

CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN TRANSLATIONS OF OTTOMAN DOCUMENTS AND VICE VERSA (15TH–17TH CENTURIES)*

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Ottoman documents that were to be sent to rulers or officials of other states often were accompanied by translations made by the Ottoman dragomans at the Porte. Some others were translated at the addressee's court by interpreters engaged there. There also are some examples of translations of European documents into Ottoman Turkish. The authorship of many translations thus being known, individual habits and abilities can be associated to specific dragomans, whose names and biographies, education and careers have been established long ago. On the basis of several published pairs of originals and translations, the focus of the present article lies on the way the dragomans tackled the texts, the level of their fluency, the accuracy of their translations, and political implications of deliberate and/or accidental misinterpretations.

Key words: Early modern period, Ottoman documents, translations, dragomans, intercultural communication, language training, transcription texts.

“The professional interpreters occupy a most prominent place within the framework of social and ethical values. In order to punish the world, God has brought the division of languages. Therefore the interpreters, by bridging the gap, fulfil an almost redemptory task”.¹ In this paper, however, I will not focus on philosophical and religious aspects of the translator's profession, but I will concentrate on philological issues and analyse a number of translations of European documents and some translations of Ottoman documents into other languages. These translations often accompa-

* Ottoman quotations, both original and drawn from publications, will be rendered without any diacritics according to modern Turkish orthography, with the exception of vowels in non-first syllables. These will be given according to Middle Ottoman usage.

¹ Translated from Palumbo Fossati Casa (1997, p. 115 and note 11), which gives as a source Abbrugiati (1989, no page numbers), with a further citation from Garzoni (1587, no page numbers).

nied the originals and were done by the dragomans at the Porte.² They could also be translated at the addressee's court by interpreters engaged there, although the Ottomans preferred to have their letters translated by their own dragomans. This ensured the Ottoman viewpoint to be transmitted correctly (Matuz 1975, p. 30).

In this paper I will neither deal with the biographies and careers of the dragomans, nor with the history of the first European institutions for language training. Instead, I will take a number of published pairs of originals and translations as a starting point and focus on the way the dragomans tackled the texts, on the level of their fluency, on the accuracy of their translations and on political implications of deliberate and/or accidental misinterpretations. Although a thorough analysis of all published documents of this kind as well as a systematic edition and subsequent examination of hitherto unpublished material still have to be done, I think that even at this point we can group the translations and draw some preliminary conclusions.

In Hungary, as early as in Mathias Corvinus' times, Serbian was used as an intermediary due to the lack of persons fluent in both Turkish and Hungarian. Documents originally written in Serbian were translated into Ottoman at the sultan's court and then dispatched further (Hazai 1977, pp. 82–83).³ Even in the 1520s Ferdinand I still used the same intermediary: *ve hazret-i 'alinüzün ma'lumı ola ki, bu kâğıd Bosna dilince yazdurduk, gönderdük ki, mebâzâ yanunuzda diyaklar kâğıdın okur kimesne bulunmaya deyü fikir olunmağın* "It shall be known to your Highness that we sent this letter written in the Bosnian language, for there might not be anybody to read a letter written by the *deâks* (i.e., by the scribes)" (Hazai 1977, p. 86).⁴

Similarly, in the 15th century, Greek was used as a common language in the correspondence between the Ottomans and Venice, Florence and the Order of St. John (Vatin 1997, p. 42). The Ottoman documents were first written in Turkish and then translated. The Greek documents sent by the Latin powers were accompanied by a Greek translation (Vatin 1997, p. 44). Thus, like with Serbian in the Ottoman–Hungarian relationship, the working language was not Greek, but both parties had to translate their texts (Vatin 1997, p. 47). A Greek translation of the Ottoman–Venetian treaty of 1482 has been compared to the original and found to be very close to it (Gallotta 1982).

But Italian also played a certain role as a medium of correspondence, as we can see from documents sent to Francesco Gonzaga (Kissling 1965). It has to be said, though, that Kissling took the Ottoman translation of some formulas to be met with in Italian diplomatic texts and vice versa too seriously.⁵ But there probably is at least one copy of an Ottoman common phrase: *başınız sağ olsun: sia pur sana la testa de vostra Signoria* (Kissling 1965, pp. 53, 54).

² Although dragomans were probably used at the court of Mehmed II, they were only established as members of the *divan-i hümayun* during the 16th century, cf. Bosworth (1999, p. 237).

³ On the use of Serbian and on the existence of a *Lugat-i farisi ve rumi ve sirb* written for Mehmed II, cf. also Bojović (1987, pp. 134, 137).

⁴ With an equation Serbian–Bosnian. For another possible use and interpretation of this phrase see below note 14.

⁵ Cf. Kissling (1965, pp. 78, 108–109), see also Römer (1992, p. 458, note 3, and more generally p. 457).

In 1535, Ferdinand asked İbrahim Paşa to send Italian translations along with Ottoman originals, just as he himself sent Italian translations of Latin letters (Bacqué-Grammont 1987b, p. 186, note 23).

Italian also was the language known by most Levantine dragomans serving at the embassies of the European powers, who, in the 16th and 17th centuries often were of Levantine origin (Bosworth 1999, p. 238). They were granted fiscal and commercial privileges by a *berat*, hence their name *barataires* (Séraphin-Vincent 1997, p. 143).

In 1535, Francis I of France sent his first permanent ambassador to the Porte. And immediately the problem of language arose. The position of an interpreter was a precarious one. Not only had the difference of languages from one another to be considered (“l’impossibilité de calquer une langue sur une autre”), but ambassadors had to trust interpreters. And on the other hand, the Ottomans had to be satisfied as well (Séraphin-Vincent 1997, p. 143).

All dragomans of the Porte were supposed to know Arabic and Persian (Matuz 1975, p. 28). Being renegades, most of them knew several European languages, Latin in most cases. The level they generally attained, however, was rather low (Matuz 1975, p. 38).

According to Pigafetta, İbrahim Beg Strasz knew Italian, Latin and German, but none of them well. French ambassadors like De La Vigne accused him of deliberately mistranslating documents. At one time it was even thought to have all the translations made by him for the French checked for accurateness, starting from Aramon’s mission. But this plan was never carried out (Lesure 1976, p. 120, note 6). İbrahim was also said to have had an unsatisfactory knowledge of writing (Matuz 1975, p. 38).

The translations dealt with here can be divided into three groups;

1. Ottoman – Latin / Ottoman – Italian / Ottoman – German
2. Latin – Ottoman / French – Ottoman
3. Contemporary transliterations / simplifications

ad 1

a. A credential letter for the ambassador of Bayazid II to Louis XI dated 1483 (Vatin 1986), Ottoman–Italian. It is basically a good translation as becomes clear from Nicolas Vatin’s article. Also it seems that the translation was made rather systematically, with well-corresponding equivalents in both versions, e.g., the intitulation and inscription, which are rendered in Latin (with the exception of *al*), whereas the rest of the translation is in Italian:

*sultan bayezid ki Allâhun ‘inayetiyle sultan-dır müslimânlara ve rûmlara >
Soltam Bagiazit, Dei gratia Turchiaequ Graeciae Imperator, & c.
şol nûrlanmış asl-zâde ve hürmetlenmiş ve buyuruk ıssı Lûzoko firenkler sul-
tânına selâm >*

*al Serenissimo & Illustrissimo, ac Excelentissimo Principi Ludovico Francorum Regi salutem.*⁶

One instance discussed by Vatin is the rendering of *megali masturiyle kavıl olunan meblâğ ırsâl etdük ki ol dahi karındaşına ırsâl ede as mandaremo a lo gran Maistro de Rhodo la impromessa moneda, et lui la mandarà a lo mio fratello*. Although the tenses do not correspond (Vatin 1986, p. 8, note 21), one could interpret the past tense in the Ottoman text as a present in the sense of a “Koinzidenzfall” (Johanson 1971, pp. 122–125), i.e. “we have already sent”, i.e. further “now we are sending”.

It seems queer that the formula *ziyade kelam lazım degüldür* should appear in a sultan’s decree. It is extremely frequent in 16th-century documents of Ottoman officials of all levels (cf. Procházka-Eisl – Römer 2007, *passim*).

b. Three identical Italian translations of a credential letter for an ambassador of Federico Gonzaga to Süleyman (1526), issued by the viziers İbrahim Paşa, Ayas Paşa and Mustafa Paşa respectively (Römer 1992, p. 457). The translation is mainly correct, except for a rather confused and partly fantastic enumeration of localities under Süleyman’s dominion in the intitulation, like *Asia, Europa, Africa, Macedonia, Usaki, Peloponiso, Grecia, Romania*. Some others, however, correspond to what is really included in the intitulation, like *Natolia, Caramania, Calleo, Damasco, Chairi, Lamecha, Germania*.⁷

Another misinterpretation is that the enumeration of Süleyman’s father and forefathers is understood as being the people who conquered the countries cited ... *et di tutti li Regni de nri predecessori Imperatori acquistati per Forza d’armi et di virtute bellica et di la nra spata ueramte diuina et fulminea et del nro auo sultan baesit sach* (deleted: *Imperator invictisso de Constantinopeli*) *et del suo Figliolo sultan selim sach et de mi suo figliolo sultan suliman sach Imperator invictisso di constantinopoli et de li supradetti Regni*.⁸

c. A Latin translation of a letter of İbrahim Paşa to Charles V dated 1533 (Bacqué-Grammont 1987a). This translation shows some diverging ideas as compared to the original Ottoman text. One point is the question whether Charles V may use Jerusalem in his intitulation, the possession of which is of course claimed by Süleyman.⁹ The same applies to the dispute over Hungary (Bacqué-Grammont 1987a, p. 86):

Üngürus memleketin hüccet ile da’va ederler idi “il prétendait réclamer le royaume de Hongrie en vertu d’un acte légal” > *quod querebat Hungariam bello et armis* and *hüccet ile memleket sevdasından ve talebinden feragat edüb* “Il renonce à sa prétention et à sa demande [d’obtenir] le royaume en vertu d’un acte légal” > *omisit querere Hungariam omnibus modis quibus solebat*. The Ottoman concluding formula

⁶ See especially Vatin (1986, p. 3, note 10).

⁷ Bacqué-Grammont has shown that *Germania* must be a corruption of *Giemenia*, i.e. Yemen, cf. Bacqué-Grammont (1983, p. 234, note 11).

⁸ Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga, Busta 794.

⁹ Ottoman text, l. 24, cf. Bacqué-Grammont (1987a, pp. 78, 87).

is not rendered in the Latin text: *baki es-selam 'ala men ittaba'a l-hüda* “Quant au reste, le salut soit sur celui qui suit la Vraie Voie” (Bacqué-Grammont 1987a, p. 79, p. 88, transcription altered).

The second translation of this letter into French, done by Cornelius Duplicius Schepper from the Latin text, is very close to both the Latin and Ottoman texts (Bacqué-Grammont 1983, pp. 233–236).

d. A Latin translation of a letter of Süleyman to Ferdinand (1551) by İbrahim Beg.¹⁰ This text is characterized by İbrahim's bad knowledge of Latin as well as by some instances that are not clear. As an example I will give a passage characteristic for the function the Ottomans attributed to ambassadors (cf. Schaendlinger 1989):

eyle olsa kırallarun elçileri 'ahd u amana i'timad u itminan içün rehn mesabesinde olub kırallar canibinden mu'ahede mukarrer u muhkem olmaga müte'allik her ne takrir ederse sözlerine i'tikad olunmak içündür

“Therefore the kings' ambassadors are regarded as hostages for the trust in the peace treaty. Whatever they say about the treaty being upheld, it is for their words to be trusted by the kings” (Schaendlinger 1983, document No. 15, l. 4–5).

İbrahim Beg's translation: *sic sciat maiestas vestra, quod oratores qui sunt ubique e parte principibus essendo in amicitia et in induciis, non manent apud principes more oratoribus, sed manent ut fidem eiis datur a principibus suis atque pro omnia securitate, ut aliquid contra inducias et amicitiam factum esse non deberetur, et ut nunquam dubitaret unus in alio; et huic modo manendo orator in porta excelsitudinis maiestatis nostre.*

e. At a much later date, a German translation was made by an unknown translator of a letter of Serdar Yeğen Paşa to Max Emmanuel, Elector of Bavaria (1688). This translation served as a basis for the Elector's answer. Both texts were printed several times and the German translation was remodelled before printing.¹¹ There are also Latin, Italian and English translations of the same letter. H. G. Majer's aim was not so much to dwell on the translators' abilities, but rather to show the reason for the differences between the versions (Majer 1974, p. 135). The Latin translation, probably done by Meninski or Mamucca de la Torre, is accurate and has not been altered. As Majer could show, the remodelling was done in order to be able to stress the rather condescending wording of the answer (Majer 1974, p. 142).

ad 2

a. A credential letter for ambassador Hüseyin Beg issued by Charles VIII in 1486 (Vatin 1983). It is an extremely inaccurate translation, rather a “document de travail”.

¹⁰ Cf. Petritsch (1991, p. 70, No. 154), Schaendlinger (1983, document No. 15). I quote from a typed copy made by Ernst Petritsch.

¹¹ Majer has been able to establish the relations between the various translations of this document, cf. Majer (1974, p. 141).

It shows the translator's apparent ignorance of French dignitaries and his limited vocabulary. Moreover, the translation has been remodelled according to Ottoman 15th-century chancery usage (Vatin 1983, pp. 226–227).¹²

b. Two translations of Latin letters of Ferdinand to İbrahim Paşa (Bacqué-Grammont 1987b), one of which is the translation of a letter sent by Ferdinand in July 1529. Here the differences between the two texts are basically limited to İbrahim Paşa's bombastic titles.

The other one was made on the basis of an intermediary "Bosnian" translation, which apparently was thought necessary for safety's reason. While the letter was on its way, nobody was supposed to read the original text (Bacqué-Grammont 1987b, p. 184).¹³

c. Another translation dates from 1533 and is the answer of Charles V to the letter discussed above under 1.c. (Bacqué-Grammont 1983). In this case, there are considerable differences between the Latin text and its translation.¹⁴ The translation was made by dragoman Yunus Beg, who expanded the text in more than one instance, especially in order to flatter İbrahim Paşa, but also when it was impossible to render

¹² One characteristic of Ottoman chancery usage is, e.g., the use of the formula *eyle olsa buyurdum ki* "pour ce est-il que nous ordonnons..."

¹³ This is what Bacqué-Grammont understands ("Il apparaît donc que le souci de Ferdinand était de transmettre au grand-vizir un message dans une langue considérée comme incompréhensible pour des transfuges vraisemblablement catholiques romains à l'origine, mais nous retiendrons surtout que Ferdinand ne considérait pas le latin comme une langue assez sûre pour véhiculer en territoire ottoman un message discret à l'intention du seul grand-vizir". Bacqué-Grammont links this document (TSA E. 3929), which bears no date, to a Latin text given by Gévay (1838–1842) IV, p. 52, No. VII, a letter of Ferdinand to İbrahim Paşa, dated 1531. In the main text Ferdinand's envoys Leonardo de Nogarola and Joseph v. Lamberg are mentioned. However, the Ottoman text does not at all correspond to the Latin original, as has been thoroughly discussed by Bacqué-Grammont, especially under the assumption of a lost Bosnian version (pp. 184–186). The Ottoman text mentions Leonardo in the heading: *sadrü l-vüzerâ'i l-'izâm İbrahim Paşa hazretlerine Çah kralı olan Çesar Ferdinantun ulu ve baş veziri olan La'onardadan gelen mektub suretidür* "copie de la lettre arrivée auprès de Monseigneur İbrahim Paşa, grand-vizir, par l'intermédiaire de La'onarda, grand et principal vizir de Çesar Ferdinanta". Here, the ablative case is not meant to be understood as *par l'intermédiaire*, but it just means "from". This Ottoman document is the same one Hazai (1977, p. 86, note 11, cf. above, note 5) cites under the shelf-mark of TSA E. 3939. He identifies the person named Leonardo in the heading as Ferdinand's chancellor, Leonhard von Harrach, thereby dating the text between the years 1526–1527. – I would suggest the simple reading for the language issue, namely, that at the sultan's court nobody knows Latin and that the "Bosnian" (or Serbian?) language was used as a medium. Moreover, linguistic questions are sometimes also addressed in letters of Ottoman officials. Thus, Ali Paşa of Buda writes in a letter of 1552: *macarca yazılan kağıdün yazusın oqıyamaduğumuz için buni Türkçe yazduk gönderdük*, "We wrote and sent this in Turkish, because we cannot read the writing of a letter written in Hungarian", cf. Procházka-Eisl–Römer (2007, doc. No. 22).

¹⁴ "... révélant maint embarras des drogman de la Prote devant des concepts intraduisibles, des formulations insuffisamment pompeuses, certains passages dans lesquels l'Empereur n'avait sans doute aucune arrière-pensée injurieuse, mais qui se trouvent purement et simplement censurés", cf. Bacqué-Grammont (1987b, p. 175).

alien concepts.¹⁵ Thus, Bacqué-Grammont has shown that after the rendering of the Latin inscription *Illustrissime et clarissime vir* by *ruşen ve safî İbrahim Paşa hazretleri*, there is a long paragraph containing honorific titles of İbrahim Paşa.

... *ki külliye müslümanların çesarı olan devletlü yüce padişah Sultan Süleyman Şahun ulu veziri ve sırdaşı ve cümle memleketlerinin zabt edicisi ve cümle beglerinin ve kullarının ve za'imlerinin başı ve ulusudur bizüm dahı sevgilü dostumuz* "Monseigneur İbrahim Paşa, lumineux et clair, qui est le grand-vizir et le confident du haut Empereur fortuné Sultan Süleyman Şah, César de tous les Musulmans, celui qui tient en bon ordre tous les royaumes [de celui-ci], lui qui est le chef et le plus grand de tous les beys, les serviteurs et les za'im [de celui-ci] et qui est aussi notre ami cher." (Bacqué-Grammont 1983, pp. 239, 243). Similarly, other items of the diplomatic formulas have been added and/or altered. At the same time, there are paragraphs which have been completely skipped in the Ottoman translation, e.g., *atque ob id magis quam nobilissimis maioribus eamdem dominationem vestram ortam esse et pietatis interim opera plurima non intermisisse audiamus*, a sentence either unthinkable to be presented to İbrahim Paşa or not worth mentioning due to the different structure of notables in the Ottoman Empire (Bacqué-Grammont 1983, pp. 241, 244, note 37).

However, these titles do not contain the usual wording of İbrahim Paşa's titles.¹⁶

d. A translation of a Latin letter of Maximilian II. (1562) to Süleyman (Schaendlinger 1990, Petritsch 1990, p.139, No. 388). A. de Wyss, Habsburg resident at the Porte, wrote the Latin text after an envoy had brought a list of complaints about incursions at the Ottoman–Habsburg border. Then dragoman Murad¹⁷ translated it into Ottoman. A copy of the translation was sent to Vienna. This is a good and accurate Ottoman translation. This document is well adapted to the Ottoman chancery style, except for some parts of the formulae and a maybe deliberately less harsh and less generalized translation of lines 15–19 of the Latin original:

... *quae quidem loca in potestate et Ditione Sers^{mi} Turcarum Imperatoris directè non existunt, et propterea saluis Inducijs per Turcas **reparari vel muniri minime possunt**. Praeterea Praefecti, Sanziachi, et officiales Turcici **nunquam desinunt** Subditos Ces. Ms^{ts}, illos etiam, ad quos nunquam pervenerunt literis ad deditionem sollicitare.*

... *ki bu yerler islam padişahının sahih yerlerinde degüldür ve bu ecilden bu barışıklık ri'ayet olmağa budur ki müslimanlardan **bu yapmaqlar ve ma'mur eylemekler olmayaydı** ve haliyen bunlardan kat'-i nazar serhaddlarda olan sancak begler ve sayir serdarlar benüm efendimün re'ayasını ve şunları ki her giz bundan akdem*

¹⁵ Bacqué-Grammont (1983, pp. 238–239). Yunus knew Latin very well and Italian, cf. Bacqué-Grammont (1997, p. 24).

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Procházka-Eisl–Römer (2007, pp. 14–19 and the works cited there).

¹⁷ Murad knew Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Croatian, but was weak in Latin, cf. Matuz (1975, pp. 38, 53).

*dahı elleri ermemişdür anları mektublar yazub korkudub*¹⁸ *elbette bize tabi' olun de-yü muzayaka verürler.*

“... the places which really do not belong to the territories of the *padişah* of Islam. Therefore, in order to respect this peace, none of these building activities ought to have been carried out by the Muslims. Moreover, the *sancakbegs* and other commanders along the border frighten my Lord's subjects and those who never before were under their rule by writing letters. They oppress them by saying, “Surely you shall become our subjects”.¹⁹

e. Quite a different example is an Ottoman translation of a letter of Maximilian II to Süleyman (1565) probably made by Michael Czernowitz (Schaendlinger 1986; 1987). This text is written in a very simple style and shows many more features of Middle Ottoman than are generally met with in original sultan's decrees of the period. Its literary level is very near to the spoken language and the number of orthographic mistakes, like mixing up emphatic and non-emphatic Arabic consonants or long and short vowels, is extremely high. Syntactic errors also occur, and even parts of the formulas to be usually met with in documents are somehow distorted, e.g.,

dergah-i kaysariyümde olan merdümzade ve yarar elçim Mihal Çernovik nam “my noble and excellent ambassador at my imperial court, named Mihal Çernovik” (Schaendlinger 1987, p. 64).

devletini ve nusretini ziyade ola ve 'ukbeti hayr ola “his fortune and victory may augment and his end may be good” (salutation formula) (Schaendlinger 1987, p. 62).

haliyen bundan evvel “now before that” (beginning of the narration) – The two adverbs contradict each other and are never to be found side by side in original Ottoman documents, the first one being used for accounts of events in the immediate past, the second one for accounts of events prior to these (Schaendlinger 1987, p. 63).

ad 3

a. “List turecki” (1551) (Zajaczkowski 1936; Römer 1994/1996), which is an Ottoman original letter of Süleyman to Sigismund Augustus of Poland, accompanied by another Ottoman version and a Polish translation made by İbrahim Beg (Strasz).

After what Zajaczkowski had remarked upon the differences between the two Ottoman texts (Zajaczkowski 1936, p. 113), I could show that İbrahim Beg apparently simplified the text for his own use before translating it into Polish. But he did so rather inconsistently, and one may wonder why he chose to change some phrases, whereas he left some others as they were.

¹⁸ For the construction *anları mektublar yazub korkudub* “they frighten them by writing letters” see Römer (2006).

¹⁹ For both texts and their German translations see Schaendlinger (1990, pp. 219–220).

Examples: *şimdiye dek kral oğlu Erdel vilayetine kral nasb olunurdu* > *Simdie dek kral ogli erdel vilayete kral dikerlerdi* “until now the King’s son was appointed king of the land of Erdel” (Römer 1994, document line 22, transcription lines 39–40).

südde-i saadetümüze tevatur ile şöyle haber varid olur ki > *Judze asitanemuze sik sik ve tez tez chaberler gelerki* “The following kind of news is often arriving at our threshold of felicity/at our high threshold” (Römer 1994, document lines 20–21, transcription lines 36–37).

b. Bombaci (1949) has published a letter of İbrahim Beg to Michele Membre, Venetian interpreter who knew Turkish well as we know from a number of his translations preserved in the archives of Venice. İbrahim Beg wrote his letter in Ottoman, but in Roman characters along with an Italian translation. Here he was more fluent, but still colloquial. The document is a record of spoken Middle Ottoman (cf. Bombaci 1949, p. 130). İbrahim Beg sometimes combines Italian words with Turkish vocabulary:

we begler dosstlarumuze we duczie da: chi recomandaris eyleyesis, which in the Italian corresponds to *et ueprego sopra tutto di ricomandarme, moldo al Ch.mo m.(esser) Jher(oni)mo Zane, mio singular amico, et medemeamente alli Ch.mi signori fratelli del Ch.mo baylo Soranzo et al Mag.co M. (esser) franc(esc)o pisanj ...*” (Bombaci 1949, p. 139). Here we witness a spontaneous forming of a phraseological verb.

c. An Ottoman letter of Davud Paşa to István Bocskai (1605), written in Roman characters. The text was probably transcribed from an original Ottoman document “in order to become familiar with the official Ottoman Turkish language” (Majda 1994, p. 517). Linguistically speaking, the text reflects Middle Ottoman, and apparently the Ottoman text was not simplified, as can be seen from the whole document. As an example, cf. the oath formula, part of which I will quote here (transcription simplified):

bubade itminani hatirinuz icun Jemin eideriþ ki yerleri ve gökleri iokdan vare-den czennabi rabbil eizzetun azamet ve vachtaniyeti hak iczun... (Majda 1994, p. 521).

“Therefore, for the sake of your peace of mind, we swear that by the highness and unity of the exalted Lord who created heaven and earth ...”

Conclusion

As we have seen, the picture is not uniform. According to the interpreters’ various personalities and their differing skills we have a more or less differentiated impression of the accuracy of their translations.

Although misinterpretations and deliberately wrong translations occur less frequently than anticipated, the overall situation was not satisfactory. Translators used by the European courts sometimes were unreliable and/or involved in espionage like Michael Czernowitz. Malvezzi, the Habsburg resident at the Porte, engaged a Veronese youth who translated Latin texts into Ottoman (Papp 1999, p. 110). Moreover, they

were not always available. In 1529, for instance, Ferdinand sought help from a Mantuan interpreter.²⁰ The interpreters' skills and fluency in Ottoman could not easily be tested.

With a few rare exceptions like Mahmud Beg and Murad Beg, the Ottoman dragomans, not being native speakers of Ottoman Turkish, acquired no deeper knowledge of literary Ottoman with its rhymed prose and other stylistic devices. They continuously struggled with the intricate structure of high Ottoman syntax when translating from Ottoman. On the other hand, when translating from European languages, first their knowledge of these latter languages was put to a test. Then they had to render the text within the framework of Ottoman chancery usage, a most difficult task for a person with a limited notion of the literary language.

For this reason, we can witness first steps for establishing a methodology of translation from Ottoman into other languages. İbrahim Beg at least, but probably some others, too, first made a transliteration of the Ottoman original, thereby simplifying its style and vocabulary. The degree of simplification must have been related to the individual gift of each interpreter. Except for Mahmud Beg, the overall stylistic and linguistic evidence points to the colloquial language of the Middle Ottoman period.

As a result of this situation, Sigismund Augustus of Poland sent young boys to Istanbul to be trained by Ottoman teachers and dragomans, some of whom later became diplomats and translators (cf. Majda 1997, p. 124), the Venetians already by the middle of the 16th century founded their school of the *Giovani di lingua*, followed a century later by the French, the Polish, and in the 18th century by the Austrians. And on the Ottoman side, the time of the Phanariotes of the latter part of the 17th century and onwards was yet to come, ultimately leading to the foundation of the *tercüme odası* in the 19th century. This, however, is an altogether different story.

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²⁰ Cf. Römer (1992, p. 457), quoting from Luzio (1922, II, p. 158, note 7).

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