The Diplomatic Trinity: Ambassadors, Dragomans and the Porte

The history of interpreters in the Ottoman Empire date back as early as the beginnings of diplomatic history. In terms of their professional tasks and their status interpreters have had a privileged position in the Ottoman Empire. The present paper explores the scenes of audience whereby Ottoman sultans or grand viziers received foreign delegations. Such audience ceremonies were one of the main area of activity for interpreters and paintings which have chosen such ceremonies as their theme provide ample space to interpreters. These representations are significant in the sense that they provide visual documentation pertaining to the status of interpreters in the Ottoman Empire. The majority of audience scenes are made by Western painters upon commissions from Western ambassadors and each scene was regarded as a source of prestige for ambassadors. One of the major aims of this study is to describe and analyze the position of interpreters in these representations. The history of diplomatic interpreting in the Ottoman Empire will also be tackled, providing a factual basis of comparison for the various elements discovered in the visual representations. Another aim of the paper is to study positions and costumes of the interpreters in order to question their place both within the compositions in the paintings and their status in the Ottoman Empire. All of the examples chosen for this study are borrowed from the 18th

century since this was the last century when interpreters of the Sublime Porte were still non-muslims.

Until the second half of the 18th century the Ottoman Empire continued its relations with the West employing an "ad hoc" diplomacy. Interpreters played a significant role in the field of diplomatic and economic relations between the Ottoman government and Western states. The Ottomans used the word "tercüman" to refer to interpreters. This word originated from Syriac language and passed into Arabic. This word was adopted as "dragomanno" in Italian, "drogman" in French and "dragoman" in English (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995:17). The most significant dragoman in the Ottoman Empire was the dragoman of the Sublime Porte. This service is thought to have been introduced in the early 16th century and in the beginning converts were employed for this job. Yunus Bey, who died in 1551, was one of these dragomans descending from a Greek origin. Yunus Bey had close and good relations with the first French diplomats in the Ottoman Empire. Another 16th century dragoman Murad Bey descending from Hungarian origin, had great knowledge of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Croatian and the ability to speak Latin even though he was not fluent. However he translated Cicero's work *De Senectute* into Ottoman (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995:17).

Dragomans of the Sublime Porte translated treaties, official documents, interpreted conversations, and sometimes were employed in diplomatic missions. The increase in the political and economic relations between the Ottoman Empire and the West enhanced their tasks and the importance of their role. The title of dragoman of the

Sublime Porte became a position which was inherited among relatives in the late 17th century. A number of Greek families who dwelled at Fener area in the Ottoman capital had a monopoly over the title of dragoman (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995:17). Among those families were Scarlattos, Mavrocordato, Ghika, Callimachi, Soutzo, Ypsilanti, Mavroyeni. The families resided at the Fener area in the Ottoman capital which was why they were called "Phanariots." Some members of these families were appointed by the Sultan as princes of Wallachia or Moldavia and ruled for limited periods. European courts acknowledged their rank and in the Ottoman hierarchy they almost ranked with the Grand Vizier (Mansel 1995:148-56). Christian dragomans to the Sublime Porte were given imperial edicts which brought them some advantages such as tax exemption (Uzunçarşılı 1984:74). But some princes of Wallachia or Moldavia and dragomans of the Porte who were the members of Phanariot families, spied for the Russian Empire and Austria and instigated the Greek revolt. Their activities corrupted the trust the Ottoman government felt for them (Uzunçarşılı 1984:72-73; Mansel 1995:160-62). In 1821 an interpreting office was setup where Muslim officers were taught foreign languages and the position of dragoman was taken from the possession of Phanariot families completely (Uzunçarşılı 1984:73-74).

On the other hand Western ambassadors and merchants employed dragomans in their relations with the Sublime Porte and the Imperial Palace. Those dragomans were chosen among the Latin Catholic families of the Galata area of the city. They were given imperial edicts issued by the Sultan which provided them some advantages, like the other dragomans at the service of the Porte. These dragomans did not inspire

confidence in Western ambassadors and merchants due to the fact that they were Ottoman citizens and were not fluent in Western languages. The Venetian Republic sent some of its young citizens to Istanbul to learn Oriental languages and to work as dragomans. Those dragomans were called "Giovani della lingua." This example inspired the French government to establish a school for educating dragomans. With the encouragement of the minister to the King Louis the XVIth the school was established in 1669 and was given the name "L'Ecole des Enfants de langues." (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995:18-19). In the year 1700 twelve students were given scholarship by the King of France in order to complete "L'Ecole des Enfants de langues" in the Pera region at Istanbul. Those were Oriental boys and would study religion, literature and Oriental languages in the College of Louis-le-Grand directed by the Jesuit order in Paris. All of their expenses would be covered by the royal treasury. When they went back to their homeland they would be employed as missionaries or dragomans by the French government. Those boys were placed in a class which was called the "Class of Armenians." They wore cloak-like robes as their daily costumes, and during ceremonies they were attired with silk loose robes and long red wool cloaks with blue lining. Because the school did not fulfill the government's expectations it was rearranged in 1721. According to the rearrangement, ten French pupils would be accepted to the college in Paris. After their graduation they would be sent to the Saint-Louis Monastery controlled by Capuchin monks in Istanbul, where they would practice what they learnt in Paris. After the expulsion of Jesuits from France "L'Ecole des Enfants de langues" was articulated to the university regime and lost its importance in the course of time.

The school for boys of language in Istanbul was inactive during the French Revolution. The lack of communication with France and the fact that almost all the dragomans left the Ottoman capital made it impossible for the school to enroll new students. A new school for interpreters named "L'Ecole nationale des langues orientales vivantes" was established under the National Library in 1795 by the Convention Assembly. But in 1796 the school was taken under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and survived until 1873. So the school in Pera, Istanbul stayed became redundant. Talleyrand, the minister of foreign affairs of the time, sent four dragomans who graduated from the Paris school, to Istanbul in order to rearrange the school in Pera. The school in Pera was active until 1831 when the Palace of the French Ambassador burnt down.

In the 18th century Istanbul became a popular city for European artists because of its growing diplomatic and cultural contacts with Europe as well as its geographical location. The paintings I will study for the purposes of this presentation were depicted by Western artists in the second half of the 18th century. All five paintings treat the audience Western ambassadors by the Ottoman Sultan or the Grand Vizier. These scenes were multi-figural compositions, largely affected by the Baroque and Rococo styles very much in vogue in the 18th century. The commissioners of these paintings in the West were aristocrats and the newly rising bourgeoisie which increasingly became wealthier thanks to the developing trade. The scenes depicting contacts between Western ambassadors and Ottoman sultans were usually commissioned by the ambassadors themselves. The painters were Western artists who accompanied the

ambassadors in their diplomatic missions and some of whom lived in Istanbul. These paintings feature interior spaces with the dramatic light foregrounding colours, a technique used by Baroque masters such as Velazquez or Rubens in their multif-figural group compositions.

(Illustration 1) The first example I would like to share with you is by Jean-Baptiste Van Mour (1671-1737) dated 1727 and titled *The Arrival of the Dutch Ambassador Cornelis Calcoen in the Palace to Meet Ahmed III*. Van Mour was a French painter of Flemish origin who arrived in Istanbul in 1699 when his friend Comte de Ferriol was appointed to the city as the French Ambassador. In addition to his commissions by the ambassador, he painted scenes from the daily life of Istanbul as well as landscapes of the city. His collection of 100 engravings was published in Paris and was soon known all over Europe. The artist stayed in Istanbul after Comte de Ferriol left and served his successors who took office as French ambassadors in the city. He also received commissions from other European ambassadors in the Ottoman capital (Özel 1994:366-67). A first look at the painting reveals crowded groups of figures in the imperial courtyard. There are two dragomans following two high ranking palace officials in the foreground. They are followed by the Dutch ambassador and his suite. There are janissaries gathered in the courtyard occupying the middle and background. When the Sultan would receive a Western ambassadors, he would gather janissaries in the second courtyard of the Topkapı Palace and have them served rice in large containers which would be followed by the payment of their salaries (Uzunçarşılı 1984:293-96). This ceremony was organized in order to make an impression on the ambassadors. The

ambassador would first be received by the Grand Vizier, dine with him and then introduced to the Sultan after he and his suit were dressed with the special "hilat" kaftans. This painting shows the ambassador and his suit, on their way to the Grand Vizier's office. The interpreters following the court officials walk in front of the ambassador with their dark blue gowns with fur collars and their black fur caps. The janissaries gathered in the courtyard are waiting to eat the rice they are served. The artist designed the portico circling the courtyard with round arches and doric pillars carrying the arches which does not reflect the reality unlike the figures and costumes which are depicted quite realistically. During his time in Istanbul, Van Mour was commissioned many audience ceremonies by Western painters. The painter was very familiar with the strict and unchanging rituals of the Ottoman court and therefore kept the figures, the costumes and the positions of the figures a constant in all of these compositions, while he only changed the Sultan and the ambassador's suite (Boppe 1998:20-21). In this painting, the costumes used by the figures are realistic, but the location is the product of the artist's imagination. One of the two dragomans in this paintings is the interpreter of the Sublime Porte, while the second one works for the Dutch ambassador (Boppe 1998:21). The interpreters at the service of Western ambassadors in Istanbul or other Ottoman cities sometimes wore costumes decided by the embassies, while they sometimes preferred to wear Oriental dragoman costumes (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995:53-46). Yet, whatever the case, these costumes were always designed so as to reflect the prestige of their profession and displayed some unchanging elements such as a woolen gown with a fur collar and a dark fur cap.

(Illustration 2) This painting by Antoine de Favray (1706-92) bears the title *Sultan's Audience Granted to Ambassador Saint-Priest.* The painting was exhibited in the 1771 Salon in Paris (Boppe 1998:60). After Antoine de Favray graduated from the French Academy in Rome in 1744'te he became a Maltese knight and lived in Malta for 18 years where he painted portraits of knights and landscapes. He traveled to Istanbul in 1762 and worked in the Ottoman capital under the patronage of Marquis de Vergennes, the French ambassador. He became famous in the city with the Istanbul landscapes he painted. De Favray befriended leading Greek families in Istanbul and had the chance to observe their daily domestic lives. Apart from his depictions of daily life in Istanbul the artist painted portraits of local Greek dragomans and their families (Boppe 1998:41-60). This composition depicts Sultan's audience of the French ambassador Marquis de Saint-Priest on 28 November 1768. Such receptions would be carried out when ambassadors arrived in or departed from Istanbul. The documents do not have any information as to whether the artist personally took part in this ceremony. But since he was under the ambassador's patronage, this is rather likely. The painting was met with great popular interest when it was exhibited in the 1771 Paris Salon because the public had never seen such a realistic composition on the Orient. Moreover, the Ottoman Sultan appeared before the eyes of Western spectators with such a realistic portrait for the first time. However, there were some criticisms raised suggesting that the French ambassador did not resemble his real appearance (Boppe 1998:60). The figures in the painting can be identified as real-life persons. These include the Sultan, seating firmly on his throne, Grand Vizier Nişancı Mehmed Emin Paşa to his left, Nikolaki Draco, the interpreter of

the Sublime Porte, Marquis de Saint-Priest, Baron Bietzel, first secretary Lebas, and chief interpreter Deval to his right. This painting characterized by a style reminiscent of the multi-figural interior compositions by Velazquez or Rubens brings Oriental and Western figures together. In the paintings by Van Mour and Guardi we had seen Western ambassadors on their ways to the Grand Vizier's office. This painting depicts a Western ambassador in direct contact with the Sultan. The ambassador and his suite wear "hilats". Their positions in the ceremony are strictly regulated by conventions according to which the dragoman must stand between the Sultan and the ambassador (Uzunçarşılı 1984:71). Just like the other figures, the position and the gestures of the dragoman remain constant, as well as his costume. The dragoman depicted as such is an unchanging element of audience scenes. He always occupies a salient position in the composition, visually expressing the salience of his professional function.

(Illustration 3) Another painting by Antoine de Favray is titled *Audience Granted by Sultan Mustafa III to Ambassador Vergennes 17 December 1768* and depicts a farewell visit paid by the ambassador. This composition provided inspiration to a larger oil painting treating the same theme and the previous painting I discussed. Here it is evident that the rules of the ceremony remain unchanged and the figures stand in positions and gestures conventionally attributed to them

(Illustration 4) This painting titled*Gustaf Celsing received by Sultan Mustafa III* depicts the Swedish Ambassador Gustaf Celsing before Mustafa III. It is currently held by the Biby Collection at Celsing Family's Biby Mansion in Sweden (Theolin 2000: 61, 66-67). Gustaf Celsing arrived in Istanbul in 1745 as a secretary and was appointed as

Resident by the Swedish King's Council in 1747. Celsing who worked hard to maintain friendly relations between the Ottoman Empire and Sweden and to incite the Ottoman State against Russia, was promoted to the post of envoy in 1750 and served as ambassador until 1773 (Theolin 2000: 60-62).

In terms of the composition scheme the painting is based on Van Mour's audience scenes. The sultan is seated in his throne in the Audience Room (Arzodası). To his left is the grand vizier; two dragomans are placed on the right, accompanying the Heads of the Palace Doorkeepers, ambassador Gustaf Celsing and his delegation. The organization of the painting resembles de Favray's *Audience Granted by Sultan Mustafa III to Ambassador Vergennes 17 December 1768* both in terms of the spatial and the figural depiction. The artist is unknown like the other paintings brought from Istanbul by the members of the Celsing Family who served in the Ottoman Empire (Theolin 2000: 66-67). Although there has been no research about the identity of the artist, we can safely assume that he was a local or levantin painter who worked at Van Mour's studio in Istanbul and saw de Favray's audience scenes. We can draw this conclusion based on his depiction of Ahmet III: the sultan's form, style of sitting and above all, his attire as well as the depiction of the face bear strict resemblance to the depictions of sultans in the sultans' portraits albums (şemailname) (Renda 1977: 59), a style which became a tradition starting from the 16th century. Moreover, the appearance of the princes standing next to the sultan as figures which are disproportionately small and tall, lead to question marks about the artist's knowledge on proportion and perspective, which, in turn, reinforces the idea that the artist was a local painter. The scene depicted in the

painting is probably Gustaf Celsing's farewell to Mustafa III prior to his departure from Istanbul in 1773. The painting is a commission as revealed by the fact that the artist borrowed many of the figures in *Audience Granted by Sultan Mustafa III to Ambassador Vergennes 17 December 1768*, one of de Favray's audience scenes and placed them in the right hand side of his composition. The most significant change is the use of original portraits to depict the Swedish ambassador and his delegation, including the dragoman. The artist's intention was to form a realistic depiction of each figure so as to create the feeling that he himself was a participant in this audience scene. The resulting painting can also be termed a collage. The Sultan is depicted in a realistic fashion, however, the grand vizier is not the person seen in de Favray's painting, because he had been replaced shortly before the ambassador took his leave, in 1771 (Sakaoğlu 1994:553). The costumes of the Heads of the Palace Door Keepers and dragomans are nearly identical with the ones depicted in de Favray's painting and their postures are also similar. However, the hilat worn by the Swedish ambassador is different than the hilat worn by the French ambassador in de Favray's painting, which is by all means natural. The dragoman who is the chief interpreter of the Sublime Porte can easily be distinguished with his robe and fur cap, items worn by interpreters only. He is shown slightly bending before the sultan, right in front of the Swedish ambassador. This interpreter is probably Alexandre Ghika as he was later executed and replaced by Konstantin Moruzi in 1774-77 (Sözen 2000: 117). The interpreter of the Swedish embassy was probably Pierre Camcıoğlu. He stands behind the ambassadorial delegation among the Heads of the Palace Door Keepers and can easily be identified by his fur cap. Like in all audience

scenes, the rank of figures can be distinguished through their costumes and positions. The dragomans are visible among the major figures in these paintings and they are usually positioned facing the sultan in front of the ambassadors. However, in this painting the chief interpreter of the Sublime Porte was placed in a more prominent position vis-à-vis the interpreter of the Swedish embassy because he occupied a more respectable and important position in the Empire. As I will discuss in my conclusion, interpreters of the Sublime Porte commanded a more prestigious position in the Empire in comparison to interpreters who worked for embassies despite the similarities in the costumes worn by them.

In the painting *Sultan Ahmed III's Audience Granted to Ambassador d'Andrezel, 17 October 1724* **(Illustration 5)** (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995 :69). by Jean-Baptiste Van Mour, the ambassadorial interpreter is the only figure facing the spectator. This interpreter figure is used as an element shaping the relationship between the painting and the onlooker which forms an interesting allegory when the primary function of an interpreter is considered: While the interpreter mediates between the Ottoman court and the foreign diplomatic mission, his pictorial representation mediates between the pictorial universe and the audience. In both paintings which feature a multi-figural composition, the composition is visible from a wide angle and the artist is situated higher than other figures in the composition. In the composition by the unknown painter Sultan Mustafa III and his two sons, actually the Sultan had one son, sit on the throne. The viziers stand in front of the throne, while the interpreter of the Sublime

Porte stand on the right hand side, followed by the interpreter of the ambassadorial delegation, the ambassador and the accompanying members of the court.

As mentioned above, the composition seen in Illustration 4 was largely inspired by de Favray's painting. This means that the artist did not base the painting on an audience scene he had observed, but rather designed it according to a conventional scheme. This led to a major mistake: Mustafa III had only one surviving son who later took throne under the name of Selim III (Sakaoğlu 1994: 554), while the artist placed two princes next to the sultan .

(Illustration 6) The last audience scene to be taken up in this study is *Audience granted by the Grand Vizier to Monsieur de Saint-Priest in Aynalikavak 18 March 1779* by Francesco Casanova, currently in Musée de Versailles. Francesco Casanova (1727-1803) was born in London and spent his youth in Venice which would later have a great impact on his artistic work. His brother Giovanni Giacomo Casanova writes in his *Mémories* that Francesco studied painting under Antonio Guardi for 10 years until 1749. He traveled to Paris in 1751 and to Dresden in 1752 where he had a chance to see the works of Charles Parrocel and Philips Wouwerman. According to *Mémories*, Casanova returned to Paris in 1757 and became the court painter of battle, hunting and equestrian scenes following his exhibition of a painting in Louvre. He served as the court painter until 1783, the year he settled in Vienna. In the 1790s he made a cycle of pictures depicting the *Russian Victory over the Turks* for Catherine II of Russia. He traveled to Hungary in 1795 with Prince Nicolas Esterházy and painted many equestrian sketches there. In 1797 he completed a series of pictures commissioned by Bourbon King of

Naples Ferdinand IV ("Francesco Casanova" 1996: 907-8). The audience scene in Illustration 6 is different from the previous ones both in terms of its composition, setting and theme. The composition displays the ambassadorial delegation and the interpreters on the left and the the grand vizier and the imperial officers on the right. The balance in the painting is also different from other audience scenes: the painting unfolds itself from the left and develops in a diagonal fashion ending with the two Ottoman court officers standing behind the grand vizier. The setting is different: Aynalıkavak Palace replaces the Topkapı Palace, the residence of Ottoman sultans and the hallmark of other audience scenes. In the painting, the ambassadors are received by the grand vizier instead of the sultan. Although the theme is the audience of ambassadors, the ambassador depicted here is on a visit involving the signing of a political treaty. The scene depicted in the painting is the submission of the Aynalıkavak Act, a document concluded with the mediation of the French ambassador who managed to eliminate the risk of a war between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire eminating from their disagreement over the administration of the Crimean Khanate (Sakaoğlu 1993: 32). The figures that can be identified in the painting are the French ambassador Saint-Priest and Grand Vizier Silahtar Mehmed Pasha seated across him. The background of the composition offers a landscape of Istanbul featuring the historical peninsula and a wide sky as seen from the arbor and largely contrasts with the indoor settings of other audience scenes. In this painting the eye turns from an indoor setting towards an open area consisting of an urban panaroma appearing to be the Ottoman capital with the empowering presence of a mosque. The parties to the negotiation are in a sitting

position; the French ambassador and his mission are seated on chairs while the Grand Vizier sits on a long sofa on his knees, about to sign the treaty with the reed pen he has just taken out of the ink pot. One of the servants waits on his knees to offer coffee to the Grand Vizier. The interpreter of the Sublime Porte and the interpreter of the embassy stand behind the French ambassador and hold texts, possibly translations, in their hands. Since the composition represents an audience not by the sultan but by the grand vizier, the ambassadors are depicted while sitting on chairs on the same level as the grand vizier instead of standing before him. The interpreters are included among a group of standing figures including an officer from the embassy and two heads of palace door keepers. The composition scheme is affected by the change in the figure receiving the ambassador. Although the artist has chosen to represent the negotiating parties in a sitting position, he made the interpreters stand and placed them behind the ambassadors while other audience scenes usually had the interpreters standing across the Ottoman sultan. The costumes and the positions of the interpreters offer some clues about their professional status. The costumes, i.e. the long robes and the fur caps, give away the identity of the figures as interpreters. The interpreter standing at the front is probably the interpreter of the Sublime Porte since he hands the texts in his hand to the Grand Vizier. The figure standing next to him must be the interpreter of the embassy, handing the document in his hand to the embassy officer standing behind him. We have no information as to whether the artist personally attended this audience ceremony or whether he had ever been to the Ottoman capital. It is however natural to assume that one of the ambassadors depicted in the painting commissioned this painting as a

leading figure in this significant political event. If Francesco Casanova has never been to the Ottoman capital, he must have studied Ottoman costumes and architecture in depth and perused costume albums and even examined various audience scenes. This familiarity with Ottoman manners and architecture could stem from Casanova's practice from the paintings he made for Catherine II about the Russian victory over the Ottoman Empire. It can also be safely assumed that the ambassador related the theme of the painting to the artist and that the artist based the composition on this account. A striking feature of the painting is that the group of figures placed on the left hand side including the interpreters and the ambassadorial delegation are depicted from the profile while the Grand Vizier and most of the Ottoman figures on the right hand side are depicted from the front. This can be associated with an Orientalist viewpoint that concentrates directly on the Ottoman world and attempts to represent and describe the "foreign" in a clear fashion.

Concluding Remarks

In paintings treating audience granted to ambassadors by the Ottoman court the composition is carried out according to a fixed scheme. This scheme has been predetermined by Ottoman court rules. The scheme dictates the position of the dragomans who are always placed between the Sultan or the Grand Vizier and the Western ambassador. The paintings adopting this scheme largely reflect the reality. The dragomans appear as significant figures in the paintings, complementing the

composition featuring two major figures, the Sultan or the Grand Vizier and the Western ambassador. In other words, the dragomans are not depicted as an invisible "veil" serving a transparent function between the two parties in dialogue, but rather as a visible, dominant and indispensable element in these compositions.

The function and position granted to interpreters in the above examples are by no means original or innovatory. A historical example to the way interpreters have been depicted in visual representations comes from ancient Egypt where two interpreters are shown in a rather prominent position, mediating between two parties **(Illustration 7)**. The use of interpreters in diplomatic or military settings is likewise a historical phenomenon. In the Ottoman Empire, the main reason for the need to employ interpreters stemmed from the fact that Sultans and the court elite refused to learn the language of Western powers. As Bowen states, this attitude was also common in ancient Egypt and Rome where "other languages were held in low esteem with the consequence that the elite made no effort to learn such languages, except Greek" (Bowen et al. 1995:246, 279). This no doubt placed interpreters on a shifting ground – in the Ottoman Empire they were both much needed and at the same time scorned for dealing with perceivably low-esteem languages. Their crucial role of being linguistic and cultural intermediaries granted them a place at the state protocol which is also clearly visible in the examples given above. However, their social status should not be inferred from these depictions alone; their knowledge of foreign languages and cultures did not guarantee interpreters instant access to respect and prestige.

The dragomans are almost always easily identifiable in the scenes of audience in which they are placed because their costumes are their professional hallmark. The long gowns they dress with their fur collars and dark fur caps are in a way their uniforms and these costumes give away their occupation in the paintings, as they did in real life. The costumes of interpreters was in fact regulated by the state for which they worked. By way of example we can refer to a royal circular from France which described the costumes interpreters were allowed to wear in articles 93 and 94: "Sa Majéste permet aux Dragomans de continuer à porter dans les Echelles du Levant l'habit oriental ou de prendre un habit à la Française, tel qu'il sera désigné par l'article suivant; mais elle entend que tous les Dragomans d'une Echelle particuliére y soient habillés de la meme manière; ils pourront en consequence opter pour l'un ou pour l'autre habillement, et en cas de contestation entr'eux à cet égard, elle sera décidée provisoirement par son Ambassadeur à Constantinople, et par les consuls et vice-consuls, dans les autres Echelles du Levant, qui en rendront compte au Secrétaire d'Etat ayant le département de la Marine." (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995: 54). However, it is also a fact that interpreters wore Oriental clothes despite these instructions from the French Kingdom. Interpreters wore nearly identical costumes in the Ottoman Empire, which can be interpreted as a sign for both the social class they belonged and a professional solidarity they maintained (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995: 54). Jean-Michel Tancoigne, who was also an interpreter, wrote in 1811 that although the French state made it mandatory for interpreters to wear Western costumes in 1806, dragomans still wore Oriental clothes: " dont le calpak ou bonnet à quatre cornes, appelé par une dame espagnole

'l'éteignoir du bon sens', n'est pas la pièce la moins essentiele. Son plus ou moins d'ampleur et la manière négligée de le poser sur l'oreille ou tout à fait sur le derrière de la tête dénotent presque toujours le degré d'importance du personnage." (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995: 54).

Interpreters at the service of Western embassies often complained that they were paid poorly and that there was no career track in interpreting. It was indeed difficult to become a consul or ambassador for interpreters and there were very few who succeeded in attaining diplomatic posts. One of the major figures who moved on to a diplomatic career from interpreting was Mouratgea d'Ohsson (Muradcan Tosunyan). After he worked as a translator and interpreter at the Swedish embassy, d'Ohsson was promoted to the post of an ambassador and wrote *Tableau Genéral de l'Empire Othoman*, one of the major sources about the state of the Ottoman Empire in late 18th century. The book is based on the proposal submitted by d'Ohsson to Selim III on the innovations needed in the Imperial School of Engineering (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995: 84, Theolin 2000: 80-82, Beydilli 1995: 311).

Unlike their colleagues working at the service of Western embassies, the interpreters of the Sublime Porte enjoyed favorable conditions until the first half of the 19th century. These dragomans both enjoyed the benefits of working for the Ottoman court and used their interpreting career as a stepping stone to higher political posts. Until the second half of the 17th century the Ottoman Empire had no official translation bureau and the interpreting profession only became established in the court after Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Pasha created the post of the chief interpreter of the Sublime

Porte for his friend Panayotis Nikosios Effendi in 1669 (Sözen 2000: 46). Panayotis Nikosios Effendi gained some privileges after he was appointed as chief interpreter including the privileges of growing a beard, riding a horse and wearing a fur cap with his servants. Sultan Murad IV had banned the non-muslim population in Istanbul from wearing sable fur and cap and satin clothes and from riding on a horse with an imperial edict he sent to the Cadi of Istanbul in 1630. The privileges bestowed upon the chief interpreter thus distinguished him from other non-muslims in terms of his costume (Sözen 2000: 46).

(Illustration 8) This water-colour depiction titled *Chief Dragoman to the Sublime Porte* comes from *Recueil des costumes turcs* featuring 152 illustrations. It is registered in the Municipal Library of Burg-en-Bresse. The painting was originally made as part of an album prepared by a Greek artist who was commissioned by Captain Joseph Gabriel Monnier (1745-1818) who stayed in Istanbul in 1784-86 and 1793-97 as military adviser to the Ottoman army (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995: 59-60). The painting represents a chief interpreter of the Ottoman Empire with his fur cap, long-sleeved gown and yellow shoes which were only allowed for Turks. The figure holds the concession given to him by the Ottoman state allowing him to work as an interpreter. These Phanariot interpreters who were largely of Greek origin used this advantageous concession to become princes of Wallachia or Moldavia. These princedoms were later converted into "Hospodars" (governorships) after 1711 and Phanariot dragomans continued to be appointed to the post of governor until the early 19th century (Sözen

2000: 43-44). The illustration offers a typical interpreter's attire with a satin shirt, a ruby-coloured gown with fur lining, a cap and yellow shoes.

(Illustration 9) *Portrait of Pierre Camcıoğlu* was painted in December 1787 by Jean-François Duchateau. This oil painting is currently in a private collection in Paris (Theolin 2000: 83). Pierre Camcıoğlu who was a member of a family who served the Swedish embassy throughout the 18th century bought the land on which the Swedish embassy was located on behalf of Swedish ambassador Celsing in 1757. He became the interpreter of the Swedish embassy and lived under Swedish protection, accumulating great wealth during his lifetime (Theolin 2000: 83). His career offers us interesting clues about the status of the profession of interpreting: It appears as though embassy interpreters were not only involved in a linguistic profession, they also acted as intermediaries and economic agents. The painting displays an interpreter working at the service of a Western embassy. His appearance is no different than that of a chief interpreter of the Sublime Porte. The fur cap, the long robe, the beard and the concession document are there as common elements. In this painting Camcıoğlu is depicted with his son who would later follow his father's career. The painting is an important document, illustrating that dragomans held a strong position and could commission their own paintings. All of the attributes of an interpreter's status are visible in this painting where the interpreter is no longer a secondary figure in an audience scene but the central object. This shows that Ottoman interpreters were very much integrated with the Western world. The costumes depicted in this painting verify the depiction of interpreters in the various audience scenes. Although interpreters

working at the service of Western embassies frequently complained about their poor income and the lack of promotion in their profession Mouratgea d'Ohsson and Pierre Camcıoğlu who both worked for the Swedish embassy stand as exceptions to the rule. Both of these figures are members of Ottoman Armenian families. D'Ohsson married the daughter of a rich Armenian banker and was promoted to the post of the Swedish ambassador. Camcıoğlu's familiy served the Swedish state throughout many generations and apart from becoming the chief interpreter of the Swedish Kingdom Pierre Camcıoğlu also served as the secretary of the Swedish embassy.

The artistic depiction of the dragomans as strong and visible figures in the audience scenes and portraits offered in this paper contradicts with some aspects of their professional reality. The dragomans were usually Ottoman subjects of Greek or Armenian origin who were educated in the west in various languages. They were familiar with Persian and Arabic apart from Ottoman and Western languages. For westerners they always remained an Oriental, while for Ottomans they were "windows opening up to the west". This led to the fact that they always remained in between the two cultures and were deprived of the full trust of either party. This placed them on a shifting ground – both socially and materially. Although Western painters granted them a fixed and salient position in their paintings, and although they played a key role in shaping the political and diplomatic relations between the East and the West, the social and material standing of interpreters in the Ottoman Empire was characterized with distrust and ambiguity. Thus their visual representation forms and interesting case where art does not imitate life.

The dragomans in the Ottoman Empire did not earn high incomes but above this, they were bothered by the fact that they had no opportunities for advancing their careers. Counselors and dragomans belonged to two different classes and it was rather difficult for a dragoman to be promoted to the position of counselor. Dragomans complained about this situation and demanded that the most skilled dragomans be promoted as counselors. They saw this as their right as they were confident in their skills and knowledge. In 1796 dragomans wrote a letter to French ambassador Aubert-Dubayet expressing the following recommendations and demands: "A good interpreter has received a good education; knows the laws, customs and languages of Eastern countries. Is there any reason for the government to dishearten them by not announcing that they could be promoted as counselors in the future?". The dragomans showed Knight Mouradgea d'Ohsson who served at the Swedish embassy and was later promoted as the Swedish ambassador as an example. Despite these clear demands, the dragomans were turned down and were refused the chance of professional promotion, perhaps due to age-old inclinations above everything else. In the Ottoman Empire a dragoman who wanted a change of career could only return to France to try his luck to join the group of four Oriental clerk-translators reporting to the king (Enfants de langue et Drogmans 1995: 84).

Although dragomans in the Ottoman Empire belonged to the most refined and learned sections of the society, they lacked the kind of prestige and earnings that they aspired to, and most likely also deserved. While they occupied a prominent place in the diplomatic protocol, their social status remained ambiguous. The visual examples given

above indicate that interpreters took on important, difficult and even dangerous tasks since they were involved in the shaping of relations between the Ottoman Empire and other states. These tasks were clearly recognized and appreciated by Western artists who placed interpreters in prominent positions in their paintings. However, historical sources reveal that the social and material standing of dragomans was incommensurate with their professional performance and achievements.

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Illustration 8: Unknown painter, *Chief Dragoman to the Sublime Porte*, 1786, 38 x 25cm, watercolor, Burg-en-Bresse, Municipality Museum, inv. ms.65.

Illustration 9: Jean-François Duchateau, *Portrait of Dragoman Pierre Camcıoğlu*, December 1787, 80 x 60cm, oil on canvas, Paris, Private Collection

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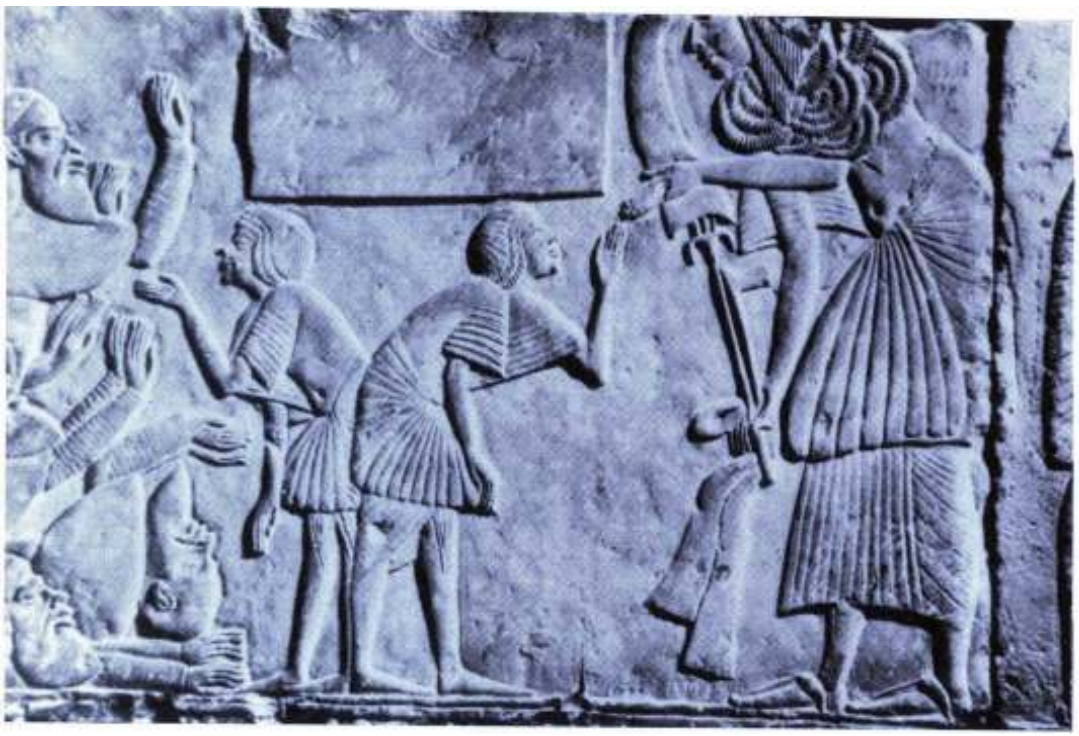

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