# ON THE ROAD TO CARLOWITZ: VISIONS OF OTTOMAN DIPLOMACY IN THE LETTERS OF THOMAS COKE, 1691-1694*

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## I

Few individuals contributed as much to English knowledge of the Ottoman Empire in the late seventeenth century as Thomas Coke, despite his never having published a single work. Although he was described as early as 1672 as the secretary at the English embassy in Istanbul, Coke's presence in the Ottoman Empire goes back much further, at least to 1667 when Coke competed with Paul Rycaut for the consulship in Smyrna.[1] There exists earlier evidence too that suggests that some of Coke's earliest travels and voyages in the Mediterranean date to 1663, and the same journal also refers to a journey he made from Istanbul to Livorno in October 1664.[2] As *cancellarius*, or head of chancery, in the English embassy, Coke remains a ubiquitous presence in the background of most English documents produced in Istanbul in this period, his distinct handwriting easily identified by any scholars who have worked on English trade in the late seventeenth century. Even so, it is difficult to discern much about the man who spent nearly three decades of his life at the centre of the Levant Company's business in the Ottoman world. There are fleeting glimpses of certain quirks — Sir John Finch mentions his 'republican' sympathies, and Coke's own will records his ownership of a ring with his name written 'in Turkish characters' — but beyond such rare

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* In what follows, all references to the letters of Thomas Coke refer to the collection of letters found today in box 7, bundle 33 of William Paget's papers held in the Special Collections of the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. I have modernised all passages taken from his letters, and I have also changed any English renderings of Ottoman words into the corresponding terminology in Turkish. I am grateful to Colin Heywood for inviting me to submit a contribution to this collection, in spite of my having been unable to attend the original conference held in Sofia in 2014. Let me also note here that this paper is given as a small token of appreciation to Professor Heywood for his guidance, friendship and the example of his own meticulous research throughout the years.

[1] S. Anderson, *An English Consul in Turkey: Paul Rycaut in Smyrna, 1667-1678* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989), 234-5, 249, and 281. In his will, Coke referred to 'over one and twenty years' of service to the Levant Company, see SP 105/177, f. 24 in The National Archives (TNA) in Kew.

[2] 'The Journals of several voyages in the Mediterranean, &c., between 1663 and 1678, by T. Coke; with various memoranda', British Library, Add. MS 10130; the journey from Istanbul to Livorno is on f. 11.

anecdotal evidence, we know very little indeed about Coke's personality.[3] All that remains today is the huge amount of documentation he produced during his work for the Levant Company, a corpus of documents in which he is ever-present as author, compiler, recorder, or witness, but rarely the actual subject of his own writing. Even at his death in 1694, his will revealed more about his wife and sons than his own connections with the community of English merchants with whom he had lived and worked for nearly three decades.[4]

Although his importance has been the subject of passing comment by at least a few scholars, there remains as yet no complete study of Coke's role in both the social and intellectual history of Anglo-Ottoman relations.[5] This article cannot even begin to do justice to this subject in its entirety; instead I want to focus here on the few years of Coke's life during which he came closest to having a role to play in the ongoing negotiations that would culminate in the congress of Carlowitz. I have written elsewhere about Coke's role in the dissemination of news about the deposition of Mehmed IV in 1687.[6] But long before that, and indeed for several years after, Coke was responsible time and time again for writing up accounts of daily life and politics in the Ottoman capital that would eventually find their way into a diverse range of scribal and printed texts, including intelligence briefings, news accounts, and drafts of official dispatches sent to England, France, and other parts of the wider Mediterranean world. Indeed, Coke's pen provided the raw materials of the dispatches for a series of English ambassadors in Istanbul over a period of nearly three decades, which included the likes of Sir John Finch (1672-1681), James Brydges, the Eighth Baron Chandos

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[3] On allegations of his republican sympathies, see *Report on the Manuscripts of Allan George Finch, Esq., of Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland* (London, 1913-2004), vol. II, 157-61.

[4] Coke's wife complained after his death of the 'small part of his estate' assigned to her 'notwithstanding she brought so considerable a fortune to him', in the petition of Ann Coke to William Paget, 19 January 1694/5.

[5] In addition to Anderson, *An English consul in Smyrna*, see, for example, Colin Heywood's comments in 'An Undiplomatic Anglo-Dutch Dispute at the Porte: The Quarrel at Edirne between Coenraad van Heemskerck and Lord Paget (1693)', in A. Hamilton, A. H. de Groot, M. van den Boogert (eds.), *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, Brill, 2000), 59-94.

[6] 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), 122-158.

(1681-1687), Sir William Trumbull (1687-1691), Sir William Hussey (1691), Sir William Harbord (1691), and William Paget (1692-1701), until Coke's own death in late 1694. In the last years preceding his death, Coke served as an informant and regular correspondent to Paget, thereby giving Coke a small but interesting role to play in the ongoing negotiations that culminated in the congress of Carlowitz. Of course, Coke was long dead by the time the peace agreements were signed in 1699, but even so, his contributions to the subject-matter of this volume deserve further attention.

This is especially the case given how invaluable Coke's writings are when it comes to answering a set of wider questions about Ottoman diplomacy in this period. In the first instance, this is related to a methodological challenge: Coke's letters help balance the asymmetries in source production that plague the study of European and Ottoman diplomacy in this period. Because the Ottomans did not establish permanent embassies in Europe until the late eighteenth century, it has long been assumed that they lacked interest in, or inclination for, any sort of reciprocal diplomacy such as that which had emerged in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.[7] And without a permanent diplomatic staff established abroad, the Ottomans never produced anything like the reams of diplomatic correspondence that has become the subject of intense study by historians of European diplomacy in this same period.[8] Instead, Ottomanists have to satisfy themselves with occasional reports, for example *sefaretnāme*s or journals of embassies kept by envoys sent abroad. When placed against such sources, the long-running commentary provided by Coke's letters offer an account of Ottoman politics and diplomacy that surpasses the detail and duration of any other

[7] For a classic formulation of this idea, see J.C. Hurewitz, 'Ottoman Diplomacy and the European State System' (1961) *Middle East Journal* 15.2, 141-152. For a general introduction to the study of Ottoman diplomacy, see the articles collected in A. Nuri Yurdusev, *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[8] See, for example, T. A. Sowerby, J. Hennings (eds.), *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World, c. 1410-1800* (London, Routledge, 2017).

type of source, not least given Coke's own embeddedness in the heart of political life in the capital over such a long period.

But Coke's writings are important for a second reason that has something to do with the diversity of perspectives brought together in his letters. When compared with the univocal and often retrospective nature of Ottoman diplomats and chroniclers, few sources offer as detailed a vision into Ottoman decision-making as it unfolded from one day to the next and as it varied across the perspectives of individual Ottoman decision-makers. Perhaps this is the reason why certain traditional ideas about Ottoman diplomacy continue to persist in Ottoman historiography, not least the idea that until Carlowitz the Ottomans had only engaged in unilateral diplomacy for short periods of time because of a deep-rooted reluctance to relinquish lands that had once been ruled over by Muslims. This may be true, of course, however the acknowledgment of these realities assumes a certain coherence of purpose that is more akin to modern policy positions than it is to the nature of decision-making in the early modern period. At the very least, it leaves little room for understanding how Ottoman officials — and indeed a wider public of Ottoman subjects — differed, and sometimes disagreed, in their opinions about the course of war and general relations with foreign powers. This is reinforced, as noted in the introduction to this volume, by the general dearth of studies of particular statesmen or factions in Ottoman politics, as much for the seventeenth century as for earlier periods. Yet although we are still very far from the sort of intensive studies of European statesmen that have existed since the 1980s,[9] there have been a slew of recent works that have enabled us to better understand Ottoman officials: they increasingly appear less as the caricatures they once were and more as three-dimensional figures with particular agendas, policy preferences, and individual idiosyncrasies.[10] All of this promises

[9] I think, for example, of John H. Elliott's now classic study of *Richelieu and Olivares* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[10] For some notable examples, see Y. Yılmaz, 'Grand Vizieral Authority Revisited: Köprülüs' legacy and Kara Mustafa Paşa', (2016) *Mediterranean Historical Review* 31.1, 21-42; Marc Baer's study of Mehmed

to transform the study of Ottoman diplomacy into a more complicated, attentive, and empathetic understanding of Ottoman officials and their exchanges with their enemies, allies, and neighbours.

Of particular relevance here are some 59 letters that Thomas Coke wrote to William Paget over the period of 1691 to 1694. These letters are held today among the collection of Paget Papers housed in the School of Oriental and African Studies, first studied to great effect by Colin Heywood.[11] During this period, Paget was first the English ambassador in Vienna (1689-1692) before he was appointed to the ambassadorship in Istanbul in June 1692. Coke's letters, therefore, cover a rather unlucky period for the embassy in Istanbul during which not one, but two, English ambassadors died, namely Sir William Hussey in Edirne and Sir William Harbord whose death took place while he was travelling to take up his post in Istanbul. The first of Coke's letters dates to news of the death of Hussey in September 1691 and the last dates to sometime during or after June 1694, by which point Coke had fallen ill. He would die a few months later. Throughout this period, Coke offered to Paget one letter after another full of close detailed accounts of political developments in the capital, ranging from such things as changes in appointments, Ottoman attitudes to war, preparations related to Paget's arrival, and much more. The rest of this article presents some of the most important aspects of these letters, particularly with regard to what they reveal about Ottoman diplomacy in this critical period of war leading up to the Treaty of Carlowitz.

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IV in *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008); and Giancarlo Casale's study of the factions that developed around Ottoman policy in the Red Sea in *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010). I have not yet had the opportunity to consult a recently completed dissertation by M. Fatih Calisir, *A 'Virtuous' Grand Vizier: Politics and Patronage in the Ottoman Empire during the Grand Vizierate of Fazıl Ahmed Pasha (1661-1676)* (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 2016).

[11] C. J. Heywood, *English diplomacy between Austria and the Ottoman Empire in the war of the Sacra Liga, 1684-1699, with special reference to the period 1688-1699* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1970).

## II

Running across all of Coke's dispatches from 1692 until 1694 is the recurring theme of Ottoman refusal to seek peace. Yet within this context, Coke's letters also provide an interesting view of attitudes to war held by particular Ottoman officials as well as a wider circle of popular opinion. On the one hand, Coke's reports reinforce the idea, prevalent in Ottoman historiography, that Ottoman officials absolutely rejected any possibility of giving up land that had once been in the possession of Muslims. His description of the negotiations between the Poles and the Ottomans are a case in point. In January 1694, Coke described how negotiations had fallen apart over the Ottoman refusal to relinquish the fortress of Kamenets-Podolsk in Podolia. As Coke described it, 'the Grand Signore was very reticent to give his consent to this, it being a place taken by an Ottoman emperor in person, who had also made mosques there, and without a *fetva* of the mufti of the legality of it, [he] would not approve it'.[12] It is worth noting, however, that the sultan's unwillingness to give up lands formerly held by Muslims appeared to Coke at least as a political matter rather than a religious one. Indeed, disagreement on the issue appears to have existed among the Ottomans. Coke reported that the Grand Mufti himself actually sanctioned the handing over of Podolia: the 'Mufti was ready to give the *fetva*, as lawful, being for the benefit of the empire, and good of the Muslims,' apparently because of the Mufti's opinion that the mosques themselves were of no military importance if left in 'the hands of the infidels'.[13]

Evidence of some sort of blanket opposition to relinquishing land once possessed by Muslims is interlaced in Coke's letters by another theme, one that emphasises the extent to which Ottoman perseverance in the war was a consequence of the routine shuffling of appointments, especially of grand viziers, that took place in Ottoman officialdom. In

[12] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 31 January 1693/4.
[13] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 31 January 1693/4.

February 1692, this is how Coke described the role of local politics in the continuation of the war.

> Experience has shown that in all this war, though they have had so many great losses, such intestine embroils (of which they are now clear), frequent changes, eight viziers, three grand signores, yet they have been ever averse to peace. Every new Vizier will try his fortune in the field, it being a general opinion, that the Vizier who makes the peace, [even if] it be confirmed and kept, yet he will be sacrificed for a peace offering.[14]

Likewise, in a letter to Harbord on the same day, Coke makes a similar suggestion, this time in a way that highlights the real conundrum faced by Ottoman grand viziers in this period.

> There is no hopes of peace, and the more it is pressed, the remoter it is. I have long since wrote this, but I cannot justly expect any regard should be had to the words of so inconsiderable a person. What may happen upon an unlucky campaign, God alone knows, and the usual consequence is a new Vizier, who will try his fortune, and by squeezing the creatures of the last [vizier] and the rich men, added to the revenues, fails not to afford for a new Army. Whoever makes a peace running the danger of his head, he concludes it better to try his stars in the field, which if successful will advance and establish him in glory, [rather] than fall into a certain destruction.[15]

Where religious motivations are sometimes too easily invoked as an explanation for Ottoman decision-making in this period, Coke's letters remind us that the Ottoman commitment to war was also the product of an unpredictable, and constantly changing, political climate in which newly-appointed viziers knew well that the price of peace was likely to be their own political career and perhaps even their lives.

All of this suggests that in 1692 peace was a plausible and arguably even desirable outcome in the minds of at least some Ottoman subjects. That this issue was also being considered in popular discussion is clear from Coke's reports about Çalik ʿAli Pasha, who was appointed grand vizier on 27 March 1692 following the dismissal of Arabacı Ali Pasha, and who had once been a member of the household of Kara Mustafa Pasha. When Coke reported the news of his appointment, Coke also described how there was a 'conceit among

[14] Coke to Paget, Constantinople, 17/27 February 1691/2.
[15] Coke to Harbord, Constantinople, 17/27 February 1691/2.

the people [that] one Ali shall resettle the Empire, and this is the man'.[16] Moreover, anxiety about the ongoing war also reflected itself in a series of public bans on the use of tobacco, which were reported by Coke in November 1693.[17] As suggested by James Grehan and Marc Baer in other contexts, such concerns about the use of tobacco reflected larger anxieties about political change, sedition, and religious purity, especially in times of war.[18] Indeed, further research into the papers of James Brydges, Thomas Coke, and William Trumbull — all of which contained regular accounts of popular attitudes to the ongoing war — might shed further light on whether coffeehouses in this period had become a site for the expression of popular opinion for or against the ongoing war.

Alongside Ottoman attitudes to war, Coke's letters also offer an interesting glimpse into Ottoman reluctance to accept English offers for mediating a peace. Of course, this would be the ultimate outcome of Paget's time in Istanbul, but in the early years of his embassy, Coke's missives paint a very different picture of Ottoman rebuffs of English offers at mediation. In one of his earliest letters to Paget, for example, this was how Coke described the imminent arrival of Sir William Hussey in February 1692.

> In my weak opinion, our new Ambassador ought not to mention to the Porte anything of mediation, or of peace, but seem to be as indifferent and cold in it as they. For our pressing it, is thrusting it backwards, and if the Turks do not desire it, or being obliquely hinted, if they do not meet it half way, but ask what have you to propose, and say nothing themselves, there can be no good success.[19]

Over a year later, in December 1693, Coke's message to Paget, appointed a year after the death of Hussey, was much the same. He warned Paget that Ottoman officials were uninterested in his attempts to travel to Edirne, mainly because it was associated in their minds with English attempts to mediate a peace. Instead, he wrote, 'They are resolved for

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[16] Coke to Paget, Constantinople, 7 April 1692.

[17] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 30 November 1693; cf. the ignoring of the ban in Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 11 December 1693.

[18] Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, p. 66; J. Grehan, 'Smoking and "Early Modern" Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries)', (2006) *American Historical Review* 111.5, 1352-1377.

[19] Coke to Paget, Constantinople, 17/27 February 1691/2.

war, and will not hear of any treaty. This is a thing determined and they are people not easily persuaded to change'.[20] Even so, Coke would spend the last months of his life doing all he could to prepare Paget's arrival in such a way as to enable his attempts to make peace. And given that Coke was expressing such views about Ottoman opposition to English mediation only six months before Paget's arrival, it is a testament to Paget's efficacy and success that he would ultimately play a central role in the peace negotiations.

The general picture of Ottoman attitudes to war that emerges from Coke's letters is far from the decisive and monolithic perspective sometimes suggested in accounts of Ottoman diplomacy in this period. It is true that in the years during which Coke was writing to Paget, there was a clear position among many Ottoman officials against making peace with their enemies. Yet the reasons for this surely could differ from one group to another. For some, the reluctance to make peace was clearly borne of a refusal to give up land that had once been held by Muslims. Yet for many others, especially new viziers faced with the unenviable task of determining a course of policy, continued war was preferred to peace given the very real costs that a peace would have on their own career, reputation, and lives. Not surprising, therefore, that Ottoman officials remained uninterested in English offers of mediating a peace.

## III

Beyond the general picture of Ottoman attitudes to war and diplomacy, Coke's letters also offer a detailed and fascinating account of political culture and developments taking place in everyday politics in the Ottoman capital. These reports are worth further research given the insights they offer into specific bouts of factionalism and rivalry between particular officials and their households in the 1690s. As noted by Colin Heywood and Ivan Parvev in the introduction to this volume, and elsewhere by Yasir Yılmaz, the emphasis on religion in

[20] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 23 December 1693.

Ottoman studies has sometimes meant that scholars have not taken seriously enough phenomena related to power struggles, competition between elites, and political travails in understanding Ottoman decision-making.[21] In this respect, Coke's letters offer a treasure trove of contemporary intelligence about specific individuals, which is otherwise difficult to glean from any other types of sources in this period. Here, I will confine myself to one revealing, albeit lengthy, example drawn from Coke's account of the political repercussions following the appointment of the grand vizier Arabacı ʿAli Pasha at the end of August 1691.

> The vizier ʿAli Pasha takes the usual course of all viziers, to secure himself by removing all [who have given] him umbrage, out of the world, or out of the way. The pashas that were turbulent in the Army, and for having Halil Pasha vizier he has cut off, and Halil, one 80 years old where ambition was frozen, and declined the viziership, is divested of all his employments, and has an assignment made him ... to pass the remainder of his days in retirement. Topall Ussine Pasha is made *serasker* in his place.
>
> Ibrahim Pasha of Negrepont who defended that place against Doge Morosini, who also was talked on for vizier is ordered to go as Pasha to Basra on the Gulf of Persia, to be remote, on pretext to quiet affairs there, which are in some disorder, the Arabs having killed Osman Pashaoğlu Pasha of that place. Of the four chief Councils of the late vizier, Hakimoğlu, *kazasker* for the matters of the law, he was gently laid aside. Those people ever fall easily.
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> Ismael Effendi, Lord Treasurer, on his arrival at Adrianople was imprisoned in the gate of the Seraglio, & run danger of his head, but redeemed it with a 100m crowns.
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> Mahmet Aga, *kahya-beğ* of the janissaries, and chief director of the Military affairs, and after the death of the Janissary Ağa in the battle his successor, was highly caressed by this vizier and contributed much to his establishment, by settling things in the Army, & keeping all quiet, with a pure aim only at the public good, that the Grand Signore having named one vizier, the Army should not set up another, and put all in confusion, after his arrival at Adrianople, no man had more the Vizier's favour. He had the superintendence of the military affairs as in the last Vizier's time, was consulted in all occasions. But after 15 days, there was this pretext taken to remove him. The Caravan from Mecca of Pilgrims, which is ever very rich (the concourse there from all parts making it the greatest fare in the world) was robbed in the deserts by the Arabs, to a great value, several women (among whom the old Tartar Han's) carried away. So the Vizier got an order from the Grand Signore that the Janissary Ağa should be made *amir al-hajj*, the pasha who conducts the Pilgrims to Mecca. So the Vizier calls him one morning, and being come, and sat down in the Company, the Vizier rose and went out, saying he would return presently and going into another room, where was the *cebecibaşı*, whom he had sent for, he told him the Grand Signore

[21] Yasir Yılmaz, 'Grand Vizieral Authority Revisited: Köprülüs' legacy and Kara Mustafa Paşa'.

> had made him Janissary Ağa, and bidding him go and keep them in good order, returning he said to the deposed one, Brother Pasha, the Grand Signore by his Imperial Command makes you *amir al-hajj,* and confers this honor on you, confiding in your prudence, & conduct, to chastise those who disturb the holy pilgrimage, go immediately to Constantinople and fit yourself for this holy journey. So a coach being ready he was put into it and sent away. On the road he left his people and came alone hither, where finding his house sealed up, a certain sign of death, he endeavoured to escape into Asia, but was taken the 17th December and 24th [by the] janissaries strangled, his body exposed a short time at the Seraglio Gate, and by the Janissary Ağa here buried at Scutari. The import of his Estate found was 150m dollars. He was an able man, of great capacity for government of the soldiers, strict justice, and ardent zeal for the public. The cause of his ruin was partly an old grudge of the Vizier's to him. For being Janissary Ağa in Köprülü's time, and the other *kahya-beğ*, he was but a cipher Mahmet Ağa acting all, and slighting him: all this was dissembled and when he came from Belgrade, and all the great caresses made him, the Vizier's *kahya* sent one to entrap him in his discourse, and being a man of no great reserve, and thinking he spoke to a confidant, said, the Vizier was a good man, and well intentioned for the public good, but of little practice in government & dull. But what precipitated him was, transported with an unpolitic zeal for the service of the Empire, and falsely believing he was really in the Vizier's favor, he told him he knew well what persons were fit to be made pashas for the war, desiring he might nominate them whom he was sure would do good service. This was interpreted as if he would get all the power into his own hands, and set up himself. For if to his command of the janissaries were added the nomination of the pashas, the whole Army would be at his devotion. So his ruin was resolved, and he died a State Martyr, generally compassioned as having done nothing to deserve that fate, and being useful to the Empire in this conjuncture.
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> There remains now only Bekir Effendi, *rais effendi*, employed by the late vizier for the Political affairs. It is evident he's not in that regard he was in the time of the last vizier. It's Ibrahim Ağa, the vizier's *kahya*, who governs all. The Court is made by all to him.[22]

The extract above has been included in its entirety to give a sense of just how detailed was the information that Coke provided to his correspondents. But before saying something below about where and how Coke obtained such information, it is worth noting here three important aspects of these reports in Coke's letters.

First, there is a clear indication that Coke's long residence in the capital, combined with his access to information from informants and contemporaries, adds a layer of depth to the study of Ottoman politics that is difficult to obtain from Ottoman sources alone. At the

[22] Coke to Paget, Constantinople, 18 February 1691/2. On this ʿAli Pasha, who was himself dismissed a month after Coke's despatch, see C. J. Heywood, 'Arabacı Ali Paşa', in Kate Fleet et. al., *The Encyclopedia of Islam Three* (Leiden, Brill, 2017), vol. I, 6-8.

least, it offers a window into how motivations and grudges played out in politics, an important reminder that even in the context of total war, decisions about governance were also impacted by the circumstances of particular relations played out in the realm of court politics. Second, across all of Coke's letters during this period, there is a good deal of attention given to the changing fortunes of individuals in a way that refers back constantly to their own relations with members of the Köprülü household. Not only is this a sign of the continued relevance of ties to Köprülü household even as late as the 1690s, but more to the point, there is a real sense in Coke's letters that this period witnessed the sorting out of a set of factional conflicts that dated back to the 1660s. Of particular interest to Coke was the legacy of Kara Mustafa Pasha, the man who had effectively brought the empire to war in the first place with his ill-fated siege of Vienna in 1683. In a letter sent to Paget in January 1694, Coke's description of the newly-appointed *silahdar* focused on the ties that connected the servants of various officials, all of which had served at one time or another in the household of Kara Mustafa Pasha: '[The silahdar's] *kahya* is one Ali Ağa, formerly *hasnadar* to Mehmed, *kahya* of Cara Mustapha [Pasha]; and the present *kahya* of the vizier [Bozoklu Mustafa Pasha] was at the same time his *muherdar*, they were fellow pages'.[23] Finally, the microscopic details provided by Coke are not, strictly-speaking, only relevant to diplomacy; rather they offer a picture of how emotion, relationships, and kinship played into political culture in the Ottoman capital. In February 1694, for example, Coke described the disorder in Istanbul arising from a conflict between the Kizlar Ağa and the Grand Vizier. As Coke reported it, 'The Vizier would willingly be rid of his office, could he do it with safety and name his successor. His wife seeks to accommodate things between him and the *Kizlar Ağa*. What success she may have I know not, but they seem to be too far advanced for a sincere

[23] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 4 January 1693/4.

reconciliation, the Vizier having unsuccessfully attempted his removal from the Court.'[24] Such reports give evidence of phenomena that are not always adequately represented in either Ottoman chronicles or European ambassadorial dispatches.

The abundance of detail in Coke's letters begs the question of where and how he obtained such information. I have described elsewhere how Coke managed to obtain information about the deposition of Mehmed IV as events unfolded in November 1687.[25] Similarly, in his letters to Paget, Coke offers several clues about his links to a well-informed circle of contacts within Ottoman officialdom. In his attempts to prepare the way for Paget's arrival in Istanbul, for example, Coke tells Paget that he is unable to meet privately with the grand vizier, but only that whenever he can see him others will be present — the *rais effendi,* the *teskerecis,* and others in the Vizier's court — and 'these people keep nothing secret'.[26] Coke's letters also reveal the power of scribes and bureaucrats when it comes to the business of diplomacy and trade. In a letter sent to Paget in January 1694, Coke described the travails of the English nation in their encounters with a powerful scribe.

> To complain of this man is in vain for he is the only knowing man in the Secretaria, and has the *rais effendi*'s beard in his hand, who leaves all to him and tells the Vizier he must consult him in drawing up orders as more practiced and skilful then himself. To speak to the Vizier will not turn him out of this place and all our business must necessarily pass his hands. He treats all people alike — even his dear friends the French all cry out of him — but all are forced to comply with him for he stands in awe of nobody.[27]

Not only was this a complaint about the power of a single scribe, but it also captures the importance of writing more generally in the business of diplomacy in the Ottoman capital. As Coke put it in a subsequent letter, 'Till we come to an accommodation with this beast, we can take out no commands for by ill wording them he will make them useless'.[28]

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[24] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 20 February 1693/4.
[25] Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities*, pp. 122-158.
[26] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 23 December 1693.
[27] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 4 January 1693/4.
[28] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 22 January 1693/4.

Writing was not strictly a concern in terms of English trade, but it is clear that the mechanics of Ottoman decision-making about diplomacy offered opportunities for outsiders to obtain and consult documents under consideration by Ottoman officials. In one letter to Paget, Coke includes an Italian translation of a Turkish document that he has obtained, which related to the negotiations between the Ottomans and the Poles.

> All pains and diligence is sued to give Your Excellency the most exact information and Signore L[uca Barcha] does bestir himself. The Turkish copy of the enclosed paper cannot send, he that gave it requiring it back, not permitting that under his own character to be out of his hand, and I fear there will not be time to transcribe it by the conveyance but shall go by the next, the person that gave it expects a good watch, of which Signor Luca will advise your Lordship. For such things money must be spent, and without it nothing can be done here.[29]

In this instance, at least, it is clear that Europeans in the diplomatic community in Istanbul could gain access to Ottoman documents, works and treatises, but what is especially striking here is that Coke appears to be privy to notes on negotiations circulating within the Ottoman bureaucracy. This is not to say that this information was uncritically accepted: indeed, a few days later, Coke wrote to Paget to warn him that a copy of an Ottoman letter that he had sent to him in translation, which purported to be a copy of a letter given to the Dutch representative Heemskerck, differed in important details from the actual letter given to Heemskerck. He wondered whether this was foul play on the part of the scribe, but either way he had obtained a copy of the 'real letter', promising to send on the Turkish original when he could obtain it.[30]

One further aspect of Coke's letters relates specifically to Ottoman attitudes to treaty-making and alliances, a subject of recurring interest among scholars of early modern diplomacy. In January 1694, Coke reported what struck him as an interesting development in Istanbul: 'I know not what the design is but by order of the *rais effendi*, the scribes are

[29] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 25 January 1693/4. At the end of the letter the post-script reads 'the Turkish paper being transcribed is herein enclosed with the translation in Italian'. No Italian translation is present.

[30] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 25 January 1693/4.

copying out ours and the Dutch capitulations'.[31] A few weeks later, Coke reports again that the capitulations — now for the Dutch, the English and the French — have been copied but that he cannot understand to what purpose: all he knows is that the *rais effendi* keeps them near his person.[32] But by the middle of February, Coke was finally able to get to the bottom of the matter, which appears to have involved an Ottoman enquiry into the treatment of European merchants whose countries were at war with the Ottomans. On 15 February, Coke wrote that 'there is a *hatt-i sharif* [or imperial command] given ordering all Venetians to go out of the empire under what protection so ever and none of their shops to trade under any *bandiera* in Turkey. It was about the protection of those in hostility with for which the capitulations were copied and examined.'[33] For all the talk of feigned respect for treaties among the Ottomans before Carlowitz, this incident suggests that some officials at least took very seriously indeed the *ahdnāme*s that had been issued to European powers by the Ottoman sultan. Here we have evidence not only of official interest in the capitulations as a basis for diplomatic agreements, but even of a coordinated endeavour to consult and copy out archival documents for consultation in the making of policy. Again, the episode underlines the importance of individuals, contexts and particular circumstances to making sense of the practice of Ottoman diplomacy.

Indeed, what I have tried to do in this chapter is to highlight the extent to which sources like Coke's letters to Paget promise to transform our understanding of the daily mechanics and practice of Ottoman diplomacy. In some ways, this simply reflects the momentum of the so-called new history of diplomacy, with its concomitant focus on expanding the study of diplomacy beyond individual ambassadors, widening the range of genres under study beyond diplomatic dispatches to other sources including journals, drafts of correspondence, and consular accounts, and extending attention to events and

[31] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 22 January 1693/4.
[32] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 5 February 1693/4.
[33] Coke to Paget, Adrianople, 15 February 1693/4.

conversations taking place on the ground and not just within the formal and official business of diplomatic meetings, treaties and alliances. Even today, many alleged certainties persist when it comes to the study of Ottoman diplomacy and warfare, especially for the last half of the seventeenth century. For this reason, it is sometimes too easy to view Ottoman attitudes to war as one of stubbornness, a reluctance to consider peace, and influenced mainly by religious considerations, but a closer look at the daily circumstances of diplomacy and the actual individuals involved in it suggests a more nuanced vision of Ottoman diplomacy in the years leading up to Carlowitz. Indeed, it remains difficult to dislodge such traditional views if we continue to perch on high at the level of ambassadors, grand viziers, and sultans — whether Ottoman, British or European — without also taking into account how the view look from the perspective of mere mortals like Thomas Coke. Viewed through the kaleidoscopic letters of Thomas Coke, Ottoman diplomacy at Carlowitz appears more nuanced than we know it, more complicated by disagreements, and more hostage to personal impulses that were rooted in the careers, grudges, and hopes for renewal of an entire generation of Ottoman officials. This may be a more impressionistic vision of Ottoman diplomacy than we are perhaps used to, but it is one that is worth taking very seriously indeed if we are to obtain a clearer understanding of the wider changes and transformations of Ottoman diplomacy that took place in the centuries before and after the Treaty of Carlowitz.