



échanges, relations internationales
Histoire du monde atlantique

La figure de l'ambassadeur entre mondes éloignés

Ambassadeurs, envoyés officiels
et représentations diplomatiques
entre Orient islamique, Occident latin
et Orient chrétien (XI^e-XVI^e siècle)

Sous la direction de
Nicolas Drocourt



Muslim Ambassadors to Venice up to the 16th century

THE VENETIAN COMMERCIAL NETWORK

During the Middle Ages the city of Venice was an important commercial centre. On the Rialto market goods from the East and the West were exchanged. Venetian ships used to reach the ports of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea while its merchants went even further, travelling along the Eurasian commercial routes. During their journeys Venetians could rely on a real network of consulates and vice-consulates. The government of the city did not use to leave alone its merchants. On the contrary they were controlled and helped by state officials sent to far-off countries, called *bailos* or consuls. The first ones were the most important and has some characteristics of residential ambassadors in a period when permanent embassies did not yet existed, the first one being that established by Venetians in Rome in 1431. In the 13th century bailos existed both in Venetian colonial lands and in foreign countries, such as Negroponte (1204), Patras, Tenedos, Tyre, Tripoli of Syria, Acre (1212), Constantinople (1265), Trebizond, the kingdom of Armenia, Cyprus, Corfu, Durazzo, Nauplia, Aleppo, Koron and Modon. A little later Venetian consuls were established in Tunis (1231), Naples (about 1231), Alexandria of Egypt (1238), Abruzzo (about 1275), Pola (1284), Chiarentza in Mora (1300), Bruges (1322), Tabriz (before 1325), Messina (before 1333), Tana (1333), Kaffa (1345), Maiorca (1358), Trebizond (1395), Granada (1400), Senj (1408), Damascus (before 1409), Jerusalem (1415), London (about 1445), Durazzo (about 1465), Oran (1488), and Trani¹.

Before sending an official to a foreign land the government of Venice used to sign an agreement with the ruler of that country. In this way the consul, or *bailo*, was recognized by the foreign government and he could act really as the head of its community. In Islamic countries the official presence of non-Muslim religious communities formed by *dhimmī* helped Venetians to organize their own colonies. In that period a peace agreement made between a Christian and a Muslim ruler was called *capitulatio* in Latin, and *capitolazione* in Italian, but,

according to Muslim law, it was either a general safe-conduct (*amān 'amm*) or a truce (*hudna*).

The most ancient still existing agreements made between Venice and Muslim rulers date back to the 13th century but a chronicle says that already Pietro Orseolo II (991-1008) sent diplomatic missions to Muslim lords to start commercial intercourses. In the Middle Ages, up to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt (1517), Venice made agreements with the Hafsīd dynasty of Tunis (1231, 1251, 1271, 1305, 1317, 1392, 1427, 1438, 1456), the Seljuks of Rum (1220), the Ayyubids (1206, 1238, 1244) and Mamluks of Egypt (1254, 1288, 1302, 1344, 1355, 1361, 1415, 1422, 1442, 1507, 1512), and the Nasrids of Granada (1400), the Ilkhanids (1306, 1320), the sultans of Aleppo (1207, 1225, 1229, 1254), the emir of Laodicea (1225) and the lord of Sahyūn (1225, 1229), the emir of Menteshe (1331, 1337, 1358, 1375, 1403, 1407, 1414) and that of Aydin (1337, 1348, 1353), the lord of Bādīs in Morocco (1508), that of Tripoli and Gerba (1356), the Tatar khans of Crimea (1332, 1340, 1342, 1347, 1358), the Tatar emir of Qirim (1356, 1358), the Mongol Jalayiride dynasty who ruled in Iraq and Persian lands (1370, 1372) as well as the Ottoman rulers (1403, 1408, 1411, 1419, 1430, 1446, 1451, 1454, 1479, 1482, 1502, 1513) and the emirs of Karaman (1454); moreover, they had friendly contacts also with Uzun Hasan (1453-1478), lord of the Aq Qoyunlu, and then the Safavids. To make these agreements the doges used to send their ambassadors but sometimes the international situation pushed also some Muslim sovereign to send diplomatic envoys to Venice.

EARLY MUSLIM DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS TO VENICE

Between the 13th and the 14th century a Mongol dynasty, the Ilkhanids, ruled on Persian lands. At the turn of the century the khan Mahmud Ghazan (1295-1304) chose Islam to replace the ancient shamanic belief and obliged all his subjects to follow his conversion. His predecessor Ahmad Teküder (1282-1284) had behaved in a completely different way: he had become Muslim but he had not compelled his tribe to imitate his conversion. The Ilkhanids fought long and terrible wars with the Mamluks of Egypt and for this reason they looked for support in the West. The khans Hülegü (1256-1265), Abāqā (1265-1682), Arghun (1284-1291), Mahmud Ghazan and Öljaitü (1304-1316) sent envoys to European lands, to the pope, the kings of France and England. Some of the ambassadors were Muslims, some Nestorians, some were also from Genoa. Venice was not involved in most of these diplomatic exchanges even if at the turn of the 13th century Ghazan sent a letter also to the doge². Some years later, in 1307, an Ilkhanid envoy reached Venice with a safe-conduct issued by Öljaitü for the Venetian merchants travelling in his lands and a document written in Mongolic language where Hoca Abdallah renounced to all his rights against some Venetian merchants. This envoy was probably not the sword-

bearer Tommaso Ugi from Siena, who had already sailed on Venetian ships in 1306 and reached Rome, England and Poitiers to come back to Persia in 1308: Tommaso was already in Europe when the khan signed the safe-conduct for the doge³.

In the 14th century Venice was in contact also with other Muslim lands. In 1329 an envoy arrived from Tunis, while in 1356 the doge signed an agreement with the lord of Tripoli and Djerba and his ambassadors, Barnaba Girardo and Maffeo Michiel, were accompanied back to Venice by some Muslim envoys who had the task of confirming their lord's words. Another ambassador from Tripoli seemed to have arrived in 1362⁴.

In the Middle Ages the envoys of Eastern rulers sometimes did not reach Venice, but they met Venetian officials in the East. For instance in 1344 the doge suggested to the *bailo* in Constantinople, Marco Foscarini, to meet the Ilkhanid ambassadors who were going there in order to make an agreement with the Genoese. In 1369 the Jalayirid ruler of Iraq and Azerbaijan, Shaykh Oweis khan (1356/60-1374), sent his ambassador "Irassaga Asaul" to Trabzon to inform Venetian merchants and *bailo* that they could trade safely in his lands. Some years later, in 1373 "Chazipaychi" brought to him the complaints of the Venetians about the lack of safety on the route Trabzon-Tauris⁵.

On the contrary, in 1341 the Mamluk sultan of Egypt sent his envoys to the king of Armenia to ask back the money that some Venetians who were trading in that kingdom had to give to other merchants who were his subjects. In 1331 the agreement between the duke of Crete and the emir of Mentesh Orhan was signed in the Venetian island at the presence of the ambassador "Bimberachi" (bin Ber hakim? or bin Berahim?). In 1348 the truce between the Crusaders' Holy League (*Sancta Unio*) and the emir of Aydin, Khizir, was signed by the emir's ambassador. In 1358 another agreement between the duke of Crete Pietro Badoer and the emir of Mentesh Musa was made by "Chalilli de Melasso, ambaxatore magni admirati Musabechi" (Halil from Mylassa/Milas) while "Salachatini chaciam turcum, ambaxatorem ipsium admirati" (Salaheddin hoca) wrote some documents in the name of his lord. In 1402 Mehmed, who ruled on Ayasoluk in the name of Timur Lenk, sent his envoys to the Venetian authorities in Crete, while the ambassador of the so-called Prester John (in this case David I of Ethiopia, 1382-1411) presented the doge with four leopards. Later on, in 1424, an ambassador sent by the ruler of the cities of Ayasoluk (Altoluogo, Teologo, Ephesus) and Balat (Palatia, Mileto), reached Salonica to look for the Venetian help against the common Ottoman enemy, Murad II⁶.

In the same century the first Ottoman envoy reached Venice. On 11 February and then again on 10 March 1384 he saw the doge and left the city around mid-June. Murad I had sent him to ask for friendship against the Genoese as well as for some large-sized dogs. He was a *çavuş* (official envoy of the sultan) but documents do not remember his name. Venetians spent about 200 ducats to honour him and he came back together with the Venetian ambassador Marino

Malipiero and eight great dogs. Other envoys were sent to Venice by Bayezid I (1390) and by prince Süleyman (1402, 1406, 1409 and 1410) when he was looking for help against his brothers. The 1406 was the Greek Paul while the 1410 one was Pietro Longo. The names of the others are not written in the sources as well as their provenance and religion. In 1415 a Turk and a Greek arrived from the pretender to the Ottoman throne Mustafa, while in 1417 Mehmed I's high official, Hamza, arrived in Venice to ask the release of Turkish prisoner taken at the battle of Gallipoli. In 1436 Murad II sent an envoy to obtain justice for some of his subjects who had not been paid by a Venetian merchant, while in 1436 he sent Gökterem to consolidate peace and friendship⁷. From this time onwards, the Ottoman sultans decided more and more frequently to send diplomatic missions to Venice. They were emulated by members of the Ottoman ruling class, who used their men to deal political affairs or to find luxury items on the Rialto market, as well as by the governors of the Balkan provinces that were near Venetian lands⁸.

AN HECTIC PERIOD

In the years 1463-1479 a war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire blew out. This fact pushed Venetians to look for allies among their enemy's enemies, such as the lord of Aq Qoyunlu, Uzun Hasan, who ruled on the lands from Derbent to Tiflis, from Erzurum to Mosul and Baghdad, from Hormuz to Shiraz and Kerman, from Isfahan to Tabriz. The doge of Venice sent many ambassadors to this emir to invite him to fight against Mehmed the Conqueror and he too sent his men to Venice. In 1463 Lazzaro Querini left Venice for Tabriz and on 13 March of the following year "Mamenatazab", Uzun Hasan's ambassador, reached Venice via Aleppo and Rhodes, to make an alliance. In February 1466 another envoy, Hasan "Azanum", arrived to confirm the agreement⁹.

In these years several diplomatic missions reached Tabriz, the Karaman, Istanbul, Venice and Milan. In 1464 the Karaman emir, who desired to fight against the Ottomans together with Venetians and Aq Qoyunlu, sent his envoys to Rhodes to treat with a Venetian diplomats. On the other hand, the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II sent the former *sancakbey* of Vlöre, together with the interpreter Nicolò Corner, to the duke of Milan trying to create a new alliance against Venice, but, at the same time, he tried to put an end to the war with the help of the Albanian captain Skanderbeg, with whom he had just made a temporary truce. In 1465 the sultan sent a diplomatic envoy directly to Venice. After some months also his great vizier, Mahmud pasha, sent another envoy, Jacob Bunich, who was followed by the Jew David Maurogonato in 1466. In the meanwhile, between November 1465 and January 1466, the sultan of Egypt sent twice his interpreter Ğānī Beg *al-tarğumān* to Venice, officially to discuss about an episode of piracy with the doge, but probably to have secret contacts with the doge¹⁰.

In the '70s Uzun Hasan sent many diplomatic missions to Venice. In February 1471 the Armenian Mirath arrived together with Lazzaro Querini; in 1472 there was a Spanish Jew, the physician Isaac, who then went to Rome and Naples. At the end of August of the same year Hacı Mehmed presented the doge with a precious gift, a blue-green cup set in gold which is still in the treasury of St. Mark's church; he remained many months in Venice and left only on 18 February 1473 together with the Venetian ambassador, Giosafat Barbaro. He was killed by Kurds, during the journey to Persia, while Barbaro succeeded in saving himself thanks to his brave horse. In the same month another envoy arrived, to inform the doge of the victories of his lord. Then the Venetian ambassador Caterino Zen (sent at the end of 1471 to Tabriz) came back officially encharged of a diplomatic mission by Uzun Hasan. He was a relative of this ruler's wife, Despina Hatun, and for this reason he had been received in the most secret rooms of the imperial palace. On coming back, as Aq Qoyunlu ambassador, he met the king of Poland, that of Hungary, and after the doge, also the pope and the king of Naples. Ambrogio Contarini and Paolo Ognibene were other two Venetians sent to Tabriz. However, all this diplomatic activity had no effective result: Uzun Hasan died in 1478 and Venice was obliged to sign the peace with the Ottoman sultan during the following year¹¹.

During the war also the Ottoman sultan's stepmother, Mara Branković, sent to Venice five unofficial diplomatic missions to try to reach an agreement. One of the ambassadors was Teodoro Spandugino Cantacuzino, the son of one of her cousins, who is known as the author of a history of the Ottoman dynasty. In 1476 another Mamluk ambassador, Muhammad ibn Mahfūz, reached Venice to settle a problem caused by French Occitan sailors who had damaged members of the Mamluk high society and, above all, the powerful court merchant ibn 'Ulayba: after this fact all the Europeans who were in Egypt had been arrested and their goods confiscated. In the same year, two Tatar ambassador "Thair" and "Brunachio Batir" arrived from the Kipçak khan of Crimea. In this period the Venetian ceremonial masters had the important task of avoiding that ambassadors coming from kingdom that were fighting one against the other met in the rooms of the Ducal Palace or in the streets of the city¹².

THE BEGINNING OF THE 16TH CENTURY

At the beginning of the 16th century the kingdom of Egypt underwent a very difficult period because of the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean that damaged the spice trade and shook the basis of Egyptian wealth. Venice too had to suffer from the opening of this new maritime route. The Mamluks turned to the Most Serene Republic but, rather than a straight response, Venetians said that, if their subjects volunteered to help, they could go. The sultan Qānsūh al-Ghawrī sent some Franciscan friars from the convent of Mount Zion as his

ambassadors to Rome, France, Spain, and even Portugal, to help a blockade of the new trade route, threatening as a counter measure to cut access to the Church of the Holy Sepulcre for Christian pilgrims. Lastly he sought also the Ottoman sultan's help and Bayezid II (1481-1512) finally agreed to provide enough manpower and material to set up a fleet in the Red Sea. In Egypt and Venice the crisis became worse and worse and in 1504 Venetians thought of sending an envoy to the Mamluks to open a new trade route. They wanted to dig again the ancient canal choked with sand by the caliph al-Mansūr (754-775) in 767 and re-opened for a short while about 1000 AD. However the Venetian ambassador, Francesco Teldi, did not leave Venice and the new canal remained a thought, a remote possibility, a project that needed no further consideration¹³.

Diplomatic contacts between Venice and Egypt went on also in the following years. In 1506 the sultan's chief interpreter, Taghrī Berdī, reached Venice to discuss a peace agreement. Venetians had known him at least since 1489 and they did not trust him very much. However, they discussed the new text of the agreement but, in the end, Qānsūh al-Ghawrī never ratified it. The sultan's ambassador remained in Venice from September 1506 to July of the following year. Besides the official part of his mission he had also some entertainments. In the same day, the 27 of September, he was at a dinner in Malipero's house, at a concert in the church of Santa Maria delle Vergini and at the performance of an eclogue (a poem describing rural life). On 4 October there was a wedding feast at Ca' Nani at San Trovaso where he and ten of his men had a dinner and met fifty Venetian noblewomen. On 25 October he was received by the Maggior Consiglio, on 4 February 1507 by the doge and the Collegio, and on 3 March by the Signoria. On 11 November he was at Ca' Grimani, at San Vio, to see the state procession in the Grand Canal and on 23 December there was the usual shopping tour in Rialto to buy precious items to bring back to Egypt. Then he went to Florence, but he came back and left officially the Most Serene Republic on 26 June 1507 when he was again received by the Collegio and then escorted through St. Mark's square by the ducal musical band. To invite an Oriental ambassador to a wedding feast was then not unusual in Venice since in this way the strict laws against luxury could be avoided. Taghrī Berdī too was hosted in a flat in the Giudecca Island, and this was a means to control better his tours in Venice. When he left he received precious cloths for him and his men, worth 300 ducats, and other 1,000 ducats. It was a very huge sum if compared to the money given to the Ottoman ambassadors in the same period. Very few envoys received more, first of all the interpreter of the Porte Yunus in 1542 (6,000) and, many years later (in 1581), Hasan ağa *çeşnegir* (1,500)¹⁴.

At the beginning of the 16th century it was possible to meet ambassadors from Christian and Muslim countries in the streets and the palaces of Venice. They did not come only from Cairo and Constantinople but also from the Ottoman provinces and other kingdoms. In July 1504 a moor from Tunis arrived, on his way to Constantinople, and he met an Ottoman ambassador and the

envoy of the *sancakbeyi* of Vlöre. In 1509 an ambassador of the Safavid ruler Ismā'īl (1501-1524) arrived, accompanied by an envoy of the former lord of Karaman (still alive even if prisoner of the Mamluks, as Venetian sources say). He was not considered very important: in fact he had only 2 ducats every day for his expenses while, at the same time, the ambassador from Hungary had 5 ducats. He was hosted in Ca' Barbaro, near San Stefano, where also the French ambassador was and where, about sixty years later, just after the Lepanto battle (1571), all the Ottoman subjects still present in Venice sought shelter from the raging crowd. He brought the proposal of an alliance against the Ottomans but Venice was on the point of starting a most dangerous war against its Italian enemies and the sultan of Constantinople seemed more an ally than a foe. On coming back to Persia the Safavid ambassador was discovered by the Mamluks. Qānsūh al-Ghawrī was then shah Ismā'īl's enemy and he imprisoned the Venetian consuls and merchants who lived in his kingdom, but a new sultan was on the point of seating on the Ottoman throne, Selim I (1512-1520), who conquered the Mamluk kingdom in 1517¹⁵.

In 1519 an envoy from the Hafsid ruler was received by the doge. He was a scholar and had books written by Averroes with him. He presented the Senat with twenty jars full of dates: Venetians quarrelled to divide them up but, when they were opened, the fruits turned out to be rotten. In 1530 the ruler Djerba sent a barefoot more as his ambassador: this time the diplomatic gifts were only two small carpets since the gazelles and the ostriches he had with him had died during the journey. By then, the great period of Eastern embassies to Venice was fading away. Only one Muslim emperor ruled in the Mediterranean zone and he was the Ottoman sultan. Muslim ambassadors to Venice were now almost all Ottoman but some envoy from the Safavid shah, which arrived after the Cyprus war and in the first years of the 17th century¹⁶.

Venetians received Muslim ambassadors in the best way. They knew that food, cloths, money and lodgings had to be given to them, according to their customs. In the 15th century they were hosted usually in some inn near St. Marks' square but in the following century we know that often flats with carpets and eastern furniture were prepared for them in a Venetian palace, above all in the Giudecca Island. Tours and feasts were organized for them but Venetians were always very careful. They wanted to know if they were true diplomatic envoys or not. In that period only non-residential ambassadors existed, the first embassy being that created by Venetians in Rome in 1440. Thus, Muslim envoys too arrived and went away and did not usually stay for a long period. There were also fakers who tried, and sometimes succeeded, in deceiving even courtesans and rulers. In Venice it was more difficult than in other European countries since Venetians had had contacts with Eastern countries for a very long period and their noblemen, who were also merchants, had seen personally far off lands and often knew Arabic, Persian and Turkish. On the contrary, in other European countries, it was possible to meet swindlers

who pretended to be ambassadors sent by far-off and exotic sovereigns. Some of them succeeded in faking even kings and popes: in 1460 friar Ludovico da Bologna arrived in Rome with a group of odd fellows who (according to him) were ambassadors of the king of Georgia, of Uzun Hasan, of the prince of Cilicia and so on. Pius II (1458-1464) welcomed him. He went to Paris: the king of France did not take him seriously but he was received with great honours by the duke of Burgundy. He went to Venice and here, at last, his fraud was discovered. The pope too ordered to arrest him and he fled away. Venetians, who had had contacts with Muslims for centuries, could not be easily deceived and even Ludovico's adventure found its inevitable conclusion just in the city of the Lagoon¹⁷.

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NOTES

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ed La figure de l'ambassadeur entre mondes éloignés

Ambassadeurs, envoyés officiels et représentations
diplomatiques entre Orient islamique, Occident latin
et Orient chrétien (xi^e-xvi^e siècle)

Les ambassadeurs, en tant qu'acteurs des contacts diplomatiques entre Orient islamique, Occident latin et Orient chrétien de la seconde partie du Moyen Âge, sont au cœur du présent ouvrage. Celui-ci réunit diverses contributions de chercheurs et historiens travaillant sur l'histoire de la diplomatie médiévale. Il constitue la version écrite d'une journée d'études organisée en juin 2012 dans le cadre des Journées Scientifiques de l'université de Nantes. Cette rencontre internationale fut le fruit d'un partenariat entre plusieurs institutions (CRHIA, université de Nantes, École pratique des hautes études, université de Liège et CNRS, UMR 8167 « Orient et Méditerranée ») prenant part à l'une des thématiques du programme « La Paix : concepts, pratiques et systèmes politiques » de l'IFAO (Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale – Le Caire).

Dans les articles regroupés ici, les auteurs répondent à des questions communes, quoique chacun sur ses propres terrains d'enquête. Qu'est-ce qu'un ambassadeur entre les espaces et civilisations considérés et pour la période prise en compte ? Cette notion, au risque de l'anachronisme, est-elle réellement compatible avec les fonctions de porte-parole et de représentation officielle qu'assument ces hommes ? De quelle manière la terminologie des multiples sources en langues diverses (latin, grec, arabe, arménien, vieux slavons, etc.) dont l'historien dispose désigne-t-elle ces intermédiaires entre États, princes ou entités politiques souveraines ? Quelles spécificités caractérisent ces ambassadeurs circulant sur de grandes distances entre civilisations voisines, mais souvent rivales ? Autant d'interrogations légitimes auxquelles les contributions donnent des éléments de réponse, apportant de nouvelles pistes de réflexions et permettant des comparaisons suggestives, sans volonté d'exhaustivité toutefois. Le lecteur pourra ainsi appréhender l'activité de certains de ces envoyés officiels sur des espaces aussi divers que les rives de l'océan Indien, les principaux centres politiques et économiques du monde méditerranéen médiéval (Constantinople, Le Caire, Pise, Venise...), les principautés roumaines et arméniennes, ou encore suivre les routes des envoyés pontificaux vers l'Orient du xiii^e siècle.

En couverture :

Laurent le Magnifique recevant des ambassadeurs mamelouks.
G. Vasari, 1556. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence © Thierry Buquet.

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