Gustav Bayerle the only palace official permitted to grow a beard was the *Bostancıbaşı* (the commander of *bostancı* corps), a particularly close aide of the sultan.³³

Matharel described Süleyman as aged around 50; he was strong, wise and highly esteemed. This reflects the fact that the Porte placed much emphasis on personality in its selection of envoys.³⁴ Matharel added that the envoy was 'sage, honest, and very civil', which he thought was contrary to the custom of the Turks, 'who are almost all brusque, boorish, uncivil and crude – even those who hold high rank at the Porte'.³⁵ The letter even described a mealtime, where the envoy and his entourage 'ate on the floor cross legged, eating with very bad manners, extraordinarily quickly and without saying anything; and without drinking anything throughout meal.' This kind of information offers an important insight into French perceptions of Ottomans at this time, when face-to-face encounters was still very rare. What is striking is the relative objectivity of the report, compared to the negative descriptions which characterized 'official' French descriptions of Süleyman after he arrived in France.

Having been treated with honours aboard the French vessel, the fleet arrived at Toulon on 4 August. Süleyman Ağa stayed there at the *Hôtel de ville* until the arrival of the sieur Giberti, one of Louis XIV's *gentilshommes ordinaires*, who then escorted him to Paris. The order was given 'to receive and defray him in

training pool of the Janissary corps while performing manual labor in the imperial gardens, as well as other tasks in the palace. Bayerle, *Pashas, Beks, and Effendis*, 1, 23.

31 Ibid., 45, 116

32 Ibid., 23; AAE CP Turquie Supplément 7 f.341, Matharel to Matharel (30 June 1669).

33 Bayerle, *Pashas, Beks, and Effendis*, 23.

34 Ari, 'Early Ottoman Diplomacy: Ad Hoc Period', 48.

35 AAE CP Turquie Supplément 7 f.341, Matharel to Matharel (30 June 1669).

towns along route according to his dignity'.³⁶ However what that 'dignity' was remained uncertain. The French fixated in particular on whether Süleyman held the title *elçi*, which they (incorrectly) believed meant ambassador.³⁷ In fact, in keeping with Ottoman practice, Süleyman Ağa was not an ambassador, but a messenger tasked simply to deliver the sultan's letter, which evoked the ancient alliance between the two powers and requested the reason for the recall of the French ambassador. Unlike European diplomats, Süleyman did not carry a letter of credence, and refused to show the sultan's letter to anyone but the king. This made it very difficult to ascertain his status. In an attempt to clarify matters, the Parlement of Provence investigated. A cross-examination of Georges Fontana, the second dragoman of the French embassy in Istanbul who had accompanied Süleyman from Larissa, appeared (rather confusingly) to confirm that he was indeed an ambassador.³⁸

Having mis-identified Süleyman's status, the French accorded him municipal ceremonial receptions as he proceeded towards Paris via Marseille, Aix, Lyon and Fontainebleau. Almost immediately problems of protocol emerged. One report from Marseille complained that in his 'arrogance' he neglected to get off his horse when he was received by the *échevins* of the city.³⁹ Such cultural misunderstandings reflected the inadequacies of the mission. Süleyman had no knowledge of France and its customs and would have relied on the Greek dragoman Fontana for information; yet Fontana's own knowledge of France was probably limited to his experience at the embassy in Istanbul. Furthermore Fontana's Turkish language skills have been placed in doubt from a number of quarters.⁴⁰ What happened in Marseille provided a foretaste of what was to come in the capital. During his visit to the French court in November and December of 1669, inadequacies on both sides became increasingly apparent.

36 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits Françaises 14118 f. 85, 'Relation de ce qui s'est passé a la reception de Soliman Aga Mustapharaca envoyé par Sultan Mahomet Han Empereur des Turcs en 1669'.

37 The word referred to foreign envoys generally: Bayerle, *Pashas, Begs and Effendis*, 45.

38 Fontana is not to be confused with the Fonton family, originally from Drôme, who provided a long line of interpreters to the French embassy in Istanbul. Marie de Testa and Antoine Gautier, *Drogmans et diplomates européens auprès de la porte Ottomane* (Istanbul, 2003), 163, 258

39 AAE CP Turquie 9, f.188: Monsieur de Meaux to Lionne (1 October 1669).

40 Mary Hossain, 'The Training of Interpreters in Arabic and Turkish under Louis XIV: The Ottoman Empire 1', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 15 (1993), 282.

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For the French government, there remained some uncertainty over Süleyman Ağa's rank. Many seemed to believe that Süleyman was an ambassador, including the court poet Jean de La Fontaine, who penned the following in July in anticipation of his arrival,

Nous attendons du Grand-Seigneur
Un bel et bon ambassadeur:
Il vient avec une grande cohorte;
Le nôtre est flatté par la Porte.
Tout ceci la paix nous promet,
Entre Saint-Marc et Mahomet.⁴¹

It would cause significant embarrassment if, when the sultan's letter was finally opened before the king, he turned out not to be an ambassador after all. In order to shed further light on his status, the French foreign minister Hugues de Lionne gave Süleyman two preliminary audiences at his estate at Suresnes outside of Paris in November. This was in line with Ottoman ceremonial, where the French ambassador would be received by the grand vizier on arrival in Istanbul, rather than by the sultan. The intention to imitate Ottoman practice reflects Louis XIV's desire to achieve official equal standing with the sultan. To underline this, Lionne's audience constituted a deliberate imitation of the Ottoman court, with an attempt to recreate the *divan* of the grand vizier - a role played by Lionne. Coffee and sorbets were even served after the meeting, following the practice of the Porte. No doubt aware of the ambiguity with which these proceedings could be reported to the reading public in France and abroad, the French government issued official accounts which stressed that Lionne had lectured the envoy on the advantages of the French absolutist system.⁴²

The main eye-witness account of the two Suresnes audiences comes from Laurent d'Arvieux, a Marseillais former merchant who had travelled extensively throughout the Levant and spoke fluent Turkish. According to Arvieux, he was there at the invitation of Lionne and provided the information upon which the

41 Jean de La Fontaine, 'A Son Altesse Sérénissime Madame la Princesse de Bavière' (July 1669) in *Œuvres complètes de Jean de La Fontaine*, ed. Charles Athanase Walckenaer (Paris, 1835), 537.

42 *La Gazette* 139 (23 November 1669), 'Relation de l'audience donnée par le Sieur de Lionne, à Soliman Musta-Féragea, Envoyé au Roi, par l'Empereur des Turcs, le Mardi 19 Novembre 1669, à Suresnes', 1125-1128.

audiences were organized. His account must be treated critically, however, as he clearly intended to highlight his own importance in proceedings and advance his career (he wished to be appointed as the new French resident in Istanbul). He also seems to have personally disliked Süleyman, describing him as having a ‘disagreeable physiognomy’ and being ‘too melancholic’;⁴³ furthermore he had already set out his advice to Lionne that Süleyman’s supposed ‘insolences’ (such as had happened in Marseille) should not go unpunished.

In his memoirs, Arvieux highlights Lionne’s apparent desire to belittle Süleyman first by making him wait several hours and then through seating (he was made to sit on a stool just beyond the rim of a carpet).⁴⁴ This may have been another attempt to mirror Ottoman practice. Ottoman receptions of foreign diplomats in Istanbul were calculated to deliberately belittle them: Edhem Eldem has called this ‘degrading hospitality’, as the reception of foreign envoys became an occasion to enact the Ottoman sultan’s claim of superiority, by establishing a delicate balance between magnanimous hospitality and scornful disdain. The clearest sense of this was in the way in which the envoy entered the audience chamber: two officials of the palace held his arms and forced him to the ground in prostration before the sultan.⁴⁵

Arvieux also highlights the deficiencies of the official court interpreters (another role he coveted for himself). The interpreter on the French side was François Petis de la Croix, *Secrétaire Interprète du Roi pour les langues Turquesque et Arabesque*, who was an accomplished scholar but who had never been to the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁶ As one of a group of scholars meeting at the *Bibliothèque du Roi*, he had, at Colbert’s request, compiled a Turkish Dictionary and catalogued Arabic and Turkish books for the library. However Arvieux describes him as completely lost without his dictionaries and, in the first interview between Süleyman Ağa and Lionne, ‘all he could do was babble, so the envoy could understand nothing

43 Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV, 125.

44 Ibid., 133–35.

45 Edhem Eldem, ‘Foreigners on the threshold of felicity: the reception of foreigners in Ottoman Istanbul’ in Donatella Calabi and Stephen Turk Christensen, eds., *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe. Volume 2. Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700* (Cambridge, 2013), 114–131 at 119–20.

46 Paul Sebag, ‘Sur deux orientalistes français du XVIIe siècle: F. Petis de la Croix et le sieur de la Croix’, *Revue de l’Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 25 (1978), 89–117.

of what he said'.⁴⁷ He had to be rescued by Arvieux and Fontana.⁴⁸ At the second Ottoman-style audience on 19 November Arvieux took over as chief interpreter, Petis de la Croix apparently being told to remain in the background. Arvieux was also critical of the dragoman Fontana, claiming that he was not to be trusted as he was in the pay of Ambassador La Haye.⁴⁹ That very same month, the twin problems of the competence and reliability of Turkish interpreters was addressed directly by Jean-Baptiste Colbert: on 18 November 1669, the *Conseil royal de commerce* issued an edict creating the *Ecole des jeunes de langues*: six boys were sent to the French Capuchin monasteries in Istanbul and Izmir to study Turkish, with a view to eventually supplying reliable French interpreters.⁵⁰

At the subsequent audience with the king at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 5 December, Fontana represented Süleyman Ağa and Arvieux Louis XIV. It was apparent by this stage, however, that Süleyman did not carry the credentials of an ambassador. In spite of this, the status-obsessed French court was determined to capitalize on the prestige associated with the reception of an Ottoman envoy. The royal audience included a very deliberate display of French military might – the palace was surrounded by the French and Swiss Guards, musketeers and gendarmes. Inside, Louis XIV was dressed in a golden costume studded with diamonds and adorned with plumage (perhaps designed to approximate the sultan's own clothing).⁵¹ This extravagant show of opulence organised by Louis XIV jarred with the simplicity of Süleyman Ağa's status and function. It was designed above all to impress upon him the power and wealth of the king of France.

That the French were determined to emphasise the king's equality with the sultan is shown by what happened next. When it came to the moment where Süleyman Ağa was to present the sultan's letter to the king, he stepped forward, and waited, apparently expecting Louis to rise to receive it.⁵² Louis, having been told that the sultan remained seated when he presented the letter to La Haye in

47 Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV, 136-7.

48 AN AE B1 376 f.40, La Haye to Colbert (12 June 1669).

49 Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV, 131

50 Hossain, 'The Training of Interpreters', 283-4; Testa and Gautier, *Drogmans et diplomats* 30-31, 43-48.

51 Adile Ayda, 'Molière et l'envoyé de la Sublime Porte', *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises*, 9 (1957), 103-116 at 112.

52 BNF Ms. Fr. 14118 f.85 'Relation de ce qui s'est passé à la reception de Soliman Ağa Mustapharaca envoyé par Sultan Mahomet Han Empereur des Turcs en 1669'.

Larissa, refused to do so. The French sources state how Süleyman then ‘withdrew brusquely, murmuring with clenched teeth, with signs of anger’. As the superscription to the sultan’s letter was being read out by the interpreter, Süleyman descended from the steps of throne; he bowed, then shook his head and reportedly said loudly in Turkish that the sultan would not be satisfied by the manner in which Louis received the letter.⁵³ His displeasure is perhaps understandable: his role, after all, was to uphold the status of his sovereign at all costs.⁵⁴ According to Arvieux, Süleyman also expressed his displeasure that the king had not presented him with the gift of a kaftan, as was practiced at the Porte (although he himself had brought no gifts for the king).⁵⁵ The papal nuncio reported that the king and the envoy ‘showed little signs of being pleased with one another’ and the audience seems to have been brought to a swift end.⁵⁶

Following the audience at Saint-Germain, Süleyman Ağa remained in Paris, lodged at the Hôtel de Venise for several months. Contrary to the strict instructions from the Porte that he return immediately after delivering the letter, Süleyman’s requests for leave to return home were refused. The pretext given was that the French wished to spare him a long journey during the rigors of winter,⁵⁷ but the royal council was divided and playing for time to consider its next move.⁵⁸ The Porte’s anxiety about Süleyman’s whereabouts is clear from the dispatches of La Haye: on numerous occasions the kaymakam asked him for news about Süleyman Ağa and the reasons for the delay in his return; La Haye always responded that he had no information.⁵⁹ According to several accounts, Süleyman appears to have been kept under surveillance during this period and his contact with other Ottoman subjects in Paris was strictly proscribed;⁶⁰ this was presumably to stop

53 Ibid.

54 This appears to have been the main priority of Ottoman emissaries in this period, as noted by Faroqhi in respect to Kara Mehmed Pasha’s mission to Vienna in 1665: Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans*, 6.

55 Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV, 183.

56 Pietro Bargellini, quoted in Poumarède, ‘Les envoyés ottomans’, 89.

57 Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV, 201.

58 Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce Francais dans le Levant au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1893), 211-12.

59 AN AE B1 376, f.47-50 La Haye to Colbert (15 Jan 1670); f.81-2 La Haye to Colbert (24 May 1670); f.90-91 La Haye to Colbert (15 June 1670); f.96. La Haye to Colbert (8 July 1670); f.108 La Haye to Colbert (16 Aug 1670).

60 Arvieux mentions that it was necessary to stop several ‘Turks’ dressed in French fashion from visiting him, ‘for fear of the information they may have provided him with’. Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV 154-5; Vandal, *L’Odyssée d’un ambassadeur*, 30.

him becoming a point of refuge for fugitive Muslim galley slaves. Given Süleyman's inability to speak French, his contact with other Parisians seems to have been limited, the dragoman Fontana being the only possible point of contact. No evidence of his activities during this period appears to have survived.

Finally, in May 1670, the French government resolved to dispatch a new ambassador to Istanbul to replace La Haye. Süleyman had his final audience with Lionne that month, during which he received letters to be presented to the sultan and the kaymakam. In the weeks following, reciprocal visits were arranged between Süleyman and the new ambassador to the Porte, the marquis de Nointel. During his visit to the latter, 'a great number of Ladies, and persons of quality' were present, highlighting the public interest in Süleyman.⁶¹ Finally leaving Paris in mid-July, he was escorted to Toulon by Giberti, where he embarked with Nointel. In contrast to his journey the previous year, he was not received officially in any towns along the way. Furthermore his journey did not include a stop at Marseille, as the authorities were supposedly concerned that this might agitate the Muslim galley slaves there.⁶² At Toulon, however, Nointel was instructed by the king to make a point of showing Süleyman the naval forces in the port, so that he might report this to the sultan.⁶³ The king did not give him leaving gifts, since he had brought none;⁶⁴ however the newly constituted *Compagnie du Levant* did present him with gifts including a watch, some brocade and some cloth.⁶⁵

Süleyman Ağa and Nointel arrived in Istanbul in late October 1670, nearly a year after his audiences in Paris.⁶⁶ Before they were separated Nointel impressed upon Süleyman the importance of their remaining friends, and that he tell the sultan of 'the merits, and sovereign power of His Majesty at sea, on land, and the

61 *La Gazette*, 66 (31 May 1670), 528.

62 Arvieux, *Mémoires*, IV 156.

63 AAE CP Turquie 4 19, Louis XIV to Nointel (12 June 1670); AE B1 376 109, Nointel to Colbert (19 August 1670).

64 'Mémoire du Roy pour servir d'instruction au Sieur de Nointel allant ambassadeur à Constantinople' in *Recueil des Instructions données aux Ambassadeurs et Ministres de France*, vol. XXIX: *Turquie*, ed. Pierre Duparc (Paris, 1969), 50-66 at 53.

65 BNF Ms. Fr. 14118 79, 'Relation de ce qui s'est passé à la réception de Soliman Ağa Mustapharaca envoyé par Sultan Mahomet Han Empereur des Turcs en 1669'; Jean Rousset de Missy, *Le cérémonial diplomatique des cours de l'Europe* (Amsterdam and The Hague, 1739), 101.

66 AN AE B1 376 115, La Haye to Colbert (30 October 1670); 122, Nointel to Colbert (6 November 1670).

beauty, magnificence and populousness of his empire'.⁶⁷ From Nointel's dispatches, we know that Süleyman debriefed the sultan and grand vizier on his return, and that he and his entourage cast France in a positive light.⁶⁸ Furthermore at subsequent diplomatic audiences Süleyman Ağa was present and gave the ambassador 'the warmest welcome possible'.⁶⁹ Whether he had any further agency in the negotiations for the renewal of the capitulations in June 1673 remains unclear.

On one level, Süleyman Ağa's mission to France and his reception by the French court was clearly not a successful encounter. The mismatch between the expectations of the messenger and his hosts was simply too great. Yet the episode does nevertheless demonstrate several important aspects of the Franco-Ottoman relationship. Despite all of its shortcomings, it reveals the desire of both the French and the Ottoman governments to save their old friendship before it was irredeemably lost. Admittedly, each side was concerned with maintaining or enhancing their own status as far as possible, often at the other's cost. Yet it is possible also to detect a willingness to accommodate each other. Instead of forcing Süleyman to conform to French practice, Louis XIV and Lionne decided to mirror Ottoman practice, albeit based on partial knowledge and approximation. Furthermore, Ottoman diplomacy may have been less 'unilateral' than previously appreciated: Süleyman's mission consisted ostensibly of one task, which was to deliver the sultan's letter to the king. Yet the fact that the French foreign ministry archives also hold a letter from the kaymakam Kara Mustafa Pasha to Lionne suggests that there was some willingness to negotiate; Suraiya Faroqhi has noted that this was also practiced in Ottoman diplomacy with Venice.⁷⁰

The episode also reveals some of the broader problems of Ottoman diplomacy at European courts in the second half of the seventeenth century. The low-key diplomatic practice of the Ottoman envoys which had worked reasonably well in a functional way in the sixteenth century was now largely incompatible with the culture of diplomatic practice in the second half of the seventeenth century, which was increasingly elaborate. No further Ottoman envoys were sent to France during the reign of Louis XIV, suggesting that neither side felt they had much to gain from another such mission. Yet as is well known, the weakening of the Ottoman

67 AN AE B1 376 122, Nointel to Colbert (6 November 1670).

68 AN AE B1 376 124, Nointel to Colbert (12 November 1670).

69 AN AE B1 376 128 Nointel to Colbert (30 November 1670).

70 AAE CP Turquie Supplément 7 f.328, Kara Mustafa Pasha to Lionne (June 1669); Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans*, 5.

military position after the failed siege of Vienna in 1683 eventually forced the Ottoman government to adapt to European diplomatic practices.⁷¹ Although they did not have permanent residents in European countries until after 1789, the Sublime Porte began more regularly to send ambassadors with specific missions to Europe after the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699).

The next Ottoman envoy to France would arrive in the politically more relaxed atmosphere of the 1720s. The embassy of Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi of 1720-21, which has been well documented, is regarded as a much more successful encounter and conformed more closely to what the French expected.⁷² Unlike Süleyman Ağa, Mehmed Efendi was learned and experienced in European diplomacy; he held the rank of ambassador, came with a substantial suite, and brought numerous gifts with him. His written report gathered all sorts of information about France and was marked by a sense of curiosity, and openness. Furthermore it has been argued that Mehmed Efendi's report had a significant and lasting impact on Ottoman society.⁷³

In a similar way, despite the apparent diplomatic shortcomings of Süleyman Ağa's mission to France, it did have a deeper impact on a cultural level in France. He is often credited with popularising the practice of drinking coffee,⁷⁴ as well as an interest in Turkish culture more generally (or a heavily mediated version of it). His supposed hubris was also the object of some of the satire in Moliere's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.⁷⁵ An 'orientalised' Ottoman Empire was clearly visible in these representations, as it was in the recreation of the grand vizier's audience at Suresnes. This was a product of the limitations in French knowledge of the Ottoman practices; as well as vice versa. It added a new layer to French society's

71 Ari, 'Early Ottoman Diplomacy', 52.

72 Julia A. Landweber, 'How can one be Turkish? French Responses to Two Ottoman Embassies' in Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, ed., *Europa und die Türkei im 18. Jahrhundert = Europe and Turkey in the 18th century* (Bonn, 2011), 403-16.

73 Fatma Müge Göçek, *East encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century* (New York, 1987); Mehmed Efendi, *Le paradis des infidèles: Relation de Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed efendi, ambassadeur en France sous la Régence, Traduit de l'ottoman par Julien-Claude Galland*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris, 1981).

74 Emma C. Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment: Food and the Sciences in Paris* (Chicago, 2012), 55.

75 Ayda, 'Moliere et l'envoyé de la Sublime Porte'; Darren Hodson, 'A Would-Be Turk: Louis XIV in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 32 (2010), 90-101; Mary Hossain, 'The chevalier d'Arvieux and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 12 (1990), 76-88.

already complex perspectives on the Ottoman world, a layer which would last for a long time to come.

On several levels, then, the 'encounter' associated with this particular mission had implications well beyond its original diplomatic goals. Even without Ottoman source material, we can still learn much from looking at this mission and the European sources generated by it: reading between the lines of French sources can reveal much about lower-level encounters between Christian Europeans and Muslim Ottomans such as that between the Matharel and Süleyman. Furthermore, behind the rhetoric from both sides, what emerges could be regarded as a precursor to Ottoman bilateral engagement with France, and is therefore a crucial step in the development of Ottoman diplomatic engagement with Europe more generally.

An Ottoman envoy in Paris: Süleyman Ağa's mission to the court of Louis XIV, 1669
 Abstract ■ In 1669, Sultan Mehmed IV dispatched Süleyman Ağa as emissary to King Louis XIV of France. Coming at the end of a decade which saw a series of military confrontations between France and the Ottoman Empire, the mission was an attempt to resolve the crisis in the traditional Franco-Ottoman entente. If the thinking behind this diplomatic mission is reasonably clear, the precise role of Süleyman Ağa was anything but. While the French expected an ambassador and made preparations to receive him accordingly, the Ottoman envoy's status was in fact far more limited. This article investigates the problems encountered as Ottoman and French diplomatic protocol clashed, and the ways in which the French government attempted to resolve these problems. The episode reflects many of the difficulties in conducting Ottoman-European diplomacy in the seventeenth century. But it also underlines the ability of the French and Ottoman governments to remain reasonably pragmatic in the name of higher political imperatives.

Keywords: Franco-Ottoman relations, Süleyman Ağa, diplomacy, interpreters.

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