

## The Ottoman-Venetian Border (15th-18th Centuries)

Maria Pia Pedani

# 7 In Search of an Identity

**Summary** 7.1 Ambassadors, Envoys and Diplomats. – 7.2 Merchants. – 7.3 Slaves on the Run. – 7.4 Other Means of Identification. – 7.5 The Health Front.

## 7.1 Ambassadors, Envoys and Diplomats

Besides those who fought along the border or had settled in a border area, there were also those who, pushed by various reasons, left a country for another: it was not easy to go in a foreign state at that time, but this did not keep militaries, ambassadors, scholars, physicians, spies and runaways from doing it.

First of all, the beginning of international relations required the exchange of messengers, envoys and ambassadors. Until a short time ago, scholars agreed that in the Middle Ages and the Modern Era the Muslim-Christian diplomatic exchange happened only in a single direction, i.e. from West to East, but recently it has been shown that this statement is not true and that, although less frequently, not only eastern Muslim sovereigns but also North-African rulers sent their envoys to European capitals. For example, the first Ottoman envoy reached Venice in 1384 and many others followed him, almost one every year throughout the sixteenth century. Others came from Tunis, Mamluk Egypt, Persia, the khanate of Crimea and finally, in the eighteenth century, also from Tripoli of the West. In the hall of the *Quattro Porte* in the Ducal Palace of Venice, a big painting bears witness to the arrival of the Safavid envoys at the beginning of the seventeenth century, whereas carpets and other gifts they brought are still kept, some in Saint Mark's Treasury and some in the Correr and Mocenigo Museums.<sup>1</sup>

An ambassador was usually followed by a large group of people who helped him to perform his mission and make it more sumptuous, in order to display also the importance of the sovereign they represented. There were secretaries, interpreters, servants, sometimes also cartographers or physicians; these were often joined by men of letters or scientists willing to discover new countries and by young men who would be ambassadors or

<sup>1</sup> Arazzi, 62, 60-70, 72-74.

chancellors themselves one day and who took advantage of the opportunity to learn the job. As for Venice, the retinue of an Ottoman envoy was made up of twenty people in the sixteenth century but then decreased after the war of Cyprus when a retinue of ten people could count itself to be large. In other circumstances, however, these groups were stately, formed by hundreds of people, including a band to impress even more. For example, Kara Mehmed pasha went to Vienna in 1665 with a retinue of one hundred and fifty people.<sup>2</sup>

Such a train could not secretly cross the border and it was not required to do so either. Diplomats, on the contrary, enjoyed special protection and those who gave offense to them were accused of lese-majesty towards the sovereign who had sent them. Sometimes this was considered as a deliberate declaration of war, as it happened when in 1461 Vlad IV of Walacchia ordered to drive three nails into the turbans - and the heads - of the Ottoman sultan's envoys to kill them.<sup>3</sup>

The protection of an ambassador and his retinue was made by means of letters issued both by the ruler who sent him and by those who welcomed him. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the Ottoman sultan wrote some official letters, which are still kept in Venice, to accredit either a diplomatic envoy or even a real ambassador. Already at that time, to make reference to these diplomats, these documents used the word *elçi* if they were written in Ottoman and *apokrysarion* if they were written in Greek.<sup>4</sup> Also Venetian ambassadors and *bailos* had letters of the doge who accredited them as his representatives. A letter of this kind usually bore the name of the envoy, his role and, more generically, the reason of his mission. If the letter and the person did not match, it was readily found out, since there were swindlers who turned up as envoys just to have their expenses paid and then vanished with the money or the gifts given by the host government.

Upon his departure, the envoy carried one or more credentials issued by his sovereign or by other important officials - for example, by the grand vizier or another member of the *divan* if he came from the Ottoman Empire. Before leaving Istanbul, the Ottoman envoys sent to Venice customarily paid a visit to the *bailo* who gave them another letter that certified their role.<sup>5</sup> Besides these letters, however, a diplomat usually bore also other

2 Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, 54-55; Lewis, *Europa barbara e infedele*, 103.

3 Babinger, *Maometto*, 218.

4 Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, 8-9.

5 This habit was then extended to the other diplomatic venues in the Ottoman Empire and was made valid for all the subjects who went abroad; it was abolished and substituted by the passport only after the foundation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Vekâlet-i Hariciye*) in 1836; cf. Zakia, *The Reforms of Sultan Mahmud II*, 424.

letters addressed to the commanders of the places he had to cross to reach his destination. If the credentials made reference only to the diplomat, the latter (a sort of safe-conduct or passport) had to protect his retinue too.

al-Qalqaşandī's chancellery manual, written in the Mamluk period, contains examples of this kind of safe-conduct. It describes a decree of Turkish origin little used in Egypt, called *barliġ* (plural *barāliġ*), belonging to the category of the public correspondence (*mukātabāt 'amma*), i.e. letters sent contemporarily to various addresses, and explains its use by means of an example: in 729 (1328-1329), upon his arrival in Egypt, the Ilkhanid envoy Timur Buġā showed a document to the sultan Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn and received a similar one in order to have free right of way in the countries he would cross on his way back. al-Qalqaşandī explains that, when a foreign ambassador reached the Mamluk borders, the governor of that region had to write immediately to the sultan to inform him of his arrival.<sup>6</sup>

In case of two neighbouring countries, the journey was usually quite simple. The sultan's documents ordering sanjaks, qadis, *dizdars* of fortresses and other officials of the places between Venice and Istanbul to protect a Venetian ambassador and his retinue are several: if the route was the maritime one, then the document was addressed only to those who lived on the coast; on the contrary, if the envoy followed the *Via Egnatia*, or another parallel itinerary across the Balkans, the order was addressed to the authorities along the route that joined the two capitals.<sup>7</sup>

In case of an exchange between ambassadors of countries that did not border each other or were not separated by the sea, other letters, which could offer a further official protection to the envoy, had to be addressed to the rulers of the countries the diplomat had to cross. The latter could offer a further official protection to the envoy. Several *name-i hümayuns* and letters of viziers that certified diplomatic contacts with France and other countries are kept in Venice. For example, already in 1483 İskender, on his way to Paris, passed through Venice; the same route was followed by Kasım and Martino (1487), Mahmud bey (1570), the *çeşnegir* Hasan *ağa* (1581), the *müteferrika* and dragoman Ali (1581),<sup>8</sup> Hasan *ağa* (1583), the *müteferrika* Mustafa *ağa* (1597) and, finally, a dragoman and a janissary in 1652. The *subaşı* Hüseyin and another anonymous envoy, instead, were accredited to the emperor in 1483 and in 1497 respectively; the *kapıcıbaşı*

6 al-Qalqaşandī, *Şubḥ*, vol. 4, 58-59; vol. 7, 229-231.

7 Cf. for example *Documenti turchi*, nos. 417 (1539), 475 (1542); ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 250, reg. 332, c. 93 (1614 for the *bailo* Nani, the *çavuş* Hüseyin and the dragoman Giancesino Salvago); reg. 334, c. 49 (1622 December-1632 January for the ambassador Simone Contarini); b. 251, reg. 335, c. 32 (1625 for Simone Contarini).

8 With the sultan's and Siyavuş' letters to the doge, cf. *Documenti turchi*, nos. 893, 896.

Mustafa *ağa*, passing through Venice in 1490, went to Rome, while Mustafa *dei Cordovani*<sup>9</sup> was heading towards Florence in 1574.

Obviously, an ambassador had better avoid the countries that were at war with his sovereign, even at the cost of undertaking long tours. The envoy who, heading towards Paris, was in Venice right when the sultan opened hostilities with the Republic for the island of Cyprus (1570) discovered it to his cost. If the official bearer of the declaration of war, the *çavuş* Kubad, could immediately go back to his homeland protected by the diplomatic immunity, this did not happen to Mahmud who had not been accredited to the doge but only had a request for transit: confined to his house in the Giudecca and then moved to the castle of San Felice in Verona, he stayed there for three years before he could set foot in his homeland again.<sup>10</sup> If this was the only case of an Ottoman ambassador imprisoned in time of war, the Venetian *bailos* accredited to the Porte often had to suffer the same fate, mostly in older times; on this point we should go into what Ottomans really thought of the diplomatic role of such a character; accustomed to ambassadors who went in a foreign country only to settle one single affair, now they were facing a resident diplomat who was responsible for his fellow countrymen's trades, collected custom duties and had a jurisdiction over the subjects of his sovereign. According to the Ottoman point of view, he looked like the chief of a *millet* or the Ragusean ambassadors who, charged with bringing the tribute of their city, were detained almost as hostages until the next tribute arrived.

The diplomatic representative brought official letters also in his homeward journey. He carried with him the other sovereign's permission to go back and, as a matter of fact, he could not leave the country without that document.<sup>11</sup> In the eighteenth century, together with the imperial letter addressed to the *bailo* or the Venetian ambassador who were leaving Istanbul, another letter by the grand vizier was handed over. Then, the envoy who came back home was often accompanied by some militaries or interpreters of the other country at least as far as the border or some important towns from which he could continue his journey safe. In 1633, for example, Mehmed *ağa* was sent as far as Venice by the pasha of Buda

9 'Dei Cordovani' probably indicated a profession previously practised by the envoy. NB in Venice the 'cordovani' were skins tanned after the fashion of Córdoba.

10 Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, 163-164.

11 Many examples of Ottoman documents issued by Venetian ambassadors may be consulted in *Documenti turchi*, nos. 6, 27, 44, 1863, 1867, 1869, 1881-1883, 1887, 1889, 1895, 1897, 1899-1900, 1901, 1903, 1905, 1908, 1924, 1926, 1939, 1941, 1946, 1948, 1954, 1956, 1961, 1964, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986. In the eighteenth century, the credentials issued by the sultan were always accompanied by a similar letter issued in the name of the grand vizier.

to accompany the ambassador of the king of Sweden to the Porte.<sup>12</sup> It was mainly during this century that the military escorts increased, namely when the deterioration of the international situation, together with a minor control exerted by Ottomans in their provinces, made the journey more dangerous.

Not only ambassadors and eminent characters of the state élite were charged with missions abroad, but also less known people. Among these abounded interpreters, who could move at their ease in a foreign country speaking its language like natives. Among the Ottoman envoys who reached Venice between the end of the fifteenth century and the war of Cyprus were all those who held the position of *divan-i hümayun tercümanı* (dragoman of the imperial *divan*) and, more specifically, Ali bey bin Abdullah, Yunus bey bin Abderrahman, İbrahim bey (Joachim Strasz) and Mahmud. With regard to the Venetian interpreters, instead, they were sent mainly during periods of high international tension and, as a matter of fact, they were often allowed to wear Turkish clothes, white turbans and weapons by the sultan's safe-conduct.<sup>13</sup> The interpreters, however, carried out an important function also in their motherland, because they were the official intermediaries between the foreigners and their fellow citizens.

## 7.2 Merchants

When the systems of personal identification were not yet very sophisticated, being part of a group meant to travel safer and easily find shelter. In past ages, as a matter of fact, the entire group was considered to be responsible for its members' actions and was obliged to retaliate, if unfortunate events occurred and other protective measures had not been established by means of international agreements. Many documents testify how, throughout the Middle Ages, European merchants travelling in Muslim countries were summoned all together, as if they were *in solidum*, because of problems caused by one of them. As we saw, Ottomans themselves created the 'system of *millets*' and, thus, took the idea of community to its extreme meaning: they believed that every *millet* was not a foreign community but a group different as for religion or origin, but still harmoniously included in the Empire. Their starting point was Islam, which theorises the existence of infidels, called *ḍimmīs*, living in peace under a Muslim ruler and only subject to particular obligations.

12 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 1436, 1439.

13 Cf. for example ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 250, reg. 331, c. 12 (1595 to the sanjakbegs and qadis of the Porte in Klis and vice versa, for Giancesino Salvago).

Many international agreements between Muslim and Christian countries were used to protect merchants and merchandises, mostly if they did not share common borders: in this case, as a matter of fact, to occupy the other's land with an army was very unlikely. For instance, the rulers of Egypt – from Ayyubids to Mamluks – chose the general safe-conduct (*amān 'āmm*) to offer protection to the foreign merchants. In that case, a Venetian who went to Alexandria to trade did not need any other document since his own community vouched for him and his honesty. Living in the same *fonduk*, using the same *hammam*, the same church and the same bakery made all Venetians a close-knit group, under their consul. This happened also to Genoese, Pisans and Catalans.

The influence of the Egyptian *amān 'āmm*s was so strong that, when Selim I conquered Egypt, took over the point of view of the sovereigns he had defeated with regard to his authority over foreign communities. Even though he could not change, if not occasionally, the structure of the Ottoman *ahdnames* already used for some European countries, he tried to turn them into something different. His successors, from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, went on the same path and granted no more bilateral international agreements to France, England and Holland, but only *berats* (in this case, a kind of 'trade licences').

If European merchants were protected by the capitulations (both *ahdnames* and *berats*), and mostly by their own community, Ottoman merchants in Christian land had a different experience. First of all, they were people belonging to different ethnic groups, speaking several languages and believing in different religions, even though they were all subjects of the sultan. This meant that an Ottoman community abroad could not be close-knit but was necessarily tormented by quarrels and misunderstandings. Moreover, they usually stopped only for the time needed for the trade; it was inconceivable for a Muslim to move definitively or create a family in a Christian country unless he abandoned his religion; on the contrary, thanks to the concept of *ḡimmā*, the infidels could legally go to live in a Muslim empire without having to embrace Islam.

The first Ottoman merchants arrived in Venice in the fifteenth century. At the beginning, the sources about their presence in the city are scanty, but the two following centuries number many examples. We know the areas they went to and where they lived for the most part. We hear of letters of attorneys, agreements, sales and, most of all, quarrels; there are also the death certificates of those who died in Venice from 1631 until the end of the eighteenth century. The institution of the *Fondaco dei Turchi* in 1621 did not definitely solve the problem of their dwelling because some continued to gravitate around the parishes of San Martino and San Pietro of Castello, which especially attended by foreigners such as Greeks or Dalmatians. They were mostly people coming from Bosnia and Albany, but some of them came from Anatolia too, mainly from Bursa,

as Cemal Kafadar argues when he finds out the expansion of an Ottoman trade activity in Venice between the end of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Just like the sultan's ambassadors, the merchants used to travel overland as far as a town of the Adriatic coast and then crossed the sea on a Venetian or Ottoman ship. They could spend the compulsory quarantine either in a town of the *Stato da Mar*, or in the lazaretto of Venice. The quarantine was used to prevent epidemic diseases from entering the country. Venetians were not interested in their honesty as traders or their solvency but in the public health: as a matter of fact, they were not asked to present any document that certified their identity but only their health.<sup>15</sup>

The Ottoman merchants were protected not only by a reciprocal treatment granted by the capitulations, but also by the Venetian laws. They did not have a consul who helped them in Venice, as happened in other towns of the *Stato da Mar*: in some places, they used to chose a Venetian subject to hold this office; in the most ancient times, the 'consul for the Ottoman subjects' was officially acknowledged only by the Venetian state, which tried to turn him into one of its officials, but around mid-eighteenth century he was acknowledged by the sultan himself by means of a *berat* of appointment.<sup>16</sup>

Some Ottoman subjects arrived in Venice protected by imperial documents that accredited them, not as ambassadors, but as merchants. Sometimes they were on proper official missions, aimed not at the establishment of international relations but at the purchase of luxury goods for the court, often on the occasion of special holidays; these envoys are sometimes called 'court merchants' in the documents and they were received and hosted as the diplomats. In any case, the Porte considered the market of Rialto, as well as the *bailo's* house in Istanbul, to be the place where they could stock with any object, such as silk or velvet cloths, glasses, telescopes and Arabic manuscripts as well.<sup>17</sup>

Also eminent characters of the Ottoman government sometimes sent their men to Venice to purchase; in that case, as a rule, they were accompanied by a letter of introduction in which their name and the reason for their voyage were specified: for example, in 1560 the *beylerbeyi* of Egypt, Ali pasha, wrote a letter for two Jews, whose name was Ḥayyīm for both; so did the sanjakbeg of Klis, Mehmed, for his *kâhya* Süleyman in 1561; and the *nazır* of the sanjak of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mehmed, in the

14 Lucchetta, *Turchi morti a Venezia*, 133-146; Kafadar, *A Death in Venice*, 198.

15 Moracchiello, *Lazzaretti*, 819-836; D'Alberton Vitale, *Tra sanità e commercio*, 253-288.

16 ASVe, *Mercanzia*, 2nd s., b. 44, fasc. 102, 3rd part, c. 51.

17 Cf. for example Turan, *Venedik*, doc. 4; *Documenti turchi*, nos. 991-992; Fabris, *Artisanat et culture*, 51-60.

name of the sanjakbeg Mustafa bey Malkovich (the second vizier's cousin), for his man Mustafa *çelebi* in 1563. Also Christian merchants sometimes could dress up as Turks in dangerous places; an evidence is an order for the qadis of Aydın and Saruhan and of Smyrna issued in Emanuele Negroponte's favour in 1608.<sup>18</sup>

Among the merchants mostly Jews managed to obtain *name-i hümayuns* in their favour addressed to the doge. In 1585 a similar document was granted to Giacobbe Castiel who, however, confident in a slender acquaintance with the Ottoman language, showed it about ten years later, as if it was a recommendation for his definitive settlement in the city. He was soon discovered by the state interpreters and had to make amends for what he had falsely stated. Another example of a sultan's safe-conduct issued in favour of a woman, Grazia, and her son dates back to 1569 and is addressed not to the doge but to the qadis on the road from Venice to Istanbul. More often, however, these Jews were not merchants but people on the run from Spain and Portugal, where the situation was more and more critical, and who had relatives or friends in Istanbul who could deliver *arzs* to the sultan and pay the attendant taxes to obtain the protection documents. This was the case of Ezibona and her daughters, related to Giovanni Miches' widow, who passed through Venice in 1580, and of Alvaro Mendez: in 1584 Murad III wrote a letter in his favour stating that he had been officially called in Istanbul and asking to accompany him from Venice to Ragusa.<sup>19</sup>

The Ottoman subjects in Venice, therefore, did not constitute a close-knit community; they did not live always in the same buildings and did not have an official representative but, all the same, their commercial opposite party obviously knew their identity and, above all, their solvency. This was certified not by the members of a community but by the Venetian brokers (*sanseri*). These were officials, acknowledged by the state, and not scratch people who acted breaking all the rules. The first information about the *sanseri de turchi* (brokers dealing with Turks), as those who were specialised in that kind of customers were called at that time, dates back to 15 December 1534; in front of unauthorised people who behaved incorrectly meddling in the Ottoman subjects' business, «*si mercanti come oratori et altri de la dita nation che vengono in questa città*» (merchants as well as

18 ASVe, *LST*, f. II, c. 66, 82, 131; cf. also c. 64 (in 1554 Ali himself writes in favour of the Jewish merchant Samuele Cohen's commercial traveller); *Bailo*, b. 250, reg. 331, c. 145.

19 ASVe, *LST*, f. I, c. 76, cf. also cc. 78, 80, 81, 83, 85, 87 (1585, letters written by various Ottoman authorities to various Christian and Muslim addresses in Mosé Sarfati's favour to protect his journey as far as Istanbul); *Documenti turchi*, nos. 931, 1064-1065, 1067. Wittek, *A Letter of Murad III*, 381-383 (transcription and translation of the 1580 document, published in an antiquarian catalogue of Istanbul; this originally was the c. 42 of the f. VIII of the series *LST*, kept in the ASVe; only the cover and some of the first pages are kept today; the rest has been evidently removed and sold in the antiquarian market more than fifty years ago).



diplomatic envoys and others of the above-mentioned nation who come to this city), it was established that sale contracts could be entered into only in the presence of Girolamo Civran, interpreter of Turkish and Greek and notary of the Ducal Palace's chancellery.<sup>20</sup>

Michele Membré took the place of Girolamo Civran, who died in 1550.<sup>21</sup> Within a few years, as a proof of the increase of the Ottoman presence in Venice that Kafadar had already imagined, the title of official broker dealing only with Ottoman merchants started to be entrusted to people who knew the language and who, in any case, had to pay a tax to Membré even though they did not employ him as interpreter. The first was probably a Venetian in 1561: Michele Summa di Santo, who had been enslaved, sold and resold and had embraced Islam. He went back to Venice and his former faith after nine years and a half and here he used what he had learnt during his slavery to survive. Others followed the same path, such as in the same year Simone the Armenian who had lived in Venice for twenty-eight years and then, in 1571, Filippo Emmanuel from Cyprus, already slave in Istanbul, who was made broker because he was Membré's nephew, even though he had not already lived in Venice for ten years, as it was established by the law.<sup>22</sup>

In Membré's times, thus, there were some *sanseri ordinari* (ordinary brokers) who, even though they did not know the Turkish language and had to avail themselves of an official interpreter, had specialised, although non-exclusively, in negotiations with Ottoman merchants. Besides them, there were those who, thanks to their linguistic skills and the events of their life, could exert the *sansaria*, but only for the Ottoman subjects. We may infer that to attest that a foreign merchant was reliable and trustworthy and a business transaction with him was not risky was the task of the official interpreter of the Republic, such as Civran or Membré, or of those who had obtained the right to exert «solo con turchi» (only with Turks). In a time when the document of personal identification did not exist, besides ready money and bills of exchange, only the following things were of value in order to trade without running any risk: acquaintances, friendships or the presence of countrymen and finally even rumours that in certain milieus got around from mouth to mouth.

20 ASVe, CN, reg. 22, cc. 153v-154. On the importance of interpreters in the economic transactions in the Ottoman Empire, cf. Çiçek, *Interpreters*, 1-15.

21 ASVe, CN, reg. 27, c. 86v; on this interpreter cf. Membré, *Relazione di Persia*, xi-lxx; *Mission*, vii-xxviii.

22 ASVe, CN, reg. 33, cc. 39, 62v; reg. 39, c. 17v; reg. 40, c. 166v; cf. also ff. 39 and 48. As for other brokers, cf. Vercellin, *Mercanti turchi a Venezia*, 243-276; Dal Borgo, *Neoconvertiti*, 163-165.

### 7.3 Slaves on the Run

Besides those who had made the frontier their house, there were also those who stayed there only for the time necessary to cross it. They were often people who had decided to leave their motherland and their faith or those who, on the contrary, wanted to go back to their house after a period of detention or slavery in a foreign land. Most European-Ottoman agreements state that the prisoners of war had to be given back after its end but they were very often detained as slaves by those who did not intend to lose a free labour. The situation was different along the Persian front: as a matter of fact, other Muslims, however Shiites, could not be enslaved by Ottomans. Some masters of prisoners of war even stated that they were only purchased and sold slaves or even other slaves' sons. The Venetian-Ottoman capitulations always established the reciprocal exchange of prisoners. This meant that in the Republic, during peacetime and at least officially, there could not be subjects of the Ottoman Empire reduced to slavery; moreover, the Republic ordered its officials to release and give back to the sultan also the Muslim prisoners that had been found on Christian privateers' or pirates' ships; likewise, the Porte had to give back Venetians taken prisoner during the war, even though it often refused to set free those who had been reduced to slavery in other circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

During the wars, instead, such as the Cretean or the Morean ones, the Venetian navy needed very huge crews - up to 150 rowers could stay in a trireme, besides soldiers, officials and sailors - and its galleys were equipped also with Muslim rowers. The slaves' condition was very bad; as a matter of fact, they frequently died and other had to take their place. In peacetime, instead, Muslim rowers on the galleys or Muslim slaves in the palaces were secretly employed; the captains of public and private galleys kept them hidden and did their best to avoid controls, or recorded these people among the dead onboard; thus, they had men doing an exhausting job cheap, in a period in which free rowers (the so-called *buonavoglia*) were decreasing in number.<sup>24</sup>

Both during and after the cessation of the hostilities, prisoners and slaves fled, if they could go back to their homeland. They were wretches, often moneyless and easy prey to impostors and frauds who, promising to ferry them across a river or to accompany them in dangerous areas, stole everything they had. The painful account of Osman *ağa* of Temesvar's<sup>25</sup> wanderings presents a clear image of how dangerous those journeys were,

23 Zug Tucci, *Venezia e i prigionieri*, 51; Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan*, 90; Bono, *Schiavi musulmani*, 450-460.

24 Lo Basso, *Schiavi, forzati e buonevoglie*, 204.

25 *Documenti turchi*, no. 198; Osmân Agha de Temechvar, *Prisonnier des infidèles*, 145-201.

of how they could end in despair, and of how mean men could be towards their likes. The thirst for profit overrode any moral or religious consideration and only those who had a lot of money and as much slyness could hope to survive and succeed in their object. Venetians were not better than Turks on this point: Osman *ağa* met them twice during his journeys between the Balkans and Vienna and twice they were slave traders who bought men to supply the Most Serene Republic's galleys with rowers. This happened at the end of the seventeenth century when slavery was little talked about but still existed, also in Italy, as Salvatore Bono's recent book on Muslim slaves shows.

The quickest escape route from south Italy included the passage by sea to the Maghreb. In the Mediterranean there were some islands, such as Giannutri and even more so Lampedusa, that could give shelter to the runaways. For the latter, there was also a tacit agreement between Christians and Muslims to leave provisions and money in a cave, where there were both an altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the *türbe* of a marabout, for those who needed them. According to legend, a hermit who lived on the island lighted a candle every night to point out the track and introduced himself as a Muslim to Muslims and as a Christian to Christians, so much so that still today in Sicily «il romito di Lampedusa» (the hermit of Lampedusa) means a person with a double faith.<sup>26</sup> Another escape route for a Muslim slave could be the territory of the Republic of Venice, which was the only Italian state that directly bordered the Ottoman Empire; moreover, the peace agreements with the Porte made Venetians respect and, if necessary, help the Muslim runaways of any status.

If we know little of Muslim slaves and if the accounts of their misadventures (such as Osman *ağa*'s) are rare, we have more information about Christians in flight, thanks to both the archives of the Inquisition, always ready to check those who might have abjured the faith,<sup>27</sup> and the accounts left by some of them, which soon became a widespread and highly regarded literary genre with *topoi* such as capture, slavery and regained freedom. One of the most famous examples is an episode of the *Don Quixote* whose author, Miguel de Cervantes, really was in Algiers as a slave of that stronghold's commander, the Venetian renegade *Venedikli* Hasan pasha. A model of this kind of literature is Andres Laguna's pseudo-biography, which is a summa of many other accounts on the subject and tells the story of a Spanish young man captured in 1552 off the island of Ponza and forced to row; after having pretended to be a physician, he managed to run away passing along Mount Athos, the islands of the Greek archipelago and reaching Sicily.<sup>28</sup>

26 Scaraffia, *Rinnegati*, 15-18; Bono, *Schiavi musulmani*, 463, 468.

27 Bennassar, Bennassar, *I cristiani di Allah*; Scaraffia, *Rinnegati*.

28 Fabris, *Hasan*, 51-66; Laguna, *Avventure*.

In the western jurisprudence the escape of a slave was considered to be a theft, even if of oneself. On the contrary, Ottoman subjects very often accused their Christian former slaves, who had already reached Venice's lands, of having stolen their goods or money so to convene them before a court on the basis of the peace agreements. These complaints often caused endless cases between border authorities and sometimes they involved also the central authority. A firman of 1533, for example, addressed by the sultan to the sanjakbeg and the qadis of Morea, established that some Turkish subjects wrongly charged their Venetian former slaves, freed from a Barbary galliot by the *capitano generale da mar*.<sup>29</sup>

Slaves on the run usually did not have documents that could protect them during their journey. Sometimes, however, someone tried to offer them an official protection. This was the case of the Venetian representatives in Constantinople, but the attempt did not always go through. In 1574, for instance, the *bailo* Antonio Tiepolo let some of them run away on a Venetian ship, but they were arrested by Ottoman officials who found out they had letters with the *bailo's* seal. Freed slaves, instead, received official documents by the imperial chancellery addressed to the Ottoman authorities certifying that they were going back to their homeland.<sup>30</sup>

Also women, however fewer than men since they had less occasions to be captured, were slaves of Christian or Ottoman holders and, if they could, they too tried to run away. In his dangerous but successful return home, Osman *ağa* brought also his friend Mehmed, two Muslim women and a three or four-year-old little girl. A document of 1559 speaks of a mother and her two daughters who had been captured in Hungary, had fled from Klis and were looking for shelter in the Venetian town of Trogir. That same year, Franceschina Zorzi Michiel – the Venetian mother of Gazanfer, the man who would become the most famous chief of the white eunuchs of the Topkapı at the end of the sixteenth century – was captured together with her four children on a ship that was crossing the Adriatic; she could not save her two sons, who were brought to the imperial palace in Istanbul, but only the two girls with whom she managed to go back to Venice after many wanderings.<sup>31</sup>

29 *Documenti turchi*, no. 291.

30 ASVe, *LST*, f. III, c. 40; *Bailo*, b. 251, reg. 334, c. 6 (1621, for seven freed Venetians already captured by Abaza Mahmud).

31 Osmân Agha de Temechvar, *Prisonnier des infedèles*, 143-144, 193; Pedani, *Veneziani a Costantinopoli*, 67-84; *Safiye's Household*, 9-32. *Documenti turchi*, no. 749.

## 7.4 Other Means of Identification

When we read biographies of people who went on a long journey from East to West or vice versa, we are struck by the fact that the foreign was looked at with distrust by the people of the countries he crossed and, even more so, by the inhabitants of the border areas. A traveller was not obliged to have a document written by a high authority and addressed to the officials of the countries along the way, even though it could certainly smooth out some difficulties. Those issued by the Porte usually specified only the name and the role of the person who bore them and sometimes his (or her) generic itinerary or other information such as, for example, if he was travelling in secret and if he was armed; instead, there were no physical descriptions that let identify the person for certain. As a rule, such documents were issued for those who travelled on behalf of one or the other state but, as we saw, sometimes also for private citizens who went in a foreign land to trade, for religious reasons or to reach their relatives or anything.<sup>32</sup>

Among those who provided a public service, there were also couriers and postmen, meaning with the first term those who were paid by the state and with the second one those who undertook that activity under private companies' orders or ordinary citizens. The postal service, considered to be a sovereign prerogative, was already widespread in the Muslim Egypt since 659/1260-1261, when the sultan Baybars organised it. In the most magnificent period of the Mamluk Empire, when state borders were almost impassable by those who were not authorised, the postal service officers were several and they had documents certifying their role. In his description of the *mukâtābats*, al-Qalqaşandi includes in that category the passports *āwrāq al-ğawāz* or *āwrāq al-ṭarīq* (singular *waraqah*) employed by the couriers to have the right of way and to certify their identity.<sup>33</sup> Besides paper, however, there were also other marks that allowed the officer to be easily recognisable from afar. They were identification marks made of silvery or golden leather, coin-like but as big as the palm of the hand, tied to the neck with a cord or a yellow silk foulard and kept under one's clothes, even though a big and very visible bow hung at the back. This mark was useful also to immediately swap horses at the post houses. Once gone back to Cairo, the couriers had to give back to the chancellery (*dīwān al-inšā'*)

32 ASVe, *LST*, f. IV, c. 106 (1591, the *kapiağası* Gazanfer for his mother who, travelling from Venice, had to join him in Istanbul), f. V, c. 131 (1593, Abdi *alaybeyi* sent to Venice by the *beylerbeyi* of Bosnia for the interpreter Luca Stagner); *Bailo*, b. 259, reg. 361, cc. 126-127 (1747, for Antonio Becich who goes to Walachia); *Documenti turchi*, no. 401 (1537, issued for Giovanni Soranzo, relative of the Venetian ambassador who goes to Jerusalem from Istanbul).

33 al-Qalqaşandi, *Şubḥ*, vol. 7, 231-233.

the leather mark that, being coined by the state mints, was conceptually linked to the sovereign right to mint money.<sup>34</sup>

The Ottoman post derived from the post that existed in the ancient Muslim and Mongolian states. Since Mehmed II's times, there were state messengers (*ulaks* or *tatars*) whose task was to keep the contact between the Porte and the provincial authorities; the service, however, was employed also to gather information on the frontier areas. For their correspondence, the private citizens used either occasional carriers (*emanetçis*) or people paid to do it (*sais*). It was mainly a horse post; therefore, *menzilhanes* (post houses) and *hans* were used for the change of mounts, while escorts of janissaries ensured the safety.<sup>35</sup> As we saw, the name of some Ottoman units of measurement was conceptually linked to the postal service. When the *ulaks* were used to send official letters abroad, accreditation letters were written also for them specifying their role and the reason for their mission, according to the practice for diplomatic envoys.

For centuries, Venetian post to and from Istanbul used only couriers and messengers who went on foot; also in this case, there was a service provided by the state together with other webs of transmissions run by and for private citizens. People who engaged in that activity usually were either Slavonians or Ottoman subjects of Montenegro. On this point, an episode of 1590 that caused the *bailo's* vehement complaints can be reminded; the *bailo's arz* to the sultan brought about a *name-i hümayun* for the sanjakbeg of Shkodër obliging the qadis of his zone to overrule the order he had given to the men of Montenegro not to serve the Most Serene Republic. We know that, already around 1524-25, an imperial document was issued to offer protection to those who practised that profession, but in periods of international tension, when carrying letters to Venetians meant risking their life, the envoys had to move in secret and did not have letters certifying their profession, neither from the Venetian authorities nor from the Ottoman ones.<sup>36</sup>

Also other countries used their own postal services. For example, since 1514, Poland and the Ottoman Empire ensured reciprocity of treatment to 'ambassadors, merchants and messengers'; in this clause, taken up again in the following *ahdnames*, some Italian translations of the same period included couriers too; as for France, in 1542 the sultan asked the doge to let right of way to the official messengers to and from that country.<sup>37</sup>

34 al-Qalqaşandi, *Şubh*, vol. 14, 366-372; Sauvaget, *La poste*, 20, 44-49.

35 Stein, *Ottoman Ambassador*, 219-312.

36 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 250, reg. 330, cc. 18a-b; De Zanche, *I vettori*, 19-43; *Tra Costantinopoli e Venezia*, 33-71; Fedele, *Un enigma di storia postale*, 5-17.

37 Cf. Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 217; *Documenti turchi*, no. 486.

Sometimes the imperial documents certifying people's role were also export licences for forbidden goods. They concern mostly horses, usually given as a gift to some ambassadors who returned home. It should be observed that also the passports for ships stated that they could enter the Ottoman harbours only if they had not shipped forbidden goods such as arms or horses.<sup>38</sup>

In the Mamluk Empire, the authorities could issue also a kind of safe-conduct to protect those who had not obeyed some orders and thus feared to be punished. In any case, theoretically, from an Islamic point of view, the 'safe-conducts for Muslims' (*amānāt li-ahl al-Islām*) were not needed since Muslims could travel safe within the *dār al-Islām*. More specifically, they were a kind of certification of amnesty, such as the *dafn*: its name meant 'to hide something', namely the sins, and it was a document already neglected at the beginning of the fifteenth century. In the Mamluk reign there were also the *tarhānīyāts*, i.e. letters of freedom, given at the moment of the retirement with or without the pay, mostly to state officers, the so-called 'men of sword', such as the emirs, but sometimes also to some 'men of pen'. These letters allowed to settle or travel everywhere they wanted within the state borders.<sup>39</sup>

To end a discussion on the ancient means of identification we must cite a very effective one, however more macabre and drastic. It could be used only to make sure that somebody condemned in absentia, or a state enemy, had really been eliminated. This happened a few times in Venice too. Some bounty hunters, after having killed, sent to the *Consiglio dei Dieci* the head severed from the bust so that they could collect what they had been promised.<sup>40</sup> This practice was certainly more common in the Ottoman Empire: in the outer walls of the Topkapı, there are still some niches where the executed criminals' heads were placed and such macabre trophies were often sent in great numbers as a generous gift to the sultan by commanders and militaries.<sup>41</sup> Thus, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a Persian ruler's head – maybe of the famous Alāüddevlle according to some Venetian sources but not according to the Ottoman ones – was sent to the doge as a gift by the sultan.<sup>42</sup>

38 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 251, reg. 335, c. 32 (1625, for Simone Contarini, with a horse of great value given by the sultan); b. 252, reg. 343, c. 37 (1593).

39 al-Qalqaşandi, *Şubḥ*, vol. 13, 48-53, 352-355.

40 Fabris, *Il dottor Girolamo Fasaneo*, 105-118.

41 See, for example, ASVe, *LST*, f. IV, cc. 79-80 (undated, around 1583, Hasan ağa, it tells of an Ottoman attack near Zadar and of the sending to Istanbul of the heads of twelve killed people).

42 Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 22, col. 460, 462, 465; İdrîs-i Bidlîsî, *Silim şah-nâme*, 250.

At that time, it was rather difficult to effectively depict the appearance of a person in a piece of writing, except from the description of some distinguishing marks; to make sure about a man's identity it would have been necessary to have a portrait at least. The sultan Bayezid, for example, used this device despite his disapproval of images: he sent two pictures to the duke of Mantua, the first of which represented prince Cem and the other an envoy of the Mamluk sovereign who protected him; but in this case, the sultan was probably organising their murder in Italy.<sup>43</sup>

## 7.5 The Health Front

In 1348 a plague epidemic, i.e. a disease doomed to periodically reappear for more than three centuries, spread in all Europe. In 1377, Ragusa, which had just become independent from Venice, was the first city to create a sort of quarantine. Within a few years, it was imitated by many other countries. In 1423 also the *Comune Veneciarum* started to systematically prohibit the contacts with the areas at risk. The Venetian hospital for plague victims was turned into a quarantine station for the foreigners coming from infected countries and was used with this function until 1471 when another complex was built. The quarantine was compulsory both for merchants and merchandises, to the extent that already at the beginning of the sixteenth century people said that the *Lazzaretto Nuovo* served also as *dogana da mar* (sea customs) and, sometimes, as *dogana da terra* (land customs); it was right there that the first contacts between merchants, interpreters and brokers were established. The lazaretto, therefore, was also a meeting place where merchants, however unwillingly, stroke up a friendship, knew each other and got to know also some Venetians.<sup>44</sup>

The officials of the *Stato da Mar* had also the task to promptly inform the central government of any possible centre of infection so that they could immediately break off the ordinary contacts with those places, whereas special permits, the *fedi di santità*, were used by land and sea to check the place of origin of travellers and loads: countersigned at the various checkpoints, those documents had to be propounded upon their arrival in Venice.<sup>45</sup> In that case, therefore, the state was not interested in the individuals themselves or their role or profession, but wanted to know only the place they came from and if they were infection vehicles.

The lazaretto was used also in some Muslim countries, at least in the eighteenth century. There are proofs that by then there was a lazaretto in

43 Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*, 111.

44 Preto, *Le grandi paure*, 177-192.

45 Palmer, *L'azione della Repubblica*, 103-110.



Tunis for the goods and people coming from the ships in which the disease had manifested itself. Other North-African countries were not as quick in taking the necessary precautionary steps for the infectious diseases. Some Moroccan harbours could use the very strict quarantines imposed in the Spanish harbours and, if the infection spread, officials did not allow ships coming from areas at risk without the Spanish *fede di santità*. When the danger diminished, however, they used to leave people and goods in the open air for some days, according to an ancient custom of their country. At that time, in general, in the Ottoman provinces mainly the foreign consuls tried to persuade indifferent pashas to take into consideration the health front but, already at the beginning of the following century, the Ottoman governors themselves started to worry about the spreading of the infection. They usually acted in this way prompted by the circumstances and soon abandoned the restrictive measures right after the first results and not when the plague had been eradicated; moreover, the various local administrations did not act jointly and, therefore, the measures were effective only to a limited extent. The methods to fight the epidemic, however, were those used in Europe and, when some brisk governors were imitated by their neighbours, the plague started to slowly shrink back also in the Empire, even though it did not completely disappear.<sup>46</sup>

Venice, the Oriental gateway of Europe, was more exposed to the contagion coming from East than other states. The border line that divided its territory and the Muslim one from Kotor onwards little by little turned into a *cordon sanitaire* that separated two areas where the virulence and the contagion of the epidemic had different values. Leaving the Christian territory behind often was experienced as an entrance in hell, not for religious reasons but for sanitary ones: people left behind a country where science and experience had found out tools useful to reduce, if not eradicate, the propagation of the miasma, and entered the reign of death. The observance of the *cordons sanitaires* became stricter and stricter: people could show preference neither for the noble nor for the rich; all men, animals and also goods were considered to be a possible carrier of infectious diseases. Also the mail could convey the plague and, therefore, letters were often smoked so that the fire could purify them, or 'perfumed' with olive oil and juniper berries, or else carried in tarred boxes, believing that these stratagems avoided its spreading. Although rather late, the Venetian rigour as for health was imitated by other countries bordering the Ottoman Empire and, thus, easily exposed to contagion. In 1770 the Austrian state used an existing structure to this end, the *Militärgrenze*, i.e. the strip of land that was from 15 to 20 kilometres wide and more than

46 Ciammaichella, *Il 'Giornale storico'*, 21-23; Speciale, *Oltre la peste*, 207-212, 252-256; Arribas Palau, *Los hermanos Chiappe*, 813-869; Panzac, *La peste*, 452-454.

one thousand kilometres long, from the Adriatic to the limits of Bukovina and Moldavia. It reminded the Roman *limes* and had been created after the Treaty of Karlowitz. In that area, the military border and the sanitary one overlapped and jointly acted, whereas the fear of the military invasion yielded to the dread of epidemics.<sup>47</sup>

---

47 De Zanche, *Tra Costantinopoli e Venezia*, 104-109; Selmi, *Il Magistrato di Sanità*, 28-38; Panzac, *Politique sanitaire*, 87-108.