

SEMIOTICS OF BEHAVIOR IN EARLY MODERN DIPLOMACY: POLISH EMBASSIES IN ISTANBUL AND BAHÇESARAY

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ABSTRACT

Ceremonial has always played a great role among European and Middle Eastern societies, reflecting the value systems cherished by their elites. Embassy instructions and envoys' reports provide valuable material concerning codes of behavior in early modern diplomacy. What was considered "proper," and how was an envoy expected to behave in order to stress his sovereign's dignity and power? Oriental courts in Istanbul and Bahçesaray developed elaborate ceremonials for foreign envoys. Forced into a deep prostration before the Muslim ruler, sometimes even threatened with physical violence, Polish envoys deeply resented their humiliation. Some of them sought comfort in alcohol, others produced fabulous reports of their imaginary altercations with Ottoman and Crimean dignitaries, and others found pleasure and revenge in contemptuous descriptions of their hosts' "barbarous" habits. Until recently, such diplomatic reports have been used in Polish historiography almost uncritically. Yet such reports often tell us more about their authors' mentalities than about the world they pretend to describe.

In 1634 a Polish embassy reached Istanbul in order to prolong the existing peace. When received by Sultan Murad IV, the Polish envoy Aleksander Trzebiński was asked that his king commence paying a tribute. The envoy reportedly responded that a war would be better than such a shameful condition. In reaction, the sultan grasped his sabre and exploded: "Don't you recognize in me the emperor, whose sabre terrifies all the nations?!" "I do," responded Trzebiński, "but I have been sent from my Lord, who is an equal monarch to you." "Then I shall enter Poland with my army and destroy it with fire and sword," threatened the sultan, to which the Polish envoy retorted: "That you can do, but the victory is in the hand of God. Also King Ladislaus would pull out his victorious sword and entrust his fate to fortune."

Today, for anyone familiar with the ceremonial of Ottoman court, the authenticity of the above scene must be problematic. Yet, until recently, the news of this violent dispute between the sultan and the

Polish envoy has been credulously repeated in the Polish historiography.¹ The aforementioned dialogue appears for the first time in a panegyric by Everhard Wassenberg, *Gestorum gloriosissimi ac invictissimi Vladislai IV Poloniae et Sveciae Regis*, published in Danzig in 1643.² One might easily suspect that the whole scene was a pure invention by Wassenberg, who wanted to extol his beloved hero, King Ladislaus of Poland. So far, though, this doubt has not been raised by any historians, who consciously or unconsciously have relied on Wassenberg. In 1823, a *History of Poland under Ladislaus IV* was published by Kajetan Kwiatkowski, a Polish historian and antiquary. Kwiatkowski not only relied on Wassenberg, but he embellished the aforementioned dialogue with his own insertions and comments, thus making Sultan Murad even more meager and helpless in the face of the brave and eloquent Polish envoy.³ Still more surprising is to find the very same dialogue quoted by Joseph von Hammer in the fifth volume of his monumental *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, published in Pest in 1829.⁴ Usually scrupulous in quoting his sources, Hammer in this case mentions only an anonymous “pölnischen Geschichtschreiber.”⁵ In another place, however, he quotes the book by Kajetan Kwiatkowski, published only six years earlier.⁶ Apparently, someone translated the relevant Polish fragment for Hammer, but the eminent Austrian historian was unable to locate the quotation more precisely. In sum, the dialogue between Sultan Murad and Trzebiński, reported—or rather invented—by Wassenberg in Latin, was then translated into Polish by Kwiatkowski, and finally quoted in German by Hammer without a real footnote. Even more confusing is the fact that Hammer often refers to the Ottoman chronicle by Mustafâ Na‘ima, thus giving a false impression that the above dialogue might have originated from this chronicle as well. Indeed, Na‘ima mentions Trzebiński’s embassy to Istanbul, but he does not record any rhetorical display on the part of the Polish envoy. We read only that the Polish refusal to pay a tribute

¹ For instance, see Leszek Podhorodecki, “Wojna polsko-turecka 1633-1634r.,” *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości* 20 (1976): 27-72, esp. 58-59.

² Everhard Wassenberg, *Gestorum gloriosissimi ac invictissimi Vladislai IV Poloniae et Sveciae Regis pars secunda* (Gdańsk, 1643), 152-153. The envoy’s name is mistakenly rendered as Stanisław and not Aleksander Trzebiński.

³ Kajetan Kwiatkowski, *Dzieje narodu polskiego za panowania Władysława IV, króla polskiego i szwedzkiego* (Warsaw, 1823), 99-101.

⁴ Joseph von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. 5 (Pest, 1829), 177-178.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 177, note c.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 667.

resulted in a declaration of war and that the Polish envoy, whose peace supplication had been rejected, was sent home: “ve Leh kiralı tarafından gelen elçiye cevap virilüb niyazmend olduğu vech üzere sulha müsa’de olunmayub üzerlerine sefer mütehakkik oldu lakin elçiye icazet virildi . . .”⁷

The Ottoman court ceremonial has been studied and analyzed at length by numerous authors. The reforms introduced under Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) are vividly described by Pál Fodor:

In the first decade of his reign, he introduced the practice of remaining seated when receiving ambassadors. During the audiences, he sat on a throne instead of the formerly used sofa, and unlike his predecessors, he either kept silent or only uttered a few words. The latter practice struck such firm roots in the etiquette of the Ottoman rulers that Koçi Bey described secretiveness and little talk as the main attributes of Sultanic dignity.⁸

In her excellent monograph, Gülrü Necipoğlu concludes that “Süleyman no longer rose to honor ambassadors; he did not allow them to sit in his presence, nor did he even address a single word to them.” She quotes numerous Western observers, who compared the sultan to an immobile idol surrounded by the “venerating silence,” and likened the audience in the Topkapı Palace to a visit to a holy sanctuary.⁹ The ambassadors and their retinues were hustled into the audience chamber, forced into a deep prostration before the imperial throne, and then the audience was over. It once happened that somebody lost his shoe on the carpet, causing brief laughter which interrupted the austere silence.¹⁰ To quote a seventeenth-century eyewitness, Paul Rycaut:

At the door of the Chamber of Audience is a deep silence, and the murmuring of a fountain near by, adds to the melancholy; and no other guard is there but a white eunuch: and here a pause is made, and they tread softly in token of fear and reverence, so as not to disturb with the least noise the Majesty of the Sultan: for access to the Eastern Princes was always difficult, and not permitted with the same familiarity as hath been practised amongst the Romans, and at present with us, where the sight of the King is his own glory, and the satisfaction of his subjects. . . .

⁷ Mustafa Na‘ima, *Ta‘rih* (Istanbul, 1864-1867), 3:207; for an imprecise Polish translation, see Józef Sełkowski, *Collectanea z dziejopisów tureckich rzeczy do historii polskiej służących*, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1824), 192.

⁸ Pál Fodor, “Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman Ruling Elite and the Formation of the Grand Vizieral *Telhis*,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47 (1994): 67-85, esp. 80.

⁹ Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 102-103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

When the Embassadour comes to appear before the Grand Signior, he is led in, and supported under the arms by the two Capugibashees; . . .¹¹ who bringing him to a convenient distance, laying their hands upon his neck, make him bow until his forehead almost touches the ground, and then raising him again, retire backwards to the farther parts of the room; the like ceremony is used with all the others, who attend the Embassadour; only that they make them bow somewhat lower than him. . . .

The Embassadour at this audience hath no chair set him, but standing, informs the Grand Signior by his Interpreter, the several demands of his Master, and the business he comes upon, which is all penned first in writing; which when read, is with the letter of credence consigned into the hands of the great Visier, from whom the answer and farther treaty is to be received.¹²

In conclusion, Rycaut adds:

Embassadours in this country have need both of courage and circumspection, wisdom to dissemble with honour, and discreet patience, seemingly to take no notice of affronts and contempts, from which this uncivilized people cannot temperate their tongues, even when they would seem to put on the most courteous deportment and respect towards Christians.¹³

The above picture is further supported by iconography. Ottoman painters had a special predilection towards depicting the very moment of prostration by showing foreign ambassadors on their knees or being forced to a deep bow before the imperial throne.¹⁴

So far, I have not identified any Ottoman miniature presenting a Polish envoy. Yet one Polish embassy has been commemorated by four gouache pictures, executed in 1679 in Paris by a French painter, Pierre-Paul Sevin. Though Sevin had never been to the Orient, he specialized in "Oriental scenes," learning about the Ottoman architecture from plans and descriptions. In 1677-1678 a Polish envoy, Jan Gniński, spent several months in Istanbul, remaining in close contact with the French embassy. Apparently, a French diplomat asked Sevin to depict Gniński's audience according to his meticulous report. In the nineteenth century, these pictures were acquired in Paris by Prince Czartoryski and can be seen today in the Czartoryski Museum in Cracow. While painting

¹¹ *Kapuçbaşı*, lit. "head gatekeepers," Ottoman officials charged with various tasks, including assistance at solemn audiences.

¹² Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668; reprint, New York, 1971), 84-85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴ A characteristic picture originating from Feridun Beg's *Nüzhet el-esrar der sefer-i Zîgetvar*, is included in Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 103. It shows Sultan Süleyman receiving the Austrian ambassador. Numerous similar pictures can be found in Arifi's *Süleymanname* (ca. 1557); see Esin Atlı, *Süleymanname: The Illustrated History of Süleyman the Magnificent* (New York and Washington, 1986).

Gniński's audience, Sevin spared him the most humiliating moment, presenting only the prostration of another embassy member. Nevertheless, we might suspect that the same happened to Gniński as well.¹⁵

Aside from the sultan and the Polish embassy members accompanied by the *kapuçbaşı*s, Sevin depicted a group of viziers standing in line before the imperial throne. This is not accidental, as can be seen from a memo prepared in 1706 by an unnamed Ottoman chancery clerk. The report, based on earlier precedents, describes the ceremonial of receiving the Polish envoys. It is preserved today in the Başbakanlık Arşivi and reads as follows:

In the imperial presence the third vizier takes the letter of the envoy and gives [it] to the second [vizier]. He then gives [it] to the grand vizier, who takes [it] and lays [it] before the imperial throne; after the envoy leaves they take [the letter], translate [it], and submit [to the sultan]. This is the [imperial] law.¹⁶

This practice was continued well into the eighteenth century. A French illustration depicting the reception of Ambassador de Bonnac by Sultan Ahmed III in 1717 presents a very similar scene, with a bowing Ottoman vizier passing the French royal letter to another vizier while the French embassy members stand lined against the wall. The sultan, “immobile like statue,” is seated on the throne situated in the corner of the audience chamber (labeled in Ottoman Turkish as “Chamber of Petitions,” *‘arz odası*).¹⁷ According to Fatma Müge Göçek, “the sultan never revealed his emotions in audiences, kept his exchanges short, terse, and firm. He had to fulfill these requirements of his position regardless of his age. The court around him modeled their behavior after him.”¹⁸

In light of the above evidence, one must conclude that the probability of a free discourse between the Polish envoy and Sultan Murad

¹⁵ Sevin's pictures are published in postcard form, entitled *Polskie poselstwo do Stambułu 1677-1678 ze zbiorów Czartoryskich Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie* (n.p., n.d.). The picture showing the reception of Gniński by Sultan Mehmed IV is also published in I. Czamańska, ed., *Poselstwo Rafała Leszczyńskiego do Turcji w 1700 roku. Diariusze i inne materiały* (Leszno, 1998), il. 10 following p. 48.

¹⁶ “Huzur-i hümayunda ilçinin namesin üçüncü vezir alub ikinciye virir. Ol dahi sadra‘zama virir. Anlar dahi alub taht-i hümayunun önüne koyub ilçü gitdikden sonra alub tercüme itdirüb telhis buyururlar. Kanun budur;” Istanbul, Başbakanlık Arşivi [Prime Ministry Archives], A. DVN. DVE 168, no. 1 (dated 9 Rebi I 1118 A.H. = 21 June 1706).

¹⁷ This illustration is published in Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York and Oxford, 1987), 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

IV, described at the beginning of this article, is more than questionable. Besides, even if we assume that the envoy was brave enough (or stupid enough) to threaten the sultan with the Polish army, who would possibly translate his words? Polish embassies usually had to rely on Armenian interpreters, often more terrified in front of the sultan than the ambassador himself.

Even today, the Turkish language contains such meaningful expressions as *başvurmak*¹⁹ or *yüz sümek*.²⁰ Significantly, the first one has an equivalent in Russian (*čelobit'e*), but not in Polish. The problem of prostration before the ruler has raised issues of cross-cultural misunderstandings since antiquity, to mention only the encounter and clash of Greek and Persian customs under Alexander the Great.

An interesting note on ancient Turks can be found in the famous relation by the Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan, dated 921. While crossing the territory of Oghuz Turks, his caravan was stopped by a Turkish chieftain, who had to be persuaded with small gifts. He then suddenly changed his behavior and prostrated himself before the travelers. In conclusion Ibn Fadlan noted that "it is their custom: when a man wants to pay respect to another man, he prostrates".²¹

Though this topic definitely requires meticulous research, the afore-described scene leaves the impression that prostration was not perceived as degrading by the said Turkish chieftain. The latter was still in control of the situation, and the fate of travelers depended on his good will. Yet, he prostrated himself as soon as he had received a bundle of small gifts, such as a caftan, a pair of shoes, some bread, raisins, and nuts.

Before one begins to apply generalizing models, such as the one of "Oriental despotism," one should not overlook a banal truth that the meaning of prostrating oneself might have changed over time and space.²²

¹⁹ Literally, to knock one's head (against the ground); here to request.

²⁰ Literally, to rub one's face (in the dust); here, to pay respect to one's superior.

²¹ "و هذا رسمهم اذا اكرم الرجل الرجل سجدة له" Ibn Fadlan, *Kitab*, vol. 3 of *Żródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny*, ed. A. Kmieciowicz, F. Kmieciowicz, and T. Lewicki (Wrocław, 1985), 39 (Arabic text), 94-95 (Polish translation), and 142 (commentary); cf. *Risalat Ibn Fadlan* (1309; reprint, Damascus, 1961), 98.

²² Unlike the Turkish chieftain, it seems that medieval Arabs and Europeans had a similar attitude towards prostration. An amusing story is recounted by Bernard Lewis on the embassy from the emir of Cordova to a Viking king, dated 845. The Muslim ambassador, al-Ghazal, stipulated in advance that he would not be made to kneel to the king. The king agreed, but then he "ordered an entrance, through which he must be approached, to be made so low that one could only enter kneeling. When al-Ghazal came to this, he sat on the ground, stretched forth his two legs, and dragged himself through on his rear. And when he had passed through the doorway, he stood erect;"

In this article, however, I focus my observations on the Polish envoys sent to Istanbul and Bahçesaray, who definitely perceived this custom as debasing and humiliating to themselves as well as to the country they were representing. Often they tried to modify the established ceremonial, but these efforts usually led to nothing.

The Polish ambassador to the Crimea in 1578, Marcin Broniowski, calmly admitted that during an audience the envoys had to remain on their knees (*genibus flexis*).²³ His successor, Ławryn Piaseczyński, tried to change this procedure. In his report from 1601 we read that he had tried to persuade the members of the Crimean *divan* that he might stand in front of the khan, offering in return a similar treatment of the Crimean envoys in Warsaw. His offer was rejected. His only success was that during the audience granted by the khan he remained kneeling only on his right knee.²⁴ The ceremonial in Bahçesaray closely resembled that of Istanbul, with one notable difference: while asking about the health of the Polish king, the khan rose and put his hand on his heart.²⁵ Though initially Piaseczyński received a fair treatment at the Crimean court, his next visit the following year was much less pleasant. As the envoy arrived without the promised gifts from the Polish king—treated by the Tatars as a tribute, *harac*—he was warned by the furious khan that “envoys, who come with false missions might have their noses and ears cut off.”²⁶ When the poor envoy tried to argue, the members of the khan’s retinue hushed him with cries of “sus, sus, Han sewlisen.”²⁷

Though usually such threats did not materialize, one must admit that a Polish envoy sent to Istanbul or Bahçesaray was exposed to serious stress. The fate of the Venetian dragoman Grillo, strangled in 1649,

see Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York and London, 1982), 93-94. The probability of al-Ghazal’s relation as well as the very fact of his embassy have already been questioned (*ibid.*, 315, n. 9). Yet, one thing is genuine in this story: the humiliating aspect of kneeling was equally comprehensible to both participants of this cross-cultural encounter.

²³ *Martini Broniowii . . . Tartariae descriptio* (Cologne, 1595), 18; Russian translation in *Жапські Одеського Общества Історії і Древностей* (1867), 6:333–367, esp. 358.

²⁴ Kazimierz Pułaski, ed., “Trzy poselstwa Ławryna Piaseczyńskiego do Kazi Gireja, hana Tatarów perekopskich (1601-1603). Szkic historyczny,” *Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki* 39 (1911): 135-145, 244-256, 358-366, 467-480, 553-566, 645-660, 756-768, 845-864, 945–960, esp. 361.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 362.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 758-759.

²⁷ “shut up! let the khan speak!” *ibid.*, 760. Thus recorded in Piaseczyński’s report. Apparently, it should read: *sus, sus, Han söylesin*.

proved that the danger was not only theoretical.²⁸ Even the French ambassadors to Istanbul, Nointel, and Guilleragues, were repeatedly threatened with imprisonment.²⁹

In general, one can point to a sketchy three-tiered typology of envoys' reactions to the stress and humiliation experienced by them during their embassies. The first reaction was excessive drinking of alcohol. One encounters numerous reports of the heavy drinking by Polish envoys. The most famous is the case of Franciszek Wysocki, the envoy in 1671 accused of imprudent behavior both by the Ottomans and by his fellow Western colleagues in Constantinople. Elsewhere, I have argued that Wysocki's behavior was quite natural: as the war was imminent and the Ottomans were only looking for an excuse, the envoy was exposed to a tremendous psychological pressure.³⁰ Even today, one finds diplomats who drink too much, though we can assume that their noses and ears are not now in danger. On the other hand, one must not forget that accusations of drinking often served—and sometimes still do—to discredit too smart foreign diplomats in the eyes of their own governments. One such case was studied by Andrzej Kamiński, who described the story of Jerzy Dominik Dowmont, a very gifted Polish diplomat expelled from Moscow in 1693.³¹ Though often true, such accusations, therefore, should be taken with a grain of salt.

A second type of reaction is much more interesting and has been described by psychologists. It fits the popular label *esprit d'escalier*. Even

²⁸ Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1962), 529. See also a first-hand report by the Venetian diplomat Giulio Cesare Alberti, dated 30 April 1649; Venice, Archivio di Stato, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al Senato, Costantinopoli, filza 133, fol. 90a-97b. Grillo's superior, the bailo Giovanni Soranzo, was more fortunate, as he had suffered only temporary imprisonment. The fate of Soranzo and Grillo drew much interest in Venice. The execution of the latter is carefully depicted in a seventeenth-century codex, today preserved in the Museo Correr; see the exhibition catalogue *Yüzyıllar Boyunca Venedik ve İstanbul Görünimleri/Vedute di Venezia ed İstanbul Attraverso i Secoli* (Venice and Istanbul, 1995), 229ff.

²⁹ Nointel was notorious for his demands to be treated equally, though he usually had no success. At his first reception by Sultan Mehmed IV in 1671, he refused to bow his head low enough. Consequently, he was pushed so strongly that he fell. In 1677 he paid a solemn visit to the new grand vizier, Kara Mustafa Pasha, but he refused to sit below the podium assigned to his host. The infuriated Kara Mustafa Pasha had him thrown out of the palace. The so-called *affaire de sofa* was not extinguished by his recall, as his successor, Comte de Guilleragues, faced similar problems in 1682. See Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. 6 (Pest, 1830), 263, 339, 372.

³⁰ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century): An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents* (Leiden, 2000), 177.

³¹ Andrzej Kamiński, *Republic vs. Autocracy. Poland-Lithuania and Russia, 1686-1697* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993), 172-173.

today, a clerk humiliated by his superior often consciously or unconsciously modifies his report on the unpleasant event. When sitting at dinner with his wife, he is already boasting of his uncompromising stand in front of his stupid boss, though the reality might have been much more gloomy. I think that the relation from Trzebiński's embassy, quoted at the beginning of this article, belongs to this particular category. A similar scene was recorded by another Polish envoy, Aleksander Piaseczyński, sent to the Porte in 1630. When interrogated by the Ottoman military commander (*serasker*), Murtaza Pasha, Piaseczyński was reported to have burst out: "I am not coming from Diyarbakır or Algiers, but from a great king and lord equal to yours. Speak to me like to a free envoy and not like to a slave of your master."³² We can easily imagine how popular these reports must have been among the Polish nobility, whose members thus strengthened their self-esteem. The only doubt that remains is whether the reported phrases were ever expressed (and translated!) in the presence of Ottoman dignitaries.

A third and last type of reaction was contempt. Contempt has often been the last resort of the losing classes and, in general, the weapon of the weak. A few years ago, I attended a conference on Ottoman food, organized in Istanbul.³³ While studying the reports by Polish envoys on Ottoman banquets, I was astonished to read how ungrateful these people were towards their Turkish hosts. The ambassador in 1640, Wojciech Miaskowski, was so much disgusted with the lack of knives, that he called the *divan* reception a "scratching party."³⁴ Another member of this embassy was very much amused by the behavior of janissaries, who "grabbed at the remaining food like dogs," drowning their turbans and *şapkas* in the soup.³⁵ Almost a century later, a Polish participant of Chomentowski's embassy of 1712-1714 composed a poem, devoting part to Ottoman eating habits:

³² Adam Walaszek, ed., *Trzy relacje z polskich podróży na Wschód muzułmański w I połowie XVII w. (Muratowicz, Piaseczyński, Lubieniecki)* (Cracow, 1980), 79.

³³ A published version of the papers (ed. Suraiya Faroqui) from the conference, "Food, Beverages, and Sociability in the Ottoman Empire" held in Istanbul in 1996, are forthcoming.

³⁴ "Prędko tam ten bankiet albo raczej drapanina odprawiała się, bo nikomu noża nie dano;" see Adam Przyboś, ed., *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.* (Warsaw, 1985), 93.

³⁵ "My po jednemu wstawając ledwośmy ustąpili z miejsca, zaraz czausowie, janczarowie po półmiskach, cośmy nie dojedli, jeden drugiego pchali, aż czapki im i zawoje w polewkę, w kaszę wpadywały, jak psi i gorzej rwali;" see the report by Zbigniew Lubieniecki in *ibid.*, 145.

Every janissary, in flock as he stood,
 grabbed at çorba, each one happy with what he took;
 Having filled their mugs with bare hands, what else?
 they step back to find retreat and recess; [. . .]
 No knives, no forks, no spoon and no plate,
 you will see, everyone eats with his hand!
 If you like, you are welcome, please come, tear a piece;
 filling quickly your mouth with fingers in grease!³⁶

As a matter of fact, in Poland as well forks were not widely known until the eighteenth century, and table-knives only gradually became a tool of everyday use.³⁷ Yet the lack of these tools at the Ottoman *sofra* served as proof of the “Turkish barbarity.” The Polish author did not even want to notice the spoons, though we know that they were used in the Topkapı Palace.³⁸

Notwithstanding their haughty attitude, the behavior of Polish envoys was apparently no more distinguished than the manners of their hosts. Ławryn Piaseczyński, the previously mentioned envoy to the Crimea, composed an early seventeenth-century *savoir-vivre* manual for the Polish diplomats. Its contents would have certainly amused Norbert Elias if he had read it. To quote just a short fragment:

While performing his duty, the envoy should stay like an embedded trunk and look straight ahead, with eyes directed towards the person he has been sent to, while:
 Standing still without peeking around
 Not shaking his head
 Keeping his hands calm without waving
 Abstaining from stroking his beard, coughing, spitting, or blowing his nose
 Avoiding head scratching and poking his nose and ears as well as biting his lips
 Conveying the message in a delicate tone, but in meaningful words
 While keeping in mind to avoid repetition.³⁹

³⁶ “Rzucili się janczarzy, tak jak stali w kupie / do czorby i kto zarwał, w swym się cieszac lupie / zaraz garzcią do gęby ten frysztyk ładują / a zjadłszy, na swe miejsca się rejterują [. . .] / Ni noży, ni widelec, łyżki, ni talerza / obaczysz, każdy z ręką do potrawy zmierza / kto chce tylko, a z misy udarty kawalec / do gęby skoro niesie utłuszczony palec;” see Franciszek Gościecki, *Poselstwo wielkie Jaśnie Wielmożnego Stanisława Chomentowskiego . . . przez lata 1712, 1713, 1714 odprawione* (Lwów [today L’viv], 1732), 260, 264.

³⁷ Wojciech Hensel and Jan Pazdur, eds., *Historia kultury materialnej Polski w zarysie* (Wrocław, 1978), vol. 3: *Od XVI do połowy XVII wieku*, 318; *ibid.*, vol. 4: *Od połowy XVII do końca XVIII wieku*, 275, 284.

³⁸ The difference in eating habits also played a great role in the mutual perception of Ottomans and Western Europeans; see Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 37-41. Western visitors noticed the lack of tablecloths, napkins, knives, forks, plates, salt, and, of course, wine at the Ottoman table. They were shocked by the speed with which the meals were served. Unlike in Europe, women never participated in Ottoman public events.

³⁹ Pułaski, “Trzy poselstwa Ławryna Piaseczyńskiego,” 954.

Considering Piaseczyński's advice, we might assume that it was in no way obvious for his audience. The requirement not to spit or blow one's nose in public must have been perceived especially harsh by contemporary Europeans. Václav Vratislav from Mitrovica, a Czech nobleman and participant of the Habsburg embassy to Constantinople dated 1591, recollected with envious admiration that the Turks did not spit or blow their noses in their mosques.⁴⁰ The same topic can be found in the versified relation from the Polish embassy of Prince Krzysztof Zbaraski to Constantinople (1622-1623), written by Samuel Twardowski, a seventeenth-century poet and participant of this mission. Neither the dignity of Prince Zbaraski, presented here as a model statesman and Christian hero, nor the good taste of Twardowski, labeled by his contemporaries as a "Slavic Virgil," prevented the poet from inserting a marginal remark, stating that it was not proper to blow one's nose or spit on the floor carpets in the Topkapı Palace. According to Twardowski, the Turks were able to keep from spitting thanks to their habit of drinking coffee.⁴¹

No matter how contemptuous of Ottoman eating habits, Polish embassy members could hardly hide their admiration for Ottoman textiles and garb. They eagerly fought for the caftans, distributed at the audiences, even though they knew that wearing them symbolized recognition of the Ottoman authority, as a padishah was expected to feed and dress his servants.

Notwithstanding personal discomforts and humiliations, participation in an embassy to Istanbul was quite popular among Polish nobles. For the ambassador himself, his mission might serve as a useful step in his political career. Young nobles, forming their retinues, considered a trip to Istanbul a useful supplement to their education. Ottoman authorities were often irritated by the large size of Polish embassies, whose members were entitled to a food and accomodation allowance called *tayfin*.⁴²

⁴⁰ I am quoting here the Polish translation: *Przygody Václava Vratislava z Mitrovic, jakich on w głównym mieście tureckim Konstantynopolu zaznał, jako pojmany doświadczył, a po szczęśliwym do kraju rodzinnego powrocie własnoręcznie w Roku Pańskim 1599 spisał*, ed. and trans. D. Reychmanowa (Warsaw, 1983), 37. Apart from the Czech original (published in 1777), German (1786) and English (1862) translations exist as well.

⁴¹ Samuel Twardowski, *Przeważna legacja Krzysztofa Zbaraskiego od Zygmunta III do Soltana Mostafy*, ed. R. Krzywy (Warsaw, 2000), 144.

⁴² Also in Poland-Lithuania, envoys coming from "eastern" countries such as the Ottoman Empire, Muscovy, Persia, Moldavia, Wallachia, and the Crimean Khanate, were entitled to free food and accomodation at the cost of the royal treasury. However, this rule did not apply to their Western colleagues; see Zbigniew Wójcik, ed., *Polska*

Eager to receive caftans and *tayfîn*, Polish embassy members also engaged in smuggling and private trade, trying to recover their voyage expenses. As such behavior was not deemed proper by the Polish authorities, they tried to stop it by official reprimands. The royal instruction given to Jan Szczerbny Herbut in 1598 stated that the envoy “should not buy and trade, like previous envoys, to the shame of the Crown.”⁴³ Needless to say, such admonitions rarely had any effect.

The controversial symbols surrounding the Polish embassies to the Orient retain some bearing even today. According to a popular tradition, in the nineteenth century each reception of a foreign ambassador in Istanbul began with a sacramental formula: “the ambassador of Lehistan⁴⁴ has not yet arrived.” This romantic legend reflected the fact that the Porte had initially refused to recognize the partitions of Poland. In 1989, when the first noncommunist Polish prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, applied for Poland’s membership in the European Council, he recalled in Strasbourg this very legend, adding that at last the ambassador of Lehistan has arrived. Fortunately his statement escaped the notice of Polish Euroskeptics. If they were familiar with the ceremonial of receiving ambassadors at the Ottoman court, they would have been delighted by such a comparison. It is exactly what they claim: that Poland is going to enter the European Union on her knees.

szlucha dyplomatyczna XVI-XVIII wieku (Warsaw, 1966), 278-279. Likewise, Polish envoys sent to Western Europe “knew the rules” and were prepared to pay themselves for their expenses. On the contrary, Ottoman diplomats sent to Western Europe expected reciprocity and were shocked by the Western “inhospitality;” see Göçek, *East Encounters West*, 64.

⁴³ “Kupiami i handlami bawić się nie ma, co snadź inni Posłowie y przed nim z niesławą koronną czynili;” Warsaw, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Libri Legationum 27, fol. 61b; already quoted in Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 178.

⁴⁴ Ancient Turkish name for Poland, apparently originating from the early medieval tribe of *Łędzianie*, which had lived in the southeast of present-day Poland (cf. Hungarian *Lengyel*, Lithuanian *Lenkija*, or Ukrainian *Ljaxy*—all of these terms, coined by the Poles’ southern and eastern neighbors, apply to Poland or Poles).

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