

## SULTANS AND VOIVODAS IN THE 16TH C. GIFTS AND INSIGNIA\*

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### Abstract

The territorial extent of the Ottoman Empire did not allow the central government to control all the country in the same way. To understand the kind of relations established between the Ottoman Empire and its vassal states scholars took into consideration also peace treaties (*sulhnâme*) and how these agreements changed in the course of time. The most ancient documents were capitulations (*ahdnâme*) with mutual oaths, derived from the idea of truce (*hudna*), such as those made with sovereign countries which bordered on the Empire. Little by little they changed and became imperial decrees (*berat*), which mean that the sultan was the lord and the others subordinate powers. In the Middle Ages bilateral agreements were used to make peace with European countries too, but, since the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., sultans began to issue *berats* to grant commercial facilities to distant countries, such as France or England. This meant that, at that time, they felt themselves superior to other rulers. On the contrary, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, European countries became stronger and they succeeded in compelling the Ottoman Empire to issue capitulations, in the form of *berat*, on their behalf. The article hence deals with the Ottoman's imperial authority up on the vassal states due to the historical evidences of sovereignty.

**Key Words:** Ottoman Empire, voivoda, gift, insignia.

### 1. Introduction

The territorial extent of the Ottoman Empire did not allow the central government to control all the country in the same way. From 1363, when John V Paleologo made a alliance with Murad I, the number of regions that enjoyed

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\* This paper is a revised version of Maria Pia Pedani, *Doni e insegne del potere concessi dai sultani ottomani ai principi rumeni nel Cinquecento*, in *L'Italia e l'Europa Centro-Orientale attraverso i secoli. Miscellanea di studi di storia politico-diplomatica*, a cura di Cristian Luca, Gianluca Masi, Andrea Piccardi, Braila (Romania)-Venezia 2004, pp. 117-132.

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different degrees of autonomy increased insomuch that in the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a ring of countries dependent in different ways from Istanbul. The bonds that united these regions and vassal states to the capital varied, such as the religion of their inhabitants and rulers. There were Christians, such as the voivoda of Walachia and that of Moldavia, but there were also Muslim princes, such as the Sheriff in Mecca or the Tatar khan, who were also entrusted to take over the succession of the Empire if Osman's dynasty would have come to an end. Some regions had above all a strategic-military value such as those near Hapsburg territories. Kurdistan was the bastion of the Sunni Ottoman Empire against those who were considered Shiia heretics. Other areas had, above all, an economic value, such as the Republic of Dubrovnik: Ottomans took advantage from its market and port and, as a result, they preferred to control an independent city for centuries rather than to take direct possession of another small piece of land. Mecca and Medina provided an international acknowledgement for the sultan's legitimacy: he protected the pilgrims and was officially 'the servant of the Holy Cities'. At the same time the Venetian Republic continued for centuries to pay tribute to the sultan for the islands of Cyprus and Zante. Other regions, such as Albanian mountains, part of Montenegro as well as part of Lebanon lived in a state of more nominal than effective subjection: to establish a direct rule there would have involved more costs than profit for Istanbul<sup>1</sup>.

The quantity and worth of tributes and diplomatic gifts, given and received, and their symbolic value, as well as the rank of the envoys who brought them, were a sign of different degrees of subjection. For instance, in the second half of the 16th century, the Muslim Tatar Khan paid no money, but had to take part in the sultan's war campaigns with his men. On the contrary, the Roman emperor paid every year 30,000 pieces of gold. Other Christian lands did the same: Transylvania used to send 10,000 pieces of gold (and, after 1575, 15,000), Dubrovnik 12,500 and Venice 8,000 for the island of Cyprus (until the Cyprus war), and another 500 for the island of Zante (after 1573 increased to 1,500, until 1684). Notwithstanding these tributes, the Republic of Venice and the Hapsburgs were free and independent. On the contrary, the Tatar Khan or the Christian voivodas of Transylvania, Moldavia and Walachia were forced to follow the politics of Istanbul<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Eggar Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire*, Leiden 1972, pp. 129-131; Gilles Veinstein, *Les provinces balkaniques (1606-1774)*, in *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman*, under the direction of Robert Mantran, Paris 1989, pp. 287-340.

<sup>2</sup> Mihai Maxim, *Nouveaux documents turcs sur les cadeaux protocolaires (peşkeş) et les insignes du pouvoir (hükümet alâmetleri)*, in Mihai Maxim, *Romano-Ottomanica. Essays & Documents from the Turkish Archives*, İstanbul 2001, pp. 70-151, in particular p. 75; Maria Pia Pedani, *Le prime 'sottoscrizioni a coda' dei tesorieri*

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> c., in the area between the Aegean sea and the Carpathians, there were several Ottoman provinces: the *eyâlet of Cezayir* (i.e. Cezayiri Bahri Sefid, the Aegean island, from about 1537-38), *Rumeli* (from about 1365), *Bosna* (from about 1525), *Kanije* (from 1600), *Budin* (from 1541), *Eğri* (from 1596), *Timushvar* (from 1552) and *Silistre* (from about 1599). The river Danube divided *Rumeli* from a Northern region where Ottomans ruled in a different way. *Eflâk*, *Boğdan* and *Erdel*, that is to say Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, were vassal states. Sultans could appoint or remove their princes (called voivodas), ask for support during military campaigns, determine their foreign policy and receive a tribute. In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Istanbul claimed also the right of having armed garrisons in some stronghold of Walachia and Moldavia, but not of Transylvania. For about a century these countries gave up independence for submission and obedience. Scholars are still discussing the date of the beginning and end of this process. According to Viorel Panaite in Walachia this process began at the time of Mircea the old (1386-1418) and finished in 1462 under Radu the Beautiful; in Moldavia it started in 1455-56 and ended in 1538, while in Transylvania it began in 1528, when János Zápolya kissed the sultan's hands and ended when John Sigismund Zápolya paid homage to him on 29 June 1566.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the kind of relations established between the Ottoman Empire and its vassal states scholars took into consideration also peace treaties (*sulhnâme*) and how these agreements changed in the course of time. The most ancient documents were capitulations (*ahdnâme*) with mutual oaths, derived from the idea of truce (*hudna*), such as those made with sovereign countries which bordered on the Empire. Little by little they changed and became imperial decrees (*berat*), which mean that the sultan was the lord and the others subordinate powers. In the Middle Ages bilateral agreements were used to make peace with European countries too, but, since the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., sultans began to issue *berats* to grant commercial facilities to distant countries, such as France or England. This meant that, at that time, they felt themselves superior to other rulers. On the contrary, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, European countries became stronger and they succeeded in compelling the Ottoman Empire to issue

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*nell'impero ottomano*, «Quaderni di Studi Arabi», 8 (1990), pp. 215-228. About the theory of Venetian dependence cfr. the language used in some 16<sup>th</sup> c. Ottoman documents where the doge is called *zâbit* (subordinate official) and he must demonstrate "submission and obedience" (*itaat ve inkiyad*) towards the sultan, Maria Pia Pedani, *Dalla frontiera al confine*, Roma 2002, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Viorel Panaite, *The Status of the "Kharâj-gûzarlar". A Case Study: Wallachians, Moldavians and Transylvanians in the 15th to 17th centuries*, in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization*, ed. by Kemal Çiçek, 4 voll., Ankara 2000, vol. I, pp. 227-238. Cfr. also Mihai Maxim, *Le statut des Pays Roumains envers la Porte ottomane aux XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*, in Maxim, *Romano-Ottomanica*, pp. 23-46.

capitulations, in the form of *berat*, on their behalf<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Diplomatic gifts (*peşkeş*)

The diplomatic gifts which had always a great symbolic value are also useful to understand the nature of relations established between the Empire and its vassal states. Christian princes of Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania sent presents (*peşkeş*) to Istanbul, while, at their turn, sultans send them other gifts (*irsâliye*) and insignia (*hükümet alâmetleri*)<sup>5</sup>.

*Peşkeş* was the name of a gift offered by an inferior authority to a superior one. In 1526 some *peşkeşes* arrived in Istanbul from Moldavia: they were furs of sable and ermine and *dendân-ı mâhi*, i.e. "fish teeth". In this context, the word means walrus tusks, even if it may refer also to the more precious ivory of narwhal. At the times of al-Bîrûnî and Mamûd al-Kâşgarî, both these items were already collected by the inhabitants of Northern countries and sold to Volga Bulgarians; thus, they went southwards, together with other goods, and we know that some of them arrived as far as Mecca. In 1668 also the Russian ambassador brought to the sultan Mehmed IV sables, ermines and narwhal teeth. In the same century in the islands of the Red Sea craftsmen worked walrus and elephant tusks and in this way they imitated the most precious narwhal<sup>6</sup>.

In 1528 Walachian *peşkeşes* were pack-horses (*esb*) and peregrine falcons (*şâhin*). Sometimes these animals too were sent from Moldavia and we know that, towards the end of the century, hawks arrived also from Transylvania<sup>7</sup>. If the number of horses (called *esb* or *bargir* in the documents) was about sixteen or twenty, that of *şâhins* was usually seventy from Moldavia and twenty from

<sup>4</sup> Mihai Maxim, *An Introduction to the Juridical-Legal Foundations of the Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Roman Principalities*, in Maxim, *Romano-Ottomanica*, pp. 11-22; Mihai Maxim, *L'autonomie de la Moldavie et de la Vlachie dans les actes officiels de la Porte au cours de la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle*, in Mihai Maxim, *L'empire ottoman au nord du Danube et l'autonomie des Principautés Roumaines au XVIe siècle. Études et documents*, İstanbul 1999, pp. 11-82; Sandor Papp, *Christian Vassals on the Northwest Border of the Ottoman Empire*, in *The Turks*, ed. by Hasan Celâl Güzel - C. Cem Oğuz - Osman Karatay, 6 voll., Ankara 2002, vol. III, pp. 719-730; Hans Theunissen, *Ottoman-Venetian Diplomats: the 'Ahd-names. The Historical Background and the Development of a Category of Political-Commercial Instruments together with an Annotated Edition of a Corpus of Relevant Documents*, «Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies», 1 (1998), n. 2; Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, *La dimora della pace. Considerazioni sulle capitolazioni tra i paesi islamici e l'Europa*, Venezia 1996, pp. 29-36.

<sup>5</sup> About the years 1526-1563, cfr. M. Maxim, *Nouveaux documents*, pp. 70-151.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Hammer, *Storia dell'Impero Osmano*, 24 voll., Venezia 1824-1831 vol. XXII, p. 354; James W. Redhouse, *Turkish and English Lexicon*, Beirut 1987, p. 1664 ('ivory of walrus, etc.');

Flora Manzonetto, *Storia di un alicorno*, Venezia 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Maxim, *Nouveaux documents*, pp. 85-93.

Walachia and Transylvania and this fact probably indicates a different level of subjection. In 1581 and 1585 falcons were sent also from the Venetian Republic to Istanbul but, this time, they were only voluntary gifts<sup>8</sup>.

*Peşkeşes* were usually offered to the sultan in some special days of the year, that is to say the last feast of the Virgin (15 August) and Hidrellez day, which then in those regions clashed with the Christian feast of St. George (25 April according to the Julian calendar). According to the Julian calendar the year began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, and so the last feast of the Virgin was that of August. After the Gregorian reform of 1582, Walachians and Moldavians preserved the Julian calendar, while Transylvanians adopted the new one in 1590. In the 16<sup>th</sup> c. the difference between the two was ten days. For this reason in that period the feast of Hidrellez, which is linked with the spring equinox and is usually calculated on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, fell ten days before. Moreover, we may note that Hidrellez and St. George had many distinctive features in common; they belonged to two different traditions but they both were associated with the beginning of spring<sup>9</sup>.

In 1563 the prince of Moldavia offered a very rich *peşkeş*, that is to say valuable clothes, twelve carafes, silver dishes and cups. At that time such objects were important above all for their value, but in most ancient times they had also a symbolic meaning<sup>10</sup>. The image of a prince holding a cup stood for the sovereign in majesty and in Iran it was already used in the Sassanian period. In the Mongolian-Turkish tradition, by means of drinking a cup (or a skull) filled with the enemy's blood, a winner ruler took possession of his power and made him his slave in the after world. For this reason Bayezid II made a gold cup of an Uzbek prince's skull and drank from it. In most ancient times cups were among the most common gifts for sultans and they went on being used, even if their symbolic meaning was probably soon forgotten.

<sup>8</sup> In 1581 seventeen Flemish gyrfalcons were given to the sultan and in 1585 eighteen, even if this time their number was less than imagined because some of them had died during the journey. Other falcons (about ten or fifteen) were given by the inhabitants of Cefalonia to the Venetian authorities, to acknowledge Venetian rights on the island; Venetians usually sold them immediately to the Turks. Venetian State Archives, *Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere ambasciatori*, b. 6 (5 e 19 Mar. 1581); *Senato, Dispacci ambasciatori, Costantinopoli*, filza 20, n. 53 (29 Jan. 1585); filza 21, c. 188 (without date, with n. 22, 23 apr. 1585); *Senato, Mar*, reg. 35, c. 86 (27 jun. 1561).

<sup>9</sup> Louis Bazin, *Les Systemes chronologiques dans le monde turc ancien*, Budapest-Paris 1991, pp. 498-525.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Paul Roux, *Quelques objets numineux des Turcs et des Mongols*, 4. *La coupe*, Turcica, 12 (1980), pp. 40-65.

### 3. Insignia (hükümet alâmetleri)

In his turn the Ottoman sultan sent to the Christian princes of his vassal states some insignia of authority. They too had symbolic meanings which referred to ancient Turkish tradition. In the 16<sup>th</sup> c. the new rulers of Walachia and Moldavia usually received 10,000 *akçe*, valuable robes or cloths, of which at least one was red, a “wonderful” horse (*esb-i mükemmel*) with its harnesses, a club (*bazdoğan*) and a cylindrical hat with a red part (*börk*), a heron (*balıkçıl*) feather (*töy*) and another part (the *külâh-ı kâvûk*) made of gold<sup>11</sup>. The sum of 10,000 silver *akçe* was not very high. In 1529, when the first imperial gift was given to the Walachian ruler, a golden *sultani* corresponded to 57 silver coins. This meant a payment of about 175 golden coins. In 1540 the ratio reached 60 *akçe* per *sultani* and remained fixed for about forty years. In the same period the sum given to Walachian and Moldavian princes did not change, and it was about 166 *sultani*. To make a comparison we may note that in the same period Venetians paid 8,000 ducats (i.e. about 8,000 *sultani*) to the sultan for Cyprus and 500 for Zante<sup>12</sup>.

The custom of giving a ceremonial robe (*hil'at*) to honour a person came from Iran but was used also in the Byzantine Empire. The second Ottoman ruler, Orhan (1326-1359), received a robe of this kind from the *basileus* and the historian Cantacuzeno wrote that it was considered a great honour among those barbarians<sup>13</sup>. In the most ancient times the emperor himself had worn the dress before making it a gift, but in the 16<sup>th</sup> c., when the use became common, robes of honour were produced by special factories. Moreover, they were bought by the Palace, presented and then sold again to the imperial treasury by the honoured person. In this way the same dress could be used many times. The quality of the fabric, as well as its shape, varied according to the rank of the person and the honour given. There were ordinary caftans, made of wool (*sof*) and cotton (*çuha*) but also clothes of different kinds of silk: lampas (*kemha*), velvet (*kadife*), cloths with gold and silver threads (*çatma*), satin (*atlas*, made of only one colour, and *benek*). Lighter silks were the taffetas (*tafta*, *canfes*, *valâ*), but there were also cloths with drawings (*münakkaş*), others made of three colours but without precious threads (*serenk*) and also European cloths, such as satin from Florence, English cloths and Venetian brocade made of silver and gold<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Maxim, *Nouveaux documents*, pp. 94-96: «üsküf-ü merdâne ma' börk-ü surh ve tüy-i sefid ve külâh-ı kâvûk».

<sup>12</sup> Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge 1999, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Hammer, *Storia*, vol. XXII, pp. 270-271.

<sup>14</sup> Hülya Tezcan, *Costumes et habits dans les collections du palais de Topkapı*, in *Topkapı à Versailles. Trésors de la Cour ottomane*, Paris 1999, pp. 83-88; Olivia Pelletier, *Les robes d'honneur et les ambassades européennes à la Cour ottomane*, in *Topkapı à Versailles*, p. 89.

A new voivoda could receive both robes (*câme*) and cloths (*çuka*) of different qualities: silver *çatma* from Bursa, *münakkaş* and red *kemha* from Amasya, red *kadife*, sometimes interwoven with golden threads, from Bursa or from Europe, red and golden *benek*, which sometimes came also from Europe. In Istanbul also the voivoda's ambassadors (*elçi*) and his men (*merdüm*) were presented with robes of honour, even if of a lower quality: *benek*, *münakkaş*, crimson *kemhâ*, *bişurî* and sometimes *çatma*. The colour of these cloths was above all red: *kızıl*, bright and clear, and *al*, dark as fire. In the days of the conquest of Edirne Murad I chose it as the symbol of Ottoman sovereignty. Thus, in the Empire, it took the place of green, white and black, the colours which had been associated with Islamic countries until then. In this way the previous distaste for red was overcome and it became one of the Islamic favourite colours<sup>15</sup>. On the contrary in Europe, in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c., the expensive blue took the place of purple, the Roman and Byzantine imperial colour, and became the most favoured. It was used for the mantle of the Virgin in frescos and pictures and was used by the French kings. For this reason in Istanbul it was usually associated with Christians while yellow was linked with Jews. In the same city blue, black and violet were also the colours of mourning: for five days they were used by the court when a sultan died. Red was associated with the idea of power and it was not by chance that the hat (*üsküf*) given by the sultan to a new voivoda had a red part (*börk*). *Börk* was a light felt helmet, used by the janissaries. During the war campaigns the sultan too left aside the heavy turbans to use a lighter hat, embroidered with golden and silver threads: it too was called *üsküf*, and the same word was used also for the golden caps used by the guards of the Inner Imperial Palace.

An important element of the voivoda's hats was the heron feather. In the 16<sup>th</sup> c. it was probably still the symbol of the ruler's fortune (*kut*). The first Ottoman sovereign to use one of these items was Selim I who had it on his turban when he ascended to the throne (1512). Till that moment it had been used only by the Tatar khan, belonging to the Genghis khan dynasty, but Selim had married a princess of this family. In the period of Süleyman the Magnificent heron feathers began to be used a lot. In 1526 this sultan arrived at Mohacs with three feathers on his hat and, on the same occasion, gave another one, with diamonds, to his

<sup>15</sup> Pier Giovanni Donini, *Sulla fortuna del rosso nell'Islam*, «Annali di Ca' Foscari», serie orientale 16, 25/3 (1985), pp. 33-40; Pier Giovanni Donini, *Appunti per un'analisi del contributo turco-iranico al superamento dell'eritrofobia islamica*, in *Studi eurasiatici in onore di Mario Grignaschi*, a cura di Giampiero Bellingeri - Giorgio Vercellin, Venezia 1988, pp. 173-182; Ida Zilio-Grandi, *Un esempio di interpretazione dei sogni nell'Islam: il colore verde*, «Annali di Ca' Foscari», serie orientale 18, 26/3 (1987), pp. 53-66; Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, *Simbologia ottomana nell'opera di Gentile Bellini*, «Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, lettere e arti», 155 (1996-97), cl. di Scienze morali, Lettere ed Arti, pp. 1-29; Reflat Genç, *Colors in the Turkish Beliefs and National Customs Yellow-Red-Green*, Ankara 2000, pp. 15-25.

favourite grand vizier, Ibrahim pasha. Many times Süleyman gave gifts of this kind to his generals on the point of leaving Istanbul for a war campaign. In Ottoman miniatures of the period, such as those of the *Süleymân-nâme*, heron feathers appeared only in scenes of war. In that period it probably was still a talisman and was considered a protection for the person who wore it during a battle. It was probably linked to the fabulous *hüma* bird, the royal vulture “crushers of bones”, from which the Ottoman word *hümayun* (imperial) came. At Murad III’s time (1574-1595) the heron feather (or feathers) became a fixed attribute of imperial turbans but, in the following period, it was only considered a symbol of power, and it was worn also by sultan’s daughters and sisters<sup>16</sup>.

Among the sultan’s titles there was: “he who bestows *tağs* (crowns, but better turbans with precious gems) to the sovereigns of the time”. In this context the voivoda’s *üsküfs* can be compared to *tağs*. Moreover, according to ancient Turkish tradition, hats, as well as belts, were linked at the idea of a bond between an authority and a subject. When, a man put on a hat, or fastened a belt<sup>17</sup> during a ceremony, he meant to deliver himself to the authority of the person who had given it to him. For instance, women fastened a belt during the marriage. On the contrary those who were without hat or belt had no position in society, were linked to nobody and often were outcasts. For this reason, when an Ottoman sultan died, his soldiers threw their hats to the ground in token of sadness and mourning: the bond between them and the sovereign had been broken. Western and Eastern traditions are sometimes different. For instance, in 1566 in Istanbul the Persian ambassador Khan Şahkuli Sultan, governor of Erevan, a famous scholar who knew very well diplomatic etiquette, was terribly astonished when some Europeans took off their hats in his presence; his Ottoman hosts had to explain him that this was not an impolite gesture on his behalf but only a strange European way of showing that they were ready to offer their heads to the sultan. In 1657 the *hetman* of the Cossacks asked the sultan to receive the title together with a golden hat, a horsetail and a flag, but this time the sultan refused to honour him in this way since the Tatar khan might take offence at it. A little later, in 1674, another Cossack ruler received a caftan, a velvet and sable busby, a mace and a horse with its harness, together with the title of *hetman*<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Paul Roux, *Quelques objets numineux des Turcs et des Mongols*, 2. *Les plumes*, «Turcica», 8/1 (1976), pp. 28-57; Hammer, *Storia*, vol. XXII, p. 546.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Bel bağlamak*, i.e. to tie the belt but also to entrust oneself to somebody.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Paul Roux, *Quelques objets numineux des Turcs et des Mongols*, 1. *Le bonnet et la ceinture*, «Turcica», 7 (1975), pp. 50-64; Nicolas Vatin - Gilles Veinstein, *Les obsèques des sultans ottomans de Mehmed II à Ahmed Ier*, in *Les Ottomans et la mort. Permanences et mutations*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1996, pp. 207-244; Hammer, *Storia*, vol; XII, pp. 473-476; 21, p. 66; vol. XXII, pp. 527-528.

The mace may perhaps be linked with the club that the Abbasid caliphs used to send to a new sultan together with a black turban, a long robe and a decree, to invest him with the title. If black was the Abbasid colour, the mace or club was a symbol of power and justice. The person who received it had the faculty of enforcing the law. It corresponds to the sword or the sceptre of European iconology. According to a tradition, the caliph Omar used a riding-whip as symbol of his power. Moreover, many Muslim rulers used a sword or a mace in public ceremonies. Even the preachers had sometimes a dagger, a club or a bow near them on the *minber*. In the Ottoman Empire the mace belonged to some officials such as, for instance, the *çavuşes*, i.e. the messengers who brought the sultan's word and justice far from the capital; they could order the capital punishment even of the highest persons of the Empire<sup>19</sup>.

Among the *hükümet alâmetleri* there were also some "wonderful" horses, very different from the pack horses usually brought as a gift to Istanbul. Horses were among the goods which could not be exported out of the Empire. Ottomans were proud above all of their nimble Arab steeds, so different from the European war-horses which, in the Middle Ages, had to sustain the weight of armour and rider. Since horses were so important in war they could not be sold to enemies. Making a gift of this kind to foreign ambassadors or allies was considered a great honour<sup>20</sup>.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> c., other *hükümet alâmetleri* given to the voivodas were gold-plated silver finials for banners (*ser-i 'alem*)<sup>21</sup>. In the ancient Turkish world the ruler used to give a banner to his new vassal, such as that given by the Selgiukid sultan to Osman. In those times there was not only one kind of banner for a single state. In the same country different flags could be used, with different colours and symbols. Süleyman the Magnificent was accompanied on parade by seven horse-tails (*tuğ*) and eight banners, even if his ancestors used to raise a lower number of insignia. Notwithstanding what is written in the lists of gifts kept in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, the books of ceremonies say that the princes of Walachia and Moldavia received not only the points but also a flags and two white horse-tails. Thus, in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. among their insignia there were also two *tuğs*, such as those given to Bogdan, prince of Moldavia, in 1498 as a reward for

<sup>19</sup> Alessio Bombaci, *La Turchia dall'epoca preottomana al XV secolo*, in A. Bombaci - Stanford J. Shaw, *L'Impero ottomano*, Torino 1981, pp. 3-368 in particular p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> According to a use introduced by the Abbasid caliph al-Manşûr (754-775), Ottoman sovereigns had always a saddled horse ready for them. Ottoman rulers used to ride in the parades only animals that had been kept awake all the night, to be sure that they were not too fiery. According to a tradition, the land where the head of the sultan's horse had arrived, was Ottoman Empire.

<sup>21</sup> Venetian State Archives, *Archivio proprio Constantinopoli*, b. 9, c. 13<sup>v</sup>, c. 38<sup>r</sup>; b. 10, c. 4<sup>r</sup>, c. 9<sup>v</sup>, c. 99<sup>r</sup>, c. 164<sup>r</sup>, c. 194<sup>r</sup>

his military help, together with a sable fur, a flag and a hat. The *tuğ* was another important symbolic element in Ottoman ceremonial language. According to the shamanic belief the soul of the animal who protected a tribe was incorporated in insignias of this kind. In Süleyman the Magnificent's time six *tuğs* went before the sultan in peace ceremonies and seven in war campaigns, three were used by the grand vizier, two by the *beylerbeyis* and one by the *sancakbeyis*. They were also driven into the ground in front of their tents to show the rank of the person who used them. The voivodas had two *tuğs* and this means that they were at the same level of the *beylerbeyis*. In the 18<sup>th</sup> c. the same honour was for the orthodox patriarch in his capacity of head of his community (*milletbaşı*)<sup>22</sup>.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> c. among the insignia for voivodas there was no sword. Gifts of this kind were given only to Muslims rulers or also vassals, such as the Tatar khan. Only once, in 1598, Mehmed III wanted to send a sword to the king of France, but then he relinquished the idea. It was a symbol of peace relations and meant that the sultan trusted so much a person that he could send him a weapon. However, it was also a symbol of authority. In the 1446 Ottoman-Venetian peace agreement Mehmed II swears by his sword. In 1512, at the moment of his accession, Selim I received a sword from his father, who was leaving him his throne. In his turn Süleyman the Magnificent gave it to his son Selim in 1559 and, in this way, he officially recognized him as his heir<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4. Ottoman envoys to voivodas

Since the 14<sup>th</sup> c. there is evidence that Ottoman rulers sent ambassadors to foreign sovereigns. For instance in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Venice received about one Ottoman envoy every year<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the fact that the sultan's diplomats went to Northern vassal states was not an indication of their subjection. At their turn, voivodas used to send to Istanbul either real ambassadors (*elçiyân*) or envoys (*merdümân*), according to the reasons for their mission<sup>25</sup>. Looking at the names of the Ottoman officials who went to Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania from Istanbul in the

<sup>22</sup> In the war campaigns, the *tuğs* went before the army in Ottoman countries, but once crossed the border, they had to follow it, as the tail follows the animal. Bahaeddin Ögel, *Tuğ*, in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 12/2, İstanbul 1988, pp. 1-5; Hammer, *Storia*, vol. VII, p. 106; Pedani, *Simbologia*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>23</sup> Venetian State Archives, *Senato, dipacci Ambasciatori, Costantinopoli*, reg. 2B, c. 171 (29 Jun. 1559); reg. 12 (10 feb. 1598); f. 47 (22 Aug. 1598); Pedani Fabris, *La dimora della pace*, p. 20; *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, vol. XIV, *Costantinopoli. Relazioni inedite. (1512-1789)*, ed. by Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, Padova 1996, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Maria Pia Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore. Inviati ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia*, Venezia 1994, pp. 203-209.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Maxime, *Nouveaux documents*, pp. 75-76, 79, 84.

second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., it can be seen that some of these persons had been sent also to other countries, such as the Republic of Venice or the Hapsburg court.

Some of them were interpreters. It is clear that, in diplomacy, there was a kind of linguistic specialization and persons were sent in preference to the countries which they knew the language of. The Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic unity, governed by converts, removed from their families when they were boys by means of the *devşirme*, and then rose in the Palace school to become bureaucrats and high officials. In an environment of this kind it was not difficult to find a person who knew Greek, Serbian or Croatian. Among prisoners of war and slaves one could find others who knew German, Italian, Hungarian, Polish or French; some of them converted to Islam and became officials or civil servants. Even some Turks by birth might have learned other languages, if they had been made prisoners or slaves by the enemy and, after some years, had succeeded in returning home. Thus, to find an interpreter in Istanbul was not very difficult and some of them worked for the Imperial Palace.

Some interpreters of the Imperial *divan* were chosen for more than one mission. For instance, Mahmud was in Europe in 1549 and again in 1574. He was a German convert from Passau but his family lived in Vienna. He was made prisoner when boy, during the battle of Mohács (1526), and brought up in the Imperial Palace school. In 1549 he was sent to the emperor Ferdinand to present him with a *fethnâme*, an imperial letter where the achievements of the Ottoman army in Persia were described. On that occasion he also had to discover the emperor's intentions concerning Transylvania. Ferdinand revealed his thoughts with some incautious remarks and after some months Mahmud was sent to Transylvania with official letters for the three nations, i.e. Saxons, Székelys and Hungarians, prohibiting them to obey the monk Giorgio Utyscheviz, who was then the ruler of that country and was on the point of betrayal. In 1554 Mahmud himself, together with the interpreter Ferhad and a *çavuş*, enthroned queen Isabel's son, Sigismund. In his turn, another interpreter Ferhad, who was of Hungarian origin, was sent again in Transylvania for state affairs many years after, in 1569.

In 1569 Mahmud, who had become second imperial *tercüman* (interpreter), was sent to France by Sokollu Mehmed pasha to ask Margaret of Valois's hand for Sigismund of Transylvania. The grand vizier's aim was to prepare a possible accession to the throne of Poland for his protégé. In 1570 Mahmud went to Dubrovnik and then to Venice, but there his travel came to an abrupt end. The French ambassador, Claude du Burg who had accompanied him from Istanbul did not approved an Ottoman envoy meeting his sovereign on the

eve of a Venetian-Ottoman war and succeeded in keeping him in Venice. The war for Cyprus blew over. Venetians imprisoned Mahmud, who had credentials only for the king of France and had only to cross Venetian lands and not to stay there for such a long time. He spent three years as a hostage of the Most Serene Republic, first in Venice and then in the castle of San Felice in Verona. When the war ended he came back directly to Istanbul. Venetians gave him some gifts, such as robes and 1,000 ducats, as they had done for the other Ottoman ambassadors who had been received in those years. Then he succeeded in taking the place of the *divan-i hümayun tercümanı* Hurrem bey but he had not yet finished travelling. In 1574 he was sent to Prague, where he died. Some scholars think that he was the author of an Ottoman chronicle of Hungary<sup>26</sup>.

Another interpreter, *çavuş* and envoy was Mustafa who too was Hungarian. His career shows that Ottomans choose their diplomats according to their linguistic abilities. In May 1574 he was sent to Transylvania and then to Venice, to bring the news of Murad III's accession to the throne. In the same year he was also in Vienna, accompanied by a Greek from Fanar, degli Scarlatti, to try to get in touch with the Moldavian prince Bogdan Lăpuşneanu who was then into exile. At the end of 1577 he was sent to Poland, together with the *çavuş* Ahmed, to renew the peace agreement. In 1581 they both went to Transylvania. He was again in Poland in 1576, 1578 and 1583. He was charged of diplomatic relations with the Swiss cantons and, with the help of William Osborne, he was also able to make contact with Elizabeth I of England<sup>27</sup>.

The envoys sent to Moldavia, Walachia and Transylvania were above all *çavuşes*, rather than simple interpreters. For instance in 1554 Ahmed *çavuş* was chose for a mission in that country. In 1573 another person with the same name brought the *hükümet alâmetleri* to prince Bathory and came back there in 1581, together with the interpreter Mustafa. In 1589 another Ahmed *çavuş* was killed in Walachia with a *silahdar* who was with him and three servants<sup>28</sup>. Offending a diplomat, or even worst killing him, was a very serious international affair which was tantamount to a declaration of war. In 1461 Vlad Tepeş killed Mehmed II's personal secretary Yunus bey (i.e. the Greek Katavolenos) who had been sent to

<sup>26</sup> Hammer, *Storia*, vol. XI, pp. 19-22, 94; vol. XII, pp. 489-490; Jean-Louis Bacqué Grammont - Sinan Kuneralp - Frédéric Hitzel, *Représentant permanents de la France en Turquie (1536-1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797-1991)*, İstanbul-Paris 1991, p. 110; Maria Pia Pedani, *Ottoman Fethihnames. The Imperial Letters Announcing a Victory*, «Tarih incelemeleri dergisi» 13 (1998), pp. 181-192; Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, pp. 163-164; Joseph Matuz, *Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymâns des Prächtigen*, «Südost-Forschungen», 24 (1975), pp. 26-60; György Hazai, *Mahmud tardjumân*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islâm*, Leiden 1991, vol. VI, pp. 74-75.

<sup>27</sup> Hammer, *Storia*, vol. XII, p. 632; Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, p. 128.

<sup>28</sup> Maxime, *L'autonomie*, p. 25.

Walachia to invite him to Istanbul. The sultan had prepared a snare to get rid of him but Vlad arrived earlier. He ordered the turban to be literally nailed to the secretary's head and then had him impaled<sup>29</sup>. During a war, in 1574, the Moldavian prince John the Terrible cut off the ears, lips and noses of the envoys sent to him by the Ottoman commander who was fighting against him; then he made them beheaded and put their heads on the walls of his fortress. The Ottoman envoys had brought him ten cannon balls and two arrows, that is to say symbolic gifts which meant that he was on the point of being defeated. Previously John the Terrible had treated according to the best diplomatic practice another Ottoman envoy who had had the task of asking him to pay double the usual annual tribute. A little later the Moldavian prince's head was hung on the wall of the castle of Iassi by the Ottomans<sup>30</sup>.

On the contrary, the murder of Ahmed *çavuş* in 1589 was not connected with war. He and his rich suite had the chance of meeting some highwaymen on coming back to Istanbul. Other episodes of this kind happened and some of them marred international relations. In 1486, for instance, an ambassador of the king of Tunis to the sultan was killed by Venetian robbers near Modon and the following year two Ottoman envoys, İlyas bey and İskender *çavuş*, were sent one after the other to Venice to protest. The Republic feared more the sultan's anger than that of the Tunisian sovereign and immediately found the murderers and punished them<sup>31</sup>.

Among the *çavuşes* to Ottoman vassal states there was also Kubad, who was sent to Transylvania in 1561 and to Venice in 1567-68 and 1570. We do not have much news about his first embassy, but the five months he spent on the Lagoon are better known. Between October 1567 and March 1568 he was a guest on the Giudecca island, in a small flat furnished in Turkish style just for him. He had to solve a commercial affair but he also found time to attend a concert for harpsichord and violin organized for him, to ask for a physician to bleed him, and to talk many times with the Venetian interpreter Michele Membrè, who was of Circassian origin as himself. On the contrary in 1570 he stopped only two days, just the time to give the declaration of war to the doge. On this occasion he reached the Ducal Palace pale and trembling, but when he heard that his colleague Mahmed had been made prisoner he proudly said «You must free him, because ambassadors are not responsible for the word they bring»<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Franz Babinger, *Maometto il conquistatore e il suo tempo*, Torino 1977, pp. 217-218.

<sup>30</sup> Hammer, *Storia*, vol. XII, p. 632; Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, p. 128.

<sup>31</sup> Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> Venetian State Archives, *Esposizioni principi*, reg. 1, cc.256-284, about Kubad's second voyage to Venice, cfr. also reg. 2, cc.4-25. Kubad's story is well known since the beginning of the 1990's and there is no reason to

Besides *çavuşes* and interpreters the sultans sent to Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania also other kind of persons: for instance, high officials had sometimes the task of putting on the throne the voivodas. For this reason, in 1527 the *müteferrika* and *müşaherehâr* Cafer was sent to Moldavia, in 1562 the *ser-i bevâbin-i evvel* Ferhad ağa and in the following year his orderly Ahmed ağa. In 1529 Ahmed bey, ağa of the Istanbul *sipahi*, was sent to Walachia, and he was followed in 1533 by *ser-i çakirciyân* (chief falconer) Mehmed bey<sup>33</sup>. They were all high imperial official and this fact shows the importance that the sultan attached to missions of this kind.

### 5. Coronation ceremonies

Many Ottoman envoys sent to Walachian, Moldavian and Transylvanian princes had the main task of taking part, on behalf of the sultan, in the ceremony of their enthronement. Corina Nicolescu has shown that, even in the Ottoman period, the Rumanian ritual maintained elements of the Byzantine tradition. This scholar divides these ceremonies into three periods: in the 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c. the ancient rite was adopted without any change; in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. the main new element was the presence of the Ottoman envoy; in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c. two ceremonies were arranged, the first in Istanbul before the new prince left the capital, and the second in the most important cathedral of the Christian vassal state<sup>34</sup>.

In the first Ottoman period the coronation ceremony was organized in this way. First of all the new prince, wearing a mourning dress, made a speech in his Palace and then the great *logoteta* asked him to take possession of the throne, on honouring his ancestor's customs. Then he went in procession to the cathedral. On its staircase the prince met the metropolitan and kissed the Gospel and the Cross. Everybody began to sing and he took off his hat and entered the church. He knelt down and then, at the centre of the *naos*, he met the bishops who supported his arms and accompanied him towards the altar. He knelt again, and the *omophorion* and the *epigonation* were put on him. Then, there was a prayer, the unction and the exchange of kisses, according to the ancient Byzantine use. The princes kissed the metropolitan's hand and he kissed the prince's head.

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fancy about an imaginary sojourn of this ambassador in Venetian prisons as in Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 131-136, 165-168, 189-191.

<sup>33</sup> Maxim, *Nouveaux documents*, pp. 78, 98-99, 111, 129-130, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Corina Nicolescu, *Le couronnement "incoronatia". Contribution à l'histoire du cérémonial roumain*, «Revue des études Sud-Est européennes», 4 (1976), pp. 647-663; Radu G. Paun, *Sur l'investiture des derniers princes phanariotes*, «Revue des études Sud-Est européennes», 35 (1997), pp. 63-75. About pictures with voivodas or coronation ceremonies, cfr. Razvan Theodorescu, *Roumains et Balkaniques dans la civilisation sud-est européenne*, Bucarest, 1999, pp. 318-319, 339-354, figg. 30-32, 37-39.

Then they all kissed the altar and the rite of coronation began. The most important prelate crowned the prince with the hat sent by the sultan, made of gold, precious stones and with a heron feather. The new sovereign was accompanied to his throne while songs and cannon salvos announced the end of the ceremony. There was a last prayer and all went in procession to the Palace where, in the council room (*divan*), the Ottoman ambassador confirmed the new ruler.

In the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c. the ceremony was divided into two parts. The first one was made in Istanbul where there was a religious rite and where a flag (*sancak*) and two *tuğs* were given to the new prince. The coronation was repeated in his capital: there, the prelates crowned him again and the Ottoman ambassador gave him the official document and a caftan. In the *divan* hall two thrones were prepared and the sultan's *hatt-i sheriff* was read in Ottoman and translated into Rumanian. The exchange of gifts and insignia was made. The metropolitan made a speech and gave his blessing. Kisses were exchanged, also on the border of the new sovereign's dress. There were handshakes and then the official banquet.

According to Corina Nicolescu this ceremony shows not only that the ancient Byzantine customs were preserved, but also that the Ottomans allowed simple officials, as these princes were in their eyes, to be crowned. Nevertheless, in the light of the symbolic meaning of some objects, also another interpretation may be given. Moldavians and Ottomans read the same gestures according to two different perspectives. The removing of the hat at the entrance of the church, the supporting of the arms of the new sovereign by bishops, but above all the coronation with the hat given by the sultan assumed different meanings if they were seen with the eyes of a Moldavian subject or of an Ottoman envoy.

For instance, foreign ambassadors who were received by the sultan were held strongly by the arms and some took offence at being treated so rudely. This practice came back to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> c. when Murad I was killed by a Serbian prisoner who had asked to talk with him, after the victory of Kosovo Polje. From this time onward no foreigner could come near the sultan with unbound arms. Holding the new prince's arms could be read by his Christian subjects as his presentation to God made by bishops, and by the Ottomans as his introduction to the presence of the ambassador, acting for the sultan.

Above all the moment of coronation had two different meanings. On one side it was linked with the ancient crowning ceremonies and the presence of a hat instead of a crown might appear to be only a mere accident due to the lack of a royal dignity and not of the ruler's power. Even elsewhere other headgears took the place of a crown. In Venice the doge had a ducal *cornio* (horn-shaped hat) and

in the Middle Ages the emperors of Trabzon used large high hats. On the contrary, reading the ceremony from an Ottoman point of view the hat given by the sultan put the prince in a subordinate position and made him a vassal ruler.

However, besides the different meanings that the same ceremony could have, it is interesting to note that, in reality, it was possible to find a common rite. Therefore the new prince appeared to his own subjects as the heir of the great Byzantine tradition and the real sovereign of his kingdom; at the same time and with the same gestures he admitted that the sultan was his emperor and that, without his permission, he could not reign.

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