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# A THIRD WAY. AN ATTEMPT TO REORIENT HISTORY OF EARLY MODERN VENETIAN/ ITALIAN CONNECTIONS WITH THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ITS BORDERLANDS

**ABSTRACT**
The history of early modern Italian connections with the Ottoman Empire and its borderlands is often considered separated from those of any other Central/ Eastern European state or area. Only sporadically, when referred to moments of anti-Ottoman alliances' formation, it is presented in a wider geographical context. Depicted even so, it is usually limited to political cooperation between respective Italian and Central/Eastern European polities.
Taking cue from a report on Georgia by Pietro della Valle – who indicated a third way from Italy to that country passing through Poland-Lithuania, equivalent to those via Constantinople or Aleppo – the paper aims to reorient studies on connections between Poland-Lithuania, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th/17th century. Based i.a. on primary sources mostly taken from the Venetian archives, it invites to adopt an entangled, "triangular" perspective on the study of the considered areas' history through a closer examination of diplomatic practices, circulation of motifs in diplomatic writings on the Ottomans, and individuals' migrations.

**KEYWORDS:** Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; Venice; Ottoman Empire; Diplomacy; Armenians.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1626 a Roman traveler Pietro Della Valle presented to the Pope Urban VIII a detailed report on Georgian lands and their inhabitants. The document was used by the Papal curia to prepare a new Catholic mission in the Caucasus, entrusted to the Theatines. In his report Della Valle proposed to missionaries to use one of three alternative ways to that country: via Constantinople/Istanbul, Persia, or Poland-Lithuania[1]. The first one was the shortest. It began as a sea journey to Constantinople. More difficult, in the traveler's opinion, was the rest of this route, passing by the Ottoman Empire and thus requiring caution from traveling clergymen. An alternative way – via Persia – was presented by Della Valle as much easier, even if secrecy, «prudence and great caution» also there were of the essence. Both these ways to Georgia, running across lands not governed by the «Christian princes», assumed cooperation of the newly sent priests with other Catholic missionaries

1 Juansher Vateishvili, ed., "Informazione della Georgia data alla Santità di nostro Signore Papa Urbano VIII da Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino l'anno MDCXXVI", *Regnum Dei*, 56 (2000): 106-07. All translations of quoted passages from Italian and Polish texts are mine [PC].

already operating locally. Finally, a third way indicated by Della Valle was the way «through Poland». Choosing it, one could easily reach the Black Sea and thence «in a very few days arrive in Georgia»; an alternative way passed through Kyiv and then down with the course of Dnieper. While the Theatines could also profit from the assistance of other missionaries present in Poland-Lithuania, they could – moreover – rely on «that very Catholic and pious king» and on the support by Cossacks or Catholic Ruthenians thanks to whom «not only simple missionaries […] but even a bishop, nuncio or ambassador […] might enter Georgia in perfect security».

The description of possible missionaries' routes from Italy to Georgia – situated in the then borderlands of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires – served as inspiration for the present contribution. The history of early modern Italian (and, mainly analysed here: Venetian) contacts with the Ottomans is increasingly more often considered in a broader Mediterranean context, oftentimes extended to a Balkan hinter – or borderland[2]. At the same time, however, studies linking Venice (and more broadly: Italy), Ottoman Empire, and East-Central Europe are less frequently undertaken. In particular, the connections between Venice and the latter area in the Ottoman context are usually studied through the lens of strictly political aspects; such studies are often focused on anti-Ottoman leagues or efforts to establish them, mostly in the 17th century[3]. Yet, as the outcome of those alliances not always seemed to be satisfactory for all their participants (let alone historians), an interest in other dimensions of contacts between all mentioned polities or regions seems to offer a wide range of research possibilities. This is the rationale of this article, mostly focused on certain aspects of contacts between Poland-Lithuania and Venice in the Ottoman context roughly between 1550 and 1650, as shown by Venetian sources. Given its limited character, this contribution aims at setting a general agenda for directions of a possible further research – rather than at thoroughly describing them.



**2** E.g., Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople. Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire. Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Stephen Ortega, *Negotiating Transcultural Relations in the Early Modern Mediterranean. Ottoman-Venetian Encounters* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2014); Maria Pia Pedani, *The Ottoman-Venetian Border (15th-18th Centuries)* (Venezia: Ca' Foscari, 2017).

**3** Cf. recently: Alessandro Boccolini, "'In mare et in terra'. La Lega Santa del 1684 e la diplomazia pontificia", *Perspektywy Kultury/Perspectives on Culture,* 30/3 (2020): 179-96; Alessandro Boccolini, "La Lega Santa del 1684 e l'ambasciata straordinaria di Angelo Morosini alla corte di Jan III Sobieski tratta dalle carte conservate presso l'Archivio di Stato di Venezia", *Eastern European History Review,* 3 (2020): 27-46 – and the vast bibliography included in both contributions, in particular works by Domenico Caccamo and Gaetano Platania. On plans of a Polish-Venetian alliance in the late 1640s cf. Wiktor Czermak, *Plany wojny tureckiej Władysława IV* (Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności, 1895).

## A DIPLOMATIC TRIANGLE: POLAND-LITHUANIA, VENICE, AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The Polish-Venetian relations in the early modern period did not develop particularly intensively, despite a general positive perception of the Republic (and its original constitutional solutions) by the nobility of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and a lack of problematic issues on bilateral agenda throughout the centuries in question. What potentially blocked the development of any deeper mutual relations was a significant difference in organization of foreign missions in both polities. Contrary to Venice, Poland-Lithuania – as a rule – did not either send or accept foreign residents, mostly using envoys on ad hoc missions in its practice related to the foreign policy. As a consequence, the diplomatic documentation preserved in the State Archives of Venice and concerning Venetian missions to Poland-Lithuania is relatively small, including only eight reports (*relazioni*)[4] and a similarly limited set of dispatches sent by Venetian envoys to Poland-Lithuania back to their capital[5].

Besides a general respect for the Republic of St. Mark noted among the Polish-Lithuanian nobles, the country's attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire were another area of interest for the Venetian diplomats when considering potential driving factors to intensify mutual relations. For instance, Marino Cavalli in his report from Vienna (1545) included two observations on Poland-Lithuania: that it was actually a republic (and hence the respect of its inhabitants towards Venice) and that it was «prudently governed» to maintain peace with its neighbours, including the Ottoman Empire[6]. Equally, these two elements were included in a short mention on the country in the Federico Badoer's report from 1557[7]. In a similar vein, the *relazione* produced by Pietro Duodo – who was sent to Poland-Lithuania in 1592 – aimed to analyse «friendship that can be contracted» with that country, and to «consider reasons that can move Poles to be united with this most excellent Republic [of Venice – PC]». Among these motives, the only one thoroughly described in the report's introductory part was a possible cooperation against a

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**4** Andrea Da Mosto, *Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Indice generale, storico, descrittivo ed analitico*, vol. I (Roma: Biblioteca d'Arte, 1937), 48. These reports are dated: 1557, 1568, 1574, 1573-80, 1647, 1649, 1685, 1717. Their number is definitely lower than those from Constantinople, France, Spain, Germany/Austria, and even England, but still much higher with respect to those concerning other countries such as Portugal, Switzerland, Muscovy/Russia etc. (Italian polities excluded). The given number of reports from Poland-Lithuania should be increased by several unpreserved ones.

**5** The dispatches of Venetian envoys to Polish-Lithuania are gathered in 20 or 21 files (*filze*) and 6 or 7 registers; cf. diverging data given by Da Mosto, *Archivio*, 41 and *Guida generale degli Archivi di Stato italiani,* vol. IV (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1994), 897. This not very impressive legacy should be integrated by documents from the Venetian mission in Vienna, partly covering news from Poland-Lithuania.

**6** Eugenio Alberi, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, ser. I, vol. 3 (Firenze: Società editrice fiorentina, 1853), 141.

**7** Alberi, *Relazioni*, I/3, 210-11.

«universal enemy», i.e., the Ottoman Empire[8]. This perception grew stronger over time; as Józef Garbacik underlines, the Polish-Venetian relations started to intensify in the 17th century due to a need to address the Ottoman expansion[9].

No wonder then that when looking for sources for Polish-Venetian relations in early modern times one should be interested in the documents left by the Venetian residents in Constantinople (*baili*): i.e., their reports and dispatches. Clearly, these documents also constitute an important source for Polish-Ottoman relations. For example, Poland was mentioned in 17 summaries (headings) of the dispatches' register from March through December 1633 and in 26 further ones of the subsequent year[10]. The observations included in the dispatches concerned both events of local importance (i.a., arrivals of subsequent Polish envoys to Constantinople) and plans or progresses of wars or peace negotiations not only between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire but also in a broader geopolitical context, including Muscovy and Sweden. Interestingly, news from Poland-Lithuania and from Persia – i.e., countries that could assume the burden of fighting against the Ottoman Empire or temporarily blocking its forces, which Venice was keenly interested in – are sometimes described in the same dispatches[11]. A recurring motif of an imminent (or at least future) Ottoman expansion towards Poland-Lithuania can also be found in numerous reports by Venetian baili, including Giovanni Correr (1578), Lorenzo Bernardo (1592), Giovanni Moro (1590), and Ottaviano Bon (1608)[12].



An attempt to analyse baili's dispatches in this respect was made by Józef Garbacik who studied a number of these documents from the turn of the 16th and 17th century (1587-1608)[13]. More recently, a study in this direction was undertaken by Dariusz Kołodziejczyk who focused on a number of dispatches of the early 17th century, concerning the activity of Cossacks, and on those related to the Venetian diplomacy's actions towards Poland-Lithuania after the outbreak of the War of Candia[14]. Furthermore, endeavours to establish a permanent Venetian mission in

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**8** Eugenio Alberi, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, ser. I, vol. 6 (Firenze: Società editrice fiorentina, 1862), 319-20.

**9** Józef Garbacik, "Polska wobec konfliktu Wenecji z papieżem Pawłem V (1606–1607)", *Collectanea Theologica*, 19/2 (1938): 159-60.

**10** ASVe, Disp. Cost., reg. D23a.

**11** E.g., ASVe, Disp. Cost., reg. D23a, f. 44r (disp. 46, 16.10.1633).

**12** Luigi Firpo, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato tratte dalle migliori edizioni disponibili e ordinate cronologicamente*, vol. XIII (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1984), 20 (Moro) and 67 (Bernardo); Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti*, vol. 14: *Costantinopoli. Relazioni inedite 1512-1789* (Padova: Aldo Ausilio, 1996), 248 (Correr) and 490 (Bon).

**13** Józef Garbacik, "Le relazioni turco-polacche tra XVI e XVII secolo alla luce dei rapporti e dei dispacci dei baili veneziani a Costantinopoli", in *Italia, Venezia e Polonia tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento*, ed. Mieczysław Brahmer (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1967), 215. His sources are presented on 218-19.

**14** Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "The Ottoman Northern Policy as Seen from the Venetian

the Commonwealth – with the Ottoman threat in their potential background – also met with a significant interest by Polish historians[15]. In light of their findings, these attempts failed mostly due to divergent current interests in other areas than a potential anti-Ottoman cooperation; or sometimes even because of actions undertaken by other actors, including the Papacy. Quite symbolically, it seems to show that it might be advisable not to restrict studies on the Polish-Venetian political relations only to anti-Ottoman leagues. While the Venetian documents from the legation in Constantinople certainly show that the Polish-Venetian diplomatic connections cannot be separated from the Ottoman context, a more systematic study of these sources, focused on a longer period, would be certainly of benefit for further research. It could integrate entangled relations between Poland-Lithuania, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire, especially in the light of the latter's "Northern policy", to use Kołodziejczyk's words. Furthermore, the appearance of the new diplomatic history with its own agenda prompts a reformulation of this task to new directions.



In this context, a deeper study of contacts between Polish and Venetian envoys in Constantinople may contribute to a better understanding of how the Christian/European diplomatic corps in Constantinople functioned. This is an area seemingly less popular as a research theme when compared to – for example – the Ottoman court ceremonial[16]. We learn, for instance, from the Polish envoy Aleksander Piaseczyński's report (mission of 1630) that he asked i.a. the Venetian bailo to support his request to release captives, presented to the *kaymakam*. This mention confirms that there was a practice of joint actions by European ambassadors to the Sublime Porte undertaken in mutual support, especially in defence of capitulations,

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Archives", *CIÉPO Osmanlı Öncesi ve Osmanlı Araştırmaları Uluslararası Komitesi XIV. Sempozyumu Bildirileri XIV. Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, ed. Tuncer Baykara (Ankara: TTK, 2004), 417-26.

**15** Ludwik Boratyński, "Sprawa ambasady weneckiej w Polsce za Stefana Batorego", in *Studya historyczne wydane ku czci Prof. Wincentego Zakrzewskiego* (Kraków: Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1908), 3-30; Józef Garbacik, "Sprawa ambasady weneckiej w Polsce za Zygmunta III", in *Studia z dziejów kultury polskiej: książka zbiorowa*, eds. Henryk Barycz and Jan Hulewicz (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1949), 315-31.

**16** E.g. Maria Pia Pedani, "The Sultan and the Venetian Bailo. Ceremonial Diplomatic Protocol in Istanbul", in *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Ralph Kauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederkorn (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 287-99; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "Semiotics of Behavior in Early Modern Diplomacy: Polish Embassies in Istanbul and Bahçesaray", *Journal of Early Modern History,* 7/3-4 (2003): 245-56; Tetiana Grygorieva, "Symbols and Perceptions of Diplomatic Ceremony. Ambassadors of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Istanbul", in *Kommunikation durch symbolische Akte. Religiöse Heterogenität und politische Herrschaft in Polen-Litauen*, ed. Yvonne Kleinmann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 115-31. On the functioning of the diplomatic corps in Constantinople: Geoff R. Berridge, "Notes on the Origins of the Diplomatic Corps: Constantinople in the 1620", *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy,* 92 (2004): 1-20.

and that it was not restricted to resident ambassadors[17]. The same Piaseczyński was aware of another practice, i.e., courtesy calls on representatives of other polities staying in Constantinople; however – as he had no particular topics to be raised with them, including with Bailo Giovanni Cappello – the former only sent members of his suite to those diplomats[18]. Continuing this practice, in 1640, Polish legate Wojciech Miaskowski met his Venetian counterpart four times, including mutual visits – following Miaskowski's audience at the sultan's court – as well as greetings at the legation's arrival in Constantinople and before its departure[19].

The Miaskowski's mission provided the Venetians with an opportunity to make an interesting note on the ceremonial. It was observed in the register of dispatches that the Polish envoy was required to kiss the «king's» (i.e., sultan's) garment. It seems that this information was related to a withdrawal from the custom of kissing the sultan by foreign diplomats on the hand. This practice was abandoned in 1636 (from then on, the envoys were to kiss the ground); it is then not excluded that this detail was perceived by the Venetian diplomatic milieu in the context of the recalled ceremonial's transformations[20]. Certainly, this is not the only case showing how useful are the sources concerned for the study of Polish, Venetian or Ottoman diplomatic protocol, especially if not limited solely to bilateral contacts. For example, Giacomo Soranzo – an extraordinary envoy to the ceremony of the sultan's (Murad III) son Mehmet circumcision in 1582 – noted in his final report that during the recalled ceremony he was given a superior place with respect to that of the Polish envoy, so «it was publicly confirmed that it was given to Your Serenity [the doge – PC] a better place than that [assigned – PC] to Poland»[21].



Other interesting issues that stem from personal contacts between the Polish and Venetian agents are related to communication flows they participated in. As

**17** [Aleksander Piaseczyński], "Relacya poselstwa od Najjaśniejszego Zygmunta III, polskiego i szwedzkiego króla, do Amurata Sołtana, cesarza tureckiego […]", in *Trzy relacje z polskich podróży na Wschód muzułmański w pierwszej połowie XVII w.*, ed. Adam Walaszek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980), 68 and 70. This is also cofirmed by Bailo Cappello's dispatches: ASVe, Disp. Cost., filza 111, ff. 1r-v (disp. 59, 2.09.1630). On the practice itself: Berridge, "Notes", 12-14.

**18** [Piaseczyński], "Relacya", 68.

**19** [Wojciech Miaskowski], "Dyaryusz legacyjej do Turek […]", in *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, ed. Adam Przyboś (Warszawa: PWN, 1985), 56, 64, 66, and 69. The meetings are dated: April 21; May 13, 20, and 27. Their dates are confirmed in the diary of a member of Miaskowski's suite: [Zbigniew Lubieniecki], "Diariusz drogi tureckiej", in Walaszek, *Trzy*, 114, 125, 127–28, and 130. It is worth noting that the Venetian bailo met by Miaskowski was Alvise Contarini and not Pietro Foscarini as mentioned by the editor in the note (114, n. 73). Cf. also Maria Pia Pedani, "Elenco degli inviati diplomatici veneziani presso i sovrani ottomani", *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies*, 5/4 (2002): 42-43.

**20** ASVe, Disp. Cost., reg. D22, f. 52r (disp. 59, 2.09.1630). According to Piaseczyński, his audience with the sultan took place on August 20, 1630 ("Relacya", 59). On the practice and its abolition: Pedani, "Sultan", 296.

**21** Pedani, *Relazioni*, 266-67.

Garbacik found, a future Polish envoy Krzysztof Dzierżek, guided by his personal attachment to Venice, used to send secret dispatches from Constantinople to Venice via Polish-Lithuania during a Venetian-Ottoman war (most probably, the War of Cyprus) when staying in Constantinople as a student of Oriental languages[22]. Thus, Polish agents sometimes facilitated exchange of information for Venetians – what might be quite surprising if we consider that it was mostly diplomats of other polities in Constantinople to complain about the Venetian omnipotence in terms of postal services and news delivery[23].

## DIPLOMATIC WRITINGS: CIRCULATION OF KNOWLEDGE, TRANSMISSION OF MOTIFS

In was most probably in 1557[24] when a member of the Polish legation to the sultan, Erazm Otwinowski – accompanying the great envoy Andrzej Bzicki – visited Constantinople. He left a travel journal, describing in detail audiences at the court and "curiosities" of the city[25]. In that text he paid attention to vast size of Constantinople and the city's individual buildings such as caravansaries, mosques, baths, fountains, and *bezesten*, i.e., markets[26]. He also noted some more general observations concerning the political constitution of the Ottoman Empire, including on particular offices, role of *devshirme*, secluded life of the sultan (Selim II – whom he characterised as prone to drink, impulsive, and unfair)[27]. Finally, among his observations one can find motifs frequently recurring in the description of the Ottoman Empire by early modern diplomats, such as alleged "tyranny" and "barbarism" of the Ottoman political culture, low skills of the Ottomans demonstrated in governing the empire, or widespread corruption at the sultan's court[28].



There are some themes of the Otwinowski's narrative that resemble two texts left by a Venetian, Marcantonio Donini, who spent many years in Constantinople as secretary of the Republic' mission to the Ottoman Empire, in the period close to the time of Otwinowski's visit. Donini was posted in this capacity to the Ottoman capital three times (1554-57, 1560-62, and 1575-79), intertwining these stays with

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**22** Garbacik, "Baili", 220. The author does not clarifies to which war his observation is referred to.

**23** Berridge, "Notes", 16-17.

**24** Cf. n. 42.

**25** [Erazm Otwinowski], "Wypisanie drogi tureckiej […]", in *Podróże i poselstwa polskie do Turcyi*, ed. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Biblioteki Polskiej, 1860), 7-40.

**26** [Otwinowski], "Wypisanie", 13 (size), 12 (caravasaries), and 22 (bezesten). Cf. especially his mentions on caravansaries: «There, each guest is allowed to stay for twenty-four hours, is given dinner and supper, and the poor [can stay – PC] until the third day»; and on bezesten «where they sell various precious things from gold, silver, pearls, precious stones, and garments […]».

**27** [Otwinowski], "Wypisanie", 24-29 (on Selim's nature: 26).

**28** [Otwinowski], "Wypisanie", 29 (tyranny), 13 (low skills), and 17 (corruption).

work in other Venetian legations, i.e., in Rome and Vienna[29]. Moreover, during his second posting to Constantinople, he even temporarily headed the mission due to the death of the bailo (Girolamo Ferro). As a consequence, he prepared a final report of the mission, required from returning Venetian ambassadors[30]. Apart from the report, he also wrote a treatise composed as a set of three dialogues «on the things of the Turks», presenting to the reader details of everyday life in Constantinople[31]. The loose form of the Donini's text brings to mind the chatty Otwinowski's narrative; moreover, both lower-ranking diplomats have another thing in common, i.e., their aversion to superiors. While Otwinowski portrayed Bzicki as a clumsy person – the best example of which is the description of the envoy who got tangled up in the garments he received from the sultan[32] – Donini found himself in serious conflict with Vicebailo Dandolo who arrived in the place of the deceased Ferro, and the mutual complaints of both gentlemen presented in their *relazioni* are unprecedented in the entire corpus of such texts prepared by the Venetian diplomats[33].



If Otwinowski met Donini in Constantinople, they would probably agree on those observations that were written down by the Polish visitor. While the Donini's descriptions are much more detailed – proof of his much longer stay in the Ottoman capital – the Venetian secretary also marks as «most notable things about Turkey» buildings such as «mosques, serais, baths, fountains, streets, gates, gardens, imarets, caravanserais, and *bezesten*». In the latter places, one sells «of every kind of cloth of gold, silver, silk, wool, linen, bombage, carpets, jewels, pearls, works of gold, silver, silk [*sic!* – PC], slaves, mules, horses, camels, and many other things». The Venetian's secretary's attention is also drawn to caravansaries whose guests are served with different meals three times a day, can drink water from fountains, and sometimes are even provided with a candle in the evening[34]. The motif of Constantinople's vast size returns in Donini's discussion on organization of judiciary in the city. Other themes present in Otwinowski – such as secluded life of the sultan, including Selim's drunkennes and injustice; or characteristics of the Ottoman Empire and its way of governance – are also reflected in Donini's works[35],

**29** Donini's career is reconstructed here according to his writings: BCV, [Marcantonio Donini], *Tre dialoghi di Marc'Antonio Donini Già secretario Veneto nelli quali si tratta di diverse cose de Turchi et della Turchia*, ms. Wcowich-Lazzari 31.10, 30-32.

**30** Eugenio Alberi, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, ser. III, vol. 3 (Firenze: Società editrice fiorentina, 1855), 173-208; a part lacking in this edition was completed by Pedani, *Relazioni*, 127-31.

**31** Cf. n. 29.

**32** [Otwinowski], "Wypisanie", 30.

**33** Alberi, *Relazioni*, III/3, 174.

**34** BCV, [Donini], 36 (buildings), 61 (bezesten), and 57-58 (caravansaries).

**35** Alberi, *Relazioni*, III/3, 179-80 (secluded life of sultans, Selim's description); 185–90 (lack of officials' skills); BCV, [Donini], 57, 84, 104, and 143 (alleged Ottoman barbarism); 154-55 (sultans' subjects as slaves); 70 and 137 (corruption).

being generally typical for late 16th-century Venetian ambassadors' *relazioni*[36].
The similarity of observations made by both travelers might be theoretically attributed to their education and earlier life experience or to their common diplomatic background. Following this line of reasoning, Tetiana Grygorieva observed that Otwinowski «knew quite well what he was going to see, and that he already had a map of the city in his imagination, probably derived from previous readings»[37]. Other scholars rather underlined his personal skills; according to Marek Prejs, Otwinowski was «certainly the most intelligent of the Poles» who visited the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century[38]. In a similar vein, Otwinowski's intelligence, perceptiveness and independence of judgments, especially with regard to anthropological observations, was praised by Claude Backvis and, more recently, Piotr Tafiłowski[39]. On the contrary, more critical towards the traveler was the older historiography, emphasising the lack of depth of his mind, simplicity, and numerous factual errors[40]. These diverging evaluations show indeed that it is difficult to explain Otwinowski's "professional" and intellectual preparation, including possible sources of his observations. Contrary to Donini – a career secretary working i.a. in the doge's chancellery and sent seven times in total on diplomatic missions in different locations – Otwinowski did not have an experience related to a chancellery's work; moreover, it would be difficult to compare the Polish-Lithuanian and Venetian diplomacies in terms of their organization or accumulated institutional knowledge. Otwinowski was a poet staying in the service of Cracow's voivode Stanisław Tęczyński and his son Jan Baptysta. Most probably, apart from one journey to Denmark[41] and the mission to Constantinople, he did not travel abroad[42]. As a consequence, it would be difficult to attribute



**36** Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1975), 146-234; Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despote. Venice and the Sublime Porte*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), passim.

**37** Grygorieva, "Symbols", 129-30.

**38** Marek Prejs, *Egzotyzm w literaturze staropolskiej: wybrane problemy* (Warszawa: WPUW, 1999), 97.

**39** Claude Backvis, *Szkice o kulturze staropolskiej* (Warszawa: PIW, 1975), 642-43; Piotr Tafiłowski, *Imago Turci. Studium z dziejów komunikacji społecznej w dawnej Polsce (1453–1572)* (Lublin: WUMCS, 2013), 209–10.

**40** Cf. i.a. works by Bohdan Baranowski and Stanisław Kot quoted by Tafiłowski, *Imago*, 209-10 (n. 224-25). Their comments resemble observations made by previous generations of scholars with regard to "mental laziness" of Venetian diplomats in the Ottoman Empire, cf. a synthetic oveview of these opinions in Eric R. Dursteler, "Describing or Distorting the 'Turk'? The Relazioni of the Venetian Ambassadors in Constantinople as Historical Source", *Acta Histriae,* 19 (2011): 231-48.

**41** The scope of the travel – undertaken in Jan Baptysta Tęczyński's suite – was Sweden. However, the whole suite was detained and imprisoned by the Danish forces. Cf. Kazimierz Gutaker, *Dramatyczne dzieje bałtyckiego dyplomaty* (Warszawa: PWN, 1993), 110-61.

**42** Piotr Wilczek, *Erazm Otwinowski: pisarz ariański* (Katowice: Gnome Books,

Otwinowski's opinions to his familiarity with the diplomatic world or to travels, including those undertaken to complete university studies, for example, in Italy: a popular destination among the Polish nobility at that time. Unfortunately, given little knowledge of his biography – and his readings on the matter – we are not able to carry out such a detailed and fascinating analysis of the sources of his knowledge and views, as it was possible for John-Paul Ghobrial to do with the case of a 17th century English ambassador to the Sublime Porte[43]. The same conclusion applies to Donini. Regardless of that (or maybe: all the more so), the circulation of motifs used by Polish-Lithuanian and Venetian envoys in their diplomatic writings on the Ottoman Empire – and possibly also a transformation of these motifs over time – certainly merits a closer examination.



## INDIVIDUALS' MOBILITY. ARMENIANS AS CULTURAL BROKERS

Finally, a third opportunity to broaden research on Venetian/Italian connections with the Ottoman Empire and its bordering countries – by Poland-Lithuania and East-Central Europe in general – is offered by fates of individuals and their mobility, as emerging from diplomatic (or mostly: consular) sources. The recalled documents confirm presence of subjects of the Polish king, seeking for Venetian representatives' assistance in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, in 1635, the bailo's chancellery issued a certificate to two such persons of «Greek rite», i.e., Orthodox confession: Opłatnicki and Jergonoroski[44]. Some applicants were reportedly former slaves asking for a certificate to facilitate their further travel through lands of the «Christian princes». This was the case, i.a., of certain «Pietro Vroblaschi, a Pole» (most probably: Piotr Wróblewski) who asked the chancellery of Bailo Foscarini in 1633 to be granted with such a certificate[45].

Among individual persons coming from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Armenians are those whose presence is noticeable in the Venetian consular

1994), 18-20 and 25-6. Marek Prejs postponed the Otwinowski's stay in Constantinople – i.e., 1557, as written in the manuscript – to 1567, given i.a. mentions on Selim II as the then reigning sultan (*Egzotyzm*, 56-9; however, it rather seems to the author of this contribution that it is not the date of the stay itself, but the date of writing the text, which should be postponed). This new datation enabled Prejs to conclude that «the astonishing erudition and competence of the author demonstrated in his text may stem from his four-years stay in France and Spain in the suite of Jan Baptysta Tęczyński who spent the period 1556–1560 studying abroad» (Prejs, *Egzotyzm*, 59). Nevertheless, Otwinowski's participation in Tęczyński's journey is convincingly challenged by other scholars, including the very author of the monography on the poet (Wilczek, *Erazm*, 19). In fact, given Otwinowski's participation in a Protestant meeting in Pińczów in 1559, it would be difficult to assume that he had left the Tęczyński's suite earlier, returning alone to Poland.

**43** John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities. Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), mostly 19-41.

**44** ASVe, BAC 297, fasc. 12, f. 1r (24.07.1635).

**45** ASVe, BAC 297, fasc. 11, f. 10v (10.09.1633).

records. For example, in February 1601, the bailo's chancellery noted a visit of a certain «Daniel the Armenian» from Lviv to receive a certificate confirming his journey to Jerusalem; while seven months later he applied for another certificate attesting to his return journey. At that time, he was reportedly heading to Rome[46]. Likewise, certain Lazzaro Vartario, «a Pole of Armenian nationality», was granted with a certificate on his way back to Europe in 1642[47]. This presence of Armenians is unsurprising, given a visible representation of the nation's members in the cards of the Venetian consular documentation[48]. A focus on Armenians allows a historian to consider an additional dimension of the connections here described, i.a., the role of Armenians as merchants, dragomans, or even envoys operating between European countries and the Ottoman and Safavid Empires; as well as Armenian political projects involving cooperation with Western Christians against the Ottoman Empire. While these topics have been already studied[49], these studies seem not to be fully integrated in the area of connections between Italy (including Venice) and the Ottoman Empire and its borderlands; perhaps being considered too specialised to this more general topic. Moreover, the context of Armenian mobility provides historians of Poland-Lithuania and of Venice with a rich and important background, also by highlighting the role of Lviv and Venice for the Armenian culture. Quite symbolically, the first play in Armenian language in modern times was staged in Lviv in 1668, in the context of the activity of Armenian College led by the Theatines[50]. The same town was among the first centers of early Armenian printed publications (1618)[51]; certainly, preceded by Venice where the first Armenian book was issued (1512)[52].



Similar to other sections of this article, individuals' fates seem to be the most convincing argument for the proposed reorientation of research. Perhaps the best case in this context, by now understudied, is Clemente Galano (1611–66): a Theatine from Sorrento who served as missionary in Georgia, therafter founded a college

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**46** ASVe, BAC 297, fasc. [nn], f. 6v (23.02.1601); f. 13v (3.09.1601).

**47** ASVe, BAC 297, fasc. [nn], f. 14r (11.08.1642).

**48** Piotr Chmiel, *Rethinking the Concept of Antemurale: Venetian Diplomacy in Respect of the Ottoman World (1573-1645)* (Roma: Accademia Polacca delle Scienze, 2019), 123-24.

**49** E.g. Aldo Ferrari, *L'Ararat e la grù. Studi sulla storia e la cultura degli Armeni* (Milano: Mimesis, 2008); Aldo Ferrari, *In cerca di un regno. Profezia, nobiltà e monarchia in Armenia tra Settecento e Ottocento* (Milano: Mimesis, 2011); Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians. From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Comissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 75–126; incl. extensive bibliography in each of these works.

**50** Panossian, *Armenians*, 88.

**51** Sebouh David Aslanian, "Reader Response and the Circulation of Mkhit'arist Books across the Armenian Communities of the Early Modern Indian Ocean", *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 22 (2013): 40; compared to Panossian, *Armenians* 91 n. 40.

**52** Panossian, *Armenians*, 91.

for Armenians in Constantinople, and in the last years of his life was sent to Lviv to settle a new college for the Armenian youth in that town[53]. These observations lead us once more to the Theatines and their mission in the Georgian lands. The clergymen used only the two first ways proposed by Della Valle, even if they were invited to consider positive aspects of the third route (via Poland-Lithuania) also by a Caffa-based Dominican – Giovanni da Lucca, who stopped several times in the Theatine missionary house in Gori on his way to Persia. In 1646, while performing a diplomatic mission entrusted him by several monarchs, including the king of Poland-Lithuania Ladislaus IV Vasa, to the Persian shah, the Dominican even offered an opportunity to join him to one of the Theatines, Cristoforo Castelli[54]. Although a visit to Persia and a possible settlement of a Theatine mission in that country was a Castelli's big dream, he did not join the legation of Ft. Giovanni; the Dominican continued his travel accompanied by a confrere – a former renegade – Domenico Vedulato[55]. The latter, in turn, was mentioned in Venetian consular records as recipient of a certificate issued to him by the bailo's chancellery on May 6, 1637. At that time, he was a priest travelling to Jerusalem[56].



## CONCLUSION

When joining Giovanni da Lucca in his travel to Persia, Domenico Vedulato – as many missionaries, diplomats and travelers of the early modern times – was once more reorienting his life on a new track. Whether it was "a third way" – in both its literal and figurative senses – is probably less relevant to these considerations. Their scope was, however, to propose a reorientation of the studies on early modern connections between Italy and the Ottoman Empire (and their respective border- and hinterlands) by including East-Central Europe therein. Mostly inspired by diplomatic and misisonary history, the proposed approach focuses on mobility of persons and ideas. It was exemplified here by a number of cases connecting Poland-Lithuania, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire, thus inviting to explore a "triangular" Polish-Veneto-Ottoman history and to consider new research opportunities

**53** Mentions on Galano: Gabriella Uluhogian, *Gli armeni* (Milano: Il Mulino, 2009), 186; Ferrari, *In cerca*, 94 (who shifts Galano's life for 1610–65).

**54** Patrizia Licini, *Carteggio inedito di D. Cristoforo Castelli chierico regolare, missionario in Georgia e Mingrelia* (Milano: Politecnico di Milano, 1980), 80. This was not Giovanni's first mission to Persia, at least entrusted him by the Polish king. He also travelled to the shah in this capacity in 1635, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "Historical Introduction", in *Stosunki dawnej Rzeczypospolitej z Persją Safawidów i katolikosatem w Eczmiadzynie w świetle dokumentów archiwalnych/The Relations of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with Safavid Iran and the Catholicosate in Etchmiadzin in the Light of Archival Documents*, eds. Stanisław Jaśkowski, Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, and Piruz Mnatsakanyan (Warszawa: AGAD, 2017), 82.

**55** Licini, *Carteggio*, 80 and 87. According to Castelli, Vedulato converted in Constantinople, but afterwards he reconciled with the Catholic Church being under the influence of Ft. Giovanni and the Theatines who hosted him in Georgia for some months.

**56** ASVe, BAC 297, fasc. 13, f. 3v, (6.05.1637).

offered by this attitude. Among them, a need for a broader and more systematic examination of Venetian diplomatic sources, rather focused on long-lasting political tendencies and diplomatic practices, has been underlined. Similarly, an analysis of circulation of themes and motifs concerning the Ottoman Empire, present in Venetian and Polish-Lithuanian diplomatic writings, is also worth considering. Finally, an exploration of migrations of individuals, including those belonging to the Armenian community, can strongly contribute to present the early modern history of the regions concerned in the triangular dimension here described.

It seems, however, that the proposed approach can be extended even more, both in geographical and chronological terms: i.e., to include the Safavid Empire and to be investigated over the whole range of the early modern times. The presence of the Armenian Mekhitarist order in Venice since the early 18th century – and its later branch in Vienna – serves as a good illustration of such patterns of circulation of people and ideas both within and outside the Armenian community that can link Venice, the Ottoman and Safavid Empires and their borderlands, even reaching India; and Central/East-Central Europe[57].



57 On Mekhitarists in Venice and Vienna: Panossian, *Armenians*, 101–109; Aslanian, "Reader", 31-70.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

ASVe: Archivio di Stato di Venezia
BAC: *Bailo a Costantinopoli*
Disp. Cost.: *Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli*
BCV: Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venezia

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