

## *Emotion, Diplomacy and Gift Exchanging Practices in the Ottoman Context\**

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In recent years, an increasing number of studies on diplomatic gifts in the Ottoman context have emphasised, through a variety of different approaches, the central roles played by gift exchanges in the performance of diplomatic interactions taking place both in the capital of the empire, Istanbul – one of the crucial nodes of early modern diplomatic networks – and during ad hoc Ottoman ambassadorial missions abroad.<sup>1</sup> More generally, these studies have also contributed to a growing literature on how gifts enhanced the establishment and development of complex and globally interconnected practices.<sup>2</sup> Contextually, over the last two decades, historians have started approaching diplomatic history, traditionally grounded in legal and political theory, from an interdisciplinary perspective, introducing new themes and wider cultural and social understandings of diplomatic connections.<sup>3</sup> The articles that make up this thematic section, *Emotion, Diplomacy and Gift Exchanging Practices in the Ottoman*

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<sup>1</sup> See, among the others, 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*, eds Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 113–24; SINEM A. CASALE, 'Iconography of the Gift: Diplomacy and Self-Fashioning at the Ottoman Court,' *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 1 (2018): 29–123; MICHAEL TALBOT, 'Gifts of Time: Watches and Clocks in Ottoman-British Diplomacy, 1693-1803,' *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 17 (2016): 55–79 and the recent TRACEY A. SOWERBY and CHRISTOPHER MARKIEWICZ, eds, *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> See ZOLTAN BIEDERMANN, ANNE GERRITSEN, and GIORGIO RIELLO, eds, *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) see in this volume, in particular as regards the Ottoman context, the articles of ANTONIA GATWARD CEVIZLI, 'Portraits, Turbans and Cuirasses. Material Exchange between Mantua and the Ottomans at the End of the Fifteenth Century,' 34–55; LUCA MOLÀ, 'Material Diplomacy. Venetian Luxury Gifts for the Ottoman Empire in the Late Renaissance,' 56–87; and BARBARA KARL, 'Objects of Prestige and Spoils of War. Ottoman Objects in the Habsburg Gift-Giving in the Sixteenth Century,' 119–49.

<sup>3</sup> ZOLTAN BIEDERMANN, ANNE GERRITSEN, and GIORGIO RIELLO, 'Introduction: Global Gifts and the Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia,' in *Global Gifts*, eds Biedermann, Gerritsen, and Riello, 8–9; TRACEY A. SOWERBY and CHRISTOPHER MARKIEWICZ, 'Introduction: Constantinople as a Centre of Diplomatic Culture,' in *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630*, eds Tracey A. Sowerby and Christopher Markiewicz (New York: Routledge, 2021), 27–28.

*Context*, draw on the existing scholarship and take a step in a new direction by posing challenging questions regarding the emotional implications of the processes of exchanging gifts in the framework of Ottoman diplomatic encounters.

Gifts were a central yet particularly conflict-ridden aspect of the interactions between different states. Diplomatic gifts, and the practices and ceremonies through which they were given, received, requested or even demanded, inevitably conveyed either subtle or at times quite clear messages of power, alliance, trust and friendship or, on the contrary, submission, hostility, wariness and rivalry. The authors of this section reflect on how, in this intricate web of often contrasting sentiments, gifts can help us understand the emotions that drove and characterised diplomatic exchanges. This reflection is shaped by several further questions. Which emotions (for example, hope, amazement, curiosity, sense of superiority, disappointment, anxiety, suspicion, weakness, fear) accompanied the giving and receiving of gifts? Could the choice of certain gifts communicate how the giver regarded and felt about the receiver and convey information about the person who had sent them? How did the receiver perceive the gifts and use them by attributing new meanings or constructing new self-narratives and narratives about the other? Is it possible to reconstruct the individual agency and emotional involvement of the different actors engaged in choosing, producing, delivering or receiving gifts, and the way they felt and regarded their roles? Which emotions were the receipt and presentation of gifts intended to evoke in the general public attending the aptly choreographed ambassadorial receptions? The main objective of this section is to address these and other related questions through three case studies from the Ottoman context.

In the opening article, Hedda Reindl-Kiel sets out to detect traces of emotions in ‘Ottoman gift traffic’ by looking at various Ottoman archival sources from different periods, such as notes that accompanied gifts exchanged in the domestic sphere, like the ones from the legate of Silahdar Mustafa Pasha referring to the first half of the seventeenth century; notes accompanying gifts sent to foreign rulers, like the letter from Hürrem, Süleyman the Magnificent’s wife, dispatched between 1548 and 1549 to the Polish king, Sigismund II Augustus; or treasury registers, like a register of daily expenses from the time of Beyazid II (r. 1481–1512) listing several sets of diplomatic gifts sent to Muslim monarchs. The scrutiny of these sources, in which it is very difficult to detect the expression of real emotions, apart from the codified and formulaic references to the emotional sphere contained in commonly used locutions, leads Reindl-Kiel to suggest that in Ottoman society, at least until the eighteenth century, the concept of gift would continue to be mostly based on the notion of *piskeş*, a sort of compulsory gift almost resembling a tribute that on certain occasions had to be offered by an inferior to an individual of higher rank and that did not necessarily entail reciprocity. This makes Ottoman gift-giving appear a somewhat impersonal practice. The author also shows different instances in which the emotions, although not clearly expressed in writing, were occasionally conveyed by the kind of gifts chosen in certain circumstances – the ‘two pairs of underpants

with waist-strings' donated by Hürrem to the Polish king signalling intimacy and friendship, for example. At the same time, considering the difficulty to understand different semiotic codes, the emotional messages expressed by gifts in diplomatic interaction might have been misunderstood on no rare occasion.

Michał Wasiucionek's fascinating essay explores the loaded meanings and expectations that accompanied diplomatic gift exchanges and the different emotional responses that they produced. Using ambassadorial accounts and related texts, the article focuses on the context of Polish-Ottoman and Polish-Moldavian diplomatic relations and covers a period from 1623, when, after a brief stop in the Moldavian capital of Iași, the grand Polish-Lithuanian embassy led by Prince Krzysztof arrived in Istanbul, to 1700, the year in which Rafał Leszczyński's mission to the Sublime Porte took place. During the course of the seventeenth century, trade, direct contacts and complex diplomatic networks facilitated largely peaceful relationships along the vast frontier between the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, spanning from eastern Ukraine to the heart of Central Asia. Wasiucionek shows how, in the course of these diplomatic interactions, gifts were always a particularly charged topic and a recurrent source of concern and anxiety. Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors, Ottoman officials and Moldavian boyars were all aware that gifts were part of the currency that facilitated connections, alliances and, more in general, friendship – in the sense of lack of conflict and absence of hostility – a highly emotional rhetoric constantly reiterated by all parties. In Wasiucionek's words, gifts as necessary 'tokens of friendship' were also invariably a 'source of dissent' because, being strictly connected to a hierarchical expression of power and authority, they were used as tools to affirm and impose vertical subordination by the Ottomans over the Poles and, in turn, by the Poles over the Moldavian elite. If, when visiting Constantinople, the Polish-Lithuanian diplomats implemented different strategies so that their gifts would not be interpreted and employed by their hosts as an acknowledgement of the Commonwealth's inferior status vis-à-vis the sultan, instead, when dealing with the Moldavian voyvodes, they tried to put pressure on them to recognise their superiority. In analysing the interplay between the expression of mutual affection conveying the necessity to maintain good and at least apparently balanced diplomatic relationships, and the carefully choreographed encounters where gift exchanges had a prominent and highly symbolical role, Wasiucionek's article also brings another important emotional layer to the discussion: the Polish-Lithuanian diplomats' necessity to construct the narratives of their ambassadorial accounts in such a way that this would evoke positive emotions and receive approval back home.

The need to construct an effective narrative around gift-giving in diplomatic exchanges that could serve specific political or propagandistic aims is also explored in Rosita D'Amora's article, this time in the context of the events surrounding the official visit of a special envoy sent by the Ottoman sultan, Mahmud I, to the court of King Charles of Bourbon in Naples. The highly fêted visit of Hacı Hüseyin Efendi took place between August and October 1741, its intention to celebrate in Naples the

signing of a treaty of peace, commerce and navigation (*'abdname*) between the two states and to bring the sultan's gifts to the king. This visit was followed, exactly one year later, in November 1742, by the arrival of another exotic guest, this time an elephant that, despite being presented to the Neapolitan public as another gift from the sultan, had actually been explicitly requested by King Charles. D'Amora examines these events in the light of an anonymous contemporary account commissioned by the Neapolitan court to describe the envoy's visit and, in particular, the public audience he had with king. The author also makes use of other related visual and textual sources and archival documents that complement the propagandistic and pristine narrative of the state-sponsored pamphlet, offering not only further information but also showing all the challenges that the Neapolitan court faced during the visit of the sultan's envoy. What clearly emerges is that the visits of both the envoy and the elephant were 'staged' and used by the newly established monarchy, keen to affirm itself internationally, as a tool to cement a political connection with an important ally such as the Ottoman Empire, as well as to promote state formation and shape the internal political landscape. All these texts contain an important material dimension (the materiality of the diplomatic documents, the materials used to furnish the palace in which the envoy was hosted and the locations where he was received and entertained by the court, the dress used during the ceremonies, the materiality of the gifts) but it is difficult to find in them a clear expression of the emotional responses to this diplomatic encounter. However, the entire narrative is permeated by feelings: the desire for domestic self-presentation and legitimation, the political ambition of the ruling monarchy eager to show its close connections with powerful and at least apparently culturally distant allies, the fear of disappointing the guest, the curiosity and astonishment the envoy and his retinue aroused in the Neapolitan public.

Sources about Ottoman diplomatic relationships very rarely contain explicit references to the emotional responses gift exchanges produced in either the individuals directly involved in the negotiations and ceremonies or in the addressees of the textual and visual representations of these exchanges. Yet, by looking at the choice of the gifts, and the way they were given, received, requested, presented, staged and narrated, we can also see their function as broader tools for understanding the interplay between gift exchanging practices and the emotions connected to them.