

B O O K R E V I E W S

DIPLOMATIC CULTURES AT THE OTTOMAN COURT, C. 1500–1630, ed. by Tracey A. Sowerby and Christopher Markiewicz (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 302, 6 B/W ills; ISBN: 9780367767426

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The last two decades have seen a revival of research on diplomatic history and a boom in studies of ‘new diplomatic history’. These works started to explore various uncharted aspects of diplomatic practices in different political entities and surveys particularly on non-European states gained momentum. Studies on the Ottoman Empire occupy a respective position within this field. It was usually given the secondary role, whose distinct diplomatic culture or ‘supposed lack thereof’ was used as a counterexample to emphasise the development of diplomatic practices in Christian states with whom they initially shared a seemingly unilateral relationship. Furthermore, when Ottoman Empire was given the role of the protagonist, a specific part of the diplomatic processes was scrutinised such as court translators or imperial treatises, leaving other parts of the processes out of the analysis. On the other hand, this particular volume, put together by Tracey A. Sowerby and Christopher Markiewicz, presents us with nine articles that set out to examine diplomatic cultures at the Ottoman capital, in their words, ‘holistically,’ by exploring these disregarded factors. Their chosen period was also befitting as the Ottoman state entered into a swift ‘bureaucratisation’ process, and a distinct Ottoman ‘court culture’ was gradually being established in that particular time.

This volume revolves around three main themes. The first one is the role of various diplomatic *actors* and how they interacted and shaped the diplomatic cultures of the Ottoman capital. For example, distancing from traditional diplomatic representatives, Christopher Markiewicz’s article shows the role of Persian ‘émigré’ secretaries as a persecuted community in forging the eastern policy of Selim I during the early sixteenth century. Furthermore, Zahit Atçıl’s text focuses on the efforts of one-man, grand vizier Rüstem Pasha, who managed to transform the Ottoman foreign policy from conquest-based expansionism to a peace-oriented foreign policy in the mid-sixteenth century. Going back to traditional representatives, Aneliya

Stoyanova in her study shows the effects of this Ottoman foreign policy change on the decision-making processes of the imperial ambassadors sent to Istanbul to juggle the interests of both the Austrian and Spanish Habsburgs. On the other hand, Daniel J. Bamford, in his article, demonstrates the degree of rivalry and cooperation between different diplomatic communities by examining the religious sensibilities of English ambassadors in late sixteenth-century Istanbul, adding another perspective to the lively diplomatic cultures the city came to enjoy.

The diplomatic actors who operated in specifically designated *spaces* constitute this volume's second theme. While delving into the space of Topkapı Palace, where the said actors traditionally interacted with each other, the authors also aim to move our gaze away from this conventional area of diplomacy to a larger one: the city of Istanbul itself. Tetiana Grygorieva's article about *ad hoc* Polish embassies focuses on the consequences of *not* establishing a permanent residence in Istanbul, unlike other foreign communities. These Polish diplomats, lacking necessary networks and funding, were left to the goodwill of their Ottoman hosts who had used 'space' as a tool to control these ambassadors and inhibit their access to diplomatic environments if necessary either by offering different lodgings or limiting their mobility in the city. On the other hand, Maxwell Hudson's text about Venetian ambassadors, who established the earliest permanent diplomatic residence in the city, focuses on diplomatic interactions practised outside of Topkapı Palace which expanded the space of encounters and transformed their diplomatic language. Hudson's article also points out the importance of *ceremonies* as a 'powerful tool of communication', establishing the third theme this volume discusses thoroughly. In this sense, Christopher Markiewicz and Tracey A. Sowerby's article turns our attention back to the Topkapı Palace, where gift-giving was presented as a ceremonial performance that functioned along with the materiality of the gift as the third form of diplomatic language next to the verbal and written forms of communication. The article by Talitha Maria G. Schepers uncovers this theme further by examining printed friezes of Netherlandish artist Pieter Coecke van Aelst, which were produced during his visit to Istanbul as part of a diplomatic embassy. These friezes, intended as a gift to Suleiman I, put forward a visual language of diplomatic ceremonies and rituals of early modern Ottoman capital.

Easily read as these articles analysed episodes that took place in a limited period and space functioning *in tandem*, this volume successfully shows that instead of sharing a unilateral relationship in which Ottomans were the superior party, Istanbul provided a diplomatic milieu that included complex diplomatic cultures which were shaped by a combination of Ottoman protocol and the different cultural input of various political entities. Thus, this volume re-positions Istanbul and, as an extension, the Ottomans as essential topics in early modern diplomatic studies *per se*. In conclusion, this book is a valuable step towards further investigations into this field.