

CENTRE D'HISTOIRE DIPLOMATIQUE OTTOMANE  
CENTER FOR OTTOMAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

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THE FIRST PERMANENT  
OTTOMAN EMBASSY  
IN EUROPE



THE EMBASSY OF YUSUF AGAH EFENDI  
TO LONDON  
(1793-1797)

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#### NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND SPELLING

In general the system of transliteration employed in this thesis conforms to that of the *Islam Ansiklopedisi* (see Vol. I, p. XXII). Words commonly used in English are given in their English or Turkish forms; eg., Seyhü'l-islam, Reis Efendi, Grand Vizier, Pasa, Kapudan Pasa, para, akce, gurus, etc. Places names commonly used in Turkish are given in their Turkish forms; Izmir, Istanbul, Varna, Edirne, Ankara etc. The other places names are given in English or their original language; eg., Leghorn in English Livorno in Italian and El-Korta in Turkish, Hermannstadt in German, Sibiu in Romanian and Sibir in Turkish. Dates are given in the following form: A.H. [After Hegira] / A.D. The quotations are given in their original form without any corrections, and the words which were illegible are indicated by three commas (,,,).

## INTRODUCTION

In the early stages of the reign of Selim III (1789-1807) the Ottoman Empire attempted to reorganise some of its basic institutions along European lines. The Sultan was determined to prevent his empire from declining, and meant to transform it into a modern state. His principal intention was to reorganise his empire in order to restore its former power. He strongly believed that this object could be achieved only by modernising the vital institutions of the empire, namely the military, administrative, politic, economic and diplomatic ones, along European lines. The diplomatic reform first attempted by Sultan Selim has had a long lasting effect from 1793 to the present time.

Ottoman diplomacy was one of the principal channels through which European ideas and methods were transmitted to the Ottoman Empire. This required the existence of permanent Ottoman Embassies in Europe. However, there were no such permanent embassies in any of the major European capitals until 1793. This study is concerned with the establishment of the first permanent embassy in London, the activities of the ambassador, Yusuf Agah Efendi (1793-1797), and Anglo-Ottoman diplomatic relations at that time. Many Turkish and British historians have studied Anglo-Ottoman relations, but they have mostly neglected these relations during the embassy of Yusuf Agah. They have mainly concentrated on political, diplomatic, economic and military matters, but they have hardly touched matters concerning social and cultural relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Turkish historians have largely published documents about political, diplomatic and military subjects. These documents, sometimes in the original and sometimes in transcription, have been inserted into those studies without any critical analysis. Copies of several of these documents are available in British archives and libraries, both in translation and, rarely, in Turkish. Therefore, they can be profitably compared, and this has been done in the footnotes to each chapter. With a few exceptions historians have failed to produce scholarly studies using both the British and Turkish sources. The aim of this study is primarily to examine the activity of the first permanent Ottoman Embassy in London. This study is based extensively on materials from the Prime Minister's Archives, the libraries of Fatih Millet and the Sultan Ahmed III collection (Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi) in Istanbul, and from the Public Record Office and Oriental Library of the British Museum in London.

In this study, the documents published by Hammer, Uzunçarşılı, Karal, Unat and Fikirkoca are the most important. The work of Hammer, who translated Yusuf Agah's report of his Public Entry into the court of George III (r. 1760-1820) on 29 January 1795, is particularly important. Unfortunately, however he made a few mistakes at the beginning of his translation. His mistakes are as follows: firstly, Yusuf *Agha* is Yusuf Agah; secondly, *Tuesday*, the 8th of Rajab 1209 (29th January 1795) is Thursday. Uzunçarşılı is also prominent in this field ; he has dealt chiefly with Anglo-Ottoman political relations on the basis of the documents. He transliterated the documents located in the *Name-i Hümayun Defteri no: 9* about Yusuf Agah's letters of credentials and his presents for the king, the other members of the Royal family, the Prime Minister Pitt and the Foreign Minister Grenville. Unfortunately, some of his citations in his other works relating to the Ottoman institutions are open to serious criticism. Karal's work is more varied, comprehensive, and thorough. However, his studies based on these documents are not always reliable; his work contains many errors not only of fact, but in his citations and bibliographies, and some of his generalisations and conclusions are open to serious criticism. Nevertheless, his work in editing and making available documents from the Turkish archives has been fundamental and invaluable. He transliterated the conversation between the Reis Efendi and the British ambassador on 13 July 1793 about the establishment of the first permanent embassy to London (*mukaleme mazbatası*). Unat's work is also worth mentioning. Unfortunately, some of his citations and conclusions are open to criticism. Nevertheless, his work was based directly on the accounts of Yusuf Agah and Mahmud Raif. Fikirkoca translated part of Mahmud Raif's account from French into Turkish.

The historical works of Ottoman historians such as Vasif and Cevdet include the texts of documents and record contemporary accounts of events during the embassy of Yusuf Agah. Vasif (?- 1806) is especially important because he was a contemporary of Yusuf Agah. His work on this period is contained in a supplementary volume to the *Tarih-i Enveri* (April 1789-July 1794) which is used in this study. His work is extensively based on the archival materials with which I have compared similar documents in the Turkish archives in the footnotes. Cevdet (1822-1895) is the only historian in the field who gives a large amount of information about the establishment of the first permanent embassy and Yusuf Agah's embassy. In this thesis, Volume Six of his History has been extensively used. Some of his information about the early stages of the embassy of Yusuf Agah was derived largely from Vasif's work. This volume like his others was based to a very large extent on archival sources which he quotes or summarises. When he used archival sources, he rarely cited them inaccurately, but he also used



them in his own style. Cevdet recorded several accounts of the same event using European as well as Ottoman sources. His work is remarkably accurate and reliable, when he used the documentary sources of European archives. All in all, this work of Cevdet contains the most accurate and most comprehensive information about Yusuf Agah's embassy.

The Turkish archival sources for this period are very well known to many researchers, but have not been fully utilised. Therefore some brief comments might be useful. Firstly, the documents in the Prime Minister's Archive (*Başbakanlık Arşivi*) in Istanbul concerning this period in question are classified under different categories, such as the catalogues of the *Cevdet Hariciye (CH)*, and of the *Ali Emiri Selim III (AES III)*, and of the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* collection (*HH*), and of a volume of the *Name-i Hümayun Defteri* collection no: 9 (*NHD 9*). A volume of the *Bab-ı Defteri Başmuhasebe kalemî (DBSM)* figures also among the sources relating to this study.

*CH* contains a collection of documents, 9328 in total, concerning the foreign affairs of the Ottoman Empire. The documents collected in *CH* were catalogued by a team headed by Muallim Cevdet between 1932 and 1937, and the catalogues are written in Latin script. The documents in this collection are however in a bad condition compared to the other documents. The documents with which I am most concerned and which are mostly used for the first time in this study are the following. *CH 1555* contains three documents dated *Zilhicce 1210 / June-July 1796*, which are concerned with the recruitment of a certain French immigrant officer Oktavin. *CH 1730* consists of four documents dated *Cemaziyelevvel 1211 / November 1796*, which also deal with the employment of western experts, particularly Cooke (*Kok*), in the service of the Ottoman Empire. *CH 1896*, dated 5 *Rebiülevvel 1208 / 11 October 1793*, is related to the presents to be given by Yusuf Agah to the king of Britain. *CH 2307* contains three documents, dated *Şevval* and *Zilhicce 1208 / May-August 1794*, about the extra expenses of the Ottoman Embassy in London. All the names of Yusuf Agah's retinue can be found in these materials. *CH 2463*, dated 9 *Cemaziyyelahir 1211 / 10 December 1796*, is concerned with the letters of credentials of İsmail Ferruh Efendi to the king of Britain. Therefore, I can infer the likeliest date of his appointment to London as Yusuf Agah' successor. *CH 2653* contains three documents dated *Rebiülevvel 1211 / September-October 1796*. They deal with the salaries of the ambassador and his retinue of the same year. *CH 4250*, dated 13 *Receb 1208 / 14 February 1794*, notes the arrival of Yusuf Agah at London on 17 *Cemaziyelevvel 1208 (21 December 1793)*. *CH 4714* is a private letter of Yusuf Agah addressed to his close friend Ebubekir Efendi, the administrator of the imperial mint. This document has no date, but it must have been written

after his arrival to London. He explains in this letter his appointment, journey and first impression of his view about Britain. Although, this letter is referred to in Kuran's work, he could not have used it entirely. *CH 5064*, dated 25 *Receb* 1208 / 26 February 1794, is concerned with the extra expenses of Yusuf Agah and his retinue and his embassy's requirements such as the rent of a residence and coach for the ambassador. *CH 5706* dealt with the expenses and presents of the permanent ambassadors to Berlin, Vienna, Paris and London. It notes that Yusuf Agah's expenses and presents would be used as a model for these ambassadors in order to prepare future expenses and presents. It has no date, but it can be dated approximately to 1211 / 1796-1797. *CH 8785*, which deals with the expenses of the horses which were presented to the king, was dated *Safer* and *Rebiülevvel* 1208 / September-October 1793.

The catalogues of Ali Emiri are collections of documents concerning various topics in the day-to-day affairs of the Ottoman Empire from Osman I (1281-1324) to Abdülmecid (1839-1863). In this study only the documents concerning the reign of Selim III (1789-1807) will be considered. *AES III* was catalogued by Ali Emiri and his team between 1918 and 1921. The catalogues, which are written in Arabic script, contains altogether 24747 documents. The documents relevant to this subject have been used for the first time in this thesis. *AES III 3093*, dated 27 *Receb* 1207 / 10 March 1793, and *AES III 3095*, dated 19 *Safer* 1208 / 26 September 1793, are not very significant. However, *AES III 4903* is very important in this study for the following reasons : it contains four documents dated 1215 (1800-1801) which were written after the embassy of Yusuf Agah. These documents consist of correspondence between Seyyid Mehmed Tahir Efendi, one of the Muslim noblemen in the retinue of Yusuf Agah, and the Ottoman treasury. In these correspondences Seyyid Mehmed Tahir claimed his stipend sent by the order of the Sultan after he and his Turkish colleagues despatched treatises in French to the Porte. These documents also include information about the educational activities of the Ottoman Embassy in London and indicated how the stipend was spent by the ambassador.

The *Hatt-ı Hümayun* collections contain imperial rescripts by the Ottoman Sultans. There are 58,419 documents dating from 1713 to 1832. The catalogues of *HH* are written in the Latin script. Some of the documents in these catalogues have been seen by historians, but some are used here for the first time. *Name-i Hümayun Defteri* is a collection of correspondence between the Ottoman Sultans and Muslim and Christian states and vassal states. It also contains *hatt-ı hümayun* (imperial rescripts), *muahedename* (treaties), *ahdname* (pacts or treaties), *tasdikname* (letter of confirmations), and *temessiük* (title deed) etc. It also contains important correspondence between the Sultan and the Grand Vizier. There are 17 NHD's covering the period