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# An Ottoman Envoy at the Medici Court: Mustafa Agha's Reception in Florence (1598)

by *Özden Mercan*

## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Ottoman representative Mustafa Agha's diplomatic mission to Florence in 1598. Playing a key role in Grand Duke Ferdinando I's attempt to establish diplomatic contacts with the Sublime Porte, Mustafa Agha acted as mediator and actively participated in the diplomatic negotiation process between the two courts. One of the important moments in this regard was his travel to Florence. Besides delivering the official letters of Sultan Mehmed III and Grand Admiral Halil Pasha concerning Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici's request for friendship and privileges, Mustafa Agha also conducted diplomatic negotiations with the Grand Duke and attended some courtly ceremonies in the Medici palaces. Unfortunately, he did not leave any testimony about his stay in Florence; however, thanks to the evidence in the unpublished diplomatic correspondence and reports we possess sufficient information about his reception and perception in this city. This article explores how current political situation and preconceived notions shaped the attitudes of local people and court elites towards this Ottoman representative. Although the Medici-Ottoman diplomatic negotiations ended in failure, Mustafa Agha's travel to Florence contains a story in itself – offering us insight into diverse and fascinating aspects of cross-cultural interactions in the early modern Mediterranean.

Keywords: early modern diplomacy – Ottoman diplomats – Grand Duchy of Tuscany – cross-cultural interactions – Medici Florence

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## 1. Introduction

Prior to the eighteenth century, there were no resident embassies of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, but the absence of such institutions should not imply a lack of interest on the part of the Ottomans in conducting diplomacy with the outside world. Being close to and expanding towards Europe, the Sublime Porte always had close diplomatic relations and intensive contacts with the European states in the early modern period. One way of doing this was to allow resident embassies in their capital city; thus, the Ottomans conducted diplomacy mainly through the European ambassadors resident in Istanbul. However, they also frequently sent envoys to various European powers, especially to the Italian states, for different purposes – from negotiating peace treaties to inviting foreign rulers to attend imperial celebrations in the Ottoman capital. In this respect, evaluating early modern diplomacy in the context of resident embassies and their formation as a uniquely European phenomenon leads us to ignore the complex and intensive forms of diplomacy that were conducted between the Italian states and the Ottoman Empire during this period, which undeniably were part of the practice of diplomacy.

In recent years, with the attempt to re-consider «relationships between and among polities» in the early modern period, novel approaches to cross-cultural or cross-confessional diplomacy have been proposed within the framework of the new diplomatic history<sup>1</sup>. One such direction has been to focus on the importance of mediation in cross-cultural diplomacy. While there are studies on the mediating role of European envoys and representatives in Constantinople<sup>2</sup>, much less is known about their Ottoman/

<sup>1</sup> J. Watkins, *Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, in «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», 38, 2008, 1, pp. 1-14. Also see D. Goffman, *Negotiating with the Renaissance State: The Ottoman Empire and the New Diplomacy*, in V.H. Aksan - D. Goffman (eds.), *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 61-74; I. Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict. Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015; E.S. Gürkan, *Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600*, pp. 107-128; T.A. Sowerby, *Early Modern Diplomatic History*, in «History Compass», 14, 2016, 9, pp. 441-456; T.A. Sowerby - J. Hennings, *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World c. 1410-1800*, New York, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> M.P. Pedani, *The Sultan and the Venetian Bailo: Ceremonial Diplomatic Protocol in Istanbul*, in R. Kauz - G. Rota - J.P. Niederkorn (eds.), *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Wien, VÖAW, 2009, pp. 287-299; E. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006; J.-P. Ghobrial,

Muslim counterparts<sup>3</sup>. Historiography regarding the role of Ottoman diplomats in Italian states has focused extensively on Venice, but less so on other states. For Venice, scholars such as Maria Pia Pedani have analyzed in depth the Ottoman diplomats there and their reception and perception by the *Serenissima* in the early modern period<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, Venice remained an exceptional place in hosting numerous envoys from the Ottoman Empire. The status of these representatives varied depending on their mission. Sometimes they only delivered the letter of the sultan *Nâme-i Hümâyun* and if required waited for the response. But most of the time they had more extensive tasks such as negotiating military agreements and discussing the articles of the treaties<sup>5</sup>. As the Ottoman envoys stayed for months in Venice, not much time passed between the departure of one envoy and the arrival of another. In this regard, there was almost permanent Ottoman representation<sup>6</sup> and besides the diplomats, there was also a significant presence of Ottoman Muslim merchants as well as other Ottoman subjects in Venice. The presence of these groups in this city, their contact

*The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014. A recently published edited volume also includes articles on this topic, see T.A. Sowerby - C. Markiewicz, *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c. 1500-1630*, New York, Routledge, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> There are a few studies on the topic, but they are chronologically focusing on later periods (17th-18th centuries). For a discussion of this issue, see S. Faroqhi, *What an Ottoman Ambassador Might Find Out in Vienna*, in S. Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire: Employment and Mobility in the Early Modern Era*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 3-25. See also, M. Grenet, *Muslim Missions to Early Modern France, c. 1610-c. 1780: Notes for a Social History of Cross-Cultural Diplomacy*, in «Journal of Early Modern History», 19, 2015, pp. 223-244; D. Do Paço, *Trans-Imperial Familiarity. Ottoman Ambassadors in Eighteenth-Century Vienna*, in T.A. Sowerby - J. Hennings (eds.), *Practices of Diplomacy*, pp. 166-184. For the Muslim ambassadors from North Africa into Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Nabil Matar's works: *In the Lands of the Christians. Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century*, New York, Routledge, 2003, and *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> M.P. Pedani, *In Nome del Gran Signore*, Venezia, Deputazione Editrice, 1994; by the same author: *Ottoman Diplomats in the West: The Sultan's Ambassadors to the Republic of Venice*, in «Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi», 2, 1996, pp. 187-202; *Between Diplomacy and Trade: Ottoman Merchants in Venice*, in S. Faroqhi - G. Veinstein (eds.), *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire*, Paris, Peeters, 2008, pp. 3-21.

<sup>5</sup> M.P. Pedani, *In Nome del Gran Signore*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> S. Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans*, p. 76.

with locals, and their treatment by the Venetian authorities have been examined by various scholars<sup>7</sup>.

However, significant gaps remain in our present knowledge of Ottoman envoys who were sent to other Italian states such as Rome, Ferrara, and Florence during the sixteenth century. In particular, the growing desire of the Medici dukes to obtain trading privileges from the Ottoman court in order to gain direct access to the trade routes and commercial networks of the Levant urged them to restore diplomatic relations with the Sublime Porte. Consequently, from the second half of the sixteenth century, there was a diplomatic traffic between the two states through the reciprocal sending of representatives. This article will focus on one of these figures, Müteferrika<sup>8</sup> Mustafa Agha, who was sent to Florence in 1598 to conduct negotiations with Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici (r. 1587-1609). *Müteferrika* was a high-ranking position in the Ottoman administrative system. The individuals holding it were responsible for the court service and when necessary were employed for political and diplomatic missions. Previously, men from the sultan's family such as the sons of sultan's sisters, or of other high-ranking officials such as viziers and governors were appointed to this position. However, from the second half of the sixteenth century, the post was also open to people coming from various ranks in the palace service, including converts from the sultan's and vizier's households<sup>9</sup> – indeed, Mustafa Agha, being a convert, belonged to this last category.

Mustafa Agha became an active participant and facilitator of the Ottoman-Tuscan negotiations. He not only played an important role in initiating the negotiation process but also delivered the letters from Sultan Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603) and Grand Admiral Halil Pasha (in office 1595-1599) to Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici in response to his request for friendship and privileges. During his visit in Florence, Mustafa Agha conducted

<sup>7</sup> C. Kafadar, *A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima*, in «Journal of Turkish Studies», 10, 1986, pp. 191-218; S. Ortega, *Across Religious and Ethnic Boundaries: Ottoman Networks and Spaces in Early Modern Venice*, in «Mediterranean Studies», 18, 2009, pp. 66-89; by the same author, *Negotiating Transcultural Relations in the Early Modern Mediterranean. Ottoman-Venetian Encounters*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2014; R. Salzberg, *Mobility, Cobabitation and Cultural Exchange in the Lodging Houses of Early Modern Venice*, in «Urban History», 46, 2019, 3, pp. 398-418.

<sup>8</sup> In the Venetian sources the title was written as Mutahhar Aga and in the Florentine sources the name and title were written as Mustafa Aga Müteferrika; thus «Mutahhar» in the Venetian sources seems to be a distorted version of *müteferrika*.

<sup>9</sup> E. Afyoncu, *Müteferrika*, in «Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi», 32, 2006, pp. 183-184.

negotiations with the grand duke and he met with the grand duchess, Florentine noblemen and noblewomen. He had the opportunity to witness courtly celebrations and had limited contacts with the residents of the city. The close examination of all these interactions highlights various aspects of cross-cultural diplomacy and offers valuable insights on the relations between Muslim foreigners and the local inhabitants in early modern Florence.

There are, however, some challenges in reconstructing Mustafa Agha's activity in Florence since his presence and movements were mentioned only in Italian diplomatic correspondence. There is no trace of his mission in the Ottoman sources, neither in the registers of important affairs (*mühimme defterleri*)<sup>10</sup> nor in the chronicles of the period<sup>11</sup>. He does not seem to have given a written account of his mission and his stay in Florence, at least no such document has come to light yet<sup>12</sup>. However, the lack of an account written in Turkish by Mustafa Agha should not obscure the fact that his mission to Florence was an important event. A variety of sources from Venetian embassy reports to Medici records as well as Mustafa's letters written in Italian and located in the Florence State Archive provide impressive details on this Ottoman envoy's stay in the Medici Florence.

In light of the evidence in these sources, the aim of this article is to reconstruct Mustafa Agha's visit to Florence and his reception by the Medici authorities and locals in the city. An analysis of his visit is important in many ways. First of all, while European diplomats and ambassadors had easier access to the Ottoman Empire and left many written accounts regarding their stay and experience in the Ottoman capital, Constantinople, during the sixteenth century<sup>13</sup>, our knowledge of the Ottoman envoys' experience in European states in the same period is rather limited. In that

<sup>10</sup> *Mühimme Registers* consist of decisions taken by the *Divân-ı Hümayûn* on the diplomatic, political, economic, and social events of the period.

<sup>11</sup> Among these are the chronicles of Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, İbrahim Peçevî, Selanîkî and Naîmâ.

<sup>12</sup> Although we do not have written reports by the Ottoman envoys and messengers of the sixteenth century, from the seventeenth century onwards, it is possible to find accounts and observations regarding European cities written by the Ottomans attending diplomatic missions. See S. Yerasimos, *Explorateurs de la Modernité. Les Ambassadeurs Ottomans en Europe*, in «Genèses», 35, 1999 (L'Europe vue d'ailleurs), pp. 65-82.

<sup>13</sup> One of the best-known accounts in this regard is Habsburg ambassador Busbecq's letters. For a recent English edition, see O. Ghiselin de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, London, Sickle Moon Books, 2001.

sense, Mustafa Agha's case is very revealing. His mission stands in striking contrast to the dominant view in the traditional historiography that the Ottomans were 'disinterested' in diplomacy with Europe and they preferred to receive ambassadors than to send them<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to the existence of rich documentation, previously unexamined, it is possible to rebuild and analyze Mustafa Agha's almost two and a half-month stay in Florence.

Such an examination brings to the forefront three main issues that will be addressed throughout this article. The first one is the impact of the volatile relations between the two states on the reception of the Ottoman envoy in Florence. An important aspect of Mustafa Agha's mission is that the Ottoman administration sent him to a state where there were not yet friendly relations or peace agreement. Therefore, his visit to the grand duchy of Tuscany is quite different from the visits of other Ottoman envoys to Venice or France, which had mostly amiable relations with the Ottoman court during the second half of the sixteenth century. The article will explore how this situation affected or shaped the reception of the Ottoman envoy by the Medici authorities and the locals. The second question is the influence of long-established representations in European literary, political, and religious discourses regarding the 'Other' on Mustafa Agha's reception and perception in Florence. An analysis of his mission will provide important insights about how 'notions of otherness' were expressed in the early modern period. Mustafa Agha's mediating role is the last issue to be explored in the article. In the sixteenth century Ottoman diplomatic agents, often coming from mixed cultural backgrounds, fluent in multiple languages and possessing complex personal identities, played a significant role in establishing a dialogue between East and West. These intermediaries' «cultural and linguistic brokering» does not necessarily mean that the contacts between Christian and Muslim polities would otherwise

<sup>14</sup> J.C. Hurewitz, *Ottoman Diplomacy and the European States System*, in «The Middle East Journal», 15, 1961, 2, pp. 141-152. Bernard Lewis and M.S. Anderson had also similar arguments. For an overview of their arguments, see A. Nuri Yurdusev, *The Ottoman Attitude toward Diplomacy*, in A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy. Conventional or Unconventional?*, New York, Palgrave, 2004, pp. 5-35. This approach has already been problematized in various studies. For instance, see D. Goffman, *Negotiating with the Renaissance State*, pp. 61-74; M. van Gelder - T. Krstić, *Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, in «Journal of Early Modern History», 19, 2015, pp. 93-105; T. Krstić, *Islam and Muslims in Europe*, in H. Scott (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750*, I: *Peoples and Places*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 670-671.

be impossible<sup>15</sup>. In fact, Mustafa Agha's example demonstrates how these people shifted boundaries of belonging, identity, and loyalties to further their own interests and for their own personal gain. The article will also discuss whether his double agency affected the Medici authorities' attitude towards him.

By examining Mustafa Agha's mission in the context of these three lines of inquiry, this article aims to shed light on the nature of cross-cultural interactions in the early modern period, highlighting both forms of sociability and middle grounds as well as frontiers and cultural prejudices. That being the case, it offers important insights concerning the reception of Ottoman Muslims in Europe.

## 2. Mustafa Agha's visit in the context of Medici-Ottoman relations

Before going into details of Mustafa Agha's stay in Florence, it is necessary to briefly outline the context in which this event took place, that is, the Ottoman-Florentine relations in this period. Such background information will help us to understand the process leading to the negotiations between the two states in 1598 and the role of Mustafa Agha. From the second half of the sixteenth century Medici-Ottoman relations were characterized by conflict and confrontation, due to the activities of the Order of St Stephen in the Eastern Mediterranean. Established by Cosimo I in 1562 with the spirit of crusading, the galleys of the Order were to defend the Tuscan coast against Ottoman warships<sup>16</sup>. Yet soon the Knights of the Order started sailing toward the Barbary coasts and the Levant to hunt for Ottoman merchant ships<sup>17</sup>. The anti-Ottoman activities of the galleys of the Order from the second half of the sixteenth century sowed the seeds of discord between Tuscany and the Sublime Porte, putting the grand duchy

<sup>15</sup> M. van Gelder - T. Krstić, *Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy*, p. 97. Also see E.N. Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011, pp. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> G. Guarnieri, *Cavalieri di Santo Stefano. Contributo alla storia della Marina Militare Italiana (1562-1859)*, Pisa, Succ. Nistri, 1928, pp. 25-36; E. Fasano Guarini, *La fondazione del principato: Da Cosimo I a Ferdinando I (1530-1609)*, in E. Fasano Guarini - G. Petralia - P. Pezzino (eds.), *Storia della città Toscana*, 5 vols., Roma - Bari, Laterza, 2003, III: *Il principato mediceo*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> M. Berti, *La marina da guerra mediceo-stefaniana e l'attività commerciale nel Mediterraneo (secoli XVI-XVII)*, in M. Berti, *Nel Mediterraneo ed oltre. Temi di storia e storiografia marittima toscana (secoli XIII-XVIII)*, Pisa, ETS, 2000, pp. 62-63.



in the position of a potential enemy of the Ottoman Empire<sup>18</sup>. However, when favorable political and economic circumstances emerged, there were attempts by the Medici dukes to resume diplomatic negotiations with the sultan. For instance, in 1592 a Florentine merchant, Antonio Vecchietti, was sent to Constantinople as representative of Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici to deliver the grand duke's letters to Sultan Murad III and Grand Vizier Siyavuş Pasha and restore the relations with the Ottoman court<sup>19</sup>. In his letters, Ferdinando made no mention of the question of St Stephen's galleys, which had been a frequently raised issue in the previous negotiations<sup>20</sup>. Presumably unwilling to stir up the conflict related to the galleys, the grand duke made his initial attempt purely trade oriented. He intended to secure for Florentine merchants who were trading in the Ottoman domains privileges similar to those enjoyed by the Venetians and French. More importantly, he also aimed to attract Ottoman merchants to Livorno, which had already become popular as a commercial free port during this period. Moreover, Ferdinando's edicts of 1591 and 1593, called *Livornine*, provided privileges and freedom to merchants of all nations, among whom Armenians, Jews, Turks, Moors, and Persians<sup>21</sup>. Yet despite these efforts, Antonio Vecchietti's attempt did not succeed. Although the grand duke's request was well received by the Ottoman court, the negotiations did not reach a conclusion due to intervention by a third party – the French, who considered this a threat to their interests.

Meanwhile, in 1593 the grand duke also sent representatives to Transylvania, together with papal envoys, to negotiate with Sigismund Bathory, the ruler of Transylvania and a vassal of the Ottoman sultan<sup>22</sup>. The aim was to per-

<sup>18</sup> On the activities of the Order during the second half of the sixteenth century, see M. Gemignani, *Diplomazia e marina stefaniana nell'epoca di Francesco I de' Medici*, in *L'Ordine di Santo Stefano e il Mare*, Pisa, ETS, 2001, pp. 85-110.

<sup>19</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Mediceo del Principato (MdP) 4274, fol. 37r-v, fol. 40r (30 August 1592).

<sup>20</sup> F. Özden Mercan, *Medici-Ottoman Diplomatic Relations (1574-78): What Went Wrong?*, in M. Arfaioli - M. Carosio (eds.), *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant*, Turnhout, Brepols - Harvey Miller, 2016, pp. 19-31.

<sup>21</sup> ASFi, Auditore Poi Segretario delle Riformagioni (ASR) 18, fol. 661.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding the relations of the Principality of Transylvania with the Ottoman Empire and Habsburg Empire, see J.B. Szabó, 'Splendid Isolation?' *The Military Cooperation of the Principality of Transylvania with the Ottoman Empire (1571-1688) in the Mirror of the Hungarian Historiography's Dilemmas*, in G. Karman - L. Kunčević (eds.), *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, pp. 301-337.

suade Bathory to rebel against the Ottomans and participate in the papacy's plans for a crusade<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, the grand duke adopted an anti-Ottoman stance in the conflict that had recently erupted between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, agreeing to provide financial and military support to Emperor Rudolf II in his war against the Ottomans in Hungary. In 1594 he sent troops under the command of his stepbrother Don Giovanni de' Medici, as well as military architects and engineers to serve the Habsburg emperor<sup>24</sup>. Together with the Tuscan forces, Sigismund's collaboration with Emperor Rudolf and the revolt of Wallachian and Moldavian princes against Ottoman rule resulted in the defeat of the Ottomans at Eztergom in 1595<sup>25</sup>. However, in the following year the Ottoman army gained a major victory against the Habsburg forces, and the Tuscan troops returned to Florence with heavy losses<sup>26</sup>. As the grand duke's expectations came to naught as a result of the Ottoman-Habsburg wars, he once again chose the path of reconciliation and started to look for ways to negotiate with the Sublime Porte.

It was only in June 1597 that a good opportunity fell into the grand duke's lap. Müteferrika Mustafa Agha, who had been in Fez and France on diplomatic missions, stopped at Livorno on his way back to Istanbul and sent a letter to the grand duke asking for safe passage through Florence to Venice. Apparently finding himself amid a military conflict in Fez, the Ottoman envoy left the city with a ship going to Marseilles. With the help of the Duke of Guise he came to Livorno, where he needed a letter of safe-conduct from the grand duke to travel safely to Venice. In addition, Mustafa Agha offered his services should the grand duke desire to establish diplomatic negotiations with the Sublime Porte<sup>27</sup>. He wrote this letter from the ship of Marcantonio Bianchi in Livorno. In fact, we also have a letter from Bianchi himself, which provides information to the grand duke concerning this Ottoman envoy. Seemingly upon the request of the

<sup>23</sup> İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Ankara, TTK, 1995, 3/II, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> G. Spini, *Il principato dei Medici e il sistema degli stati europei del Cinquecento*, in G. Garfagnini (ed.), *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'Europa del '500*, I: *Strumenti e veicoli della cultura relazioni politiche ed economiche*, Firenze, Olschki, 1983, p. 211; G. Masi «I rapporti tra il Granducato di Toscana e il Principato di Transilvania (1540-1699)», PhD diss., Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2013, pp. 97-100.

<sup>25</sup> K. Fleet, *The Ottomans, 1451-1603: A Political History Introduction*, in S. Faroqhi - K. Fleet (eds.), *Cambridge History of Turkey*, II: *The Ottoman Empire as World Power*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 42-43.

<sup>26</sup> G. Spini, *Il Principato dei Medici*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>27</sup> ASFi, MdP 879, fol. 673 (23 June 1597).

Duke of Guise, Bianchi accepted Mustafa Agha, «who was the ambassador of the sultan and a venerable and esteemed person», onto his ship. Bianchi also noted that the Duke of Guise strongly recommended giving this Ottoman envoy and his two servants, all dressed in Turkish clothes, safe passage through Florence<sup>28</sup>.

Seeing this as a golden opportunity, Ferdinando summoned Mustafa Agha and spoke to him about the trading possibilities of the Florentines in Constantinople. The grand duke also sent letters to Sultan Mehmed III and his mother Safiye Sultan putting emphasis on resuming negotiations that would be beneficial for both sides<sup>29</sup>. Safiye Sultan was one such figure who took an active part in the decision-making process in state affairs during this period<sup>30</sup>. Since gaining her support would put the negotiations on a solid footing, in his letter to Safiye Sultan, Ferdinando praised her prudent way of conducting the affairs of the empire and asked for her support of the negotiations<sup>31</sup>. Thus began Grand Duke Ferdinando I's second attempt at Tuscan-Ottoman diplomatic contacts, in which Mustafa Agha agreed to be the mediator, promising to convey the grand duke's letters and to lobby at the Ottoman court in favor of the grand duke and the Florentine interests. It can be said that the initial diplomatic rapprochement between the two states was facilitated by Mustafa Agha who clearly provided guidance to the grand duke offering him information concerning the Ottoman diplomatic practices and the key figures who exerted considerable influence over the sultan's decisions.

A year later Mustafa Agha would again arrive in Florence for the negotiations. But from Venetian sources we understand that he already had some troubles on his return way from Florence to Venice. In his letter to Venetian Doge Marino Grimani, the Ottoman envoy informed the doge that he arrived in Venice from his diplomatic mission in Fez, France, and from there via Marseilles to Livorno, Florence, and Ferrara and he added

<sup>28</sup> ASFi, MdP 879, fol. 676 (23 June 1597); fol. 716 (27 June 1597).

<sup>29</sup> ASFi, MdP 2863, fol. 60 (4 July 1597).

<sup>30</sup> For the role of Safiye Sultan in diplomacy and state affairs, see M.P. Pedani, *Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy*, in «Turcica», 32, 2000, pp. 9-32; L. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 219-228; A. Akyıldız, *Haremin Padişahı Valide Sultan*, Istanbul, Timaş, 2017, pp. 48-103.

<sup>31</sup> ASFi, MdP 2863, fol. 60 (4 July 1597). About Safiye Sultan: «... di animo nobilissimo et di così condotta prudenza che ella governa l'imperio del gran monarca Sultan Memet suo figliolo».

that after a voyage full of unfortunate incidents with the loss of goods and twelve servants he was very happy to be «at the land of our dear brothers, which is like a home for us»<sup>32</sup>. Mustafa Agha's comment resonates Nabil Matar's argument that for many Muslims traveling to European states was quite challenging. If they traveled by sea, there was always a high risk of falling prey to the pirates. While traveling on land, they had to survive the rigors of the journey such as robberies, attacks, or conflicts with the locals. Thus, the ease and protection provided by the host state played a decisive role in the Muslims' travel to Europe<sup>33</sup>. This could be the case for Mustafa Agha as well. Although he did not provide much detail about his travel, he seems to have experienced some safety issues while *en route*. It must have been because of this fact that the following year, when he set out for Florence, the grand duke sent a Florentine merchant, Neri Giraldi, to receive Mustafa Agha in Ancona and accompany him to Florence<sup>34</sup>.

### 3. Müteferrika Mustafa Agha's arrival in Florence

Through their linguistic abilities and cultural flexibility, Ottoman diplomatic agents were able to actively participate in the diplomatic negotiation process between Muslim and Christian polities, and indeed they helped to significantly shape it. Mustafa Agha could be a good example of it. He seems to have proved himself as a capable intermediary by fulfilling the first stage of his mission: conveying the request of the grand duke to the Ottoman court and ensuring a positive response to the negotiations. Mustafa Agha came to Florence on 26 April 1598, with the long-expected letters from Sultan Mehmed III and Grand Admiral Halil Pasha. Apparently, the grand duke's request had been received positively by the Ottoman court, and in these letters both the sultan and Halil Pasha as usual stated in a very diplomatic way that the Sublime Porte was always open to those who showed friendship and sincerity. They added that the grand duke should send an ambassador to Istanbul with Mustafa Agha in order to renew the

<sup>32</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASVe), *Lettere e Scritture Turchesche* V: 209 (11 July 1597).

<sup>33</sup> N. Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes*, pp. 10-14.

<sup>34</sup> ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fols. 85-86.

privileges<sup>35</sup>. What was the motive for the Ottoman court to give green light for the negotiations and send Mustafa Agha to Florence? The long-lasting wars with the Safavids on the eastern frontier (1578-1590) and with the Habsburgs in the west (1593-1606) depleted the financial and military resources of the empire significantly. Moreover, *Celali* uprisings in Anatolia put the sultan in a difficult situation. The turmoil and strife due to wars and economic decline seem to have played a role in the favorable attitude of the Ottoman court to the grand duke's request.

There were, however, also more specific reasons. Grand Admiral Halil Pasha was a strong supporter of this negotiation. He was appointed as grand admiral of the navy in 1595. When Halil Pasha replaced Cigalazade Sinan Pasha as grand admiral of the navy, some contemporaries considered this appointment a mistake. According to Selânikî's chronicle, the position (*kapudan-ı deryâhk*) was appropriate for someone who was shrewd, capable, and of good reputation; however, Halil Pasha was a weak-willed individual, and thus the appointment would only, and inevitably, cause the administration to regret the decision<sup>36</sup>. In fact these concerns were not unfounded as according to Venetian *bailo* Marco Venier, Halil Pasha had no experience in seamanship and navigation, therefore he would hardly put out to sea with a large fleet<sup>37</sup>. Thus it is highly likely that promoting the diplomatic negotiations with the Florentines, Halil Pasha looked to bring an end to the harmful activities of the galleys of St Stephen by peaceful means. For this reason, he actively participated in the negotiation process and lobbied at the Ottoman court along with Mustafa Agha in favor of the grand duke.

While the Ottoman-Florentine friendship had its supporters within the Ottoman court, there were also those who opposed it, such as the Venetians, who did not wish to share their interests in the Levant market with yet another rival, and so devoted considerable effort to follow and, if necessary, disrupt the Florentine-Ottoman diplomatic negotiations. For this reason, Mustafa Agha's activities in Florence and his audience with the grand

<sup>35</sup> The original copies of these two letters are still preserved in the Mediceo del Principato collection together with their Italian translations. ASFi, MdP 4275, fols. 8r-9r: Sultan Mehmed III's letter in Ottoman Turkish dated from 29 Cemazeyilahir 1006 (6 February 1598) and fol. 74r: Grand Admiral Halil Pasha's letter. The Italian translations of these letters are in MdP 4274, fols. 53r-54r and fols. 55r-56r.

<sup>36</sup> Selânikî, *Tarih-i Selânikî*, II, p. 438.

<sup>37</sup> Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to the English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, (CSP, Venice), 9: 328 (31 January 1594 [1595]).

duke were closely followed by the Venetian permanent diplomatic representative (*residente*) in Florence, Giulio Gerardo, who reported everything to Venice in detail. The *dispacci*, sent regularly by Gerardo to the Senate, provide different perspectives and details about Mustafa Agha's stay in Florence. Gerardo noted that, in accordance with his high-ranking status as *müteferrika*, Mustafa Agha entered the city on a magnificent horse accompanied by twelve other horses (possibly to be presented as gifts of the sultan to the grand duke)<sup>38</sup>.

Medici records also provide rich details regarding the arrival and reception of Mustafa Agha, who came with a carriage of horses and seven Turks in his service. He was received outside Porta San Niccolò at Villa del Bandino by Cavalier Rustico Piccardini who was sent by the grand duke along with 25 horsemen and 8 horses for the Turks. Mustafa Agha's horse was adorned in Turkish style and with a vast concourse of people he went to the garden of Francesco and Lorenzo Salviati behind Piazza SS Annunziata<sup>39</sup>. Since there is not much information we do not know exactly where Mustafa Agha stayed; however, he was provided with a villa and with people given to his service. In fact, he had four German halberdiers (guards), two footmen, a steward, a butler, and a cook in addition to his own Turkish servants<sup>40</sup>. During his stay in Florence, the Ottoman envoy was served a dish with three birds in silver plate and for his servants there was boiled or roasted meat. The staff serving him was daily provided with twelve breads and three flasks of wine<sup>41</sup>. Thus, looking at all this, it is possible to say that the reception of Mustafa Agha was carefully coordinated by the Medici officials.

This kind of treatment was not exclusive to the Ottoman envoy; the grand duke had received other foreign envoys and representatives in similar manner. For instance, the representative of Transylvania, Stefano Tosca, who arrived in 1591, was welcomed at one of the gates of the city by the leading Florentine noblemen and accompanied to the Palazzo Pitti and he was provided with servants, horses, and carriages. In 1600 the ambassadors of Shah Abbas I of Safavid Persia were also welcomed by the Medici authorities with many carriages and accompanied to the grand

<sup>38</sup> ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Firenze (SDF) 13, fol. 30v (2 May 1598).

<sup>39</sup> All these details about the Ottoman envoy's arrival in the city could be found in ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fols. 85-86.

<sup>40</sup> ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fol. 85.

<sup>41</sup> ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fol. 85.

duke's palace<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, unlike Mustafa Agha, most of the foreign envoys, including the representatives of Shah Abbas, stayed at the Palazzo Pitti instead of elsewhere in the city. This does not imply that Mustafa Agha received an inferior or superior treatment. The grand duke probably wanted to show the same courtesy that the Ottoman administration had formerly provided to Florentine ambassadors. For instance, when Bongigianni Gianfigliuzzi came to Constantinople for diplomatic negotiations in 1578, he was welcomed with honors in Pera, stayed in a house allocated to him and was provided with servants, daily allowance, and provisioning. Although we do not know what type of food was given to the Florentine ambassador, examples from earlier periods may give an idea. When the Genoese delegate arrived in Istanbul in 1558 to negotiate peace with the Ottoman court, the latter provided daily a certain quantity of food including hot pot, chicken, wine, bread, sugar, and fruit as standard provisioning made for foreign ambassadors<sup>43</sup>. Thus, it can be argued that whatever the nature of relations between the two states, the rule of reciprocity was observed in diplomatic ceremonials and protocol. The way Mustafa Agha was received in Florence demonstrates that the grand duke complied with the principle of reciprocity.

The Ottoman envoy was treated with all due honor during his audience as well. We learn that on 3 May the grand duke dined with Mustafa Agha at Villa La Petraia, one of the Medici villas located on the hill of Castello near Florence. The latter had also his first audience there with the company of Neri Girdali and Riccardo Riccardi, who was a strong supporter of the negotiations, since his firm was actively traded between Livorno and the Levant during this period<sup>44</sup>. As there was no interpreter at the audience, it can be assumed that Mustafa Agha conducted the negotiations in Italian. After the audience, he was lavishly entertained by the grand duke and also had his breakfast there with eight cups of jam<sup>45</sup>. Later, Mustafa Agha was accompanied by the grand duke's guards, who took a route behind the walls of the city to get to the house he was staying close

<sup>42</sup> ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fols. 37-38, 127.

<sup>43</sup> Archivio di Stato di Genova, Biblioteca Ms. 128, fol. 18r.

<sup>44</sup> ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fols. 85-86. Regarding Riccardo Riccardi and his activities in the East, see P. Malanima, *I Riccardi di Firenze. Una famiglia e un patrimonio nella Toscana dei Medici*, Firenze, Olschki, 1977, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fol. 86.

to Piazza SS Annunziata in order to avoid the large crowds of people<sup>46</sup>. Mustafa Agha's audience and, more importantly, the entertainment that followed not only served as important means by which political relations were mediated at court but they also provided a medium for diplomatic sociability. Mustafa Agha's sociability, however, seems to have remained limited as he did not have access to all kinds of spaces.

After his first audience, he was kept in total isolation from the public. This was in stark contrast to the case of other foreign envoys in Florence who were taken to visit places within the city and its surroundings and to attend hunting activities<sup>47</sup>. The main reason for such an attitude was most probably the grand duke's deep scepticism about the possibility of a peace with the Ottomans and, more importantly, the negative impact that such a peace could have on his relations with other states, i.e. the Spanish Habsburgs<sup>48</sup>. These factors urged him to keep the negotiations completely secret. This bias and the ongoing volatile situation between the two states affected the way Mustafa Agha was treated. He was not allowed to speak to anyone, and the grand duke kept a close eye on him until he confirmed from secure sources the authenticity of the letters of Sultan Mehmed III and Grand Admiral Halil Pasha that he had brought. Unsurprisingly, extreme covertness and confidentiality regarding Mustafa Agha's presence in the city aroused curiosity among the people including the Venetian ambassador himself, and caused Gerardo to write to the Senate, «the negotiations are passing in such secrecy that it has not been yet possible to find out the truth»<sup>49</sup>. In addition to this secrecy, the Ottoman envoy's not having had a second audience soon led to speculation concerning the person of Mustafa Agha.

In conclusion, looking at the ways the Ottoman envoy was received in the city, it is possible to say that the diplomatic protocol and ceremonials applied to other foreign representatives were also applied to Mustafa Agha. He was received in a manner befitting an envoy. However, the grand duke's scepticism about the possibility of a peace and trade agreement between the two states, and in particular, his cynicism that the Ottoman court might be receptive to such a peace, triggered his suspicions about

<sup>46</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 43r (9 May 1598).

<sup>47</sup> It is possible to find examples on that in *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta*.

<sup>48</sup> For the relations between Ferdinando I and the Spanish Habsburgs, see B. Brege, *Tuscany in the Age of Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2021, pp. 84-87.

<sup>49</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 43r (9 May 1598).



Mustafa Agha himself. This suggests some conclusions regarding one of the lines of inquiry mentioned earlier and demonstrates that the delicate and changeable relations between the two states influenced the grand duke's attitude towards the negotiations, which in turn shaped his treatment of Mustafa Agha. The concern to keep negotiations secret from other states and his distrust of the Ottoman envoy significantly affected the latter's sociability and interaction with the local inhabitants of Florence.

#### 4. Local reactions to Mustafa Agha

Because of the prolonged negotiations, Mustafa Agha stayed in Florence for several weeks. This meant that various of Florence's residents, from different social classes, could come into direct or indirect contact with him and the people in his retinue. Such cross-cultural and cross-confessional interactions could have an impact on both the foreign travelers in question and the locals. For instance, an analysis of the interaction of Florentines with Mustafa Agha's arrival can provide us with insight into the creation and development of prejudices regarding the 'Other'. Indeed, it was not long after Mustafa Agha's arrival in Florence that rumors started to circulate about him among local inhabitants. According to Venetian representative Gerardo, some people in Florence thought that Mustafa Agha was a scoundrel (*un gran scelerato*), who was originally a Jew, then converted to Christianity, and subsequently became a Turkish renegade. Furthermore, due to the fact that he had visited various places and was able to speak Spanish and Italian very well, some believed that although this man had come to Florence under the pretense of negotiations, he was actually a spy, whose real aim was to collect information about the Italian princes offering help to the Austrian Habsburgs in the war in Hungary against the Ottomans. Some others, however, assumed that he had indeed come with Grand Duke Ferdinando's knowledge and that the latter had even sent Neri Giraldi to receive Mustafa Agha in Ancona<sup>50</sup>.

It can be assumed that all these rumors and information circulating around Mustafa Agha and his mission were deliberately disseminated by the grand duke, who wanted to keep the actual aim of the negotiation a secret from the Venetians and other European powers. The mystery created about Mustafa Agha himself and his restricted interaction with the local inhabitants significantly shaped the public opinion about him. The fact that he

<sup>50</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 43r (9 May 1598).

was a convert, he had the ability to speak languages, and he visited various places put Mustafa Agha in a suspicious position in the eyes of the Florentines and caused him to be viewed as a spy. Moreover, the rumors circulating about his personality seem to have enforced his suspicious status. Mustafa Agha was defined as «cunning» and «brutal» (*molto astuto e bestiale*). Moreover, since he was a «big-mouthed» (*un gran parabolano*) and «shrewd» person (*un solenne furbo*), everyone suspected of his real intentions<sup>51</sup>. Thus, all these character traits attributed to the Ottoman envoy and the uncertainty about his mission drew clear boundaries between Mustafa Agha, seen as ‘Other’, and the residents of Florence.

The grand duke’s tactic, in this regard, seemed to be successful, as Venetian representative Gerardo also deemed this visit unlikely to be for the purpose of reopening trade negotiations. And even if it was, he believed it was doomed to failure because the matter had already been negotiated during the time of Francesco I and the outcome had not been favorable. This *chiaus* (çavuş, i.e. Ottoman envoy) would also return from Constantinople without any positive results, as none of the Florentine merchants were willing to trade in the Levant. They were concerned that any harm which would come to Ottoman subjects from the galleys of St. Stephen put them face to face with evident danger. On the other hand, the grand duke did not want to risk his great capital; in other words, he did not want to stop his galleys from going *in corso* in the Levant. Thus, in Gerardo’s opinion, this would be a hopeless attempt<sup>52</sup>. Examining Gerardo’s reports can allow us to see that the Venetian representative had his finger on the pulse of public opinion. Thanks to his close interaction with the Florentine locals, he was aware that the grand duke would never put an end to the piracy of his knights as the booty captured from the Ottoman ships by the galleys of St Stephen served better to Ferdinando’s interests than gaining the favor of the Ottoman court through diplomacy.

While Gerardo was polling the public opinion concerning the arrival of Mustafa Agha, the latter was showered with many signs of ducal favor, including an invitation to a banquet organized by Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine in the Palazzo Pitti with concerts and enchanting music in the corridors of royally furnished apartments<sup>53</sup>. As indicated in recent studies,

<sup>51</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 58v.

<sup>52</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 43v (9 May 1598).

<sup>53</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 54v (17 May 1598); ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fol. 86.

women were «instrumental to many diplomatic relationships»<sup>54</sup>. Both princely consorts and noblewomen at the court were able to operate in all forms of diplomacy and became an integral part of the diplomatic networks and procedures<sup>55</sup>. In this respect, the banquet given by the grand duchess was intended not only to honor Mustafa Agha upon his visit but also to leave him with a vivid impression of the grandeur of the grand duchy. Music was an important component of splendor and an emblem of luxury and lavishness in courtly events and diplomatic encounters during this period<sup>56</sup>. It also allowed for a more personalized interaction between the envoy and the host. During this ceremonial, Mustafa Agha came into direct contact with the grand duchess as well as a group of leading noblewomen of the city. They were richly dressed and all of them expressed «their amazement» to the Ottoman envoy<sup>57</sup>. This scene gives us hints of the cross-cultural encounter between Mustafa Agha and the Florentine elites. In fact, as Charry and Shahani indicate, in these kinds of ceremonials, the emissaries not only had to put themselves on «official display», but they were also aware that they were being seen from «the perspective of a judgmental and observant other»<sup>58</sup>. It is possible to say that Mustafa Agha had similar experience, he was met with considerable interest among the Florentine elite women and as in the case of his interaction with the local inhabitants, his contacts with the court elites brought the notions of ‘Other’ but this time in the framework of «exoticism» and «cultural difference»<sup>59</sup>.

It is highly likely that this encounter also provided a venue for various sorts of exchanges from political to cultural and material. Although it is

<sup>54</sup> J. Hennings - T.A. Sowerby, *Introduction. Practices of Diplomacy*, in J. Hennings - T.A. Sowerby (eds.), *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> C. James, *Women and Diplomacy in Renaissance Italy*, in G. Sluga - C. James (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, London, Routledge, 2016, pp. 13-25.

<sup>56</sup> M. Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005, p. 189; J. Cole, *Music, Spectacle and Cultural Brokerage in Early Modern Italy: Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane*, Firenze, Olschki, 2011; R. Ahrendt - M. Ferraguto - D. Mahiet (eds.), *Music and Diplomacy. From the Early Modern Era to the Present*, New York, Palgrave, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 54v (17 May 1598).

<sup>58</sup> B. Charry - G. Shahani, *Introduction*, in B. Charry - G. Shahani (eds.), *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture. Mediation, Transmission, Traffic, 1550-1700*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> Here I use these terms with reference to Mathieu Grenet's article *Muslim Missions to Early Modern France*.

not mentioned in the sources, it may be assumed that Mustafa Agha presented gifts and conveyed news from the mother of the Sultan, namely Safiye Sultan, to the grand duchess. As already mentioned, during this period Safiye Sultan had great influence and authority at the Ottoman court, being closely engaged in political and diplomatic affairs. Grand Duke Ferdinando was well aware of this fact, as in his letters he had addressed both Sultan Mehmed III and his mother Safiye Sultan. Considering this, and Safiye Sultan's ongoing relations with Queen Elizabeth at around the same time<sup>60</sup>, it would not be unlikely that she exchanged information with the grand duchess through the mediation of Mustafa Agha, who «was in high favor with the mother sultan»<sup>61</sup>.

Another group Mustafa Agha had direct contact with throughout his stay was the Levantine Jews resident in Florence. After the edicts, the *Livornine*, several Jewish merchants moved from Constantinople to Tuscany with their families and possessions. They not only offered to introduce new techniques to invigorate the textile industry in Tuscany but also acted as agents in re-establishing the trade links between Tuscany and the Ottoman market. For this sake, they took active roles in the diplomatic negotiations with the Ottoman court. According to the evidence in the archival sources, Mustafa Agha was mainly accompanied by the Jews whom the grand duke most trusted<sup>62</sup>. Taking into account their shared background and culture, Mustafa Agha might have had some close acquaintances among these Jews. Levantine Jewish craftsman Mattedia Menachem, for instance, seems to have accompanied Mustafa Agha during his stay in Florence. The letters of Mustafa Agha also reveal that the exchange of information between the Medici and the Ottoman court was conducted through Menachem and his relatives in Ancona<sup>63</sup>. The familiarity between these Levantine Jews and Mustafa Agha gave the grand duke the opportunity to monitor closely the Ottoman envoy, to know more about him and his main intentions. On the other side, they probably shared news and information with Mustafa Agha about the grand duchy. As recent studies demonstrate, such familiarities not only reduced the religious and cultural

<sup>60</sup> S. Skilliter, *Three Letters from the Ottoman 'Sultana' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I*, in S.M. Stern (ed.), *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965, pp. 119-157; C. Woodhead, *England, the Ottomans and the Barbary Coast in the Late Sixteenth Century*, in State Papers Online The Government of Britain, 1509-1714.

<sup>61</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 84v.

<sup>62</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 58v.

<sup>63</sup> ASFi, MdP 891, fols. 483-485 (15 June 1599).

barriers but also balanced «the asymmetric relationship the envoys had with their host»<sup>64</sup>. In this regard, the encounter between this Jewish minority group and Mustafa Agha reveals a different kind of sociability «free from the constraining framework of defined cultural zones»<sup>65</sup>.

In conclusion, during his stay in Florence Mustafa Agha established contacts with the locals from different social classes in varying degrees. He mainly socialized with the grand ducal family, elite women, and the Levantine Jews. These encounters not only uncover the complex informal networks that made these groups part of the diplomatic process, but also demonstrates how the interweaving of informal networks and formal diplomacy fostered various sorts of exchanges, from political to cultural and material. Mustafa Agha's sociability, however, was confined to certain circles, which caused him to be perceived differently by the public and by the court circle. While his limited interaction with the local inhabitants put him in a negative light, his meeting with the court elite passed in a positive mood. The latter, however, was still far from establishing proximity, Mustafa Agha rather appeared as fascinating 'Oriental Other'. The presence of Levantine Jewish minority in Florence and its contacts with Mustafa Agha, on the other hand, demonstrate the importance of immigrant commercial communities for agency and possibilities for social bonding for Ottoman travelers visiting European states.

##### 5. «An obedient servant» of the grand duke

The analysis of Mustafa Agha's experience in Florence sheds light on the multi-layered and complex character of conducting cross-cultural diplomacy during the second half of the sixteenth century. Mustafa Agha was the diplomatic representative of the Ottoman administration and servant of the sultan but he also offered his services to the grand duke in his diplomatic negotiations with the Ottomans. In this respect, he was a good example of «early modern agents» whose characteristics, noted by Keblusek, were «mobility, organizational experience, command of languages, flexibility, and

<sup>64</sup> D. Do Paço, *Trans-Imperial Familiarity*, p. 168. Also see M. Grenet, *Muslim Missions to Early Modern France*, p. 235.

<sup>65</sup> D. Do Paço, *Trans-Imperial Familiarity*, p. 167.

networking capabilities<sup>66</sup>. Having many of these features, Mustafa Agha fashioned himself as an ideal broker/mediator for these negotiations. However, his being at the service of various patrons at the same time brought forth questions of his loyalty<sup>67</sup>. As can be seen, due to his multiple loyalties, Mustafa Agha was also subjected to suspicions and closely supervised by the grand duke.

It was only after the grand duke was informed about the authenticity of the letters that he received Mustafa Agha at another audience<sup>68</sup>. In this audience, Ferdinando discussed with the Ottoman envoy the capitulations he hoped to obtain from the Ottoman administration. Besides the emphasis on reciprocal rights and granting of the same privileges enjoyed by the Venetians and the French to the Florentine merchants, another important issue discussed during the audience was the galleys of St. Stephen. When Mustafa Agha expressed the view that the grand duke should not send his galleys to the Ottoman ports, Ferdinando presented him with an argument similar to the one his brother Francesco had used two decades ago: namely, the galleys of St. Stephen were not under his sole authority and therefore, he could not be responsible for their activities and could not stop them from going *in corso*. Ferdinando followed his brother's strategy most probably because he thought that he had the upper hand and that through the help of Mustafa Agha he could get this argument accepted by the Ottoman court.

In fact, the capitulations to be presented at the Porte were the same as those already proposed by Francesco I in the 1574 negotiations. They were composed of twenty-two articles and an additional note concerning the galleys, according to which the Florentine merchants and their commodities would not be captured or pillaged in case of war between the Ottomans and the grand duke or any other Christian princes. Moreover, the merchants should not be held responsible for any conflicts provoked by the galleys, vessels, or ships of the grand duke or other rulers. They could freely come and trade in the Ottoman lands without fear of being captured and held by the Ottoman authorities, and they could send their

<sup>66</sup> M. Keblusek, *Introduction: Double Agents in Early Modern Europe*, in M. Keblusek - B.V. Noldus (eds.), *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> M. Keblusek, *Introduction: Profiling the Early Modern Agent*, in H. Cools - M. Keblusek - B.V. Noldus (eds.), *Your Humble Servant. Agents in Early Modern Europe*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 71r (20 June 1598); 77v (27 June 1598).

ships to Alexandria and Syria<sup>69</sup>. This additional clause had already created conflict and disagreement on the Ottoman side during the previous negotiations. Ferdinando's insistence on proposing the same clause was a sign that he did not want to back down concerning the galleys of St. Stephen. On the contrary, presumably with a view to profiting from the current conditions in the Ottoman Empire, which was fighting a war with the Habsburg monarchy on the western front while also struggling against the uprisings in Anatolia, the grand duke intended to try again with the new sultan Mehmed III and Ottoman high officials.

Mustafa Agha agreed with this explanation and promised to strive at the Sublime Porte that the Florentine capitulations, including the article on the galleys of St. Stephen, would be confirmed as desired by the grand duke. According to the Venetian representative, the Ottoman envoy may simply have felt obliged to accede to the grand duke's request because he had been received in such a courtly and respectful manner in Florence<sup>70</sup>. The honorable reception by the grand duchy could be an influential factor but even more important was Mustafa Agha's deal with the grand duke. As recent research shows, issues of reward and loyalty were central to the patron-agent relationship<sup>71</sup>. In return for his services, the grand duke offered the Ottoman envoy gifts and financial reward. These included robes for Mustafa Agha and his whole family, as well as a significant amount of money<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, Ferdinando bought various quantities of *panni di seta* (silk cloth) from the Florentine workshops to be presented at the Porte<sup>73</sup>. Florentine gifts to Mustafa Agha and the Ottoman court were impressive not only for their value but also for the quality of the workmanship, which demonstrated the importance the grand duke gave to Mustafa Agha as well as the Ottoman administration. It can be argued that such magnificent gifts were also intended to enhance Florence's reputation for wealth and generosity in the eyes of the foreign powers. Moreover, both the councils of the *Arte della Lana* and the *Arte della Seta* provided funds as textiles for

<sup>69</sup> ASFi, MdP 4274, fols. 35r-36r: «Copia de Capitoli, gia molti anni sono concessi dal Gran signore alla natione fiorentina; sotto li quali, mercanti fiorentini hanno lungo tempo negoziato in quello imperio».

<sup>70</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 89r.

<sup>71</sup> M. Keblusek, *Introduction: Profiling the Early Modern Agent*, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 91v (11 July 1598).

<sup>73</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fols. 89v; 91v.

Mustafa Agha's travel to Istanbul<sup>74</sup>. The main motive for the *Arte* to finance his trip was the growing desire to find new markets for the luxury textiles of Florentine workshops and to advertise their craftsmanship to create demand at the Ottoman court for Florentine luxury textiles. In fact, in a letter to the director of the *Arte della Lana*, Grand Duke Ferdinando also emphasized the particular importance of these negotiations for both guilds, and listed the expenses in detail, from the payment to be made to the Ottoman envoy Mustafa Agha for his travel expenses back to Istanbul to the gifts for the Ottoman court<sup>75</sup>.

Finally on 9 July, Mustafa Agha left for Constantinople along with Neri Giraldi who was «a valuable and experienced person whom the grand duke very much trusted», in order to conduct the negotiations with the Ottoman court<sup>76</sup>. The rest, namely their adventure in Constantinople is another story. Both Grand Admiral Halil Pasha and the grand vizier regarded Neri Giraldi as an inappropriate person to be conducting diplomatic negotiations with the Sublime Porte and would ask for a proper ambassador to be sent to the Ottoman court by the grand duke since Giraldi did not follow the orders of Halil Pasha, nor did he take into consideration Mustafa Agha's advice. Moreover, he did not follow the diplomatic practices and procedures of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, his adventure at the Süleymaniye Mosque, where he entered without permission and climbed up one of the minarets, became the last straw. Consequently, Giraldi's mishaps at the Ottoman capital led to some diplomatic crises and the Florentine representative had to leave, or to be more precise, run away from the Ottoman capital in secret<sup>77</sup>. For the purpose of this article it suffices to say that in the end Ferdinando's desire to obtain trade privileges from the Sublime Porte did not come to fruition.

<sup>74</sup> ASFi, MdP 4274, fol. 59r-v (2 July 1598); ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 91v.

<sup>75</sup> ASFi, MdP 4274, fol. 59r-v (2 July 1598). For a discussion of the importance of the *Arte* in the Florentine-Ottoman diplomatic negotiations in the second half of the sixteenth century see, F. Özden Mercan, *A Diplomacy Woven with Textiles: Medici-Ottoman Relations During the Late Renaissance*, in «Mediterranean Historical Review», 35, 2022, 2, pp. 169-188.

<sup>76</sup> ASVe, SDF 13, fol. 89r (4 July 1598); ASFi, *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta* 1, fol. 86.

<sup>77</sup> In another article, I discuss Neri Giraldi's adventures in Constantinople, see F. Özden Mercan, *Toskana Elçisi Neri Giraldi'nin İstanbul'daki Maceraları (1598)*, in «Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi», 39, 2022, 2, pp. 433-447.



Grand Duke Ferdinando received the outcome with fury, as he regarded the events that occurred in Constantinople as a humiliation of the Ottoman administration towards his state – not surprisingly, given that he heard the story from Giraldi's perspective. Moreover, he became enraged at Mustafa Agha, as he considered himself to have been deceived by the Ottoman envoy and regretted having treated him with so much courtesy and generosity during his stay in Florence. Thus, the negotiations started in a favorable atmosphere, turned into a deadlock, which directly affected Mustafa Agha's image and reliability in the eyes of the grand duke.

Soon after Giraldi's secret escape from Constantinople, the grand duke started preparations for an expedition to Chios Island on the Aegean Sea<sup>78</sup>. The expedition was not successful. The Tuscan galleys had to escape, leaving many Florentines on the island. Some of them died and others were enslaved<sup>79</sup>. The defeat was a huge disappointment for the grand duke, bringing disrepute instead of prestige and honor<sup>80</sup>. For the Ottomans, the Tuscan attack on Chios was surprising as well as upsetting, especially as the negotiations with the grand duke were still going on at least from the Ottoman side<sup>81</sup>. Even though the Ottomans successfully defended the island, the Ottoman administration, and especially the supporters of the recent Ottoman-Florentine negotiations, specifically Halil Pasha and Mustafa Agha, were stunned by this hostile enterprise of the grand duke, after having striven so hard at the Ottoman court for the confirmation of Florentine trade privileges.

On 29 May 1599, Mustafa Agha arrived in Naples and sent a letter to the grand duke via Riccardo Riccardi. In fact, this was not his first letter; after Giraldi left, the Ottoman envoy had sent letters to the grand duke about the developments concerning the negotiations, but he did not receive a reply. The main motivation for Mustafa Agha to write this letter was in fact to express his disappointment regarding the Florentine attack on the Ottoman island. His letter also demonstrates how things were interpreted

<sup>78</sup> Most of the details and archival sources concerning this expedition were compiled and published by Philip Argenti in *The Expedition of the Florentines to Chios (1599): Described in Contemporary Diplomatic Reports and Military Dispatches*, London, John Lane, 1934.

<sup>79</sup> For a list of the names of these people, see ASFi, Carte Stroziane I/143, fol. 41r.

<sup>80</sup> P. Argenti, *The Expedition of the Florentines to Chios*, p. XXIV.

<sup>81</sup> *Relazione di Girolamo Cappello in 1600*, in M.P. Pedani (ed.), *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, XIV: Costantinopoli, Relazioni Inedite (1512-1789), Padova, Bottega d'Erasmus, 1996, pp. 453-454.

differently on both sides. While on the Ottoman side there still existed a positive attitude concerning the negotiations, the grand duke responded with the expedition to Chios. For this reason, Mustafa Agha assumed a reproachful tone towards the grand duke in his letter:

«I have traveled three times to Florence, I have remained in the service of your highness for three years, and I have had to contend with so much opposition from the viziers, ambassadors, grand vizier, and court officials in Istanbul in order to carry out and conclude the negotiations»<sup>82</sup>.

The Ottoman envoy's appeal was of no avail. The grand duke responded neither to this proposal nor to Mustafa Agha's other letters. On 15 June 1599, the Ottoman envoy sent another letter full of lamentations and complaints. He expressed particular resentment at being treated so unjustly by the grand duke. He claimed that, after having striven hard in support of the negotiations and always remaining loyal and true in the service of the grand duke, it was difficult for him to understand why the latter was so furiously annoyed with him<sup>83</sup>. He had been quite sincere and eager to assist in opening negotiations, and had been very careful to keep the matter secret from the Venetians, who would consider such an attempt detrimental to the position of their own merchants in the Levant. He was sure that he had not done anything, either secretly or publicly, that could have displeased the grand duke. Thus, it was all because of Neri Giraldi who had misinformed the grand duke and not told the truth regarding Mustafa Agha's efforts to forward these negotiations and the difficulties he had experienced with the grand vizier, the Venetian *bailo*, the French ambassador, and other Ottoman officials.

In order to show his loyalty to the grand duke, the Ottoman envoy also noted that he had been offered money (3000 *talleri*) by the Venetian *bailo* and French ambassador to hinder the negotiations; however, he kept his word to the grand duke and did not pursue any other interests. It can be seen that as an attempt to emphasize his loyalty and services to the grand duke, Mustafa Agha defended himself and his actions against false accusations and depicted himself as a resourceful individual, who had tried

<sup>82</sup> ASFi, MdP 891, fol. 316v (29 May 1599): «[H]avendo fatto tre viaggi e stato occupato tre anni in servizio di V.A. et in Costantinopoli havendo havuto tante contrarietà con li visiri, imbasciatori et consiglio del stato et sententatori nostri per effettuare et concludere il negotio di V.A.».

<sup>83</sup> ASFi, MdP 891, fol. 449r (15 June 1599).

all means to get the capitulations confirmed for the grand duke but failed due to external factors.

Perhaps the most striking statement Mustafa Agha made in his letter was that he would rather lose his *patria* than lose the friendship of the grand duke<sup>84</sup>. He added that he had always served the grand duke with fidelity and honesty and hoped that the latter would, with his judgment and wisdom, see the truth. It is intriguing that the Ottoman envoy showed such devotion and obedience to the grand duke. Whether he was really sincere in his words or was after a different agenda – like financial gain – remains unanswered. However, according to Keblusek, this kind of expressions was quite common in the correspondence of the agents as they used it as a rhetorical strategy to get hold of their money from the patrons<sup>85</sup>. However, it was a vain attempt for Mustafa Agha. Being frustrated by the unfulfilled promises, Ferdinando dismissed him from his service. Thus, the relationship between the grand duke and Mustafa Agha gives significant insight into the double agents in the early modern period and indicates how the issues of loyalty and financial reward shaped the already precarious relationship between the agent and the patron.

## 6. Conclusion

Two diplomatic negotiations marked Tuscan-Ottoman relations in the last decade of the sixteenth century – those of 1592 and 1598. Neither of them brought any results; however, close examination of the negotiation process, reconstructed from a variety of sources, sheds light on various issues in cross-cultural diplomacy during the early modern period, particularly the importance of mediation and the role of ambassadors and envoys in diplomatic relations between disparate politico-cultural entities. Especially in the case of the 1598 negotiations, different narratives of the same event by the main actors provide us with valuable details concerning the individual relations and perceptions as shaped by rivalry, personal interests, factional politics. In fact, all these played an influential role in the decision-making process and diplomatic relations at the state level.

Mustafa Agha's role furnishes an excellent case study of the informal and less visible role of early modern mediators acting between different

<sup>84</sup> ASFi, MdP 891, fol. 450v.

<sup>85</sup> M. Keblusek, *Introduction: Double Agents in Early Modern Europe*, p. 7.

politics and cultures. Considering his position at the Ottoman court and his relations with the grand duchy, he can be regarded as a double agent serving both sides. The reliability and loyalty of this sort of agents were always questionable for both sides. Still, as an intermediary and informant, Mustafa Agha not only bridged the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Ottoman world, but also enabled various sorts of exchanges, from information to the acquisition and exchange of luxury items.

The study of Mustafa Agha's presence in Florence also offers us a fascinating example of cross-cultural interactions in the early modern period. Mustafa Agha's case, first, challenges the traditional arguments on the limited travel of Muslims to European states and highlights that his case was not exceptional. The close analysis of his reception at the city demonstrates that Florentine perceptions of Mustafa Agha were shaped by various factors from state politics and foreign relations to preconceived assumptions about the 'Other' and relations between patron and agent. All these factors also determined the levels of sociability and interactions between Mustafa Agha and the local inhabitants, and thus, provided a diverse range of attitudes towards the Ottoman envoy. The examination of these attitudes demonstrates that different modes and modalities of interaction helped (re)set the boundaries between the foreign traveler and the local inhabitants. Thus, in this picture there was both familiarity/ease of communication with the foreigner and frontiers and resonating notions of the 'Other'.

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