

Family of Empires: The Pisanis in the Ottoman and British Empires

by

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For my Parents

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### **Note on Places and Names**

I have opted to use the modern Turkish form for place names. For example, I use Istanbul, instead of Constantinople. In terms of names of the Pisanis, I have streamlined their names because of the fluctuation of the way that they are written by the British, the Ottomans, and author's in secondary sources. In the text, I provide the streamlined version first, and then the way they are written in the British or Ottoman documents, and in secondary sources, in brackets. For Ottoman-Turkish Muslims, I use the Ottoman/Turkish version of names of people. For example I use Arifi, instead of the British form, Aarifi.



## Note on Rates of Exchange

### Rates of Exchange between the British Pound Sterling and the Ottoman Kuruş

| Year      | 1 Pound Sterling to Ottoman Kuruş |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| 1736      | 5-7                               |
| 1768      | 8                                 |
| 1774      | 9-10                              |
| 1788      | 11                                |
| 1798      | 15                                |
| 1805      | 15-17                             |
| 1810      | 19                                |
| 1816      | 19                                |
| 1820      | 25                                |
| 1822      | 40                                |
| 1825      | 53.5                              |
| 1828      | 57-62                             |
| 1830      | 75-77.5                           |
| 1832      | 87-94                             |
| 1834      | 98-100                            |
| 1844      | 108-11                            |
| 1850-1914 | 110                               |

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Şevket Pamuk, "Money in the Ottoman Empire," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, eds. Halil İnalcık, Donald Quataert (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Table A8: Exchange rates of other coins and currency expressed in Ottoman kuruş, 1720-1844, 968. I have adjusted the table to include only the rate of exchange between the British Pound Sterling and the Ottoman *kuruş*, which were termed by the British, the Ottoman piaster. Pamuk only provides information on rates of exchange up to 1844. For 1850-1914, see Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Table 13.1, 209. Pamuk lists the conversion in Ottoman gold liras. I thank him for his clarification that the exchange from gold liras to piasters was 110 piasters to 1.10 Ottoman gold liras.

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## Introduction

More than once throughout the nineteenth century, the Levant Company and later the Foreign Office debated whether or not to replace members of Levantine families with natural born Englishmen to serve as their dragomans. Unlike other embassies that had active and thorough programs to train their own nationals to fill dragoman positions,<sup>1</sup> the British generally relied on the sons of existing dragomans to fill the ranks of *Giovani di Lingua* or student interpreters, who would eventually move up into the position of dragoman. In their absence, the embassy would hire a suitable replacement from the Levantine community.<sup>2</sup> The British indeed tried to institute a similar program, but faced the more pressing question of who would fill those positions.

The Levantines, the men that had a stronghold over the dragoman positions at the embassy since the onset of trading arrangements between Britain and the Ottoman Empire in 1581, were of course the most suitable to act as translators and interpreters for the British. They were born and raised in the Ottoman Empire, were Ottoman subjects, and knew the languages needed to communicate with the Ottoman government, other European powers, and the local

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<sup>1</sup> The Austrians began to train their own dragomans in 1754, and were educated at the Orientalische Akademie where they were taught German, French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Arabic and Persian. On the founding of the Orientalische Akademie, see Marie de Testa, Antoine Gautier, "L'Académie Orientale de Vienne (1754-2002), Une Création de L'Impératrice Marie-Thérèse," in *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de la Porte Ottomane*, eds. Marie de Testa, Antoine Gautier (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2003), 53-61; French nationals were sent to the L'École des Jeunes de Langues to be trained as dragomans. For a brief discussion on the creation of the L'École des Jeunes de Langues, see Marie de Testa, Antoine Gautier, "De l'établissement des Pères capucins à Constantinople à la fondation de l'école des jeunes de langues (1626-1669)," in *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de la Porte Ottomane*, 43-46. The British did in fact try to implement a system of training their own nationals once in the 1640s, and once in the early nineteenth century, but were unsuccessful until 1877. See G.R. Berridge, "Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries in the British Embassy in Istanbul," in *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* ed. A. Nuri Yurdusev (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 151-166.

<sup>2</sup> TNA SP 105/120, Cooper to Murray, 30/04/1773.

population. Their immersion in Ottoman and European cultures facilitated an easy transition into these powerful positions inside foreign empires. It also ensured that their blood-ties and extended family would reap the benefits of having had an association with a European empire. More often than not, multiple members of one family served as a dragoman for one embassy, and therefore cemented their position inside foreign imperial structures. Though it was a process and not a swift decision, the British managed to establish a permanent system to train their own nationals for these positions at the embassy, beginning in 1877. But even then, Levantines were still in active service.

The period 1810 to 1877 was one of experimentation for the British Embassy, and the very few natural-born Englishmen hired to fill dragoman positions served alongside Levantines, who dominated the office from the middle of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. However the Levantines, and specifically the Pisanis, continued to control the office and had much influence within and outside of the embassy. The gradual process of change in the embassy, however, did not affect the Pisanis.

The process to hire natural-born dragomans has been covered extensively in articles by Geoff Berridge, and by Judith Laffan in her doctoral dissertation. Both generally argue that the need for reform of the office of dragomans stemmed from internal factors at the embassy, including questions of loyalty, and external factors related to image control back in England.<sup>3</sup> The clamoring for reform in Istanbul occurred in the early nineteenth century and was initiated by the Levant Company, which at that time paid the salaries of the dragomans and other embassy staff, but not that of the ambassador. Berridge points out that between 1810 and 1814, the dragomans began to take most of the blame for mishaps at the Porte related to commercial

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Cecily Laffan, "Negotiating Empires: "British" dragomans and changing identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Levant," (Ph.D. diss., University of Queensland, 2011), 122-131.

decisions, where the embassy lost out.<sup>4</sup> To induce some change, in 1810 the Levant Company increased the salaries of the student interpreters, in the hope that it could ground up support to begin attracting British nationals to fill dragoman positions. That was followed by the decision to hire George Wood as a student interpreter. Wood, who was born in Britain, had previously served as a dragoman to Lord Elgin in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Though it was a step in the right direction for the Levant Company in fulfilling its desire to shake up the composition of the office, the problem was how to bring change in a way that would not disrupt class structure at home. Put simply, the British were unsure how they would convince well-educated and well-connected Englishmen to move to Istanbul to take up a position in that city.

Soliciting upper-class men from England was an issue that the Levant Company and the Foreign Office had to contend with each time the question of training natural-born subjects emerged. They also had to deal with the issue of finding suitable replacements for the Pisanis and other Ottoman subjects they employed. The Pisanis were probably aware of the favor that the idea of reform was gaining in Istanbul and back in London. In 1810, Berto (Bartolomeo) Pisani brought up the issue of the condition of the office of dragomans in a letter to his Consul General in Istanbul, Isaac Morier. Berto's main reason for writing to Morier was to procure a student interpreter position for his nephew, Alexander. In the letter, he went on to suggest that a new system for training dragomans be put in place due to the recent shortage of student interpreters, and the overall increase in the workload placed on the shoulders of the dragomans. Berto's plan was to create a system of student dragomans split into three classes, where they would be ranked based on their age. The idea was that the system would provide a continual crop

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<sup>4</sup>G.R. Berridge, "English Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries: The Early Nineteenth Century Origins of the Anglicization of the British Embassy *Drogmanat* in Constantinople," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14 no. 4 (2003): 141-142. Berridge notes that the trouble was probably related to British complaints against French privateering against British merchantmen in the Aegean to the Porte, which did not produce any results. See fn. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

of students from oldest to youngest for the Levant Company to draw from over time.<sup>6</sup> Berto prefaced his suggestion with a long discussion on the importance of the connection between the families of Pera as dragomans employed by the embassies in general, and his family and Britain, in particular.<sup>7</sup> Pisani's suggestions were initially taken into consideration by Morier and then by Robert Liston, the ambassador. Though Liston did not object to the idea in principle, he did mention that it might not be wise to embark on such a plan since the idea of bringing in Englishmen to fill the positions of dragomans was still very much alive.<sup>8</sup> Liston reiterated the same sentiment to Jacob Bosanquet, the Deputy Governor of the Levant Company.

Liston outlined some of the pros and cons of maintaining the status quo of the current system in place for the training of dragomans. He grumbled about the present structure of dragomans employed by the embassy. Not only did they not have the respect of the "Turks," who viewed them as "inferior," Liston lamented the strength they had in the non-Muslim Ottoman and diplomatic communities. According to him, the "interpreters at Pera form in some measure a distinct body, that by means of inter-marriages they may be said to compose one single family, and that a community of sentiments of maxims of interests, makes it difficult either to ensure the keeping of a secret (however essential this may sometimes be) or to operate the smallest reform."<sup>9</sup> To fix this problem, Liston argued that the British had to train their own nationals. But in order for this to be effective, he believed that they had to come from families that did not provide for the possibility of any advancement back in Britain.

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<sup>6</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Berto Pisani to Isaac Morier, 10/02/1814, 22. Also in Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Robert Liston to Isaac Morier, 09/03/1814.

<sup>9</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Liston to Bosanquet, 24/11/1814.

Choosing boys from lower classes would ensure they would remain in their assignments in Istanbul or elsewhere, and not abandon them for something more prestigious.<sup>10</sup> As Berridge points out, it was “inconceivable that an “English gentleman” should be asked to suffer the daily drudgery and humiliation of genuine dragoman work.”<sup>11</sup> Though Liston was keen on the idea of using British nationals, he later settled on the idea of having a mixed establishment of Levantines and natural-born British dragomans,<sup>12</sup> which for the most part was achieved over the course of the nineteenth century. They were not to be given the title of dragoman, however, but “Oriental Attaché” in a bid to make the position more appealing to applicants.<sup>13</sup> Terrick Hamilton was the first sent to Istanbul to be trained for the position of “Principal Interpreter,” a title for an Englishman that was elevated above the common core of dragomans at the embassy.<sup>14</sup> In 1812, Robert Liston, the ambassador, took a family friend’s son, Robert Liston Elliot to Istanbul. He was eventually sent back to England to complete his education at Cambridge University, and later returned to the Ottoman capital and became the first “Oriental Attaché” at the embassy. In the meantime, Hamilton had been promoted to “Oriental Secretary,” and when he moved up into the Secretary of the Embassy position, Elliot replaced him in his previous role. According to Berridge, the new post of Oriental Secretary was a “clever second-best solution to the problem of how to Anglicize the dragomanate,” giving the holder of that position higher status than a regular dragoman. The hope was that such a title would attract recruits from England. Though there were

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>11</sup> G.R. Berridge, “Nation, Class, Diplomacy: The Diminishing of the Dragomanate of the British Embassy in Constantinople 1810-1914,” in *The Diplomats’ World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914* ed. Markus Mösslang, Torsten Riotte (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 409.

<sup>12</sup> G.R. Berridge, “English Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries,” 146.

<sup>13</sup> Berridge, “Nation, Class, Diplomacy,” 410.

<sup>14</sup> G.R. Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the present: A Study in the evolution of a resident Embassy* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009), 55-56.



successive holders of this position, many were ill suited for it, and it seemed to have fizzled out over the course of the nineteenth century and eventually dissolved in 1875.<sup>15</sup>

Certain events periodically incited a return to the question of employing British nationals, including the so-called Chabert affair in 1825, where the head dragoman at that time, François Chabert, was accused of passing on embassy secrets to the Prussians, and an attack on Frederick Pisani by the *Times* newspaper (London) in 1837. Though four Oriental Attachés were hired between 1841 and 1845, Ambassador Stratford Canning found them to be incompetent and favored the Levantines. Even though Canning's solution was to hire Anglo-Levantines who were the sons of English families active in the Levant, that plan did not work out too well. The embassy was only successful in hiring two of them during his second period of tenure at the embassy, Henry Simmons and Philip Sarell. The Pisanis remained, and were joined by four more Levantines, Constantine Stavrides and Vincent Alischan, who took up a position in 1855, Robert Casolani who was added in 1857, and Hugo Marinitch in 1870.<sup>16</sup> It was not until 1877 when the Foreign Office made a real attempt to reform the office of the dragomans in the embassy through the creation of the Levant Consular Service. Even then, Count Alexander Pisani was still employed by the embassy until his retirement in 1882.

For over six decades the tide of change crept in and out of the embassy, and had no real effect on the Pisanis. There were certainly disagreements that stemmed from other issues between members of the family and their superiors, so serious in fact that at times more than one Pisani resigned, only to gain their position back. Why? Were they so important to the embassy that it could not function without them? Were they untouchable? Or did they simply last so long because no respectable Englishmen were suitable replacements?

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 55-58.

<sup>16</sup>Berridge, "Nation, Class, Diplomacy," 412-414.

In this dissertation, I examine some of these questions through tracing the activities of the Pisanis from their arrival in Istanbul in the late seventeenth century up to Count Alexander Pisani's retirement in 1882. I explore the spaces in which the Pisanis operated to underscore how members of this family, and dragomans in general, were not and did not simply act "in-between" empires, but were firmly embedded in Ottoman and British imperial structures. I do so through examining the spaces that the Pisanis operated inside of in their public, or professional lives as dragomans, and in their private lives, as Ottoman subjects. The focus, however, is on the nineteenth century and the branch of the Pisani family that served the British embassy, and not the Russian embassy. I do so for two reasons. The first is that there are not many studies on non-Muslim dragomans in the nineteenth century, and specifically on the Pisanis. The second is that I am not able to access Russian language sources and archives.

### *Locating Dragomans in Imperial Spaces*

There are two characteristics about the Pisanis in their roles as dragomans that stand out. The first is that they were often at the center of diplomatic activity between the Ottomans and the British. As Ottoman subjects, they were privy to British and Ottoman diplomatic exchanges, secrets, and protocols. Files in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi - BOA) are full of references to the Pisanis in their roles as dragomans, but not very much on their personal lives. The second involves their representation and location inside Ottoman and British imperial spaces, and the extent to which they had agency in negotiating such representation, categories of belonging, and the boundaries of their identity. Both of these features call attention to the organization of imperial space in the Ottoman Empire. What made the Pisanis unique in Ottoman political and social landscapes was neither the fact that they were non-Muslim or members of the Levantine community, nor even that they were dragomans.

It was their location inside of the Ottoman Empire and British Empire, which, though directly linked to their identity and to their occupation as dragomans, was based on exclusion, not inclusion. The boundaries that separated the Pisanis from both of these empires were also the ones that facilitated their negotiation inside Ottoman and British structures. In other words, the fluid, irregular, and fluctuant configuration of empires allowed the Pisanis to occupy “indeterminate spaces” and “ambiguous places” when they wanted to.<sup>17</sup> That flexibility is different than the way actors are conceptualized in the nation-state model.

What makes intermediaries and the spaces they operated in so interesting, yet difficult to map, is due to their unique location inside empires. Unlike nation-states, which regulate identities through carefully defined and compartmentalized categories of citizenship, comprised of a seemingly unified, homogenized group of people located in a single territory,<sup>18</sup> the boundaries of belonging were much more fluid in empires. Empires were unsteady, in constant flux, and focused on meaning production in an effort to manage people in vast territories made of diverse groups of people with different ethnicities and religious confessions. These people often had nothing in common with one another, other than their association with the ruling imperial power. If the functioning of the nation-state hinges on the maintenance of a uniform populace with shared interests, and fixed identities and citizenship, empires “gave rise both to new zones of exclusion and social groups with privileged exemption.”<sup>19</sup> Intermediaries, particularly Levantines in the Ottoman Empire, fit into the latter category because they were members of an excluded minority and acquired privileged positions in both non-Muslim and Muslim circles due

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<sup>17</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* 18 no. 1 (2006): 137.

<sup>18</sup> Jane Burbank, Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and Politics of Difference*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8. Though Burbank and Cooper’s comparison of empires and nation-states is thorough, I disagree with their point that empires do not exclude those who do not belong.

<sup>19</sup> Stoler, 128.

to their affiliation with foreign empires. But what is the value in analyzing these intermediaries in such a way? What do they teach about the people within empires?

The answer to both of these questions is related to the process of how the excluded, which in this case were intermediaries that belonged to the non-Muslim community in Istanbul, became included in imperial polities and categories of belonging. Nation-state models do not fit into this conceptualization, but empires and their structures facilitated and permitted the existence of multiple identities.<sup>20</sup> Examining the Pisanis in this way provides insight into how multiple identities were manageable and managed by certain actors, and offers a method through which to analyze how dynamics of exclusion turn into dynamics of inclusion. Moving beyond nation-state perceptions of how people are categorized through top down and arbitrary institutional structures and toward an analysis from the bottom up calls attention to processes of meaning production, the negotiation of identities, and the agency that intermediaries had in shaping the contours of imperial structures and inter-imperial relations. Spatial analysis furthermore enables a critical historical analysis of the methods through which intermediaries' linked empires through the negotiation of their own identities, and their engagement with the empires they operated within and between.

Spatial concepts employed to examine empires are usually bound up in language determined by analytical frameworks used to point out the many trajectories that connected empires together. Postcolonial theorists have edged past traditional concepts of "center and

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<sup>20</sup> Krishan Kumar, however, argues that there is some similarities in the features of empires and nation-states, though he is cautious in merging the two concepts together and treating them as mutually exclusive. In terms of people in empires, he argues that rulers "tend to define its character" and they are the "state-bearing" peoples of empire. He points out that as specific ethnic groups identify with the nation-state, this also happened in empires. His point is that in both empires and nation-states, there are groups that derive their identity from either entity. He also notes that the sense of identity of imperial peoples as a type of "imperial" or "missionary" nationalism, though admits that there are problems with that terminology, given the fact that nationalism as an ideology did not emerge until the eighteenth century, and that empires are not nation-states and vice-versa. Krishan Kumar, "Nation-states as empires, empires as nation-states: two principles, one practice?" *Theory and Society* 39 no. 2 (2010): 129-130.

periphery” and “metropolitan and colonial” to emphasize the components that connected imperial projects. They argue for a “networked conception of imperial interconnectedness,” a conceptualization that is useful to avoid the binaries of “center and periphery” or “metropole and colony,” which privileged the colonial power over the states and peoples that it subjugated.<sup>21</sup> One way to locate these types of networks and components is through examining what Alan Lester and David Lambert call the “imperial careering” of people who travelled, resided, and were immersed in multiple sites of empire and across trans-imperial spaces. In looking at the careers of such actors through biography, life-geographies, and I would add to that prosopography, “we can gain insight into the dynamic trajectories and networks of knowledge, power, and culture that connected the multiple sites of empire to each other, to imperial metropole and to extra-imperial spaces and beyond.”<sup>22</sup> Lambert and Lester are referring here to a method for analyzing British colonial projects.

In another article, Lester argues that together with “networked notions of empire,” “networked conception of imperial space” and analyses of the sites and components that connected empires and colonies, will allow for more useful conceptualizations of the complexity of the interconnectedness of empires.<sup>23</sup> According to him, imperial space is ““the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories,” many of them shaped by specific colonial or anticolonial projects,” including settler capitalism, commercial enterprise, and governmentality. Metropolitan and colonial places are specific meeting points of these types of trajectories.<sup>24</sup> Though the Ottoman

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<sup>21</sup> David Lambert, Alan Lester, “Imperial Spaces, Imperial Subjects,” in *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial careering in the long nineteenth century*, eds. David Lambert and Alan Lester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11; Simon Potter, Jonathan Saha, “Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories in Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16 no. 1 (2015). Page numbers are not provided. The article is very much a review of the state of the field of British Imperial historiography.

<sup>22</sup> Lambert and Lester, *Imperial Spaces*, 23-24.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 4 no. 1 (2006): 130-134.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 136. In this definition, Lester cites the work of Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

Empire was never colonized, the trajectories and spaces that dragomans traversed were similar to the sites and spaces inside imperial polities that connected empires together in colonial contexts. Yet, as Lambert and Lester also point out, in the British context imperial spaces and spatial concepts have rarely been examined.<sup>25</sup> Ottoman historiography, however, has underscored the relationship between the imperial center and the provinces,<sup>26</sup> and there has been a recent surge in studies that emphasize the multiple sites of connectivities between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, particularly comparative studies.

According to Natalie Rothman, the turn towards examining engagement with other states and societies has had significant consequences for understanding how categories of cultural “difference” and “sameness” have been shaped. It forces new methods of analysis to complement comparative studies, specifically transregional studies that analyze the “movements across boundaries of both people and signifying practices.”<sup>27</sup> In examining these boundaries and the people that established connectivities between empires, actors and their networks become important because they moved beyond bounded notions of space and place that limit our ability to analyze imperial interconnectedness, and force us to consider how imperial space is a “sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories” that these actors operated among and between.<sup>28</sup> Examining the “imperial careering” of the Pisanis in this light calls attention to how imperial polities were connected, and provides a view from the bottom-up of how that process actually worked. Equally important is that it illuminates the daily life of a family of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects who were central to that process, the opportunities that were presented to them, and constant

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 10-11, fn. 44.

<sup>28</sup> Lester, Allan, 14.

negotiation of their status inside the imperial spaces they operated in due to their positions as dragomans at the British Embassy.

The embassy was indeed an institution and one space of encounter that connected Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Spatial concepts and analytical frameworks employed to delineate the connectivities of and between empires have undergone significant shifts in British historiography. Scholars of British imperial history have begun to emphasize new methodologies and analytical tools to be used in examining the specificities of the connectivities between empires, particularly regarding the British Empire and its colonies. Drawing on postcolonial theory, Potter and Saha have argued that historians of the British Empire can benefit from writing “connected histories of empire” and analyzing the methodologies of related fields, including global and transnational history, comparative history, and post-colonial theory.<sup>29</sup> They point out middlemen of different types were “connectors,” a term used by transnational historians to describe intermediaries, brokers, and go-betweens.<sup>30</sup> If “imperial careering” is one key to understanding the spaces that connected imperial projects, how can we account for the spaces in which these actors operated while attached to such projects?

Christine Philliou and Alan Mikhail have suggested that Ottomanists begin to look beyond traditions in Ottoman historiography that place the Ottoman Empire as being different or similar to Europe, as “traditionalist” or going through long phases of “westernization.” They argue that historians should start to examine the “processes going on in the space “between,” –

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<sup>29</sup> See Simon Potter, Jonathan Saha, “Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories in Empire.” No pages numbers are provided. The article is very much a review of the state of the field of British Imperial historiography. Their historiographical discussion and argument follows closely to that made by Alan Lester in the previously mentioned article, “Imperial Circuits and Networks.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, quoted in Potter and Saha, No page numbers are provided; On the usefulness of using imperial careers as a method for studying empires as a dynamic network model, see David Lambert, “Reflections on the Concept of Imperial Biographies, The British Case,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40 (2014): 22-41.

not the void, but in areas of contestation between many forces, actors and, places.”<sup>31</sup> One such example of this is Ziad Fahmy’s article on extra-territoriality in Alexandria. Using US consular records, Fahmy has shown how residents in middle to late nineteenth century Alexandria used their protégé status (protected subject status) from different consulates to their advantage to move in and out of different legal jurisdictions, in order to obtain legal or economic benefits. He describes them as “legal chameleons” that operated in the “jurisdictional borderlands” of Alexandria.<sup>32</sup> Karen Barkey has called attention to the intermediate space that existed between empires, and the interstitial men that occupied it and facilitated exchange.<sup>33</sup> For Barkey, it was in the intermediate space where boundaries were crossed and agreements were made by these types of actors that undergirded empires, and extended their longevity.<sup>34</sup> Such actors had power and were influential in that they could use their position between empires to support or oppose existing imperial structures and either help to maintain the status-quo, or dissent.<sup>35</sup> If actors, or intermediaries that operated in-between empires were essential for the maintenance of empire, how can actors that operated simultaneously within empires be classified?

Levantine dragomans are often considered to be actors that were “in-between” the Ottoman Empire and Europe, on account of their being non-Muslim Ottoman subjects who claimed non-Ottoman cultural roots, but were nevertheless marked by vague European habits and ancestry.<sup>36</sup> This distinction, which is hardly neat, attempts to conceptualize complicated

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Mikhail, Christine M. Philliou, “The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54 no. 4 (2012): 743.

<sup>32</sup> Ziad Fahmy, “Jurisdictional Borderlands: Extraterritoriality and “Legal Chameleons” in Precolonial Alexandria, 1840-1870,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55 no. 2 (2013): 305-329.

<sup>33</sup> Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 13, 36-39. Here Barkey refers to that intermediate space as a ‘frontier’ space between empires while discussing the relationship between the Byzantine and Seljuk empires.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 13, 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 157-158.

<sup>36</sup> See Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, Chapter 7; Edhem Eldem, “Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City: Myths and Realities,” in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* eds. Ato Quayson, Girish Diswani (NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 212–30.



social actors, and to offer an analytical framework for the spaces within which Levantine dragomans operated between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. I am interested in how the Pisanis operated *within* British and Ottoman imperial spaces, including the British Embassy in Istanbul, where they were employed, and in the Ottoman Empire, in which they were born. Examining the Pisanis this way represents an added layer to the complexity of the boundaries straddled by Levantine dragomans.

This study is a social history of the Pisani family of dragomans in nineteenth century Istanbul. I demonstrate how members of a family of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects managed to work with the opportunities that were presented to them in a relatively short period of time in the Ottoman capital. The focus, however, is not on diplomacy, nor on one family member. It is a prosopography, and I am more interested in their daily lives, relationships, modes of conduct, and how they functioned as non-Muslim Ottomans with European protection due to their positions as dragomans, instead of just their roles as intermediaries. Throughout, I argue that rather than simply acting in-between two empires, the Pisanis operated within the Ottoman and British empires and their institutions, and often did so on their own terms. They choreographed how they wanted to incorporate themselves into either empire by negotiating their status within Ottoman and British imperial structures. Focusing on how they operated within Ottoman and British imperial spaces and structures demonstrates how members of this family mediated their positions, livelihood, and at times, their juridical status. The Pisanis were active and cognizant of how they wanted to operate inside Ottoman and British imperial spaces and institutions. I examine a number of incidents, including business transactions, inter-imperial disagreements between the Ottomans and British where the Pisanis figured prominently, and legal questions of

subjecthood to explore the opportunities and limitations available to the Pisanis as Ottoman subjects serving the British Embassy in Istanbul.

In examining how the Pisanis operated within imperial spaces, I concentrate on the spatial, institutional, and relational characteristics that were interconnected through fluid, yet formal and informal boundaries.<sup>37</sup> By formal boundaries, I mean official boundaries between British and Ottoman state and society; by informal ones, I refer to social spaces including community and residence. All are “entwined” or “entangled” because the Pisanis operated inside British and Ottoman structures simultaneously, and their interactions within these structures affected the trajectories of the spatial, institutional, and relational characteristics of imperial space.<sup>38</sup>

The first characteristic, spatial, distinguished the territorialized boundaries that separated Britain and the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul. These constituted official structures, such as those of the British Embassy/Consulate in Istanbul and the Sublime Porte, as well as the semi-official (or officially supported) separation in the imperial capital between the living quarters of the “European” or Levantine community in Pera and Galata, and the Ottoman-Muslim community in Istanbul. The second characteristic, institutional, denotes the configuration of the specific institutions that the Pisanis moved in and out of, including Ottoman and European legal systems and courts, again the bureaucracies of the British Embassy and the Sublime Porte, and the organizational structure of Ottoman society, particularly the separation of religious communities

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<sup>37</sup> I adapt Philliou’s distinction between formal and informal politics to formal and informal boundaries. Philliou’s distinction is the following: Formal, official politics— which includes formal positions and titles, state-sanctioned meetings and social events, official receptions of ambassadors, and official memos and documents sent between official representatives of state or individual agents— and unofficial, informal politics, by which I mean meetings that occurred in private residences, with or without the express consent and sanction of the central state, meetings that were ordered to be covert or informal, that involved individuals without official political positions, and that were arranged to convey information on behalf of official state actors. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, xxiv. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*; Eldem, “Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City: Myths and Realities.”

<sup>38</sup> I borrow the idea of ‘entwine’ from Michael Mann. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume II: The rise of classes and nation-states, 1760-1914* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), introduction.

or *millets*. The third characteristic, relational, refers to the distinction between dragomans' official duties for the British Embassy, and their private lives, namely their day-to-day activities as members of the Levantine community in Pera. Their particular interactions in these spaces were determined by the nature of their relations embedded in them, including their activities in family life, relationships with members of their community, and personal transactions. The flexibility of imperial spaces allowed the Pisanis to interpret, determine, and negotiate the specific manner in which they operated inside Ottoman and British politics, society, and legal jurisdictions; it thus enabled them to establish a certain degree of self-regulation of their activities inside British and Ottoman imperial structures as non-Muslim Ottoman dragomans.

### ***Dragomans in the Ottoman Empire***

The study of dragomans in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire is still in the preliminary stages of research. The attention that dragomans have received, though informative and important, has created more questions than answers, and for the most part, studies have been more descriptive than analytical. Dragomans have been ascribed many hats, portrayed and defined as translators and interpreters, agents, intermediaries, cross-cultural brokers, go-betweens, and boundary crossers. Scholars and amateur historians have approached non-Muslim dragomans in the nineteenth century through the frameworks of two greater metanarratives in Ottoman historiography: diplomacy and identity. Yet, to a certain extent, analyses of dragomans have not been placed within the wider and most dominant historiographical trends of the Ottoman Empire since at least the 1950s. These include the paradigms of decline, modernization/westernization,<sup>39</sup> center-periphery relations,<sup>40</sup> or world-systems theory.<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> See for example, Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, transl. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, (NY: Praeger, 1973); Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill, 1964). Lewis and Berkes both subscribed to the decline and modernization paradigms.

frameworks of diplomacy and Levantine identity are also treated as coterminous, suggesting that if one was a dragoman for a foreign embassy in Istanbul in the nineteenth century, they were, or must have certainly been a Levantine. The identity of dragomans has largely been unquestioned, and the concept of Levantine as an identity is murky, very broad, and circumvents the possibility of any self-identification by dragomans, or other non-Muslim members of that community. Non-Muslim dragomans have also been treated as parochial, marginal actors in Ottoman historiography, and studies have largely failed to address the interaction between dragomans and the non-Muslim community of Pera and Galata that they were part of, and with Ottoman imperial structures.

If we take into account all of the areas of scholarly research that dragomans and members of the Levantine community appear, then the historiography about both of them is vast. This is particularly true for the Levantine community. But for dragomans operating in the nineteenth century, the historiography is sparse and uneven. On the one hand, much of the literature directly concerning the Levantine community has been produced by both amateur historians, who are either self-identified Levantines or descendants of Levantines, and by scholars. On the other hand, studies on dragomans, and especially Levantine dragomans in the nineteenth century are very few. In terms of sources, studies have relied on a range of material including travelogues, memoirs, diaries, and material from European archives. For the most part, material from the BOA has been neglected. That problem is most likely due to an inability to work with Ottoman language sources and not simply archival material, but also Ottoman chronicles. The lack of diversity in sources has of course affected methodologies, producing limitations on how

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<sup>40</sup> Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?," *Daedalus* 102 (1) 1973: 169-190.

<sup>41</sup> See for example the articles in *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, ed. Huri Islamoğlu (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Reşat Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century* (NY: State University of New York Press, 1988).

interaction between members of the Levantine community and dragomans with the Ottoman state can be assessed. That does not mean, however, that fruitful studies have not been produced, but that these have been largely confined to general histories of the Levantine community, family histories, discussions of identity, and the roles of members of the Levantine community in the banking and trade sectors in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, most studies have focused on the Levantine community in İzmir and not Istanbul. The reason for the preference for İzmir over Istanbul, however, is unclear.

The history of the Levantine community has largely been preserved by the efforts of members of the Levantine community in Istanbul and İzmir, and by descendants of Levantines. The Levantine Heritage Foundation has been quite active in that endeavor and has organized conferences in Turkey and in Europe to bring together descendants and academics. The Foundation also hosts a website focused on the preservation and dissemination of Levantine history, and includes testimonies from Levantines and Levantine descendants, bibliographic and research materials, and interviews with scholars about their research on the community.<sup>42</sup> Other Levantines have conducted book length studies on their community.

Rinaldo Marmara, a Levantine and descendant of a Genoese family, has published book-length studies on different aspects of the Levantine community in Istanbul, including Pancaldi, an old Levantine district of Istanbul, and about Chios, an island where many members of the Levantine community in the Ottoman Empire descended.<sup>43</sup> Another Levantine, Livio Missir de Lusignan has also published books on the Levantine community, focusing on the lives and histories of Levantine families in the Ottoman Empire from the founding of the community in

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<sup>42</sup> [www.levantineheritagefoundation.org/](http://www.levantineheritagefoundation.org/); [www.levantineheritage.com](http://www.levantineheritage.com).

<sup>43</sup> Rinaldo Marmara, *Pancaldi: Quartier Levantin du XIX Siècle* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004); *La Communauté Levantine de Constantinople: De L'empire Byzantin à La République Turquie* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2012).

the mid-fifteenth century up to the late 1990s.<sup>44</sup> Giovanni Scognamillo has published a memoir about his life as a Levantine in Istanbul.<sup>45</sup> Willy Sperco, also a Levantine, published a short study that traced the origins of Italian Levantine families in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>46</sup> Other studies that include information about the Levantine community are found in works on the Latin Catholic or Roman Catholic community in Pera and Galata, otherwise known as the *Magnifica Comunità*, which included the Levantine community. The *Magnifica Comunità* was located in Galata, or Pera, as referred to by Europeans, and was largely composed of descendants of the Genoese that had been present there since before the Fourth Crusade.<sup>47</sup> Following Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople against the Byzantine Empire in 1453, he granted capitulations to the Genoese community in Galata and later the Venetian community.<sup>48</sup> Other studies that include the Levantine community as a whole or members of the Levantine community are on relations between the Ottoman Empire and European empires, including Venice and France, and on the Italian and French communities in Istanbul.<sup>49</sup> The Levantine community and its members can

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<sup>44</sup> Livio Missir de Lusignan, *Vie Latine de l'empire Ottoman* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004); *Familles Latines de L'empire Ottoman* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Scognamillo, *Bir Levantenin Beyoğlu Anıları* (Metis Yayınları, 1990). The book was republished with additions in 2009 by Agora Kitaplığı.

<sup>46</sup> Willy Sperco, *Les Anciennes Familles Italiennes de Turquie* (Istanbul: Lui Zelliç Matbaacılık Ltd Şirketi). There is no publication date provided for the book.

<sup>47</sup> Eric Dursteler, "Education and identity in Constantinople's Latin Rite community, c. 1600," *Renaissance Studies* 18 no. 2 (2004): 288-289; E. Natalie Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 no. 4 (2009): 776-777.

<sup>48</sup> van den Boogert, Maurits H. *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and Beraths in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 7. On the Latin community of Istanbul, see for example, M.A. Belin, *Histoire de la Latinité de Constantinople* (Paris: Aine, 1872, second edition, 1894); Eric Dursteler, "Erken Modern Dönem İstanbulu'nda Latin Kilisesi Hıristiyanları/Latin-Rite Christians in Early Modern Istanbul," in *Osmanlı İstanbulu*, eds. Feridun M. Emecen, Emrah Safa Gürkan (Istanbul: İstanbul Mayıs Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2014), 127-146; Charles Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire 1453-1923* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 178; Rinaldo Marmara, *Bizans İmparatorluğu'ndan Günümüze İstanbul Latin Cemaati ve Kilisesi* (Istanbul: Kitap, 2006); Rinaldo Marmara *Précis Historique de la Communauté latine de Constantinople et de son Eglise: De l'Empire Byzantin à la République de Turquie* (Istanbul: Latin Katolik Ruhani Reisliği), 2003.

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Eric Dursteler, "Neighbors: Venetians and Ottomans in Early Modern Galata," in *Multicultural Europe and Cultural Exchange*, ed. James P. Helfers (Turnhout: BREPOLs, 2005), 33-47; Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Edhem Eldem, "The Ethnic Structure of Galata," *Biannual Istanbul* 1 (1993), 28-33; Halil İnalcık,

also be found in studies on urban history and port cities in the Ottoman Empire,<sup>50</sup> on works on Ottoman financial and banking history in the nineteenth century,<sup>51</sup> and on architecture in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>52</sup> Yet, there are not many studies specifically focused on the Levantine community.

The multifaceted studies that the Levantine community and its members appear in are disproportionate when books and article-length studies specifically discussing the Levantine community are taken into consideration. Some works, such as Osman Öndeş' *Asil Efendiler Levantler* (Levantine: The Real Gentlemen) take a more prosopographical approach and document the various Levantine families in Istanbul and Izmir; articulating the interconnectedness of the community, and the types of business and other activities they were

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“Ottoman Galata 1453-1553,” in *Première rencontre internationale sur l’empire Ottoman et la Turquie moderne*, ed. Edhem Eldem (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1991); E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire*; E. Natalie Rothman “Narrating Conversion and Subjecthood in the Venetian-Ottoman Contact Zone,” in *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*, eds. Harald Hendrix, Todd Richardson and Lieke Stelling (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 109-150; E. Natalie Rothman, “Conversion and Convergence in the Venetian-Ottoman Borderlands,” *Identity and Religion in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean*, special issue of *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, ed. John J. Martin, 41 no. 3 (2011): 601-634.

<sup>50</sup> Marc Aymes, *A Provincial History of the Ottoman Empire: Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean in the nineteenth Century* (NY: Routledge, 2014), particularly pages 124-126; Edhem Eldem, “Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City: Myths and Realities,” 212-230; Daniel Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World, 1550-1650* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1990); Daniel Goffman, “Izmir: from village to colonial port city,” in *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir and Istanbul*, Eds. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 79-134; Malte Fuhrmann and Vangelis Kechriotis, “The late Ottoman port-cities and their inhabitants: subjectivity, urbanity, and conflicting orders,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24 no. 2 (2009): 71-78; Malte Fuhrmann, “Cosmopolitan Imperialists and the Ottoman Port Cities. Conflicting logics in urban social fabrics,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 67 (2003): 2-11; Marie Carmen Smyrnelis, *Une société hors de soi: identités et relations sociales à Smyrne aux XVIII et XIX siècles* (Louvain: Peeters, 2012); *Une Ville Ottomane Plurielle: Smyrne aux XVIII et XIX Siècles* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2006); Eleni Frangakis-Syrett, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1820* (Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1992); Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840-1880* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> See for example, Edhem Eldem, *The History of the Ottoman Bank* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Historical Research Center, 1999); Nora Şeni, Sophie Le Tarnec, *Les Camondo ou l’éclipse d’une fortune* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1997); Nora Şeni, “The Camondos and their Imprint on 19<sup>th</sup> Century Istanbul,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 663-675; Nora Şeni, “Finances ottomans et figures levantines,” in *L’Accession de la Turquie à la civilisation industrielle*, eds. Jacques Thobie, Jean Louis Bacqué-Grammont (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1987), 13-24.

<sup>52</sup> See for example, Paolo Giardelli, “Sheltering Diversity. Levantine Architecture in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” in *Multicultural Urban Fabric and Types in the South and Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. Maurice Cerasi, Attilio Petruccioli, Adriana Sarro and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Beirut Texts und Studien, Herausgegeben vom Orient-Institut, 2007), 113-140; Alyson Wharton, *The Architects of Ottoman Constantinople: The Balyan Family and the History of Ottoman Architecture*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

involved in.<sup>53</sup> An earlier work of his also focuses on Levantine shipping agents, and their impact on trade in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>54</sup> Bulent Şenocak's *Levant'ın Yıldızı İzmir: Levantenler, Rumlar, Ermeniler ve Yahüdiler* (İzmir, the Star of the Levant: Levantines, Rum, Armenians, and Jews) takes a comparative and ethnographic approach to write a history of Izmir through the eyes of members of the Levantine, Orthodox, Armenian and Jewish communities, while demonstrating the city's tolerance towards these communities and western culture.<sup>55</sup> Other studies directly focusing on the Levantine community are concerned with the question of Levantine identity.

The metanarrative related to Levantine identity has produced an operational term that lacks clarity, and is empirically and conceptually dysfunctional. Attempts to define Levantines and to construct a conceptual framework that better explains where they fit in Ottoman society treats Levantines as separate social actors that operated inside the Ottoman Empire, rather than actively engaging with Ottoman society. Nora Şeni views Levantines as a “pure product of mixtures,” mainly between “*francs*” and members of Ottoman-Christian nations.<sup>56</sup> Fikret Yılmaz argues that Levantines were Westerners that were “in limbo” living in the Ottoman Empire,<sup>57</sup> while İlber Ortaylı defines Levantines as people, mainly Italians, Catalans, and French, that migrated from the western to the eastern Mediterranean, as well as others who migrated from central and northern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were generally

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<sup>53</sup> Osman Öndeş, *Asil Efendiler Levantenler* (İzmir: Şenocak Yayınları), 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Osman Öndeş, *Son Levantenler – Gemi Ajentaları* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayıncılık, 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Bulent Şenocak, *Levant'ın Yıldızı İzmir: Levantenler, Rumlar, Ermeniler ve Yahüdiler* (İzmir, the Star of the Levant: Levantines, Rum, Armenians and Jews), (İzmir: Şenocak Yayınları, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Nora Şeni, “Dynasties Drogmans et Levantinisme à Istanbul,” in *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel (Montreal: L'Harmattan Inc, 1997), 161.

<sup>57</sup> Fikret Yılmaz, “Ârafda Kalanlar/Those in Limbo,” in *Geçmişten Günümüze Levantenler/Levantines: From the Past to the Present*, ed. Fikret Yılmaz (İzmir: Kültür, Sanat ve Tarih Yayınları), 49-78. Yılmaz provides an excellent overview on studies about Levantines written in Turkish.



Christian expatriates who spoke Italian, and then French.<sup>58</sup> Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis argues that Levantines are difficult to define and do not constitute a coherent group, though they shared common interests and a relational space characterized by their national, ethnic, religious and social heterogeneity, and the links created by and to their members.<sup>59</sup> Philip Mansel avoids articulating any precise definition of Levantine, but offers a conceptual framework on how to think about the Levant, and its inhabitants. For Mansel, the Levant, or eastern Mediterranean is concurrently an “area, a dialogue, a quest, and a mentality.”<sup>60</sup> He does not provide a direct definition of Levantines, but through his analysis of the port cities of Beirut, Smyrna, and Alexandria, he demonstrates that the Levant was multicultural and multi-ethnic, and the site of an ongoing dialogue between east and west.

Arus Yumul’s and Fahri Dikkaya’s edited volume *Avrupalı mı? Levanten mi?* is a collection of articles that debate the different definitions and concepts of “Levantine,” and discuss the Levantine communities in Istanbul and Izmir. The book treats “Levantine” as a hybrid identity composed of a combination of European and Ottoman traits.<sup>61</sup> The most extensive study on the Levantine community and Levantine identity has been Oliver Jens Schmitt’s *Levantiner: Lebenswelten und Identitäten einer ethnokonfessionellen Gruppe im osmanischen Reich im „langen 19. Jahrhundert.“* Schmitt’s study analyzes the Levantine communities in Istanbul and Izmir, and how this group handled the transition from empire to nation-state, the concept of a “Levantine identity,” and how the community managed to preserve their identity during the nineteenth century. It also examines how Levantines engaged with

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<sup>58</sup> İlber Ortaylı, “Levantenler/Levantines,” in *Geçmişten Günümüze Levantenler/Levantines*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Marie Carmen-Smyrnelis, *Une société hors de soi: identités et relations sociales à Smyrne au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, 228. Smyrnelis also examined contemporaneous historical studies and chronicles to compare the usage of the term ‘Levantine’ in Smyrna, Alexandria, and Istanbul. She shows that the meaning of the term differed in each place, though ‘Levantine’ denoted or included being ‘European.’ See pages 228-233.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Avrupalı mı? Levanten mi?*, eds. Arus Yumul, Fahri Dikkaya (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2006).

Ottoman society. Schmitt's study is based on archival material from Europe, the contemporaneous press and studies on the community, travelogues and memoirs. Schmitt argues that Levantines were an ethno-confessional group that was largely Catholic, but ethnically diverse.<sup>62</sup> In addition to Schmitt's analysis of Levantine identity and the centrality of religious confession to his argument, works by Rinaldo Marmara and Livio Missir di Lusignano do not use the term Levantine, and instead deploy the term "Latin" to describe this community. But as Alessandro Pannuti points out, doing so limits their terminology to really only describing members of the Catholic Church in the Levantine community.<sup>63</sup> Another and more recent article-length study that takes up the question of Levantine identity is Malte Fuhrmann's "Was there a Levantine Community in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Istanbul? The Quest for an Elusive Identity."

In this article Fuhrmann enters into the debate on Levantine identity. Although he simply defines Levantines as a "group," his analysis about the issues confronting scholars that study the concept of Levantine identity is much more profound. He rightly points out the fluidity of ethnic identities of actors in Ottoman society, and the difficulty in assigning specific identities to certain types of groups that did not easily fit into the boundaries of identity articulated by the Ottoman state, which rested on religion and denomination, or the *millet* system. Members of the Levantine community shared common traits such as being residents or descendants of people from the Eastern Mediterranean, and were usually members of the Latin Catholic, or Roman Catholic church. He also points out that language, denomination, geographical origin or even legal status could not be used as definitive criteria for Levantine identity because of the diversity of the

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<sup>62</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Levantiner: Lebenswelten und Identitäten einer ethnokonfessionellen Gruppe im osmanischen Reich im „langen 19. Jahrhundert“* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag München, 2005), 15 and part 2 of the book.

<sup>63</sup> Alessandro Pannuti, "Istanbul's Italian Levantines among the Other Non-Muslims: a Community's Fortune and Dissolution Despite Identity Preservation," *Levantine Heritage* (2008).  
<http://levantineheritage.com/pdf/pannuti3.pdf>.

community. Many people considered to have been Levantine spoke different languages, came from different places, were not all Catholic, and had different legal statuses.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Fuhrmann draws attention to one major problem in any discussion on Levantine identity, which is the lack of information on how members of the Levantine community in the Ottoman Empire identified themselves. Due to this problem, Fuhrmann argues that there are two opposing points of view about what constituted Levantine identity. The first is the above- mentioned argument made by Schmitt, which was their Catholic confession and sense of belonging in a specific community. Fuhrmann shows that the second is the argument made by Edhem Eldem in his article “‘Levanten’ Kelimesi Üzerine,” where he argues that in the nineteenth century “Levantine” only existed in negative contexts, usually when slandering people. In that article Eldem rejects the category of Levantine altogether.<sup>65</sup> To be fair, however, Eldem also noted that the word itself had a variety of meanings.<sup>66</sup> Eldem does make the point about the deployment of “Levantine” in a negative context in another article where he discusses Levantine identity in the context of cosmopolitanism in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. His definition is worth quoting at length:

the term “Levant” had traditionally been used to describe a geographical area extending from the coast of Dalmatia to Egypt, a rather close match with the broad definition of the eastern Mediterranean basin. “Levantine,” however, had been to a large extent redefined culturally and politically during the nineteenth century. Until then, the term had been used – especially by the French – to describe rather indiscriminately all the inhabitants of the area, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, much like a synonym for “Ottoman subject,” while Muslims were lumped under the collective appellation of “Turks.” By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the meaning attached to this term had greatly changed: from an initially neutral and inclusive term, it had gradually moved

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<sup>64</sup> Malte Fuhrmann, “Was there a Levantine Community in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Istanbul? The Quest for an Elusive Identity.” *Unpublished Paper*, 1-3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5.

<sup>66</sup> Edhem Eldem, “‘Levanten’ Kelimesi Üzerine,” in *Avrupalı mı? Levanten mi?*, 12.

in the direction of a derogatory label used to describe the hybrid identities of half-Westernized local non-Muslims and of Westerners who had “gone native” as a result of several generations of residence in the Ottoman lands. Considering that one of the dominant features of Levantine identity – as described by “real” Westerners – was an eagerness to integrate and assimilate into European culture...<sup>67</sup>

Eldem touches on one crucial point that many studying Levantines overlook, which is the change in the meaning of the term Levantine by the nineteenth century. There is a third issue that needs to be added to the problem of coming to terms with a definition of Levantine, and one that Natalie Rothman already pointed out in her study on trans-imperial subjects between Venice and Istanbul in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rothman devotes one full chapter to examining how the articulation and meaning of “*Levantini*” shifted overtime, and how people used the changes in the meaning of the term to move in and out of ethno-linguistic and cultural boundaries, to their advantage. In the sixteenth century, the term was used to describe Jews in Venice, particularly diasporic Sephardic Jews. In the seventeenth century “Levantine” referred to Jews and other Ottoman merchants in Venice.<sup>68</sup> Later, Levantine came to mean “inhabitants of the Levant, or those employed in the Levant,” and by the nineteenth century, “non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, marked vaguely by “European” habits and sometimes ancestry but corrupted by their surrounding environment into a lifestyle that was not quite European.”<sup>69</sup> Levantine could also be used to describe anybody who was a Muslim-Ottoman, Christian-Ottoman, non-Muslim Ottoman, or Jewish Ottoman.<sup>70</sup> Rothman also shows that the term could be used strategically in order to express or confirm belonging within Venice. In other words, actors could move in and out of the category of “Levantine” whenever it was suitable for them.

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<sup>67</sup> Eldem, “Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City: Myths and Realities,” 221-222.

<sup>68</sup> Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 213.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 213-214. Rothman also quotes Schmitt, *Levantine*, 57-58.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 226.

All of these perspectives are valid, raise important points and warrant careful consideration. I thus consider “Levantine” to be a complex and evolving mechanism of identification for a group of actors that were non-Muslim Ottoman subjects attached to a community characterized by a mixture of Ottoman and European cultural traits. Though I reject its heuristic usefulness.<sup>71</sup> I take up the issue of Levantine identity and subjecthood in chapter 3, which was and many ways still is a prescribed marker of identity for the Pisanis and for other non-Muslim Ottoman subjects that served as dragomans in the foreign embassies of Istanbul.

In spite of their numbers and roles in major diplomatic affairs between the Ottoman Empire and European empires, there are no book-length studies on dragomans that were members of the Levantine community in Istanbul in the nineteenth century. There are, however, a few edited volumes where articles include studies on dragomans during this period. Two other books on dragomans in the nineteenth century have also been written, but these are biographical studies of European-born dragomans that served two separate embassies.<sup>72</sup> The major problem with many of these works is that they are insular in that they describe aspects of the lives and work of dragomans as they were related to the Levantine community and Europe, and not how they engaged with Ottoman politics or society. One important reason for that is due to the lack of Ottoman sources used in these studies. Three studies, however, break from that practice.

Maurits van den Boogert’s work on dragomans in the eighteenth century has been the most complete, and has deepened our knowledge about how dragomans interacted with the embassies that employed them, and with the Ottoman state. Most of his focus has been on

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<sup>71</sup> I agree with Jens Hanssen’s point that Levant and Levantine actors were constantly evolving. See below, fn. 276 and his article, Jens Hanssen, ““Malhamé – Malfamé: Levantine Elites and Transimperial Networks on the Eve of the Young Turk Revolution,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 no.1 (2011): 31.

<sup>72</sup> G.R. Berridge, *Gerald Fitzmaurice (1865-1939), Chief Dragoman of the British Embassy in Turkey* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2007); Elizabeth Özdalga, *The Last Dragoman: Swedish Orientalist Johannes Kolmodin as Scholar, Activist and Diplomat* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Charles Malouf Samaha, *Nassif Mallouf, Dragoman and Orientalist (1823-1865)* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2010).

dragomans employed by the Dutch and the British in Aleppo, though occasionally he uses examples from dragomans employed by the French. In his study on the capitulations, van den Boogert, one of the few to engage with Ottoman sources, shows where dragomans fit into the protection system, the privileges that dragomans received, and their legal status as Ottoman subjects that received diplomatic protection from the European states that they served. van den Boogert demonstrates that dragomans were the most important of all *protégés* that received protection from European empires and that they enjoyed similar privileges to foreigners that came to the Ottoman Empire under the protection system. He also explains the processes through which dragomans received *berats* (a license/deed of appointment) and the rules that were attached to their appointment as salaried employees of the embassies.<sup>73</sup> Alongside his work on the legal position of dragomans, van den Boogert has examined their day-to-day functions as intermediaries, and their roles within their communities.<sup>74</sup> He has shown that dragomans supplemented the income they received from their work at the embassies with other activities, including trade and the sale of merchandise, arguing that their engagement with part-time employment was most likely common for many dragomans in the eighteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Like many of van den Boogert's studies, Judith Laffan's doctoral dissertation on dragomans in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century takes a deeper look at how they interacted with the Ottoman state.

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<sup>73</sup> Maurits H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and The Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls And Beraths in The 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). Also see, Maurits H. van den Boogert, "European Patronage in the Ottoman Empire: Anglo-Dutch conflicts of interest in Aleppo (1703-1755)," in eds. Hamilton et al, *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the Seventeenth Century to the early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 210-213.

<sup>74</sup> Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Intermediaries *par excellence*? Ottoman Dragomans in the Eighteenth Century," in *Hommes de l'entre-deux: Parcours individuels et portraits de groupes sur la frontière de la Méditerranée, XVI-XX siècle* eds. Bernard Heyberger, Chantal Verdeil (Paris, Les Indes savantes – Rivages des Xantons, 2009), 95-115.

<sup>75</sup> Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Ottoman Intermediaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Analysis of a 'dirty trade,'" *Oriente Moderno* 93 (2013): 547-562; Also see his discussion on the activities and wealth of Jirjis 'Ā'ida, the first dragoman of the British consulate in Aleppo, in van den Boogert, "Provocative Wealth: Non-Muslim Elites in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo," *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010): 219-237.

Laffan's dissertation concentrates on members of the Abkāriyūs family, a non-Muslim Christian family employed as dragomans by the British and American consuls in and around Beirut, and briefly in Cairo during the mid to late nineteenth century. Her specific purpose is to investigate the extent to which the Abkāriyūs' were affected by and responded to the Ottoman Nationality Law of 1869. Hers is a study on identity politics, and she shows how dragomans articulated and manifested belonging between imperial polities. Though Laffan did not use Ottoman sources, she achieves her goal of showing how members of the Abkāriyūs family negotiated their status between two empires. As the changes to Ottoman nationality reached the provinces, the Abkāriyūs' resisted being identified as Ottoman subjects because of their longstanding relationship with the British consulate, which brought them prestige and protection.<sup>76</sup>

The bulk of the work on dragomans and particularly those in the nineteenth century is comprised of articles that concentrate on those that were employed by foreign embassies in Istanbul. The work by the late Antoine Gautier and Marie de Testa, largely on dragomans that were members of the Levantine community, has been vast and illuminating in many respects. All of their studies are based on European sources, family memoirs, travelogues, and the contemporaneous press. Being a descendant of the Testa family, Marie de Testa and Gautier have had access to a range of material kept by that family, including family papers and photographs. Their work on dragomans and dragoman families has ranged from short biographical studies of dragomans and members of the Levantine community, to the education of dragomans and the origins of dragoman "dynasties."<sup>77</sup> Other studies, as either stand-alone

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<sup>76</sup> Laffan, 'Negotiating Empires.'

<sup>77</sup> Antoine Gautier (en collaboration avec Marie de Testa), *Drogmans, Diplomates et Ressortissants Européens Auprès la Porte Ottomane* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2013); *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de la Porte*

articles or edited volumes have explored dragomans' roles as actors in the foreign diplomatic community of Istanbul, the training of dragomans for their positions as translators and interpreters, as well as the process and practice of translation by dragomans in the empire.

Attending to the more practical side of the work that the dragomans conducted, studies have focused on the generalities of their position. These have largely described the inner-workings of the European embassies and where the dragomans fit in to those institutions. Their origins, the duties that they were expected to fulfill, their mobility within the embassies that they served, and at times, their shifts in employment to different European embassies, have all received some attention.<sup>78</sup> A small group of works has also focused on the dragomans employed by the Ottoman government in the Translation Office (*Bab-ı Âli Tercüme Odası*). These works have been enlightening in providing information on the process of the establishment of the translation office at the Sublime Porte that began in 1821 after the long-serving Phanariots were dismissed from Ottoman service because of their assumed collaboration with revolutionaries during Greek Revolution, and replaced by Muslims.<sup>79</sup> Christine Philliou has concentrated on the

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*Ottomane*; de Testa, Marie, Antoine Gautier, "Deux Grandes Dynasties de Drogmans: Les Fonton et Les Testa," in *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, 175-196.

<sup>78</sup> Suna Timur Agildere, "Les interprètes au carrefour des cultures: Où les drogmans dans l'Empire ottoman (XVIe-début du XXe siècle)," *Babel* 55 no. 1 (2009): 1-19; G.R. Berridge, *Gerald Fitzmaurice*; G.R. Berridge, "English Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries: The Early Nineteenth Century Origins of the Anglicization of the British Embassy *Drogmanat* in Constantinople," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 14 no. 4 (2003): 137-152; Allan Cunningham, "The Dragomans of the British Embassy at Constantinople," in *Eastern Questions in the Nineteenth Century, Collected Essays* vol. 1. ed. Edward Ingram (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 1-22; Roderic H. Davison, "The French Dragomanate in mid-Nineteenth Century Istanbul," in *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, 271-282; Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1851-1876*. NY: Gordian, 1973; Alexander H. de Groot, "Dragomans' Careers: Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829," in *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century*, eds. Alastair Hamilton, Alexander H. de Groot, Maurits van den Boogert (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 223-246; Alexander H. de Groot, "Protection and Nationality: The Decline of the Dragomans," in *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, 235-256; *Enfants de langue et Drogmans/Dil Oğlanları ve Tercümanları* (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995); Tijana Kristic, "Of Translation and Empire: Sixteenth Century Ottoman Imperial Interpreters as Renaissance Go-Betweens," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2011), 130-142; E. Natalie Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 no. 4 (2009): 771-800.

<sup>79</sup> Bilgin Aydın, "Divan-ı Hümayun Tercümanları ve Osmanlı Kültür ve Diplomasisindeki Yerleri," *The Journal of Ottoman Studies/Osmanlı Araştırmaları Dergisi* 29 (2007): 41-76; Sezai Balcı, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tercümanlık ve*



Phanariots, members of elite Greek families from the Phanar or Fener district in Istanbul. In her work, she analyzes the changes to Ottoman governance during the early nineteenth century through the story of Stephanos Vogorides, a Phanariot that survived the Greek Revolution of 1821, and managed to further integrate into the Ottoman imperial structure.<sup>80</sup> Other books have also appeared as autobiographies of dragomans that served the British Embassy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>81</sup>

Although important, the general picture that is drawn from these studies is one of insularity, lacking critical analysis of the relationship between the dragomans and the Sublime Porte and members of the Ottoman government. Rarely do we have any accounts of dragomans discussing their relationships with Ottoman governmental officials, comments on their acts of diplomatic brokerage for the embassies or their own influence at the Porte, in the embassy, or in their community. Instead, the roles that they fulfilled have been discussed in the context of the imperial power that they served, or their actions as members of the Levantine community in Istanbul and Smyrna. There is a similar deficiency in understanding the spaces that dragomans operated inside of as intermediaries, cultural brokers, mediators, translators, interpreters, and go-betweens.

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*Bab-ı Ali Tercüme Odası*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara University, 2006; Cahit Bilim, “Tercüme Odası” *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 1 (1990): 29-43; Mehmet Darakcioğlu, *Rebuilding the Tower of Babel: Language Divide, Employment of Translators, and the Translation Bureau of the Ottoman Empire*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2010; Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1799-1922* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 126-140; Gilles Veinstein, “The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters,” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization vol. 3*, ed. Kemal Çiçek (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2000), 607-615.

<sup>80</sup> Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, particularly chapters 1 and 4. Also see her article, “Communities on the Verge: Unravelling the Phanariot Ascendancy in Ottoman Governance,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51 no. 1 (2009): 151-181.

<sup>81</sup> Sir Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961); Sir Andrew Ryan, *The Last of the Dragomans* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1951).

The diversity of titles given to dragomans by contemporary observers and by the actors that dealt with them developed out of the multiple roles that they took on as skilled interlocutors and dialogists. The job itself, as translator or interpreter, was not necessarily exclusive to the larger cities or trading centers. Empire-wide, dragomans were used in official and unofficial capacities by foreign embassies, the Sublime Porte, private companies involved in trade and finance, and by pleasure-seeking travelers. The demand for interpreters and translators was quite high, and so too was the dependability on them by those who hired them. This was also hardly a phenomenon confined to the Ottoman Empire.

Outside of Ottoman historiography, different types of intermediaries and go-betweens have received some attention. Book-length studies and articles shed light on the multifarious roles that intermediaries took on in different empires and societies. These include a range of actors such as colonial interpreters in British India, traders, letter-writers and secretaries in Africa, indigenous actors in sixteenth century Brazil, interpreters in the Portuguese Empire, and intermediaries in Oaxaca.<sup>82</sup> These studies have shed light on the many different types of intermediary work, whether it was cultural, political, or economic brokerage, and knowledge mediation. They provide insight into how contact zones between colonizer and colonized, foreign merchant and indigenous translator operated, and the centrality of spaces of mediation in

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<sup>82</sup> Gráinne Goodwin, "A trustworthy interpreter between rulers and ruled: Behramji Malabari, colonial and cultural interpreter in nineteenth-century British India," *Social History* 38 no. 1 (2013): 1-25; Kapil Raj, "Mapping Knowledge Go-Betweens in Calcutta, 1770-1820," in *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820*, eds. Simon Schaffer et al (MA: Science History Publications, 2009), 105-150; *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees in the Making Colonial Africa*, ed. Benjamin Lawrence et al (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Dejanirah Couto, "The Role of Interpreters, or *Linguas*, in the Portuguese Empire During the 16th Century," *E-Journal of Portuguese History* 1 no. 2 (2003). [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese\\_Brazilian\\_Studies/ejph/html/issue2/html/couto\\_main.html](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue2/html/couto_main.html); Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

different empires during different periods.<sup>83</sup> Intermediaries of whatever type conveyed forms of information, or knowledge between two entities. The knowledge they passed on was variable, and depended on the circumstance that intermediaries found themselves in. As Raj points out, most intermediaries corresponded to more than one single-type.<sup>84</sup> Their activities often involved all aspects of mediation, having to consider cultural, religious, political, social, and economic or commercial implications. Cross-cultural brokerage, or the act of mediating between cultures is traditionally understood to be a role taken up by middlemen or intermediaries that facilitate exchange between two distinct cultures.<sup>85</sup> Studying cross-cultural brokerage through middlemen, or go-betweens offers new insights into how Muslim and non-Muslim populations engaged with each other through business, material or intellectual exchange, and how they shaped their inter-ethnic and cultural dialogue. This was certainly the case for dragomans like the Pisanis, who were a mainstay at the British Embassy for over one hundred and fifty years.

### ***Privileges and Protection for Dragomans***

Men that acquired the necessary language skills and who achieved employment with the embassies as dragomans also obtained diplomatic protection from the embassy to which they were attached. Unilateral guarantees, or capitulations, were granted by the sultan to foreign nations, which regulated political, diplomatic and commercial relations. The sultan's pledge also recognized members of foreign nations as legal residents in the empire, and allowed foreign

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<sup>83</sup> Kapil Raj "Mapping Knowledge Go-Betweens" provides an excellent overview and historiography of intermediaries, particularly in the Indian Ocean during the pre-modern and modern periods. 105-112.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>85</sup> For a brief, but excellent overview of the concept of cultural brokerage and how the study of this concept has transformed since the 1950s, see E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 3-7.

governments to employ non-Muslim subjects of the sultan as interpreters. In return, the sultan received a guarantee of the preservation of peaceful relations from the foreign power.<sup>86</sup>

Although subjects of the sultan, locally recruited dragomans enjoyed the same privileges and protection given to members of a European nation through the capitulations. Dragomans were issued a *berat*, or deed of appointment, which granted them protégé status as an employee or functionary of the embassy of a foreign power. The status of a *berathl* or protégé was advantageous for dragomans because of the individual diplomatic protection that they and their families acquired. They were exempt from certain taxes and duties, such as the poll-tax (*cizye*), and the transit and customs taxes that non-Muslims residing in the empire were required to pay.<sup>87</sup> These privileges extended to the sons and servants of dragomans, but not to their brothers. Their protection by a foreign power lasted until the death of the original *berat* holder, unless he lost his position or voluntarily left the service.<sup>88</sup>

The level of protection enjoyed by dragomans and the hereditary extension of their privileges allowed them to create their own networks of influence through intermarriage between prominent non-Muslim families in Pera, such as the Chaberts, Fontons, Testas and Pisanis. These families branched out into positions in the many European embassies in Istanbul, not only as dragomans, but as chancellors and secretaries. The Testas, for example, had family members in the service of Austria, Prussia, Sweden, Tuscany and the Netherlands during the early to mid-nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup> Members of indigenous communities that acted as intermediaries were placed in a position where they wielded political power. But to a certain extent, their actions and

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<sup>86</sup> Maurits van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 6-8; Also see Edhem Eldem, "Capitulations and Western Trade," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire 1603-1839*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 294.

<sup>87</sup> van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 66-67.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 67-68. van den Boogert points out that some *berat* holders would list their brothers as their servants in order to extend their privileges to family members.

<sup>89</sup> Roderic H. Davison, "The French Dragomanate in mid-Nineteenth Century Istanbul," 273.

their affiliation to the empire that granted them protégé status was regulated. Dragomans were not granted automatic subjecthood or citizenship of the empire that employed them, and their actions were bound by Ottoman laws and European rules and procedures.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *berat* system became widely abused by the foreign embassies. Increasingly high numbers of foreigners and Ottoman subjects became protected by consuls and embassies, which sold the deeds of appointment to artisans and merchants, in turn making them “honorary dragomans.” The Ottomans were aware of this practice and attempted to stop it by tightening regulations connected to issuing *berats*.<sup>90</sup> It was only in 1863 when the Ottomans officially curbed the power of embassies in granting *berats* and redefined its terms and conditions. The policy of hereditary extension was abolished for those that obtained patents of protection after 9 August 1863,<sup>91</sup> and the number of dragomans that could be employed by foreign powers was limited.<sup>92</sup> This decision by the Porte did not do much to change the situation, as *berats* continued to be sold, and there was reportedly an increase in the number of Ottoman subjects adopting foreign nationality.<sup>93</sup> İbrahim Serbestioğlu points out that the decision of the Porte also did not mean that Ottoman subjects employed by foreign consulates lost their Ottoman

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<sup>90</sup> van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 105-108. In 1852, the Porte issued an official note to the embassies in Istanbul stating that the foreign protection of Ottoman subjects would no longer be recognized, unless they were directly attached to the embassies or consulates. P. Dislere, R. de Mouy, *Droits et devoirs des Français dans les pays d'orient et d'extreme orient* (Paris, 1893), 45 in Nasim Sousa, *The capitulatory régime of Turkey, its history, origin, and nature* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1933), 101. In 1860, another note was sent to the embassies announcing that new protégés were to be subjected to Ottoman jurisdiction and that ‘the inheritance of rights for protection’ was abolished. But the efforts put forward by the Porte to control the protection system only produced the creation of a mixed commission to revise the titles of protection. The citation is written as Du Rausas, op. cit., II, 36, but the full title is not listed in the Sousa’s bibliography. See Sousa, 102.

<sup>91</sup> Sousa, 103.

<sup>92</sup> de Groot, “Protection and Nationality,” 238-239. The number of dragomans that could be employed were set to four for consulates-general, three for consulates and two for consular agencies. de Groot does not list the numbers for embassies. Serbestioğlu provides similar numbers but does not say whether or not these could be or had to be dragomans, but only Ottoman subjects. İbrahim Serbestioğlu, “Zorunlu Bir Modernleşme Örneği Olarak Osmanlı Tabiiyet Kanunu,” *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 29 (2011): 204.

<sup>93</sup> Sousa, 104.

“nationality” (*tabiiyet*), but they did have to pay for their exemption from military service (*bedel*).<sup>94</sup>

On 19 January 1869, the Porte promulgated the Ottoman Nationality Law. The naturalization of Ottoman subjects by foreign powers was prohibited, and those wanting to obtain foreign subjecthood had to receive permission from the Porte. But they did find ways to circumvent these regulations, mainly by manipulating their position in the imperial spaces that they acted within.

### ***Sources***

In researching for this study, I faced two hurdles. The first was that since there has not been any book-length studies on Levantine dragomans or the Pisanis in the nineteenth century, and most articles that discussed them had not consulted Ottoman archival material, archives were “wide-open.” My point of departure was to more or less “follow the sources,” collect as much data as I could, and see where that would lead. The result was that I amassed a considerable amount of material in the four major archives I conducted research – The National Archives, Kew (TNA), the BOA, The French Diplomatic Archives in Nantes, and the Santa Maria Draperis Parish (SMDP). The TNA provided most of the material on the Pisanis, which was unsurprising because of their employment at the embassy. Files and documents from a number of series, including the British State Papers (SP), the Foreign Office (FO) yielded the most information about the Pisanis, including biographical, professional, and personal data for family members from the eighteenth century onward. This information, alongside the thousands of pages of correspondence between the Pisanis and British ambassadors and other officials connected to the embassy provided enough information to reconstruct timelines for when members of the family served, their activities, and their career trajectories. At times, files also provided a glimpse into

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<sup>94</sup> İbrahim Serbestioğlu, 199 (193-214).

their personal and family lives and activities. Other valuable data emerged from these documents related to the interaction of the embassy, the Pisanis and Ottoman officials. Usually tucked within these files were pages of correspondence between the embassy and the Porte in a mixture of English, French, and Ottoman Turkish languages. The second challenge was in trying to find and trace consistent information about the Pisanis in files from the BOA.

When I began research for this project, I thought that since the Pisanis were Ottoman subjects there was probably going to be a substantial amount of information about them in files in the BOA. But when they showed up in various registers they did so sporadically and unevenly. No biographical information about them was written other than the fact that they were dragomans for the British Embassy, and even then, their first name was not always provided. When the Pisanis were documented in files, more often than not, there was no detailed information about their role in a particular event or proceeding, other than that they were dragomans involved in a particular discussion, that they relayed some kind of information. Trying to determine how certain cases ended up in specific registers, how and why certain Ottoman officials were given documents over others, and tracing the movement of files between them was difficult and much of it remains unclear. These include files from the Imperial Decrees collection (*Hatt-ı Hümayûn*), the Office of the Grand Vizier (*Sadaret*), documents from the Foreign Affairs Ministry (*Hariciye Nezâreti Belgeleri*) and documents from the Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet Belgeleri*). The unevenness in the information they provide about the Pisanis obviously brought me to use the files from the TNA on a much greater scale. For trying to discern the structure of the Pisanis and their social networks, I relied on two sources, Mihail-Dimitri Sturdza's *Dictionnaire historique et généalogique des grandes familles de Grèce, d'Albanie et de Constantinople*, and registers of the SMDP. Both provided valuable data on the

marriage networks of the Pisanis, though there were some differences in dates and names between the two sources. The SMDP provided birth, baptismal, marriage, and death records for the Pisanis, and therefore data on their intermarriage with other Levantine families. After making digital copies of all of these registers, I was introduced to an ongoing project on family genealogies by Marie Anne Marandet, a descendant of a Levantine family. Marandet incorporated the SMDP records into that project, and her work has been an indispensable reference tool for this study.

Alongside these sources, this study incorporates other primary material from the Ponsonby Papers from the Archives and Special Collections at the Durham University Library, UK, and contemporaneous newspapers and journals. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate any diaries or memoirs written by the Pisanis, dragomans or otherwise, and I am inclined to believe they do not exist.

The dissertation consists of four, thematically arranged chapters. The first traces the arrival of the Domenico Pisani into Istanbul in the late eighteenth century, and the integration of this family into the Levantine community and the British Embassy. Chapter Two examines the professionalization of their positions in the embassy, the more mundane routine of their lives as dragomans, their duties before and after the takeover of the functioning of the embassy by the British government from the Levant Company, and how the Pisanis negotiated the importance of their positions through resignations. Chapter Three explores questions of subjecthood status through two court cases, examining how Frederick and Count Alexander Pisani straddled Ottoman and European legal boundaries to support their claims of self-identification. The final chapter analyzes how members of the family, both dragomans and non-dragomans,



simultaneously operated within Ottoman and British spaces and used imperial institutions to support their business ventures.

## Chapter 1

### The Pisanis in Istanbul

The official story of the entrance of the Pisani family into Pera, Istanbul's bustling district, comprised of mostly non-Muslim Ottoman subjects and members of the foreign diplomatic community is intriguing, unclear, and a bit problematic. The story has received little attention by historians, leaving more to the imagination and more questions than definitive answers. But this is to be expected. Family histories are often untidy, and stories of dislocation and relocation can be unreliable, complicated, and political. The narrative that unfolds is one of speculation, social networking through marriage alliances, and the manufacture of a controlling monopoly over the office of dragomans by members of the Pisani family at the British Embassy in Istanbul.

The Pisanis, like other elite Levantine families in Istanbul were strategic. They used marriage alliances to build and strengthen their position in the Ottoman capital. Marriage between families also opened new doors for social and economic advancement. Merchant families could bring wealth to the table, while dragoman families brought the advantage of European diplomatic protection until the mid-nineteenth century, when the Sublime Porte abolished the practice of hereditary extension of *berats*.

Examining marriage alliances through social network analysis provides an analytical framework to measure the extent to which the Pisanis managed to initially integrate, and eventually elevate their social position into the Levantine community. The networks that the Pisanis built provided them with two specific types of social capital. The first was in the

Levantine community of Pera, and contributed to solidifying their place among the prominent, powerful families. The second was in the diplomatic community in Istanbul, chiefly among the European embassies and the Sublime Porte. Building their social network through marriage alliances reflected the efforts of the Pisanis to find and create opportunities that improved their social standing in the community of Pera, with great success.

This chapter discusses how the Pisanis integrated into the Levantine community. I demonstrate how they shaped their social networks through marriage according to the macrostructural composition of Pera and Galata, strengthening and maintaining their horizontal network in that community. In what follows, I do not provide a full outline of the Pisani family, or of all of the marriages that took place between members of the family and other Levantines. Rather, I concentrate on the branch of the family that was employed by the British Embassy in Istanbul, and demonstrate that the Pisanis were conscious of the marriage ties that they created. This is significant because unlike other elite Levantine families in Istanbul, the Pisanis were latecomers to Pera. However, in a relatively short period of time, members of this family managed to improve their social and political status in Istanbul. As I argue throughout the dissertation, all of the Pisanis after the first member of the family to arrive in Istanbul were Ottoman subjects, and members of the Levantine community because they were non-Muslims with European heritage.

I view social networks and their creation as a relational process,<sup>95</sup> which leads to the benefit of obtaining social capital because of the nature of the relationships that are constructed. Social networks inherently emphasize the structural-relational opportunities that actors pursue both in terms of mobility and in what they seek to receive because of their association with

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<sup>95</sup> Paul D. McClean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

certain individuals, or groups of individuals. The concept of social capital has received a lot of attention by scholars and definitions have been provided to explain how it is that certain individuals fair better than others and why, within and outside of networks.<sup>96</sup>

My definition of social capital is influenced by the work of Sebouh Aslanian, and Ronald S. Burt. Both take a relational approach, and have some overlap in their definitions. Burt defines social capital as “the advantage created by a person’s location in a structure of relationships.” Burt further argues that social capital is an asset, and is what “explains how people do better because they are somehow better connected with other people.”<sup>97</sup> Aslanian defines social capital as “the value generated when individuals join together and invest resources in the formation of ongoing and structured relationships with each other (known as “social network”) that generate collective and individual benefits.” Aslanian notes that the benefits may vary, but the constant variable is that they allow actors within the network to achieve their common goals.<sup>98</sup> Taking Burt and Aslanian’s definitions together, social capital is a quantifiable benefit that is created by or through the advantage of being part of a social network that is based upon similar interests and goals. The building of this type of network by the Pisanis was facilitated by a shared culture and religion, and their connection to the British Embassy.<sup>99</sup> In addition to creating networks through

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<sup>96</sup> For an excellent overview of the most important studies on social capital, see McClean, 8-12. These include studies by Bourdieu, Lin, Coleman, Burt, and Putnam.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald S. Burt, *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>98</sup> Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2011), 170. Aslanian notes that his definition relies on that of Sheilagh Ogilvie, “The Use and Abuse of Trust: Social Capital and Its Development by Early Modern Guilds,” *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1, 15-122.

<sup>99</sup> Aslanian makes the point that social capital is the benefit from the creation of four components, all of which are related to each other. 1) A social network. 2) A set of formal or informal norms that members of a network are expected to abide by. 3) Information flows in the social networks that spread knowledge about those norms, and ensure that people are loyal to them by sanctioning those who break them or rewarding those who uphold them. 4) Trust and trustworthiness between network members, created as a result of the preceding three aspects of social capital. All four of these are important and needed for the network and the individuals within them to achieve their common goals and objectives. These points are related to McClean’s idea that mobility through social networks is

marriage that spurred membership into the elite circles of non-Muslim society in the Ottoman capital, the Pisanis ensured their family members obtained dragoman positions in the British Embassy in Istanbul. In doing so they retained a monopoly over dragoman positions in the embassy until about the mid-nineteenth century.

Ottomanists have conducted some research on social networks in the Ottoman Empire in general, but much less has been done by scholars that concentrate on Pera and Galata, or the Levantine community. Margaret Meriwether's work on the notable families in Aleppo, between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is more than just a study about family structures. A large part of her work is explains how marriage integrated families into larger networks, and how these solidified alliances.<sup>100</sup> In her book *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, Karen Barkey uses social network analysis to explain the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire. She examines the vertical and horizontal networks between the center, local communities, and the periphery that the Ottomans successfully negotiated. These networks and their flexibility, she argues, strengthened the empire and allowed it to survive as long as it did.<sup>101</sup> The issue with both of these works, however, and particularly Barkey's is that they do not address non-Muslims, therefore privileging Ottoman Turkish, or Muslim society. Barkey shows that the boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly after the *Tanzimat*, created "bounded identities" that separated and differentiated groups.<sup>102</sup> She does not consider how non-Muslims became embedded in Ottoman political and social structures.

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determined by the cultural repertoires that actors have available to them, and as Aslanian notes, these are often a set of shared norms. See McClean, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Margaret Meriwether, *The Kin who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo 1770-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), chapter 3.

<sup>101</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Her theoretical approach to networks is highly influenced by the work of Ronald S. Burt.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

Social networks created through marriage alliances, were in fact “models of connectivity”<sup>103</sup> that demarcated social and religious boundaries. They also demonstrated the fluidity of Ottoman politics, economics, and society. Family structures in the Levantine community did not entirely resemble the households of the Ottoman elite, such as those of the *Viziers, Paşas*,<sup>104</sup> and provincial notables or *Ayans*, all of which mimicked the structure of the sultan’s palace. These Ottoman households consisted of inner and outer retinues, military and non-military segments, and like the sultan’s household, they were patrimonial. In exchange for absolute loyalty to the sultan, members of his house received positions and offices.<sup>105</sup> What Levantines did have in common with Ottoman households was that families used marriage to construct alliances with other households. Elite Ottoman households were largely concerned with the maintenance of power and prestige within the Ottoman ruling elite, and Levantine households paralleled these concerns, albeit in their own community. Studies on families in the

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<sup>103</sup> Palmira Brummett, “Placing the Ottomans in the Mediterranean World: The Question of Notables and Households,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 36 (2010): 79. Brummett is discussing Abou el-haj’s model of the Ottoman household.

<sup>104</sup> See Rif’aat Ali Abou-El-Haj, “The Ottoman Vezir and Paşa Households 1683-1703: A Preliminary Report,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94 (1974): 438-447.

<sup>105</sup> For a general overview of the composition of the palace, the challenges to the absolute power of the sultan, and Ottoman households, see Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, “administration, central,” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (NY: Facts on File Inc, 2009), 10-13; Carter Vaughn Findley, “Political culture and the great households,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (NY: Cambridge University Press), 65-80. On the power of the queen mothers and their challenge to the sultans, see Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); on the Grand Viziers and Paşas, see Abou-El-Haj, “The Ottoman Vezir and Paşa Households;” İ. Metin Kunt, *The Sultan’s Servants: the Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1983); On the provincial notables, see Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,” in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, eds. W. R. Polk and R. L. Chambers (Chicago, 1968), 41-65; Fikret Adanir, “Semi-autonomous provincial forces in the Balkans and Anatolia,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (NY: Cambridge University Press), 157-185, also see Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapter 3. Very few studies have tackled the question of households in the Ottoman Empire, in general. See Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997); İ. Metin Kunt, *The Sultans Servants*; Alan Duben, Cem Bahar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family, and Fertility, 1880-1940* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991); Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*; Rhoads Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty: Tradition, Image and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400-1800* (London: Continuum, 2008).

Levantine community, however, have taken a more macro approach to mapping the institutional, religious, and economic sites of the community.<sup>106</sup>

Studies on Levantine families in Istanbul and in the Ottoman Empire in general are relatively thin when compared to other non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire, such as Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. They are more functional in that they are concerned with the larger community of Levantines, their occupations, or membership in certain institutions. Historians of the Levantine community have collected data on the marriage ties that bound families together, particularly dragoman families, but have not provided an adequate framework to conceptualize them. Although informative, these studies are narrowly focused. de Testa and Gautier, for example, discuss a number of dragoman families or “dynasties,” as they call them, but treat these as biographical works, and do not provide much narrative on how these families interacted with greater Ottoman society.<sup>107</sup> The same is true for other short studies on dragomans in Frédéric Hitzel’s edited volume on the study and acquisition of Oriental languages in Istanbul by non-Muslim Europeans who settled there.<sup>108</sup> Throughout his book, Oliver Jens Schmitt provides an excellent overview of the many marriages that took place between the elite families of Pera and Galata,<sup>109</sup> and shows how these families became powerful and expansive, which strengthened families within and outside of the Levantine community. His discussion on Levantine “*hans*” is particularly interesting, but he only groups families that were involved in

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<sup>106</sup> See for example M.A. Belin, *Histoire de la Latinité de Constantinople* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1894); Livio Missir de Lusignan, *Vie Latine de L’Empire Ottoman (Les Latins d’Orient)* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004); Rinaldo Marmara, *Précis Historique de la Communauté latine de Constantinople et de son Eglise: De l’Empire byzantin à la République de Turquie* (Istanbul: Latin Katolik Ruhani Reislîği, 2003); Rinaldo Marmara, *Pancaldi: Quartier Levantin du XIXe Siècle* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004); Rinaldo Marmara, *La Communauté Levantine de Constantinople: De l’Empire byzantin à la République de Turquie* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2012).

<sup>107</sup> Marie de Testa, Antoine Gautier, *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de la Porte Ottomane*. See the sections “Les dynasties,” and “Biographies.”

<sup>108</sup> *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*. See particularly the sections “L’ère des Drogmans.”

<sup>109</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Les Levantins: Cadres de Vie et Identités d’un Groupe Ethno-Confessionnel de l’Empire Ottoman au ‘Long’ 19e Siècle* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2007), particularly 236-256; Schmitt, *Levantiner*, 220-238.

commerce, merchant activities, and trade because his main source is the *Indicateur ottoman illustré – Annuaire-Almanach du commerce, de l'industrie, de l'administration et de la magistrature* (1883), which focuses on those groups.<sup>110</sup> The overall emphasis on biography, family lineage, and occupation, though important, obstructs the possibility for adding a more critical framework through which to examine how families like the Pisanis controlled the growth of their family, and extended their reach in Levantine society through their roles as dragomans.

Christine Philliou, though working on Phanariots in the nineteenth century, points out the difficulty in reconstructing patterns of kinship due to the lack of sources. She uses the framework of households to explain how Phanariots managed to create their own networks, and to sustain them through their positions as *voyvodas*, or princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, and in Istanbul, as dragoman of the fleet and dragoman of the court.<sup>111</sup> Philliou compares Phanariot households, or *hanedans*,<sup>112</sup> to the *ayan* and janissary households in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing that there were parallels between all three. For example, *ayans* and Phanariots had connections to Ottoman officials, and both were called upon by the Ottoman state to take up positions in the Ottoman government in periods of instability.<sup>113</sup> Phanariot families did not build the same private militias like those of the *ayan*, nor did they have access to revenue streams such as tax-farms. Phanariots acquired wealth and prestige through tax collection, merchant activities, and their appointments as dragomans and ambassadors at foreign posts for the Ottoman court. Like their Ottoman counterparts, Phanariots also used patronage and gift giving to further their

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<sup>110</sup> Schmitt, 469-472 (French); 438-440 (German). Schmitt uses the second edition of the *Indicateur Ottoman Illustré*. The first one was published in 1881.

<sup>111</sup> Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2011) chapter 1. Phanariots that were appointed as *voyvodas* of Wallachia and Moldavia, and the dragoman of the fleet, and dragoman of the court must be distinguished from Levantines/Latin dragomans in that they were directly employed by the Ottoman palace, and therefore already integrated into the Ottoman political and imperial structure.

<sup>112</sup> Philliou notes that Phanariots fashioned themselves as *hanedans*, meaning tribe or family. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire*, 27-28.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 25.



interests, and kinship and marriage alliances were important tools used to expand their networks. Where Phanariots differed from *ayans*, in particular, was their ability to expand their networks and influence beyond one region. Philliou shows that Phanariots had “transregional influence,” which in turn elevated their social and professional positions.<sup>114</sup> The self-fashioning and strategies of Phanariots did not isolate them from Ottoman political and social life, but deepened their integration into those spheres. Phanariots enjoyed these positions until the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, when they were dismissed for being alleged collaborators with the revolutionaries.

The difference in large part between Phanariots and Levantines is that the former, and particularly the *voyvodas* and dragomans, were already well integrated into the Ottoman imperial structure. They were well poised to advance in that structure by having achieved a monopoly of Ottoman political and diplomatic positions. But members of the Levantine elite did not have that same access. Instead, they created alliances within their community, and either established their own businesses in the Ottoman capital or gained employment with the European embassies that were established there. Most of the Pisanis chose the embassy route.

### ***The Arrival of the Pisanis in Istanbul***

The first Pisani to arrive in Istanbul in the late seventeenth century was Domenico. The year of his arrival, however, is contested and there are three narratives that seek to explain how he ended up there. Two of the narratives are found in secondary literature, and the third is in the file of the Last Will and Testament of Etienne Pisani from the British Embassy in 1886. The two in the secondary literature are both similar in that they describe a family that hailed from Pisa, and then landed on the Greek island of Chios. The other, told by Charles Pisani, a direct descendant of the family, mostly lines up with the other version but differs slightly, not even

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, chapter 1, particularly pages 27-32.

mentioning the presence of the family ever having been in Chios. The differences between the three accounts of the early history of the Pisani family also expose other issues, namely the proper spelling of names, dates, and relationships.

Two short studies by amateur historians, one by Antoine Gautier, and another by Mihail-Dimitri Sturdza, provide biographical information about the branch of the Pisani family that settled in Istanbul. The portrait painted by these two is similar. The Pisanis were a noble Venetian family that presumably fled to Chios at the end of the sixteenth century after the Ottoman army took the Pisani fiefdom on the Greek island of Nio in the Aegean.<sup>115</sup> According to Gautier, there is definitive proof that the Pisanis were present on Chios in the sixteenth century, found through marriage and baptismal records from a Catholic church on that island.<sup>116</sup> He also notes that according to Fernand Testa (1877-1930), whose mother was a Pisani, Domenico arrived in Constantinople in 1684 after the Ottomans captured him during hostilities between the Ottomans and the Venetians in that same year. He was taken prisoner and then brought to a prison in Istanbul, “the city” where he apparently appeared as a “witness” in 1685. It is unclear if he was ransomed and under what circumstances, but Gautier argues that he subsequently paid for his freedom.<sup>117</sup> Domenico then married Victoria Bianchi in 1693, the wedding having been witnessed by André Béraut, the “great writer of the prison.” Their marriage was recorded in the records of the Santa Maria Draperis Parish, showing that they were married on 15 “ybre” 1693. Domenico is listed as coming from “Scio” (Chios), though the year and the circumstances of his arrival are not disclosed.<sup>118</sup> The witnesses were also recorded in the register – Pietro Vition, Luca

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<sup>115</sup> Antoine Gautier, “Un diplomate russe à Constantinople, Paul Pisani (1786-1873),” in Antoine Gautier (en collaboration avec Marie de Testa), *Drogmans, Diplomates et Ressortissant Européens Auprès de la Porte Ottomane* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2013,) 53.

<sup>116</sup> Gautier’s point about the presence of the baptismal records on Chios is contested. According to Marie Anne Marandet, the baptismal records for 1650-1707 are missing.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 53-54. Gautier does not say what Domenico was a witness to.

<sup>118</sup> SMDP, *Liber I Conjugatorum, Baptizatorum, Mortuorum, 1662-1742*. Entry 42, 15 Ybre November 1693, p. 18.

Baria(?), Steffano Boneri and Luigi Berault, but not André Béraut.<sup>119</sup> Domenico apparently still held some property on Chios at the time of his wedding. Domenico's son, Antoine (Antonio/Anthony), later married Maria Elisabetta Testa, whose family was attached to the Venetian embassy. Antoine and Maria had two sons, Nicholas (Nicolo) and Stefano.<sup>120</sup> There is a discrepancy regarding whether or not a third son, Bartolomeo, was born to Antonio. Sturdza lists him as Bartolomeo, who died in 1826, and so too does Charles Pisani (as Bartholomew) as the son of Antoine Pisani.<sup>121</sup> Marandet shows that there were only two sons born to Antoine, Nicholas and Stefano. She lists Bartolomeo as the brother of Antonio Pisani.<sup>122</sup> All three, however, served as dragomans in Istanbul. (See the tables of family trees on pages 199 and 200).<sup>123</sup>

Nicholas was initially employed by the British Embassy, then later moved to serve the Russian Embassy in 1774. Stefano and Bartolomeo were employed by the British Embassy, and remained there throughout their professional lives.<sup>124</sup> Nicholas' son Paul (b.1786, d.1873)<sup>125</sup> joined his father at the Russian Embassy, beginning his career at the young age of twelve when he commenced his training at the embassy's school of foreign relations. He subsequently worked

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<sup>119</sup> Domenico and Vittoria (sic) are listed as a married couple in a Baptismal entry for Elisabetta in 1694. SMDP, *Liber I Conjugatorum, Baptizatorum, Mortuorum, 1662-1742*. Entry 272, November 1694, p. 86; André Béraut's identity as the "great writer of the prison" was corroborated by Antoine Galland, the translator of *The Thousand and One Nights*. See *Journal d'Antoine Galland pendant Son Séjour A Constantinople (1672-1673), Publié et Annoté par Charles Schefer Tome II*, ed. Ernest Leroux (Paris: Libraire de la Société Asiatique, de l'École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, etc, 1881), 3. The meaning of Béraut's title of "Great Writer," however, is unclear. There is no indication if it was something prisoner's called him, or if it was an official title bestowed upon him from the prison authorities.

<sup>120</sup> Marie Anne Marandet, *Levantine Genealogy Project*, <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=stefano&n=pisani>. Marandet does not cite sources used for the dates of his birth and death.

<sup>121</sup> Marandet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=charles+dominique+frederic+marie&n=pisani>

<sup>122</sup> Marandet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=antonio&n=pisani&oc=3>

<sup>123</sup> Sturdza's Family Tree of the Pisanis has been adapted to only include the branch of the Pisani family that served the British Embassy in Istanbul. For the original, see Sturdza, 589. Charles Pisani's Family Tree can be found in FO 780/217.

<sup>124</sup> Gautier, 54-55.

<sup>125</sup> Marandet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=paul&n=pisani&oc=1>; Sturdza, 589.

his way up through the ranks, taking different positions within the embassy, serving there for fifty years.<sup>126</sup>

The other narrative in the secondary literature, written by Mihail-Dimitri Sturdza, is found in his lengthy and important study of notable families in Greece, Albania and Constantinople. It includes a short prosopography of the Pisani family and a family tree. The major difference between the two, however, is that Sturdza traced the family roots back to the thirteenth century in Italy, and provides a more in-depth study of the different branches of the family. The family claimed its descent from Rome but later split, forming branches in Pisa and Venice. Members of the branch from Venice eventually made their way to the Cycladic islands in Greece, which included Keos, Santorini, and Candia. He notes that the Pisanis were driven by the Ottomans from Crete in 1669, and were later present on the island of Chios, but is silent on how the Pisanis ended up there. Aside from a small family tree on the Pisanis of Candia, his main focus is on the branch of the Pisanis that settled in Istanbul. According to Sturdza Domenico Pisani, the same Domenico mentioned by Gautier above, was a refugee on Crete, who later married Victoria Bianchi in Istanbul in 1693.<sup>127</sup> The absence of any in-depth discussion by Sturdza about the Pisanis on Chios raises questions.

Sturdza knew that somehow members of the Pisani family ended up in Greece, but leaves it at that. But Gautier's claims of them being there are corroborated by the register in the Santa Maria Draperis Parish. The problem for both narratives is that Gautier and Sturdza do not fully state their sources, raising flags about the extent to which the Pisanis, and specifically the Pisanis that went to Istanbul, were present on Chios.<sup>128</sup> To make matters more difficult, the third

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 58-59. Gautier lists the positions that Paul Pisani held throughout his career.

<sup>127</sup> Sturdza, 587-589.

<sup>128</sup> Gautier's narrative on the Pisani family provides information about the Pisanis's that were present on Chios. But his sources are problematic. He writes that he received information about the Pisanis's from other descendants of the

narrative about the family history by Charles Pisani in the nineteenth century does not provide any answers to that question, and Charles gives an alternative date for when Domenico was brought to Istanbul and when he married Victoria Bianchi.

When Count Alexander Pisani died in 1886, the executors of his Last Will and Testament put forward a case to the British Consular Court in Istanbul to ensure that the Will was deposited into the embassy and regulated by that court. Within that case, Charles Pisani provided a history of his family as he knew it, and a family tree. Charles and his brother Count Pisani were direct descendants of Domenico.

The Pisani family history as told by Charles, to my knowledge, has not been cited in any of the literature about the Pisani family, or in general works on Levantines in the Ottoman Empire. His narrative is diachronic and synchronic in that he is concerned with explaining that his rich family history went through a simple transition, one from being Italian to becoming British, or at least more British than Ottoman or Turkish. Charles notes the information about his family that he provided came from his brother, Count Alexander Pisani. Charles stated that over the course of his life, his brother took great interest in studying his family history, and was the self-avowed head of the family. Count Pisani maintained papers and writings about his family, and Charles confirmed that in the affidavit of filing for the Last Will and Testament.<sup>129</sup> Where Charles' narrative differs from that of Sturdza and Gautier, is in the details. The context of the arrival of the Pisanis in Istanbul is the same, but dates and names differ, illuminating problems within all three of the narratives, their sources, and the early history of the family. Charles'

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family, which he lists. He also mentions that research conducted on Chios, and later certified by the Episcopal Chancellor Cristoforo Deodati verifies the existence of the Pisani family on the island. Gautier points to a marriage and baptism that occurred on the island of members of the Pisani family. Gautier, "Paul Pisani," 53.

<sup>129</sup> See chapter 3.

history, however, only focuses on the branch of the family that served the British Embassy in Istanbul.

According to Charles, his family hailed from Pisa. Domenico, or Dominique Pisani, as he names him, was taken prisoner by “the Turks” [sic] in 1696 during the Ottoman-Venetian War.<sup>130</sup> He was brought to Constantinople, settled there and later married Victoria Bianchi. Charles did not provide a date for the nuptials.<sup>131</sup> Domenico’s eldest son returned to Italy and Pope Clement [XI] bestowed upon him the title of Count, apparently previously given to one of his ancestors, Bartholomew.<sup>132</sup> Domenico’s other son, Antonio, was born in Pera and later became head dragoman for the British embassy in 1741, the first member of this branch of the family to do so. According to Charles he was awarded the position through a patent signed by King George II and the Duke of Newcastle, when he traveled to England with Lord Faulkner in 1741.<sup>133</sup> In terms of family lineage, Charles’ account is both different and similar to those provided by Gautier and Sturdza, particularly in regards to the early descendants of Domenico Pisani that resided in Istanbul.

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<sup>130</sup> TNA FO 780/217, “Affidavit of filing, Charles Pisani.” In the Application for Probate, dated 18/12/1886, Count Alexander’s trustees added that the family was from Pisa but was “shuffled to Venice.”

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, Domenico’s eldest son, who is not named in Charles’ account, returned to Italy at some point and married Amelia Pallavicini [?].

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, Bartholomew was a friend and relative of a Cardinal Pisani. The title, Charles noted, passed down through the branch of the family that settled in the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, The year 1741 that Charles provided is problematic and his claim that Antonio Pisani received the patent is also questionable. Charles stated that the “records and documents relative to the Family Pisani, especially the original patent... were in the possession of my said brother...and were destroyed in the fires which in 1831 and 1870 destroyed the greater part of Pera... and which the latter fire burnt the British embassy.” I have not been able to locate evidence that Antonio Pisani actually accompanied Lord Faulkner to England in 1741, but he was appointed first dragoman in 1749, succeeding Luca Chirico, who died. See TNA SP 105/118: 134-135 24 January 1749, Levant Company, London to [Ambassador] James Porter, Constantinople. Antonio Pisani later became the “King’s Official Interpreter of Oriental Languages” shortly afterwards. Also See TNA SP 105/118, 139-140, 23 March 1749, Levant Company, London to [Ambassador] James Porter, Constantinople. I thank Maurits van den Boogert for these references. Also, according to Samuel Medley, the butler to Lord Kinnoull (George Henry Hay), the Ambassador at Constantinople, Antonio Pisani was as a dragoman at the British embassy before 1741. He actually served as first dragoman, then was replaced and appointed second dragoman in 1731, briefly resigned in 1734, but was later reinstated as a dragoman. Kinnoull described Antonio Pisani as a “Greek of the Latin Church who has family here [Constantinople] and a Turkish subject.” See Nigel and Caroline Webb, *The Earl and his butler in Constantinople: the secret diary of an English servant among the Ottomans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 95-97.

Gautier and Sturdza offer almost the exact same information, though Gautier is of course more focused on the descendants of Paul Pisani, a member of the Pisani family employed by the Russian Embassy in Istanbul, and the subject of his article. For example, Gautier and Sturdza provide in-depth detail about the first descendants of Domenico Pisani from his marriage with Victoria Bianchi, noting that their son, Antonio (Antoine, according to Gautier) had three sons of his own, Nicholas (Nicolo, according to Gautier, and Nicolas, according to Sturdza), Stefano, (Etienne Stefano, according to Charles) and Bartolomeo (Bartholomew, according to Charles). Stefano and Bartolomeo took up positions as dragomans in the British Embassy in Istanbul in the late eighteenth century. As noted above, Nicholas first worked as a dragoman at the British embassy, and later moved to the Russian Embassy in 1774, and his son Paul followed him. Nowhere does Nicholas or Paul Pisani appear in Charles' account of his family. Charles lists Etienne Stefano and Bartholomew as the sons of Antonio Pisani, but leaves Nicholas and the succeeding generations of his line of the Pisani family completely out of the family tree that he constructed. Charles, like Sturdza and Gautier, also did not mention that Matteo, one of Stefano's sons, also went to work for the Russian Embassy in Istanbul.<sup>134</sup> It is unclear why Charles did not include his great-uncle in the account of his family. Speculating that Charles' main concern in his account was to focus on the fact that his family had always served the British Embassy, we can assume that he left out any other members that did not fit that profile. After all, he was trying to get his brother's Last Will and Testament filed and regulated by the British Consular Court in

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<sup>134</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Berto Pisani to Isaac Morier, 10 February 1814. Berto provides a brief history of his family, and notes that one of Stefano's sons went to work for the Russians. This had to have been Matteo, who was listed as being in the employment of Russia in 1811. See the Erik-Amburger-Datenbank - Ausländer im vorrevolutionären Russland database. <http://dokumente.ios-regensburg.de/amburger/index.php?id=91185>. Biographical information about some of the Pisanis that served the Russian Empire can be found here. Gautier also cites the database. See Gautier "Paul Pisani," fn. 4, 55.

Istanbul. However, evidence that Charles and his brother Count Alexander Pisani were related to Nicolas and Paul Pisani had appeared four decades earlier.

In 1837, Frederick Pisani, Count Pisani and Charles' uncle, brought a lawsuit against the editor of the *Times* daily (London) for libel. The case lasted for five years. At one point during the court proceedings, Count Pisani was called on the witness stand. During the cross-examination, he stated that he had family members in the service of the Russian Embassy in Istanbul. He specifically named Paul Pisani, the director of the commercial department for that embassy in 1837, as his second cousin. He also stated that the current dragoman at the time, Nicholas Pisani, was his uncle, and brother to Frederick Pisani.<sup>135</sup>

According to Sturdza, but not Charles Pisani, Frederick did have an older brother named Nicholas, who was born in 1775. Sturdza does not provide information on Nicholas' occupation. Charles, however, only listed another Antonio Pisani, who was Charles and Count Pisani's father, as being the brother of Frederick. The only other Nicholas that served the Russian Embassy in Istanbul was Paul Pisani's father. But Count Pisani could not have been referring to that Nicholas, who would have been his great-uncle because according to Sturdza he had died in 1819. It is unclear if Count Pisani's first uncle Nicholas had indeed worked for the Russian Embassy.<sup>136</sup> According to Sturdza's family tree of the Pisanis, Paul Pisani would have been the second cousin of Count Pisani and Charles Pisani, as Paul was the nephew of their grandfather Stefano, or Etienne Stefano as Charles called him.

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<sup>135</sup> "The Libel Law," in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* vol. LI no. CCCXVI (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes) February 1842, 142. Also see Frank Castiglione, "'Levantine' Dragomans in Nineteenth Century Istanbul: The Pisanis, the British, and Issues of Subjecthood," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları Dergisi/The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 44 (2014): 169-195.

<sup>136</sup> A search in the Erik-Amburger-Datenbank - Ausländer im vorrevolutionären Russland database only turned out one Nicolo Pisani who was Paul Pisani's father, and who began serving the Russian Embassy in 1768. <http://dokumente.ios-regensburg.de/amburger/index.php?id=91180>. Another Nicolo or Nicolas Pisani is not listed, though there is a Nikolaj. But he is classified as being of Greek origin and not Italian, as the other Pisanis are. He also does not fit the chronology here. Nikolaj owned a bakery in Odessa in 1902.



The blotchy narratives that make up the only information available about the initial settlement of the Pisanis in Istanbul, stress the peculiar circumstances that led the first member of the family to Istanbul. The agreement between Sturdza, Gautier, and Charles Pisani on Domenico's arrival to the Ottoman capital, establishes at least some confidence that he was in fact a captive or slave, and that he did reach Istanbul at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But without definitive proof or a document of manumission, a fissure remains in the story. That also applies to the differences in the three accounts regarding the lineage of the family. The structure of the family, though similar, is a bit muddled where dates and names are concerned, and this is particularly the case for Nicholas and Paul Pisani's branch of the family that served the Russian Embassy. For example, Sturdza lists Antoine, son of the Russian dragoman, Nicholas Pisani, as born in 1772, married to "Helene" (sic) in 1800, and deceased in 1852. The date of Antoine's birth is correct but that of his death, however, is recorded as 1776 in the Santa Maria Draperis Parish register for that year.<sup>137</sup> The same is true for the date of Domenico's arrival in Istanbul. Charles wrote that he arrived in 1696, but Gautier and Sturdza show that he was married in Istanbul in 1693. A case of poor memory, mismanaged, or edited information might be attributed to the date provided by Charles, and the latter may also apply to Sturdza and Gautier, due in part to the absence of recording the sources that they used to produce their narratives.

From Domenico's interesting arrival in Istanbul at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Pisanis established themselves in the non-Muslim community of Pera. The Pisanis were rational actors. Unlike other families that relied on trade, business partnerships, or merchant activities to carve out a niche for themselves, the Pisanis owed their prosperity to two factors. The first was

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<sup>137</sup> SMDP, Liber.II entry 305, p. 70. I thank Marie Ann Marandet for pointing out this discrepancy. Antoine was baptized at the St. Antoine Catholic Parish in Pera. See SMDP Liber B M D 1733-1778, 22 May 1772. No page numbers are provided.

marriage alliances, and the second was their eventual immersion into the British Embassy. From the very beginning, the Pisanis focused on creating marriage alliances with prominent families involved in business or merchant activities, or who were members of the foreign diplomatic community. Marriage alliances offered social mobility, and attachment to the embassy, provided employment security and a connection to a powerful foreign empire.

### ***Marriage Alliances and Social Networks***

Constructing marriage alliances with already well-established Levantine families in Pera and Galata was a strategy that began very early in the eighteenth century for the Pisanis, particularly after the marriage between Domenico Pisani and Victoria Bianchi. Victoria's father, Stefano Bianchi, was interestingly enough, a scribe at the *bagno* in Istanbul, and his mother-in-law, Caterina (nee Polacca) was connected to the Navonis, having been godmother to Tomasso Navoni in the seventeenth century.<sup>138</sup> Their son Antonio, who later became a dragoman at the British Embassy in Istanbul, married into one of the most prominent Levantine families, taking Maria de Testa (Testa) as his bride. A Genoese family, the Testas were present in Pera before Mehmed II granted the first Ottoman capitulations to the non-Muslim community there, and for some time, had the original text in their family archives, before depositing it into the British Museum.<sup>139</sup>

The Testas played a significant role in the communal and diplomatic life of Pera, and reached a prominent level of power and influence. In 1565 Angelo Testa became the Prior of the Levantine community, followed by Bartolomeo Testa in 1568. Outside of being important

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<sup>138</sup> See Marandet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=stefano&n=bianchi> and <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=caterina&n=polacca>. For Polacca, Marandet cites the Santa Maria Draperis Parish records.

<sup>139</sup> Antoine Gautier, Marie de Testa, "Deux grandes dynasties de drogmans: les Fonton et les Testa," in *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de La Porte Ottomane*, 137. Also see Sturdza, 590. It is unclear whether or not the Testas had that document in their possession. It was however, held at the British Museum before being turned over to the British Library, where it is now housed. The reference number is Egerton MS 2817:1453.

religious figures, the Testas held dragoman positions in more than one European embassy in Istanbul. For more than sixty years, Bartolomeo de Testa (1723-1809), served as a dragoman, court councilor, and *chargé d'affaires* for the Austrian Embassy, while Gaspard Testa (1770-1847) was in the service of the Dutch for sixty-six years, even obtaining the title of Baron.<sup>140</sup> Other Testas also held various positions in the embassies and governments of Venice, Genoa, Tuscany, Prussia, Poland, and the Netherlands.<sup>141</sup> The Testas were probably the most prolific family in the community in that they constructed a wide network of contacts through marriage for succeeding generations. The Pisanis followed suit.

Alongside marriage into the Testa family, the Pisanis widened their network with other high-profile families. Etienne-Stefano Pisani married Marie Hübsch in 1767, a member of the German Hübsch von Grossthal family. The Hübschs started out in Istanbul as merchants, and later expanded into the diplomatic community after Friedrich Hübsch was appointed the Court Councillor for Saxony by the King of Poland in 1730. Friedrich then became the *chargé d'affaires* in Istanbul in 1740, the minister plenipotentiary in 1744, and finally the resident minister for Poland at the Sublime Porte. Friedrich converted to Catholicism after his marriage to Catherine Dantan, the descendant of another dynasty of dragomans.<sup>142</sup> Another Hübsch, Casimir-Alphonse, served as the *chargé d'affaires* for Denmark in Pera.<sup>143</sup> Etienne-Stefano Pisani's sister, Caterina, married Luca Navoni in 1771, solidifying their connection to another prominent Levantine family. The Navonis were a Genoese family who made their way in Pera as

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<sup>140</sup> Gautier, de Testa, "Deux grandes dynasties de drogmans," 141-142; On the Testas in Dutch service, see Alexander H. de Groot, "Protection and Nationality," 246-249.

<sup>141</sup> See the family tree constructed by Sturdza, 592-596.

<sup>142</sup> Sturdza, 582.

<sup>143</sup> Sturdza, 582; Schmitt (French), 240.

dragomans. The Navonis had family members that served France, Venice, and the United States.<sup>144</sup>

The branch of the Pisanis that exclusively served the British Embassy between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that were from the same lineage as the abovementioned Stefano, continued to expand their networks through marriage. Etienne-Stefano's daughter Beatrix married into the Chabert family when she took François as her husband, which joined two prominent dragoman families together. The Chaberts were another family dynasty of dragomans that reached Pera at the end of the eighteenth century. Originally from Marseilles and involved in the ship-building industry, members of this family eventually went into the dragoman business. Many were employed by the Polish Embassy in Istanbul, and others branched out into the British and French embassies, including François.<sup>145</sup> Beatrix's brother, Antonio (Antoine), married Maria Alexis.<sup>146</sup> Though information on the Alexis family is lacking, the marriage contract signed between Pisani and Alexis indicates that she was from a wealthy family. Her family offered a dowry of 10,000 piasters up front, and included goods such as jewelery and furniture valued at 17,601 piasters, totalling 27,601 piasters. Antonio agreed to give his new bride 6,000 piasters in the event that he died before her.<sup>147</sup>

The Pisanis also strengthened their relations with the Timonis, another powerful Levantine family when Angela Pisani, Stefano's niece, married the dragoman and later vice-chancellor of the Russian Embassy in Istanbul, Angelo Timoni in 1770. Etienne Pisani (Stephane-Thomas, according to Sturdza) married Helene Timoni in 1842. The Timonis were a

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<sup>144</sup> Sturdza, 586.

<sup>145</sup> Sturdza, 573-574.

<sup>146</sup> Sturdza refers to Marie Alexis as Maria Alexio. Sturdza, 589.

<sup>147</sup> William Turner, *Journal of a Tour in the Levant, Volume III* (London: John Murray, 1820), 529-531. Turner included the marriage contract in the addenda of the volume and section on "The customs of the Greeks." The sections preceding this one discussed the "customs" of the Turks, the Armenians, the Persians, the Arabs, "of Constantinople."

family of mixed occupations, including doctors, merchants, lawyers and of course, dragomans. At different times the Timonis had family members in the service of Russia, Austria, and Sweden.<sup>148</sup> The Timonis were also partners with the Hübsch family in a merchant/banking firm in Galata.<sup>149</sup> The Pisani-Timoni connection became particularly important later on when the Pisanis capitalized on Michel Timoni's position as a lawyer, and used him as a pivotal figure in trying to establish Etienne Pisani's charitable organization, as discussed in the fourth chapter.

The Pisanis managed to integrate themselves into British families too, when Beatrix, the daughter of Antonio (Antoine) Pisani, married Henry Adrian Churchill. Churchill, though born and raised in Istanbul, was a British Consul-General, who held posts throughout the Ottoman Empire and then in Persia during the mid to late nineteenth century.<sup>150</sup>

The network that the Pisanis built through marriage alliances stretched throughout Pera, and did not confine them or their family members simply to the embassy, though that was their greatest asset. The British were well aware of the strength of not only the Pisanis, but also the structure of the Levantine community and alliances between these families. Robert Liston was probably right in his statement that dragomans in Pera formed something like a "distinct body" because of their intermarriage, and that "they may be said to compose one single family."<sup>151</sup>

There is a lack of sufficient evidence to suggest or to explain the extent to which early marriage alliances with other Levantine families played a role in helping the Pisanis to become employed by the British Embassy in Istanbul. Domenico's son Antonio was the first member to become a dragoman for the Levant Company, and other than a brief mention of a raise in his

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 597.

<sup>149</sup> Alexander H. de Groot, "Dragomans' Careers: Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829," in *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century* eds. Alexander H. de Groot, Maurits van den Boogert (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 238. de Groot quotes a "Levantine Spokesperson" for this information, but does not provide a citation for it.

<sup>150</sup> Sturdza, 589. There is no date provided for the nuptial.

<sup>151</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Liston to Bosanquet 25 November 1814. Also cited in Berridge "English Dragomans," 143.

salary in 1716, it is unclear how he was admitted into British service.<sup>152</sup> It was Antonio's position as dragoman, and the subsequent generations of family members that gained appointments in the embassy that later gave the Pisanis real influence and power in the Levantine community and in the British Embassy.

In the subsequent decades following Antonio Pisani's employment as a dragoman at the British Embassy, the Pisanis continued to arrange for appointments of their family members to dragoman positions. There was no real formal recruitment of men for dragomans conducted by the embassy, and appointments were generally made through word of mouth suggestions, which were then typically supported by the referee vouching for the person that they recommended for the position. This practice was not all that difficult considering that the recommendations put forward by the Pisanis were only for members of their family or people connected to it. All of the petitions to admit family members after Antonio Pisani are not available, but it is clear that family members entered the service of the embassy mainly through this process. Antonio (Antoine) was admitted as a *giovani di lingua* in 1784, after his father Etienne-Stefano, applied for that favor to the Levant Company.<sup>153</sup> A decade later, Stefano's other son, presumably Nicholas (Nicolo), was also appointed at his father's request.<sup>154</sup> Etienne-Stefano's youngest son, Frederick, entered into the service as a student interpreter in 1797, after his father died that same year.<sup>155</sup> The tradition of soliciting the embassy to hire family members had become so ingrained in the process of hiring dragomans that the Levant Company began to support the practice. When George Calavro was set to enter the service as a student interpreter in 1795, the governing board

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<sup>152</sup> TNA SP 105/116, 16 March 1716.

<sup>153</sup> TNA SP 105/121, S. Bosanquet to Robert Liston, 31/12/1784.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, ? to George Abbott, 16/09/1794, p. 503-505. It was presumably Nicola Pisani that was appointed as a *giovani* because Stefano's only remaining son, Frederick, did not enter the service until 1797. The name of the sender of the dispatch is unclear.

<sup>155</sup> TNA SP 105/123, ? to Spencer Smith, 26/05/1797. The initials of the writer are unclear.

of the Levant Company wrote to Ambassador Liston that they supported his appointment, but on the condition that it did not “interfere with the promotion of the children of our present Drugomen [sic] who seem to have a sort of preferent [sic] right.”<sup>156</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, there were still four members of the family in active service in the embassy, including Berto.

Berto was not shy in his attempts to ensure that the Pisanis continued to dominate the dragoman positions in the embassy. He was crafty and intelligent enough to tie the fate of the office of dragomans and the functioning of the embassy to members of his family, and having no son of his own, looked to take care of his nephews. In one letter to Consul-General Isaac Morier regarding the administration of the student dragomans, Berto used the opportunity to request a favor from the ambassador regarding the employment of his nephew Alexander (later Count Alexander). To support his request, he discussed the essential services that his family played in the embassy, and that it was important for the embassy to maintain the Pisani line there, beyond the three members that were currently employed.<sup>157</sup> He believed that each of the members of his family that served the embassy had all done an exceptional job, and intimated that they remained loyal to Britain in spite of their family being split between the service of that embassy and Russia.<sup>158</sup> Alexander, Berto wrote, was 13 years old, “healthy,” “active,” and was interested in joining the service. In the letter, Berto doubled his efforts in suggesting that his other nephew Frederick, should be moved up in the ranking from a student dragoman to a formal dragoman, and should receive an increase in his salary. According to Berto, Frederick had a number of favorable attributes including his knowledge of English and other languages, and that he was

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, Levant Company to Robert Liston, 29/09/1795, p. 2-7

<sup>157</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Berto Pisani to Isaac Morier 10/02/1814, p. 20-23. These were Berto, Frederick and Anthony.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, Berto was also quick to point out that the only reason some Pisanis went to work for Russia was because they enjoyed a better salary.

active in almost every branch of business in the embassy.<sup>159</sup> Berto's efforts were indeed successful, and the ambassador, Robert Liston, agreed that Alexander should gain admittance into the service, and Frederick be given a raise.<sup>160</sup> Count Alexander was the last Pisani to enter the service and served there until his retirement in 1886.

### ***Conclusion***

The near closure of the positions of dragoman or student interpreter in the British Embassy to people outside of the Pisanis brought the family much control over the operation and recruitment of employees to the office of the dragomans, particularly in the early to mid-nineteenth century. That does not mean that others outside of the family were not employed by the embassy in that capacity. But even then, the Pisanis had some sort of relationship to them. These included Robert Timoni, Berto Pisani's grandson, who was appointed a student interpreter in 1816,<sup>161</sup> and the above-mentioned François Chabert, who was married to Beatrix Pisani.

Marriage into prominent and well-established families in Pera and the implementation of measures to safeguard their own family's position as dragomans in the embassy generated social capital for the Pisanis in two ways. In following the tradition among Levantine families in Istanbul, the Pisanis intermarried within their own community. Shared culture and religion eased the process, and so too did the access that these families had to social and economic status. The process of building their social networks through marriage with these families put the Pisanis in a position that increased their own standing in the social structures of the Levantine community. The second advantage for the Pisanis was the connection to the embassy and more importantly maintaining their ties to it. Keeping the circle of employment at the embassy as closed to

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Robert Liston to Isaac Morier, 09/03/1814. Also see Isaac Morier to the Governor of the Company of Merchants of England trading to the Levant Seas, 25/10/1814.

<sup>161</sup> TNA SP 105/123, ? to Isaac Morier, 4/04/1816. Also cited in Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 55.



outsiders as possible ensured a constant and uninterrupted connection to their main benefactor in the Ottoman Empire. Employment at the embassy provided them with similar benefits achieved through marriage alliances, namely status and an elevated socio-political position. The fact that the Pisanis were the principal family that the British drew upon to act as their dragomans had connected the embassy to their social networks, which by the nineteenth century had a well-established foothold in the Levantine community, and British and Ottoman imperial spaces.

## Chapter 2

### Professionalization and Negotiation

Prior to the departure of ambassador Lyons from Istanbul to Paris in 1867, he received a letter from his first dragoman, Etienne Pisani. Pisani requested Lyons' recommendation to receive an increase in his salary. In the petition, Pisani outlined his lengthy career and the different stages of his service that he thought were most important to the embassy. He wrote that he began as a student dragoman in the Levant Company in June 1823, and carried over into the service of His Majesty's embassy in 1826. He pointed out the highlights of his career, which included his role in settling the affairs of the island of Samos in 1833, and his assistance in conducting a military survey of Rumelia and Bulgaria in 1836. His promotion to first dragoman went without any application, as was the custom, and he had been appointed outright by the previous ambassador, Stratford Canning. According to Etienne, his brief resignation between March 1857 and April 1858, due to a misunderstanding between him and Stratford Canning, the ambassador at the time, did not sour their relationship too much, and he retained his post of first dragoman thereafter for fourteen years without interruption. Pisani expressed that up until now he had never solicited any favors or asked for a raise in his salary.

To further support his request, he noted that he had performed his duties satisfactorily. He went so far as to compare the importance of his service and his execution of it to some of the Consular Generals that at one point or another worked in Istanbul. Pisani signed off by stating

that through his request, he hoped he was not “over-estimating the value” of his twenty six years of “devotion” to His Majesty’s service in Turkey.<sup>162</sup>

Pisani’s emphasis on the excellence of his service and his dedication to the embassy was obviously a technique used to inveigle Lyons’ support for his raise. His self-image as a faithful employee, and his comparison of the importance of his job and his effectiveness in that position with higher ranked British officials, underlines how Etienne thought about himself and his profession. But Etienne’s narrative and his point of view must be placed alongside the structure of the dragomans at the British Embassy in Istanbul. Pisani’s petition and the details that he provided in it relates to professional hierarchies in the office of dragomans at the embassy, and the process through which one had to go through to reach the highest echelon of their occupation, even though that did not apply to him. It also gave Pisani the opportunity to use his position to his own advantage in asking for a raise. He was aware of the organization of the embassy and the consulate in Istanbul, and undoubtedly privy to the conduct of the employees in them. The details in his petition are noteworthy when we take into consideration the extent to which his position as a dragoman and the nature of his work brought him in and out of the territorial and ethno-linguistic boundaries of empire. His position as a dragoman blurred the lines that separated those boundaries.

This chapter demonstrates how, as Ottoman subjects, the Pisanis operated inside British imperial space and institutions, underlining their skill in negotiating their position in the embassy. To do so, it explores the professionalization of the office of dragomans at the British Embassy in Istanbul, including the shift in the administration from the Levant Company after 1825 to the British government. In 1827, the British introduced a set of rules for their dragomans to regulate their behavior outside of the embassy and to strengthen their grip over their functions

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<sup>162</sup> TNA FO 195/887, Etienne Pisani to Lyons, 10 May 1867, 206-209.

and duties. The goal was to create a more professionalized corps of dragomans that reflected the integrity of the embassy. I argue that the structural changes imposed after 1827 did not complicate the position of the Pisanis or their job security. It benefitted them. The Pisanis toed the line but still managed to mediate the tension between what they wanted and what was expected of them as employees of the embassy. They also negotiated the value of their position, and when challenged, rallied together to improve their personal and collective conditions. The first section of this chapter discusses the regulations imposed by the embassy alongside the more mundane aspects of dragoman life. It provides a snapshot of their day-to-day activities, situating the Pisanis as actors operating inside British and Ottoman imperial spaces in their roles as intermediaries and brokers between the British and the Ottoman Empire. The second section explains how having a position as a dragoman supplied the Pisanis with the opportunity to negotiate their position in the British embassy as non-Muslim Ottoman subjects through tendering their resignations.

The Pisanis crossed multiple boundaries during their tenure as dragomans for the British Embassy. The murkiness of their identity, the questions surrounding how they were initially employed as dragomans at the embassy, and their lasting stronghold there did not obscure their involvement in, or connection to Ottoman society and politics. They were born in, and very much ingrained in Ottoman political and social structures, so much so that it gave them the opportunity to negotiate how they crossed the spatial and institutional characteristics of imperial spaces, and formal and informal boundaries that separated them from Ottoman-Muslim subjects.

The concept of boundary crossing for dragomans in nineteenth century Istanbul is unclear. The expression “crossing boundaries” is widely used but rarely explained.<sup>163</sup> By the

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<sup>163</sup> I take this idea from Francesca Trivelatto who, in the context of a discussion on Sephardic Jewish merchants involved in cross-cultural trade, points out the deficiencies in the usage and analysis of the concept of “cross-cultural

nineteenth century Istanbul was a city characterized by its cultural fluidity, hybridity, and arguably cosmopolitan distinction.<sup>164</sup> Non-Muslims living and operating in the Ottoman Empire could be considered boundary-crossers in one way or another. Foreign merchants, missionaries, travelers, and European diplomats taking short-term or long-term posts in Ottoman port cities could all be placed in that category. As foreigners, they were probably aware of the well-maintained and generally enforced boundaries established between the different confessional communities in the empire. In spite of this separation, Ottoman society was indeed fluid and multi-confessional, which made it possible to cross cultural and religious boundaries, though at times doing so came with the cost of changing one's identity, usually through religious conversion.<sup>165</sup>

Boundary-crossers, cultural or otherwise, are notable because of their abilities to adapt and to transcend spaces outside of where they came from, into others. Usually foreign, these actors learned local languages, adopted the cultural and social mannerisms of their host society, and exploited their position to achieve their own ends. Forging economic ties, brokering deals between clients and patrons of different backgrounds, or gaining permission to operate in foreign places,<sup>166</sup> boundary-crossers in the Ottoman Empire operated between two entities where one was foreign, and the other, indigenous. Trans-imperial intermediaries and other subjects such as travelers, merchants, or émigrés between Europe and the Ottoman Empire were veritable outsiders that later operated among and between boundaries in the Ottoman Empire and

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brokers." Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>164</sup> For debates on Istanbul as a cosmopolitan city, see for example, Henk Driessen, "Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered," *History and Anthropology* 16 no. 1 (2005): 129-141; Edhem Eldem, "Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City;" Will Hanley, "Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies," *History Compass* 6 (5) 2008: 1346-1367; Ulrike Freitag, "'Cosmopolitanism' and 'Conviviality'? Some conceptual considerations concerning the late Ottoman Empire," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (4) 2014: 375-391.

<sup>165</sup> Edhem Eldem, "Istanbul as a Cosmopolitan City: Myths and Realities," 217.

<sup>166</sup> Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, part one of the book.

Europe.<sup>167</sup> These boundaries, whether symbolic, such as cultural traditions that preserved social differences, or social boundaries, the types of social differences evident through unequal access to resources and opportunities,<sup>168</sup> were porous and essentially relational for the Pisanis. They were in a privileged position by virtue of their jobs as dragomans, and because their family history as dragomans propelled them into a multilateral society. The Pisanis did not necessarily have to cross hard and fast boundaries outside of religion. Other boundaries did not apply to them. A boundary to a European immigrant to the Ottoman Empire, such as learning mannerisms of Ottoman-Muslim society did not apply to, or have an effect on already ingrained non-Muslims that lived and operated in the Ottoman Empire for centuries.

Non-Muslims, by definition as *dhimmi*s (protected minorities) and under the jurisdiction of their religious leaders, were placed at the margins of Ottoman society until the onset of the *Tanzimat* in 1839, and the declaration of *Hatt-i Hümayun* in 1856, when the Ottomans promised equality for all subjects, notwithstanding their religious confession.<sup>169</sup> The Pisanis and other Levantine dragomans born in the Ottoman Empire, already transcended any social and political boundaries, because having been non-Muslim already legally and socially, changed their relationship with Ottoman political and social structures. At the same time, their jobs as dragomans makes any idea, real or imagined, that they had to or constantly crossed boundaries unclear. Their proximity to the boundaries they seemingly crossed, however, was accentuated by their roles as intermediaries, brokers and go-betweens. Through these functions, the Pisanis, and

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<sup>167</sup> On trans-imperial intermediaries and subjects, see E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 3.

<sup>168</sup> On symbolic and social boundaries, see Michèle Lamont, Virág Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 168-169.

<sup>169</sup> On the *millets*, see Maurits H. van den Boogert, “Millets: Past and Present,” in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East*, eds. Anne Sofie Roald, Anh Nga Longva, (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 27-45; Bruce Masters, “Millet,” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Gabor Agoston, Bruce Masters (NY: Facts on File Inc, 2009), 383-384; The collection of essays on the *millets* in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society, 2 Volumes*, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), particularly Braude’s article “Foundation Myths of the Millet System,” Volume 1, 69-88.

other non-Muslim dragomans that were born in Istanbul, facilitated cultural, political, and social exchange.

After Domenico, the Pisanis did not immigrate to the Ottoman Empire from Europe. They were not temporary sojourners there, nor short-term employees at the embassy. They were born, raised, and died in the imperial capital. One benefit of their occupation was that they received diplomatic protection providing them with extra-territorial legal status, which provided them access to British and Ottoman legal systems. It represented the duality of the juridical status that some Ottoman subjects could occupy because of their service to, or association with foreign empires. This association is what separated the Pisanis from other Ottoman subjects, and defined their particular position in Ottoman society and inter-imperial diplomacy and politics. Through their position as dragomans, the Pisanis operated within imperial spaces that did not conform to established boundaries between those empires, either territorial or legal.

The Pisanis operated inside the gaps that existed within imperial landscapes; it was where non-Muslim Ottoman subjects mediated politics, diplomacy, their juridical status, and financial activities. It was where they blurred the boundaries of identity, law, society and culture due to their status as *beraths* according to Ottoman legal categories, or protected Ottoman subjects according to European legal categories. The Pisanis functioned and thrived in this space because of its flexibility. It allowed them to negotiate how they wanted to operate inside the contours of Ottoman and British politics and society, and the spatial, institutional and relational characteristics of imperial space. Doing so could create personal opportunities for advancement, or stave off disaster.

Not much is known about the private lives of the Pisanis. Pieces of information appear here and there in letters to the ambassador or in correspondence between family members, but it

is unclear if they were simply private in their written communications, or if they preferred the spoken word. Outside of official correspondence in British documents, their name appears sporadically in travel literature<sup>170</sup> and in the British domestic press.<sup>171</sup> The absence of memoirs or private papers by any member of the Pisani family clouds perspectives on how and why the Pisanis undertook and maintained such an arduous career over such a long period of time. What is clear, however, is that members of this family went to great lengths, and at times great pains to ensure that they kept their position at the embassy secure. Their dynasty and its sustainability was the result of a combination of a number of dynamics, which were the need of their services by the embassy, and how they situated themselves within and between Ottoman and European imperial landscapes.

### ***From the Levant Company to the British Government: Working for the Embassy***

In Istanbul, dragomans were often recruited from the Levantine community of Pera and Galata, comprised of Jews, Armenians, and Latin-Catholics. Greeks from the Phanariot community were also dragomans, though as previously mentioned, were mainly employed by the Sublime Porte until the outbreak of the Greek Revolution, or War of Independence in 1821.<sup>172</sup> The appointment of non-Muslim dragomans was not a decision based solely on the preference of the British, or any other European embassy in the Ottoman capital. It was in fact the Ottomans

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<sup>170</sup> See for example, Thomas Watkins, *Travels through Switzerland, Italy, Sicily, the Greek islands to Constantinople; through part of Greece, Ragusa, and the Dalmatian isles; in a series of letters to Pennoyre Watkins, Esq. from Thomas Watkins, ... In the years 1787, 1788, 1789, Vol. 2, Second Edition* (London: J. Owen, 1794), 279; William Turner, *Journal of a Tour of the Levant Vol.III*, (London: John Murray, 1820), 529; J.C. Hobhouse, *A journey through Albania, and other provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia, to Constantinople, during the years 1809 and 1810 Vol. 2*, (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Son, 1817), 235; Charles White, *Three years in Constantinople; or, Domestic manners of the Turks in 1844 Vol. 1*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1845), 313.

<sup>171</sup> See for example, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine; "Foreign News," *Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* XCVIII (1827), 263. It is not possible to list all instances when the Pisanis appear in the press.

<sup>172</sup> Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 88; 91-95. Phanariots were removed from their positions as dragomans due to their presumed involvement in the revolution and were replaced by Muslims. Also see Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 132-133.



that preferred only non-Muslims to be employed as dragomans for the embassies.<sup>173</sup> The dragomans were given considerable privileges through the capitulations that distinguished them from other non-Muslims or Europeans resident in the empire that were protected by foreign embassies. As representatives of the ambassador or consul, dragomans were given diplomatic protection against any falsities or mistakes made in their interpretations or translations. As such, they were free from any punishment. In the event that a dragoman did commit an offence, they were not to be imprisoned or physically harmed without the knowledge of the ambassador.<sup>174</sup> The reality, however, was different. Alfred Wood notes that a French dragoman lost his head, and an “exasperated Turk” hanged another in the seventeenth century. It was also common for them to be bastinadoed.<sup>175</sup> Other forms of discipline were possible. Berto Pisani was arrested in 1807 at the onset of the Anglo-Ottoman War (1807-1809). No sooner had British ships left the Dardanelles, Berto was captured by Ottoman authorities and later imprisoned in Kütahya, until his release in 1809 upon the return of the British to Istanbul. He then helped broker the Treaty of the Dardanelles in that same year, ending hostilities between the British and the Ottomans.<sup>176</sup>

Dragoman privileges also extended to their property when they died. If he was an Englishman, all of his possessions came under the jurisdiction of the embassy or consul. If he was an Ottoman subject, as in the case of the Pisanis, then his property was passed on to his

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<sup>173</sup> van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 64-66. van den Boogert is not very clear on what premise the Ottomans based their preference for non-Muslims as dragomans for the European embassies. The last set of capitulations granted to the British in 1675 notes that the ambassador or consul for the king of England could choose any janissary or interpreter for their service at their own charge. The article essentially struck out any possibility of a dragoman being appointed for the embassy by the Ottomans. See, *The capitulations and articles of peace between the Majesty of the King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, &c. and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire: as they have been augmented and altered in the times of several ambassadors, and particularly as they have been renewed, augmented, and amplified at the city of Adrianople in the month of January 1661/2, by Heneage, Earl of Winchelsea, Ambassador Extraordinary from His Majesty: and also as they have been since renewed in the month of September 1675 : with divers additional articles and priviledges, by Sir John Finch, to Sultan Mahomet Han, the most puissant Prince and Emperour of the Turks*, (London: Printed for J.S., 1679), 16 Article XXIX.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 24, Article XLIV.

<sup>175</sup> Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 226.

<sup>176</sup> TNA FO 78/79, Berto Pisani to Liston, 24/08/1812, 165.

immediate heir. In the event that there was no heir, his goods were claimed by the Porte.<sup>177</sup> The most advantageous privilege, perhaps aside from diplomatic protection, was their exemption from paying taxes, and particularly the *cizye*, or poll-tax that was required to be paid by all non-Muslim males living in the empire.<sup>178</sup> That tax-exemption passed on to the heirs of their estates, who did not have to pay customs duties on the goods that they inherited from the dragoman.<sup>179</sup>

Contact between the embassies and the Ottomans was regulated through the capitulations, and so too was the manner in which communication was conducted. The provisions that governed the relationship between the dragomans, the embassy, and the Porte, handed down by the Ottomans through the capitulations, institutionalized the occupation of a dragoman in Ottoman and European foreign relations. At the same time, it created a new space for non-Muslims to interact with European and Ottoman state and society because it also formalized and categorized a privileged group of intermediaries. Even if a dragoman was an Ottoman subject, as the Pisanis were, they enjoyed similar rights given to Europeans in the Ottoman Empire. That jurisdiction gave them a degree of autonomy in their public and private lives. It also levied a certain degree of power and influence within the embassy that employed them, where they shouldered important responsibilities.

The Pisanis served as dragomans under two separate, yet interconnected entities between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Levant Company was unique in that it had almost complete control over the British Embassy in Istanbul for just over two centuries. It oversaw the conduct of British merchants in Istanbul, the business of the trading stations or “factories” as they were known, and the business of the consuls throughout the empire. The Company began its operations in the Ottoman Empire as the Turkey Company after William Harborne obtained

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<sup>177</sup> *The Capitulations and Articles of Peace*, 24 Article XLIV.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 37-38 Article LXVI.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 37 Article XLV. Cf. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 66.

trading privileges for England from Sultan Murat III in 1580. He later became the first ambassador there in 1583.<sup>180</sup> The Company regulated trade, refereed domestic disputes between merchants and residents throughout the rest of the empire, and managed communication between the British and the Sublime Porte. In exchange for being granted a trading monopoly in the Levant from the crown, the Company initially bore most of the costs of running the embassy and the consulates in the empire, which included the payment of salaries for the ambassadors, dragomans, cavasses, janissaries that protected the embassy, and the Turkish scribe employed to write the correspondence between the embassy and the Sublime Porte. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, a shortage of Company funds to run the embassy brought the government to begin making financial contributions to maintain it.<sup>181</sup>

The Company controlled the initial appointments of ambassadors and the men chosen were primarily merchants. That changed in 1626 when King Charles I pressed his own appointment on the Company, and thereafter ambassadors were generally diplomats and ranked officials.<sup>182</sup> The ambassadors handled the day-to-day functioning of the embassy, which included political and commercial activities up until 1804. Due to the increasing demands of the political work brought on by the French Revolution and increasing Russian interest in Ottoman affairs, the ambassador was instructed to focus exclusively on political affairs, and the Levant Company to appoint and pay the salary of a consul-general to handle its commercial activities. The salary for the ambassador was now fully paid by the government.<sup>183</sup> In 1805 the government

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<sup>180</sup> On Harborne's mission to the Ottoman Empire, see Susan Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578-1582: A Documentary Study of the first Anglo-Ottoman Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). The Turkey Company changed its name to the Levant Company after its merger with the Venice Company in 1592. G.R. Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 2. On the reasons for the merger, see Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1964), 18-20.

<sup>181</sup> Berridge, *British Diplomacy*, 30

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 31; Wood, *History of the Levant Company*, 88.

<sup>183</sup> Berridge, *British Diplomacy*, 32-33. Berridge cites Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 184; Also see Cunningham, "The Dragomans of the British Embassy," 3.

completely took over the costs for the functioning of the embassy.<sup>184</sup> Dragomans, however, were still appointed by and under the jurisdiction of the Company until 1812, when they too were brought under the control of the ambassador and thus the British government.<sup>185</sup> Their salaries were still paid by the Levant Company until its dissolution in 1825.<sup>186</sup> During these periods of transition, the duties of dragomans, the expectations of them, and their ranks were quite clear. But after the British government took over the functioning of the embassy, dragomans were given a set of rules and regulations that they were to abide by.

The document reflected something like a job description, which was meant to bring greater control over the employees of the embassy and regulate their behavior and conduct outside of the embassy. Making professionals out of the dragomans, or at least professionals in the eyes of the government makes sense considering the general reform of the consular establishment in 1825. George Canning's Consular Act of 1825, at least in theory, was designed to establish some uniformity throughout the consular service. A Consular Department was created at the Foreign Office, and the reforms sought to consolidate all of the consulates and servants into a single system and streamline salaries. What it did not do is clarify the appointment of candidates to posts, institute a system of ranking, or promotion.<sup>187</sup>

In 1827, the embassy set down a list of rules and requirements for their dragomans. It was couched within a document that provided them and the student interpreters with a gratuity for their performance and "zeal" during the negotiations conducted by the previous ambassador,

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<sup>184</sup> Berridge, *British Diplomacy*, 30. Berridge cites Alfred C. Wood, "The English Embassy at Constantinople, 1660–1762," *The English Historical Review* XL (CLX) 1925, 538; Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 161, 180, 184; *The Despatches of Sir Robert Sutton, Ambassador in Constantinople (1710–1714)*, ed. Kurat Akdeş (London: Royal Historical Society, 1953): 42, 50; Phyllis S. Lachs, *The Diplomatic Corps under Charles II and James II* (NJ: Rutgers University Press), 35–6.

<sup>185</sup> Cunningham, "The Dragomans of the British Embassy," 8.

<sup>186</sup> Berridge, *British Diplomacy*, 52.

<sup>187</sup> Platt, *The Cinderella Service*, 13–15.

Lord Strangford.<sup>188</sup> It covered issues related to the employment of dragomans, including salary and rank. It specifically stated that dragomans were to “look to no emolument beyond their salaries,” and that they were not to receive any gifts or marks of distinction in exchange for their services, without the permission of the ambassador. The document further noted that the dragomans were already informed that surplus funds from the fees paid for the applications for *fermans* were at the disposal of the embassy. The rule was not designed to remove the privilege of receiving those funds from dragomans that already enjoyed them. The distribution of the funds, however, was at the discretion of the embassy, and some of these were put aside for British subjects that were “destitute.” Dragomans and student interpreters were also prohibited from taking part in any political or commercial business, unless otherwise directed by the ambassador or the consul-general. If so, they were to report it immediately. The document also noted those principles might have to be fixed by more specific regulations in the future, and concluded with a brief discussion of seniority. These rules, however, were not necessarily new, but it appeared that the embassy was keen on upholding the “respectability of the establishment and the comfort of the individuals composing it.” In return, the dragomans and student interpreters were expected to perform their duties satisfactorily.<sup>189</sup>

The British Embassy and government were very concerned with the prospects of dragomans making a supplementary income because it damaged the integrity of the embassy. Prior to the takeover of the Levant Company, dragomans were forbidden to accept supplementary forms of income, including gifts. This stemmed from a long tradition of “back-

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<sup>188</sup> The negotiations were presumably related to Strangford’s role in mediating the Greek Revolution from 1821 until his return to England from Constantinople in 1825. See Alan Cunningham, “Lord Strangford and the Greek Revolt,” in *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters*, 188-232.

<sup>189</sup> TNA FO 352/59 1 (B). There is no date or page number on the document, but it is in a file for the year 1827. Funds from the sale of *fermans* were in fact still provided to dragomans well into the nineteenth century. See for example, TNA FO 195/107, 10/02/1834; FO 195/411, 10/02/1853.

scratching” by dragomans, particularly with the sale of *berats*. When the embassy used the sale of *berats* to Ottoman subjects as a way to generate additional income,<sup>190</sup> the buyer would turn around and give the dragomans gifts. In return, the dragomans would lobby for their new friend’s interests at the Porte, and manage their lawsuits in the courts. The Company considered that conduct to be abusive to its interests, and discontinued the practice. The dragomans were left to rely solely on their salaries for subsistence.<sup>191</sup> But engaging in other activities, including trade or finance to supplement their income was not uncommon for dragomans due to their access to Ottoman and international markets. van den Boogert provides evidence for these activities in the eighteenth century.

Prior to working as a dragoman for the Dutch consulate in Aleppo, then “switching over to British protection,” Maṭlūb w. Raḥāmīm was a warehouseman for a French Firm. He also acted as a banker.<sup>192</sup> The First Dragoman for the British consulate in Aleppo in the eighteenth century, Jirjis ‘Ā’ida, was also involved in international trade and owned a considerable amount of real estate in the city.<sup>193</sup> Though these practices were evident in the eighteenth century among dragomans appointed at the British consuls outside of Istanbul, it also occurred in the early nineteenth century. In 1803, Berto Pisani was awarded 10,000 *kuruş* by the Porte in recognition for his service to the Ottoman state. Along with the money, Berto was assured that prayers for him and his family would be offered. The circumstances surrounding the award, however, were

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<sup>190</sup> Christine Laidlaw, *British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 39. Laidlaw points out that after his arrival to Istanbul in 1766, ambassador John Murray charged a fix rate of 2600 piasters (approximately £330) for a *berat*, which was a discounted rate compared to the 3500 piasters charged by previous ambassadors.

<sup>191</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Liston to Bosanquet, 24/11/1814, 134-137.

<sup>192</sup> van den Boogert, “Analysis of a Dirty Trade,” 560.

<sup>193</sup> van den Boogert, “Provocative Wealth,” 219-220.

not disclosed.<sup>194</sup> After 1827, there is circumstantial evidence that the Pisanis engaged in activities to try to supplement their income, even though that was against the policy of the embassy.

Etienne Pisani caused a minor stir when it was revealed that he used his influence at the Porte to promote a railway concession that he had an interest in. He of course denied the allegation when confronted by ambassador Henry Elliot.<sup>195</sup> The section on receiving permission from the ambassador for commercial business seemed to have had more of an effect. That policy was tested many times, for different reasons. For example, when Etienne was in the market for a new summer residence for his family, he settled on a plot of land in Yeniköy. He was notified that that specific location was too close to the “Kiosk of Kalendar,” a summer retreat for the sultan, and thus had to seek direct permission from the sultan to build so close to it. The sultan nevertheless acquiesced. Before accepting the sultan’s favor, Etienne duly wrote to ambassador Henry Bulwer asking his permission to accept the land.<sup>196</sup>

On another occasion, Etienne wrote a private letter to the ambassador informing him about a conversation that took place between Sir Moses Montefiore and himself, an Anglo-Jewish philanthropist staying in Istanbul at the time, and Montefiore’s doctor. The two men requested that Etienne pull some strings to have the ‘Nishan Medjidié’ (*Nişan-i Mecidiye*) conferred upon Montefiore by the Porte. The decoration, created by Sultan Abdülmecid I in 1852 had five different ranks or classes and was awarded to Ottoman subjects and foreigners in

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<sup>194</sup> BOA HAT 261/15068 1218 Z 29. In a note on the top of the document, the sultan did not address the money given to Pisani but instead inquired about the acquisition of boats and munitions from the British. It is unclear if Pisani had anything to do with brokering a deal for these, which might explain why he was given such a sum.

<sup>195</sup> TNA FO 391/21, Elliot to Hammond, 18/11/1867, 53-54; Elliot to Hammond 21/01/1868, 59-60. In the second dispatch Elliot remarked that the reputation of the first dragoman for the French Embassy was not very good. He was known to ‘have an itching palm, and that he feathered his nest very comfortably.’

<sup>196</sup> TNA FO 195/589, Etienne Pisani to Bulwer, 22/12/1858. There is no definitive evidence that Pisani ended up taking the land, and it is unclear whether or not he was given approval from the sultan for it. A document found in the BOA written in 1856 states that there was no record that Pisani was to be granted any land in Kalendar. BOA A.MKT.NZD 227/34 1273.

recognition of their service to the Ottoman Empire. These were also awarded on a lifetime basis.<sup>197</sup>

Etienne informed him that he could not exercise that kind of influence without permission from his superiors. In the letter, Etienne noted that he suggested that Montefiore's doctor write to the ambassador instead, but the physician stated that he did not want to "trespass" on the ambassador's valuable time. Etienne's letter was rather open-ended, simply telling the ambassador about what transpired.<sup>198</sup> But according to Montefiore's diary, six days later he was notified by Pisani that he was selected to receive the decoration because the "Turkish Ministers" wanted to show him "some mark of the high esteem" they had for him. The private conversation that Montefiore and his doctor had with Pisani was of course not mentioned in his diary.<sup>199</sup> The practice of giving medals to Ottoman subjects and foreigners alike was common in the nineteenth century. They were awarded in recognition of their service or loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, and duties to the state.<sup>200</sup> The Pisanis were also given these medals. Frederick's son, Bartolomeo was awarded the *Nişan-i Mecidiye* at different ranks three times, due to his role as a teacher at the Ottoman Imperial Music Conservatory, once at the fourth rank 1857,<sup>201</sup> and two more times in 1859 at the same rank.<sup>202</sup>

Dragomans' jobs were complex and difficult, and went well beyond the duties of translation and interpretation. On call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, dragomans

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<sup>197</sup> Edhem Eldem, *Pride and Privilege: A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals, and Decorations* (Istanbul: Osmanlı Bankası, 2004), 176-177.

<sup>198</sup> TNA FO 195/484, Private Letter, Etienne to the Ambassador, 21/06/1855.

<sup>199</sup> *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore Comprising their Life and Work as Recorded in their Diaries From 1812 to 1883, Vol. 2*, ed. Dr. L. Loewe (Chicago: Belford-Clarke Co, 1890), 42.

<sup>200</sup> Kemal Hakan Tekin, "Osmanlı Devletinde Gelenekten Yeniliğe Geçişin Anlamlı bir Sembolü: Mecidi Nişanları," *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 28 (2014): 395 (393-411).

<sup>201</sup> BOA A.DVN.MHM. 23/92 1274 RA 00. The first name is not given in the document, but this must have been Bartolomeo. On his role as a teacher and Master in the Imperial Conservatory, see Evren Kutlay, *Osmanlı'nın Avrupali Müzisyenleri*, (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2010), Chapter 2.

<sup>202</sup> BOA A.DVN.MHM 28/63 M.00.1276. The first name is not written in the document; BOA A.MKT.MHM 98/162 M.18.1276. The first name is not written in the document. He is only referred to as Mösyö Pisani.



were the “right hand man” of the ambassador, and all embassy personnel. They were not marginal, but in the mix as intelligence gatherers, mediators, and advisors to the ambassadors, who relied upon their expertise of Ottoman and European cultural, social and political norms and procedures. They could be found at the local *kadi* court or consular court, in the imperial shipyards, at the imperial arsenal, the police houses, the summer homes of Ottoman officials, and at the Sublime Porte. They engaged in almost daily conversation with the Grand Vizier, the *Reis Efendi*, Ottoman dragomans of the Sublime Porte, and dragomans of other European embassies in Istanbul. Their business was managing, relaying, and providing information to the embassies and the Ottomans, and they were indispensable links for both. They received daily instructions from the ambassador and returned with detailed reports on the events of the day, ensuring a constant flow of information needed to maintain a steady diplomatic relationship with the Ottomans. But their positions were perhaps not nearly as prestigious as they should have been, given their title and position with a foreign embassy.

Diplomatic social gatherings at the Pera Palace were certainly a benefit of the position, but did not outweigh their daily grind and the demands of the job. Their duties brought them in and out of imperial and communal spaces on a daily basis. Moving about “European” Istanbul, up and down the streets and alleys of Pera and Galata, to the British embassy and Ottoman courts and offices was a typical day for the Pisanis. The Pisanis lived in Pera and Beyoğlu, close enough to the Sublime Porte and the embassy, where moving about by foot was rather easy for them.<sup>203</sup> Some owned property just outside of the city and close to the British ambassador’s summer residence in Tarabya (Therapia). In 1820, Berto wrote to the Grand Vizier requesting

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<sup>203</sup> BOA I.HR 47/2254, 1255 Z 29. The second dragoman, presumably Antonio Pisani, wrote to the Grand Vizier asking for permission to replace a pipe in his home, which was located in Beyoğlu. Though he was granted permission, an exact address for the house was not provided. A similar document from 1847 also shows that another Pisani who was a dragoman at the British Embassy, also requested to have land in Beyoğlu transferred to his wife. See BOA İ.DH 135/6922 1263 M 28. Though there is a name in the document for Pisani, it is unclear.

permission to exchange a farm (*çiftlik*) in Belgrad Forest (*Belgrad Ormanı*), Trabya worth 5,937.5 *kuruş* for a yalı in an undisclosed location valued at 23,027.5 *kuruş*. The land was in the possession of his wife Cecilia, since 1795. Even though there was a significant difference in the value of the properties, the request was sent to the sultan, urging him to approve the exchange.<sup>204</sup> Being located near their place of employment and their ambassador was advantageous for carrying out their duties. Having boats at their disposal was crucial for them to carry out their duties.<sup>205</sup> But even accommodations such as a boat did not really lighten their burden.

Most dragoman business had to be carried out at the Sublime Porte, which was fine in the fall and winter because in the nineteenth century the embassy was located in Pera, which was close. The summer heat was more challenging as the ambassadors usually spent their time either at the residence in the Belgrad Forest which was about fifteen kilometers from Istanbul, or between Büyükdere and Trabya on the Bosphorus, where it was cooler and acted something like a safe haven against outbreaks of disease in the city.<sup>206</sup> While the ambassadors sought refuge from illness, so too did the dragomans. A few times each year the whole dragoman office suffered when one was absent due to illness. The timeframe could range anywhere from a day or two to months, depending on the severity of their condition. Leaving Istanbul for greener pastures was a common practice, and at times they would leave the empire.

Etienne sent a note from his doctors to ambassador Bulwer when he requested a two month leave for Vichy, wanting to use the mineral waters there to help him recover from a few of his ailments, which included kidney stones and “herpetic inflammation of the eye.”<sup>207</sup> One

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<sup>204</sup> BOA HAT 1176/46461 1236 Z 29.

<sup>205</sup> TNA FO 195/913, Etienne to Elliot 09/03/1868. Etienne wrote to Elliot requesting a new oar boat as the one assigned to him was out of date and not useable.

<sup>206</sup> Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 10.

<sup>207</sup> TNA FO 195/627, Etienne Pisani to Bulwer, 06/05/1860.

year later, he again requested leave to Europe due to the condition of his health.<sup>208</sup> The same was true for student interpreters. Just after completing his three-year language training with satisfactory results, Percy Smythe immediately requested leave from Istanbul for England due to health reasons.<sup>209</sup> Henry Simmons, another dragoman working alongside the Pisanis directly blamed the “arduous duties of dragomans for his failing health.” In his letter to ambassador Bulwer, he requested a transfer to a consulate outside of Istanbul. Simmons argued that the harsh winter weather and summer heat had been too much for him, mainly because of his bowel issues and stomach diseases.<sup>210</sup> Instead, Simmons was offered the position of Chief Dragoman at the Consulate General, only to refuse it and once again ask for a transfer out of Istanbul because of his health. He was so adamant about it, that if the transfer was not granted, he preferred to receive a pension, which he believed was not too great of a request for a servant of thirty-six years.<sup>211</sup> If adverse affects of health were directly linked to the job, so too was the level of debt that dragomans accrued over the course of their service at the embassy. The Pisanis, and other dragomans employed with them at the embassy often complained about their salary and debts, which at times affected their relationships with members of their family and community.

Prior to the takeover from the Levant Company, the embassy employed approximately five active dragomans, and five student dragomans. The dragomans and the students were generally chosen by the ambassador and before 1825, the ambassador and the Levant Company’s chief officer.<sup>212</sup> According to embassy rules in 1827, the student-interpreters were expected to

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<sup>208</sup> TNA FO 195/693, Etienne Pisani to Bulwer, 27/08/1861. Etienne did not say what was wrong with him, nor provide dates for his absence.

<sup>209</sup> TNA FO 195/289, Percy Smythe to Stratford Canning, 18/08/1848. On Smythe’s language training completion, see in the same file Alison to Canning, 18/08/1848.

<sup>210</sup> TNA FO 195/627, Henry Simmons to Bulwer, 30/07/1859.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, Simmons to Bulwer, 28/11/1859.

<sup>212</sup> TNA FO 366/569, Memorandum: Dragomans at Constantinople, October 1831, 9. Wood lists the number of dragomans and number of students as four each for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Berridge argues that Wood is incorrect, stating that it was three dragomans, and three students. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*,

learn English and Turkish, and to acquire proficiency in reading, writing and speaking both languages. The first dragoman was selected by the ambassador and was to be the “organ of his community at the Porte.” The first student interpreter was to act as an extra interpreter if he was needed. Though traditionally a system of seniority was loosely in place that set the standard for upward mobility, the embassy noted that no system was actually in effect. But, “claims of long service combined with those of merit will no doubt be duly appreciated.” Aside from the first dragoman and first student dragoman, interpreters and student interpreters were deemed to be on “equal footing in every respect,” except for salary, which varied, because of the considerations to length of time in the service. A case in point was the salary of Anthony Pisani, whose lengthy service as an interpreter rendered him an increase in salary to £500 compared to the salary of the other interpreters, who were paid £300.<sup>213</sup>

The first dragoman was by far the most important in terms of his duties. He was charged with translating and interpreting the political information from the Porte, and delivered *communiqués* between the ambassador and high Ottoman functionaries. These included the Grand Vizier, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (*Reis Efendi*), and at times, the sultan. He was also responsible for conducting business between dragomans of other embassies. The lower-ranked dragomans usually spent their time in the customs houses or the *kadi* courts, and acted as representatives for merchants protected by the embassy and other members of the English nation in Istanbul. The embassy also hired a dragoman that acted as an archivist who was in charge of the diplomatic chancery. The head of the chancery was probably the most important employee of the embassy after the first dragoman. His knowledge of embassy records had to be exceptional and so did his proficiency in Ottoman Turkish, English, French, and Italian. The organizational

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227. G.R. Berridge, “English Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries: The Early Nineteenth Century Origins of the British Embassy Drogmanat in Constantinople,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 14 (4) 2003, 139. See footnote 12.

<sup>213</sup> TNA FO 352/59 1 (B). Untitled. There is no date on the document but it is in a file dated 1827.

skills of the archivist had to be excellent because of the sheer amount of correspondence that he had to file on a daily basis. These included dispatches from the ambassador to officials operating in the Ottoman Empire, dispatches between the ambassador and his superiors in England, other embassy personnel, the dragomans that were completing their daily tasks at the Porte, the courthouses, or in the Levantine community.

Performing the most important political work, the first dragoman received the highest salary and a small bonus, or gratuity for his services. There was not too much of a difference in the scale of salaries. The amount of compensation they received changed after the British government took over the Levant Company, and payment shifted from piasters to pounds. Just after this shift, the yearly salary of François Chabert, the First Dragoman, was £700/year and he received a bonus of £400/year. Anthony Pisani, the second dragoman, had a salary of £500/year, George Calavro, the third dragoman, and George Wood, the fourth dragoman were each paid £300/year. The student dragomans received a salary that ranged from £75 to £100/year, depending on their rank.<sup>214</sup> Upon retirement, the dragomans were eligible for a small pension, and when they had died, their wives could apply to the embassy to receive their husband's pension. The wife of Berto Pisani, for example, received a yearly pension of £100 and in 1827, a gratification of £500.<sup>215</sup> The British government was inclined to award pensions to retired dragomans as a type of reward for their lengthy service and merit. Pensions, however, were not necessarily a given.

We know little about the process of decision-making in awarding pensions, but in general the embassy would turn over the request to the Foreign Office, and before the takeover of the embassy by the British government, to the Levant Company. The amount of the pensions varied,

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<sup>214</sup> TNA FO 366/569, Memorandum: Dragomans at Constantinople, October 1831, 9-10.

<sup>215</sup> TNA FO 352/16 B, 20 April 1827, Folder 8, 519-520.

however. As noted above, Berto Pisani's wife was awarded a yearly pension of £100 and a one-time gratuity of £500 after his death in 1827.<sup>216</sup> That amount was a drastic decrease compared to the £600/year that Berto was initially given after his retirement.<sup>217</sup> Years later in 1834 her pension dropped again to £50/year, and seemed to have remained at that rate.<sup>218</sup>

When dragoman Umberti (Umberto) Calavro died in 1841, his wife Rose promptly called upon the ambassador to request a pension. In lieu of a yearly pension, Ambassador Ponsonby granted her a one-time gratuity of £300, which matched the yearly salary of her husband.<sup>219</sup> In the correspondence, Ponsonby wrote a short note stating that he was not aware that pensions were granted to widows of deceased dragomans since the abolition of the Levant Company. He did note that Berto Pisani's wife received a pension of £200 (which is debatable since other files note that the pension was £100). But apparently Calavro's services could not be compared to that of Pisanis. Upon the death of former first dragoman Frederick Pisani in 1871, his wife petitioned the embassy to procure the continuation of the pension that he was granted when he formally retired in 1852, though he continued to perform some translations for the embassy until 1857, at the age of 76. He stopped due to his age and failing health.<sup>220</sup> In the letter, she wrote that his salary was the only form of subsistence that she and her family could rely on, and noted that her husband had served the embassy for 54 years. Upon receipt of the petition, Ambassador Henry

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<sup>216</sup> TNA FO 362/16B Folder 8, British Palace to Mrs. Pisani, 20/04/1827, 519-520.

<sup>217</sup> TNA FO 366/569, Memorandum: Dragomans at Constantinople, October 1831, 9. Cf. FO 352/59 1 (B).

<sup>218</sup> TNA FO 78/235, 1834, 22; TNA FO 78/276, 1836, 20; TNA FO 78/304, 1837, 17. It is unclear why the rate of her pension decreased.

<sup>219</sup> TNA FO 366/569, 80-85. The one-time gratuity is debatable because in 1853, a pension of 900 piastres was given to Mrs. Calavro, to be paid over six months. See TNA FO 195/411, Robert Chabert, 17/01/1853.

<sup>220</sup> For the petition, see TNA HD 3/45, Therèse Pisani to Elliot, 6/02/1871. On Frederick's retirement see TNA FO 195/534, Frederick Pisani to Alison, 1/04/1857; See Stratford Canning's reply to that letter, Canning to Frederick Pisani, 2/02/1857 in the same file; Also see Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 61.

Elliot forwarded the request to the Foreign Office, which in turn issued a yearly pension of £100 to the widow to be paid in quarterly installments.<sup>221</sup>

The issuing of pensions, it seems, was a practice that remained throughout the nineteenth century. They were often the principal means through which families of deceased dragomans could continue to survive in Istanbul, as the petitions from each of their widows shared that common theme. But regardless of rank or the money they made, finances were a constant burden. Dragomans in all positions at one time or another petitioned the embassy with the hope of increasing their salary.

The majority of the requests connected the amount of work that they were expected to complete with their compensation. Casolani, whose rank at the embassy was equal to that of a Second Dragoman, wrote to ambassador Lyons requesting an increase in his salary from £500 to £600. He argued that in spite of his living as “quietly as possible,” his expenses had outweighed his income. He pointed out that the situation was leading to embarrassment in his personal life. In consequence, he was considering supplementing his income from his position as a dragoman by taking on additional employment elsewhere. Casolani did not disclose what exactly he meant by that, but did note that if he did so, it would take away from his focus on the duties expected of him as a dragoman, which would be “detrimental to him and the embassy.”<sup>222</sup> The shame associated with lack of finances was something that seemingly affected all of the dragomans, and often times was related to some type of debt they had.

There were times when, dissatisfied with their salary and petitioning for a raise, they would threaten to leave for greener pastures, as Casolani attempted to above, but these were usually empty threats. They would also use the shame of their debts to induce the embassy to feel

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<sup>221</sup> TNA HD 3/45, Therese Pisani to Elliot, 06/02/1871; Elliot to Earl Granville, 09/02/1871; Earl Granville to Elliot, 05/06/1871.

<sup>222</sup> TNA FO 195/887, Dragomans 1867 Volume 2, 04/05/1867, Casolani to Lyons.

sorry for them, or help them out when they found themselves strapped for money. At times, that strategy worked, even before the British government took over the functioning of the embassy from the Levant Company.

When Berto Pisani was feeling the pinch from money owed to a lender he wrote to Ambassador Liston, to bump up his salary and in his request, he noted that much of his salary went towards paying interest on debts that he owed, which was an embarrassing situation.<sup>223</sup> He told of how the debts accrued from his time of imprisonment by the Ottomans between 1807 and 1809, when diplomatic relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire had ceased. His loss of salary during that period caused him to fall into debt because he had to take out loans in order to support himself and his family.<sup>224</sup> The situation was so dire for him that he had to list his deceased mother's house for sale, located in Pera. The sale of the house would satisfy the payment of his debts, but still leave him in a poor financial situation.<sup>225</sup>

Berto asked Liston to help to satisfy his debts, and Liston did his best to help him, requesting some relief for him from Viscount Castlereigh, the Foreign Secretary. In his letter to Castlereigh, Liston explained the dire circumstances that Berto was in, and actually put some of the blame for Berto's debt on himself. According to Liston, the "foreign empires active in the Ottoman Empire used to supplement dragomans' salaries through the sale of patents of protection to Ottoman subjects. The "valuable consideration" was then shared between ambassadors, dragomans, and other members of the mission. The profits from these sales were considerable and dragomans and others employed by the embassies never really complained about their salaries.<sup>226</sup> He explained further that when he discovered this practice during his last

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<sup>223</sup> TNA FO 78/79, Berto Pisani to Robert Liston, 24/08/1812, 168.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 165-166.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 169. Berto did not say to whom he owed money to, or the nature of his loans.

<sup>226</sup> TNA FO 78/79, Liston to Viscount Castlereigh, 13/12/1812, 230.



mission to Istanbul, he worked to abolish the system because it ended up costing the embassy and England too much money, and so too did many of the ministers that followed him after he left the embassy.<sup>227</sup> Though Liston felt that his efforts were honorable and, in the end, advantageous for the embassy, it hurt the income of dragomans. He argued that they had a “fair claim for compensation.”<sup>228</sup> Helping out dragomans that were in a financial jam was apparently not anything new. Liston reminded Castlereigh that he gave him permission to help out Chabert, who he gave 3200 piasters to clean up his finances. Pisani needed about 10,000 more than that. He hoped that Castlereigh would acquiesce to his request. It is unclear whether or not Pisani did in fact receive the funds. But if his years of service after this incident were any indication that an arrangement was worked out for him, he probably did.

Liston’s point that the loss of money dragomans experienced because of the sale of patents of protection that were stopped, probably had a significant impact on their sustenance and indeed led some to become financially in debt. But debt seemed to be a constant factor in the life of dragomans. Almost fifty years later, Henry Simmons found himself in a similar quandary when petitioning Ambassador Bulwer for a raise, pointing out that he too suffered from debts at one point during his career. He argued that his financial history did not give him the ability to put aside any savings.<sup>229</sup> Salary was important and dragomans believed that their compensation should have reflected the type of work they were doing, which went beyond facilitating diplomatic relations strictly between the Porte and the embassy.

Dragomans were the lifeline of the embassy and were the only individuals able and qualified to communicate with the Porte. They handled judicial, commercial, and communal

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, Liston’s first residency in Istanbul was 1793-1796. He names Straton, William Drummond, and Arbuthnot as other ambassadors that worked on dismantling that system.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 230-231.

<sup>229</sup> TNA FO 195/627, Simmons to Bulwer, 30/07/1859.

cases between the Ottomans and British subjects operating in the Ottoman Empire under the protection of the embassy, and essentially had a role in every step of the decision-making process for the embassy and the consuls. Individual merchants and members of the “factories” also relied on dragomans because they were often charged with representing their interests. This was particularly the case if there was a dispute between a British merchant and an Ottoman subject that went to local *kadi* courts. Dragomans were the only embassy employees that had the ability to interact with the court, and convey information that was vital for the merchant’s activities. Decisions passed by Ottoman courts could not be enforced without the presence of a dragoman.<sup>230</sup>

Beyond representing merchants at the *kadi* courts, dragomans were also important for their local community, and members of the British nation that lived and worked in Pera and Galata. They were present at meetings that involved members of the Levantine community and other non-Muslims working and living in Istanbul, such as the Corporation of Tavern Keepers,<sup>231</sup> and anything having to do with crime, infrastructure, travel concerns, and of course the issuing of their *berats*. Dragomans were also appointed as embassy delegates to various boards in Pera and Galata, such as the Pera Board of Health.<sup>232</sup> British subjects operating in Istanbul under the embassy’s protection usually dealt first-hand with the dragomans, who then conveyed the matter to the ambassadors or consuls.

The protection of British subjects operating in the Ottoman Empire was an important function for the embassy, and dragomans were at the forefront of those efforts. Amending disagreements between British subjects and Ottoman subjects had to be handled carefully, but at

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<sup>230</sup> *The capitulations and articles of peace between the Majesty of the King of Great Britain*, 11 Article XV.

<sup>231</sup> TNA FO 195/289, Memo of Etienne Pisani, 14/03/1847.

<sup>232</sup> BOA HR.TO 225/4, to Edhem Pasha 25/01/1857. Henry Simmons was appointed to be the delegate to the Pera Board of health after Robert Chabert died in 1857.

times brought dragomans perilously close to over-extending themselves, damaging the integrity of the embassy and their own reputation. Such cases often tested the limits of the relationship between Ottoman officials and the Pisanis. It is difficult to gauge a general positive or negative relationship between the Pisanis and various Ottoman officials. Most references to the Pisanis in the BOA are official in that when they are mentioned, it is usually in the context of them passing along information from the ambassador, or attending to a matter with Ottoman officials in their roles as dragomans. It was rare when Ottoman ministers discussed their thoughts about them on a personal level. But Berto Pisani seemed to have been well-liked. As mentioned above, when he petitioned to have his *çiftlik* swapped for the *yalı*, he was described as having been spoken highly of by the British ambassador, the current dragoman at the embassy, Chabert, and by Ottoman statesmen. He was also commended for his experience and loyal service to the Ottoman sultan.<sup>233</sup> But relationships between the Pisanis and Ottoman officials were not always so favorable. The Churchill Affair in 1836 provides insight into how the Pisanis could become personally embroiled in conflicts between British subjects in Istanbul and the Porte, and how they handled these types of situations when they clashed with high-ranking Ottoman officials.

The events that unfolded on 8 May 1836 demanded immediate intervention by the embassy on behalf of William Churchill, a protected British subject. Churchill, a newspaper correspondent for the *Morning Herald*, and a merchant living just outside of Istanbul at the time, was quail hunting in Scutari, and inadvertently shot and wounded a young Turkish boy. Churchill should have known better than hunting at that time. Open season had ended two months before, so he was not even allowed to be in the area, let alone actively shooting at game. The locals heard the commotion and along with holding him until the police arrived, beat and

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<sup>233</sup> BOA HAT 1176/46461 1236 Z 29. It is unclear from the document what type of service Pisani offered to the Ottomans.

insulted him. That was the least of Churchill's problems. When the police arrived, they hit him even more, this time with sticks. Churchill was beaten so bad that he could not stand, and had to be dragged to local officials. While there and trying to explain himself, he was beaten again by another officer, this time with a cane. He was eventually turned over to the *Reis Efendi*, Akif Efendi in Istanbul, and then put imprisoned at the Porte. Rather than meeting with Akif Efendi, he was transferred to the prison at the Arsenal, to be presented to Ahmet Paşa, the *kadi* whose jurisdiction covered the village where the crime was committed. His time at the prison at the Arsenal was short-lived. A guard representing Akif Efendi appeared with orders to transfer Churchill to the *bagno*, one of the worst prisons in Istanbul that housed notorious criminals. It was at this point where Etienne Pisani finally arrived and intervened in the case, and tried to relieve Churchill from the ordeal.<sup>234</sup>

Not much has been written about the so-called Churchill Affair of 1836. Snippets of information appear here and there in other studies related to British foreign affairs in the nineteenth century, particularly in regard to the Eastern Question, diplomacy, and the careers of British statesmen.<sup>235</sup> An article by Joseph M. Fewster focuses on the role of the British Ambassador, Lord Ponsonby, and his handling of the situation in relation to the Eastern Question. The Pisanis figure prominently into this discussion but only through their roles as intermediaries, and relaying messages between the embassy and the Porte. Fewster was correct

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<sup>234</sup> Joseph M. Fewster, "Lord Ponsonby and the Churchill affair of 1836: An episode in the eastern question," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 9 no. 2 (1998): 57-58.

<sup>235</sup> Sir Charles K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1831-1841; Britain, the liberal movement and the Eastern question* Volume II (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1951), 530-535; Vernon J. Puryear, *International Economics and Diplomacy in the Near East: A Study of British Commercial Policy in the Levant 1834-1853* (Leland: Stanford University Press, 1935), 45-48; G.H. Bolsover, "Lord Ponsonby and the Eastern Question," *Slavonic and East European Review* 13 (37) 1934, 98-118; Kenneth Bourne, *Palmerston, the Early Years, 1784-1841* (London: Allen Lane, 1982), 563-564; Carter V. Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (NJ: Princeton, 1989), 74-75. Fewster also cites these works.

in that the whole episode bore a significant connection to European power politics in the Ottoman Empire.

In the context of the Eastern Question, the Churchill Affair was more or less a win in great power politics for Britain. At that time, British influence at the Porte had been waning and the Ottomans, in the view of Britain, were in too comfortable of a position with Russia, ostensibly pushing the British out of their strong position of influence previously held at the Porte. Three years earlier, Sultan Mahmud II, signed the Treaty of *Hünkâr İskelesi* with Russia, a gesture of appreciation for their assistance in suppressing the governor of Egypt, Mehmet Ali's uprising against the Porte. In effect, the Treaty was a defensive alliance between the Ottomans and the Russians. But what angered the British was the inclusion of a secret article in the Treaty that required the Ottomans to close the Dardanelles to foreign warships if the Russians were attacked. The British viewed the Treaty as a sign of increasing Russian influence in Ottoman Affairs.<sup>236</sup> For the British, it was a return to the drawing board, and a step back in their efforts to preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. For almost three decades previous, the whole of British foreign policy centered on maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in order to have a secure route to India,<sup>237</sup> and using it as a bulwark against Russian expansion into Europe. Over the next decade, the British worked towards restoring their positive and previously influential relationship with the Ottomans, even later pledging their support for the empire, both military and moral, again against Mehmet Ali in 1839, when the governor caused another crisis in Egypt.<sup>238</sup> That pledge emerged on the heels of the treaty of Balta Limanı (Anglo-Ottoman

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<sup>236</sup> Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars: 1700-1870: An Empire Beseiged* (NY: Pearson Longman, 2007), 375. Aksan cites Roderic Davison, "Britain, the International Spectrum, and the Eastern Question," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 7 (1992): 15-35.

<sup>237</sup> Reşat Kasaba, "Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 4 no. 2 (1993): 221.

<sup>238</sup> Aksan, 375.

Treaty) signed between Britain and the Ottoman Empire in 1838. Essentially a free trade agreement, the British were given unfettered access to the Ottoman market, all state monopolies were abrogated, and customs duties and tariffs were more favorable to the British than ever before.<sup>239</sup> As Kasaba points out, the Treaty represented a pivotal moment in British foreign policy in that it committed Britain in thwarting Russian and French expansion deeper into Ottoman affairs. The Ottomans became the “center-piece” of British Near Eastern policy.<sup>240</sup>

Kasaba is right that Balta Limanı essentially entrenched Britain into Ottoman affairs until the end of empire, and was used as a device to cut off Russian influence at the Porte. The Churchill Affair two years earlier, was used in a similar vein by the British, to try to reincorporate themselves directly into Ottoman affairs, and to thwart Russian influence. The Pisanis were key players in that process.

The fallout between Britain and the Porte from the Treaty of *Hünkâr İskelesi* had still not settled when Churchill shot and wounded that boy. As previously mentioned, Churchill was swiftly taken into custody and suffered numerous beatings and injuries because of his actions. Behind the scenes, the Pisanis acted rather quickly. Churchill managed to send a note to the embassy to inform Frederick that he was being held in the prison in the Arsenal. Though Frederick Pisani was the First Dragoman, he sent his nephew Etienne (referred to as Stephen in the documents) to the prison to oversee Churchill and figure out what exactly had transpired.

According to Frederick, Etienne reached the Arsenal to find an empty cell. He was informed that Churchill had been removed and sent to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The next morning, Etienne went directly to the Reis Efendi’s house to find out where Churchill had been placed, and what exactly happened. Akif was apparently angry about the whole situation and told

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<sup>239</sup> Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 47.

<sup>240</sup> Kasaba, 220.

Etienne that Churchill was at the Porte, but was soon going to be transferred to the *bagno*. Etienne opposed those measures until he had a chance to meet with Ambassador Ponsonby before to discuss his perspective on the matter. The following day, Frederick hustled to the Porte where he finally met with Churchill. He told the dragoman of the ordeal he had been through and that he had been beaten. Etienne then met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs. In their conversation, Frederick expressed that he and the British embassy were “sorry for the accident.” He also came to Churchill’s defence, arguing that what transpired was an accident of “no consequence” and that nobody could ever think that a “respectable British merchant,” who was “honest and quiet” could have been responsible for wanting to injure a small boy. Frederick insisted that Churchill be released at once, but his demand fell on deaf ears. Frederick had learned from an *ilam* written by the *kadi* at Scutari, shown to him by Akif, that the boy suffered wounds in the arm, the leg and genitals, and that Churchill was to be sent to the prison of the Arsenal. Speaking once again to Akif Efendi, Etienne told him that he just saw Churchill at the Porte. Akif replied that at that moment, the merchant was being transferred to the prison at the Arsenal. Frederick broke out into a forceful discussion in which he complained about the beating Churchill suffered and asked the *Reis Efendi* if he simply wanted to continue punishing him by holding him in prison. Akif replied that he would send one of his attendants to the Arsenal to set Churchill free. Taking Akif’s word for it, Etienne traveled to the Arsenal, but upon his arrival, and to his dismay, Churchill was not there. He had in fact been sent to the *bagno*. Frederick returned to Balta Limanı to look for Akif Efendi to figure out what was going on, and became embroiled in an argument. He was angry about Akif’s shameful conduct in giving him the wrong information. Akif denied that he told the dragoman that Churchill was sent to the Arsenal, but rather to the *bagno*.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Durham University Library Special Collections in the Papers of John Viscount Ponsonby Collection. Frederick

Fredericks's confrontation with Akif Efendi initiated a current of diplomatic activity between the embassy and the Porte, where the Pisanis figured prominently. Ponsonby certainly had a major role in the whole affair, given that he was the ambassador, but the episode provides insight into how dragomans projected themselves, their expertise, and their opinions in matters that were of critical importance for the embassy.

The altercation between Frederick and Akif, however, did not stop there. While Churchill remained in the *bagno* and Frederick worked towards obtaining his release, the dragoman learned that knowledge about the condition of the wounded boy had to be acquired before he could be freed. Though Pisani acknowledged that Akif had not beaten Churchill, he was still angry that it was he that sent him to the *bagno*. He informed Akif that keeping Churchill in the “worst and most shameful prison in the world” for three days was something that would not escape England's memory. He also explained that the embassy would not take any examination or certificate from the Turks regarding the boy's health without him being examined by a European surgeon sent by the embassy. The exchange became heated, however, when Frederick brought up the fact that he heard that Akif alluded to him as being deceitful when he applied the term of “imposture” when speaking about Frederick in relation to the initial *ilam* written by the *kadi* of Scutari. Akif denied ever using the term and told Frederick that he sent Doctor Macguffog, the physician for the embassy (who also coincidentally attended to the sultan), to the ambassador to ask for some sort of reparation due to Frederick's disrespect towards that legal document. He also wanted an apology from the dragoman. Frederick noted that if he were forced to apologize, he would rather simply resign from his post.<sup>242</sup>

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Pisani to Ponsonby, GRE/E/483/40/6,10/05/1836.

<sup>242</sup> TNA FO 78/275, Frederick Pisani to Ponsonby, 11/05/1836, 123-125.



In response to Frederick's conversation with Akif, Ponsonby defended his dragoman's conduct and told him explicitly to not apologize for his actions. Ponsonby blamed Akif for much of the misfortune that had befallen Churchill, and argued that he broke the law, insulted the English government, and acted unbecoming of an Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs. He instructed Frederick to pass on his frustration and anger about the whole affair, and particularly Akif's actions.<sup>243</sup> Ponsonby was so angered with the whole situation that he requested two men, the one who beat Churchill, and the Kiahaya [sic] (Kâhya) [of Scutari], who he believed to be just as culpable for the treatment of Churchill, to be bastinadoed. He also reminded Frederick that he hoped to learn the truth about whether or not the sultan actually had a role in Churchill's imprisonment, which he believed was probably influenced by false reports brought to him by Akif or others. It was Ponsonby's belief that the preservation of the Ottoman Empire was directly connected to England's friendship, and that England was probably the only force that prevented the settlement of the Eastern Question through the partition of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the European powers, citing Russian protagonism as the main culprit. Ponsonby underscored that England had no plans to allow that to happen, unless the Ottomans had committed some act that drove a wedge between the two empires. He furthermore expressed his wish that this affair was one that was kept between the individuals and the embassy, and not between the Porte and the British Government. He signed off by thanking Frederick for his good work and his "extreme satisfaction" with his conduct, and doubted that others could have carried out the instructions that he had been given.<sup>244</sup> It turns out that Ponsonby expressed his desire for Akif (and later Ahmet Paşa) to be dismissed from his position. When Frederick spoke to Pertev Efendi, the Ottoman Minister of the Interior about Ponsonby's demand, he told the dragoman that Russia

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid, Ponsonby to Frederick Pisani, 127-130.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, Ponsonby to Frederick Pisani, 12/05/1836, 137-139.

would surely interfere and support Akif, which would then complicate the whole matter.<sup>245</sup> But, and as Fewster points out, there was apparently a misunderstanding between Pisani and Ponsonby on what the ambassador actually meant in his statement on the dismissal of Akif and Ahmet.

Ponsonby did not make a formal demand for dismissal, but that he would provide all of the facts to the sultan, who he believed would make the proper decision. He had Pisani immediately clarify his language to Pertev.<sup>246</sup> Akif was ultimately dismissed from his position on 16 June 1836 due to health related reasons.<sup>247</sup> Fewster points out that the Sultan probably acted before the British government could formally demand Akif's dismissal.<sup>248</sup> It was not until five months later when Palmerston received a note from the Ottoman ambassador in London, Reşid Bey, that Akif was in fact let go because of his role in the affair.<sup>249</sup> Churchill was of course released and the matter was settled between the British Foreign Office, the embassy and the sultan.

Frederick's own self-fashioning as a hard-working and loyal employee who was willing to test the limits of his position provides insight into the climate that dragomans worked within. Incidents between British subjects and Ottoman subjects could initiate diplomatic crises. With dragomans literally caught in the middle of such proceedings, navigating the demands of Ottoman and British statesmen, while maintaining the integrity of the embassy and working within the contours of the professional conduct expected of dragomans was challenging. But there was nothing to suggest that their positions would be safeguarded. Their length of service

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, Ponsonby to Frederick Pisani, 14/05/1836, 145. Ponsonby reiterated that point in another letter in the same file, dated 22 May 1836, 157.

<sup>246</sup> Fewster, 63. Fewster cites Ponsonby to Pisani, TNA FO 78/275, 25 May 1836. On Ponsonby's grievance against Akif Paşa and Ahmed Paşa, see HAT 1181/46642, 1252 S 05.

<sup>247</sup> Fewster, 69. He cites a Hatti-sherif [sic] published in the Turkish Gazette, 21 June, FO 78/275 fos.259-60.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 74.

and the rules and conventions that they were expected to follow, however, should not be confused with complacency. Notwithstanding the rules or codes of conduct expected of them, the Pisanis were aware of the importance of their positions and at times willingly risked their employment, as Frederick stated that he was prepared to do during his involvement in the Churchill Affair, or gave up on it altogether when they felt that either their wants, rights, or reputation was threatened. They used that knowledge as an instrument to embed themselves deeper into the British Embassy.

### *Negotiating their place in the British Embassy*

The significance of the service that the Pisanis provided and their hereditary recruitment ensured that to some extent members of the family would have a place in the embassy and by extension, the British Empire. As Ottoman subjects, their ties to the embassy were regulated by the capitulations, but their tenure there was by and large due to their ability, and constant need to negotiate their positions inside the embassy. Their skill in further embedding themselves inside British imperial structures was directly related to how the Pisanis viewed their relationship with the embassy, and as outsiders, their need to protect themselves, at whatever the cost. Paradoxically, one tool they used to do that was through resigning from their positions.

There were resignations from the embassy by four members of the Pisani family. Two occurred in the eighteenth century, and the other three in the nineteenth century. As early as 1734, Antonio Pisani, the first family member to be employed as a dragoman at the embassy and the second ranked dragoman there, resigned. Antonio's resignation was due to a disagreement that he had with ambassador Lord Kinnoul. According to Kinnoul, Antonio was not to be missed because he did not really value the dragoman. Kinnoul admitted that he was a "very good" dragoman, but that he was not very smart, nor did he have "a way with the Turks." Kinnoul also

characterized him as a bit of a troublemaker. Pisani was too tempted to give into small intrigues, which apparently gave the ambassador too many headaches and prevented his successes. Pisani's longstanding duel with first dragoman Luca Chirico was also a concern, especially because Kinnoul believed that Chirico was overall a better dragoman.<sup>250</sup> Pisani's resignation was only in effect for just over a year, however. Charges of intrigue, double-dealing, and being under the influence of the French ambassador in Istanbul were later leveled against Chirico. He was formally dismissed as a dragoman for the British, and members of the British nation were ordered to break all contact and correspondence with him. Pisani was reinstated as second dragoman, and one Andronius Geraiti (?) was installed as first dragoman.<sup>251</sup>

The second member of the Pisani family to tender his resignation was Berto Pisani. He did so twice, once in 1789 and again in 1814. The circumstances surrounding his resignation from the Office of the Chancery in 1789, however, are unclear.<sup>252</sup> He remained a dragoman for the embassy in Istanbul, and one year later petitioned the Levant Company asking for an appointment as an agent or vice-consul in Brussa and Mundania [sic] (Mudanya).<sup>253</sup> The Company was not clear as to whether or not Pisani wanted to quit his position at the embassy and altogether move to Brussa, or only conduct business on behalf of the Company on an ad-hoc basis.<sup>254</sup> The Company felt that his services could have been more useful in Istanbul and denied his request. He was instead appointed third dragoman at the embassy.<sup>255</sup> In 1814, Berto Pisani once again expressed his wish to resign. He was aging and his health was deteriorating. He did state that he would continue his duties if he was given a raise.<sup>256</sup> Pisani ended up staying at the

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<sup>250</sup> TNA SP 97/27, Kinnoul to the Grand Duke of Newcastle, 12/07/1734, 32-37.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, Kinnoul to the British Nation, 17/09/1735, 419.

<sup>252</sup> TNA SP 105/121, Governors of the Levant Co.? to Sir Robert Ainslie, 29/01/1789, 215.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, Governors of the Levant Co.? to Sir Robert Ainslie, 16/03/1790, 267-268.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, Foster to Bartholomew Pisani, 16/03/1790, 272-273

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, Governors of the Levant Co.? to Sir Robert Ainslie, 24/09/1790, 293.

<sup>256</sup> TNA SP 105/134, Liston to Bosanquet, 24/11/18, 137-138.

embassy until his retirement from the position as first dragoman in 1820. He agreed to provide assistance in the translation of documents if needed.<sup>257</sup>

Three more resignations occurred in the nineteenth century. The first was by Frederick Pisani in April 1854, and the other two by Etienne Pisani in 1857 and 1875. There was nothing suspicious or scandalous surrounding Frederick's resignation. He had simply aged, and the demands of his work were catching up with him. Stratford Canning sent him a note thanking him for his long service, and expressed that Frederick ought to be proud of his service and the honesty with which he executed it.<sup>258</sup> The arrangement that Frederick worked out to assist in translations ended in 1857. Frederick cited that his age of 76 years did not allow him to perform his duties satisfactorily.<sup>259</sup> Etienne Pisani's resignation in 1857 was more contentious and sheds further light on how the Pisanis negotiated their position in the embassy.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March 1857, Etienne sent Stratford Canning, now Stratford de Redcliffe a scathing letter to notify the ambassador of his resignation. The letter began by Etienne charging that "it could no longer escape his notice" that de Redcliffe had been "studiously and systematically trying to undermine" him at the Porte and in public. In trying to protect his own credibility, Etienne explained that he was at a loss to come up with a reasonable explanation why his ambassador would act in that manner. He wrote that it was not possible for him to continue in his duties "either with advantage to the British interests, or with credit to myself."<sup>260</sup> After 34 years of service, Etienne called it quits.

de Redcliffe angrily replied to Pisani on the same day. He was unimpressed with Pisani's behavior and denied the dragoman's allegations. The ambassador hinted at what drove Pisani to

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<sup>257</sup> TNA SP 105/121, Liddell to Cartwright, 4/10/1820, 299.

<sup>258</sup> TNA FO 352/45B, Canning to Frederick Pisani, 2/4/1854.

<sup>259</sup> TNA FO 195/534, Frederick Pisani to Alison, 1/4/1857.

<sup>260</sup> TNA FO 195/534, Etienne Pisani to Stratford de Redcliffe, 5/3/1857. Copies of the letters can also be found in TNA FO 78/1485 with the same dates.

resign. Apparently there was a commercial dispute between two British merchants and two Ottoman subjects. de Redcliffe explained that given the circumstances of the situation, he thought that sending an attaché to the Porte instead of only a dragoman would have been the best course of action. He decided that he would send both, but apparently Pisani misunderstood the order, and believed that only the attaché was to be sent to settle the matter. Feeling that he was initially overlooked, Etienne refused to accompany the attaché. He went one step further and did not execute the rest of his duties for the day. de Redcliffe signed off by writing that he regretted that “your long official intercourse with the embassy should be brought to a close by what must appear to everyone a most unaccountable proceeding on your part.”<sup>261</sup> Etienne did not receive de Redcliffe’s response until 7 March.

In the meantime, Etienne’s decision could not have been that definitive. A day after sending de Redcliffe his notice, Etienne wrote to his brother Count Alexander Pisani that he was willing to retract his decision if the ambassador met a few of his conditions. The first was that Etienne felt that he should be treated with “consideration and respect.” The second condition related to his image and reputation. de Redcliffe was to inform Her Majesty’s government that Pisani always executed his duties with the greatest devotion.<sup>262</sup>

The next day, on 7 March, de Redcliffe wrote Etienne a second letter. He informed him he learned that on the day of Etienne’s resignation and his refusal to carry out his daily duties, that the dragoman did in fact agree that it was the ambassador’s right to distribute orders to whom he thought fit to execute them. de Redcliffe expressed that after seeing Etienne on the evening of 6 March that he believed that they had worked out their differences, and he did not send his reply to Etienne’s resignation. But later that very evening, de Redcliffe received Count

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<sup>261</sup> TNA FO 195/534, de Redcliffe to Etienne Pisani, 5/3/1857. Copies of the letters can also be found in TNA FO 78/1485 with the same dates.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, Etienne Pisani to Count Alexander Pisani, 6/3/1857.

Alexander Pisani who, at Etienne's request, showed the ambassador the letter that he sent him outlining the conditions he laid out in order for him to continue to serving the embassy. He did not acknowledge the contents of the letter, and wrote that "nothing, therefore, is left for me but to send you my preceding letter, and to acquaint you with my intention to forward your resignation to Lord Clarendon, suspending you from further service as soon as you have brought the unsettled current affairs to a conclusion."<sup>263</sup>

That same day, Etienne replied to de Redcliffe. He acknowledged receiving both of his letters from 5 and 7 March, and wrote that since it seemed that his position would not improve, to go ahead and forward his resignation to the Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs. He also noted that he would not interfere with the political or commercial affairs of the embassy.<sup>264</sup>

On 9 March 1857, de Redcliffe forwarded Etienne's resignation to the Foreign Office and enclosed copies of the letters that were exchanged between he and his dragoman. He explained his position, and defended it by describing how dragomans were expected to abide by the rules of conduct and to execute the orders that were given to them. He also explained what took place in his meeting with Etienne the day after the dragoman tendered his resignation. de Redcliffe wanted to know what it was that essentially drove Pisani over the edge. Pisani stated that he was told by some people, the names of which he did not provide, that the business he was supposed to carry out at the Porte was already known to the Ottoman ministers and that his duties were just a matter of formality. The matter it seemed, injured the ego of the dragoman. de Redcliffe argued in his letter to his superiors in London that Pisani really did not know his place, and that he had "an exaggerated notion of his dignity as first dragoman." He believed that Pisani had an ideal image of what the first dragoman was, and that he was the only one that should be transacting

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<sup>263</sup> TNA FO 195/534, de Redcliffe to Etienne Pisani, 7/3/1857

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, Etienne Pisani to de Redcliffe, 7/3/1857.

business with Ottoman ministers. The ambassador further wrote that in spite of the fact that the first dragoman is the only one that is given the responsibility to conduct business at the Porte, at times he found it to be important that he went to see Ottoman ministers personally, or to pass on confidential communiqués through other channels. de Redcliffe admitted that Pisani really was a good dragoman and was “an active, intelligent, good humored and courageous assistant.”

Notwithstanding these admirable traits, de Redcliffe wrote that within the last twenty months, he was told by some people that he should be careful around Pisani. He ended the letter by writing that he had filled Pisani’s position with one Mr. Revelaky, a British subject who was qualified, and had the confidence of Reşid Pasha, the Grand Vizier.<sup>265</sup> But the issue of Etienne’s resignation did not end there. His brother Count Alexander Pisani was working behind the scenes and intervened in the conflict. His actions shed more light on the reasons for his brother’s resignation, and echoed previous attempts to push out any competitors to their position, as in the case of Luca Chirco a century earlier.

On 12 March 1857 Count Pisani sent a confidential letter to his friend and confidant, Lord Cowley (Henry Wellesley), the British ambassador to France, though he had nothing to do with the quarrel or proceedings. His objective was to clear up some facts surrounding his brother’s resignation. Count Pisani repeated his brother’s claims that information had been reaching the Porte before he could deliver it, which led to ministers at the Porte laughing at his expense and embarrassing him. Count Pisani pointed out that the real cause of the whole situation was not Etienne’s behavior, but the actions of the man hired to replace him. According to him it was Revelaky who was conducting private business at the Porte and passing on information. Count Pisani used this as an opportunity to establish some details about Revelaky. In de Redcliffe’s letter above, he noted that Revelaky was a British subject. Count Pisani argued

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<sup>265</sup> TNA FO 78/1485, de Redcliffe to Earl of Clarendon, 9/3/1857.



otherwise. According to him, Revelaky posed as a British subject. He only recently received temporary diplomatic protection, and was in fact a “rayah” [sic] (*raya*) who was a native of Psammattia. His father had been paying the “haratch” (*haraç*) until it was abolished, and had a shop near Scutari. Revelaky apparently had been a life-long clerk in commercial houses in Galata, and had been dealing with issues with the “loan and bank.” In terms of Etienne’s behavior, Count Pisani wrote that given the circumstances he understood where his brother was coming from. According to him, Etienne’s refusal to accompany the attaché (Moore) to the Porte that day was not because he did not like the man. He used it as an occasion to express his feelings about what had been happening at the Porte. He also pointed out that Etienne ended up going with Moore to the Porte. Count Pisani believed that Etienne reacted poorly to the whole situation, and he blamed himself for showing de Redcliffe the note outlining his brother’s conditions to return to the embassy. The whole thing put Count Pisani in an “unpleasant position” stuck in “strict neutrality” between his brother and the ambassador.<sup>266</sup>

Etienne nevertheless returned to work for the embassy after he sent a letter to de Redcliffe requesting to return to his position.<sup>267</sup> The letter was sent in December, and since Alison took over as acting chief of the embassy, it was probably easier for Etienne to be reinstated. Etienne resumed his duties until 1875, when he decided to retire, though, as will be discussed in chapter four, his resignation at that time was mired in controversy.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> TNA FO 519/201, Count Alexander Pisani to Lord Cowley, 12/3/1857.

In this file there are two other letters from Count Pisani to Lord Cowley. In the first, dated 19 April 1857, Pisani thanks Cowley for his advice on how to handle the situation. Cowley apparently wrote to Count Pisani urging Etienne to keep a low profile for the time being. In the second, dated 23 December 1857, Count Pisani thanked Cowley for the kindness that he had shown to him and his brother. In this letter Count Pisani wrote that Etienne met with de Redcliffe on 7 December, and that Alison had been in charge of the embassy since 12 December. Etienne’s request to be reinstated was to be sent to London.

<sup>267</sup> TNA FO 352/45A (1), de Redcliffe to Etienne Pisani, 11/12/1857.

<sup>268</sup> Berridge points out that de Redcliffe did not trust Etienne Pisani anymore and was “forced to communicate with the Porte via a Greek named Revelaky.” Berridge also notes that Edmund Hammond, the Permanent Under

This episode sheds valuable light on procedures that had to be followed when a dragoman resigned, and how far the Pisanis were willing to go in order to guard their collective reputation. Etienne's resignation could not have ended better for the dragoman. All of the quarrelling and back and forth between him and de Redcliffe wrapped up in nine months, and Etienne recovered his job.

Dragomans had the right and the will to resign, and the ambassador could not unilaterally accept the resignation of a dragoman. That had to be sent to London for formal recognition. The problem between Etienne and de Redcliffe stemmed from Etienne's anger from feeling that he was maligned at the Porte. Ottoman ministers were receiving information from somebody other than Etienne, and he was not pleased about it. There was some credence to his claim, so much so that his brother verified it in his letters to Cowley in Paris. Revelaky, the so-called British subject that replaced Pisani, was apparently communicating with the Porte, probably on de Redcliffe's behalf. In the ambassador's letter to Clarendon, he did not deny the fact that at times he would use back channels to get his messages to Ottoman ministers. Perhaps Revelaky's official hiring was his reward for his clandestine work for the ambassador. Etienne's reaction might have been handled better. The matter seemed to have been cleared up the day after Etienne presented his resignation, when Etienne and de Redcliffe discussed the issue. But giving a set of conditions to an ambassador crossed the employer-employee line and that was something that de Redcliffe was not willing to overlook. de Redcliffe's hand was essentially forced when Count Pisani presented those conditions to him. The tables turned on Etienne, and he knew it. In his reply to de Redcliffe's two letters, he had no choice but to repeat that his resignation needed to be forwarded to London.

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Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, believed that de Redcliffe was jealous of Etienne because of the influence that he had at the Porte. See Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 61, fn. 53.

Etienne's resignation, and his brother's intervention indicate that neither was willing to risk damaging their family's reputation, even if it damaged that of the embassy. In their eyes, the Ottoman ministers were already laughing at them, and they were unwilling to let it continue. Etienne's resignation was his way of showing that he would not stand for seeming personal disgrace at the Porte, or at the embassy. Count Pisani did more harm than good when he showed his brother's conditions to the ambassador. Whether or not his correspondence with Cowley was his attempt to rectify his actions and enlist the ambassador to Paris' influence to smooth over the situation with de Redcliffe or London, is debatable. It is also unclear if Cowley did step in and shape the outcome of Etienne being hired again after it was known that de Redcliffe was leaving his post. Nevertheless, Count Pisani and Etienne rallied together to safeguard their status and family reputation.

### ***Conclusion***

The takeover of the embassy by the British government from the Levant Company provided a set of uniform and formalized norms and procedures for dragomans. It put together a seemingly equitable platform for dragomans to understand how their salaries were allocated and outlined the prerequisites for advancement and the tacit expectations of the embassy. Prolonged appointments as dragomans assisted the Pisanis in maintaining their predominant positions in the embassy, and provided them and their families with some security after they retired or died through pensions. The strategies the Pisanis employed to delegate their position in the embassy allowed them to either deepen their assimilation and attachment to the embassy, turn away from it, or remain active in the British embassy.

The Pisanis were not fully autonomous actors in the embassy but utilized their occupation to negotiate how they fit into it and navigated through its dynamics to try to ensure that their

authority was exercised. Etienne Pisani's petition to get a raise in his salary outlined his value to the embassy and had overtones of equality between himself and higher ranked British officials because of his performance on the job, crowned by his years of service.

Resignations were also a method used by the Pisanis to induce the embassy to open up rather than close down opportunities for themselves. Antonio and Berto both turned to resignations to communicate what they wanted, and used that as a tool of dispute resolution or escalation, while attempting to show their worth as dragomans. Etienne's resignation in 1857 sheds light on both the principles he attached to the position of first dragoman, and the extent to which he was willing to protect them, and his reputation.

Resignations, on the one hand, put the Pisanis in a precarious position. It could have led to the loss of their occupation, prestige, and foreign diplomatic protection. On the other hand, it provided them with the flexibility to dictate their own terms the boundaries that they mediated between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, and also the boundaries that they were personally crossing. This flexibility and the way that they capitalized on it enhanced their position in the embassy, and in their personal and official dealings with the Sublime Porte. But working as an employee at the embassy and capitalizing on the value of one's position, though advantageous, only provided the Pisanis with membership in a British institution. They remained Ottoman subjects, even though some had differing points of view on how they identified as Ottoman subjects, British subjects, or neither. Such ideas about belonging were constitutive of how political interaction and identity politics shaped personal classifications of subjecthood, and where the Pisanis fit in Britain and the Ottoman Empire.

## Chapter 3

### Categories of Belonging and Subjecthood

In February 1842, an article entitled “The Libel Law” was published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. In the context of a discussion on British libel laws, the un-named author drew primarily on the example of the trustworthiness of Levantine dragomans employed by the British embassy in Istanbul.<sup>269</sup> The author discussed a recent court case filed by Frederick Pisani, “a Greek,” and the Chief Dragoman at the British Embassy in Istanbul. Pisani had presented a case to the British Court of Common Pleas against the well-known daily, *The Times* (London). The newspaper published two letters, one in February and one in March 1837, which criticized the employment of foreign-born dragomans by the British. Although there is no other mention of Frederick Pisani, the author of the “The Libel Law” quoted the testimony of Count Alexander Pisani, archivist at the British embassy, and Frederick’s nephew.

What is interesting is the context that Count Pisani provided about the office of the dragomans. He stated that in 1837 there were five active dragomans in the embassy, including his brother Etienne. He described their duties, explaining that the “office [of dragomans] was one of responsibility and trust,” and that they were charged with interpreting and exchanging communications between the embassy and the Sublime Porte. He stated that he was born in Istanbul but was of Italian origin, that he believed that his uncle Frederick was also born in the

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same place, and that all of the Europeans, or “Franks” as they were known, lived in Pera, a district of Istanbul. His title of Count was passed on to him from a relative in Italy that had it conferred by the Pope. He then told of how he had relatives employed by the Russian embassy in Istanbul, naming Nicholas Pisani, and his second cousin, Paul. Count Pisani added that many Pisanis also lived in Russia. Based on Count Pisani’s testimony, the author of the article accused the dragomans of lack of loyalty to Britain, questioning their reliability in British service, given their familial connections with the Russians. He also queried how secrecy in British affairs was handled.<sup>270</sup>

This story provides a snapshot of the multiple layers of identity of the Pisani family. Defining groups of people, or specific people is complicated in the Ottoman context because until the late nineteenth century, subjecthood and identity were based upon religious confession, as subjects were organized along religious lines, or the *millet* system, as it is commonly referred to.<sup>271</sup> It was also difficult in the British context because subjecthood was based primarily on allegiance and place of birth. It was not uncommon for Ottoman subjects that received foreign protection to claim or try to obtain the rights of subjecthood from the British. Though not the norm, these types of claims and attempts by Ottoman subjects were taken seriously by the British. Fending off jurisdictional conflicts and claims of subjecthood was often a long drawn-out process, engendering years of complicated legal debates. In 1846, for example, Abram Abro solicited British subjecthood through documents of denization or an act of parliament. The process lasted for more than five years.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> “The Libel Law,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* vol. LI no. CCCXVI (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes) February 1842, 141-143.

<sup>271</sup> On the *millet* system, and the problems of this terminology see Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the Millet System,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society, Volume 1: The Central Lands* eds. Benjamin Braude, Bernard Lewis (NY: Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc, 1982), 69-88.

<sup>272</sup> TNA HO 45/3207. This file contains most of the dispatches related to Abram Abro’s case.

In short, the initial reason for Abro's request to obtain British subjecthood was so that he could be furnished with rights and protections of a British merchant, and the ability to formally purchase a British vessel that he could use to conduct trade. But it was later revealed that Abro had ulterior motives and in fact needed to obtain British subjecthood in order to collect an inheritance from a wealthy late uncle of his in Austria. According to Austrian law, proceeds from a Last Will and Testament could not be inherited by an Ottoman subject, but could be by a British subject. Abro was born in Smyrna in 1793, the son of the head dragoman of the British Consulate there. His grandfather and brother also served the consulate in the same capacity. Abro left Smyrna around 1814 for Trieste, where he settled and became a merchant. According to Abro, he was a British subject, a right that he inherited through the services of his family members to the consulate in Smyrna. Not only did he describe himself as a British subject, he also went to great lengths to prove that he was not an Ottoman subject. Abro argued that because his family members took up positions with the British Consulate they forfeited all of the rights and privileges accorded to them as subjects of the sultan. He also had the governor of Smyrna draw up a document to prove that he and his family members were not Ottoman subjects. That document, written in Ottoman Turkish and translated into English, coincidentally repeated much of Abro's argument that he and his family members were not Ottoman subjects because of their connection to the consulate. The document argued that neither Abram nor his family members were ever registered in the tax books of the Ottoman Empire, proving that none of the Abros had been Ottoman subjects. Abro also produced other documentation to support his claim of being a British subject.

Two passports were given to Abro by the British, one from when he left Smyrna for Trieste, and the other while in Trieste. These ascribed different statuses to him. The former noted

that he was under British protection and the latter, an actual British subject. Abro's argument did not convince Lord Palmerston, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Since the matter was one of "nationality" and might require an Act of Parliament, it was handed off to Sir George Henry Grey, the Secretary of State for the Home Department. But it was the position of Palmerston, and presumably Grey, that serving the British and obtaining diplomatic protection as an Ottoman subject did not grant automatic subjecthood to a person. Henry Addington, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs pointed this out in a dispatch to presumably one of Abro's lawyers. Perhaps in response to the document from the Governor of Smyrna, Addington drew attention to the agreement made between Britain and the Ottoman Empire of January 1809 related to Ottoman subjects employed as dragomans or in any other diplomatic capacity. Such employees were all granted the same rights and privileges of British subjects in the Ottoman Empire, including not having to pay taxes or serve in the military. According to Addington it might have been the case that because Abro's family served the consulate for so long in Smyrna, they could have been "styled" as British subjects,<sup>273</sup> meaning the appearance of being a British subject because of the diplomatic protection they received, but not treated as such by the British.

It is unclear how Abro fared in his attempt. Even though the file is over one hundred pages long and contains numerous dispatches and legal documents, Addington's dispatch is the final document available in it. The last file available in The National Archives related to Abro is dated 1852, and is another request on Abro's behalf for denization. Nevertheless, the protectionist measures taken by the British to safeguard their own laws and their agreement with the Ottoman Empire limited access to subjecthood and were based on legal statutes. Being a

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, Addington to H. Waddington, 14/10/1850. In the document, it appears that the term "nationality" is used interchangeably with "subjecthood." The British Nationality Act was not passed until 1948, and was preceded by the Naturalization Act of 1870.



dragoman, or having been a member of a family of dragomans still did not automatically grant a person British subjecthood, a truth that the Pisanis also had to grapple with in their attempts to either reinforce their relationships, or disassociate themselves from Britain and the Ottoman Empire.

Using a case filed in the British Court of Common Pleas by Frederick Pisani against *The Times*, and the process of filing the Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani at the British Consular Court in Istanbul, this chapter discusses the application of legal categories of subjecthood placed on Frederick and Count Pisani by their British employers. I discuss these categories alongside personal, self-identifying accounts by Frederick and Count Pisani to emphasize that there were conflicting views concerning their subjecthood. Frederick believed that he was not a British subject, and Count Pisani argued that he was a British subject, or at least a quasi-British subject. In both incidents, the Pisanis argued their own claims of subjecthood by using the protection that they received under the capitulatory agreement between the British and the Ottomans, with mixed success. These two examples show how the Pisanis were categorized by their employers, and how they categorized themselves, underlining that even in the nineteenth century applying such categories was difficult. That the British and the Pisanis struggled with concepts of subjecthood calls these categories into question.

These cases demonstrate the fluidity of the boundaries of belonging for the Pisanis, not just from an imperial point of view, but a personal one where their lived experiences mitigated their relationship to the empire they were born into, and the one that employed them. But still, in these cases both Pisanis need to be viewed within the context of being members of excluded groups with privileged exemption<sup>274</sup> in imperial polities. Even then, and regardless of their diplomatic protection, they still had to negotiate their inclusion into British and Ottoman

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<sup>274</sup> Op cit, fn. 19, 8.

imperial structures. In the case of Count Pisani, he was excluded from British and Ottoman categories of belonging, and Frederick from British categories. Both had to initiate cases in order to achieve a favorable settlement for themselves, which hinged on their ability to prove how they belonged. Their affiliation with Britain and the Ottoman Empire allowed them to access imperial structures. Operating inside them was a different story. The process of meaning production and the agency the Pisanis had in trying to shape legal frameworks of subjecthood, I argue, was due to the negotiation of their identities and their navigation of the spatial, institutional and relational characteristics of British and Ottoman imperial spaces.

Some important perspectives, definitions and frameworks have emerged to explain the origins and identities of Levantines, and how some of them were able to straddle or to have completely crossed political, social and cultural boundaries. Alexander H. de Groot believes that Levantine dragomans should be taken for “as they were.”<sup>275</sup> For de Groot, it is “historically meaningless to try to establish their single national standing and to define them as foreigners, westerners or orientals, or as native Ottomans,” given their complex identities. They were Ottoman subjects, but ostensibly “binational” because of their status as protégé with a foreign power in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>276</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt argues that nineteenth century Levantines were an ethno-confessional group that was mainly Catholic, yet ethnically diverse.<sup>277</sup>

Jens Hanssen uses a transimperial framework in his analysis of the networks of the Malhamé family from Beirut, just before the outbreak of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The Malhamés operated among and between Levantine networks, the provinces and the imperial

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<sup>275</sup> Hans-Jürgen Kornrumpf and Jutta Kornrumpf, *Fremde in Osmanischen Reich 1826-1912/13* (Stutensee, 1998), p. X in Alexander H. de Groot, “Dragomans’ Careers: The Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829,” in *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, eds. Alastair Hamilton, Alexander H. de Groot, Maurits H. van den Boogert (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 246.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

<sup>277</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Levantiner*, 15; Section 2 of the book. Jens Hanssen (below) also cites Schmitt.

center. Hanssen “treats the Levant and Levantine actors as a historically evolving, regionally bounded instantiation of transimperialism.” He also notes that there is no evidence of Levantine self-identification by the Malhamé family. Although he is not concerned with uncovering how members of this family viewed themselves, self-identification is nevertheless important for any discussion regarding identity claims, or how to define non-Muslims living and operating in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>278</sup>

These constructs that are used to frame “identity” or “identities” are useful but become more complex when identity is forced, negotiated, or appropriated. In the case of the Pisanis, they have become identifiable as Levantines because of their origin, occupation, religious affiliation, where they lived in Istanbul, and the fact that they shared these characteristics with other non-Muslim families in Pera. Grouping the Pisanis under the category of “Levantine,” however, is based on a broad definition of a specific group of non-Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire.

The Pisanis were politically eclectic. Members of the branch of the family that were employed by the British embassy in nineteenth century Istanbul were all born in the Ottoman Empire and received diplomatic protection by the British. They were members of the Latin Catholic community in Pera, with Italian heritage. Some were dragomans and others were not, presumably having been involved in commerce.<sup>279</sup> But how did the Pisanis want to be classified? How did others classify them at the time? Were they Ottoman subjects? Italian citizens? British nationals? Levantines? How did their British employers classify them?

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<sup>278</sup> Jens Hanssen, ““Malhamé – Malfamé,”” 31.

<sup>279</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, Nicholas Pisani (Etienne and Count Alexander’s brother) and Stamatello Volgo, a French subject, lent Osman Efendi, a servant and agent of Princess Sulfiraz, wife of Sultan Abdülmeceid I, two separate sums of money in 1858, totaling 2,982,770 piastres. Upon failing to pay his debt, Pisani and Volgo took Osman Efendi and Sulfiraz to court (*Ticaret*, or Tribunal of Commerce). After the accumulation of interest, the final debt amounted to 3,968,373 piasters. See the following chapter for a more in-depth discussion about this case.

All of the Pisanis that were employed by the embassy were issued *berats*, which provided them with foreign diplomatic protection, but not automatic British subjecthood. They were Ottoman subjects even before that status was assigned to them through the Ottoman Nationality Law in 1869. That law was the culmination of a series of reforms related to the *Tanzimat*, wherein a major concern for Ottoman reformers was the creation of a common notion of belonging to the empire that pushed beyond the boundaries of religious affiliation to include all subjects under the umbrella of a common Ottoman citizenship. The proclamation of the *Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerifi*, or the Noble Rescript of the Rose Garden by Sultan Abdülmecid I in 1839, was the first step in that process and guaranteed the property, honor, and life of all Ottoman subjects, regardless of religion. The *Islahat Fermanı* declared by the same sultan in 1856 went one-step farther and declared equality for all subjects of the sultan, and included the opportunity for non-Muslims to enter the state civil and military schools.<sup>280</sup> Both the *Gülhane Edict* and the *Islahat Fermanı*, though reflective of genuine Ottoman concerns and want of reform, were also linked to external agitation for reform. The 1839 edict emerged when the Ottomans were in need of assistance against the threat of Mehmed Ali in Egypt, and sought European, and particularly British help to control the situation. Providing greater guarantees and protection for non-Muslims in the empire was directed towards gaining the support of Britain. The *Islahat Fermanı* was declared close to the end of the Crimean War and once more geared towards appeasing the concern of the European powers about the treatment and protection of Christians in the empire, in exchange for their assistance in the war against Russia.<sup>281</sup> The Ottoman Nationality Law was a continuation of these reforms.

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<sup>280</sup> The *Gülhane* edict did in fact include an ambiguous clause promising legal equality for all subjects. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 51.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, 51; Also see Julia Philips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

On 19 January 1869, the Porte promulgated the Ottoman Nationality Law, through which the naturalization of Ottoman subjects by foreign powers was prohibited, unless they were granted authorization by the Porte. If an Ottoman subject was given permission to take another nationality, then they were not to return to the empire, and if so, they would once again be considered a subject of the sultan. If a person had become naturalized without the permission of the Porte, their foreign status would have been considered invalid, and they would have still been considered an Ottoman subject.<sup>282</sup> The Law also stipulated who was an Ottoman subject, and who could become an Ottoman subject. Article 1 stated that any person born to an Ottoman mother and father, or only of an Ottoman father, was considered to be an Ottoman subject; Article 2 decreed that any person born to foreign parents could rightfully claim to be an Ottoman subject within three years of obtaining [age of ] majority. Article 3 specified that every “major [sic] foreigner” that resided in the empire for five consecutive years could apply for Ottoman nationality. The remaining articles stipulated that all people living in the empire were Ottoman subjects; that an Ottoman woman married to a foreign man may obtain Ottoman nationality within three years of becoming a widow; that a child of an Ottoman subject who became naturalized as a foreigner or who lost that nationality did not keep that nationality and remained an Ottoman subject, while the child of a foreigner who became a naturalized Ottoman subject would not become an Ottoman, and would remain a foreigner.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Nasim Sousa, *The Capitulatory Régime of Turkey*, 105. Sousa cites the English version of the *irade* from the *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1893, 714. Sousa states that the British passed the Nationality Act of 1870 in order to avoid difficulties with the Porte over issues of nationality with Ottoman subjects that received their protection. However, J. Mervyn Jones connects the creation of the Naturalization Act (Nationality Act, as Sousa terms it) with a suggestion made by the United States, in order to clear up questions of nationality with Irish immigrants in the United States at that time. See J. Mervyn Jones, *British Nationality Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 75-78.

<sup>283</sup> For the full English text, see United States Department of State, *The executive documents of the House of Representatives for the second session of the fifty-third Congress. 1893-'94* Vol 1. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1893-1894), 714. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS189394v01>

Alexander de Groot notes that the changes in Ottoman policy regarding nationality brought the European naturalization of some dragoman families, who took the nationality of the European power that employed them. These included the Testas, who became Dutch, Austrian, French, Italian, and German citizens, and the Pisanis, British and Russian.<sup>284</sup> This may be true for the Testas, and for the Pisanis that were in Russian service, but it is unclear for the Pisanis employed by the British. Their subjecthood was unclear, and contested.

The concept of British citizenship did not exist in the nineteenth century. People born in Britain and inside its dominions were considered to be subjects of the British monarch, and subjecthood was based on allegiance. British subjects were required to give their full allegiance to the monarch and in return, received all of the rights and privileges that the monarch provided. Subjects were either naturally born, or aliens that became naturalized subjects or denizens.<sup>285</sup> British Common Law distinguished between these two types of subjects, and four types of allegiance, which were based on legal status. The four types of allegiance were *Ligeantia naturalis*, or people born with allegiance; *Ligeantia acquisita*, or subjects by acquisition; *Ligeantia localis*, an alien person arriving in Britain on amicable terms who, while there, owed allegiance to the monarch in return for the King's protection; the category of Legal obedience, which applied to all legal male subjects aged twelve and up, whether natural born or naturalized, were required by law to take an oath that reaffirmed their allegiance to the monarch.<sup>286</sup> Natural born subjects were those born inside the dominions of Britain "within the allegiance" to the monarch. Those born outside of the dominions may also have been born with allegiance to the monarch, such as children of British ambassadors or children of male members of the British

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<sup>284</sup> de Groot, "Protection and Nationality," 254.

<sup>285</sup> Jones, *British Nationality Law*, 61. Jones notes that natural-born subjects and naturalized subjects/denizens were the two main types of British subjects.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 57-61. For a more in-depth discussion on these forms of allegiance, see J. Mervyn Jones, *British Nationality Law and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 34-73.

forces.<sup>287</sup> Until the passing of The Aliens Act in 1844, the naturalization of an alien could only be achieved through an Act of Parliament, a letter of patent, or the annexation of new territory of the monarch.

A letter of patent gave an alien the status of denizen (resident), bestowing some but not all of the rights of a natural born subject. An Act of Parliament could also grant an alien naturalization, but their rights and privileges could also be limited.<sup>288</sup> Temporary residence in British dominions could also be achieved, but that too, was based on allegiance to the monarch<sup>289</sup> and the maintenance of good relations between the alien's original place of birth and Britain. Therefore, an alien friend could obtain a place of residence in Britain if it were a necessary habitation, but had to maintain allegiance to the monarch because while there, they received protection from the monarch.<sup>290</sup> They were not, however, considered to be British subjects. The Aliens Act of 1844 shelved the system of granting denization letters and Acts of Parliament, and replaced it with a case-by-case decision process by the Secretary of State. If the applicant was considered to be a suitable candidate, the Secretary was empowered to issue them a certificate of naturalization.<sup>291</sup> The Naturalization Act of 1870 did not alter the administrative process for aliens seeking British subjecthood set down in 1844, but there were alterations made in the conditions that had to be met in order to obtain naturalization. For our purposes, these were "residence in the United Kingdom for no less than five years, or having been in service of the

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 58. Acts of Parliament that granted an alien naturalization could be passed to particular individuals, or certain classes of desirable individuals for economic or political reasons. See page 64.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 58-59.

<sup>290</sup> John Scott, *Cases in the Court of Common Pleas and Exchequer Chamber* vol. VIII (London: W. McDowall, 1841), 195.

<sup>291</sup> Jones, *British Nationality Law*, 65.

Crown for no less than five years.” Service under the crown or intention of living in the United Kingdom had to be fulfilled after naturalization was granted.<sup>292</sup>

Allegiance to the monarch was the basis for British subjecthood, and Frederick Pisani’s case against *The Times* reveals, from the perspective of British Common Law, the complexity and difficulty in classifying foreign aliens in the service of the British embassy in Istanbul. Frederick’s argument did not center on his being or trying to be British, or his allegiance to the British monarch, stipulations with which the court was deeply concerned. Instead, Frederick was able to navigate among and between the conditions of his position as a dragoman, as set out in the capitulations between the Ottoman Empire and Britain.

***Frederick Pisani vs. James Joseph Lawson (The Times)***

When Frederick Pisani read the first letter that was published in *The Times* on 24 February 1837 he was probably quite agitated. The anonymous author argued that relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire had suffered because of the system of translation that had been in place between the two empires. The author criticized Lord Ponsonby for being an inactive ambassador, stating that he had “retired in his residence in Therapia” ever since he had been in Constantinople, and hardly ever met with officials from the Porte. The author then faulted the British government for employing non-British dragomans that were born and raised in Pera, and offered two separate viewpoints of their character. The first was from an unnamed French author who stated that the “Perotes [inhabitants of Pera] belonged to a degraded race.” The second came from Commodore [David] Porter, the American Charge d’Affaires at Constantinople, who described them as “ignorant,” “immoral,” and “only tolerated because of their supposed necessity...to be up to all sorts of tricks and villainy, intrigue and rascality.” The author also wrote that they possessed more facts to prove the “incapacity and flagrant dishonesty

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<sup>292</sup> Jones, *British Nationality Law and Practice*, 93.



of the interpreters,” but did not provide any other details. The author ended the letter warning that unless this “cancer” [the dragomans] was removed, British affairs in the Ottoman Empire would not improve.<sup>293</sup> The second letter, published less than two weeks later in *The Times*, was no kinder to the dragomans or to the British government.

The same author, now writing under the pseudonym of “O,” continued the attack on the use of non-British dragomans, even noting that “every member of the Divan” did not want to deal with them, which was publicly expressed. Pointing out the deficiencies in the professionalization of the dragomans at the embassy, the author discussed how the British were behind when it came to training their own nationals as dragomans, as the Austrians and the French had been doing, but noted that the Russians continued to use “Perotes.” The author also noted the family connections between the Pisanis employed by the British embassy and the Russian embassy. Francis [François] Chabert was also mentioned for having a similar situation, as his uncle and brother in-law were also in the service of the Russians.<sup>294</sup> The author criticized Ponsonby and his predecessors’ unwavering reliance on their dragomans, whose reliability and trustworthiness were also questioned.

Their low salary and lack of connection to England, the author argued, meant that the dragomans were prone to “temptation.” A previous incident of mistrust was cited when the embassy’s secrets were given to the Prussian envoy, Baron Maltitz [Miltitz] in 1826.<sup>295</sup> The author resumed his criticism of “Perotes,” and again used Commodore Porter as an example.

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<sup>293</sup> Private Correspondence. *The Times* (London, England), Friday, Feb 24, 1837; pg. 5; Issue 16348.

<sup>294</sup> Private Correspondence. *The Times* (London, England), Friday, Mar 03, 1837; pg. 2; Issue 16354. The author listed Chabert’s uncle as Mr. Timoni, a Counselor for the Russian Embassy, and his brother in-law, Mr. Kirico (Chirico) as the Russian Secretary of the Legation.

<sup>295</sup> The incident involved François Chabert, the chief dragoman at the embassy at the time, who was the alleged informant. See Allan Cunningham, “The Dragomans of the British Embassy at Constantinople,” *Eastern Questions in the Nineteenth Century: Collected Essays vol. 2*. ed. Edward Ingram (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 9-10, who cites Stanley Lane-Poole, *Life of Stratford Canning vol. 1* (London, 1888), 406-16. G.R. Berridge calls it the “Chabert Affair.” See G.R. Berridge, “Nation, Class and Diplomacy,” 409-410. He too, cites Cunningham and Lane-Poole. Baron Maltitz was actually Baron Miltitz. See Lane-Poole, 412.

Apparently Porter had hired a “Perote” named [Nicolas] Navoni, to act as a dragoman for the American Embassy. Porter learned from Navoni that the *Reis Efendi* stated that the Porte would not officially receive the Commodore because he did not hold the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, but a lesser rank of Minister. Navoni, in turn, had urged the Commodore to return to America. After some time, Porter went directly to the *Reis Efendi*, and learned that the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs had not relayed such information to Navoni. The dragoman was later discharged of his duties, and the Commodore referred to “Perote” dragomans as “worthless.”<sup>296</sup> The writer then described an incident where [Frederick] Pisani failed to procure the Porte’s permission for British use of the Euphrates as a passageway to India.

According to the author, Pisani had made numerous applications for a *ferman*, or letter of permission to the *Reis Efendi*, but after months of negotiations the dragoman told Ponsonby that the matter was “hopeless.” Permission to use the Euphrates was later achieved, however, due to the efforts of an Englishman, Mr. Millingen. The author argued that Pisani misjudged the possibility of the application being approved, and the story was used to strengthen the author’s point that there was a real problem with using foreign-born dragomans as intermediaries. Pisani’s foreignness was juxtaposed against Millingen’s being a British subject, who “was a sincere patriot” and had the “welfare of his country at the forefront of his thoughts.”<sup>297</sup> The author was quite clear in explaining that Millingen had dealt with Ahmet Ferzee Pasha [sic], who was said to be the “intermediary between the sultan and the *divan*.” This was Ahmed Fevzi Paşa, the

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<sup>296</sup> *The Times*, Friday, Mar 03, 1837.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*.

*Kapudan Paşa*, or Admiral of the Navy, who later informed the embassy that permission was granted. Berridge names the author “O” as Dr. Julius van Millingen.<sup>298</sup>

No biographical information about Millingen was provided in the letter to *The Times*, however, Millingen was Dr. Julius Michael Millingen, a surgeon and archaeologist. According to David Cameron Hall, while serving as a surgeon in the Greek army during the Greek War of Independence, Millingen was taken prisoner by Ibrahim Paşa after the Greek military surrender to the Ottomans. He later settled in Istanbul in 1827, and became a court physician to five sultans.<sup>299</sup> Lord Ponsonby believed that Millingen was in fact “O,” the anonymous author that attacked him and the dragomans in the two letters to *The Times*. What probably further stirred Ponsonby’s suspicions, but was not mentioned in his letter to Grey, was that Millingen had previously sent him a letter that discussed points made in one of the letters to the *Times* related to the Euphrates expedition. In that letter Millingen told Ponsonby that he had met with Ahmed Fevzi Paşa in order to obtain permission to use the Euphrates on an expedition, which he was presumably part of.<sup>300</sup> Ponsonby argued his case that Millingen was “O” in a letter he sent to former Prime Minister, Sir Charles Grey.

The letter written to Grey concentrated mostly on Ponsonby’s opposition to David Urquhart, the Secretary of the Embassy in Istanbul. Ponsonby believed that Millingen was an “agent” of Urquhart’s, who was trying to undermine him at the embassy. In that letter he referred to Millingen as an ambitious and treacherous person, who was willing to do anything for his own business, including losing friends for his own benefit.<sup>301</sup> But Ponsonby did note that Urquhart

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<sup>298</sup>Berridge, “Nation, Class, and Diplomacy,” fn. 8, 410.

<sup>299</sup> See David Cameron Hall, “Millingen, Julius Michael (1800–1878),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/18760>.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. Durham University Library Special Collections in the Papers of John Viscount Ponsonby Collection. GRE/E/413/3, Millingen to Ponsonby, 8/12/1834.

<sup>301</sup> GRE/E/270/31 Ponsonby to 2nd Earl Charles Grey, 06/04/1837. Also cited in Fewster, 71 and 79.

denied any connection to Millingen, “the writer of the letters in the *Times* newspaper under the signature “O,” ” which he did not believe. He pointed out to Grey that the March letter published in *The Times* contained a phrase that he used in a letter to Urquhart,<sup>302</sup> cementing his belief that Urquhart and Millingen were working together. Ponsonby also called attention to the conduct of Frederick Pisani, stating that he was a respectful person “wholly dependent on his reputation for integrity,” and that the dragoman had never criticized Urquhart. The treatment that Pisani received was therefore not warranted. According to Ponsonby, Frederick was an honest man without vice or corruption. He informed Grey that the Russians did make him an offer of employment but declined because he had been “bred up in our school and considered as his countrymen.” Frederick was also well respected by the Turks.<sup>303</sup>

Frederick Pisani’s claim of libel hit the British Court of Common Pleas on 12 June 1837,<sup>304</sup> three months after the letters were published in *The Times*. The case continued until 1841. Since the identity of the author of the letters to *The Times* was not known, Pisani sued James Joseph Lawson, the editor of the newspaper, for libel. Pisani argued that he had been the victim of libel because of what had been published about him in the two articles, that he had always been held in high esteem, and had never shown any incapacity in his position as a dragoman for the embassy. The articles, however, tried to ruin his character and employment, and to wholly disgrace him. Pisani claimed that the description of “Perotes” offered by the author

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, GRE/E/270/37 06/04/1837. This is the same letter cited above.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, GRE/E/270/38; GRE/E/270/39.

<sup>304</sup> TNA C13/1257 22, “Answer of Frederic Pisani,” the defendant to the Bill of Complaint of John Joseph Lawson Complainant,” 7 January 1841, 1. This source is from the Court of Chancery, and the only one that I could locate in the TNA related to this case. The Bill of Complaint against Frederick by Lawson was put forward in 1840, though the date written on the top of each page of the complaint was 18 January 1838. It is not clear if this is an extension of the case or a separate complaint against Pisani in response to his original suit against Lawson in the Court of Common Pleas. In his Answer to the Bill of Complaint, Pisani was required to account for a number of complaints of his misconduct in his capacity as a dragoman for the embassy. These included his handling of the case of William Churchill. Pisani’s reply was taken at his home in Pera on 10 October 1840. The date on the actual Answer was 7 January 1841.

in the first article, “injured his employment,” and his “good name” and “credit,” and also that of all of the dragomans employed by the embassy.<sup>305</sup> The second article, where the author wrote about Pisani’s alleged failure to receive permission from the Porte for passage through the Euphrates, was also libelous, and that this was, “an imposition on his character as chief dragoman.”<sup>306</sup>

Lawson pleaded not guilty, and challenged Pisani’s right to even bring the matter to a British court because he was not a British subject. Lawson argued that since Pisani had never been naturalized or domiciled in Great Britain or its dominions, was not a merchant involved in trade with Great Britain or its dominions, had no allegiance to the sovereign, and was not subjected to its laws, that he could not bring the matter to court.<sup>307</sup> Pisani admitted that he was not a formal British subject, was never a resident there, and had never become naturalized. He based his ability to bring the case to a British court on the fact that he had always been under the jurisdiction of England because of his position as dragoman at the embassy, which, according to the treaties between England and the Ottoman Empire granted him all of the rights and privileges of British subjects inside of the empire. He also admitted that he was not in allegiance to the Queen.<sup>308</sup> The court later decided that although Frederick Pisani did in fact live outside of Great Britain and its dominions, the case could proceed because of his being an alien “friend,” his service to England, and because the alleged offence committed by Lawson and *The Times* was committed in Britain. The court ruled in favor of Pisani, and allowed the case to continue.<sup>309</sup>

Lawson based his defence on the claim that the letters were not particularly directed towards Frederick Pisani, or all of the dragomans that worked at the British embassy in Istanbul.

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<sup>305</sup> Scott, *Cases in the Court of Common Pleas*, 184-187.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, 187-188.

<sup>308</sup> TNA C13/1257 22, “Answer of Frederic Pisani,” 14.

<sup>309</sup> Scott, *Cases in the Court of Common Pleas*, 193-200.

Instead, the letters were directed towards all of the dragomans of foreign embassies, and all of the residents of Pera. He argued that the purpose of publishing the letters was two-fold. The first was to draw public attention and to generate public discussion regarding the employment of foreign-born dragomans at the embassy, and to show how the British system of translation in Istanbul operated. The second was to reveal that this system, and providing the dragomans with sensitive information was harmful to British interests, and that Britain would be better served by employing natural-born Englishmen. The overall intent was not to malign or defame Pisani. After 20 minutes of deliberation, the jury served a verdict in favor of Lawson.<sup>310</sup>

Although unsuccessful, Frederick Pisani's case shows how difficult it was to apply legal categories of subjecthood to foreign-born dragomans, for a few reasons. Pisani, the court, and Lawson had different and contradictory opinions on where Pisani fit in the British legal system. The case was framed as one that had to do with whether or not Pisani could even bring the charge of libel to the British court because his status as a subject was unclear, and the court was not immediately able to classify Pisani's status. The fact that the court ended up settling on the legal category of "alien friend" for Pisani neither defined him as a British subject, nor completely dismissed him or his service as a dragoman to the British Empire. After all, Frederick had never claimed to be an Ottoman either. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate Frederick's *berat*, or his identity card (*nüfus tezkeresi*), which might have been issued to him when the Ottoman

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<sup>310</sup> *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday, December 22, 1841; Issue 22131. The case was covered rather well in the British press. See for example. *The Morning Post* (London, England), Thursday, November 14, 1839. Issue 21469; *The Standard* (London, England), Thursday, November 14, 1839 pg. [1]. Issue 4806; *The Derby Mercury* (Derby, England), Wednesday, November 27, 1839. Issue 5603; *The Morning Post* (London, England), Friday, July 09, 1841; pg. 7; Issue 21990; *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, December 25, 1841. Issue 1769; *The Bury and Norwich Post, and East Anglian* (Bury Saint Edmunds, England), Wednesday, December 29, 1841. Issue 3105.

Interior Ministry maintained population lists that registered births and deaths. That practice was “abandoned and then revived” after the Crimean War, when subjects were given their first identity cards.<sup>311</sup> The Ottoman census of 1831 included non-Muslim males but did not include Istanbul, and did not always provide information on the place of birth.<sup>312</sup> Nowhere in Pisani’s baptismal, marriage, or death records from the St. Antoine Parish in Beyoğlu is his subjecthood listed.<sup>313</sup>

Lawson and the British Court of Common Pleas were less concerned with Pisani’s argument that he had been the victim of libel and that the published letters did in fact cause him harm in his community in Istanbul. Pisani’s “Britishness” had to be scrutinized, discussed, and then ruled upon for the case to even move forward. As the Common Law laid out, it rested on residency, commerce or trade, and most importantly, allegiance. From the point of view of Lawson and his lawyers, being British, if not born in England or formally naturalized, was conditional. Yet Pisani, as he declared, had not fulfilled any of these requirements, and claimed no allegiance to the British monarch. Instead, his defence rested on his rights under the capitulations, and the privileges of his diplomatic protection. He was more concerned with proving that he was the victim of malice and slander, and in turn, protecting his own image as a dragoman, rather than proving his own subject status.

### ***The Estate of Count Alexander Pisani***

Alexander Bartholomew Stephen Count Pisani died in 1886, though he penned his Last Will and Testament much earlier on 30 May 1876, and paid the £100 fee to have it deposited in

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<sup>311</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, “Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82-1893,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9 no. 3 (1978): 255, fn. 41.

<sup>312</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, “The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9 (3) 1978: 326. The census was initiated by Sultan Mahmud II to determine how many eligible males could serve in the new military and bureaucracy that he was constructing. Also see Karpat, “Ottoman Population Records:” 244.

<sup>313</sup> I thank Marie Anne Marandet for clarifying this point. She has copies of his records from the St. Antoine Parish in Beyoğlu.

the Consular Court in Istanbul. In it, he distributed his wealth between members of his large extended family, all of whom lived in Istanbul. He also provided clear instructions on how his funeral should be conducted, and named his trustees/executors, his brother Etienne Pisani, and a solicitor, George Henry Clifton.<sup>314</sup> A third, James Hanson was added as a trustee/executor in April 1882, but it is unclear why. His other brother Charles was also later named as a trustee/executor with Clifton and Hanson in May 1882, because of Etienne's death in that same year. Hanson was temporarily replaced with George Henry Simmons, Secretary and Treasurer of the British Consulate in Istanbul, however, because he left the Ottoman Empire in 1885. Clifton died presumably in 1897, and Charles Pisani and Simmons appointed a barrister, Evelyn Fawcett, as a trustee/executor in that same year.<sup>315</sup>

The process of filing and obtaining probate for Count Pisani's Last Will and Testament at the British Consular Court in Istanbul began in 1886, and is another example of the complexity and difficulty of applying legal categories of subjecthood to the Pisani family. It reveals how Count Pisani and his brother Charles categorized themselves, how they tied their family's identity to the embassy, and how they negotiated their position inside British and Ottoman imperial space and structures in order to have the Last Will filed and administered. It also shows how Count Pisani and Charles Pisani struggled with their own ideas about how categories of subjecthood applied to them. Neither claimed to be subjects of the sultan, though they were both born in Istanbul, and according to the Ottoman Nationality Law of 1869 they were considered to be Ottoman subjects. Although both acknowledged their Italian heritage, they did not identify with it.

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<sup>314</sup> TNA FO 780/217, "Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani," 30/05/1876.

<sup>315</sup> TNA FO 780/217, First Codice 17/04/1882; Second Codice 10/05/1882; Third Codice 22/06/1885' "Appointment of Evelyn Fawcett" 05/02/1897 in this file to the original Will of Count Alexander Pisani, 1876. Hanson did in fact return to Istanbul. His signature is on documents in this file, after Count Alexander died.



The task of filing and obtaining probate for the Last Will was left to Count Pisani's trustees, which had to be done in order for the British Consular Court to file and to administer it. The trustees relied on the Pisani family history and a personal account of Count Pisani regarding his subjecthood. As in Frederick's case, there are different points of view on whether or not Count Pisani was or could be considered a British subject. Count Pisani died sixteen years after the passing of the British Naturalization Act, which added conditions to the previous Aliens Act of 1844. While allegiance was still the basis for subjecthood, naturalization was now conditional upon either having been a resident in Britain for at least five years, or having served the crown for at least five years. Count Pisani fulfilled the latter condition, but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever applied for naturalization to become a British subject. Yet, in an affidavit filed by Charles, he tried to fashion his brother as at least a quasi-British subject. In the request for probate by Charles and the other trustees, they argued that Count Pisani's service to the embassy gave him all of the rights of a British subject. There was not a legal category, provision, or statute in British Common Law, however, that recognized a quasi-British subject. The trustees instead used the capitulations as the basis for their argument that Count Pisani's Last Will should be granted probate, and be administered by the Consular Court.

According to Charles Pisani's testimony in his affidavit for filing his brother's Last Will, Count Pisani, the archivist at the British Embassy and nephew of Frederick Pisani, was born in Istanbul in 1802. He never married and after becoming an employee of the British embassy, he resided in rooms inside the embassy and in the summer residence of the embassy until his retirement in 1876. In the last few years of his life, Count Pisani was brought under Charles' care through a "*Commission de Lunatico Inquirendo*," or "an inquiry into the state of mind" that

was issued by the embassy, through which he was found to be of unsound body and mind. He died on 27 October 1886 at the home of his brother Charles, at 41 Rue Tepebaşı in Pera.<sup>316</sup>

Charles Pisani also provided a detailed account about his brother and his family, including a sketch of their family tree. At the time, Charles was 70 years old, and Count Pisani's only surviving brother. Charles wrote that Count Pisani had entered into the service of the British embassy in approximately 1819, and remained there for 59 years.<sup>317</sup> During his tenure, he was the Superintendent of the Diplomatic Chancellerie [Chancellery] and a Keeper of the Archives. The Queen also conferred upon him the Companionship of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. He retired due to old age, but remained on the British Foreign Office List until his death. Between his retirement and death, Count Pisani collected a pension of £750/year, and continued to enjoy the protection and benefits of being an employee of the embassy. His brother, Charles wrote, amassed a fortune of £19,000 from savings from his salary over the course of his 59 years of service, and from investments and interest, mainly from the "3 percent consols" in the Bank of England. Charles also noted that his brother remained a bachelor his entire life, and "was of frugal habits."<sup>318</sup>

Charles stated that over the course of his life his brother took great interest in studying his family history, and was the self-avowed head of the family. Count Pisani maintained papers and writings about his family, and Charles confirmed that in the affidavit. With Count Pisani's

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<sup>316</sup> TNA FO 780/217, "Affidavit of Filing, Charles Pisani," translated from the French original by Alphonse Divioni. 17/12/1886.

<sup>317</sup> Count Pisani's years of service are unclear. Although Charles wrote that Count Pisani began his service in 1819, the Foreign Office lists him as starting as a student interpreter on 25 June 1814. He did not become an official dragoman, opting instead to be the archivist of the embassy. See TNA FO 366/569 "Statement of the Salaries of the Dragomans at Constantinople," 10/05/1850, 169. Also cited in Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 59.

<sup>318</sup> TNA FO 780/217, "Affidavit of Filing, Charles Pisani." In a letter to his trustees Count Pisani listed his wealth as £17,011.26 and wrote that he had investments in the Bank of England. "Letter to the Executors of My Will," 12/04/1882 in this file. But this is debatable because the trustees of his Will later contested that amount. They stated that Count Pisani's wealth did not add up to £19,000. Presumably the £1,988.74 difference between what Count Pisani listed and what his trustees listed came from the accumulation of interest. Affidavit, 23/12/1886 in this file.

writings on the family history, and Charles' own knowledge on the subject, he reconstructed the history of the branch of his family, beginning with Domenico who arrived in Istanbul in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Charles provided a detailed history of his family based on his own understanding of the arrival of Domenico in Istanbul, and how his family later expanded in Pera. Domenico married Victoria Bianchi and their son Antonio eventually became a dragoman at the British Embassy. Antonio had two sons, Etienne Stefano Pisani and Bartholomew Pisani, who both served the British embassy as dragomans. Etienne Stefano Pisani also had two sons, Frederick Pisani and Antonio Pisani, who also were employed by the embassy. That Antonio had four sons, [Count] Alexander, Etienne, Charles and Nicholas, and three daughters, Helen, Marie and Beatrice. Count Pisani and Etienne were the only two sons employed by the embassy. Charles wrote that all of the descendants of the eldest Antonio Pisani, including the children of Etienne, Nicholas, Charles and Beatrice, had been born in Istanbul and never became and had never been claimed as Ottoman subjects by the Porte, or by the Italian government.<sup>319</sup>

As mentioned previously, it is unclear what Domenico Pisani's status was after he was brought to the Ottoman capital. There is no indication if he became a slave after being taken a prisoner, if he was ransomed, or if he had been claimed by the Porte as a subject. But the service of his family to the British embassy, Charles stated, granted them specific protections and immunities which, in Charles' words, made them "quasi-natural born British subjects with a domicile in England." He argued this point not only because it helped his cause, but also due to the fact that the Last Wills and Testaments of many of his ancestors were placed and legally

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<sup>319</sup> TNA FO 780/217, "Affidavit of Filing, Charles Pisani." These descendants exclude Dominique Pisani's eldest son that returned to Italy.

certified in the embassy and in the British Consular Court in Istanbul.<sup>320</sup> He also provided a statement made by his brother, explaining Count Pisani's ideas concerning his own subjecthood.

In conversations that Charles had with his brother, he wrote, Count Pisani believed that if his being a resident in Istanbul would have ever meant that he actually acquired a "domicile" there, or if it had ever deprived his rights as a "quasi-British natural born subject... gained by having served the British embassy" he would have left the Ottoman Empire to live in England or elsewhere. He also stated "he would never have done the least act that would have made him a subject in any sense to the jurisdiction to the Porte."<sup>321</sup> Although Charles did not have definitive proof, he stated that his father or brothers never tried to become Italian subjects, and that Count Pisani never identified with being an Ottoman or an Italian. Through his position at the embassy, he faced questions concerning nationality and protection by the British government, and therefore had knowledge about how such questions were handled. Charles wrote that he (and presumably his other family members) paid the registration fee for their "certificate of nationality," or patents, to the British Consulate General. Yet, Count Pisani did not pay that fee because he believed "that he was an actual British subject."<sup>322</sup>

Charles' emotional narrative was important for a few reasons. It signaled both his and Count Pisani's understanding of what being a British subject meant to them. Furthermore, challenging the residency requirement in England as a means to obtain British subjecthood and highlighting Count Pisani's loyalty to the embassy and Britain to the extent that he would have left the Ottoman Empire, was indicative of how far Charles was willing to argue that his

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid. The Will of Etienne Stefano Pisani, Charles' grandfather, was also deposited in the embassy when he died on 15 March 1797, and so too was the Will of Antonio Pisani, his father, who died on 20 August 1850. Since no executor was named in Antonio Pisani's Will, his daughter, and Charles' sister Marie Pisani was named to administer it through a judgment in the British Consular Court in 1866. His brother Etienne's Will was also deposited and certified in the embassy.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. Charles received written protection by the British embassy through a patent in 1840, signed by Ambassador Ponsonby.

brother's Will should have been deposited in the embassy. Though not a solid legal argument, Charles and Count Pisani's other executors pressed on to demonstrate that he was not an Ottoman, or even Italian subject.

In another affidavit, the trustees requested probate of Count Pisani's Will, and focused on the question of his nationality. Their main argument was that Count Pisani, by taking a position with the embassy, would have lost his Italian citizenship anyway, and not having been claimed by the Ottomans as a subject, he was without nationality.<sup>323</sup> But his lifetime appointment with the embassy, and the jurisdiction that the embassy had over Count Pisani after the "*Commission de Lunatico Inquirendo*," afforded all of the rights of a British subject that lived in England. They supported much of the information that Charles provided in his affidavit, and tried a number of different tactics to further emphasize Count Pisani's "Britishness."

Searching for a link between employment as a dragoman and subjecthood, the trustees tried to present the patent that awarded the position of dragoman to Count Pisani's great grandfather Antonio as one that was possibly a patent for naturalization or denization as a British subject. They stated that the original patent was apparently burned in the Great Fire of 1870 in Pera, and also acknowledged that it seemed "highly improbable that George II and the Duke of Newcastle would only sign a patent to appoint a dragoman, but "very possible" that this was a patent for naturalization as a British subject for Antonio Pisani and his descendants." They also stated that searches were conducted at the Foreign Office in order to understand the exact nature of the patent, but that had been unsuccessful. They did point out, however, that would have done

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<sup>323</sup> It was not uncommon for people to believe and to declare that they were unclaimed by the Porte as subjects. For example, in 1826 G. Calavro Umberti, a dragoman for the British embassy wrote to Ambassador Stratford Canning to request clarification on how to handle the issue of granting official documents of nationality to people "born in Turkey by a Raya [sic] mother." Calavro noted that other European Ministers in the Ottoman Empire "never ceased to grant official documents from the embassy to protect such of their people, and it appears that the Porte itself is little inclined to claim them as their own subjects, though it always endeavored to put a stop to marriage taking place between Franks and Rayas [sic]." TNA FO 352/14B, Calavro to Canning, 26/07/1826.

little for Count Pisani. According to British nationality law the patent would not have extended to him unless the capitulations provided that all those born to British subjects inside the Ottoman Empire were also considered to be British, and that “British jurisdiction might be deemed to them the same nationality and domicile as if any such subject, though born in Turkey had been born in Great Britain.” The executors believed that doing so would be reasonable since British subjects going to the empire did not change or lose their “domicile of origin,” which was allowed under the extra-territorial jurisdiction of Great Britain, in the empire.<sup>324</sup>

There was obviously cause for disagreement over whether or not Count Pisani could be considered a British subject because he had never lived in Britain, as stipulated by British nationality law. According to the capitulations between the British and the Ottoman Empire, the estates of deceased dragomans fell under Ottoman jurisdiction if the dragoman did not come directly from England. This was especially the case if the deceased had no heir to bestow their estate.<sup>325</sup> Whereas Count Pisani did not come from England, he did leave his possessions to his heirs, as stated in his Will.

There was no doubt that Count Pisani and the rest of the Pisanis in Istanbul were of Italian descent, but the trustees argued that he could not be considered an Italian subject. The executors commissioned a statement from Jean Rosasco, an Italian subject and “Doctor of Law in the faculty of Genes and at the Consulate General of Italy,” in Istanbul. According to Italian civil law, Italian nationality passed between father and son, and continued through the family line. The Italian citizenship of Antonio Pisani, Count Pisani’s great grandfather, passed on to his

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<sup>324</sup> TNA FO 780/217, “Affidavit for Probate” 18/12/1886. The executors cited a case where the British Consular Court made a decision regarding the nationality of one Padre Agostino. But it is unclear if he was born in the Ottoman Empire to parents that were British subjects or if he received protection by the British embassy in Istanbul, and then became naturalized.

<sup>325</sup> van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 175-176. Also see Edward A. Van Dyck, *Report of Edward A. Van Dyck, Consular Clerk of the United States at Cairo Upon Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire Since the Year 1150, Part I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), Appendix 5, 94.

son [Etienne] Stefano, and that nationality passed on to Antonio Pisani, Count Pisani's father. However, their Italian nationality would have become null and void because Italian law also stipulated that if an Italian subject took a position with a foreign government without the consent of the Italian government, they automatically lost their citizenship.<sup>326</sup> The executors explained, as Charles had previously, that Italy or the Porte had never claimed the Pisanis as subjects.

Although the executors pointed out the possibility that Count Pisani and his family could be considered without nationality, they argued that he could have been taken under the jurisdiction of Britain, since he was under the embassy's jurisdiction. They went on to argue that Count Pisani's Last Will, whether under Ottoman or British law, was in good standing, but that it should be administered by the Consular Court. Because of his position with the embassy and the protection that was given to him, they wrote, his Last Will should be validated "as if he were a quasi-British subject born in England." Since the Court had administered other Last Will and Testaments of his previously deceased family members, probate should be granted.<sup>327</sup> The executors believed that Count Pisani held a "higher protection... that could have been enjoyed by other British protected persons" that were not part of the embassy, and because of this and his length of service, that he should be given a "domicile in Great Britain." Furthermore, they stated that Count Pisani, by virtue of serving the embassy by choice, abandoned any residence in the Ottoman Empire for that of Great Britain, which he held until his death.

According to the executors, Count Pisani's service and the protection offered through his position as a dragoman brought with it the rights of British nationality and the rights of British residence. The fact that the embassy issued the "*Commission de Lunatico Inquirendo*," signed by

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<sup>326</sup> TNA FO 780/217, "Affidavit for Probate." For the statement by Jean Rosasco, see "Dans l'affaire des biens de feu le comte A.B.S. Pisani décédé." 20/12/1886 in this file.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid. These included the Last Will and Testaments of Charles' grandfather Etienne Pisani, his father Antonio, his mother Marie, and his brother Etienne.

ambassador Sir William White, meant that Count Pisani's person and estate was brought under the direct jurisdiction of the embassy and the Consular Court, which provided him with all of the rights of a British subject, as if he were a resident of Great Britain.<sup>328</sup> On 30 December 1886, Count Pisani's Last Will and Testament was granted probate by the Consular Court. The document did not mention anything about his subjecthood, but did note that he was a Count of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>329</sup>

The process of filing Count Alexander Pisani's Last Will and Testament was no less complex than his uncle Frederick's court case, and centered on issues of subjecthood. Unlike Frederick, Count Pisani believed and argued that he was in fact a British subject, or at least a quasi-British subject and made no claim to having any allegiance to the sultan, in spite of his being considered an Ottoman subject under Ottoman law. Without a legal category in British Common Law that recognized "quasi-Britishness," and without any formal application for British naturalization by Count Pisani, the executors had to be more pragmatic. They drew on the history of the Pisani family and their lineage, going so far as to prove that Italian citizenship was never on the table for them, and that he never considered himself to be an Ottoman subject, though he fulfilled the criteria of being considered one. Count Pisani and his family members were born in Istanbul, and the British never officially naturalized him. The executors made a case that demonstrated how not only Count Pisani, but also the family in general were integrated into the embassy in life and death, and had always been under its jurisdiction. The executors invoked the capitulations to support the idea that the protection and rights that Count Pisani received, combined with his length of service with the embassy, made him a British subject.

The differences in opinion between Charles and his brother in how they situated

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> TNA FO 780/217, "Grant of Probate," 30/12/1886.



themselves in their British, Italian, and Ottoman identities also sheds light on the difficulties of applying categories of subjecthood and the label of “Levantine” to the Pisanis. Both Count Pisani and Charles did not identify with being Italian or Ottoman subjects, but Charles knew that through his yearly payment to the British Consulate General that he received protection through the capitulations, and only claimed that his family may have been considered “quasi-British subjects.” Count Pisani, however, was conscious in what he believed his subjecthood to be, and staked his claim in it through his loyalty and service to the embassy, disregarding the principles of British nationality law and Ottoman nationality law. Yet, there is nothing to suggest in the proceedings of filing the Count Pisani’s Last Will that the British ever recognized him or his family members as naturalized British subjects.

### ***Conclusion***

Frederick Pisani’s court case and the process of filing the Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani in the British Consular Court in Istanbul reveal the complexity and legality of concepts of subjecthood for dragomans in British service, which were very much at the center of both of these cases. These cases also demonstrate that the concept of “Levantine” as an analytical category is vague, and does not offer any precision in a discussion on the identity of the Pisani family. This is particularly important since the concepts of subjecthood, nationality and allegiance were unclear in the nineteenth century. The fact that there were differing perspectives within the same family is instructive in understanding how individuals or specific groups have been classified.

In both instances discussed here, there is, to use Palmira Brummet’s phrase, “a complex web of intersecting identities,”<sup>330</sup> which does not entirely rest on conceived definitions of spatial,

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<sup>330</sup> Palmira Brummett, “Placing the Ottomans in the Mediterranean World: The Question of Notables and Households,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies/Osmanlı Araştırmaları Dergisi* 36 (2010): 83.

confessional, or social statuses, such as the label of “Levantine.” Three points of intersecting identities emerged in both of these examples; Frederick, who did not identify with being British; Count Pisani, who claimed to be a British or at least a quasi-British subject by virtue of his service to the embassy; and the British, whose point of view of the Pisanis was connected to their professional status as employees in the embassy, but non-British subjects as defined by British nationality law.

Their positions as dragomans, however, only facilitated their access to imperial institutions. In both cases they were still viewed as outsiders that had to prove their connections to the British Empire, and in Count Pisanis case, disassociation with the Ottoman Empire, even though they had British diplomatic protection in Istanbul. The boundaries of exclusion also had to be negotiated in order to achieve their goals. It did not matter how Count Pisani, his brother Charles, or the trustees of his Last Will shaped the identity of the Pisani family. Their subjecthood was negotiated among and between their positions at the embassy, but had no impact on how they were legally categorized by their British employers. There was also nothing monolithic about how the Pisanis viewed themselves. Both Pisanis had different positions on who they were and where they belonged. Being a “Levantine” was not presented as a possible category of subjecthood, and did not factor into Frederick or Count Pisani’s sense of identity. Using their status as protected subjects under the capitulations, Frederick, and Count Pisani’s trustees were able to argue their own identity claims to try to achieve their respective goals. That does not mean that their self-identification was not and is not important. The two Pisanis discussed here provide a rare instance where self-identification and a first-person narrative exist in primary material.

Fredrick's sense of self did not match his nephews, which was connected to his sense of being a British or quasi-British subject, and even that was impacted by his association with the capitulations. Yet, Frederick and Count Pisani had not felt any connection to their Italian heritage or with being an Ottoman subject, although Istanbul was their place of birth. Neither believed themselves to be, nor could have been legally classified to be bi-national. Their own definitions and points of view on their subjecthood were as complex as the ones that are and have been placed on them as Levantines and dragomans.

The projection of their identities and their movement within British and Ottoman, and in Count Pisanis case, even Italian legal frameworks ensured that the Pisanis could dictate how they wanted to be integrated into British and Ottoman imperial structures. Their diplomatic protection made it much easier for them to use their positions to their advantage, drawing on the power of the embassy to achieve their own goals and when it suited them. Both cases illustrate the interdependence between family members and how even they continued to rely on the embassy to achieve their goals. Charles' negotiation of imperial space, which led to using embassy resources to procure for his late brother a favorable settlement, and the arrangement that Count Pisanis wanted shows how family members could become entangled in the affairs of dragomans. Using the resources of the embassy by family members or members of kinship networks that were not dragomans was not unusual, especially when money was involved.

## Chapter 4

### Enlisting Imperial Power

In answer to the memorial enclosed herewith and referred to me for explanation, for your information, the lady alluded to in the memorial is my mother in law, and although born a Raya, she is under Austrian protection. As such, she laid the case before Count Sturmer who appointed one of his dragomans, Mr. Steindl, to defend her cause and to see that justice should be done to her. Therefore, a Takrir was presented to the Porte by the Austrian Legation, to the effect of stopping the execution of the Ilam mentioned in the petition and of the revision of the same... Your excellency may be assured that I have not interfered officially to this affair and consequently never dared to use your name. Far from acting even as dragoman, I only represented the affair as a private person and in a private manner.<sup>331</sup>

-Etienne Pisani to  
Stratford Canning,  
1844

So wrote Etienne Pisani, in reply to his chief who requested an explanation of his actions in an affair involving his mother-in-law Mrs. Timoni, who was embroiled in a lawsuit with Margaro Suvvari. The latter apparently opened up Timoni's cistern and had been using her water without permission. According to Pisani, Suvvari produced four false witnesses and bribed the "recorder" of the Court of Justice, who then influenced the judges to rule in her favor, allowing her to use the cistern and also awarding her a small portion of Timoni's land. Pisani, who "saw this illegal proceeding on the part of the judges, and being a shareholder in Mrs. Timoni's property," stepped in to obstruct the judgment. Timoni and Suvvari were now redirected to the court of the *Şeyhülislam* so that the judgment could be reversed.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> TNA FO 195/242, Etienne Pisani to Stratford Canning, 1/12/1844.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid. Suvvari bought the land from Timoni's aunt, Mme. Napry. Napry originally purchased the land from Timoni. The land was adjoined to Timoni's, and according to their agreement Napry was allowed to build a house with a pentice with an overhang over Timoni's land. The condition of the sale was that should Napry decide to sell the

According to the rules set out by the embassy in 1827, dragomans were not allowed to take part in commercial or political business without permission from the ambassador. If so, they were to immediately report their actions. Concerned with their conduct, the embassy wanted to avoid any backlash because of the actions of their dragomans in public and private life. Resources were reserved for official business, and were not to be tied up in the autonomous actions of dragomans. The extent to which dragomans used the resources of the embassy for their own personal affairs is difficult to measure but they undoubtedly had some influence in Ottoman courts because of their work in them on behalf of the embassy. Legal pluralism in the empire brought Muslims and non-Muslims into Ottoman and European courts to settle their disputes. Courts represented one space that regulated their business transactions and partnerships. Courts and the cases brought to them also provide a lens through which to examine how non-Muslims navigated through Ottoman political and legal systems and structures, the strategies used to obtain redress, or the consequences experienced if they were on the losing side of a case.

Being part of a dragoman family opened up opportunities to draw upon personal ties, and to assist in situations where connections and knowledge of the inner-workings of Ottoman juridopolitical systems were beneficial. Being embedded in Ottoman and European institutions and structures in Istanbul facilitated not only a seamless navigation of these systems, but an advantageous one as well. Non-Muslims privileged enough to be *protégés* of European empires were still subjects of the sultan, but at times, better positioned in the courts because they received support from the embassies. That was the case for Mrs. Timoni, who appealed to the Austrian Embassy for help with her lawsuit.

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house, Timoni had to be notified and if she decided not to buy it, the overhang was to be removed. Napry was never to touch the cistern, a small piece of which was underneath the land that she purchased from Timoni. Napry sold the land Suvari without notifying Timoni.

Enlisting imperial power meant using a combination of personal connections, network ties, and knowledge of the proper channels to navigate in order to solicit assistance to obtain favorable outcomes. The marriage alliances created by the Pisanis did not just benefit them, it also benefitted the families that they married into. Mrs. Timoni was probably in an even better position because her son-in-law was a dragoman with personal connections to individuals in the Ottoman court system, and had intimate knowledge of how that functioned. It might have helped that her brother Georges was also a dragoman at the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul, though there is no indication that he ever became involved with the case. Etienne's personal and economic interests in the matter perhaps prompted his intervention on behalf of his mother-in-law. That it did not go unnoticed by the ambassador shows that the embassy wanted an explanation for what the dragoman was up to, so that the embassy could distance itself from the case so that it did not appear as if it were directly involved in the issue. Canning was so concerned with the matter that he ordered Count Pisani to inform his brother that his actions were not in line with the interests of the embassy as he was performing the duties of a dragoman there.<sup>333</sup>

As discussed in chapter two, dragomans employed by the embassy were not supposed to involve themselves in activities to supplement their income, or that put them in a position where the embassy was dragged into a conflict because of their actions outside of their official duties. This attempt to separate public and private life by the embassy could not have worked, however. The Pisanis were so attached to the embassy and to their position as dragomans that there was no distinction in being a dragoman in their private life, in their business ventures, or as subjects of the sultan. They benefitted from being part of the embassy and used it to their advantage in

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid. See Canning's note on the back of the last page of the file.

effectively mobilizing the embassy's resources for their own use to strengthen their position in Ottoman society.<sup>334</sup>

In this chapter, I discuss three major incidents in the nineteenth century where the Pisanis grappled with the Sublime Porte in their roles as dragomans, and as members of the non-Muslim community in Istanbul. I argue that the position of the Pisanis in Ottoman society reflected their partial legal autonomy and provided them with access to Ottoman institutions, including courts. The benefits of their diplomatic protection, however, facilitated their use of embassy resources, which was advantageous for them when interacting with the Sublime Porte. The first incident is Nicholas Pisani and Stamatello Volgo's case against Sultana Serfiraz Hanımefendi, one of the wives of sultan Abdülmecid I, and her *kahvecibaşı* (chief coffee preparer) Osman Efendi. The case demonstrates how members of the family who were not dragomans used the resources of the embassy available to them to help recover money loaned to the sultana and Osman Efendi. It also underscores the negotiation of their status and inclusion into Ottoman and British institutions and structures by the Pisanis. The next two incidents focus on the activities of Etienne Pisani. His retirement and ultimate conclusion of active service in the embassy in 1875, was spurred by a noxious, drawn-out disagreement between him and the Grand Vizier. The argument between the two highlights how the dragoman used his position to his advantage when operating inside British and Ottoman imperial spaces and structures to mitigate any possible repercussions against his reputation, and the possibility of not receiving a pension from the British for his many years of service. Furthermore, the episode shows how his engagement with the Grand Vizier was not a personal matter, since British and Ottoman ministers ultimately

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<sup>334</sup> Kasaba, Keyder, and Tabak make a similar point in regards to native "bourgeoisies" in port cities of the Ottoman Empire. Reşat Kasaba, Çağlar Keyder, Faruk Tabak, "Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities and Their Bourgeoisies: Merchants, Political Projects, and Nation-State," *Review* 10 no. 1 (1986): 122.

became involved. The final incident focuses on Etienne's attempt to open a charitable organization in Istanbul. Etienne initially received permission from the sultan to establish the enterprise. But after Etienne's death in 1882, the decision was apparently overturned, despite the attempts of his shareholders to commence its operations. As in Nicholas' case against the sultana, the efforts of Etienne and his partners to open the charitable organization emphasize how the Pisanis and their representatives interacted with Ottoman officials, and used their networks to stabilize and intercede on their behalf in their economic ventures outside of the embassy.

All three incidents illuminate the contexts in which the Pisanis and their family members operated within Ottoman and British imperial spaces, and shows how spatial, institutional and social characteristics of imperial space overlapped and bolstered their position in Ottoman political, legal, and social structures. These episodes also bring out a number of themes that were constant features for non-Muslim *protégés* in nineteenth century Istanbul. Their *protégé* status managed their interaction with these European and Ottoman institutions.

In the nineteenth century, changes to Ottoman policy directed at *beraths* and the protection system reflected the Ottoman administration's attempts at bureaucratic centralization through the *Tanzimat* reforms. These were essentially a continuation of Sultan Selim III and Sultan Mahmud II's reform policies.<sup>335</sup> Complaints by Ottoman officials of the abuse of the protection system and inflation in the number of *protégés* by the embassies and consulates were nothing new, and stretched back into the eighteenth century.<sup>336</sup> Now the Porte was actively attempting to dismantle the protection system through a series of mandates. The first was through a *hatt-ı şerif* in 1806, which tried to police the number of *berats* that were issued, and to

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<sup>335</sup> On the continuity of reform policies, see Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, part 1.

<sup>336</sup> Frank Castiglione, "'Levantine' Dragomans in Nineteenth Century Istanbul: The Pisanis, the British, and Issues of Subjecthood," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları Dergisi/Journal of Ottoman Studies* XLIV (2014): 175; Also see Feroz Ahmad, "Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations 1800-1914," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11 no. 1 (2000): 3; van den Boogert, *Capitulations*, chapter 2.



stop the practice of original patent holders extending their protection to their servants (*hizmetkârs*) who were otherwise farmers, artisans, and shopkeepers and had really nothing to do with consular or embassy business. All *beratlîs* and *hizmetkârs* that lived outside of Istanbul were to return to the city, or lose their protected status.<sup>337</sup>

Another attempt by the Porte to control the issuing of *berats* by the embassies and consulates took place in 1852, when an official note was issued to the embassies in Istanbul notifying them that the *protégé* status of Ottoman subjects would not be recognized unless they were directly attached to the embassies or consulates. Eight years later, a similar note was sent to the embassies declaring that new *protégés* were now subjected to Ottoman jurisdiction, and “inheritance rights for protection was abolished.”<sup>338</sup> As mentioned previously, in 1863 the Ottomans curbed the power of embassies in granting *berats* and redefined its terms and conditions. The policy of hereditary extension was abolished for those that obtained patents of protection after 9 August 1863, and the number of dragomans that could be employed by foreign powers was limited.<sup>339</sup> The 1863 regulation, or the *Règlement Relatif aux Consuls Étrangers* also stipulated the number of dragomans that could be employed by foreign powers, and were set to four for consulates-general, three for consulates and two for vice-consulates/consular agencies.<sup>340</sup>

Though not a dragoman and in spite of changes to the laws on Ottoman non-Muslim *protégés*, Nicholas Pisani maintained his status as a protected subject of the British Embassy. He and his partner’s *contretemps* with the sultana underscores the scope of Pisani’s network in the Levantine community, and his family’s embeddedness in the embassy through the

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<sup>337</sup> van de Boogert *Capitulations*, 107-110. van den Boogert notes that the 1806 decree was similar to one declared in 1786.

<sup>338</sup> Castiglione, “Levantine Dragomans,” 175, fn. 17.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid*, 175, fn. 18 and 19.

<sup>340</sup> Sousa, 108; de Groot, “Protection and Nationality,” 238 -239; Laffan, 88; van Dyck, 96-97. The number of dragomans to be employed by the embassies is not listed.

mobilization of its resources.

### *Merchants and Family Networks*

Family ties represented opportunities for advancement and could shape the outcome of business ventures. For Levantine merchants, Pera and Galata were important hubs of trade, finance, and merchant activities. One glance at the *L'Indicateur Constantinopolitain* (1868), a commercial guide and yearbook listing everything from Levantine businesses to information about the embassies and Ottoman dynasty, reveals the profound marketplace that Levantines dominated, taking part in all sorts of enterprises. Pursuing profits through small businesses or becoming members in larger trading conglomerates between the Ottoman Empire and Europe attributed to the diverse commercial and European composition of Pera and Galata, and key groups of non-Muslim *beraths* and *Avrupa Tüccarı* dominated commercial affairs in the nineteenth century. The latter “Merchants of Europe” were created by the Porte in 1806 and were composed of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects in order to combat the sale of *berats* by the European powers, and the rising numbers of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects receiving foreign diplomatic protection. Bruce Masters points out that the rationale behind the *Avrupa Tüccarı* was to establish a level-playing field for other non-Muslim Ottoman subjects to conduct international trade as enjoyed by subjects of the European powers under the terms of the capitulations.<sup>341</sup> The system was also a tool used to reaffirm the authority of the sultan over the merchants.<sup>342</sup> Kaymakci argues that the Porte had two goals in establishing the *Avrupa Tüccarı*. The first was that it attempted to adopt an institutional framework that would favor the terms of trade for

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<sup>341</sup> Bruce Masters, “The Sultan’s Entrepreneurs: The *Avrupa tüccarı*s and the *Hayriye tüccarı*s in Syria,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 no. 4 (1992): 579. Masters notes that copies of *berats* for *Avrupa tüccarı*s before 1806 do not exist. On the same point, see Cihan Artunç, “The Protégé System and Beratlı Merchants in the Ottoman Empire: The Price of Legal Institutions,” *Working Paper*, March 2013, 7. <http://aalims.org/uploads/Cihan%20Artunc%20Berat.pdf>. A similar institution to the *Avrupa tüccarı*s was set up afterwards for Ottoman-Muslim merchants. On the *Hayriye tüccarı*s, see Masters, 585-586.

<sup>342</sup> Masters, 582.

Ottoman subjects and increase the wealth of the country. The second was that the system was to act as an alternative to foreign protection and to prevent the “defection” of Ottoman merchants.”<sup>343</sup>

*Avrupa tüccarıs* received similar privileges as *beratlıs*. They paid the same customs duties and had access to a comparable legal structure to settle disputes.<sup>344</sup> Like *beratlıs* who were given the right to employ two dragomans that in turn received their privileges, the *Avrupa tüccarıs* were allowed to hire two servants and they too were granted *fermans*. Upon the death of a merchant, their agents had to give back their *fermans* to the authorities; if a merchant wanted to replace an agent, an application to do so had to be submitted along with the previous agent’s *ferman*.<sup>345</sup> A major difference between *beratlı* merchants and the *Avrupa tüccarıs* was that the latter and their agents were still subjected to paying the *cizye*. That payment combined with the 1500 *akçe* cost to purchase the *berat* for *Avrupa tüccarıs*, generated additional funds for the Sublime Porte.<sup>346</sup>

The differences between *beratlı* merchants like Levantines and the *Avrupa tüccarıs* were slight, and mirrored the changes taking place in the empire through the reform programs of Selim III and his *Nizam-i Cedid* program of reform. Reorganization and countering, if not trying to control Europe’s reach into the empire revived the once weakened indigenous merchants, but the upswing did not last long. As previously mentioned, the Balta Limanı Treaty of 1838 created a free-trade zone, and although an economic treaty, it was also political in nature. It was designed to reduce Mehmet Ali’s strength in Egypt and counteract the influence of Russia in the Ottoman

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<sup>343</sup> Said Salih Kaymakci, “The Sultan’s Entrepreneurs, The Entrepreneurs’ Sultan: *Beratlı Tüccarı* and Institutional Change in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire (1835-1868),” *Unpublished M.A. Thesis* (Boğaziçi University, 2013), 29. Kaymakci bases his argument off of his reading of the memorandum that set the conditions for the *Avrupa tüccarı*.

<sup>344</sup> Masters, 581. The office of the *nazir* (superintendent) was created by the Porte and resembled that of the foreign embassies.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, 581-582.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*, 582. Citing Bağış, Artunç notes that the cost of the *berat* was between 1500-2000 *akçe*. Artunç, 23.

Empire, by limiting their power in Ottoman economic and political affairs. It also basically abrogated the Treaty of *Hünkâr İskelesi* (1833).<sup>347</sup> Legislation passed during the *Tanzimat* diminished the privileges awarded to the *Avrupa tüccarıs*. *Avrupa tüccarıs* were subjected to a commercial legal system comprised of the Commercial Court, which was established in Istanbul in 1846, mixed tribunals in 1856 to decide cases between Muslims and non-Muslims,<sup>348</sup> and commercial codes in 1850 and 1862.<sup>349</sup> Even with this competing system in place, Levantines involved in merchant activities and commerce remained important and powerful, even for members of the Ottoman imperial family.

Nicholas Pisani was the youngest brother of Count Alexander Pisani and Etienne Pisani. Like his brothers, he was born and raised in Pera, and married into another Levantine family when he wed Thérèse Marchand.<sup>350</sup> Unlike his siblings, Nicholas did not choose a life in the service of embassies as a dragoman. Instead, he became a merchant based in Pera.<sup>351</sup> This was not uncommon, since his other brother Charles was not involved in the business of translation either. Though not a merchant, Charles is listed as a *rentier* (a person with independent means) in the *Indicateur Ottoman Illustré*. Nothing else is really known about Charles. Both Nicholas and he were *beratlıs* and presumably received the patent because of their brothers' employment at the

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<sup>347</sup> Roderic Davison, "Britain, the International Spectrum, and the Eastern Question," 30-31. Also see Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 374-376, who cites Davison. Kasaba also argues that the reasons for the signing of the Balta Limani Treaty were multiple. For the British, it was a sign that the Ottomans were integral to their Near Eastern policy of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire by stopping French and Russian expansionism there. For the Ottomans, the signing of the treaty signalled a continuation of economic reform that started at the end of the eighteenth century, and the need for help in suppressing the revolt of Muhammad Ali in Egypt. See Reşat Kasaba, "Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 4 (2) 1993: 218-219.

<sup>348</sup> van den Boogert, "Millets," 38-39. van den Boogert states that the mixed tribunals were not too much a change because Muslims and non-Muslims already took their disputes to the *kadı* courts unless both parties belonged to the same religious community, or did not want to involve the Ottoman authorities.

<sup>349</sup> Masters, 593.

<sup>350</sup> Sturdza does not list the date of their marriage, and I was not able to locate a record of marriage in the Santa Maria Draperis archives.

<sup>351</sup> Schmitt, *Levantiner*, 227. Schmitt cites Cervati, *Indicateur Ottoman Illustré: Annuaire-Almanach du Commerce* (Constantinople, 1883), 314. Nicholas Pisani was listed as a *négociant* in both the 1883 and 1885 *Indicateur*. For 1885, see page 309.

British Embassy. I have not been able to locate any information on the type of business that Nicholas operated, but it seems as though he was a broker for the Ottoman Bank at one point. In 1857, he was involved in a lawsuit where he was convicted of fraud and theft. A company had assigned Pisani, as a broker for the Ottoman Bank, to receive “serghis” [sic] from the Ottoman government and then to pay over the amounts to the company. Instead, he pocketed £5000 of that money. He was ultimately found guilty of the offence, and was required to pay the amount back to the company.<sup>352</sup> Outside of his employment with the Ottoman Bank, Nicholas’ relationships with other merchants in Pera and Galata are unclear, and so too is his involvement with any businesses outside of the Ottoman Empire. He did have a business relationship with another member of the Levantine community, however, one Stamatello Volgo.

Volgo received diplomatic protection from France. The *Indicateur Ottoman Illustré* lists him as being a *homme d'affaires*, or businessman.<sup>353</sup> Though we lack sufficient evidence to suggest exactly what line of business Volgo was in, it seems that he was, at least in his partnership with Pisani, involved in money lending or commerce. Documents in the *Centres des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes* demonstrate that he was active in financial activities in the Levantine community. In 1851, he was involved in a financial dispute with a Monsieur Lachize, a case that was brought to the *Katib Efendi*, a clerk or assistant to the *kadi*. Lachize sued Volgo for the repayment of 41,000 piasters. Volgo was apparently ordered to give the money to the *Katib Efendi*, or provide a guarantor who would commit to pay the amount within a period of

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<sup>352</sup> *Sergi* – an order for payment of money from a public office/government securities or bonds. *Judgment of the Lords of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on the Appeal of Black v. the Ottoman Bank, from Her Majesty’s Consular Court at Constantinople; delivered 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1862*; Also see *The Bankers Magazine, Journal of the Money Market, and Commercial Digest XXII* (January-December, 1862): 493; *The Jurist* 8 (Part 1) 1863, 801-803. The name of the company was not listed in the appeal that was sent from the Consular Court in Istanbul to the Privy Council in London.

<sup>353</sup> Cervati, *Indicateur Ottoman Illustré* 1883, 351.

two months.<sup>354</sup> Ironically, years later Volgo was involved in a similar dispute over payments, but this time he was the one demanding the return of a large sum of money that he and Nicholas Pisani lent to Osman Efendi, the *kahvecibaşı* of sultana Serfiraz, the second wife of sultan Abdülmecid I. The lawsuit against the sultana and Osman Efendi stemmed from their failure to return money loaned to them by Pisani and Volgo, and dragged out over the course of a number of years. The British embassy and the Porte subsequently became involved in the matter.

The case involving Nicholas Pisani and Stamatello Volgo against the sultana and her servant Osman Efendi was a very long and drawn-out case. It touched on a variety of matters related to changes in the adjudication of cases involving *beratlıs* through the introduction of mixed tribunals, and jurisdictional conflicts when a member of the Ottoman imperial family was taken to court. Because Stamatello Volgo received diplomatic protection from France, the case further underscores how two embassies in Istanbul teamed up together to exert pressure on the Ottoman Sublime Porte to draw the case to a close. Hundreds of pages of correspondence and petitions circulated between the embassies and the Sublime Porte, and the ambassadors and dragomans remained persistent and worked in alliance for over a decade to bring the case to a close.

The case also sheds light on how members of the Pisani family who were not employed as dragomans but still had a direct connection to the embassy used that relationship to their advantage. Nicholas Pisani used his family relationship with the embassy, and their family's social network in the Levantine community to reach a favorable settlement for himself and his partner, Stamatello Volgo. Nicholas Pisani died during the proceedings of the case and his heirs

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<sup>354</sup> Centre des Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Constantinople, 166PO/E 607 1857/1858, Premier Drogman. J.B. Nicolas, Rapport du 24 Octobre and 31 Octobre. On 5 September, 1851, Nicolas wrote that the sum to be deposited at the Porte as collateral for (presumably goods) 41,000 piasters by Lachize. A commission was to be appointed to rule on the issue.

stepped in to keep pressure on the embassies and the Sublime Porte, to ensure that they received repayment of the debt.<sup>355</sup>

In 1858, Stamatello Volgo and Nicholas Pisani lent Osman Efendi, in his capacity as a representative and *kahvecibaşı* of sultana Sulfiraz (sic) (Serfiraz),<sup>356</sup> two large sums of money. The first sum equaled 577,695 piasters and was given to Osman Efendi on 9 March 1858. One week later on 16 March 1858, he received a second sum of money totaling 2,405,075 piasters. Both loans amounted to 2,982,770 piasters. The reason for the loans is unclear, and so too is whether or not it was the sultana that needed the money, or if it was for Osman Efendi's own personal use. It is also not certain if it was Nicholas and Stamatello's own money, or if they took out a loan from another party in order to meet the request of Osman Efendi and the sultana. The terms of the loan were also not disclosed. From the available documentation, it is not known if a formal contract between Volgo, Pisani, and Osman Efendi was created, and what the terms of repayment and rate of interest invoked in the deal. There were, however, two bonds that were drawn up in Osman Efendi's name when the loan was established.

Volgo and Pisani took their case to the Commercial Court in 1858. Due to a *ferman* declared in that same year, the court could not do anything for them.<sup>357</sup> Members of the royal family were ordered to reduce their spending limits, and debts from the Imperial Harem, or by Princes or Princesses would no longer be recognized. A commission was also established to settle the debts contracted by the palace in a fair and equitable manner. This *ferman* was

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<sup>355</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, "Exposé sommaire de la réclamation de M.M. Volgo et Pisani contre Son Altesse Sulphiras Hanoum." There is no date provided on the summary. This is a much more complex file that includes a number of documents in Ottoman and French. I am primarily relying on the "Exposé" and the exchanges between Ottoman, British and French officials.

<sup>356</sup> Serfiraz Hanımefendi, second *ikbal* to Sultan Abdülmecid I was born in approximately 1837. At about age 14, she entered the harem and had three children. She died in 1907 and was laid to rest in the Royal Mausoleum of Yahya Efendi in Beşiktaş, Istanbul. *The Concubine, the Princess and the Teacher: Voices from the Ottoman Harem*, Douglas Scott Brookes Transl/ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 290.

<sup>357</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, "Exposé." The *ferman* was declared on 17 August 1858. The date provided in the summary is 17 Muharrem 1275 (1858).

apparently circulated to the foreign missions through a Memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 August 1858.<sup>358</sup>

It was no secret to the British Embassy that the Ottomans had been facing a significant financial crisis. Reform of the bureaucracy and military was expensive.<sup>359</sup> Spending on the military alone had risen exponentially from 1841-1853, eating up roughly 40% of the empire's budget,<sup>360</sup> and the treasury was officially bankrupt in 1851 because of numerous instances of financial mismanagement. The Crimean War was extremely costly, and for the first time the Porte had to take out foreign loans to finance the war effort.<sup>361</sup> In the meantime, frivolous spending at the palace did not help the financial situation. As Badem points out, Cevdet Paşa singled out the profligate spending by palace women in his *Tezâkir*. According to him, palace favorites spent huge sums of money on luxury items, apparently influenced by the style of European and Egyptian women. The sisters, daughters and favorites of the sultan racked up an astounding debt of 288,000 purses (approximately £1.15 million) in 1855 alone. Serfiraz was apparently liable for 125,000 purses of that debt (about £500,000).<sup>362</sup>

Failing to have any luck at the Commercial Court, Volgo and Pisani appeared in front of the Commission for the settlement of debts of the Palace (*Commission chargée des règlements des dettes du Palais*). That court ruled in their favor, and on 17 May 1859, Volgo and Pisani received the equivalent of the first loan given to Osman Efendi for 577,695 piasters by receiving

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, The date provided in the summary is 21 Muharrem 1275.

<sup>359</sup> Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853-1856)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 292.

<sup>360</sup> Tefik Güran, "Tanzimat Döneminde Osmanlı Maliyesi, Bütçeler ve Hazine Hesapları 1841-1861," *Türk Tarih Kurumu, Belgeler XIII* (17), Ankara 1988, (Ayrıbasım: Ankara: TTK, 1989), 24, 37 in Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War*, 295.

<sup>361</sup> Badem, 324-325. Badem cites Edhem Eldem, "Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe: Foreign Loans, the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman Public Debt," *European Review* 13 no. 3 (2005): 434. The first loan was taken out in 1854 for £3,000,000 and organized by Dent, Palmers & Co. of London, and the second by the Rothschilds of London for £5,000,000. A third load was taken out in 1858 for £5,000,000. See p. 435. Although these were the first in a series of foreign loans, Badem does point out that the Porte had previously taken out loans with Galata bankers/sarrafs.

<sup>362</sup> Cevdet Pasha, *Tezâkir* 13-20, p. 4. Cevdet Pasha gives this amount as 120,000 purses elsewhere in the same book (p. 8), in Badem, 300-301.



thirty-three pieces of jewelry. The jewelry acted as collateral for the loan that was made in piasters. Though pleased with the payment, complications arose after Osman Efendi claimed that through that payment, the total amount of both loans, equaling 2,982,770 piasters were paid in full. Displeased with the *kahvecibaşı*'s actions, the case was directed to the *Ticaret*, or court of commerce.<sup>363</sup>

At the *Ticaret*, a mixed commission comprised of Muslim and non-Muslim adjudicators was put together to preside over the case. The president of the commission was Salih Efendi, and the other members were Ali Efendi, Gabriel Efendi, and Yanco Efendi, and Messieurs Lafontatine, Riso, Glavany, and Crespin. The Glavany and Crespin families were part of a long line of merchant families in Pera.<sup>364</sup> The Crespins also had family members in the service of the French Consulate in Istanbul.<sup>365</sup>

This commission passed a unanimous ruling on 21 April 1860 in favor of Pisani and Volgo. Osman Efendi was ordered to pay the two claimants a total of 3,968,373 piasters and a monthly interest rate and commission payment of 2.5% until the total amount owing was paid. Though Volgo and Pisani were once again victorious in their pursuit, they were still dissatisfied because nowhere in the ruling had the sultana's name been recorded.<sup>366</sup>

Volgo and Pisani's behaviour and dissatisfaction was not entirely irrational. Both believed that the absence of the sultana's name meant that she had evaded any responsibility in the matter, and so she was not "personally condemned." Volgo and Pisani turned to their embassies to exercise their options. What followed was a renewed effort to have the sultana's role in the affair exposed, and to hold her accountable.

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<sup>363</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25. "Exposé."

<sup>364</sup> Schmitt, *Levantiner*, 228. The Glavanys were also involved in banking.

<sup>365</sup> Charles MacFarlane, *Turkey and Its Destiny: The Result of Journeys Made in 1847 and 1848 to Examine Into the State of That Country*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 15.

<sup>366</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, "Exposé."

The French Embassy requested that the Sublime Porte recall the judges who made the initial ruling, and have them rewrite it to include the sultana's name. The embassy was also specific in what they wanted written in the ruling, which was "Osman Efendi who signed the bonds delivered by Pisani and Volgo in his capacity as the chief steward of her highness the second Ikbal, and it was in this capacity that he is being condemned." Now that the Sultana fell within the scope of the *Ticaret's* decision, prosecution was directed against her. Outside of protesting against the illegal interest rate on the repayment, she did not protest the judgment. Due to the new ruling, Volgo and Pisani had to return the jewelry that they previously received from Osman Efendi.<sup>367</sup> But even after Volgo and Pisani received this ruling, the saga did not end. Though this round of arbitration came to a close in 1860, for the next ten years both claimants sought restitution and repayment of the rest of the loan from the *kahvecibaşı* and the sultana. Yet, there was still some disagreement between the claimants, the embassies, and the Sublime Porte over arguments made by Pisani and Volgo that the debt of the sultana was a debt that had to be paid directly by the Ottoman imperial government. In other words, Volgo and Pisani claimed that the debt was the responsibility of the Ottoman government, and that it should thus be repaid by them. In turn, the claimants based their claim on five points.

The first was that their claim for the repayment of the debt took place before the Imperial *ferman* of 17 August 1858, and that the debt should be settled through the Imperial Treasury. The second was that the Ottoman government had already acknowledged its obligation for the payment of the debt through their ruling on 17 May 1859, which was similar to the outstanding payments. The third was that the Sublime Porte repeatedly promised the British and French embassies that it would pay the debt. The fourth was that a sum of 4,000,000 piasters was in the Imperial Treasury and assigned to satisfy the debts of the sultana, but they had received none of

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

it. The final point was that even if the Imperial government was not originally responsible for the debt, it was now, and that it was presently slowing down the execution of the judgment in favor of the claimants.<sup>368</sup>

The British and French embassies, though supportive of the claim of Volgo and Pisani, did point out that through the correspondence between their embassies and the Sublime Porte there did not appear to be any promise made by the latter to repay the debts of the sultana. There was also no evidence to support Volgo and Pisani's claim that there were 4,000,000 piasters sitting in the Imperial Treasury. Furthermore, the embassies believed that it was up to the Sublime Porte to decide whether or not they should repay the debt through the Imperial Treasury, or if it should be left to further arbitration.<sup>369</sup>

Thus was the summary of the case of Volgo and Pisani against Osman Efendi, the agent and *kahvecibaşı* of sultana Serfiraz. The case dragged on for over ten years, and as time passed, the embassies kept the pressure on the Sublime Porte to uphold the rule of law and make certain that justice was carried out. The summary of course does not include references to the numerous exchanges of notes between the two embassies and the Sublime Porte, or to the various Ottoman ministries and Ottoman ministers that were contacted. In those exchanges, the embassies made repeated attempts to remind the Porte about their obligations, and even attempted to change the terms of the repayment of the loan.

In what follows, I briefly recount the back and forth between the embassies and the Sublime Porte. I do so in order to show how the embassies handled the matter over the course of the case, and to examine the process of claiming a debt from an Ottoman princess. The analysis also reveals how members of the Pisani family maneuvered through British and Ottoman legal

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

structures and processes after Nicholas Pisani died, presumably in 1864.<sup>370</sup> Finally, it demonstrates how the Sublime Porte approached the case, and the steps they took to bring it to a close.

On 22 December 1865, British ambassador Lord Lyons sent Ali Paşa a certified copy of a protest that he received from Richard Pisani, the late Nicholas Pisani's son. In the protest, Richard Pisani wrote that he was also writing on behalf of other family members. He outlined the pending case of his father and Stamatello Volgo. He summarized the steps taken by his father and Volgo, and by the embassy to procure the payment of the debt from the sultana up to that point. These included their case at the Tribunal on 21 April 1860, where the sultana was found to be responsible for the repayment of the debt of 3,968,373 piasters, and that in addition the court awarded 2.5 percent monthly interest rate to be added to the debt. He also noted the efforts of the dragomans of the British Embassy, Stavrides and Simmons, who worked together with the French dragoman throughout the proceedings. Since then, Richard Pisani added, the embassy had sent two additional notes to the Porte, one in 1863, and another in 1865, both of which had not received a reply. He argued that after eight years the whole process had caused "enormous prejudice" against his father, and against his father's children who were "without fortune."

Richard Pisani concluded by listing some demands, and asked that his letter be submitted to the Sublime Porte. Richard and his family members complained about the amount of time that it was still taking to resolve the matter, and demanded that if the full payment of the debt could not be furnished, that at least the Porte should commit to paying a share of it in the short-term. The second demand was related to the interest. Pisani argued that because of the amount of harm and damage that he and his family had already suffered, that the interest awarded by the Tribunal

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<sup>370</sup> Marandet, <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=nicolas&n=pisani&oc=1>. Nicholas' death certificate was issued by the St. Antoine Parish.

be compounded (capitalized) at the end of each year, in accordance with the custom of bankers and traders.<sup>371</sup>

Nicholas' son was tired of dealing with the political jousting between the Porte and the embassies. It had already been seven years since his father and Volgo prepared and then received a ruling on the case and he might have thought that sending a petition would expedite a conclusion. He was witness to the British and French embassy's attempts to get his father's money. Years before, both stepped in again to try to get some clarification from the Porte on the proceedings of the case.

British Ambassador Henry Bulwer wrote to Grand Vizier Ali Paşa demanding clarification on two points. The first was whether or not members of the Commercial Tribunal that adjudicated the case actually condemned the sultana or Osman Efendi to pay back the loan. The second was whether or not members of the commission were allowed to sign the *mazbata* (report/minutes of the meeting) that expressed their opinion or findings. The ambassador asked the Commission to be brought to the Porte to clarify those issues.<sup>372</sup> One year later the French Ambassador, Lionel de Moustier, wrote to Ali Paşa to press for payment to Volgo and to respond to another ruling by the *Ticaret*, this time against Volgo. On 13 August 1862, Volgo was ordered to pay back 80,000 piasters plus interest and court fees to one Sebouh, an Ottoman subject.<sup>373</sup> It is unclear if Volgo borrowed that money from Sebouh in order to make the loan to Osman Efendi, however. The French ambassador wrote to Ali Paşa repeating what the previous French Ambassador told the Porte, that Volgo could not satisfy that loan until he received payment from the Sultana. Ali Paşa was assured once Volgo was paid, he would in turn, pay his debt to

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<sup>371</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, Petition of Richard Pisani, 22/12/1865, enclosed in Lyons to Ali Pasha, 15 January 1866.

<sup>372</sup> BOA HR.TO 237/27, Bulwer to Ali Paşa 11/27/1861. An Ottoman translation is enclosed in the file.

<sup>373</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, Moustier to Ali Paşa 5/10/1862.

Sebouh.<sup>374</sup> Sebouh sent the Porte a petition (*arzuhal*), requesting that it intervene to collect his money. Sebouh wrote that although the ministry of commerce issued an order to have the affair settled with the French Embassy, nothing happened. His own attempt at writing a petition to the French Embassy was also fruitless, so he was asking that Volgo be summoned to the Porte to recoup the debt owed to him.<sup>375</sup>

Meanwhile, Bulwer wrote again to Ali in 1863. In this letter he pointed out that since the Commission's ruling found the Sultana directly responsible for the repayment of the loan, that Pisani had "a right to justice." He also argued that because a "Turkish" Tribunal did not have the authority to enforce its own sentence against a Sultana, that the British government had the right to receive the outstanding payment from the Ottoman government. With that, he demanded that either the sultana or the Porte pay the debt. Bulwer made it clear that the disagreement concerning responsibility between the Sultana and Osman Efendi had nothing to do with the embassy, but with the Porte.<sup>376</sup>

Letters continued to pile up between the embassies and the Porte, much to the dismay of both Volgo, and Pisani's heirs. The Porte appeared to be unreliable, and unwilling to reach a settlement. With the debt still unpaid and questions unanswered, the embassies kept up their pressure on the Porte. In 1867 the British Embassy sent a letter Fuad Paşa, the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs. In that letter Fuad Paşa was reminded of the hardships that Nicholas Pisani's heirs were facing and that after four months since their last communication, an answer had not been received. The outstanding 3,968,373 piasters also had yet to be paid. Fuad Paşa was urgently requested to execute the payment of the amount of the debt to Pisani's heirs

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid. The *Kiyet Gurusu* for the petition is in the file.

<sup>376</sup> BOA HR.TO 240/17, Bulwer to Ali Paşa 3/7/1863. The letter was given to the *Hariciye Evrakı* (Department of Foreign Affairs) to be presented to the *müstesar hazretleri* (permanent undersecretary). An Ottoman Translation is in the file.

immediately, including the principal and interest, either in cash or bonds.<sup>377</sup> One year later, the British and the French Embassies sent the exact same letter on the same day to Fuad Paşa.

The letters were in response to one previously sent by the Minister on 8 June 1868. Both ambassadors could not believe that Fuad had, in their view, supported the sultana's position that she was not condemned by the *Ticaret's* decision in holding her responsible for repayment of the debt, and that it was the sole responsibility of Osman Efendi to do so.<sup>378</sup> They also declined his proposal to have a new judgment rendered in the case. Judging by their response, Fuad seemed to have also believed the sultana's contention that Volgo and Pisani (the "creditors of the Princess") might have paid off members of the tribunal that charged her in order to win the judgment in their favor. Fuad also supported the sultana's argument that she should have been "summoned or represented before the tribunal." The ambassadors rebuked that point, and asked Fuad when the last time an imperial princess had ever gone before an Ottoman tribunal, and how claims against them were regulated before the commission of Tophane. The ambassador's also wondered why the civil list had not recognized Osman Efendi as the official agent of the princess, pointing out that it could be "easily established through looking at the numerous creditors of the princess, and bonds signed for her by the *kahvecibaşı*."

The ambassadors went through the particulars of the case; that Pisani and Volgo went before the Commission of Tophane and the Imperial Treasury (due to the imperial *fermans* of 8, 17, and 21 *Muharrem* 1275); and that they received through the Commission several sums; that the Grand Marshal of the palace was ordered to execute the judgment of the Commercial Tribunal. They reminded Fuad Paşa that if Osman Efendi was the sole debtor, there would have

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<sup>377</sup> BOA HR.H 426/25, British Embassy to Fuad Paşa, 16/10/1867.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, Fuad Paşa to the Ambassadors of France and England, 8/06/1868. Enclosed in this letter is a translation of a letter by the sultana. The recipient is not named, but the date is 21 Z 1284. Her letter was a response to one received by her from the Grand Vizier.

been no reason to involve the palace and the matter would have remained in the hands of the Porte. The ambassadors also pointed out that Ali Paşa, the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs, had promised Lord Lyons in 1866 a speedy settlement. In response to Fuad's proposal for a new judgment, the ambassadors put forth their own. Declining to accept his proposal, they offered to appoint a mixed commission to develop a payment plan that could satisfy Volgo and Pisani, "without exposing the Imperial Treasury to any unnecessary embarrassment." They reminded Fuad that this was a similar proposal made by Lyons in 1867, and one that he had agreed to. That commission was ineffective, however, because rather than focusing on devising a plan to repay the debt, they instead debated the actual case. The ambassadors signed off by writing that they believed that Fuad would agree to the proposal.<sup>379</sup> The Porte replied to that note without any explanation, only informing the ambassadors that the princess was made aware of their recommendations.<sup>380</sup>

More letters were sent back and forth between the embassies and the Porte to try to come to a reasonable settlement. By 1869, all parties involved were willing to negotiate a payment, deviating from the original amount that Pisani and Volgo were awarded. There was particular urgency for Volgo to settle because of his own outstanding debts, which went beyond what he owed to Sebouh. Since 1864, he had been liable for claims made against him by the Corporation of Jewelers, a religious organization known as the "*Terre Sainte de Pera*," and a mix of traders and bankers, amounting to about 80,000 *livres*.<sup>381</sup> Sadik Paşa, the Ottoman Minister of Finance received a letter in reply to a previous proposal made by the Porte, where a cash settlement (*caïme*) would be given not for the whole amount, but instead an amount based on the original

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid. 2 separate letters: Henry Elliot to Fuad Paşa; Nicolas Bourée to Fuad Paşa, 26/07/1868.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid, Réponse Reclamation Stamatello Volgo et Pisani. The date on the document is unclear, but the writer stated that it was a response to the ambassador's note sent on 26/07/1868.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, to Sadyk [sic] Paşa, 26/07/1869.



sum awarded plus nine years of interest. Dissatisfied, Volgo's representative declined that offer, arguing that it would only award him about 53,000 *livres*, hardly enough to pay off his own debts.<sup>382</sup> Volgo wanted an arrangement that would at least provide him with 83,000 *livres*, enabling him to pay off his creditors, and have some leftover for himself.<sup>383</sup> But that proposal did not work out either.

One year later, an amount was finally agreed upon between the embassies and the Porte. Volgo and Pisani were to receive 80,000 *livres*.<sup>384</sup> On 28 April 1870, the French Embassy wrote to Grand Vizier Ali Paşa inquiring about the payment. He was reminded that since the settlement was reached on 12 January of that year and that the interest rate was set to 12%, interest had accrued to 2800 *livres*.<sup>385</sup> But again Volgo and Pisani were left by the wayside. The French Ambassador sent another letter a few weeks later, reminding him of the previous letter that was sent, the urgency of the situation, and that the interest continued to raise each day.<sup>386</sup> On 25 May the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally replied to Ambassador Bourée, acknowledging receipt of both of his previous letters. The ambassador was reminded that the sum would be paid once certain formalities were completed, and that the Ministry of Finance would receive instructions to finally settle with the stakeholders. The Foreign Ministry also pointed out that because of the process of fulfilling the transaction, which they intended to complete, interest should not be added.<sup>387</sup> Six days later, Bourée replied to the Grand Vizier.

Bourée was agitated due to what he believed to be foot dragging by the Porte. He argued that the original deal, which was supposed to be 170,000 *livres* was dropped to 80,000 because

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, French Embassy to Ali Paşa, 28/04/1870.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, French Embassy to Ali Paşa, 16/05/1870. An Ottoman translation is in the file.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ambassador Bourée, 25/05/1870.

of the abandoning of “undoubtedly due” interest. He also thought that a “delay” comprised a few days or maybe a few weeks, but not four months, as had now been the case. In terms of the interest that was piling up since the January agreement, he compromised and wrote that he would only charge the rate since 1 March, but that the payment of the capital was still absolutely necessary.<sup>388</sup>

Though the Porte agreed to foot the bill for the loan, it is unclear whether or not Volgo and Pisani’s heirs were eventually paid. Nevertheless, the case reveals the remarkable difficulties in trying to obtain payment from a member of the royal family. For the Pisanis and Volgo, their reliance on their respective embassies to cull the Porte into acting beyond the systems of adjudication put in place to legally resolve the case, though important, did not speed up its conclusion. The case does, however, demonstrate the overlap between economic activities, embassy and Ottoman imperial politics, and the financial networks of members of the Levantine community. The position that Nicholas Pisani and his children occupied in that community and their maneuvering inside imperial spaces gave them access to and support from the embassy. It also shows how they could use that position to tie together two imperial polities, and induce change in Ottoman legal procedures. Etienne Pisani, however, was not as fortunate as his brother and his heirs in effecting change.

### ***Etienne Pisani and The Grand Vizier***

The fight between Etienne Pisani and the Grand Vizier, Hüseyin Avni Paşa,<sup>389</sup> was one of the key factors that led to Pisani’s resignation in 1875 and definitive retirement from his post in

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, Bourée to Ali Paşa, 31/05/1870.

<sup>389</sup> Hüseyin Avni Paşa was the Grand Vizier from 1874-1875. He was born in İsparta in 1820, and died on 15 June 1876 in the home of Midhat Paşa as a result an attack against him by Çerkes Hasan. The attack was apparently an act of retaliation and vengeance for his being transferred to the Army of Iraq in Baghdad in 1876 by Hüseyin Avni Paşa, and for the Grand Vizier’s role in the deposition of Sultan Abdülazziz I. On the career of Hüseyin Avni Paşa, see İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1982), Cilt I, 483-560; Cilt II, 561-600; On his role in the coup against Abdülazziz I, see Florian Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the*

the British Embassy. Etienne was 74 years old at that time and Eastern Question politics were central to Anglo-Ottoman relations. Russian aggression in the Ottoman Empire continued to play a role in British decision-making toward the Porte. Russia had achieved access to the Black Sea in 1871, and the terms signed in London nullified the clauses of the Treaty of Paris (1856) that kept them out of those waters and the Danubian Principalities. That was also the last time that Britain formally co-ordinated their efforts with the Ottomans in an attempt to safeguard Ottoman interests. From then on, Britain kept a policy of non-committal and isolation toward the Ottomans until the arrival of the Disraeli government in 1874. Even then, they were more concerned with Ottoman reform, funding and debt management, and the treatment of Ottoman-Christian subjects.<sup>390</sup> Uprisings in Herzegovina and instability in the Balkans in 1875 amplified British criticism of the Porte, creating a division between Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who supported the Ottomans, and the opposition led by William Gladstone, who vociferously opposed the ill-treatment of Ottoman-Christian subjects in the eastern provinces. As Mithat Aydın points out, the revolt in Herzegovina and later Bulgaria in 1876 re-opened the Eastern Question, and created an opportunity for Russia to flex its muscle in the empire.<sup>391</sup>

On top of maintaining control in the eastern provinces and the dwindling in relations with the European powers, the Ottoman central administration was in disarray. The death of Ali Paşa in 1869 and Fuad Paşa in 1871, two central architects of the *Tanzimat*, who had much control over the bureaucracy during their tenures as Grand Vizier, created a void in the bureaucracy and provided Sultan Abdülaziz I with the opportunity to gain more control over

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*Ottoman Empire: Conspiracies and Political Cultures* (NY: Routledge, 2011), chapter 4; On his murder by Çerkes Hasan see, James J. Reid, *Crisis of the Ottoman Empire: Prelude to Collapse: 1839-1876* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 311-315.

<sup>390</sup> Gül Tokay, "Anglo-Ottoman Relations and William Gladstone," *New Bulgarian University, History Department Yearbook* 4 (2009): 321-323.

<sup>391</sup> Mithat Aydın, "İngiliz-Rus Rekabeti ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin Asya Toprakları Sorunu (1877-1878)," *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 38 (2008): 255-256.

political decision-making and appointments to offices. The consequences were disastrous for the administration of the empire.

Between 1871 and 1874 six different Grand Viziers were appointed and general opposition to the sultan in the bureaucracy emerged. Ottoman public opinion was not favorable to the sultan either. Natural disasters led to diminishing harvests and revenue had an adverse effect on subjects in Anatolia, and the treasury was almost depleted, which led to bankruptcy in 1875, setting the stage for the sultan's removal in 1876.<sup>392</sup> In this general climate, British-Ottoman relations in Istanbul were relatively positive. Ambassador Henry Elliot was pro-Ottoman, anti-Russian, and had a good working relationship with Ottoman ministers.<sup>393</sup> The dragomans, however, were a different story. The conflict between Etienne Pisani and the Grand Vizier stemmed from a disagreement over the refusal of the Ottoman official to grant a concession of building a dock in the Bosphorus to the British. The whole situation spiraled out of control when Etienne verbally insulted the Grand Vizier, which led to a diplomatic crisis. The episode spilled outside of Istanbul to London when the Ottoman ambassador to Britain, Musurus Paşa, and the British Minister for Foreign Affairs became involved. Pisani did not deny his actions and in spite of his attempt to apologize, the Grand Vizier turned the dragoman away.

Whether or not Pisani believed that he was right in his assessment of the character of the Grand Vizier, he probably did not foresee the problems that would arise after he spoke so derisively about the Ottoman minister. His position came under fire and the Sublime Porte

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<sup>392</sup> Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire*, 43-46. Şevket Pamuk calls the period from 1873 to 1896 an era of "great depression" in the Ottoman Empire. See Şevket Pamuk, "The Ottoman Empire in the "Great Depression" of 1873-1896," *Journal of Economic History* 44 no. 1 (1984): 107-118.

<sup>393</sup> William Harbutt Dawson, "Forward Policy and Reaction, 1874-1875," in *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy Volume III, 1866-1919*, eds. Sir A.W. Ward, G.P. Gooch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 93-94. (91-114)

requested his removal as First Dragoman. That appeal sparked his attempt to retire, which later put his pension into jeopardy because of charges brought against his character.

In March 1874, Etienne Pisani met with Grand Vizier Hüseyin Avni Paşa to discuss the building of a floating British dock in the Bosphorus. It is unclear whether the dock was for economic or military purposes. According to Pisani, permission had been promised many times over by the Grand Vizier's predecessors, and he believed that it was essentially a done deal. After the Grand Vizier denied Pisani's request, the dragoman, allegedly infuriated with the decision, did not hold his tongue in his comments about the Grand Vizier. After reproaching the Grand Vizier in person, he engaged in gossip in certain "circles" and in conversation with Sawas Paşa, repeating much of what he said to and about Hüseyin Avni Paşa.<sup>394</sup>

The issue was not contained to Istanbul, and the Ottoman Ministry for Foreign Affairs was quick to get involved. Outraged that a dragoman would speak so contemptuously about the highest ranked Ottoman minister, Musurus Paşa, the Ottoman Ambassador to Britain discussed their opposition to Pisani's behavior to Lord Derby, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in London. In a letter to the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs, Musurus reported what took place in that meeting. Musurus wrote that Derby had not received any information or communication about the Grand Vizier as having any hostile feelings toward England, and that he chalked up the remarks about the Grand Vizier as nothing more than slander.<sup>395</sup> According to Musurus, Lord Derby did not know Etienne Pisani very well, but he did lend his support to the dragoman and assumed that what was said about the Grand Vizier was gossip, spread by Pisani's enemies.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> BOA HR.MTV 443/46, Sydney Locoock to Aarifi [sic] Pasha, 20/05/1874.

<sup>395</sup> BOA HR.MTV 443/44, Musurus Pacha [sic] to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 15/4/1874.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

That was the first of many communiqués between the Ottoman ambassador in London and Istanbul, protesting and complaining about the First Dragoman’s conduct towards the Grand Vizier. About one month later, Reşid Paşa, the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs, sent Sidney Locock, the British Chargé d’Affaires in Istanbul, a letter condemning the actions of the dragoman. In the letter, Reşid discussed his objection to Pisani’s actions and the objections of the Grand Vizier toward his behavior. He charged that Pisani continued to use “hostile and offensive language everywhere and in all circles” about the Grand Vizier<sup>397</sup> and that he cautioned Pisani to stop talking about him in such a manner.<sup>398</sup> According to Reşid, Pisani used similar language in a conversation with Sawas Paşa, who then told the Grand Vizier the details of his discussion with the dragoman. Apparently Pisani stated that the Grand Vizier was hostile to England, would be frowned upon by the Royal Government, and that the British ambassador would not visit the Grand Vizier. Pisani also stated that the Ottoman government should not rely on any financial assistance for projects from the British government in the future.<sup>399</sup> Reşid concluded the letter by stating that Pisani’s actions were inexplicable and that the First Dragoman of the embassy, who bears an official character, should not be speaking in such a manner about the highest dignitary of the Ottoman administration. He then wrote that the Grand Vizier expected Locock to put an end to the situation.<sup>400</sup>

Locock’s reply to Reşid’s letter was sent ten days later to Arifi Paşa, the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs.<sup>401</sup> In the letter, the British chargé d’affaires indicated that he

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<sup>397</sup> BOA HR.SFR (3) 210/31, Rachid Pasha [sic] to M. Locock 10/05/1874.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ahmed Arifi Paşa (1846-1895) was the son of Mehmed Şekib Paşa, a former Ottoman foreign minister. He served in the Ottoman bureaucracy for much of his life in Istanbul and as an ambassador. He was the Ottoman ambassador to Vienna twice (1872-1873, 1875-1876) and Paris (1877-1878). He was also appointed as the Ottoman Foreign Minister three times (1874-1875, 1877, 1882-1884), and briefly the Grand Vizier in 1879. Christoph

received the letter regarding Pisani's conduct and the language that he had used in certain circles, and particularly with Sawas Paşa. Upon receipt of Reşid's letter, Locock immediately summoned Pisani to explain himself. Locock told Arifi that after speaking with Pisani, he went and spoke directly with Reşid Paşa to let him know Pisani's side of the story. Pisani agreed with Locock that he would meet with the Grand Vizier to tell him personally what had transpired. Locock pointed out in the letter, as Reşid did in the one that he sent to Locock, that it might have been difficult for Pisani to be received by the Grand Vizier again. Locock also explained that the last time he met with the Grand Vizier, Pisani accompanied him, but that he was unaware of the situation between Pisani and the Grand Vizier. He eventually returned with another dragoman.

When Locock was finally received by the Grand Vizier he explained to him that Pisani denied having used any derogatory language about him. According to Pisani, the conversation between him and Sawas Paşa was private, and what Pisani said during that conversation was "elicited by Sawas Paşa himself" who had been sent by his Highness (the Grand Vizier), to learn why Pisani had not called on him lately. Locock then told the Grand Vizier that he hoped that Pisani could go and explain himself in person.<sup>402</sup>

Locock wrote that he believed the Grand Vizier would have granted what he thought was a reasonable request. He was "astonished" that it was only after urging him three times to do so that he finally acquiesced. Locock had to inform the Grand Vizier that once the ambassador returned to Istanbul, that he would surely want to meet with him, joined by his first dragoman.

Nevertheless, Pisani called on the Grand Vizier the morning that Locock's letter to Arifi was written. According to Locock, Pisani was met by Sawas Paşa, with whom he engaged in a conversation. Pisani explained that what he previously said to Sawas Paşa about the Grand

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Herzog, "Ahmed Arifi Paşa," *Encyclopedia of Islam Three* eds. Kate Fleet et al, Brill Online, 2016 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Also See İnal, 961-988. In the documents, the British refer to him as Aarifi.

<sup>402</sup> HR. MTV 443/46, 20/5/1874, Locock to Aarifi Pasha. An Ottoman Translation is in the file.

Vizier was done in a “private character.” Pisani also stated that the Grand Vizier provoked the conversation that he just had with Sawas Paşa because he wanted to know why Pisani had been avoiding him. Once the Grand Vizier received Pisani’s explanation from Sawas Paşa, the Grand Vizier told him that he would not meet with him in the future, and that he would settle the matter with the ambassador.

Locock expressed his surprise in learning how the Grand Vizier responded to Pisani’s attempt to mend the bridge that had been burned between the two of them. Locock believed that he had done everything possible to ensure that the Grand Vizier received a satisfactory explanation, and to put the issue to rest. He wrote that had he been able to foresee that the Grand Vizier would have responded in that way, he would not have sent Pisani to him. Locock then explained that his letter to Arifi Paşa was not meant to open any more dialogue on the matter, but to simply put on record the steps that he had taken to try to resolve the issue between Pisani and the Grand Vizier, and how the latter handled the dragoman’s explanation.<sup>403</sup>

Pisani did more than just explain himself to the Grand Vizier. The day after his attempt to apologize, the dragoman sent a letter to ambassador Henry Elliot, to inform him about what had taken place between him and the Grand Vizier. According to Pisani, the Grand Vizier denied granting the concession of a floating dock in Selvi Bournor [sic] (Selvi Burnu), a locality that was previously promised by the Grand Vizier’s predecessors. What got to Etienne, however, was not so much the fact that the concession was denied, but the refusal of the Grand Vizier to provide any reason for his decision. Etienne wrote that had a reason been given, he would have “probably abstained from remonstrating.” Pisani believed that the real reason for the denial of

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid. Upon receipt of this letter, Arifi Paşa sent a letter to Musurus in London to inform him what had taken place in Pisani’s attempts to apologize to the Grand Vizier. He also asked that Musurus show the letter to Lord Derby. See BOA HR. SFR (3) 210/31, 20/05/1874, Arifi Paşa to Musurus Paşa.



the dock was due to the Grand Vizier's relationship with a Russian, General (Nikolai) Ignatiev, who recommended that the British should not have been given a dockyard in the Bosphorus.

Pisani claimed that he had no personal interest in the actual affair of the dock. He was upset because he had previously informed the embassy that permission was promised for the dock to be built. Pisani believed that the embassy was entitled to the "fulfillment of a promise" that had been given on more than one occasion. He could not "accept without indifference, the rebuff of the Grand Vizier without "expostulating."” Pisani hoped that his actions were not to be disapproved, and then requested the support of the ambassador.<sup>404</sup>

Pisani's accusations about Ignatiev were probably not far-fetched. The Russian ambassador arrived in Istanbul in 1864 and since then, gained a reputation of being mischievous. Since their defeat in the Crimean War, Russian policy towards the Ottoman Empire was driven by expanding their control in the Balkans, and strengthening their role as the protector of Ottoman-Christians. In concert with those goals and on a personal level, Ignatiev wanted to weaken French and British influence at the Porte in favor of Russia, and drive a wedge between the European ambassadors in Istanbul.<sup>405</sup> The ambassador gained real influence at the palace and the Porte, and was known to have good relationships with Sultan Abdülaziz I, the Grand Vizier Mahmud Paşa, and Ministers of Foreign Affairs Fuat Paşa and Saffet Paşa.<sup>406</sup>

More letters were exchanged between Istanbul and London regarding the matter of the dock and Pisani's actions, and the Ottomans were unwilling to let the issue go. In their view, Pisani had to face some sort of consequence for his actions. In the meantime, Etienne had departed for London, though it is unclear if he did so in an official capacity. While Etienne was

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<sup>404</sup> TNA FO 195/1033, Etienne Pisani to Sir Henry Elliot, 21/05/1874.

<sup>405</sup> Ayten Kılıç, "A Russian Machiavelli in the Ottoman Empire: Count Ignatiev Conquers İstanbul (1864-1875)," in *The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78*, ed. Ömer Turan (Ankara: Middle East Technical University; Meiji University Institute of Humanities, 2007), 11-12.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

there, Musurus received another letter from Arifi Paşa, outlining his point of view on the situation.

Arifi was not very impressed with Pisani's behavior. Discussing Pisani directly, he expressed that the Sublime Porte had always had to deal with Etienne's "slightly irksome" conduct.<sup>407</sup> He also wrote that he had always wished his "old friend moved up in the hierarchy [of the embassy] in order to bring him into another sphere, because they would have been "spared the pain in always having to complain about his incorrigible methods."<sup>408</sup> The Sublime Porte, he added, had not drawn up any formal complaints against Pisani out of respect for the British government, because they did not want to upset their friendly relationship. But given Pisani's persistent misconduct, especially against the highest dignitary of the sultan, Arifi believed that even the relationship between the Ottomans and the British could not shield him from some type of consequence.<sup>409</sup>

On 4 June, Musurus sent a letter to Arifi Paşa, describing what took place in a meeting that he had with Lord Derby in London. Musurus told Derby about the slanderous language that Pisani used against the Grand Vizier. He told Derby that the Grand Vizier wanted to prevent the adverse consequences of Pisani's actions, and that the dragoman continued to repeat the same offensive language in public and to Sawas Paşa.<sup>410</sup> Musurus discussed what had happened between Pisani and the Grand Vizier at their previous meeting and urged Lord Derby to resolve the dispute in a satisfactory matter, in a way that would be expected for such a dignitary like the Grand Vizier. Derby, however, took issue with Musurus' version of the story, because it did not agree with the report that he had received from Locock. Lord Derby also suggested that the

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<sup>407</sup> BOA HR. SFR. (3) 210/31, Arifi Paşa to Musurus Paşa, 3/06/1874.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> BOA HR. MTV 443/47, Musurus Paşa to Arifi Paşa, 4/06/1874. A rough draft of this letter can also be found in BOA HR.SFR. (3) 210/31.

charges brought against Pisani and his conduct were in fact due to a plot constructed by his enemies so that he would lose the favor of the Grand Vizier. According to Lord Derby, sufficient evidence was needed before a decision could be made about what to do with the dragoman, but nevertheless stated that the British government or the ambassador would not tolerate any employee who lacked respect for the Grand Vizier or the Ottoman government. Musurus believed that the incident would come to a timely and satisfactory conclusion, given Ambassador Henry Elliot's conciliatory spirit. He also believed that had Elliot been in Istanbul at the time, the ordeal between Pisani and the Grand Vizier would not have taken place.<sup>411</sup>

Lord Derby explained himself further in a letter that he drafted to Sir Henry Elliot. Derby wrote that Musurus read him a letter written by Reşid Paşa, the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs, regarding the conduct of Pisani during his last meeting with the Grand Vizier, and that the dragoman had made matters worse, instead of improving them. According to Reşid Paşa, Pisani did not apologize to the Grand Vizier, did not provide a suitable explanation as to the language that he used about him, and therefore essentially repeated his misconduct. Derby did not provide a full summary of the conversation with Musurus because neither he nor Musurus intended it to be "official," but he did state that he disagreed with Musurus and Reşid Paşa's account because it "differed widely" from what he had been told. He told Musurus he believed that the conduct of Locock and Pisani reflected that of "two men sincerely desiring to put an end to a quarrel which was not of their seeking by using every means of consideration which self respect allowed..." Derby believed that if either Pisani or the Ottoman government had any cause for complaint "as the matter now stood, it was not the Grand Vizier."<sup>412</sup> Derby also stated that he told Musurus that though they wanted to maintain cordial relations with the Ottoman

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> TNA FO 78/2337, Lord Derby to Sir Henry Elliot (draft), 6/06/1874.

government that they could not, in a situation where the words of an employee were questioned, admit that the employee was wrong unless there was sufficient evidence to prove it. Derby told Musurus that details could emerge if there was a further investigation into the matter in Istanbul, and that it should pass through the hands of ambassador Elliot.<sup>413</sup>

On 18 June, Musurus sent Arifi Paşa another letter, this time telling him that he had once again met with Lord Derby, and that a resolution had been made in the issue between Pisani and the Grand Vizier. Though the details of the resolution were not divulged to Musurus, Derby stated that he had received the news from Sir Henry Elliot. Musurus further wrote that Pisani arrived in London recently, was set to stay for about one week and that he would closely monitor his movements. If there were any subsequent actions by Pisani, Arifi would be duly informed.<sup>414</sup>

After a month of arguing it appeared as though the saga was coming to an end, but that was not the case. The quarrel continued for a few more months, and so too did the back and forth between Istanbul and London. It is not clear why Pisani went to London but he did, however, stay for more than one week, prompting further discussion between Arifi and Musurus about what they were going to do once Pisani returned to Istanbul. In Arifi's letter to Musurus on 12 August 1874, he feared that if Etienne returned to his duties as a dragoman in Istanbul that it would cause further problems between Britain and his government, disrupting the present harmony of their relationship.<sup>415</sup> Less than two weeks later, Musurus replied to Arifi and notified him that he believed Pisani would return to Istanbul and not resign.<sup>416</sup> That was the last communication between Musurus and Arifi about Pisani for over a month. The next letter was

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> BOA HR.SFR (3) 210/31, Musurus Paşa to Arifi Paşa 18/06/1874.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, Arifi Paşa to Musurus 12/08/1874.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, Musurus Paşa to Arifi Paşa 27/08/1874.

sent by Arifi to Musurus on 7 October. By that point, Arifi evidently had enough with the whole ordeal.

In this exchange, Arifi expressed his “disgust” with having to return to the subject of Etienne Pisani, his actions, and the issues that it caused between the Sublime Porte and the British. Coupled with expressing his disdain for having to continue on with these repetitive communications, he was upset that Musurus’ request to the British government that Pisani be retired was denied and that Pisani continued to serve in his capacity as First Dragoman in Istanbul. He believed that the only true remedy for the situation was the removal of Pisani. Arifi’s memory was long, and brought up Pisani’s previous resignation, which stemmed from his disagreement with Stratford de Redcliffe. Arifi believed that there were parallels between the two incidents, which were Pisani’s history of insubordination and the fact that he traveled to England right after there was a discrepancy between the dragoman and an official with a higher rank than he held.<sup>417</sup> He also noted that as in “Turkey” or anywhere else for that matter, a foreign official or employee that offends the head of the cabinet would not find favor with any member of government, and this is precisely the case that the Ottomans had before them. Arifi argued that Pisani keeping his position would have negatively affected relations between Britain and the Porte, and that it might cause a “permanent misintelligence” in the daily reports between the Sublime Porte and the embassy.<sup>418</sup>

Musurus’ reply seemed to be what Arifi wanted to hear. The Ottoman ambassador wrote that he had met with Lord Derby a few days before he received his last letter, and that there had

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid, Arifi Paşa to Musurus Paşa 7/10/1874. Arifi gave another version of the circumstances surrounding Etienne’s resignation and reinstatement, however. He pointed out that Etienne was “removed” from his position by the ambassador, and that Pisani was endorsed by two powerful Ottoman Ministers that were “anything but favorable to maintaining Lord Stratford.”

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

been a satisfactory reconciliation between both parties.<sup>419</sup> Musurus, however, showed Derby the last letter that he received from Arifi. After reading it, Derby told him that the Grand Vizier accepted Pisani's apology, and that he could not see what else he could do to please Arifi Paşa, especially since he had demanded an apology, but was now wanting Pisani to be removed from his position.<sup>420</sup> Musurus wrote that he told Lord Derby that since Pisani had served for fifty years that he was entitled to a pension, and that he could be retired without having to resort to him being fired.<sup>421</sup> Musurus, however, did not get a straight answer from Derby about his request, only a reply that he would discuss it with ambassador Elliot to get his opinion on it.<sup>422</sup>

That was the last available communiqué sent between Musurus and Arifi on the subject. The extent to which the Sublime Porte or the Ottoman ambassador pressed the matter further with Lord Derby in London, or with Sir Henry Elliot in Istanbul is unclear. Whether or not the Sublime Porte's pressure on the British Embassy and the Foreign Office to bring the matter to a close had any effect on Pisani's decision to retire is also debatable, but it did occur on the heels of his dispute with the Grand Vizier.

Etienne sent two letters to Sir Henry Elliot in December 1874. In the first letter, dated 13 December, Pisani wrote to request that the ambassador support his application to retire and his request for a pension. Pisani felt as though he was "justified" in his request, as it was the "usual conditions granted to persons occupying the post of first dragoman."<sup>423</sup> Pisani stated that his reason for retiring stemmed from his failing health, and that recent family afflictions had an affect on the performance of his duties. He also wrote that if medical certification was needed by

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid, Musurus Paşa to Arifi Paşa, 22/10/1874.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> TNA FO 195/1033, Etienne Pisani to Henry Elliot, 13/12/1874.

Her Majesty's government to support his claim, he had no issue with providing it.<sup>424</sup> His next letter, sent two days later, was a reply to Elliot's response to his request for support in his resignation. In this letter Pisani stated that he was not willing to withdraw his application to retire. He also wanted it to be understood that his reasons for retiring did not stem from any fear of charges that might have been pressed against his official character.<sup>425</sup>

In spite of his request to retire, charges against his character did arise. The charges were not directly related to his dispute with the Grand Vizier, but to his conduct in a business transaction involving his son-in-law, Emile Crespin. Etienne's daughter, Marie Mathilde married Crespin in 1870, continuing the practice of networking through marriage alliances. Crespin belonged to a powerful family of bankers and investors that were present in Pera since the late eighteenth century.<sup>426</sup> Besides being part of the family business as a banker,<sup>427</sup> Emile later became an inspector for the Ottoman Public Debt Commission.<sup>428</sup> Etienne was accused by his ambassador of acting like an inside man in a deal that Emile was set to enter in 1874.<sup>429</sup> Apparently Crespin became involved with one de Castro, and was interested in entering into a relationship with him marked by a contract to invest £4000 into a business venture. Upon learning that news, Pisani apparently counseled his son-in-law not to become involved with de Castro, and Emile ultimately pulled out of the agreement. The exact nature of the business

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, Etienne Pisani to Henry Elliot, 15/12/1874. I could not locate a copy of Elliot's reply to Pisani's first letter.

<sup>426</sup> Hanssen, 34.

<sup>427</sup> Emile is listed simply as a "banquier" in the *L'Indicatuier Constantinopolitan, 1868-1869*. Raphael Cervati, *L'Indicatuier Constantinopolitan Guide Commercial, 1868-1869* (Istanbul: R. Cervati, N.C. Sarcologo, G.B. Pagano Publisher, 1868), 153.

<sup>428</sup> Raphael. *Annuaire Oriental (Ancien Indicacateur Oriental) du Commerce, de l'industrie, de l'administration et de la magistrature* (Istanbul: Cervati Frères & Cie, 1891), 262.

<sup>429</sup> TNA FO 78/2385, Henry Elliot to the Earl of Derby, 5/08/1875.

venture is unclear, but it had to do with chrome mines somewhere in the empire. The location of the mines was not divulged in the documents.<sup>430</sup>

On 27 January 1875, Derby wrote to Elliot stating that he also received a letter from Pisani requesting to retire, and that he was willing to meet charges that might have been brought against him. Derby asked that a full enquiry be enacted so that Pisani could have every opportunity for his defence against the charges.<sup>431</sup> A few months later, Derby wrote again to Elliot to tell him that he had put the matter in front of the Law Officer of the Crown to investigate whether the charges against Pisani could be proven, the extent to which the embassy had to be involved, and if there was sufficient evidence that Pisani “served with diligence and fidelity to the satisfaction of the secretary of state” according to the Pension Act. If found otherwise his certificate of pension could be withheld. The Officer replied that the charges could not be proven at that point, and that the evidence in front of them was not sufficient to withhold his certificate.<sup>432</sup> Derby wrote to Elliot again in July, stating that the Law officers suggested that an inquiry be made in front of a commissioner in order for Pisani to be cross-examined.<sup>433</sup>

One month later, Pisani requested a leave of absence.<sup>434</sup> Although he was not actively working for the embassy, his application for a pension was still being debated by the embassy and the Foreign Office. On 5 August, Elliot sent Derby a reply to his dispatch regarding the position of the Law Officers related to Pisani being sent in front of a commissioner. Elliot wrote that he disagreed with that measure because “nothing could... be less desirable than the Consul

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<sup>430</sup> TNA FO 78/2378, Earl of Derby to Henry Elliot, 9/10/1875. On the chrome mines, see in this file Lord Derby to Henry Elliot, 23/12/1875. This is presumably the Earl of Derby. The signature on the document is only a “D.”

<sup>431</sup> TNA FO 78/2376, Lord Derby to Henry Elliot, 27/01/1875. This is presumably the Earl of Derby. The signature on the document is only a “D.”

<sup>432</sup> TNA FO 78/2376, Draft Lord Derby to Henry Elliot, 1/04/1875.

<sup>433</sup> TNA FO 78/2377, Lord Derby to Henry Elliot, 16/07/1875. This is presumably the Earl of Derby. The signature on the document is only a “D.”

<sup>434</sup> TNA FO 78/2377, Lord Derby to Elliot, 5/08/1875. This is presumably the Earl of Derby. The signature on the document is only a “D.”



General should be called upon to pronounce upon the merits of a charge, made by the ambassador against a member of the embassy.”<sup>435</sup> Elliot furthermore felt that neither British subjects nor any foreigners would actually step forward to present any evidence against Pisani. He reasoned that proceeding with the case in this way would damage the image of the embassy. He did not know if the embassy would suffer more if a verdict of corruption was reached against a “confidential old servant,” or if he was found to be innocent, that it was against a charge brought upon by the ambassador.<sup>436</sup> Less than two weeks later, Elliot wrote to Derby again. He expressed that he did not think that there would be an issue if Pisani took the leave of absence, unless it was decided by the Law Officer of the Crown that a further investigation of the charges against him was needed. In that case, he would have had to be present in Istanbul. Ultimately, Elliot believed that there was no other reason why he should be there while his pension was being debated. It was decided, however, that Pisani would have to wait until the Foreign Office received word from the Treasury, though Derby did not seem to have a problem in giving him permission.<sup>437</sup>

In October, Derby wrote to Elliot to let him know that he agreed with him that appointing a commission to investigate the charges against the dragoman would probably not be effective. But he did want an explanation about Pisani’s role in swaying the decision of Crespin to back out of the deal with de Castro.<sup>438</sup> Later, Crespin and Pisani did account for their actions through a letter that they sent to Elliot, which was also sent to Derby. Derby was not satisfied, and believed that the dragoman’s conduct was “injudicious and positively wary” in not revealing the connection between Crespin and the people concerned with the chrome mines. It is doubtful

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<sup>435</sup> TNA FO 78/2385, Henry Elliot to Lord Derby, 5/08/1875.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> TNA FO 78/2385, Henry Elliot to Lord Derby 17/08/1875.

<sup>438</sup> TNA FO 78/2378, Lord Derby to Henry Elliot, 9/10/1875.

that the embassy and the Foreign Office actually had any interest in the chrome mines or a deal with de Castro, and more likely that they wanted to ensure their dragoman was acting in good faith. Even though it seemed that Derby doubted that Pisani did not have a role in swaying Crespin's decision to back out of his agreement with de Castro, he still awarded the dragoman a certificate of good conduct so that he could receive his pension. He did so based on Pisani's previous service and that his behavior related to the Crespin affair and the chrome mining company might be due to the consequences of poor health and infirmity. Before receiving his pension, Pisani was to return any public documents that he still had and after doing so, application to the Treasury for his pension would be granted to him.<sup>439</sup>

Etienne nevertheless retired at the end of 1875, and was awarded his pension.

The row between him and the Grand Vizier was not one of his more positive encounters with the Sublime Porte, and certainly did not embody the professionalism that the British embassy wanted from their dragomans. There was no falsity or denial on Etienne's part. No matter how much Musurus or the Sublime Porte pushed, the Foreign Office and the Embassy backed him while at the same time trying to bring the issue to an amicable conclusion. Yet, the Sublime Porte wanted first an apology, and then dissatisfied with Pisani's attempt to provide one, turned to demanding his removal from his position. The fact that Musurus pointed out that Etienne had served for fifty years and was in line for a pension might have eased their request for his dismissal, and made it more likely for the Ottomans to get rid of him. There was nothing strange about Musurus' request for Pisani's dismissal. From his and the Sublime Porte's perspective, his actions were inexcusable. It also seemed that, given the reminiscences of Arifi and Reşid Paşa that they were simply fed up with dealing with Pisani after so many years.

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid, Lord Derby to Henry Elliot, 23/12/1875.

Throughout the whole dispute the contest was not over how Pisani needed to be categorized as a *protégé* or as an Ottoman, but how he was positioned inside European and Ottoman institutions. The Porte treated Pisani not like an Ottoman, but as an employee of the British embassy. His being an Ottoman subject or citizen did not come up once in the correspondence between Istanbul and London, nor did it arise from the British, as a distinction was made between his public and private status. Whether or not Pisani was fully included or excluded in either sphere did not really matter throughout much of the ordeal. Pisani's representation as only an employee of the embassy worked in his favor. He drew upon and enlisted the embassy's support in his conduct and his attempt, however extemporaneous, to apologize. That was until he attempted to retire and put in his request for a pension. With charges against him due to his conduct, the embassy threatened to withhold what he believed to be his right after such a long career. Though Pisani was able to use his position as a dragoman to initially shield himself from any permanent damage because of the quarrel with an Ottoman official, that did not mean that he was exempt from the conventions that governed his conduct as an employee of the embassy.

While tying together imperial polities and institutions, Pisani's maneuvering within British and Ottoman imperial spaces provided opportunities to overcome short-term crises and to a certain degree, allow for self-preservation. That was the case even when his conduct was closely examined, if not limited by British and Ottoman authorities who argued over the consequences of his actions, and how he should have been disciplined. Though he officially retired in 1875, Etienne was still very much active in British and Ottoman institutions. His strong ties to both, and his financial network, facilitated his attempt to create a new business for himself to be based in the Ottoman capital.

### *A Charitable Organization?*

In 1882, the year of his death, Etienne Pisani had applied for and was granted an imperial ferman by the sultan to establish a charitable organization in Istanbul. After his death, the heirs to his estate and representatives of the organization wanted to move forward with the plan. Pisani's motivation in founding the organization, however, is not clear.<sup>440</sup>

Two features of the venture stand out, and both have to do with the language used to describe it by the British Embassy and the Sublime Porte. The British referred to Pisani's venture as a *Mont de Piété*, and the Ottomans, as both a *bir anonime şirket darü't-terhin*, (an anonymous pawnbroking corporation) and *banka* (a bank). Both describe what appear to be an institution that paralleled cash, or *para vakıfs* in the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, very little research has been completed on these types of endowments established by non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. The following discussion is based on studies on *wakıfs* and cash *wakıfs* in general, and non-Muslim endowments in Ottoman Palestine in the late nineteenth century.

In Europe, *mont de piétés* were charitable pawn-broking institutions where a person could pawn objects. In return, they received a cash loan with a better interest rate than the standard rate at the time. The idea was that the loan benefitted the borrower and not the lender. The profits made by the interest would then go towards the operational costs of the *Mont de Piété* and to a charity, such as the maintenance of hospitals. The start-up of the institution relied on anonymous donations by people not seeking a financial return.<sup>441</sup> According to Hanafi law, Christian *wakıfs* could be established in the Ottoman Empire on the condition that they were registered in the name of a Church. Non-Muslims were allowed to found *wakıfs* for charitable

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<sup>440</sup> On the founding of the organization see the various files in BOA I.MMS 92/3887 1304 ZA 04.

<sup>441</sup> See Eoin McLaughlin, "An Experiment in banking the poor: the Irish Mont-de- Piété, c. 1830-1850," *Financial History Review* 20 no. 1 (2013): 49-72.

purposes, but not for establishing places of worship.<sup>442</sup> In terms of cash *vakıfs*, these had been operating since the fifteenth century, and were a popular alternative to the traditional landed or property-based *vakıfs*. For Muslims, the founder of landed *vakıfs* used the revenue to finance public charitable organizations, such as schools, hospitals, or mosques. Profits from the *vakıf* could also be designated for the support of family members, and mixed *vakıfs* could also be established, with the earnings from the endowment going towards family and public institutions or causes.<sup>443</sup> The cash *vakıf* was based on the same principle of philanthropy, but revenues of the endowment were earned through lending money, not from money earned from property holdings.

Like European *mont de piétés*, cash *vakıfs* operated on the principal of interest. The *vakıf* lent money to borrowers who were obligated to return what they received plus interest within an agreed upon period of time and interest rate. The revenue made from the interest was then put towards the beneficiaries designated by the owner of the endowment.<sup>444</sup> The institution of the cash *vakıf* was of course a contentious issue in Ottoman society because of the principal of lending money and charging interest, but it nevertheless remained popular until the end of empire.<sup>445</sup> Alongside the contributions that both types of *vakıfs* made to the improvement of society, the endowments reflected the founder's socio-economic position.<sup>446</sup> Whether or not the founder could drum up the initial capital to establish the *vakıf* was not really a matter of concern if he or she had a wider network to draw funds from, and to pool the money to establish the

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<sup>442</sup> Belkis Konan, "Gayrimüslim Osmanlı Vatandaşlarının Hukuki Durumuna ilişkin bir Değerlendirme," *Ankara Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi* 64 no. 1 (2015): 177.

<sup>443</sup> Randi Deguilhem, "The Waqf in the City," in *The City in the Islamic World, Volume 2*, eds. Salma K. Jayyusi et al (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 923-924. On *vakıfs* in the Ottoman Empire in general, see John Robert Barnes, *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

<sup>444</sup> Cengiz Toraman, Bedriye Tuncsiper, and Sinan Yilmaz, "Cash Awqaf in the Ottomans as Philanthropic Foundations, and their Accounting Practices," *Conference Paper*, 2. <http://www.mufad.org/journal/attachments/article/452/7.pdf>

<sup>445</sup> On the debates surrounding the cash *vakıf*, see Jon E. Mandeville, "Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10 (1979): 289-308.

<sup>446</sup> Deguilhem, 937.

endowment. In principal, the investors would not expect any returns on their contributions, nor would the founder. The major return for them beyond charity was that their name had a permanent association with a specific charitable beneficiary.<sup>447</sup>

*Vakıfs* were not exclusive to Muslims who wished to bestow their good graces on society. Christians and Jews used the institution to support their own religious communities, and did so through similar projects that ranged in small or large scale endowments. Like Muslim *vakıfs*, Christians and Jews erected either public, family or mixed endowments, and their beneficiaries included hospitals, places of worship, and family members. Non-Muslim endowments were not within the legal jurisdiction of their religious community, or *millet*. *Vakıfs* had to be recorded in the *shariah* court, and were therefore regulated by Muslim legal rules and procedures.<sup>448</sup> According to Robert Shaham, court records for Christian and Jewish *vakıfs* in Palestine in the late nineteenth century comprised very little details about the founders, and only listed his or her name and where they lived. That lack of data obfuscates any conclusions as to why, with the exception of philanthropy, non-Muslims would be interested in establishing an endowment. But there were some advantages. Shaham notes that, like Muslims, non-Muslims used the endowments as a source of security against confiscation of their property from the government, or others that put forward claims of ownership of the property. A second reason was tax purposes. Apparently *mulk* (private) property was subjected to taxes, unless it was less than one thousand square meters and located next to houses in villages and towns, enclosed by walls or fences. The endowments studied by Shaham were these types of properties. He also notes that the Ottoman government did not, in practice, subject *mulk* and *vakıf* property to taxes. A third incentive for establishing a *vakıf* was to work around issues experienced by religious institutions.

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid, 940.

<sup>448</sup> Ron Shaham, "Christian and Jewish "waqf" in Palestine during the Late Ottoman Period," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54 no. 3 (1991): 467.

Churches and public organizations were not recognized as “legal persons” by Ottoman law, and therefore could not register property in their name. To bypass this problem, property was registered as a *vakif* by a single person or whole religious communities, and the beneficiary would be the religious institution. Another reason, particularly for individuals establishing family *vakifs*, had to do with circumventing inheritance laws. If non-Muslims did not name heirs to their property or funds before their death, the Ottoman government would confiscate them. The endowment ensured that family members listed as beneficiaries would have received the assets.<sup>449</sup>

These advantages were largely related to landed, property-based endowments, acts of piety, and personal and communal advantages accounted for the founding of *vakifs* by non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. Due to lack of research, not much is known about why one would found this type of *vakif* over a cash *vakif* and vice-versa. Toraman, Tuncsiper, and Yilmaz point out that by the sixteenth century, people with liquid cash preferred cash *vakifs*, which led to questions of whether or not they used the institution to protect their wealth and use it in the place of banks.<sup>450</sup> Cash *vakifs* allowed people to put their moeny to work, especially if they were barred from doing so, such as women, who were prevented from pursuing a craft or business. Faruk Bilici argues, however, that cash *vakifs* were closely related to two functions; communal solidarity and charity, and to banking. Stressing the significance of the connection between cash *vakifs* and banks, he points out that the *vakifs* created a type of banking system that operated with the idea of generating profits.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid, 467-469.

<sup>450</sup> Toraman, Tuncsiper, and Yilmaz, “Cash Awqaf,” 8.

<sup>451</sup> Faruk Bilici, “Les Waqfs Monétaires à la fin de l’Empire Ottoman et au début de l’époque républicaine en Turquie: des Caisses de solidarité vers un système bancaire Moderne,” in *Le waqf dans le monde musulman contemporain (XIX-XX siècles)*, ed. Faruk Bilici, (Istanbul: Institut Français d’Études Anatoliennes, 1994), 57.

Whether or not profit was the motivation for benefactors, cash *vakıfs* endured and Etienne Pisani's venture had some similarities with its structure. He probably would not have engaged in it if there were not a profit to have been made. But it is difficult to gauge his motivation, and that of the investors that agreed to finance the endowment. As Shaham argues, *vakıfs* were instruments through which non-Muslims engaged with the Islamic legal system, and represented one of the many types of "cultural interaction in a mixed society."<sup>452</sup>

One year after Etienne's death, Robert Medard and Michel Timoni, the executors of his estate and ostensibly partners in the *Mont de Piété*, drafted a letter to Subi [sic] (Subhi) Paşa, the Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, to inform him that the completion of the articles of their association respecting the inauguration of their company was going to be delayed. They noted that under the terms of the Imperial Ferman that Pisani was granted on 5 October 1882 for the founding of the "Société" or company, as they referred to it, that they were perfectly within their right to do so.<sup>453</sup> Six months later, Medard and Timoni sent the statutes of the company, presumably to the Ottoman Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet*) through the British Consular Court. Accompanying the statutes was a letter by Medard and Timoni notifying the Ottoman council that they had clarified and discussed the document with their agent, one Mihran N. Chirinian.<sup>454</sup>

The statutes presented to the Ottoman Council detailed the composition of the Company, its regulations, and the terms of its governance. The document consisted of forty-seven articles and covered every aspect of the company including its size, rates of interest, governance, dispute resolution, profit distribution, and instructions on steps that had to be taken in the event that it dissolved. Since Pisani had died, John Thony was listed as its main agent, and its formal name

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<sup>452</sup> Shaham, 471.

<sup>453</sup> BOA ŞD 1176/16, Medard & Timoni to Subi Paşa, 6/02/1883.

<sup>454</sup> BOA ŞD 1176/27, Medard & Timoni 15/09/1883. Henry Fawcett, a judge for the British Consular Court signed the document on 13/09/1883. An Ottoman translation was provided in the file.



was to be “Société de Mont de Piété de Constantinople.” Thony and a group of investors were to provide and to control the initial shares, though their names were not provided. The company was to be “an Ottoman company” based in Istanbul with branches in three parts of the city. Shareholders had to be residents of Istanbul, and were subjected to Ottoman jurisdiction. The purpose of the Company was to provide loans based on the exchange of transferrable goods that were to be deposited into the stores of the Company, valued by appraisers in its employ. Loans were to be granted in accordance with the rules set out by the terms of the *Cahier des Charges*, or Bill of Specifications that was sanctioned by an Imperial *irade* granted on 26 October 1878, and later confirmed by the imperial government on 5 October 1882. The Company was not designed to be small. It had an initial capital of £20,000 with the option to increase it to £400,000 each year, and was to be in business for thirty years. In terms of interest, that rate was set to a maximum of ten percent/year, in accordance with the *Cahier des Charges*.<sup>455</sup>

The control of the company was to be directed by a Council of Administration, which consisted of seven members, including a president. Members of the board were all tied to terms of three years, and each was required to own twenty-five shares of the Company. A General Assembly of Shareholders was also to be created in order to represent their interests.<sup>456</sup>

Distribution of annual profits of the company was to be done based on percentage rates. Six percent of the capital of shares was to be distributed to shareholders as interest. At least five percent was to be put towards a reserve fund, and ten percent was allotted to the company’s directors as remuneration for their services. Any excess was to be spread among shareholders.<sup>457</sup>

The Company was also required to pay ten percent of its annual earnings to the Dar-ul-Chefakat

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid, “Statuts de la Société de Mont de Piété de Constantinople.” See articles 1-15. An Ottoman Translation of this document was also provided and signed by Timoni, and termed as a *nizamname*. The *Cahier des Charges* was also provided in Ottoman and entitled *Dersadet Darü't-terhin Şartnamesi*.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid, Article 25, 27, and 32.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, Article 41.

[sic].<sup>458</sup> Payment to the *Dar ül Şafaka*, a school for orphans in Istanbul, was the charitable aspect of the organization.<sup>459</sup>

The document put forward by Pisani's executors posed a number of challenges for the Sublime Porte. Questions were raised about the conduct of the company and the extent to which its charitable activities advanced the interests of the actual Company, the people willing to swap their goods for funds that the company was willing to lend, and how it was to work for charitable purposes. The Company's statutes were reviewed by the *Şura-yı Devleti* (Council of State), who decided that a number of articles had to be clarified or ratified. For example, the Council inquired about the handling of brokerage fees, and whether or not fees were still levied if the pawned objects did not sell, and if so, who would be responsible for paying them. Other questions were raised about the interest rates, and the Council requested to know if the rate for the remuneration of the Company's committee members could be changed from 10% to 8%. The Council also asked about the terms of the company's expiration, and what would happen to the pawned objects when the company's thirty year term was up, or if it went out of business.<sup>460</sup> The Council's request for more clarification on the operating procedures of the Company was obviously one step in negotiating the terms and conditions through which it would be allowed to operate in Istanbul. Before making any decisions about the Company, the Council did their homework. The most interesting section of Council's inquiry was their comparison of this Company and what they knew about *Mont de Piété's* in France.

In their reply to Timoni and Medard, the Council noted that they sought out information on the purpose and function of a *Mont de Piété*. According to "research" (*tetebbüat*) and

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid, Article 5.

<sup>459</sup> See "Dârüşşafaka," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, cilt 9 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi, 1994), 7-9. <http://www.islamansiklopedisi.info/index.php?klme=dar%C3%BC%C5%9F%C5%9Fafaka>

<sup>460</sup> BOA I.MMS 92/3887, Şura-yı Devlet, Tetimme-i saniye, S 9 1301 ve teşrin-i sani 28 1299.

“inquiries” (*tahkikat*), the Council learned that these organizations in France were non-profit and worked for the benefit of the person pawning objects and receiving loans.<sup>461</sup> That differed greatly from Timoni and Medard’s structure of their proposed Company, which listed profit-sharing, income for board members, and procedures to top up their coffers. That practice was something that also had to be explained to Council.

The whole affair dragged on for a number of years, and unfortunately there is a break in archival records related to the case. It is unclear whether or not the Pisani and Medard’s efforts cooled, or if the Porte was taking their time in getting more information about *Mont de Piété*’s in general, and the one granted to Pisani, in particular.

The next wave of communication between Timoni, the embassy, and the Porte came in 1886. Timoni and presumably the investors stepped up their pressure to get the Porte to further engage with the idea and to allow it to open. When Timoni approached the Porte this time, he went through diplomatic channels, and enlisted the help of the British Embassy. On 12 April 1886, Timoni sent a letter to Hugo Marinitch, a dragoman at the embassy, to fill him in on the process. In the letter he wrote that in following the advice of the ambassador he contacted the Grand Vizier Kamil Paşa and “pressed” for answer about the concession given to the late Etienne Pisani regarding the *Mont de Piété*. In reply, the Grand Vizier told Timoni that papers about the matter were already sent to the sultan a while ago, and that he was again reminded about it approximately one month previously. He then suggested that Timoni begin to try to get the first secretary of the sultan to again bring the matter to the attention of the sultan so that the appropriate *irade* could be issued. Marinitch suggested to the ambassador that he might just try

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

to get the first secretary on board.<sup>462</sup> Just over a week later, the dragoman reported to Sandison that he did in fact approach the first secretary, who “promised” to remind the sultan about it.<sup>463</sup> Marinitch reported to Sandison on the matter again two months later, writing that since a decision was still not made, he had once more brought it to the Grand Vizier’s attention. Kamil Paşa told the dragoman that he would bring it to the sultan’s attention again.

In the meantime, Timoni met with Marinitch to inform him that some people, hostile toward the venture, had been spreading rumours that the concession was already cancelled, and that he wanted to know from the ambassador and Marinitch whether or not that was true, so that he could deny the rumour.<sup>464</sup> Marinitch also notified Timoni about his conversation with the Grand Vizier.<sup>465</sup> By the end of August, the dragoman wrote to Sandison that he spoke with Kamil Paşa again to acquire more information about the status of concession. Marinitch specifically wanted to know about the “non-delivery” of the Statutes of the *Mont de Piété* given to the late Pisani. Kamil Paşa replied that he believed that the delay of an answer was caused because of a disagreement over the rate of interest, which the Porte considered to be too high. The Grand Vizier wanted to meet with Timoni to discuss whether or not the rate could be reduced. They had already met once and Timoni told him that due to current circumstances, reducing the rate was not possible. Since then, Kamil Paşa informed Timoni that the issue was now in front of the Council of Ministers. Marinitch believed that Timoni was going to protest against that proceeding.<sup>466</sup> In expressing his own opinion on the matter, Marinitch believed that it might have been a good idea to consult Her Majesty’s Consul General and the Consular Court

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<sup>462</sup> TNA FO 195/1543, Marinitch to Sir Alfred Sandison 21/04/1886. Marinitch copied the letter he received from Timoni and one Mr. Edwards to the ambassador. The original date on that letter was 12 April 1886.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, Marinitch to Sir Alfred Sandison 29/04/1886.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid, Marinitch to Sandison, 20/06/1886. The date is a bit unclear.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid, Marinitch to Timoni, 20/06/1886.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid, Marinitch to Sandison, 20/08/1886.

Judge Henry Fawcett to determine if the embassy should send a note to the Porte in support of Timoni's request.<sup>467</sup>

In the meantime, various offices at the Porte were at work debating the merits and the tenets of the *Mont de Piété* that Pisani's name remained attached to. Documents reached a number of offices, including the abovementioned Council of Ministers, the *Ticaret ve Nafia* (Ministry of Public Works), the Grand Vizier, the *Baş Kitabet Dairesi* (Clerical Head Office/*Yıldız Saray-ı Hümayun*), the *Meclisi Mahsusa* and of course, the sultan. The main stumbling block and point of contention was the rate of interest or cost of borrowing funds from the Company. In addition, there were other concerns. For example, the report from the *Baş Kitabet Dairesi* highlighted the fact that the goods to be pawned could be seized, further indebting borrowers. The report also expressed concern with the high rate of interest that Timoni's company wanted to use against the cost of borrowing.<sup>468</sup> Other reports were circulated to different offices, and all of them focused on the rate of interest.<sup>469</sup> Over the course of deliberations and reviews of Timoni's proposal, the Porte wanted the borrowing fee (*masraf-i mukabele*) reduced and the rate of interest on the loan, or usury, reduced. In the past (presumably when the original proposal was made), the rate of usury according to the *murabaha nizamname* (usury regulation) was 12%, which is why Timoni had originally set the rate at 10% in the statutes. Since then, however, a change was made to the *murabaha nizamname*, dropping it from

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid, Marinitch noted that he attached a translation of the statutes, the "Cahier des Charges," a memo from the Imperial Divan, the imperial ferman, and the legal opinion of one Mr. Thandoni, all of which were given to him by Timoni. Unfortunately these are not with this document.

<sup>468</sup> BOA I.MMS 92/3887, Yıldız Saray-ı Hümayun, Baş Kitabet Dairesi 4 ca 1304 12 ve Temmuz 1302. Bir hacet ile hane iştirasına varınca kadar emval-ı menkule nice terhine ile giriftar-ı duyun olmalarına ve bu ise bi'l-ahere ahaliye tezayud fakrı istilzam edeceği.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid. See in this file Bab-i Ali Meclisi Mahsus Fi 29 şaban 1304; Bab-i Ali Meclisi Mahsus Fi 29 şaban 1304 Tarihle Zabtname Suretidir; Amedi-yi Divan-i Humayun Fi nun (Ramazan) 1304.

12% to 9%.<sup>470</sup> The Porte wanted Timoni's rate to reflect that change, and first requested that the rate be changed to at least 8% and the cost of the borrowing fee to change from 3 to 2 *kuruş*.<sup>471</sup> Timoni, however, refused to reduce it to that rate. He was willing to drop it to 9%, but argued that since he would have to forego the fee of 3 *kuruş*, he would have to raise the interest rate to 10%. Timoni also believed that he should be exempt from any change because the original rate for the *Mont de Piété* was set at the previous *murabaha nizamname* rate.<sup>472</sup> The Porte wanted to counter with an offer to Timoni where if he agreed to drop it to 9%, the cost fee would be 1% and 5% of that would go towards supporting the orphanage.<sup>473</sup> The final decision about that offer, however, was left to the sultan.<sup>474</sup> Unfortunately, that was the last available communication on the matter until 1891, when it appears as though permission to move forward with the founding of the organization was not given.<sup>475</sup>

As Francesca Trivellato points out, business failures are occasions that offer insights into how historical actors sought to create opportunities for themselves, while exposing the limitations that confronted them.<sup>476</sup> When Pisani put the wheels in motion for the *Mont de Piété*, he undoubtedly had in mind an organization that resembled something like a cash *vakıf* but built on the model of a European *mont de piété*, where people interested or in need of funds could receive a loan based on the value of merchandise that they pawned. The Porte's limited, if any,

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<sup>470</sup> Mehmet Akif Berber, "From Interest to Usury: The Transformation of Murabaha in the Late Ottoman Empire," *M.A. Thesis*, (Istanbul Şehir University 2014), 69-71. The rate was changed on 3 April 1887 (9 *Receb* 1304), designed to increase investments in the empire.

<sup>471</sup> BOA I.MMS 92/3887. Bab-ı Ali Daire-yi Sadaret-i Uzma to Ticaret-i ve Nafia Nezaret Celilesine Fi 27 cemaziyel ahira 1304 ve fi 11 mart 1303 Sadrazam-ı Kalemi.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, Bab-ı Ali Daire-yi Sadaret-i Uzma to Ticaret-i ve Nafia Nezaret Celilesine Fi 6 şaban 1304 ve 18 nişan 1303. This communication and the one in the previous footnote are on one single document.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid. This was written as a note, and no date is listed. However, the Mazbata following the note expresses this decision. There is no date on the Mazbata, either. Yüzde dokuz fa'iz ve bir masraf alınmak ve dar-al şafakaya yüzde beş verilmek üzere mazbata.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid, Sadrazam-ı Kalemi. 3 Z 1304.

<sup>475</sup> File ŞD 2590/31309 B 19/2 in the BOA mentions that the *Darı't-terhin* was not accepted (*tervic olunmaması*), but the file was not made available at the time of writing.

<sup>476</sup> Trivellato, 266.

knowledge of the operation of *mont de piété*'s prompted an investigation into these sorts of companies. Upon discovery that although they were anonymous corporations, they operated much more like a bank than a charitable organization because the Company was set up to make a profit. So too were the board of directors that controlled the company. The Porte's implicit reference to the Company as a bank showed that they would not be misled by Timoni and his partners, and drove their efforts into demanding further clarification on its operation, and changes in the interest rate. Whether or not the failure to come to an agreement over the rate of interest was in fact the reason why the Porte rejected Timoni's proposals can only be speculative at this point. But, I am less interested in telling the story of the success or failure of this enterprise than I am in pointing out how this was another way that Pisani could and, up until his death, did have access to and engaged with Ottoman institutions,<sup>477</sup> and harnessed the embassy in order to facilitate his business initiative.

Pisani's access to Ottoman institutions was obviously easy because of his status as an Ottoman subject. Rather than representing himself or the company as Levantine, European, or having invoked his long held status as a protected employee of the embassy, the Company was presented as one that was purely Ottoman, and subjected to Ottoman law. His approach, a mix of two types of institutions, one European, the other Ottoman or Muslim was not something entirely representative of what Shahama refers to as a "cultural interaction in a mixed society." It certainly had those characteristics, but Pisani's intent, it seems, was much more economic. The initial step in obtaining the *ferman* from the sultan was probably the easiest part for Etienne while he was alive, because getting the *irade* was much more difficult, as shown through Timoni's efforts. Pisani and the group of investors that he put together were more interested in gaining a profit through something that appeared to be charitable. He used his position in

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<sup>477</sup> Trivellato does something similar in her telling the story of the "Big Diamond Affair." See chapter 10.

Ottoman society to help facilitate and begin that process, and the Company was one more example of how the Pisanis operated inside Ottoman and British political, economic, and juridical spheres.

### ***Conclusion***

All three events discussed here provide examples of where the Pisanis fit in Ottoman and British institutions. Instead of being exclusively tied to one or the other, they actively participated in both. They mediated the spatial, institutional and relational characteristics of imperial space, and the boundaries designed to exclude their position in Ottoman society. Meanwhile, the benefit of their diplomatic protection spread beyond family members employed as dragomans, and extended to kinship and business networks, which at times included protected subjects from other European embassies.

The Pisanis and their networks could and did enlist imperial institutions that they operated in as a means to protect their own interests, which were connected directly to their juridical status as protected subjects by the embassy. That is not to say that these characteristics conditioned the decisions that the Pisanis made, whether that was to enter into business partnerships, resign from their jobs, or feud with Ottoman officials. They were still vulnerable to failure or defeat, as shown through Etienne's actions on two separate occasions, the concerns expressed by the Porte and its willingness to challenge or reject proposals and actions related to the *Mont de Piété*. If political and legal affiliation with the embassy could facilitate particular advantages within imperial structures for the Pisanis, it could also have an impact on the relationship between the British and the Sublime Porte, and other empires.

Nicholas Pisani and Volgo's case, and their juridical and jurisdictional status, exposed the scope of authority exercised by foreign embassies, and that they were willing to collaborate to



defend the rights of people they provided with diplomatic protection. Etienne's resignation meanwhile, raised the issue of how a mere quarrel or episode of gossip could lead to something of an international incident, but provides a sense of how steps were taken by the Porte and the British Embassy to settle disputes. Etienne's business venture points to how one could link their relationship with European and Ottoman jurisdictions together.

## Conclusion

Three years after the retirement of Etienne Pisani, his brother Count Alexander followed suit in 1878, bringing an end to the Pisani family dynasty in the British Embassy that lasted almost one hundred and fifty years. By then, the British Foreign Office had begun to fill the dragoman positions with natural-born Englishmen. The Levant Consular Service, a new arm of the Foreign Office was established a year before, and brought in six new recruits from Britain. Aside from Count Alexander, there were still a few Levantines working as dragomans. Vincent Alischan, an Armenian, and Constantine Stavrides, who joined in 1855, along with Robert Casolani, there since 1857, remained in the service. Hugo Marinitch entered into the ranks in 1875, and was a former first dragoman for the Spanish legation. In terms of Anglo-Levantines, Henry Cumberbatch, already a student interpreter at the embassy in 1877 was there, and so too were Lionel Moore and Alfred Sandison.<sup>478</sup> The introduction of the new students of course raised some concern among the existing dragomans, so much so that they protested, and asked for an increase in the number of dragomans employed by the embassy and the consulate in Istanbul. They demanded that the title for second and third ranked “dragomans” be replaced with “oriental secretary.” They argued that it would improve their relations with the Ottomans by making their titles more official, and increase the overall *esprit de corps* among the dragomans. In spite of

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<sup>478</sup> Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey*, 62-63.

their opposition, their demands were not met. By 1903 the embassy was finally without any Levantines in their service, and filled with Englishmen.<sup>479</sup>

Their profession and subject status as Ottomans with diplomatic protection from the British Embassy provided the Pisanis with opportunities to take advantage of their position. So too, did their family members. As their activities show, over the course of the nineteenth century the Pisanis were quite adept at ensuring their own needs were met, whether under the guise of their official duties as dragomans, or as regular non-Muslim Ottoman subjects.

By placing the Pisanis at the center of this study in the broader context of non-Muslims operating in the Ottoman Empire, I have tried to move beyond the common biographical genre that has characterized work on members of the Levantine community. Rather than just tracing the existence of family members and their links to other Levantine families, this study has emphasized their roles as non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, though labeled as Levantines, who were intermediaries active in the Ottoman capital with ties to multiple imperial institutional structures. Through analyzing their activities in those institutions, emerged a very different picture of actors seemingly caught, or simply operating “in-between” empires.

If imperial careerism is one way to measure the long-lasting relationship between the Pisanis and the British Empire, and their role in connecting Britain and the Ottomans, then their activities within both of them speaks to the management of their occupation and guarded commitment to extending dragoman appointments to their family members. Their imperial careers, though important and largely the foundation of their identity, were much more than mediating relations between imperial powers; it was just as much about themselves.

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 64-67. Berridge notes that one largely unacknowledged Armenian dragoman, Onik Efendi, who was officially a messenger but paid out of the secret service fund to carry out the duties of a dragoman, remained employed by the embassy until his death in 1907.

The organization and dynamics of empire facilitated the rise of the Pisanis, the positions they carved out for themselves, and their longstanding dynasty. The fluidity of their identity and their knowledge of imperial institutions gave the Pisanis an edge in managing how they oriented themselves inside Ottoman and British imperial spaces. Doing so meant that they had to and did move beyond bounded categories of belonging and space as so-called Levantines and non-Muslims, excluded groups in the greater Ottoman imperial structure. But the Pisanis were still Ottoman subjects, and combined with their diplomatic protection and the flexibility of these spaces and structures, were able to negotiate their position inside the Ottoman and British Empires.

If the story of the Pisanis provides some clarity on the inner world of a specific group of non-Muslims operating in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, it likewise draws attention to the ubiquity of their personalities, struggles, and personal and professional exploitations within the British and Ottoman empires. Their initial asset was a strength in languages that passed through generations of the family, which they turned into a dynasty by managing to entrench themselves in the embassy. Their intimate knowledge of Ottoman and British institutions furnished moments of cooperation between empires, and even personal contests that revealed and shaped their ties to either empire.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that in spite of their status as non-Muslims and their positions as intermediaries between the British Embassy in Istanbul and the Ottoman government, the Pisanis were not simply “in-between” empires. They operated inside British and Ottoman imperial spaces, at times to justify themselves and their positions, and at others, to achieve their own personal occupational and financial goals. As their family history and activities show, the Pisanis were able to make something out of nothing in that they were relative

newcomers to Istanbul, were non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, and in a short period of time made a name for themselves in the Levantine community, the Ottoman Empire, and Britain. Even though their occupation required them to mediate relations between these empires, the Pisanis were embedded in the imperial structures of both of them.

The networks that the Pisanis established through marriage encompassed many of the leading families in Istanbul's Levantine community. If social networks generated some capital for the Pisanis, they were wise in the way that they constructed them. Dragoman families, merchants, bankers, lawyers, and others were all blended into the greater Pisani kinship network. Notwithstanding Domenico's obscure arrival in Istanbul, their family grew and ensured they had a prominent place in the Levantine community. Right from the beginning, Domenico married into a family that had some sort of connection to the Sublime Porte. The real expansion of their networks began with Antonio Pisani. Perhaps his greatest achievement was joining the ranks of the embassy as a dragoman, however contested, which created the foundation for the dynasty. It is unclear, however, if his wife's family, the Testa's, another important family of dragomans, had any role in facilitating his entrance into diplomatic service with the British. While ensuring that their family members had access to dragoman positions, the Pisanis continued to build their kinship networks with members of the upper crust of Levantine society through specific marriage alliances in order to solidify their position in that non-Muslim community.

Marriages with members of other dragoman families, and people active in business, trade, and the legal profession proved important, and later useful. The Pisanis benefitted from their connection to the Timonis and vice-versa, especially in their business dealings. Michel Timoni's services as an attorney proved crucial during the process of trying to open Etienne's *Mont de Piété*. So too, did Etienne's services for his mother-in-law when she had difficulty with

her home and neighbor. Gaps in the sources unfortunately do not provide for a more comprehensive view of how these connections allowed for greater engagement between the Pisanis and their networks with activities outside of the embassy. Their social networks, however important, did not give them an edge when it came to maintaining their positions as dragomans throughout the nineteenth century. Berto Pisani's agitation at the embassy to ensure an open path for his family into the service was an important step into solidifying their place in that institution, and in British imperial politics.

The Pisanis took advantage of their roles as dragomans to integrate themselves into British imperial structures, and did so strategically. Caught at times between their egos and their need to keep their positions in the embassy, members still did not have a problem gambling with their futures. Opposition to their employers, though briefly stifling their relationships with them, acted as a mechanism for the Pisanis to demonstrate their worth and credibility in the embassy. Furthermore, their participation in these activities deepened their connection to British imperial structures because they negotiated how they wanted to act within them, while reinforcing their own power and importance.

If the Pisanis could negotiate the importance of their position in the embassy through threats of resignation, or even, as in Etienne's case, a public dispute with the highest-ranking Ottoman official, then configuring their identity was par for the course. Over the course of the nineteenth century it is difficult to gauge how Ottoman officials viewed the Pisanis. The samples of evidence in this study show that Berto might have been fairly liked, while Etienne and Frederick's personalities and actions were less tolerated. Unfortunately there are no indications of how the Ottomans in general or Ottoman officials in particular felt about them as Ottoman subjects employed by a European embassy. Indeed, the variations in the self-identification of

Frederick and Count Alexander were illuminating, and provide an important measuring stick for how Ottoman dragomans in the service of a foreign embassy saw themselves.

Frederick's trial and the process of filing Count Pisani's Last Will and Testament challenges long-standing arguments made by scholars and popular historians regarding the representation and identity of so-called Levantine dragomans. Neither of these Pisanis viewed themselves as Levantines, and though they were undoubtedly aware of that label, that had nothing to do with their self-fashioning. But opportunism cannot be over-looked.

Equally interesting and even more important was how Frederick and Count Alexander used legal systems; British in Frederick's case, and Ottoman, British, and Italian in Count Alexander's, to try to achieve favorable outcomes for themselves. Doing so allowed them to negotiate their identity and their position inside British and Ottoman imperial spaces. As Ottoman subjects due to their birth, that legal status was not central to their claims; they were more interested in proving their rights as protected employees in the embassy, capitalizing on their belief that they had legal recourse in England and to use British legal structures. The complexity in defining identity and legal rights draws attention to how dragomans had to traverse the boundaries that separated Ottoman and European legal systems, and at the same time bring them into conversation. The difficulty in applying legal categories of belonging to dragomans sheds light on how operating inside imperial spaces simultaneously was a conscious act in order to advocate for themselves, and reap the benefits of their occupation.

Using their connection to the embassy to their advantage and maneuvering inside Ottoman and British imperial spaces and structures did not just benefit members of the family that were dragomans. Nicholas was successful in bringing his case against Serfiraz Hanımefendi and Osman Efendi to the highest Ottoman courts and officials because of his juridical status,

probably acquired through his family connections to the embassy. His partnership with Stamatello Volgo added another dimension to the case, shedding light on the dynamics of cooperation between foreign embassies working in unison against the Porte to retrieve money owed to them. The Pisanis used Ottoman and British institutions to their own advantage, and could draw on them because of their position inside of those empires. The same was true for Etienne, when, even in death, he still managed to tie the British and Ottomans together through his personal project in opening a charitable organization. No doubt, there was probably financial gain to be made, or his partners probably would not have been so eager to move forward in their attempt to have it formally opened.

Using a spatial framework to analyze how the Pisanis operated inside Ottoman and British imperial structures offers insights into the complex histories of these types of actors, and how they can be treated in Ottoman historiography. Non-Muslim Ottoman dragomans tied imperial polities together because of their roles as translators and interpreters, a clear and important function of their positions. But looking beyond their duties in diplomacy, and taking a prosopographical approach to analyzing their lives and activities enriches the understanding of how Ottomans with foreign diplomatic protection – not half-Ottoman-half-Europeans – living in the Ottoman capital interacted with the very empires that held sway over them. It provides insights into how these actors negotiated their place inside these empires without leaving their place of birth, and how their actions had consequences for the Ottoman Empire and Britain.

The far-reaching trajectories of the Pisanis at home in Istanbul, and abroad in Britain had an impact on the shifting configurations of imperial connections, including the relational and institutional characteristics that facilitated and governed their actions. Their careers, though elite, offer a purview of the sagacious opportunism available to them and the way that they

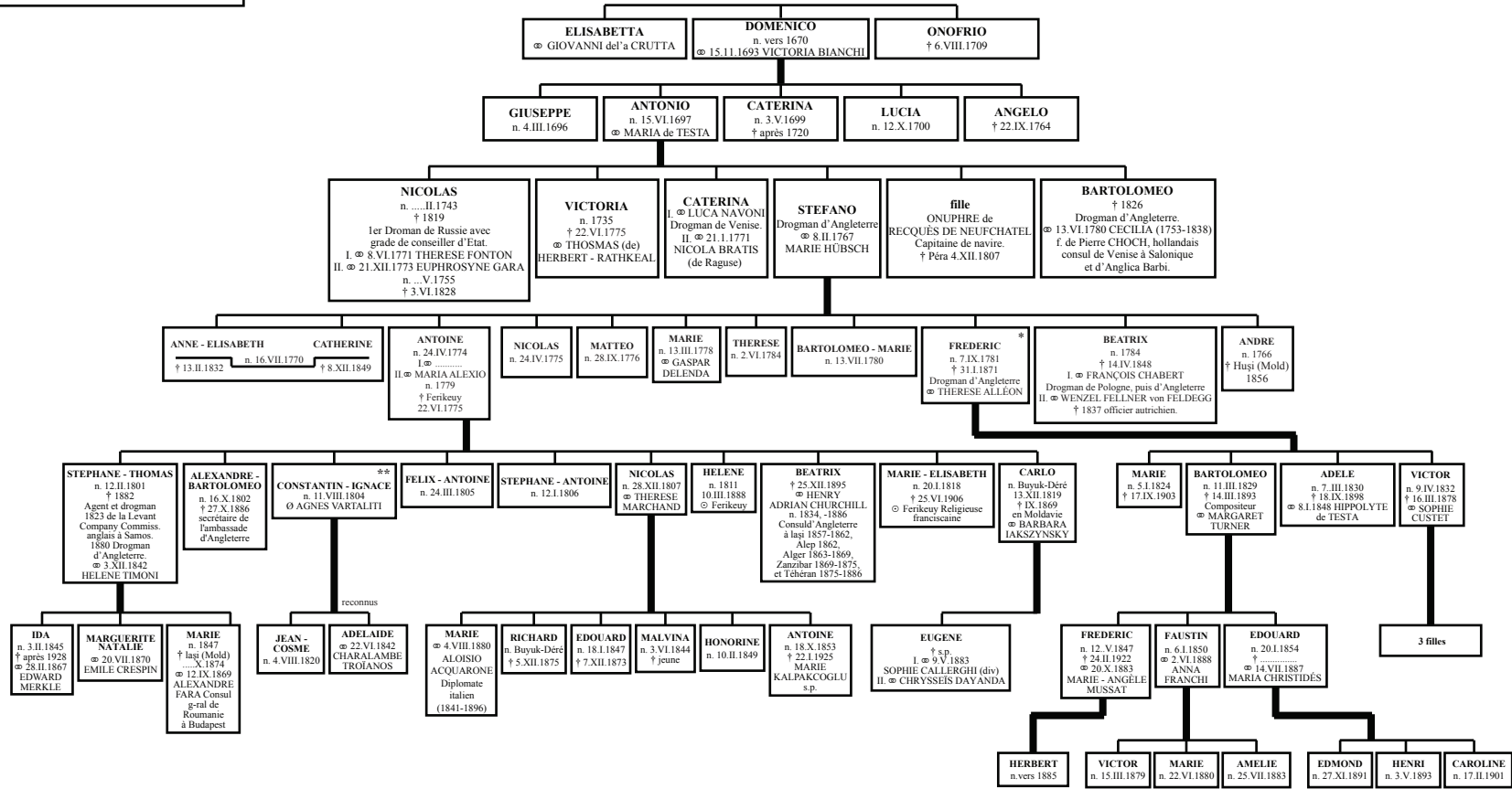


incorporated themselves into empires, personally or as a family. Furthermore, the story of the Pisanis adds to the social history of the Ottoman Empire. In examining this family of Ottoman subjects, we gain a more comprehensive picture of how non-Muslims, though elites, had the ability to shape the contours of their existence largely on their own terms. The heterogeneity of empires, imperial institutions, and the categorization of groups within them did not always exercise complete control over the peoples they ruled. Some, like the Pisanis, had a say in designing their own paths due to the conditions they found themselves in, and what they did with the opportunities they were given.

**Table 1**  
**Mihail Dimitri Sturdza's Family Tree of the Pisanis**

n. - né/born  
 † - décédé/death  
 ♂ - marié/married  
 div. - divorcé/divorced  
 s.p. - sans postérité/without descendant  
 ⊙ - burial place - not included in Sturdza's key  
 ⊖ - illegitimate union - not included in Sturdza's key

**PISANI**  
 Réfugié de Crète à Constantinople  
 vers 1669v



\* Marie Anne Marandet points out that Frederic, who she refers to as Frederic Maria, was born in 1782 and married Thérèse Alléon on 1 October 1821 in Büyükdere, Istanbul. For the date of birth and death, she cites the registers from the St. Antoine Church in Beyoğlu. The source for the marriage is Ste Marie Büyükdere. <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=frederic+maria&n=pisani>

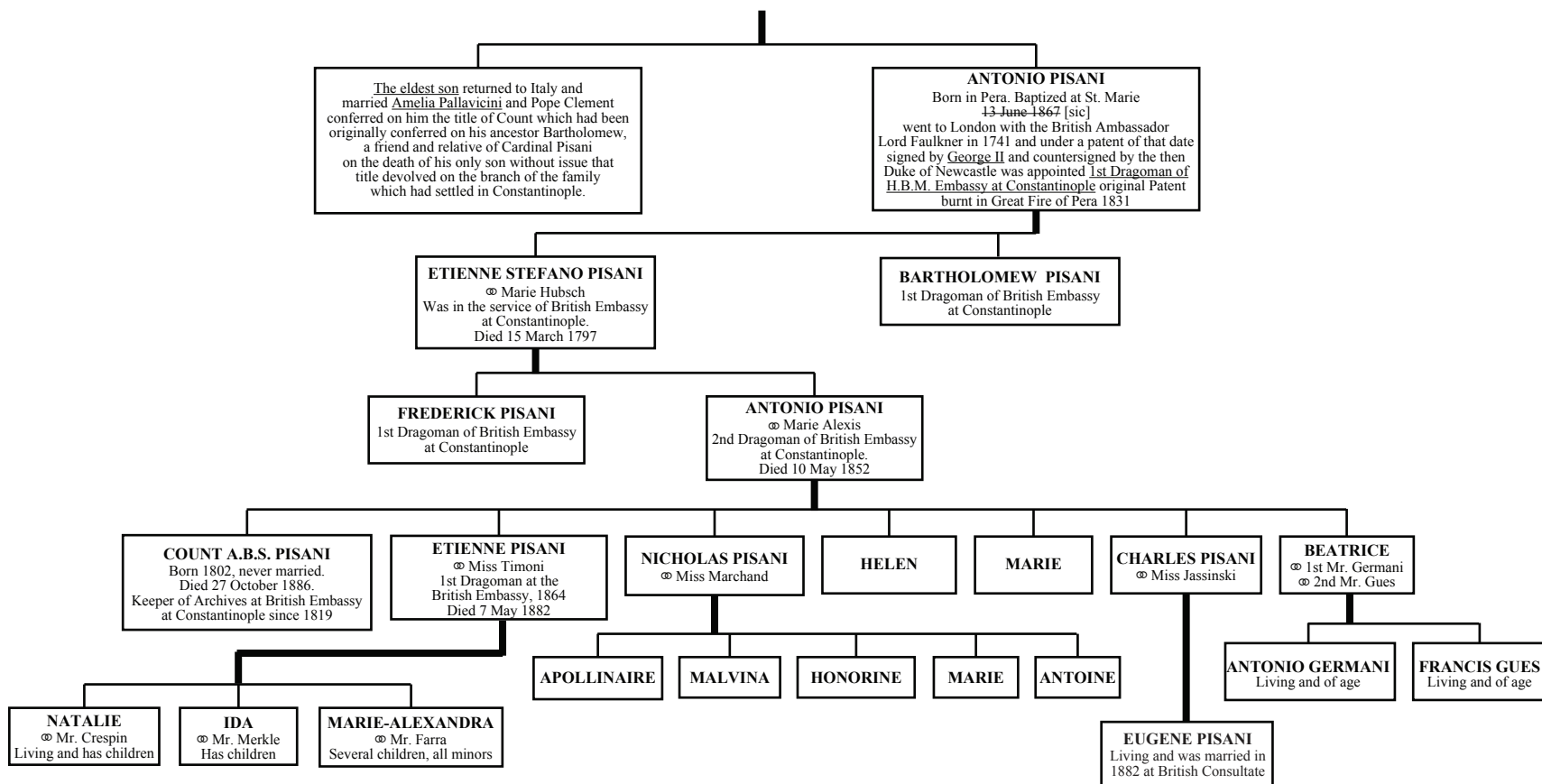
\*\* Marie Anne Marandet points out that Constantine Ignace, or Ignazio, as she refers to him, was previously married to one Maria Damofli, though does not provide a date. They had five children; Anna, Maria Carolina, Felix, Margarita, and Adelaide Thomasina (1814-1899) who was married to Charalambo Troiano. Ignazio later married Agnes Vartaliti, and had one child with her, Joannes Cosma, in 1820. Marandet does not provide a date for the nuptials between Ignazio and Agnes Vartaliti. She also notes that it was an illegitimate union. <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=ignazio&n=pisani>

**Table 2**  
**Charles Pisani's Family Tree**

**PEDIGREE**

The Family of Pisani fled originally from Pisa to Venice

During the War between the Turks and Venetians in 1696 Dominique Pisani was made a prisoner by the Turks and brought to Constantinople where he settle [sic] and married = Victoria Bianchi.



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İrade Dahiliye, İ.DH

İrade Meclis-i Mahsus, İ.MMS

##### Sadaret

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