

French Residents and Ottoman Women in 18th-Century Levant: Personal Relations, Social Control, and Cultural Interchange

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The Early Modern Ottoman Empire hosted hundreds of foreigners. Most of them lived in Constantinople and in other active trade centres, such as Smyrna and Thessaloniki. Among them, more than 700 “official” French residents, including merchants, diplomats, and artisans, formed one of the largest foreign communities up to the middle of the 19th century. Within this context, by focusing on the role of women as intermediaries and catalysts of intercommunity contacts and connections, this essay aims to show the extent to which long-term permanence in the Levant fostered personal relations between French and Ottoman inhabitants.

The chapter assumes that prolonged contiguity naturally led to personal relationships and that segregation imposed on communities, together with differences in culture and habits, could only restrain, but not prevent, such contacts. These, in turn, naturally implied material and immaterial exchanges. The acquisition of goods and items arriving both from Europe and the Empire, the experience of different customs, traditions, culinary habits, and the diffusion of new fashions and tastes became a characteristic of daily life in the *Echelles du Levant*, as the French named their *comptoirs* in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, personal relationships helped to build social networks, which constituted an ever more effective channel both for business and for conveying new cultural references and identities. In this context, women played a pivotal role, having more direct and intimate contact with French men as lovers, concubines, or wives.¹

1 Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, *Une société hors de soi: identité et relations sociales à Smyrne aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (Paris: Peters, 2006) p. 376; Id., “Coexistence et langues de contact à Smyrne au XIX^e siècle”, *Arabica*, 54, 4 (2007), 568–85.

The chapter is structured in three parts. The first one drafts a broad image of the French presence in the Ottoman Empire, focusing on the *Echelles du Levant* and the role, occupation, and social position of the French residents. The second part analyzes the nature of the contacts between French men and local women, linking them to intercommunity cultural transfers. In conclusion, it discusses the role of local women in enabling closer links between European and Ottoman subjects and in forging the peculiar character of the multicultural and multinational society characterizing many of the Levant's ports.

Our thesis is that Ottoman women, involved in long-term relations with French men residing in the Levant, ushered in a new society whose culture was remarkably different from that of previous contexts with regards to language, way of life, and consumption habits.² If these effects appeared quite clearly during the 19th century within a process of marked "westernization", which affected primarily the European part of the Ottoman Empire and led to the emergence of mixed social groups, such as the "Levantines",³ their roots are nevertheless to be sought in the long history of the 18th-century European presence in the Levant.⁴ This aspect is all the more interesting, as most literature on the French presence in 18th century Levant focuses on commercial and diplomatic aspects,⁵ or, sporadically, on very specific aspects such as the institution of the *enfants de langue*.⁶ It neglects, in this way, to uncover the extent to which interactions between French men and local women in the 18th century were already a core aspect of the French presence in the Ottoman Mediterranean, building a reality that dialectically contrasted with legal prohibitions. Besides, our primary sources confirm the interpretation that religion, much more than ethnicity, marked, at least until the 19th century a frontier,

2 Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, "La mode vient de Constantinople: les Boyards Roumains entre Orient et Occident (XVIII^e siècle)", *Etudes Balkaniques—Cahier Pierre Belon*, 1, 16 (2009), 109–116.

3 Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Levantiner. Lebenswelten und Identitäten einer ethnokonfessionellen Gruppe in osmanischen Reich im "langen 19. Jahrhundert"*, (München: 2004), 515.

4 Smyrnelis, "Coexistence et Langues de Contact": 568–585; Bruce Masters, "Semi-autonomous Forces in the Balkans and Anatolia", Suraiya Faroqhi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, 3, *The Later Ottoman Empire 1603–1839* (Cambridge: 2006), 186–208.

5 Cf. Gilles Veinstein, *Les Marchants Etrangers dans l'Empire Ottoman. XVI–XVIII siècles*, in Suraiya Faroqhi, Gilles Veinstein, *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* (Paris: 2008), 47–61.

6 Ministère des affaires Etrangère de France, *Enfants de langue et Drogmans*, Catalogue de l'Exposition, Palais de France, Istanbul 25 mai-18 juin 1995 (Istanbul: 1995), 136.

dividing not only Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities,⁷ but also, though to a lesser extent, Catholic and Orthodox ones. Conversion was, in fact, both the main possibility of overcoming otherwise effective barriers, and the most effective way of social integration.

The chapter, along with scientific literature, is based on economic and diplomatic documents, preserved in the *Archives Nationales de Paris*,⁸ which highlight the social dimension of the residents' life.

French Residents in the Ottoman Empire

French diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire have traditionally been relatively intense and productive. However, the presence of French residents in the Levant, including the setting up of tight consular networks, is strictly linked to the 18th-century growing importance of French–Ottoman trade (tab. 2.1).⁹

TABLE 2.1 *Share of the major European States in the Levant Trade*

Year	France	England	Holland	Venice	Austria
1686	15.70	43.40	38.30	2.60	–
1749–50	65.10	15.20	3.40	16.30	–
1776–78	45.10	24.90	14.40	9.60	2.90
1784	36.50	9.20	18.30	12.00	24.00

SOURCE: EDEM EDEM, "CAPITULATIONS AND WESTERN TRADE", SURAIYA FAROQHI (ED.), *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF TURKEY*, 3, THE LATTER OTTOMAN EMPIRE 1603–1839, (CAMBRIDGE: 2006), 327.

7 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Introduction*, in Suraiya Faroqhi, Gilles Veinstein, *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* Paris: 2008), XI–XLII.

8 Archives Nationales de Paris, Paris, France (from now on AN).

9 Elena Frangakis-Syrett, "The Economic Activities of Ottoman and Western Communities in Eighteenth Century Izmir", *Oriente Moderno*, 18 (1999), 11–26; Id., "The Ottoman Port of Izmir in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, 1695–1820", *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, XXXIX/1 (1985), 149–152.

Notwithstanding the relevance of commercial relations, the French community did not consist only of merchants. Along with traders, priests and monks, diplomats, artisans, soldiers, renegades, refugees, and prostitutes,¹⁰ as well as travellers¹¹ voyaged to the Levant. All together, they formed a heterogeneous and complex society made up of legal and illegal residents.¹²

The concept of “legitimate residence” represents an essential aspect which defines the French communities in the Levant and differentiates the typologies and possibilities given to each individual to interact with the local society.¹³

To live legally in the Ottoman Empire, French people had to obtain a passport and authorization to travel, issued by the Chamber of Commerce of Marseille and only valid for a specific place and limited time. Those documents gave their holders not only the right to “emigrate” and to reside in the *Echelles*, but also the qualification of member of the *Nation Française*.¹⁴ Thus, the holders were granted full diplomatic protection, consular support in

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- 10 In the correspondence of Minister de Maurepas with the consuls in the Levant, questions often emerged regarding the relatively vast presence of sometimes undisciplined monks and priests (e.g. AN, B III 1, f. 23; B III 15, f. 383; B III 30, f. 45, 55, 59), of artisans and other French men of “poor condition” (e.g. AN, B III 11/B, f. 189), sailors and soldiers (e.g. AN, B III 1, f. 96; AE B III 11, f. 191; AE, B III 16, f. 85), and of prostitutes (e.g. AN, AE B III 30, f. 71).
- 11 Léon de Laborde, *Voyage en Asie Mineure de Constantinople au Taurus et à la Cote de Cilicie* (Le Blanc: 2013), 285; Jean Otter, *Journal de Voyage en Turquie et en Perse, 1734–44* (Paris: 2010), 215. See also Françoise Cloarec, *Le Temps des Consuls: L’Echelle de Alep sous les Ottomans* (Paris: 2003), 171, and, for the bibliographical references on travellers and travellers’ accounts in the Ottoman Empire, Giulia Calvi, “Corps et Espaces. Les Costumes des Balkans dans l’Europe du XVI^e Siècle”, *L’atelier du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 11 (2013), 1–27.
- 12 Jean-Michel Casa, *Le Palais de France à Istanbul: un demi-millénaire d’Alliance entre la Turquie et la France* (Istanbul: 1995), 113.
- 13 Gilles Veinstein, *Les Marchants Etrangers dans l’Empire Ottoman. XVI^e–XVIII^e Siècles*, in Suraiya Faroqhi, Gilles Veinstein (eds.), *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* (Paris: 2008), 47–61.
- 14 These terms referred to French merchants and *commis*, working as secretaries and interpreters, and living officially in the various Mediterranean ports under the responsibility of the consul or vice-consul. Along with professional traders, the *Nation Française* might have included artisans, missionaries, and the residents’ wives who had been allowed to live in the *Echelles*. Members of the *Nation Française* were therefore identified by the fact that they were French people living officially and regularly in the *Echelles*, and accepting the control and protection of the French diplomatic network. See on this topic Thomas Philipp, “The Trade of Acre in the Eighteenth Century: French Merchants and Local Rulers in the World Economy”, in Jeremy Adelman, Stephen Aron (eds.), *Trading Cultures. The World of Western Merchants*, (Princeton: 2001), 87–110.

business activities and daily life, and the right to participate and vote in community councils. In turn, they had to abide by a stringent set of rules regarding the interaction with the local population, especially with its female constituent. For instance, marriages outside the community were prohibited, the acquisition of real estate was forbidden, and direct contact with Ottomans beyond commercial activities was heavily discouraged. Law and morality, justice, and social shaming formed an articulated net designed to prevent French residents from getting too close to locals.¹⁵

This distance was further reinforced by the separation of individual communities within specific areas of Ottoman cities according to national and religious parameters. The measure, reflecting control and security concerns, had also been enforced by European trade centres such as Venice and Livorno.¹⁶ In the Ottoman Empire, however, it acquired a much stronger character, as urban division was imposed by a system of so-called “capitulations”,¹⁷ merging fiscal privileges, jurisdictional autonomy, and the freedom to live according to European traditions.¹⁸

Institutional action and geographical separation, however, did not and could not succeed in creating impassable barriers. First of all, interactions and inter-community networks were at the core of commercial activity itself. Daily life, then, created occasions for spontaneous contacts, as Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis shows in the case of Smyrna. The city’s space was rigidly divided among communities, but during the summer Greeks and Europeans lived in the widely

15 Cfr. Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, *Une ville Ottomane Plurielle: Smyrne aux XVIII^e et XX^e siècles* (Istanbul: 2006), 39–49.

16 Cfr. Maria Pia Pedani, *Between Diplomacy and Trade: Ottoman Merchants in Venice*, in *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire*, edited by Suraiya Faroqhi, Gilles Veinstein (Paris: 2008), 3–21; Donatella Calabi, “Gli Stranieri nella Capitale della Repubblica Veneta”, *Mélanges de l’Ecole Française de Rome. Italie-Méditerranée*, 111, 2 (1999): 721–732; Francesca Trivellato, *The Family of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven-London: 2009): 470; Bruce Masters, “Christian in a Changing World”, *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, 3, *The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, (Cambridge: 2006), 272–283; Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christian and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, (Princeton: 2000), 228.

17 Eldem, “Capitulations and Western Trade”, 283–335.

18 Daniel Panzac, “International and Domestic Maritime Trade in the Ottoman Empire during the 18th Century”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 24 (1992), 189–206. For a comparison with Venice, see Umberto Signori, *Venezia e Smirne tra Sei e Settecento. Istituzioni Commerci e Comunità Mercantili* (Università degli Studi di Padova. Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Geografiche e dell’Antichità. Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Scienze Storiche, Anno Accademico 2013–14), 117–182, and Erica Ianiri, *Levante, Veneti e Ottomani nel XVIII Secolo* (Venezia: 2014), 413.

integrated milieu of their holiday residences.¹⁹ The port, the bazaars, and the cafes were other places of encounter, mostly, but not totally, reserved for men. Ultimately, restrictions on female immigration to the Levant and, in general, on intermarriages, pushed men to seek contacts with local women.

This already heterogeneous picture was further complicated by the presence in the *Echelles* of large numbers of “illegal immigrants”, *de facto* exempted of any control, who managed to buy passage to the Levant and settle there, often permanently. They lived in a “grey zone” of, mostly tolerated, illegality, interacting with both the French and Ottoman communities, favouring the latter when they openly pursued integration strategies into the local society. The relevance of this “invisible” group emerges quite clearly from the high concern with which the Minister de Maurepas²⁰ addressed the question in a letter to the French Ambassador in Constantinople, M. de Villeneuve. Maurepas stressed that “illegal passages” were very frequent and that the number of French people, both women and men, residing in the *Echelles* without passport and authorization was extremely high. He ordered Villeneuve to make a detailed list of all those living there without permission, to arrest them, seeking, if need be, the collaboration of the Ottoman authorities, and to send them back to France. To stop this trend, ship captains who illegally transported individuals to the Levant should also be prosecuted and submitted to the same punishment as their passengers.²¹

Sources focused, above all, on the extremely marginal: people without stable occupation, poor artisans, sailors, and women. The latter gave particular concern to the French diplomats. Many of them, in fact, were fleeing poverty or persecution. Joining the already vast group of European prostitutes, they endangered the “reputation of France, and the prestige of its merchants in a place where women’s morality had to be faultless”.²² Even so, consuls appear to have been unwilling to act against these women and only rarely sent them back to France. It was preferable that French men would resort to French or European prostitutes rather than to Greek, Jewish, or Muslim ones.²³ If rules

19 Smyrnelis, *Une ville Ottomane plurielle*, 45.

20 Jean Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de Maurepas was Minister of the Navy (secrétaire d’Etat à la Marine) between 1723 and 1749. The administration of foreign trade and of the colonies also fell within his duties.

21 AN, AE B III 1, f. 117.

22 Geneviève Goussaud Falgas, *Le consulat de France à Tunis aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Vie quotidienne* (Paris: 2003), 172–174.

23 Goussaud Falgas, *Le consulat de France à Tunis*, 172–174.

were clear and strict, reality was ambivalent and laws had to be bent to meet the concrete necessities of life.

More than against prostitution itself, officials reacted promptly when women were about to “abjure the faith”, as it emerges from the case of a certain widow Martin, who was sent back to France precisely for this reason and not because of her supposed “immoral conduct” and regular visits to taverns and other places of doubtful reputation.²⁴ Apostasy was, in fact, considered a danger for the cohesion of the community in relation to its Muslim and Orthodox counterparts. It is not stated, however, what religion the widow wanted to embrace. In any case, the reasons that pushed the widow towards such a particular—and definitive—step were probably linked to her marriage prospects. The opportunity to marry would have allowed her to settle down indefinitely, and decently, in the Levant. Mixed marriages and integration objectives were linked into a single strategy. It involved, as it seems, both French men and women willing to move to the Levant. The focus of our sources on the “masculine side” of the question might reflect the quantitative dimension of the practice, as well as a bias towards the more relevant components of the “French Nation”. It does not, however, forcibly imply that the phenomenon excluded the female part of the community. As a matter of fact, despite the fading number of French residents, women’s irregular emigration to the Levant continued all through the 18th and the early 19th century.²⁵

Marrying Local Women

Most European countries with residents in the Ottoman Empire, including France, prohibited the marriage of their men to local Ottoman women. While any form of marriage of French nationals in the *Echelles* was generally restricted, unions among community members were, however, more easily accepted. These marriages could be celebrated regularly with the permission of the local consul and the final approval of the Minister of the Navy.²⁶ Contraveners were morally shamed, excluded from the *Nation Française*, and, at least in theory, sent back to France. There, as the Minister de Maurepas insistently reminded, they should be punished, prevented from returning to the Levant, and, in any

24 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 49.

25 Marie Carmen Smyrnalis, *Jeux d'Identité à Smyrne aux XVIII^e et XIX^e Siècles*, in H. Le Bras (ed.), *L'Invention des Populations. Biologie, Idéologie et Politique* (Paris: 2000), 125–139.

26 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 117. The Minister of the Navy was in charge, along with naval and colonial affairs, of foreign trade questions.

case, from developing further any form of trade with the Ottoman Empire. The children eventually born from intercommunity unions would not have access to French nationality.²⁷ Diplomatic correspondence shows that these rules not only applied to merchants and other ordinary members of the *Nation Française*, but also to consuls and vice-consuls, for whom no exception was to be made.²⁸

This strict attitude can be explained as a defence against the perceived economic and social dangers of mixed unions, potentially leading to excessive expenses and debt incurred by merchants, to transfers of commercial and political information, to the formation of new families determined to reside permanently in the Levant, and to the eventual emergence of intercommunity familial networks. To prevent permanent residence of French nationals, further regulations had been enforced prohibiting the acquisition of real estate in the *Echelles*. If intercommunity marriages were officially banned, any other “personal” relationship with local residents was formally disapproved of.

The effectiveness of such strict rules needs, however, to be cast into serious doubt. Already in the 18th century, more than half of the French residents of Smyrna, for example, were married, many of them with non-French women, and they did so without any form of official authorization. After the Revolution, when old rules were abolished, the number of “non-controlled” emigrants in the *Echelles* soared together with the frequency of their contact with the local population.²⁹

The vast majority of “mixed” marriages occurred between French men and Greek women, the latter converting to Catholicism at the moment of the union. The validity of the marriage was subordinated to the regular celebration of the sacrament. This end could be reached only by convincing a priest to give his benediction to the new couple, demonstrating pregnancy or asserting the willingness to end living in concubinage. Subterfuge, such as to wait for the cleric to be alone in the street and force him to fulfil his functions, was also common. The rules enacted by the Council of Trent obliged church officials to celebrate the marriage and it was their benediction, and not the registration in notarial acts, which determined the validity of the union. In

27 Le Maire was a merchant family—and dynasty—from Marseille, traditionally trading and residing in the *Echelles* and counting, among its members, numerous consuls, both in the eastern Mediterranean and in northern Africa.

28 Probably Jacques-Louis Le Maire, consul in Cyprus, at the time. Anne Mézin, *Les consuls de France au siècle des Lumières, 1715–1792* (Paris: 1997), 394–98.

29 Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, *Une société hors de soi. Identités et relations sociales à Smyrne aux XVIII^e et XX^e siècles* (Paris: 2005), pp. 65 and ff.

fact, priests were often helpful, fearing they would lose parishioners if they did not fulfil their requests, especially in places where French and other Catholic communities—such as the Venetians or the Ragusans—lived side by side. In these cases, couples who did not succeed in convincing the French priests to celebrate the marriage resorted to foreign ones, thus getting nearer to other communities.

Only men of low rank, such as artisans, retailers, fishermen and occasionally merchants, married Greek women. This reflects a more open attitude towards local women as the men involved were less concerned with the economic potentialities of uniting two families' capitals and networks. It also reflects the strategies of integration into the local society. Entering a Greek family was, in fact, seen as a means of consolidating a relatively weak personal position in a foreign country.

As we said, Greek women usually converted to Catholicism at the moment of marriage. However, few cases of conversion of French men to Orthodoxy were recorded. This option was mostly linked to the relevance of integration strategies in the choice of spouse.³⁰ Orthodox networks were considered to offer more effective protection and aid than French ones. This is also proved by the fact that such a step almost always implied losing most links with the French community and, progressively, even with relatives still living in the homeland.³¹ When these marriages became known, the reaction of the authorities was usually very firm, the degree of severity depending on the conditions of both the French men and of the “local girls”. For example, in 1734, de Villeneuve informed the Minister de Maurepas that in Constantinople and in other *Echelles* lived numerous poor artisans, some of whom had married, without permission, local girls, mostly of Greek origin, while others maintained “all sorts of relationships with Greek, Armenian, and Jewish women”. The ambassador also noted that family links, as well as “moral abjection” and absolute poverty kept them in the *Echelles* despite their miserable life. In his response, de Maurepas ordered local consuls to prepare lists of the people who did not lead honourable lives and of individuals who, even if in good economic standing, had married local women or kept stable relationships with them. Both categories should be sent back to France immediately. Marriages should not be recognized and the women kept away from French territory. The same procedure should also apply to all French men residing legally or illegally in the

30 On the complex—and varied—framework of the conversions strategies, see E. Natalie Rothman, *Conversions and Convergence in the Venetian-Ottoman Borderlands*, “Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies”, 41 3 (2011), 602–633.

31 Smyrnelis, *Une Société hors de Soi*, 138–188.

Levant.³² The *Echelles* had to be freed “of all the French artisans, servants, and other people of poor condition having married or in any case living with local girls”. Men affected by this procedure, who refused to return to France, would lose consular protection and their status as members of the “French Nation”.

As a matter of fact, such orders—although regularly repeated through the years—seem to have been mostly ignored by local officials. Because they were carried out so sporadically, they produced no real effect on the lives of residents and did not alter the composition of the *Nation Française* as a whole. The French community did not react, as the minister supposed, against “intruders” who used any means to remain in the Levant. Even those who had been forcibly removed, itself quite an extreme action, often found a way back to the Levant, thus demonstrating their successful integration into the local society, the strength of the roots of their new life, and the ineffectiveness of government controls and reaction.³³

Marriage was not the only possible form of contact with the local female population. In a letter of 13 August 1736, de Maurepas ordered the Vice-consul of Candia, M. Antoine Maltor, to investigate if local French residents, as well as French captains and sailors stopping over in Candia, frequented Greek houses. If they did, they should be prevented all the more strictly from visiting “places where wine was sold”. Taverns were considered particularly dangerous to the moral and financial integrity not only of sailors, but also of the whole merchant class. Taverns encouraged the abuse of alcohol consumption and constituted a place of encounter with locals, most of the time Greek women, viewed as a much greater economic and moral danger than wine itself.³⁴

The source does not openly mention prostitution. It can, however, be assumed that the minister’s focus was largely on this possibility, being moved by moral as well as decency concerns. On the one hand, the mild reaction against French prostitutes, already mentioned before, shows that officials wanted, first of all, to avoid, even at this level, intercommunity contacts. Greek and Jewish prostitutes working in taverns of the non-Muslim quarters of the main Ottoman trade centres were particularly feared as a threat to the integrity of the whole French community. Less concern was expressed in relation to Muslim ones. This was linked to the fact that the actual possibility of meeting Muslim

32 AN, AE, B III, 1, f. 89.

33 AN, AE, B III 1/B, f. 189.

34 AN, AE, B III 2, f. 143. See also Joëlle Dalègre, *Greco et Ottomans. 1453–1923. De la chute de Constantinople à la disparition de l'Empire Ottoman*, (Paris: 2002), 267.

women was extremely limited; Ottoman laws severely punished women who were proven to have had intercourse with non-Muslim men.³⁵

Merchants and Dragomans

Merchants had a greater chance of having their marriages approved, above all, when the union took place between French merchants' families. So was the case of Charles Guien, a trader from Marseille residing in Smyrna, who married Marie Boule, sister of the French merchant André Boule, himself associated with Guien. Both the local French consul, Gaspar de Péleran, and the Minister de Maurepas approved the marriage, with the minister insisting that the family should not remain in the Levant more than three years and must then move back to France. A similar case was that of Gaspard Maurin, a merchant already living in Smyrna for five years when he married Anne Peretié de la Ciotat. Both the Consul and the Ambassador de Villeneuve judged the union convenient and gave their consent. The Minister de Maurepas agreed, but also stated that the family would have to move back to France within two years after the marriage. Similar conditions were imposed on the Robins and many other couples according to stories related by various sources.³⁶

When the marriage involved local women, almost exclusively Greeks or, occasionally, those of Armenian origin,³⁷ approval was extremely uncertain, even for traders of consolidated position within the "French Nation".³⁸ For example, the minister wrote to the Consul of Rettino, exhorting him to react and take

35 Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul 1700–1800*, (Berkeley: 2010), 86–111; Id., "Intercommunal Life in Istanbul During the Eighteenth Century", *Review of Middle East Studies*, 46, 1 (2012), 79–85; David Nirenberg, "Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain", *The American Historical Review*, 107, 4 (2002), 1065–93.

36 AN, AE B III 2, f. 111. We have to consider that length of residency in the Levant was one of the essential aspects of the organization of the "French Nation", not only for married couples, but also for individuals living in the Levant simply for business reasons. On August 22, 1736 de Maurepas wrote to Jean-Louis Gauthier, consul in Tunis, that he would allow a merchant named La Baume to remain in the Levant a year longer than had been initially decided for business purposes. Subsequently, he would have to come back to France immediately with all his family (AN, AE, B III 2, f. 175).

37 Cfr. Robert H. Hewsen, "Armenian on the Aegean: The City of Smyrna", in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian. Smyrna/Izmir. The Aegean Communities* (Costa Mesa: 2012), 39–54.

38 As de Villeneuve emphasized, marriages could only be approved if concluded between two French nationals already residing in the Levant. Other cases had to be evaluated

“the most convenient measures” against the marriage of M. Toulon, a merchant in the *Echelles*, to a Greek woman who had “created great scandal in Marseille”.³⁹

The same restrictions had to be applied, as clearly expressed by the minister, even to consuls, vice-consuls, and *dragomans*.⁴⁰ On February 6, 1726, de Maurepas wrote a letter addressed to all the consuls and vice-consuls from the Levant and the *Barbarie*, lamenting the fact that *dragomans* of the *Echelles* had married local Greek women, many of them “without any or with a little fortune”. He decreed that only marriages involving persons of “decent condition” would be authorized, so that the new family could afford the standard of life required to be employed at “the service of the King”.⁴¹

Not even the king’s orders solved the problem. “Irregular marriages” of *dragomans* could not be stopped and became as common as the persecution of the couples involved. In November 1730, Jean Baptiste Baume, the Vice-consul of Candia, informed the Minister de Maurepas that a certain Toulon, a *dragoman*, had married a Greek woman without permission “in front of the Cadi of that place”. As soon as the marriage became known, Toulon was ordered to embark on the first boat leaving Candia for France, which he duly did, albeit accompanied by his wife. On January 31, 1731, hearing that Toulon was already in Marseille, de Maurepas ordered that the man be punished “in order to give an example and end such scandals”. The woman was to be arrested immediately or sent back to the Levant.⁴² A month later, however, the affair came to an unexpected conclusion when it emerged that Toulon had married his wife with the blessing of the Episcopo of Marseille. The couple was therefore allowed to remain in the city, but were prohibited from returning to the Levant.⁴³ Similarly, in October 1734, a certain Boissat, *dragoman* in Alexandria, sought permission to marry Rose Martin, a French woman residing in the Levant. The request was rejected and the *dragoman* was warned that if he married Martin, he would be forced to sail back to France immediately.⁴⁴ The injunction, however, was not enough to stop Boissat’s plans. On 27 April 1735, de Maurepas informed Ambassador de Villeneuve that a *dragoman* in Alexandria, the same

based on the social situation of both future spouses and the convenience of the new union for the “French Nation” (AN, AE B III 2, f 111).

39 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 103.

40 See e.g. the letter of the Minister of the Navy to M. Le Maize where it is stated that “the intention of the King is that the consuls of the *Echelles* and above all those of the *Barbarie* do not marry” (AN, AE, B III 1, f. 214).

41 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 22.

42 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 103.

43 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 105.

44 AN, AE, B III 1, f. 220.

Boissat, had actually married Rose Martin. The union had been supposedly authorized by a local religious official, Gabius Modard, of the *tiers ordre de Saint François*, serving at the consular chapel. The minister instructed his ambassador to send the *dragoman* back to France without delay. Meanwhile, however, Boissat moved to Morea with his wife, where the couple settled down as if “authority didn’t exist”.

The question of *dragomans’* marriages became so pressing that de Maurepas sent a circular letter to all the consuls and vice-consuls in the *Echelles*. He ordered them to check the family situations of all the French residents in the Ottoman Empire, paying particular attention to interpreters, and to inquire about the relations between local women and French men living illegally in the *Echelles*. Those who had married Ottoman women, the minister emphasized, had to be sent back to France immediately and the marriage invalidated even if the couple had already received the saint sacrament. The letter also specified that marriage permissions should be granted only in the case of unions with French women belonging to the community, whose families were officially inscribed in the lists of French residents and could afford decent living standards. In all other cases, marriages had to be denied in order to preserve the morality, decency, and economic security of all French residents.⁴⁵

The particular attention paid to *dragomans* shows the closeness of French officials’ personal contacts and emphasizes the sharp contrast between rules and reality. The minister’s preoccupation with the interpreters’ conduct also hints at the relevance of their daily work. The *dragomans*, in fact, were deeply involved in processes of cultural and linguistic mediation, dealing with both diplomatic and trade matters. Their “fidelity” and the transparency of their lives and personal behaviour constituted an essential prerequisite on which to base the community’s confidence and trust.⁴⁶ Moreover, the ineffectiveness of “anti-marriage laws” is confirmed by the frequency with which ministers referred to the problem in their correspondence with ambassadors and consuls. The number of infractions and the insistence on the necessity of a more rigid application of the law convey the impression that mixed marriages and, in general, intercommunity unions were a consolidated, relentless, and unstoppable trend, involving the whole French community, from simple artisans to the *dragomans*, in all the main trading centres of the Levant. The perseverance

45 AN, AE B III 2, f. 49.

46 Natalie Rothman, “Dragomans and “Turkish Literature”: The Making of a Field of Inquiry”, *Oriente Moderno*, 93 (2013), 390–421; Id., “Self-fashioning in the Mediterranean Contact Zone: Giovanni Battista Salvago and his *Africa Overo Barbaria, 1625*”, in Konrad Eisenbichler (ed.), *Renaissance Medievalism*, (Toronto: 2009), 123–143.

of the practice all through the 18th century might well be considered one of the most important transformations having led, though with varying intensity, to the emergence of that “mixed and cosmopolitan society” so clearly and precisely depicted by Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis in the case of Smyrna.⁴⁷

Conclusion

French residents in the Levant formed a relatively large community.⁴⁸ In the view of the government they should have recreated a “piece of France” in a foreign country, perpetuating the perfect image of their homeland’s moral virtues, perfect social organization, and economic success. They should also have lived in semi-autarchy, avoiding all contact with the Ottoman population deemed unnecessary to carrying out their business. A multitude of laws and informal rules should have achieved the goal of dividing the French from the local communities by reinforcing the already existing walls of language, culture, religion, and mutual suspicion.

As our research shows, even though it was stubbornly pursued throughout the 18th century, this goal was never reached. Taking mixed marriages—and, in general, relations between French men and local women—as an indicator of intercommunity links, the chapter demonstrates that, far from being a divided space restricting contact to business issues, the *Echelles* formed an environment of transfers and interchanges.

This conclusion should be partially mitigated, as de Villeneuve remarked, by the fact that marriages were indeed common between French men and Greek women, with only one known instance where a French man married a Catholic Armenian woman and with no recorded marriages between French men and

47 Cfr. Smyrnelis, “Coexistence et Langue de Contact”, *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 4 (2007), 568–585.

48 In the mid 18th century, at the height of their presence in the *Echelles* their number reached 700 inhabitants. Most of these lived in Constantinople (144), followed by Smyrna (119), and Thessaloniki (58). 30, 34 and 31 French residents respectively were counted in the Peloponnese, Aleppo and Rhodes (Amaury Faivre d’Arcier, *Les oubliés de la liberté: négociants, consuls et missionnaires français au Levant pendant la Révolution, 1784–1798* (Paris: 2007), 14–15. See also Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, “Vivre ensemble dans l’empire ottoman (XVIII^e–XIX^e siècles)”, *Cahiers du Centre d’Histoire “Espaces et Cultures”, n° spécial: Vivre avec l’ennemi: la cohabitation de communautés hétérogènes du XVI^e au XIX^e siècle*, (2007), 55–66.

Muslim women.⁴⁹ The melting process that characterized the main *Echelles* from the 18th century onwards concerned, therefore, mainly the Christian communities, religion constituting a barrier more impenetrable than rules. Even when encounters between French men and Muslim prostitutes were recorded, they were rare, occasional, and limited to taverns operating as informal brothels.

Taverns were, in general, the main meeting-place for members of these divergent communities. As Gaspard de Pélarar, the French Consul of Smyrna, noted, inns along the “Rue des Francs” were at the centre of interaction between the French and Muslims. He also stressed that those encounters were not always friendly and peaceful, with disputes over wine or prostitutes frequently ending in fights that prompted the immediate reaction of the local Ottoman authorities.⁵⁰

In this context, and with all its limits, we must stress that relations between communities were by no means an exception; on the contrary, they constituted the structural characteristic of the Ottoman commercial centres, and intercommunity contacts were certainly more frequent than rules, and geographical and social separation would have suggested.

The extent to which this trait formed the basis for larger transfers of ideas, tastes, fashion, ways of life, and the influence mixed marriages and relations between European men and local women had on Ottoman society needs further study. Even though current sources do not directly mention such aspects, it is, however, to be assumed that the practice spurred on an ample network of contacts, which, in turn, naturally implied wider cultural interchange. Within this process, women—especially, as we said, Christians—played a central role.

49 This study has focused on personal relations established between members of the French community and local women. Therefore we do not consider here marriages between converted Frenchmen and local Muslim women, as the former were *de facto* excluded from the French community after conversion. Such cases have been, however, quite common all through Ottoman Early Modern History, conversion representing a major way for integration into the Ottoman Muslim community and, sometimes, as the life of Bonneval Pasha demonstrates, the Ottoman *élite* (Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford: 2011), i–xiii; Nabil Matar, “The Renegade in English Seventeenth-Century Imagination”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 33, 3 (1993), 489–505). Conversions were, in any case, quite a widespread process encompassing both Christians living in the Ottoman Empire and Muslims—as well as Jews—living in Christian lands (E. Natalie Rothman, “Becoming Venetian: Conversion and Transformation in the Seventeenth Century Mediterranean”, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 21, 1 (2006), 39–75).

50 AN, AE, B III, 1, f. 48 and f. 124.

This is a consequence of the quite large presence of unmarried men living in a somewhat isolated context. It is, however, also the result of social strategies of integration, the two aspects being, to some extent, juxtaposed. Our sources clearly show that French officials were not particularly offended by the nature of “personal contacts” between French men and local women, given that Christian prostitutes were tolerated; instead, they were concerned about the eventuality that these relations might lead to a stable integration of French men into the local society. More importantly, they were outraged by the possible addition of “mixed families” to the French homeland. As Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis effectively demonstrated in her studies of the Barrelier and Fontrier families in Smyrna, building intercommunity personal links and new family networks across national boundaries could not be prevented, but they also contributed deeply to the transformation of the previously “pure” national character and to the emergence of a transnational culture, along with, once again, wider transnational personal networks.

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