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GRAND VIZIERIAL RECEPTION CEREMONIES OF EUROPEAN AMBASSADORS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Abstract

Grand viziers acted as the utmost important figure in the Ottoman bureaucratic administration throughout the early modern era. Conducting relations with foreign countries and, hence, conforming to the rules of an established diplomatic practice in the process were among their duties. The present study, therefore, aims at highlighting the underrated procedure of grand vizierial audiences through selected cases from the first half of the seventeenth century. In this respect, dispatches and final reports of certain representatives of major European monarchs in Istanbul are brought to light along with complementary data from Ottoman fiscal records of the time. The reception of foreign diplomats by the grand vizier – which presents its own intricacies and follows its own set of rules – is hence laid under scrutiny to understand how a physical language of diplomacy was created. Accordingly, welcoming receptions by the grand viziers will be studied instead of focusing on the negotiation audiences between the grand viziers and the incoming embassies. Comparisons with the imperial audiences will also be useful both in underlining the differentiation of this physical language from the one employed in the audiences with the sultan and also in evaluating the diplomatic function of the grand vizier within the framework of Ottoman foreign relations. In this respect, the first receptions by the grand vizier were intended to welcome foreign embassies and played a crucial part in their diplomatic mission since the date for the sultanic audience was arranged herein. Moreover, exchange of gifts between the grand vizier and the emissaries, serving of refreshments and avoidance of any politically consequential issue during the meeting were the main elements of the grand vizierial receptions.

Keywords: Ottoman diplomacy, grand vizier, audience, European-Ottoman relations

‘The emphasis on ceremonial’, read a relatively recent view on the function of ritual in diplomacy, ‘can also be traced back to Oriental diplomacy’.¹ The authors’ subsequent evaluation of Byzantine diplomatic practice in that vein offers us an unintended precursor for the main subject of the present study, that is, the diplomatic ritual in Istanbul in the first half of the seventeenth century. Within this context, a relatively underrated aspect of this ritualised contact, grand vizierial reception of European diplomatic agents, is laid under scrutiny.

The significance of the present study lies in the fact that the first meaningful contact of foreign representatives visiting the Ottoman capital was actually with the grand vizier, who was the head of the Ottoman decision-making mechanism, the Porte. This first meeting took place at the grand vizier’s office, the so-called *bâb-ı paşa* (the pasha’s gate), as it was reflected in the Ottoman sources. We have only dispersed information regarding this first audience (*huzura kabul*, or reception ceremony), since diplomatic agents tended to overlook these in their reports, as the grand vizier was not deemed as highly important as the sultan. Furthermore, modern literature on Ottoman diplomacy similarly chose to focus on the same fulcrum of imperial audiences, overlooking the importance of the one with the grand vizier.²

The information at hand, meagre as it is, derives nonetheless from two main categories of sources that have been chosen with the intention of offering a comprehensive geographical variety despite their lack of chronological parallelism. The first and the more frequently visited of these are the narrative accounts (such as *relaziones*, dispatches, diaries or eyewitness accounts) related to selected Venetian, Austrian, French, Swedish, Polish-Lithuanian, Muscovite and Dutch diplomatic representatives to the Porte between 1612 and 1643. The less conspicuous source material, on the other hand, is the Ottoman fiscal documentation regarding the diplomatic receptions within roughly the same time frame. The temporal scope of the samples has been deliberately kept tight

¹ Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 47.

² Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1991), pp. 91–110.

(limited to three decades) to avoid the pitfall of interpreting centuries-long early modern diplomatic practices as if they were identical.

The study will first situate the office of the grand vizierate in its diplomatic context. Then, the ritualistic progress of the reception ceremonies will be examined, step by step. Finally, the grand vizieral receptions will be contrasted with the audiences held by the Ottoman sultans, which will help emphasise the function and mentality of the first diplomatic meetings with the grand vizier. So far as the approach is concerned, the treatment of the issue will be dealt less within terms of the court entertainments than theatricality of the diplomatic representatives and state actors.³

THE GRAND VIZIER IN OTTOMAN DIPLOMACY

The office of the grand vizierate, as the chair of the Ottoman imperial council, played the primary role in the conduct of state affairs. The grand vizier held ‘a decisive role in the daily running of the Ottoman state administration’ and ‘had the power to decide on many political and jurisdictional matters independently’.⁴ In many ways, a grand vizier served as the second man after the sultan, in an analogous manner to many European chancellors or presidents of royal councils in the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, the autonomy enjoyed by, or the affiliation of the office with, a particular person was not the case in the Ottoman Empire as it was in many European states of the time, a fact suggested by the frequent substitutions in the office of the grand viziers.⁵

³ Ellen Welch, *Theatre of Diplomacy: International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), p. 10.

⁴ Pál Fodor, ‘Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman Ruling Elite and the Formation of the Grand Vizieral “Telhîs”’, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 47, no. 1/2 (1994), 67–85 (p. 74).

⁵ For example, the self-indulgent policy of Swedish Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna rose to such a level that Swedish diplomats had to consult both the chancellor and then the Swedish court during the peace negotiations of Westphalia, see: Jakob Gustavsson, ‘Kanslern och diplomaten: En textanalys av breven från Johan Adler Salvius till Axel Oxenstierna under de fredsförberedande åren 1643–1648’ (unpublished thesis, Kristianstad University, 2013), p. 58; or for Cardinal Richelieu’s foreign policy conduct in France: Madeleine Haehl, *Les Affaires étrangères au temps de Richelieu: Le secrétariat d’État, les agents diplomatiques (1624–1642)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006).

Along with the daily administrative and judiciary functions, the grand vizier also rose as a determinant figure with regard to the deliberation of Ottoman international relations. Apart from partaking in the process of foreign policymaking, he also tended to take actions conspicuously: he was the first person to lead armies against foreign countries in times of war, while his letters tended to accompany the imperial letters en-route to foreign courts in times of peace.

More importantly, the grand vizier served as the contact figure to canvas inter-state relations with incoming diplomats,⁶ a role fulfilled in his absence by the so-called *sadaret kaymakamı*, that is, the deputy grand vizier. In some instances, recurrent talks between the grand vizier and diplomats were held over specific state affairs; while the meetings could assume an amicable or ‘informal manner’, too.⁷ As a contemporary Venetian ambassador (*bailo*) at the Porte observed, the grand vizier was the single most important figure, with whom ‘all important state affairs were discussed at his own house’ and ‘the ambassadors negotiated and resolved their business with him’.⁸

The emissaries coming to the Porte had to acquire the recognition of their mission by appearing before the sultan and presenting him the royal letters brought from their home countries. In this respect, they had to make their first official meeting in Istanbul with the grand vizier since they ‘did not have the right to communicate directly with the sultan’,

⁶ The Venetian bailo Giovanni Cappello (c. 1630–33) relates that all important state matters were discussed at the grand vizier’s office and diplomatic envoys were also received there as early as the 1630s, see: Giovanni Cappello, ‘Relazione di Constantinopoli del Bailo Giovanni Cappello, 1634’, in *Relazioni Degli Stati Europei Lette Al Senato Dagli Ambasciatori Veneziani Nel Secolo Decimosettimo*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. by Nicolo Barozzi and Guiglelmo Berchet (Venice: Naratovich, 1872), pp. 5–68, (pp. 30–31): ‘tutti li gravi negozi dell’Imperio sono maneggiati dal primo Visir, la maggior parte in propria casa, ove ammette gli Ambasciatori e seco tratta e seco risolve quanto occorre senza conferir col Re [...]’.

⁷ Metin Kunt and Zeynep Nevin Yelçe, ‘Divân-ı Hümâyûn: le conseil impérial Ottoman et ses conseillers, 1450–1580’, in *Conseils & Conseillers dans l’Europe de la Renaissance v. 1450 – v. 1550*, ed. by Cédric Michon (Rennes: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais & Rennes, 2012), pp. 299–339 (pp. 328–29).

⁸ Giorgio Giustinian, ‘1627, Giorgio Giustinian bailo’, in *Relazioni d’Ambasciatori Veneti a Senato*, vol. 14: *Costantinopoli, Relazioni Inedite (1512–1789)*, ed. by Maria Pia Pedani-Fabris (Padova: Aldo Ausilio, 1996), pp. 525–633 (p. 545).

a practice in function since the fifteenth century.⁹ The obligation for foreign agents to meet the grand vizier duly contributed to the ritual formation process of grand vizieral audiences. And this is probably the very point at which the grand vizier differentiated himself from his European counterparts: the grand vizierate was an official position, and hence its holder had to be more significant in the diplomatic ritual, whereas the European first ministers tended to be mere royal favourites, rendering them less visible in diplomatic ceremonial,¹⁰ which will be explained in some detail in the following sections.¹¹

THE DEPARTURE TO THE MEETING

Public diplomatic ceremonies have been regarded both as a display of friendship between the host and the visitor countries, and a means to measure the prestige of the visitors' country *vis-à-vis* the other diplomatic representatives at a given court. The audience with the grand vizier as a matter of performative diplomacy was also of primary importance in this respect.¹² It was not only a significant early modern Ottoman ceremony but also the first pillar of the bipartite diplomatic introduction ritual in Istanbul, the second one being the audience with the sultan. It transformed the incoming emissaries into recognised diplomatic actors who could only after these two meetings freely visit other ambassadors or Ottoman political figures in the city.¹³ However, this meeting with the

⁹ Güneş Işıksel, 'La politique étrangère ottomane dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle: le cas du règne de Selim II (1566–1574)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, EHESS Paris, 2012), pp. 111, 113.

¹⁰ I owe this comment in the last sentence to the anonymous reviewer, to whom I hereby offer my thanks.

¹¹ For a detailed study to distinguish between the grand vizier and the favourite in Ottoman history at this time period, see Günhan Böreği, 'Factions and Favorites at the Courts of Sultan Ahmed I (c. 1603–17) and His Immediate Predecessors' (unpublished doctoral thesis, the Ohio State University Columbus, 2010).

¹² Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations, 1661–1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), p. 142.

¹³ For the distinctive line between ritual and ceremony, see Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Zeremoniell, Ritual, Symbol. Neue Forschungen zur symbolischen Kommunikation in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 27, no. 3 (2000), 389–405 (p. 397).

grand vizier was actually not the sort of rendezvous that the diplomatic agents could have a say about: these representatives generally waited for days in their lodgings until the grand vizier (or the deputy grand vizier) sent one of his men to notify the diplomats that they would be accepted into the grand vizier's audience on the following day.

This stand-by until the audience with the grand vizier, however, was not defined by any fixed duration, contrary to a recent study pointing to a three-day-rule in the 1560s and 1570s:¹⁴ during the period concerned in this study, it tended to happen within the first week of the envoys' arrival, but there was not a pattern clearly outlined. The Dutch ambassador, Cornelius Haga, waited four days in 1612; Habsburg ambassador Negroni (in 1612), Swedish envoy Paul Strassburg (in 1632), and Muscovite representatives (in 1642) – seven days; and the Polish ambassador Zbaraski (in 1622) – eight days. Habsburg ambassador (*Grossbotschafter*) Count (Graf von) Puchheim was exceptionally rapid in acquiring the invitation from the deputy grand vizier in spring 1634, with a wait of only two days.

Once their invitation arrived, the second step for the agents was the trip to the grand vizier's office. Here, it should be remembered, it was an indispensable feature of both Ottoman and European early modernity to underline any political event of some consequence with public processions: the *surre* alayı (sending imperial presents to Holy Lands), sultan's visits to mosques for Friday prayers or official diplomatic entries into Istanbul were all conceived on this premise of forming long processions of people who passed through the city.¹⁵ The diplomats almost always regarded the public attention they attracted, evidenced by long rows of the city's inhabitants, as a manifestation of the significance attached to their monarchs.

These processions were, therefore, staged before the grand vizier's audience, too. However, it was not up to the diplomatic agents to determine their manner of proceeding to the grand vizier's office from their lodgings (which were either inside Istanbul proper or around

¹⁴ Işıksele, p. 95.

¹⁵ A fine and coloured example in English would be Karin Ådahl (ed.), *The Sultan's procession: The Swedish Embassy to Sultan Mehmed IV in 1657–1658 and the Rålamb paintings* (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2006).

Galata). To be exact, a certain number of ceremonial marshals (*çavuş*) were sent by the grand vizier to the lodgings of the diplomats, along with unmounted but saddled horses for their use. After mounting the horses, they formed their retinues into a procession line and started their journey through the city to the grand vizier's office.¹⁶ The Muscovite envoys, Miloslavskiy and Lazarevskiy (1642) provide a little more information in this respect: there were twelve *çavuşes* and an unspecified number of saddled horses sent to collect them. The Swedish envoy Strassburg gives the most detailed account by describing how his men and other attendants formed a line of two rows: first came the janissaries sent to accompany them, who were followed by the secretaries (scribes) of the embassy, then nobles, then dragomans and lastly the envoy himself. And as Strassburg also notes, 'it was customary to use only oriental horses' during these processions.¹⁷

The information at hand regarding the first moment of reception by the grand vizier is provided by the Muscovite envoys (1642). When they appeared outside the grand vizier's office, ten *çavuşes* and a *selam çavuşu* (greeting officer) came forth to welcome them. After that, the personal steward of the grand vizier made his appearance, again in the company of ten servants, to help them to the audience chamber

¹⁶ Samuel Kuszewicz, *Narratio Legationis Zbaravianae et Rerum apud Otthomanos Anno 1622 Gestarum* (Gdansk: Georg Forster, 1645), pp. 75–76: Without going into details, Zbaraski's retinue is reported to have travelled through the city 'splendidus apparatu'. Puchheim does not express more than the fact that some '*çavuşes* and horses were sent'; see: Franz Christoph Khevenhiller [Khevenhüller], *Annalium Ferdinandeorum Tom XII* (Leipzig: M.O. Weidmann, 1726), p. 1413.

¹⁷ П'яа Danilovich Miloslavskiy and Leontiy Lazarevskiy, 'Стагейный Список о Посольстве Ильи Даниловича Милославскаго и Дьяка Леонтия Лазоревскаго въ Царьградъ въ 7150 году [Statejnyj Spisok o Posol'stve Il'i Daniloviča Miloslavsjašego i D'jaka Leontija Lazorevskagi v Tsar'grad v 7150 Godu]', *Временник Императорского Московского общества истории и древностей Российских*, 8 (1850), 1–136 (p. 35); and Paul Strassburg, 'Relatio de Byzantino Itinere ac negotiis in Ottomanica Aula peractis, nec non de statu ac facie Orientalis Imperii, qualis erat circa Ann. MDCXXXIII', in *Catalogus codicum Graecorum mss. olim in Bibliotheca Palatina, nunc Vaticana asservatorum... Quibus Addita sunt alia antehac non edita Virorum Illustrum Opuscula & Epistola, Quae ad Illustrandam Historiam Exlesiasticam pariter ac Profanam faciunt, & praefixo Rerum contentarum Indice recensentur*, ed. by Friedrich Sylburg (Frankfurt, 1702), pp. 185–226 (pp. 206–07).

of the grand vizier. In the case of the Habsburg ambassador Count Puchheim with whom the Ottomans were to briskly renew a peace treaty in 1634, the deputy grand vizier personally stood at the threshold of the building to welcome the dismounting ambassador. The Swedish envoy (in 1632) was greeted by a *selam çavuşu* after entering the grand vizier's courtyard and was directed towards particular benches to sit and wait until further notice. After the envoy and his entourage took their seats, the *selam çavuşu* went inside the grand vizier's office to inform the latter of their arrival.¹⁸

THE MEETING AND THE RETURN

It can be observed that after the diplomatic agents arrived at the audience hall of the grand vizier, the same procedure was followed with slight differences: the meeting was a perfunctory one, the superficial character of which refused to touch upon any political issue. To quote from Habsburg ambassador Kuefstein (1628), 'no substantial discourse was had during this visit'.¹⁹ Hence, the welcoming character of this first reception was only marked by the grand vizier's polite enquiries, which focused on asking the representatives about their health, how their journey from home to Istanbul fared, and about the present state of their monarch or country. In return, the grand vizier received the presents intended for himself, along with the letters of credentials brought by the diplomats.²⁰

¹⁸ Miloslavskiy and Lazarevskiy, p. 36; Strassburg, p. 208; Khevenhiller, *Annalium Ferdinandeorum Tom XII*, p. 1413.

¹⁹ Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrschaftsarchiv Weinberg, Archivalien HS. 16, fol. 183r, Hans Ludwig von Kuefstein, Diarium oder genaue Beschreibung dessen, so auf der türkischen Legation von Tag zu Tag fürgeheth und gehandelt wirdt, Anfangen 21. Nov. 1627, 1629: 'Den Übrigen hat es auch bey dieser ersten Besuchung dess Chaimecham keinen Diskurs, so ein einziger Substanz abgeben...'

²⁰ *Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Levantschen Handel, Eerste Deel: 1590–1660*, ed. by K. Heeringa ('S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhof, 1910), p. 211. The Habsburg representative Andrea Negroni, who visited Istanbul in 1612, remarked that no serious state matter was handled at the first meeting, since political affairs were to be dealt with four days later during the second meeting with the grand vizier, see Andrea Negroni, 'Relatio Antonii Nigroni a Sua Majestate Constantinopolim

To go further into detail, the Swedish envoy Paul Strassburg (1632) noted that diplomatic agents could appear with their heads covered before the grand vizier. The first greetings were exchanged by the envoy's slight forward bending of the body, and the grand vizier's bowing of the head. Next, Strassburg described the seat he was indicated to take: it was a flat, short, quadrangle stool, standing three steps away from the grand vizier's seat. The dragoman, who was translating the conversation, stood between the grand vizier and the envoy. The grand vizier enquired of his king's health and his whereabouts, and after that the envoy delivered royal letters to him. The grand vizier took the letters with both hands and raised them to his chest, before handing them over to the dragoman for translation.²¹

The Muscovite envoys Lazarevskiy and Miloslavskiy (1642) found the grand vizier's office rather crowded, as the treasurer, the imperial chancellor, the viziers and a good number of *çavuşes* were present. Here, the envoys delivered the Tsar's letters to the grand vizier, and then the dragoman announced the envoys by name in a loud voice. After the introduction, the grand vizier handed the letters over to the imperial chancellor and showed the envoys their seat opposite himself. As usual, he asked them about their health, how their sea voyage over the Black Sea was and how many days it had taken. When he demanded from the envoys to hand him the Tsar's letters for the sultan, the envoys rejected, and the conversation thus came to an end.²²

Similarly, when the newly appointed English ambassador in Istanbul, Sir Peter Wyche, took his first audience with the deputy grand vizier in 1628, his speech focused on the assurance of the British King's affection and friendship towards the Ottoman Empire as he delivered the letters. Wyche also noted that the deputy grand vizier received him and his predecessor Sir Thomas Roe 'with due respect and bid [him] welcome' and also expressed that Wyche's embassy 'would be most agreeable to

missi Anno 1613, Ex Copia MS. Jankovichiano Aczéliani', in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricorum Minores, Hactenus Inediti, Synchroni, aut Proxime Coevi, Tomus I*, ed. by Márton György Kovachich (Buda: Typis Regiae Universitatis, 1798), pp. 245–77 (p. 249).

²¹ Strassburg, p. 208.

²² Miloslavskiy and Lazarevskiy, pp. 36–38; Negroni, p. 249.

the desires of the Grand Senor'. The overall ambiance of the reception was said to have been 'verie friendlie' by the ambassador.²³

These superficial conversations were usually concluded by the grand vizier's more substantial ostentation of hospitality: he got *şerbet* (sugary fruit juices) served to the envoys and presented them precious robes of honour, the *hil'at*. Regarding his 1612 mission to Istanbul, the Habsburg envoy Andrea Negroni noted that the grand vizier himself, his secretary, the dragoman and each and every remaining member of his retinue had to wear a robe of honour, before they were served 'a Turkish beverage called *şerbet*'.²⁴ In 1628, the British ambassador noted, 'In token of our Welcome, [the deputy grand vizier] had vests of slight tissue putt upon us, and fewer of our people'.²⁵ Four years later, when the Swedish envoy was accepted into audience, the grand vizier at first wished to offer him and his men *şerbet*, which was rejected by the Chief Mufti – who was present at that time – because it was Ramadan, the month of fasting during the day. However, the envoy and his men were naturally presented with their robes of honour before their departure. The envoy Paul Strassburg, who was quite fond of the robes, noted that he and his retinue returned to their lodgings by strolling through the city in their pompous style.²⁶

As already shown by Strassburg, the emissaries tended to form into processions on their way back to their lodgings after the audience

²³ The National Archives, Kew (hereafter cited as TNA), State Papers (hereafter cited as SP), 97/14, fols 134r–v, Letter from Peter Wyche to Lord Carleton, 3 May 1628. I should hereby present my thanks to Dr. Ömer Gezer (Hacettepe University) for providing me with his digital copies of related fonds from the British archives.

²⁴ Negroni, p. 249.

²⁵ TNA, SP, 97/14, fol. 134v, Letter from Peter Wyche to Lord Carleton, 3 May 1628.

²⁶ Strassburg, p. 208–09. In the Ottoman records, with got the following information regarding the Strassburg embassy, see: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri [Presidential Ottoman Archives in Istanbul] (hereafter cited as BOA), Kamil Kepeci Defterleri (hereafter cited as KK.d) 1823, p. 158: 'İn'am-ı hil'at bera-yı ba'zı kesan der bâb-ı Sadrazam Receb Paşa ba-tevarih-i muhtelife [...] Fi 22 N 1041 der bâb-ı paşa [...] hil'at-ı kârhane merdümün-i elçi-i İsvעיye, sevb 2; [...] bera-yı merdüm-i mezbur, sevb 1 [Bestowal of robes of honour for certain people at the pasha's presence at different dates ... On 12 April 1632 at the pasha's presence ... robes of workshop for the retinue of the Swedish emissary, pieces 2 ... for another of his men, piece 1]'.

with the grand vizier. The Muscovite envoys, who were inarguably more sensitive to the numbers, suggested that they had been presented thirteen robes of honour, before being escorted by a cortege of a dozen *çavuşes* on the return ride. The Habsburg ambassador Count Puchheim (1634) was presented with twelve robes and rode back to his inn with 'as many men as he had come' to the grand vizier's office. The return to the lodgings was not the end of the contact with the grand vizier for the Muscovite emissaries: on the very evening of the reception, the grand vizier had baskets of fruits sent as presents to the Muscovite envoys.²⁷

A COMPARISON WITH THE SULTANIC AUDIENCE

The (deputy) grand viziers were just one amongst many officeholders in Istanbul that European emissaries had contact with. The grand mufti, grand admiral, remaining viziers of the Porte and the members of the European *corps diplomatique* in the city also staged their own receptions for the incoming embassies. However, none of these could be as highly regarded as the audience with the sultan. For the audience, the arrangement of the proceedings of the imperial reception had to be made with the grand vizier during this first meeting.²⁸ And herein lay the importance of the grand vizieral audience, even though exceptions were occasionally made.²⁹

The difference between the audience given by the sultan on the one hand, and the grand vizier on the other, allows us to observe the layers of diplomatic ritual at the Ottoman court. To begin, the first distinction between the two audiences was the quality of the interlocation: that is

²⁷ Miloslavskiy and Lazarevskiy, p. 39; Khevenhiller, *Annalium Ferdinandeorum Tom XII*, p. 1413.

²⁸ Ernst D. Petritsch, 'Zeremoniell bei Empfängen habsburgischer Gesandtschaften in Konstantinopel', in *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Ralph Kauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederkorn (Vienna: OAW, 2009), pp. 301–22 (p. 310).

²⁹ For example, Habsburg ambassador Count Czernin's audience with Sultan Ibrahim in 1644 was arranged by the grand vizier two days earlier than the one with the latter, see Hermann Czernin von Chudenitz, *Zweite Gesandtschaftsreise des Grafen Hermann Czernin von Chudenitz nach Constantinopel im Jahre 1644* (Vienna: A. Landfrass Sohn, 1879), p. 36.

to say, the physical conduct of the conversations differed conspicuously. So far as the sultanic audience was concerned, the sultan used to sit on his broad but low reception pedestal, while the emissaries delivered their speech without receiving any response from the sultan. Moreover, the emissaries were not allowed to sit in the presence of the sultan – they performed their oration standing. The rigidity of these audiences had been set as a norm throughout the previous century during the reign of Sultan Süleyman and continued to prevail invariably in all the embassy reports of the first half of the seventeenth century.³⁰

This symbolic subjugation of the emissaries did, however, leave its place to a moderate egalitarianism during the grand vizierial reception. As suggested above, the grand vizier took pains to ensure that the emissaries took their seat opposite him. That is to say, both parties shared an equal footing during their conversation,³¹ a concern of considerable importance given the fact that pre-modern people ‘attributed great meaning to the astounding role played by the question of’ who was seated where and how.³² Moreover, it was the grand vizier who initiated the talk, which was genuinely conversational as opposed to the monologue the emissaries carried out at sultanic audiences. The equal footing both sides shared was also manifest in the fact that the emissaries walked to and from the grand vizier at their own will, which posed a contrast to the forced genuflection of the emissaries who were almost forcibly held by their arms during sultanic audiences.

The second distinction, to leave the egalitarianism aside, was the relative hospitality of the treatment at the grand vizier’s office. It might

³⁰ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, ‘Semiotics of behavior in early modern diplomacy: Polish embassies in Istanbul and Bahçesaray’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 7, no. 3 (2003), 245–56 (p. 247).

³¹ During Habsburg (extraordinary) ambassador Puchheim’s visit in 1634, the ambassador requested from the deputy grand vizier that the Habsburg Emperor’s resident representative in Istanbul, Rudolph Schmid, should also be seated instead of standing, which was immediately granted, see: Khevenhiller, *Annalium Ferdinandeorum Tom XII*, p. 1413.

³² Florian Kühnel, ‘Ein Königreich für einen Botschafter. Die Audienzen Thomas Bendishs in Konstantinopel während des Commonwealth’, in *Die Audienz: ritualisierter Kulturkontakt in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Peter Burschel and Christine Vogel (Köln–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), pp. 125–60 (p. 125).

be true that the number of robes of honour presented by the grand vizier to the emissaries was less than that of donated by the sultan.³³ However, whereas the sultan made diplomatic agents wear their robes of honour before entering into the audience chamber during sultanic audiences, the grand vizier presented the robes in his presence when diplomatic agents visited him. Similarly, the fact that the emissaries handed their presents over to the grand vizier during the audience also contrasts conspicuously: the gifts intended for the sultan had to be sent to the Topkapı Palace before the embassy even set out from their lodgings.³⁴

It could, thus, be suggested that this reciprocation of gifts and robes during audiences with the grand vizier was done as if to emphasise the fact that these robes were presents of an equal, and not a uniform one was supposed to wear prior to appearing before a hierarchically superior presence.³⁵ It has already been noted that forced genuflection, gripping by the arms and the obligation to wear the robes of honour before the sultan's audience were actually deliberately planned symbols for the emissaries' subordination to the sultan.³⁶

The hospitality at grand vizieral audiences holds true also for the serving of the *şerbet*, which not only sweetened tongues but also suggested that the grand vizier was actually playing the good host by treating the emissaries with a friendly refreshment. The presentation of

³³ For instance, when the above mentioned Count Puchheim and his retinue took audience with the (deputy) grand vizier and the sultan in March and April 1634 respectively, the former distributed thirteen robes of honour, whereas the latter twenty two, see: BOA, KK.d 667M, p. 221 (28/29 March 1634); *ibid.*, p. 224 (5 Şevval 1043/ 4 April 1634).

³⁴ Tetiana Grygorieva, 'Symbols and Perceptions of Diplomatic Ceremony: Ambassadors of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Istanbul', in *Kommunikation durch symbolische Akte: Religiöse Heterogenität und politische Herrschaft in Polen-Litauen*, ed. by Yvonne Kleinmann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), pp. 115–31 (p. 120).

³⁵ The superiority view is suggested (among others) by Hedda Reindl-Kiel, 'East is East and West is West, and Sometimes the Twain Did Meet: Diplomatic Gift Exchange in the Ottoman Empire', in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies: State, Province, and the West*, vol. 2, ed. by Colin Imber et al. (London–New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 113–23 (p. 119).

³⁶ Florian Kühnel, "'No Ambassadors Ever Having the Like". Die Übertretung der diplomatischen Rituale und die Stellung der Gesandten am osmanischen Hof"', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 52 (2016), 95–122 (p. 106).

robes and the serving of *şerbet* both signified that the grand vizier aimed to portray an ambiance of cosiness and amicability for the emissaries, who were destined to find a rather physically and psychologically rigid and abrupt reception with the sultan.³⁷

In these respects, the grand viziers' reception can be better compared to the treatment the envoys enjoyed at the hands of Ottoman provincial governors (such as the Buda, Bosnia, Silistria and Caffa governor-generals) during their first arrival in Ottoman territory. The egalitarian attitude and the service of refreshment were visible there, too, as it is illustrated by the case of Buda in this period.³⁸ Similarly, the sterility of the first audience of Ragusan emissaries with a governor-general in Bosnia had much to share with the grand vizierial audience, and the bestowal of robes of honour at the end of these courtesy visits is another parallel.³⁹

When it comes to the robes, it can be noted that the quality of the *hil'ats* presented at the (deputy) grand vizier's reception did not differ from those bestowed by the sultan. That is, diplomatic agents of the states the Ottoman Empire was in regular contact with tended to receive robes of the *altunum-gümüşüm* [golden and silver fabric] quality from both the grand vizier and the sultan. However, it must be emphasised that not all members of a diplomatic mission received the same honours: as one can see at the 1634 grand vizierial reception of the Polish-Lithuanian emissaries, only the head of the mission and his steward were donned with robes of *altunum-gümüşüm*, the remaining seven people of lower rank in his retinue were given robes of a baser quality, called *kâr-hâne* [workshop].⁴⁰

³⁷ M. Talbot's analysis covering around a hundred and fifty years of British-Ottoman encounters reveals a similar result, too, see: Talbot, p. 152.

³⁸ Gábor Kármán, "Paşa'nın Eli Öpülür mü?": Budin'de Erdel Elçileri', *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 24 (2013), 69–99 (pp. 84–85).

³⁹ Vesna Miović, 'Beylerbeyi of Bosnia and Sancakbeyi of Hercegovina in the Diplomacy of the Dubrovnik Republic', *Dubrovnik Annals*, 9 (2005), 37–69 (pp. 42–45). For a general treatment of legal, military or diplomatic relationship of the Ottoman vassal states with their neighbouring Ottoman provinces, see Kármán, Gábor and Lovro Kunčević (eds), *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2013).

⁴⁰ BOA, KK.d 667M, p. 312: 'H. 28 R 1044: Hil'at-ı a'la altunum-gümüşüm, Ser-a-ser, sevb 1; Hil'at altunum-gümüşüm sevb 1; Hil'at Kâr-hâne Sevb 7: Mezburlar

Before coming to an end, it must be remembered that the introductory character of the grand vizieral audiences must be understood within the framework of the diplomatic or political routines of Istanbul. For, as it was argued above, the envoys coming into the Ottoman territory were hosted by local provincial or district governors and, hence, they had already experienced their first audience away from the capital. Nonetheless, the transitory position of these officials for the envoys could hardly match the importance of the first meeting with the grand vizier, which was crucial in obtaining the audience with the sultan.

One last issue to turn our attention to is placing the Ottoman practice in its European context. Within the limited framework of analysis undertaken for the present study, it is hard to claim that meeting with any political personage stood as a pre-condition for the audience with European monarchs, since royal receptions could take place before the emissaries' introduction to the high officials actually in charge. This was the case in 1644 when the Swedish envoy to the Polish-Lithuanian Court, Axel Sparre, was accepted into the king's audience on the second day of his arrival in Warsaw, and invited into a feast with the Chancellor Ossolinski only two days later.⁴¹

Similarly, and more relevant to our subject, even though Recep Aga (the Ottoman ambassador to the Habsburg court in 1628-1629) was known to carry out negotiations with the head of the Habsburg Secret Council, Prince Eggenberg, throughout his mission, his first audience after arrival seems to have been with the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II, and not with the prince.⁴² However, these might be misleading, given the fact that the first audience of the Ottoman ambassador Ahmed Kahya in

Leh elçisi barışmak için geldikde kendüye ve yanında olanlara giydirilmüştür, der bâb-ı pâşâ' [21 October 1634, Highest quality golden-silver silk robe of honour, piece 1; golden-silver robe of honour, piece 1; Workshop robe of honour, pieces 7. These robes of honour were put on the Polish-Lithuanian emissary and on his retinue at the time or their arrival to conclude the peace].

⁴¹ Axel Sparre, *Axellii Sparre Legatio in Poloniam A. MDCXLV Ejusque de Statu Poloniae Relatio*, ed. by J.H. Schröder and J.A. Wennberg (Uppsala: Leffler, 1854), p. 6.

⁴² Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Staatenabteilungen, Venedig, Dispacii di Germania 72, Letters from Pietro Vico to the Venetian Senate, January to September 1629, fols 103, 271, 351, 361.

May 1615 was with Bishop Klesl, the *primado* of Kaiser Matthias. The Kaiser, in his turn, accepted the Ottoman ambassador on the following day (13 May 1615).⁴³ Nonetheless, no data points to deliberation of the audience day with the kaiser during the meeting with Bishop Klesl, suggesting that there was no conditionality involved.

CONCLUSION

The ritualistic character of early modern diplomacy revealed itself also at the grand vizierial receptions. The formation of processions through the city, the repetitive formulation of the politically sterile conversations between the emissaries and the grand vizier, the exchange of gifts between the two parties, and more importantly, the deliberation of the audience day with the sultan were the hallmarks of the grand vizierial audience. The absence of harsh solemnity, of the kind observed at sultanic audiences, might produce the idea, that the whole grand vizierial reception ceremony was designed as a welcome-party, or as aptly noted before, ‘an introduction to the basic rituals of business’ at the Ottoman central court.⁴⁴

Similar as they were to the audiences with the Ottoman provincial governors, receptions staged by the (deputy) grand viziers still had something of their own to offer: it was the inevitable step to surmount in order to arrange the audience with the sultan. And, as has been argued, this seems to be the very quality that set the grand vizierial audience apart from its European counterparts.

Even though we might have tended to regard the whole ritual of grand vizierial reception as a formality, it must not overshadow the fact that this ritual and its proper execution were deemed necessary. This is well exemplified by our concluding instance. When the newly appointed French ambassador, Count Marcheville, made his appearance in Istanbul in 1631, he had to wait for a long while to be received by the gout-ridden deputy grand vizier: for the latter had sent word to the ambassador that the meeting had to be postponed until he would

⁴³ Franz Christoph Khevenhiller [Khevenhüller], *Annalium Ferdinandeorum Achter Theil* (Leipzig: M. Wiedmann, 1722), p. 741.

⁴⁴ Talbot, p. 153.

recover his health, on the ground that the deputy grand vizier ‘had to receive him as seated, not lying’ on bed.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrits Français 7093, fols 134r–35r, Letter from Comte de Marcheville to Monsieur Bouthillier, 26 October 1631.

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