

THE BRITISH AMBASSADORS TO ISTANBUL IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: SOURCES OF INTELLIGENCE AND POLITICAL REPORTING

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Besides negotiating, the basic task of any ambassador is to report on the conditions of the country in which he is living. These include the policy of the host government and require him to provide accounts of his conversations with political leaders, officials, and anyone else who has illuminated the local scene for him.¹ Today the ambassador is expected to be more concerned with the realities permanently smouldering behind any event than with the intermittent blaze in the foreground. This is the responsibility upon his shoulders, which indeed makes his reports more serious than the writings of a news correspondent. However, the ambassador's work in getting accurate information was much more difficult to accomplish in the past, because of poor communication facilities,² scarcity of sources of information and differences in culture and mentality between the home and host countries. This was particularly true for the British representative in the Ottoman Empire.

This article mainly seeks to illuminate the specific methods and main sources used by the British ambassadors in Istanbul to obtain accurate intelligence for their reports to the Foreign Office.

Sources of Intelligence

Dragomans

In spite of general Foreign Office discontent with the interpreter service, the dragomans³ played an indispensable role in the cultivation of local

¹ H. Trevelyan, *Diplomatic Channels* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 85.

² In the case of British ambassadors in Istanbul, there were serious difficulties in getting from one place to another even within the city. This made communication with their agents, especially in winter, almost impossible and hindered the writing of comprehensive reports.

³ For a general information about the dragomans see A. Cunningham, 'The Dragomans of the British Embassy at Constantinople' in (ed) Edward Ingram *Eastern Question in the Nineteenth Century Collected Essays* Vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 1-23 ; G. R. Berridge 'English dragomans and oriental

contacts and the promotion of intelligence activities. Ambassadors sometimes sent their dragomans to obtain information in different parts of the Ottoman territories, especially when a crisis occurred.⁴ Among the activities of British Embassy dragomans in the mid-nineteenth century, those of Richard Wood are particularly worthy of mention in this context.

Following the death of his father George Wood in 1834, Richard Wood succeeded him as a dragoman to the British Embassy. Although he was the most junior *giovane* then in the embassy service⁵, he quickly became the ambassador's most trusted friend, adviser, interpreter, and agent. Indeed, it is evident that he had acquired more confidence on the part of the Ambassador than any dragoman before or afterwards⁶, in part because he was English by birth.

This unique relationship, and the copious correspondence between Ponsonby and Wood that it inspired, began in 1834 with the latter's return from Syria⁷ and flourished without a break until 1841. Because of Wood's competence in Arabic as well as some other languages⁸ and his extensive knowledge of the Eastern part of Anatolia, Syria and its adjacent areas, he was sent to these places on several occasions and 'commissioned to provide political intelligence alone'.⁹ According to Cunningham, 'his reports were the most consecutive and authoritative statements of the period, and had a wider sweep than anything the consuls in Syria could provide. Important personalities like Amir Bashir al-Shihab, major political groups like the

secretaries: the early nineteenth-century origins of the Anglicization of the British embassy *drogmanat* in Constantinople', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 14, no. 4, Dec. 2003, pp. 137-152; Maurits H. Van Den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and Beratlis in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 64-67; Alexander H. De Groot, "Dragomans Careers: Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829", <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/tcimo/tulp/research.htm>, pp. 1-16.

⁴ In 1827, Stratford Canning sent one of his dragomans, George Wood, as an observer to Greece during the time of the Greek independence movement. George Wood sent detailed reports on this affair. The National Archives (Hereafter TNA), FO 78/154, Stratford Canning to George Canning, 29 May 1827.

⁵ See A. B. Cunningham (Ed), *The Early Correspondence of Richard Wood 1831-1841*, Camden Fourth Series Vol. 3, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1966), p. 7.

⁶ Most of the dragomans in the British Embassy were coming from the Levantine origin and were the subject of the Sultan.

⁷ He went to Syria to learn Arabic with the approval of Mandeville, the chargé d'affaires of the British Embassy. He stayed there for two years.

⁸ He was competent in Italian, French, Greek and Turkish.

⁹ Cunningham, *Op cit.*, in footnote 5, 8.

Maronites and the Druses, and the character of the Egyptian occupation, were first introduced to official British opinion through the investigations of Ponsonby's indefatigable dragoman.¹⁰ He sent a series of highly appreciated reports which made an important contribution to the formation of British policy towards Syria.¹¹

However, Richard Wood's reports were not only limited to Syria because the ambassador had urgent demands for information on many subjects. These were responded to with a steady flow of reports on the part of the dragoman. Ponsonby asked Wood's opinion on various matters, even when he was not in Istanbul,¹² and there is no doubt that his services helped much towards the success of his embassy.

Of course, familiarity with the culture brought considerable fruits to the dragomans. They had special contacts of their own through which they obtained significant information on the present state of affairs in Istanbul, including relations between the Christians and Muslims. Sometimes their intelligence in advance on specific events such as anti-Christian activities in the city was crucially important. In many instances, the dragomans obtained their information from agents of their own whose identity they appear to have kept secret from the diplomatic staff of the embassy.¹³

Sometimes, the ambassadors sent their dragomans to high Ottoman officials in order to give them intelligence from the British consuls about matters in which they knew them to have some interest, such as the present state of affairs in critical areas of the Sultan's dominions.¹⁴ This enabled them both to test the validity of their own information, and to inquire into

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ TNA, FO 78/272, Palmerston to Ponsonby, 1 September 1836.

¹² Cunningham, *Op cit.*, in footnote 5, pp. 41-276.

¹³ For example Etienne Pisani reported that on 25 June last and the eighth day of Ramadan, an imam from Kaisaris preaching at the Mosque of Sultan Mohamed, addressed a large congregation there assembled in the most revolutionary and anti-Christian manner, abusing the person of the Sultan in a very shameful way, condemning the present administration and calling the ministers *grievous* (infidels), because they were favouring the Christians. Pisani refrained from giving the name or status of his agent, since that communication had been made to him in the strictest confidence. TNA, FO 195/384, E. Pisani to Rose, 14 July 1852.

¹⁴ In 1847, Etienne Pisani, on the instruction of the ambassador, communicated Consul Blank's despatch respecting the situation in Albania and Montenegro to the Porte. On the request of the Ottoman minister, Pisani translated the despatches concerned into Ottoman Turkish. In return, the Ottoman minister provided the dragoman with his own sources of information. The Ottoman Minister was very pleased with this communication. TNA, FO 195/289, E. Pisani to Crowley, 2 June 1847.

the views of the Ottoman officials about the matter in hand. At best, this type of communication also produced increasing Ottoman confidence in, and respect for the British Embassy.

The Dragomans had daily duties to perform. They had to go five days a week to the Porte, either riding over those wretched roads in the winter or going in the summer in their caique.¹⁵ They usually attended upon the Grant Vizier, or rather upon the Minister of Foreign Affairs, every day, and saw if there was any communication that he wished to make.¹⁶ On the basis of their interview with the ministers, the dragomans produced daily reports to the ambassadors in written forms. Without the dragomans, the British Embassy 'should certainly be the worst informed embassy in Istanbul as to all that was going on both in the country and foreign negotiations.'¹⁷

It was also the responsibility of the dragomans to report on the visitors from other missions who attended Ottoman high officials, especially the Sultan himself.¹⁸ They provided the ambassadors with detailed information about the visitor, the time of the visit, the persons who accompanied him, how long he stayed there and the probable subjects discussed. On the slippery ground of Ottoman politics, in a place of constant struggle to influence the Sultan, to know about his visitors was of special importance for the British ambassadors.

The interpreters of the Embassy, owing to their lengthy intercourse with ruling circles in Istanbul, also had acquaintance with the Ottoman representatives sent abroad. Thanks to this, they were able to get information from them on their return about the places where they had been on duty.

¹⁵ H. G. Elliot, *British Parliamentary Papers* (Hereafter BPP), Select Committee on Constitution of Diplomatic and Consular Service, 1870 (382), Q. 928.

¹⁶ The usual practice was to go to the waiting-room, and to wait. When the dragoman was to know to be there, he was called in. He was either told by the Minister that he had nothing to say him or he was given some piece of information. In the latter case, by the desire of the Minister, the dragoman was able to get a copy of the despatch or the substance of it from the under secretary. Then he was responsible to report to the ambassador. *Ibid.*, Q. 882.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Q. 971.

¹⁸ The registers of the letters from the Dragomans are full of such information. For example, Etienne Pisani reports to Hugh Rose, Chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, that 'Mr. De Lavallette, accompanied by Mr. Astatine and Mr. Benedetti, the first and second interpreter of the French Embassy, and by the several of the officers of the Charlemagne (French Ship), paid his visit to the Porte, the Capudan Pasha, the Seraskier and Ahmed Fethee Pasha.' TNA, FO 195/384, Pisani to Rose, 28 July 1852. In another document, Stephen (Etienne) Pisani informs Stratford Canning about the visit of Mr. De Samartine to the Sultan and the details of his audience. TNA, FO 195/352, Pisani to Canning, 6 July 1850.

This was very useful for the embassy, simply because such intelligence from a different source provided the ambassador with an opportunity to check the accuracy of the reports of his consuls scattered over the different parts of the Ottoman territories.¹⁹

When necessary, dragomans together with the oriental secretary²⁰ also collected military intelligence. For this purpose they periodically visited the barracks in and adjacent to Istanbul and Uskudar, and had negotiations with the different Pashas about the number of troops in Syria, Egypt and other places of the Empire. On the basis of these inquiries, they prepared reports on what they learnt about imperial guards, and the number of troops, regulars, guns, etc.²¹ Any material change in the strength and distribution of naval forces was also the concern of the embassy and thus the dragomans, and extensive reports were prepared.²² From 1841 onwards, however, an annual report on this subject each spring was seen as sufficient in time of peace.²³

The dragomans of the British Embassy also had contacts with the dragoman families serving the other foreign missions in Istanbul,²⁴ and from time to time gathered information from them. Of course, this sometimes worked in the opposite direction, that is to say, the British dragomans could divulge embassy information to the representatives of other embassies as well.

¹⁹ This procedure was adopted, for example, following Consul Abbot's report from Kerman on the presence and the activities of some Englishmen in Bokhara. The dragoman, Stephen Pisani, called on the agent from Bokhara and also applied to El Hadge El Sheikh Mehemed Effendi, an old acquaintance, who had previously been Ottoman ambassador to Bokhara. Pisani asked them what light they could throw on the Englishmen referred in Abbot's letter. TNA, FO 195/352, S. Pisani to Canning, 24 July 1850.

²⁰ The institution of Oriental Secretary was a distinguished post, but was not unique to the Constantinople Embassy. The person fitted for the task had, first of all, to be a natural born Englishman, because it was a purely diplomatic post placed between the secretary of embassy and the attachés. Secondly, he had to be acquainted with the native tongues and the different languages of the Levant. Therefore, in case of necessity, and in the absence of the first dragoman, he was responsible for the ambassador's confidential intercourse with the highest Turkish functionaries.

²¹ For example, TNA, FO 195/242, E. Pisani, Alison and Chabert to Canning, 6 May 1844.

²² The whole naval force of the Porte, including all vessels that were seaworthy, was described in detail. For an example of such reports, see The British Library (Hereafter TBL), Add MS 43138, Aberdeen Papers vol. C, Canning to Aberdeen, 25 April 1842, copy no. 28.

²³ TNA, FO 195/258, Canning to Aberdeen, 18 March 1846, No. 39.

²⁴ Some of them, like Pisanis, also had relatives working in other embassies (such as Russian embassy). For the detailed information about the dragoman families in Istanbul see De Groot, *Op. cit.*, in footnote 3.

Consuls

Almost all of the news that reached London from Eastern Europe and the Levant filtered through the listening post of the British Embassy in Istanbul.²⁵ And consuls scattered over different parts of the Ottoman Empire were its main sources of information. Although the British Consuls in the Levant were not so numerous in the first quarter of the nineteenth century,²⁶ they had to report on all passing occurrences, transmit intelligence from quarters more remote, and receive instructions from the ambassador or his substitute.²⁷

In time the number of British consuls in the Levant increased considerably and this augmented the embassy's work to a great extent. Apart from the Foreign Office correspondence, the Ambassador had to maintain frequent communication with the British Consuls and Vice-Consuls in every province of the Ottoman Empire. Each of them acted as an ambassador on a small scale dealing with the special problems of his own district. Their correspondence comprised commercial and political matters. In the political part they dealt with the minute details of provincial administration, the activities of other foreign agents, and cases of Turkish oppression or failure to carry out the Sultan's orders for the betterment of his empire. On Occasions, they sent comprehensive reports to the Embassy about the commercial and judicial problems of their districts as well. There was a constant flow of information through these channels. The consuls usually sent their reports directly to the Embassy in Istanbul, from whence copies were sent to the Foreign Office but sometimes they posted them directly to London and informed the Embassy at the same.²⁸

The consuls were a great help when the Ambassadors needed to inquire about rumours and obtain intelligence on developments in their districts. For example, when Stratford Canning heard that a fresh revolt of a

²⁵ L. G. Byrne, *The Great Ambassador* (Ohio State University, 1964), p. 37.

²⁶ In 1826, the Levant establishment amounted to two consuls-general and eleven consuls and vice-consuls. By 1855 it had risen to three consuls-general and forty-one consuls and vice-consuls. See D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service British Consuls since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 127.

²⁷ This expression was quoted by Byrne as Stratford Canning's words, *Op cit.*, in footnote 25, p. 37.

²⁸ H. G. Elliot, *BPP*, Select Committee on Constitution of Diplomatic and Consular Service, 1870 (382), Q. 847. On some occasions, when consular reports arrived at the Embassy at the very moment of a messenger's departure, they were unavoidably forwarded in original. TNA, FO 78/1044, Lord Napier (Secretary of Embassy) to Edmund Hammond, 26 June 1854.

very serious character had broken out in Albania (1845), he inquired into its correctness first by applying to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, and then by writing to the consul at Salonica. The Ottoman Ministry's denial of the fact was fully corroborated by Consul Blunt's despatch and further information about the state of the things there.²⁹ With this method, the ambassadors were able to double check information before developing any particular policy or sending reports to the Foreign Office.

Some consulates were especially established for political purposes rather than commercial and judicial ones. These consuls often acted as *de facto* intelligence agents in their respective areas, especially when they were close to the Empire's borders. Interestingly, because of this large web of 'political consuls', the British Embassy in Istanbul often obtained important intelligence much earlier than Ottoman officials themselves, and rarely later. For example, when Francis Stevens, Vice Consul at Trebizond,³⁰ learned that 'Russia proposed to take measures for enforcing its regulations, which have been of late relaxed, for preventing communication between the Coasts of Circasia and Asiatic Turkey', he informed the Embassy of this on 15 June 1848. He also added that 'the entry of Europeans to Georgia has been interdicted and such as were already in that country have been expelled from there, in consequence of the revolutionary movements in Europe.'³¹ Having this intelligence Ambassador Canning confidentially communicated it to Rifaat Pasha, Foreign Minister, though this did not elicit any remark from him. Indeed Rifaat Pasha was in ignorance of Steven's news at that time, and most probably did not want to make any comments about Russians towards whom he had friendly feelings. However, upon the intelligence of Stevens the ambassador transferred the information to the Foreign Office.³²

Interestingly, the British ambassador in Istanbul usually had detailed information about the international relations of the Ottoman Government, including early knowledge of the arrival of foreign representatives at its borders. An example of this comes from the consul at Erzurum, James Brant.³³ On 8 June 1848 he informed the Ambassador and the Foreign Office 'respecting the arrival of two Persian Khans commissioned by their govern-

²⁹ TNA, FO 195/247, Canning to Aberdeen, 5 March 1845.

³⁰ Stevens was Vice Consul there from 1841 to 1856, and thereafter Consul in the same place.

³¹ TNA, FO 78/733, Canning to Palmerston, No. 8, 26 June 1848.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ He was the Consul at Erzurum since 1836 and maintained his post there until 1856.

ments to claim the application of the treaty between Persia and Turkey to certain frontier tribes pasturing sometimes in the one sometimes in the other country.' Later this information was confirmed when the Dragoman Pisani saw the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs on 26 June and was informed that one of the Khans in question was on his way to Istanbul, for the purpose mentioned by Consul Brant.³⁴

The consuls were also responsible for sending periodic reports on the navies of foreign powers. Intelligence on any material change that had taken place in the strength and distribution of the naval forces of the other countries, especially neighbours of the Ottoman state, was of concern to the Embassy. Consuls' reports on this subject were usually transmitted to the Foreign Office.

In sum, there was a very intensive traffic between the embassy and the consulates. Although dealing with this was exhausting for the ambassadors, it was of the greatest value to them to have information on regular basis from all over the Ottoman territories.

The British community

The presence of the British community established in Istanbul should not be underestimated as an important channel of information for the British ambassadors. The vast majority of its members were glad to assist the embassy provided this did not injure their commercial affairs. Indeed, the relationship that existed between the British ambassadors and the British residents in Istanbul was much different from that which existed between the same parties in other countries. In Turkey the British residents regarded the ambassador, more immediately and directly, as a protector against the arbitrary methods of the Ottoman administration; and also as an arbitrator or judge in the conflicts which might arise among themselves. Turkey was the only country that Britain had the extensive judicial or magisterial rights over her citizens or people under her protection by so called Capitulations,³⁵ and these rights were certainly unique to the Levant establishment.³⁶

³⁴ TNA, FO 78/733, Canning to Palmerston, No. 9, 26 June 1848.

³⁵ For the full text of 'Final Treaty of Capitulations: The Ottoman Empire and England, September 1675' granted by Sultan Mehemed see TNA, FO 78/3370. That includes 75 articles. And also see J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record* Vol. I (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975) 35-41. But first twenty articles of the treaty have been omitted there.

³⁶ Britain used to have somewhat of a similar right in Portugal, exercised by a Judge Conservator,

Without doubt, the British community in Pera provided the ambassadors with important information about the social and commercial life of the city. For example, one of its members, J. B. Fraser, who lived in Pera, was frequently consulted by Ponsonby on a variety of matters. Most strikingly, he prepared a report on local commercial conditions as a preliminary to the negotiations for the 1838 Convention between Britain and Turkey.³⁷ Sometimes the ambassadors had very close contacts with the British community in certain social activities. For example, in 1861 the English [Masonic] lodges [in Turkey] were united in a Districk Grand Lodge under the British Ambassador, Sir Henry Bulwer, as D.G.M. [Districk Grand Master].³⁸ This position would certainly have increased Bulwer's ability to obtain intelligence from influential members of the 'British nation' in Turkey.

High Ottoman officials

One of the main sources of information used by the British ambassadors was the officials of the Ottoman government, including some occupying the highest positions within it. All of the embassies in Istanbul endeavoured to bribe these officials. They also tried to use Palace favourites to get past the official machinery to the source of power and decision, the Sultan himself. This usually required the use of a large amount of money. Russia was very active in this type of activity.

Although it is not certain how much the British embassy was involved in such methods itself, some money must have been allowed for this under the heading of 'extraordinary' expenses. However, it should be emphasized that sometimes the embassies were able to employ inducements other than money. Occasionally, high Turkish officials needed the political support of the British embassy either for promotion to higher ranks or for the protection of their lives. In a place of widespread intrigue, even the Sultan's life was in danger; how could that of others not be equally so? On the other hand, some of them were disposed to help the embassy because they believed in the sincerity of the reform activities of the British ambassadors directed to the well-being of the Ottoman Empire.³⁹

chosen by British subjects. He was chief of a court before which all cases involving rights of British subjects used to be tried. However it had ceased to exist sometime before 1850, upon the expiration of a former Treaty under which it was constituted. Palmerston, *BPP*, Select Committee on Official Salaries, 1850, (611), Q. 565.

³⁷ TNA, FO 78/309, Ponsonby to Palmerston, 20 July 1837.

³⁸ F. Gould, *The History of Freemasonry*, Vol.6 (Caxton: London, nd. but circa 1885), p. 322.

³⁹ The best example is Mustafa Reschid Pasha.

Sometimes the ambassadors took no trouble to conceal the names of their sources among the high Ottoman officials in their despatches to London, especially when they were on close terms with them. However, it must be underlined that in this type of relationship the ambassador also gave information and advice to the officials concerned - the intelligence traffic was not just one-way. During the periods of Ponsonby and Canning, there appeared to be a good atmosphere and considerable consultation between the Embassy and the Porte. This is apparent from the despatches of Stratford Canning to the Foreign Office, such as:

'My Lord, in the course of my interview with Rifaat Pasha (Minister for Foreign Affairs) this morning His Excellency informed me *confidentially* that despatches had just arrived at the Porte to announce an insurrectionary movement in Wallachia, and he expressed an anxious wish to know my opinion as to the most advisable mode of proceeding. I told him in reply that without a more exact knowledge of the circumstances, I could not presume to offer an opinion respecting a case of so much delicacy and apparent importance; but that in general it was showing the interest of the Porte to maintain the tranquillity of the Danubian Provinces, if possible, without a military intervention, or at all events by Turkish rather than by auxiliary means.He was particularly anxious that the circumstance his having consulted me should not come to the knowledge of the Russian Legation' ⁴⁰

'My dear Lord, the new president of the Council, Ali Pasha, informed me *confidentially* when I visited him at the Porte this morning, that the Sultan, of whom he had recently had private audience, has expressed his regret at having been induced to dismiss Reschid Pasha from his post of Grand Vizier....' ⁴¹

There were a great many communications which were constantly passing between the Turkish Government and the Foreign Governments. There has been, from time immemorial, a sort of system of receiving from the Porte information of all that was going on with other Governments, and the information which they got from their own provinces. Everything that was interesting of a political nature they generally communicated to the friendly courts, ⁴² among which the British Embassy took the lead. High Ottoman officials acquainted the British ambassador with their intelligence about the communications between the French and Russian missions concerning dif-

⁴⁰ TNA, FO 78/773, Confidential, Canning to Palmerston, 27 June 1848.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 78/773, Private and Confidential, Canning to Palmerston, 29 June 1848.

⁴² H. G. Elliot, *BPP*, Select Committee on Constitution of Diplomatic and Consular Service, 1870 (382), Q. 881.

ferent subjects of importance. They also informed the British ambassador about their negotiations with the other embassies.⁴³ Very often there were despatches which the Turkish Government has received from their own agents abroad, and they wished to let the British Embassy know what they have heard.⁴⁴ In all of these communications, the embassy dragomans were the confidential channel.

In some occasions, however, intelligence from high Ottoman officials was supplied in more devious ways, especially when it concerned discussions in the Ottoman Divan (Council). Not surprisingly, in such instances the name of the source was not cited by the ambassador in his despatches, the ambassador contented himself by noting only the significance of the position occupied by his source. Examples of this can also be seen in Canning's despatches. For example:

'My Lord, *I was yesterday informed confidentially by a member of the Council*, that Riza Pasha, the Commander in Chief of the Army, had declared that the Musulman (Moslem) subjects of the empire would not suffice to furnish the requisite number of recruits for the Turkish Army next year. *This declaration coming from so authentic a source* appears to indicate a continued, if not an increasing, decline in that part of the population on which alone the defence and military strength of Turkey have hitherto depended.'⁴⁵

'My Lord, *I was told in confidence a few days ago by one of the Sultan's principal ministers, who is connected with the Imperial Family by marriage*, that His Majesty had received not long since an autograph letter from the Emperor of Russia proposing to unite the two Courts by an intimate alliance. The occasion was that of writing an answer to the Sultan's customary announcement of the birth of a prince.

I naturally asked what reply had been made to an overture of so much delicacy and importance. My informant assured me that no notice had been taken of it, and that the Sultan had no thoughts of altering the character of his relation with the court of St. Petersburg.'⁴⁶

⁴³ For example, Aali Pasha, Minister for Foreign Affairs, acquainted Stratford Canning with his negotiations with the Russian and French representatives and answers to be given to them by the Porte on the question of the Holy Land. TNA, FO 195/352, E. Pisani to Canning, 2 November 1851. There are many examples of this in TNA, FO 195/384; for instance Aali Pasha informs Etienne Pisani about the visit of the Austrian Dragoman, Steindly, and the details of their communication. TNA, FO 195/384, Pisani to Canning, 18 March 1852. Indeed, Aali Pasha usually communicated the British Embassy most of the notes of the Porte to France, and the French Embassy's to the Porte. See for the examples, TNA, FO 195/384, Pisani to Rose, 5 August 1852; and TNA, FO 195/384, Pisani to Rose, 9 August 1852.

⁴⁴ H. G. Elliot, *BPP*, Select Committee on Constitution of Diplomatic and Consular Service, 1870 (382), Q. 885.

⁴⁵ TNA, FO 78/733, Confidential No. 31, Canning to Palmerston, 18 July 1848.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO 78/733, Secret No. 40, Canning to Palmerston, 22 July 1848.

'My Lord, I have received information from a *secret source* that an individual styled Baron Elsenau, known to have been, if not still, in the employment of Russia, and suspected of acting as spy for that power was yesterday arrested together with his servant by order of the Porte.'⁴⁷

The diplomatic corps

Information on the Ottoman Empire was also drawn from other diplomats in Istanbul, especially those of friendly embassies. From time to time, the heads of such missions exchanged the information they possessed with the British ambassador. During periods when there was a scarcity of information, the diplomats became particularly dependent on shared gossip and tit-bits of information. This was usually related to political developments, revolts and uprisings in the Ottoman dominions.

Among the embassies friendly to the British, the Austrian and Spanish are especially worthy of mention. The Austrian inter-nuncio, in particular, was generally a good friend to the British ambassador in this period. During the embassy of Stratford Canning, the Austrian Empire was represented at the Porte by the Baron de Sturmer, who had the title of inter-nuncio with the rank of ambassador. His name was frequently mentioned by Stratford in his despatches from Istanbul. In the words of Henry Layard, 'The Baron was a man of a quiet, unassuming disposition, who took no very prominent or active part in politics, and who had acquired a good deal of influence at the Porte. He was ready to give friendly advice when required of him, and he was in the habit of carefully refraining from any interference in the affairs of Turkey except when the interests of his country were immediately concerned.'⁴⁸ No doubt such a position enabled him to obtain exact and valuable information as to the policy and proceedings of the Turkish government which was crucially important for a foreign representative at the Porte, and especially to Stratford Canning. Certainly, there was good cooperation and mutual understanding between the two ambassadors, the internuncio even occasionally allowing Stratford to have copies of his instructions on important matters related to Ottoman affairs.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, this relationship was not one-sided. Britain had more widespread consular representation in the Ottoman territories than Austria, which enabled the British

⁴⁷ TNA, FO 78/988, Stratford de Redcliffe to Clarendon, 16 January 1854.

⁴⁸ Henry Layard, *Autobiography and Letters*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1903), p. 61.

⁴⁹ For an example of this see, TNA FO 195/248, Canning to Aberdeen, 17 December 1845.

embassy to help the latter out in places where there were no Austrian consulates or representation.⁵⁰

Another colleague of whom Sir Stratford made much use was the Spanish Minister, Senior de Cordova. Spain did not have very much interest in Turkey, and so her minister, like the Austrian inter-nuncio, abstained from any interference in Turkish affairs. This enabled him to be treated with confidence by the Porte. Indeed, he had ready access to its ministers and was often consulted by them on international questions. According to Layard 'Senior de Cordova was sincerely attached to the English Ambassador, whose remarkable qualities and loyal and sincere character he fully appreciated. He was ready to place his influence and services at Sir Stratford's disposal, and became on many important occasions the secret and indirect channel of communication between Sir Stratford and the Turkish statesmen, and even the Sultan himself. Many weighty and urgent matters were treated through him, and brought to a satisfactory conclusion, which could not have been dealt with by the usual diplomatic means.'⁵¹

Interesting but true, from time to time the British ambassador had to get in touch with the representatives of rival powers, such as those of Russia. They were sometimes obliged to work together on joint mediations, as in the case of the one between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. In these circumstances, they had to share intelligence and exchange views related to the subject.

Newspaper correspondents

Journalists living in Istanbul can be counted among the potential sources of information for the British Ambassadors. Due to the nature of their work, they were in easy reach of some sources of information. Their newspapers were usually the ones published in London, such as the *Morning Chronicle*, *Morning Post*, *The Times* etc. and some others like the *Malta Times*, a newspaper published in that island, which was then widely circulated in the Levant. The ambassador's relations with them were usually accomplished by indirect means.⁵² But sometimes these correspondents were actually agents of the ambassadors.⁵³

⁵⁰ For instance, in 1845 the Austrian internuncio asked Stratford to authorise Mr. Rosi, the British Vice Consul at Enos, to exercise the functions of Austrian agent there as well. TNA, FO 195/248, Canning to Aberdeen, 7 December 1845.

⁵¹ Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, p. 61.

⁵² For example, David Urquhart was Ponsonby's and Austen Henry Layard was Canning's well known agents who established such contacts.

⁵³ Like Austen Henry Layard, who was for a while the correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*.

British Military Officers

Another potential source of information were the British military officers employed by the Turks, who were of course quite numerous at this period. From time to time some British military officers went to Istanbul with different duties, under different pretexts. The Foreign Office used them in various ways to collect useful information. An extract from the despatch of Palmerston to Colonel Bridgeman, the Governor General of the Troops at Syria in 1841, will give a view in this respect.

'With respect to those British officers who belong to other branches of the army, they should make themselves useful in assisting the general officer in command of the Turkish troops, in making those military arrangements with regard to the movement and distribution of the Turkish Forces, which may be necessary, in consequence of the evacuation of Syria by the Egyptians: and if those officers can be useful in any way not inconsistent with their position as British officers, in establishing an improved system of organization in the Turkish military service, it is very desirable that they should do so. *Such of these officers as are not wanted for these purposes, might be usefully employed by you for a short time longer, in sending you, from different points of the country, interesting information to be transmitted by you to H. M. Government; and in collecting such facts and knowledge as might be useful, for giving H. M. G. a correct military view of the country, with reference to its sources, and natural means for defense against external attack, [emphasis added] under a government which the people of the country might be willing to support.*'⁵⁴

Some of them had responsible positions and critical duties in the border areas and strategic points of the Empire and sent regular reports to the embassy about the state of the affairs there. Many names can be counted in this context, such as Sir Baldwin Walker,⁵⁵ Colonel Fenwick Williams,⁵⁶ Lieutenant Collingwood Dickson,⁵⁷ Captain Gustavious du Plat,⁵⁸ Colonel Rawlinson, etc. The most able ones among them were subsequently appointed to British consular posts.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ TNA, FO 195/180, Palmerston to Colonel Bridgeman, 4 March 1841.

⁵⁵ He was an admiral in the Turkish service in 1843.

⁵⁶ He was an officer in the Royal Artillery who had been sent to Istanbul in 1841 at the request of the Porte to give instruction in the manufacture of explosives. Later General Sir William Fenwick Williams, Bart., G.C.B. (1800-1883).

⁵⁷ General Sir Collingwood Dickson, V. C., K.C.B.

⁵⁸ A lieutenant colonel in the Royal Engineers sent to Istanbul to work in the Ottoman Engineering department. He sent various intelligence reports to Palmerston through Ponsonby. Cunningham, *Op cit.*, in footnote 5, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁹ Colonel Rawlinson was a good example. He was first appointed Consul-General in Baghdad 1842-44, and again from 19 November 1851 to 1855.

The memoirs of Stratford Canning refer to a name of an officer, Major Williams in 1842.⁶⁰ Indeed, according to Canning there were two or three British military officers then in Istanbul. 'They had been sent out to Istanbul', he writes, 'under the impression that their services would be acceptable to the Porte for instructing their new levies; but they were in competition with the Prussians to whom more confidence was apparently given by the Turkish Authorities.'⁶¹ According to Henry Layard's account, these were two officers from the Royal Artillery. In his own version, Colonel Williams with Lieutenant Collingwood Dickson had been sent to Istanbul by the British government at the request of the Porte, to instruct the Turks in the manufacture of explosives.⁶² There are very interesting coincidences here: First of all these two officers had a very close friendship with Henry Layard (see below) who had been Stratford Canning's secret agent between the years 1842-48 in Istanbul. These three spent many nights together in each other's houses. According to Layard, 'Dickson was a brave, cool and daring soldier, much cleverer than his colleague. He was well acquainted with the details of his profession, possessed an excellent memory, and had all the qualities required to render him successful in his career, in which he acquired distinction and eminence.'⁶³ What is more interesting about Collingwood Dickson is that in the surviving British papers in the National Archives, his name was listed in the year 1849 under the general heading of 'HD Records Created or inherited by the Secret Intelligence Service 1742-1946' and under the subheading of 'HD 3/19'. So it is no difficult to assume that these officers were formally appointed as instructors to the Turkish army but they acted informally to gather military intelligence.

The career of Colonel Williams follows an interesting path. First of all he was employed on special service in Istanbul, under the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Du Plat of the Royal Engineers. According to this he was instructed by the Foreign Office that:

'On your arrival to Malta you will take charge of party consisting of the three non commissioned officers of the Royal Artillery and one civil artificer, who were sent out there some time ago to be under orders of Lieutenant Colonel Du Plat; and you

⁶⁰ Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning*, in II Vols. Vol. II, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888), p. 122.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

⁶² Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote, 48, p. 73.

⁶³ *Ibid.*,

will proceed with them to Istanbul and *on your arrival there you will report yourself to H. M. Ambassador and you will place yourself under his orders until the arrival of lieutenant Colonel du Plat*. As however L. Colonel Du Plat may be detained for sometime longer in Syria by illness, it is necessary that I should inform you that the object for which H. M. Government have determined to send you to Istanbul, is that you should assist, if the Sultan should wish it, in organizing the Turkish Artillery and Engineer Department, and such therefore will be your duty until L. Colonel Du plat arrives, when you will follow such directions as he may give you for the further prosecution of this service.⁶⁴

In line with this, the Ambassador Ponsonby was also instructed that 'he would take the necessary steps for inducing the Porte to avail itself of the assistance, thus offered to it by Her Majesty's Government, for placing his Artillery and Engineer Departments on an effective footing.'⁶⁵ As implied in these words, the suggestion for the improvement of the Ottoman military equipment came from the British government. However, the Porte declined to accept the services of Captain Williams and accordingly, Palmerston ordered him to proceed with his whole party to the British Head Quarter in Syria.⁶⁶ However, again from the documents it is understood that later Colonel Williams remained there and the Porte decided to use his services.⁶⁷ Another interesting point related to him that he started to work together with John Redhouse (see below) who was another of Canning's secret agents in Istanbul.

Later Captain Williams was appointed to perform the function of British intermediary as British Commissioner on the Turco-Persian Frontier Delimitation Commission.⁶⁸ Because of the complexities of this problem he stayed for a number of years at Erzurum and sent various reports concerning military movements in the area and the military establishments of Persia and Russia on the border.

It is understood that all these military officers, who appeared intermittently in Istanbul under the protection of the embassy, provided the British Government with valuable military intelligence, and informally fulfilled the duties of the military attachés, even though the first formal appointment to Istanbul was made in 1876.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ TNA, FO 195/180, Palmerston to Captain Williams, 11 January 1841.

⁶⁵ TNA, FO 195/180, Palmerston to Ponsonby, 11 January 1841.

⁶⁶ TNA, FO 195/ 180, Palmerston to Ponsonby, 30 March 1841.

⁶⁷ TNA, FO 78/ 505, Colonel Williams to Aberdeen, 7 March 1842.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO, 195/248, Canning to Aberdeen, 28 October 1845, No. 247.

⁶⁹ TNA, FO 78/2526, Foreign Office to Lennox, 24 October 1876.

Secret agents

In the affairs of the British embassy in Istanbul there was, as Stratford Canning informed Lord Aberdeen, an 'outlying department'. This, he said, 'requires to be served by agents not recognized as belonging to the local establishment'. It had 'become very necessary', he continued, 'since the Turks have begun to use foreign languages, and to mingle more unreservedly with the Christians.'⁷⁰

It is most likely that Charles Alison, who was an accomplished linguist,⁷¹ was the coordinator of this department. There was also an intermediary,⁷² who established the contacts between the embassy and other possible agents, who were preferably Christians and British subjects by birth living in Istanbul. These agents operated by cultivating friendships with leading Turks and spending as much time as possible with them, preferably in their houses. In addition to obtaining intelligence, these agents were also directed to shape the reporting from Istanbul to the most influential journals in England and on the Continent, and so to promote public approval of the policy of Stratford Canning in Britain. In the event, they achieved considerable success in this regard, with the result that his position in Istanbul was greatly strengthened⁷³

Among the agents of this department, the name of one person in particular strikes the eye. He was widely known in English literature as a result of his travels, his excavations on Nineveh,⁷⁴ and his embassy in Istanbul.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ TBB, Add MS Aberdeen Papers, VOL.C, Canning to Aberdeen, Private and Confidential, 12 October 1844.

⁷¹ He spoke and wrote Turkish, Persian, Greek and several European languages, with perfect facility, and had a sufficient knowledge of Arabic.

⁷² This person was Austen Henry Layard.

⁷³ Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, p. 103. All the newspaper correspondents were good friends of Layard, and they were under his control. Therefore, unreservedly, they supported the policies of Stratford Canning.

⁷⁴ For his excavations on Nineveh and other remnants of ancient civilization on the Ottoman Territories see Lane-Poole, *Op cit.*, in footnote 60, Vol. II, pp. 137-159; Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, pp. 151-194.

⁷⁵ His Embassy in Istanbul also attracted the attention of many Turkish scholars, such as: Y. T. Kurat, *Henry Layard'ın İstanbul Elçiliği, 1877-1880* [Henry Layard's Embassy in Istanbul] (Ankara: 1968); M. Aktepe, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Islahı Hakkında İngiltere Elçisi Layard'ın II. Abdulhamid'e verdiği Rapor", [English Ambassador Layard's report to Abdulhamid about the Reform of the Ottoman Empire] *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, Vol. IV, no. XXI, (July 1969), pp. 13-27; T. Işıksal, "Mithat Pasa Hakkında İngiliz Elçisi Layard'ın Düşündükleri" [English Ambassador Layard's Thoughts about Mithat Pasha], *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, Vol. I, No. II, (November 1967), pp. 40-43.

This distinguished person is Austen Henry Layard. What is not well-known but is perhaps as significant as his later accomplishments are his services to the embassy of Stratford Canning as a secret agent for many years before he actually became an official attaché to the Embassy in 1848. In this capacity, Layard fulfilled services for his country which would have been much more difficult to accomplish with the official position of an attaché under the conditions of the politics in Istanbul. Needless to say here that, in general, a secret agent may function effectively under cover of an official position as well.

Layard's relationship with Canning started with his arrival in Istanbul as the bearer of the despatches of Colonel Taylor, who was then Consul at Baghdad, after a rough experience of travel in the frontier lands between Turkey and Persia. The information that Layard was able to provide to the ambassador about eastern Anatolia subsequently proved of great value to him in the future negotiations between Turkey and Persia.⁷⁶ Later Layard entered Canning's service and, on his suggestion, visited Turkey in Europe, especially Bosnia and Serbia. The Ambassador employed him *unofficially* and *privately* as the *medium of communication* with the leaders of the popular party in Serbia.⁷⁷ Canning was highly satisfied with Layard's account of this visit, and assigned him a room in the embassy. He subsequently worked each day in this office even though the ambassador was not in a position to offer him any remuneration.

Through his friends,⁷⁸ Layard had established good connections with the enlightened Turks of the capital. Of these Ahmed Vefik Effendi⁷⁹ is especially worthy of mention. At that time he was employed in the Foreign Department at the Porte, where his father held a high official position.⁸⁰ Layard soon formed an intimate friendship with him.⁸¹ His visits to Ruh-ed-

⁷⁶ Michael Warr, *A Biography of Stratford Canning, Mainly His Career in Turkey*, (Oxford: Alden Press, 1989), pp. 113-117.

⁷⁷ Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁸ These were the newspaper correspondents: correspondent of the Morning Post, Mr. Longworth and correspondent of the Morning Chronicle, Colonel White who was a man of good family, was at Eton with Sir Stratford Canning.

⁷⁹ This enlightened man, who was then a young man of sixteen or seventeen years of age, later rose to the position of Grand Vizier when Layard was sent as an ambassador to Istanbul. He spoke and wrote French like a Frenchman. Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, p. 46

⁸⁰ Ruh-ed-din (or Ruhuddin) Effendi had been for some time Ottoman chargé d'affaires at Paris.

⁸¹ Ahmed Vefik Effendi did not have the prejudices which prevented Turks from speaking to stran-

din Effendi's house in which Ahmet Vefik was also living, were particularly important for the intelligence-gathering possibilities. An extract from his autobiography well explains this:

'Among the guests at Ruh-ed-din Effendi's tray⁸² were generally some functionaries at the Porte - mostly from the Department of Foreign Affairs - and very frequently some influential personage from the provinces, who had come, or had been summoned, to Istanbul on business with the Government, sometimes too, a Circassian Chief, or a Turcoman Beg from Central Asia on his way, as a pilgrim, to Mecca. Ahmet Vefik sought to see and entertain such strangers, as he obtained from them useful information on the state of far distant Mussulman countries and upon political matters of consequence.

I was also often able to *obtain political and other information [emphasize added]* which proved of much use to Stratford Canning, from the persons I thus met in the Effendi's house, as well as materials and news for the letters which I was then writing to the *Morning Chronicle* and other journals.⁸³

At that period there was a struggle for power in Istanbul between the Reform Party, of which Reschid Pasha⁸⁴ was the head, and those Turkish statesmen who were opposed to European institutions, which Sultan Mahmud had previously attempted to introduce into the government of his empire. The most active and powerful of the conservatives was Riza Pasha, who exercised great influence over the Sultan, Abdul-Mejid. Stratford supported the reform party and established a constant and intimate communication with Reschid Pasha and his principal followers, such as Aali and Fuad Effendis.⁸⁵ These communications were carried out in a very *secret* and *confidential* manner through Layard.⁸⁶

gers especially to Europeans, and Layard learnt from him interesting details of Turkish life and habits which subsequently proved of much use to him.

⁸² Tray means *Sini* in Turkish, and it was used as a table in the old days. But its form is different. It is a big tray made of either copper or brass and is put on the floor over a special instrument. So *Ruh-ed-din Effendi's tray* means *his sofa* (table), and is equivalent to *ambassador's table*.

⁸³ Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, pp. 54-55.

⁸⁴ He was the author of the celebrated Hat-I Sherif of Gülhane, or new constitution for the Turkish Empire. He served as the Hariciye Naziri (Foreign Minister) in 1841, 1846 and 1854.

⁸⁵ They rose to the highest offices in the Ottoman Empire. Aali Pasha became Foreign minister [Hariciye Naziri] in various times such as in 1848, 1852, 1855, 1856, 1858, 1861, 1867, 1871 and Fuad Pasha in 1853, 1856, 1861, 1869. For the list of the Ottoman Reisulküttabs [Foreign Ministers before 1836] and Hariciye Nazirs [the Foreign Ministers after 1836] see Kemal Girgin, *Osmanlı ve Cumhuriyet Dönemleri Hariciye Tarihimiz: Teşkilat ve Protokol*, (Ankara: T.T.K.B., 1994), pp. 72-78.

⁸⁶ He explains the general characteristics of these secret missions in his autobiography: 'Sir Strat-

Following the appointment of Reschid Pasha as Grand Vizier, the ambassador was even more anxious to avail himself of Layard's services. Reschid Pasha was eager to carry out reforms and relied upon the support of the English ambassador. However, because of the jealousy and susceptibilities of the representatives of the other great powers, and of the rival Turkish statesmen, these communications had to be carried out on a *secret basis*. The employment of any member of the embassy on these activities was almost impossible, because their comings and goings would be speedily known in a place as full of intrigue and spies as Istanbul, and particularly in its European suburb of Pera.

Layard spent many hours in Reschid's house in Istanbul and his *Konak*⁸⁷ on the Bosphorus in discussions on various matters which the ambassador had instructed him to pursue. This kind of activity probably made a great contribution to Canning's success. Although he does not mention the details of Layard's secret activities in his memoirs⁸⁸, there are some clues and traces of them in the letter to Lord Aberdeen where he strongly suggested Layard's appointment as an attaché to the embassy in Istanbul. Some extracts from that letter are presented below:

'...The other proposition, which I have to submit to Your Lordship, is also closely connected with Her Majesty's service in this country, but it relates to a different function, and to a different individual. *Among the English Gentlemen, who have occasionally presented me valuable information, and helped me to extend our influence in important quarters no one has rendered better or more important service than Mr. Layard, whose name has been brought under your Lordship's notice on more than one occasion in my public correspondence,*

ford, availing himself of my knowledge of the Turkish character, and of my slight acquaintance with the Turkish language, was in the habit of employing me in them. The task he imposed upon me was very *delicate and difficult one*, and, even in those days, not unaccompanied with danger. The visits I had to pay to these statesmen on Stratford's behalf, whether they were in office, or living in retirement and apparent disgrace when out of it, were usually made at night and always in the *greatest secrecy*, as it was of great importance that it should not be known that they were in communication with the English Ambassador, and that they were acting upon his advice and encouragement. Sir Stratford himself was fond of mystery, and nothing pleased him better than this kind of *underground correspondence*-not to call it intrigue-which he would carry on with the Ministers, or with their opponents, through a person not officially connected with the Embassy, but in whom he had complete confidence. Many a night I have spent in Istanbul, or on the Bosphorus, engaged on these secret missions, sometimes meeting the person to whom I had been sent in out-of-the-way places-sometimes introduced surreptitiously into their harems, where I could see them without risk of interruption or discovery.' Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, p. 57.

⁸⁷ *Konak* means a big house by the sea.

⁸⁸ Lane-Pool does not give any information about these though he gives great space to Layard's excavations in Nineveh.

and particularly with the reference to the affairs of Persia and Albania...[emphasis added] Though I had never heard of him until he arrived here from Baghdad two years ago, I have since had ample opportunities of observing his character and opinions, nor should I do him justice if I did not say that he has won my esteem under very trying circumstances, and shown himself worthy of trust in all essential respects....*One might go round the world]without finding another individual so well qualified as Mr. Layard for the delicate and important functions to which he is willing to devote himself, whether he was employed to collect information to negotiate or to exercise a secret influence, without committing the Embassy...[emphasis added]*⁸⁹

Unquestionably the availability of such persons to the ambassador and their willingness to engage in secret activities provided him with valuable opportunities to maintain confidential intercourse with high Ottoman officials without the knowledge of the embassy dragomans, and other countries' spies.

Confidential work through unofficial negotiators

In the beginning of their embassies ambassadors had to wrestle with some difficulties in having effective communications with their counterparts. On the one hand, their mistrust and dislike of the embassy dragomans made the confidential business dependent on them quite risky. On the other hand, the direct intercourse with the Ottoman high officers, especially during the negotiations of the subjects of high importance, appeared to be not so efficient. In order to convince and bring them to the point of solution, the ambassadors needed extensive power and intimate relations to influence them. Stratford Canning explains that difficulty very well when he completed his first year in the embassy in 1843:

'Influence, which is useful elsewhere, is necessary here. If we do not choose to carry out questions of right with a high hand, for them as for those of more confidential character, we should in need of influence, and in order to attain it we must either support the government in its primitive measures, or enlist in our power the interest of powerful individuals.'⁹⁰

Especially during the negotiations (January-August 1832) concerning the question of the frontiers of the newly established Greek state, Stratford Canning met with some difficulties in matters of advice and in claiming right from the Ottoman authorities. In order to tackle with these problems

⁸⁹ The British Library (hereafter TBL), Add MS Aberdeen Papers, Vol.C, Canning to Aberdeen, Private and Confidential, 12 October 1844.

⁹⁰ TBL, Add MS 43138, Aberdeen Papers Vol. C, Canning to Aberdeen, 2 November, 1843.

he tried to find something effective. The idea occurred as such: To influence the Ottoman rulers through influential persons who were capable to influence. This would serve to other purposes as well: to carry out negotiations independent of the embassy dragomans⁹¹, and to establish the tenets of the confidential structure through the unofficial channels. Preferably they were chosen from the persons who had the sympathy and confidence of the Ottoman high rank officials. He selected three agents for this purpose. Thus within a couple of months from his arrival until his leaving,⁹² he had established the structure of the confidential business which would be used in future by Ponsonby as well.

The first one was Doctor Samuel MacGuffog⁹³ who was the Embassy physician, medical adviser and occasionally consultant to Sultan Mahmud II. Canning used MacGuffog as a confidential channel for communication to the Sultan. During the six months of 1832 he urged reform and explained its meaning in various ways to Mahmud II through the Embassy physician.⁹⁴ MacGuffog provided ambassador with valuable opportunity to present his views out of the effect of any interference. Indeed, Stratford did not himself see Mahmud II between his audience on arrival and his audience of departure. But all his ideas about the necessity of substantial reform were communicated to the Sultan through MacGuffog. He believed in the improvement of the present system of the Empire in order to preserve her power and the happiness of her Christian subjects. The choice lied between fanaticism and discipline; there was no middle line. Canning also used MacGuffog as his go-between himself Grand Vizier, Reschid Mehmed Pasha.⁹⁵

The second private political agent of Stratford Canning was Stefanaki Vogorides, a Greek gentleman of a distinguished Fanariote Family, who had held high offices under the Turkish Government, and who had been the first

⁹¹ If one reason for this type of action was the sensitivity of the subject, no doubt the other one was his known suspicion about the interpreter service.

⁹² He came to Istanbul on 28 January 1832 as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and left there on 12 August 1832.

⁹³ It is understood from the Foreign Office List Reference number 35101025 that MacGuffog served as Embassy physician until 1855, so as confidential agent.

⁹⁴ TNA, FO 352/24A/2 Canning to MacGuffog, 30 March 1832; A. Cunningham, "Stratford Canning and Tanzimat" *Eastern Question in the Nineteenth Century* (Ed) Edward Ingram, (London: Frank Cass, 1993), p. 117; Lane-Pool, *Op cit.*, in footnote 60, Vol. I, p. 508.

⁹⁵ A. Cunningham, "Stratford Canning, Mahmud II and Muhammad Ali", *Eastern Question in the Nineteenth Century* (Ed) Edward Ingram, (London: Frank Cass, 1993), p. 38.

Prince of Samos, after that island obtained its autonomous constitution. 'He was a man of an accomplish intriguer, intimately acquainted with the Turkish character, and thoroughly familiar with the way of transacting business with them. He was on very intimate relations with most of the leading Ottoman statesmen'.⁹⁶ He had considerable degree of influence at the Seraglio and among the favourites of Divan.⁹⁷ This might induce Canning to throw out a line for his cooperation. His Anglophile character must have been an extra impetus for Ambassador's choice. No doubt there was a balanced confidence in their relations that later Vogorides engaged to work in Ambassador's favour with the Sultan about the question of Greek Frontier.⁹⁸

Stratford Canning also used Vogorides during the period of his later embassy in Istanbul between the years 1842-1858. However, according to Layard, 'Sir Stratford had no great respect to his character and well aware of the danger of placing too much trust to him; but he found him a most useful agent, and employed him in complicated and difficult negotiations'.⁹⁹ Though Vogorides acted as Canning's intermediary with the Sultan, they did not see each other so often. Because of the delicacy of the work, they refrained to have close contacts on public. MacGuffog was employed as a secret go-between; Canning wrote letters to MacGuffog and he carried Ambassador's ideas and instructions to Vogorides. The regular interpreters were kept entirely out of this confidential business, and the complete secrecy was provided with this arrangement.

This structure of the confidential business was also used and maintained by Ponsonby, and through Vogorides he was able to gather valuable information for the British Government. For example, when the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi¹⁰⁰ was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire on 8 July 1833, Ponsonby immediately obtained a copy of this through Vogorides and MacGuffog, and able to send it home four days after its signature.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, p. 65.

⁹⁷ See in A.B. Cunningham, "Dragomania: The Dragomans of the British Embassy in Turkey", *St. Anthony's Papers*, Vol. XI (1961), p. 90; A. Cunningham, *Op cit.*, in footnote 94, p. 37; Lane-Pool, *Op cit.*, in footnote 60, pp. 506-507.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁹⁹ Layard, *Op cit.*, in footnote 48, p. 65.

¹⁰⁰ The treaty was called after Unkiar Skelessi on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus where the Russian troops had been encamped.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO. Turkey, 223-224, Ponsonby to Foreign Office, 7,10,11,12 July, 1833.

The treaty itself was harmless enough, but it was the secret clause which was considered the most sinister. The secret article was sent home officially with the caution that the knowledge of this must not be shown to anybody. Drago-man Pisani's reports of conversations of 6, 7, and 8 June were sent by private letter as they might cost the Reis Effendi his head if revealed.¹⁰²

The third important actor of the confidential business was David Urquhart. The developments which brought him the official career in the British Embassy in 1836, started with his travels to the east in the late 1820s. During this period he acquainted with the Eastern life, culture, language and people. His life and experience among the Greeks in the period of their struggle against the Porte provided him with a good opportunity to accompany Stratford Canning in his embassy to Istanbul in 1832. Until the time of Canning's departure, Urquhart acted as his confidential agent.

Stratford Canning sent him to Albania to induce the Grand Vizier, Reschid Mehmed Pasha, to renounce his intention of carrying the power of Albania against Greece. Any measure in this way would probably have led to the complete subjugation of that country. Urquhart met Reschid Mehmed Pasha at Scodra, and became successful in his mission.¹⁰³

When Urquhart returned to London, he put his knowledge and experiences of the East to the excellent use of the British people. He first sent the Foreign Office a memorandum on the prospects of Turkey as a field for British trade.¹⁰⁴ This was followed by his impressive book on the resources of Turkey¹⁰⁵ which made a great impact in the official circles in Britain and Turkey. What made its content so important was his challenging views which emphasized the significance of trade connections and their political influence at a time when most professional diplomatists were ignorant of or uninterested in such matters.¹⁰⁶ Through the initiative and influence of

¹⁰² See Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston 1830-1841: Britain the Liberal Movement and the Eastern Question* II Vols. (London: G. Bells and Sons, 1951), p. 304, fn.1.

¹⁰³ G. Robinson, *David Urquhart, Some Chapters in the life of a Victorian Knight-Errant of Justice and Liberty* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1920), p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ G. H. Bolsover, "David Urquhart and Eastern Question, 1833-37: A Study in Publicity and Diplomacy", *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. VIII (March-December, 1936), p. 445.

¹⁰⁵ D. Urquhart, *Turkey and its Resources* (London: 1833).

¹⁰⁶ C. Webster, "Urquhart, Ponsonby, and Palmerston", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 62, Issue 244 (July, 1947), p. 329.

Sir Herbert Taylor¹⁰⁷, Urquhart was instructed¹⁰⁸ and given an official duty (1833-34) to inquire into Turkish Trade and generally on the economic situation in the Near East.

But arriving in Turkey, he faced with the growing hostility of the Ottoman Empire to England and the increasing influence of Russia on the Sublime Porte. In a short while his activities turned to be political in character. He determined to establish a good understanding between the Ottoman Empire and his country as the one existed between himself and the Sultan. To this end he began to live as a Turk in a Turkish house, surrounded himself with the Turks, both as servants and friends.¹⁰⁹ He established new relations and renewed his old connections. In the mean time, he got into touch with the Ambassador Ponsonby who was instilled with the similar anti-Russian sentiments. Thus their cooperation was established over the negative feelings towards Russia.

Lord Ponsonby was most anxious and zealous to enter into friendly relations with the Turks and further all his plans. There was then Mr. Blacque the editor of the *Moniteur Ottoman*, in possession of the highest influence with the Turkish Government,¹¹⁰ had very close relations with Urquhart. He soon brought Mr. Blacque and Lord Ponsonby into intimate relations, and then commenced series of operations upon Turks which resulted in the complete change of their dispositions towards Britain, and which gave Urquhart a complete ascendancy over the councils of the Turkish Empire, whether as regarded its internal administration or its external policy.¹¹¹ One result of the long residence in the East was the Turkish Commercial Treaty which he drew up and submitted to both the English and Turkish Governments.

Another important person that can be considered within the context

¹⁰⁷ He was the private secretary of William IV, and friend of Urquhart's matter. All the reports of Urquhart and his book on Turkey were submitted through Taylor to William IV who impressed very much with Urquhart's views.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, FO96/17, Minute, Palmerston, 2 November 1834.

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, *Op cit.*, in footnote 103, p. 46.

¹¹⁰ He was one of the confidential advisers of Sultan Mahmud. Soon after his arrival, Urquhart received a visit from M. Blacque. With Blacque's suggestion he agreed to prepare a report on the ideas he contained in his book. Later, it was decided to translate the whole of Turkey and its resources and to present its outer to Mahmoud. See, Bolsover, *Op cit.*, in footnote 104, p. 448.

¹¹¹ 'David Urquhart to G. Fyler, February 1842' *Reminiscences of William IV: Correspondence between Lord Ponsonby and Mr. Urquhart 1833-36*, (London: Diplomatic Review Office, 1891), p. 16.

of confidential business is James W. Redhouse (1811-1892).¹¹² As an Englishman he acquired a very unique position in the Ottoman Bureaucracy and served in a variety of sensitive capacities down to the outbreak of the Crimean War (1826-1853) and distinguished himself as a Turkish lexicographer. His career began with his visits to different places of the Ottoman Empire and Istanbul,¹¹³ where an occupation was offered to him due to his mathematical acquirements and technical knowledge.¹¹⁴ These opened up relations with the authorities of the Military and Naval Colleges, the Engineers, the War Office, and ultimately with the Foreign Office (translation department) at the Porte.

Interestingly enough, when the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects (Armenians, Greeks) were expelled from the translation department in the Ottoman Foreign Office, due to suspicions about their fidelity, as an Englishman and foreigner he was attached to it.¹¹⁵ He had various acquaintances with the high Ottoman Officials and elites and worked for them. When the Ottoman system of permanent diplomatic representation in European capitals were reactivated, he was in London (1834-37) and kept up his contacts with the Ottoman ambassadors, who succeeded one another at rather frequent intervals, which furthered his links with Ottoman officialdom among whom Nuri Effendi, Sarim Effendi and Mustafa Reschid Pasha can be counted. Later, due to their initiatives he obtained a post in the Translation office of the Sublime Porte and for a time being he also served as a translator to Husrev Pasha (1827-37), Minister of War.

What was exclusive about him was his ability of creating an unequal respect and confidence on the part of the Ottoman high officials that gave way to his appointment to the positions which necessitated an absolute deli-

¹¹² For a comprehensive study about James W. Redhouse, see Carter V. Findley, "Sir James W. Redhouse (1811-1892): The Making of a Perfect Orientalist", *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. XCIX (1979), pp. 573-600.

¹¹³ According to Carter Findley, he was an English orphan who had apparently been sent to sea and had jumped ship in İstanbul. See C. V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 134.

¹¹⁴ Findley stated that Redhouse was educated in the Mathematical School of Christ's Hospital in the years 1822-26 which was founded under a royal charter of Charles II in 1673 for the express purpose of training boys for naval career. Its curriculum emphasized mathematics, through trigonometry, navigation (including nautical astronomy), and drawing, naval -architectural and cartographic which explain the course he followed in Turkey. See in Findley, *Op cit.*, in footnote 112, p. 575.

¹¹⁵ He engaged there to assist in translating into Turkish the English version of the Travels of Ibn-Batuta presented to Sultan Mahmoud by King William IV.

cacy and secrecy. Although Redhouse obtained very influential positions, he kept his invisibility from the eye of the public which made him an important figure for the confidential business. He, certainly, owed his success to his personal skills and efforts, not to any initiatives from or interference of the British Embassy. In spite of his earlier acquaintance with the Ottoman bureaucratic system, his connection and services to the British Embassy were rather late. However this late discovery, indeed, after his growing influence among the Ottoman elites, made him a perfect channel for confidential communications.

His first appearance on the historical scene of our concern was during the time of the Ambassador Ponsonby when Husrev Pasha, Grand Vizier under the new Sultan, Abdulmecid, selected Redhouse as his dragoman¹¹⁶ in confidential means of communication with various embassies,¹¹⁷ including the British Ambassador, Lord Ponsonby.¹¹⁸ During the time of international expedition against the Egyptian forces in Syria, he was given a confidential mission¹¹⁹ to serve as liaison among Sir Robert Stopford, supreme commander of the combined naval force, Baldwin Walker, serving as admiral of the Ottoman naval force participating in the operation, and İzzet Pasha, the Sultan's chief representative in Syria. No doubt he was a perfect choice since he carried the confidence of both sides. Most probably, with his various abilities and discreet standing¹²⁰, Redhouse contributed much to the success of the expedition.

When Stratford Canning came to Istanbul in 1842, he found Redhouse serving once again in the Translation Office of Ottoman Foreign Ministry. The presence of an Englishman in such an important branch of the Ottoman Government was certainly unexpected asset for Canning and provided him with extraordinary opportunities for the secret communication without the

¹¹⁶ Later he was transferred to the Ottoman Navy Department and he was given the posts of naval translator (*Bahriye tercümanı*) and member in the newly created Naval Council (*Bahriye Şurast*), see in Findley, *Op cit.*, in footnote 112, 580.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁸ Although Cunningham expresses the view that help for confidential business was not sought from Redhouse by the ambassador Ponsonby (Cunningham, *Op cit.*, in footnote 5, p. 7); W. F. Williams states the opposite of this. TNA, FO, 78/1325, Memorandum of the Services of Mr. Redhouse in Turkey by W. F. Williams, 18 March 1857.

¹¹⁹ His mission was mutually accepted by Lord Ponsonby and the Turkish government.

¹²⁰ He was very much appreciated by Lord Ponsonby and he described Redhouse as 'a very discreet and clever man who will not act rashly.' TNA, FO 78/396, Ponsonby to Palmerston, 17 September 1840.

knowledge of the Embassy dragomans as well as for the negotiating and lobbying activities of the embassy. To make a good beginning, he first agreed with Sarim Effendi,¹²¹ then Foreign Minister, to use Redhouse as confidential medium of communication which led to his long standing as a titular member of the Translation office.¹²² It can further be assumed that Redhouse might have played an important role in Canning's confidential intercourse with Reschid Pasha as well who was an old acquaintance of him.¹²³

Later, an occasion occurred for his sole employment by Great Britain when Captain (later general) William Fenwick Williams¹²⁴ was selected as British Commissioner for joint mediation of England and Russia to negotiate a settlement of the Ottoman-Persian Border.¹²⁵ In this mission, Redhouse¹²⁶ accompanied Williams as interpreter and secretary. For this temporary duty, he had obtained permission from the Porte on leave of absence and during this time he was bound to devote his services exclusively to the object of the mission, acting under William's direction.¹²⁷ Certainly his presence with Williams was a great help to him and contributed much to William's reports to Istanbul who deluged the embassy with long letters and despatches.¹²⁸ After four years of duty he returned to Istanbul and the Translation Office at the Porte, again continuing his role as 'confidential medium of communication.'¹²⁹ In

¹²¹ Sarim Effendi was the old acquaintance of Redhouse.

¹²² Findley, Findley, *Op cit.*, in footnote 112, 581.

¹²³ Redhouse knew Mustafa Reschid Pasha since he was Turkish Ambassador in London. Later Redhouse returned to Istanbul on a special mission from Ambassador Sarim Effendi to Mustafa Reschid Pasha. There he was helped by Mustafa Reschid Pasha and Nuri Effendi to obtain a post in the Translation Office of the Sublime Porte.

¹²⁴ He had by then been in service at the Ottoman arsenal for two years.

¹²⁵ TNA, FO, 195/248, Canning to Aberdeen, 28 October 1845, No. 247.

¹²⁶ During the previous duty of Williams, Redhouse had already assisted him in translating the latter's reports on the Ottoman Artillery and the military schools. See TNA, FO 78/505, Captain Williams to Canning, 17 April 1842, No. 5. In this letter, Williams states that '...I continue to receive every assistance, both as relates to general information and advice from Mr. Redhouse, who is most truly attached to English interests, and more deeply versed in Turkish literature and language than perhaps any other Europeans.' In another letter Williams also states that '...I continue to receive every possible assistance from that gentleman (Redhouse) not only in translating documents, but in obtaining correct information, which I could not get from any other quarter.' TNA FO 78/505, Captain Williams to the Earl of Aberdeen, 22 July 1842.'

¹²⁷ TNA, FO 352/27, Canning to Williams, 13 January 1843; TNA, FO, 78/1325, Memorandum of the Services of Mr. Redhouse in Turkey by W. F. Williams, 18 March 1857.

¹²⁸ Lane-Pool, *Op cit.*, in footnote 60, Vol. II, p. 125.

¹²⁹ TNA, FO 78/734, Canning to Palmerston, 19 August 1848. According to this letter, Mustafa Reschid Pasha had accepted his suggestions of having Redhouse translate all communications respecting

the same period, he also became the member of the Imperial Academy of Art and Science (Encümen-i Daniş),¹³⁰ created in 1850. However, chronic health problems forced him to return to England in 1853. For some time, he worked in the British Foreign Office as oriental translator.¹³¹

Unquestionably, by being the friend of the Ottomans, having the confidence of them, knowing the Turkish culture and language extremely well, supporting the British ambassadors with advices and correct information, Redhouse helped very much to the attainment of British interests and expansion of the British influence in Istanbul. However, his real credit among the Turks came from his lexicons of English-Turkish (1861) and Turkish-English (1890)¹³² which contributed much to the study of English language in Turkey and to the development of Ottoman-British relations.

Conclusion

Certainly, information acquired by special methods is very important to support the foreign policy formation and execution of any government. The British representatives in Istanbul in the mid-nineteenth century were quite successful in using various means to get accurate information.

It appears that the British ambassadors used different channels for different types of information. First and foremost, they had urgent demands to know what was going on in the city. The Dragomans played a principal role in meeting that need. Their ability to get intelligence in advance on specific events was undeniable, without which the British embassy would certainly be the worst informed one in the town. Similarly, the British citizens and newspaper correspondents supported the embassy from another spot with some other details of the matter.

It was of the greatest value to the embassy to have information on a regular basis from all over the Ottoman territories. The extensive Consulate

matters of internal improvement for the perusal and consideration of the Turkish Ministers.

¹³⁰ See in Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 437 and Foreign Office List, 1892, p. 179.

¹³¹ His name was mentioned in the Lists of Foreign Office Secret Service Pensions since 1854. Such as: TNA, HD3/27 Statements of Pensions and Allowances paid out of Secret Service Fund 1859; TNA HD 3/36 Lists of Pensioners and Their Agents 1867. According to them he was given 400 pounds. But interesting point about him, his name in the document TNA, HD 3/31 Lists of Foreign Secret Service Pensions 1863 is given together with the name of the Ottoman Capital, Istanbul. Such as: 'Constantinople, Mr. Redhouse, 500 pounds.'

¹³² His dictionary is the best to date.

establishment in the East certainly served for this purpose. On the one hand, the consuls acted as *de facto* intelligence agents in their respective areas, notably, in places where they were close to the Empire's borders; on the other, they acted as ambassador on a small scale dealing with the special problems of their own districts. There was a constant flow of information from this channel. Interestingly, the British ambassadors often obtained the critical and accurate intelligence much earlier than Ottoman officials themselves, and rarely later. However, similar information provided by the Ottoman officials should not be underestimated. Everything politically interesting was usually communicated to the friendly courts, among which the British Embassy took the lead. The intercourse between the British embassy and the other friendly courts at Constantinople also produced valuable information concerning different subjects of importance. The reports of the British military officers sent to the embassy can be counted within this context as well.

All these channels served to get information mainly by uncovered means. However, the British representatives also used more covert means which resembled the twentieth century forms of intelligence gathering. In this type of activities they used three mechanisms. In the first instance, the Ottoman high officials were the actors, and information in these cases was supplied in more devious ways. These channels were indispensable to get inside view about the discussions held in the Ottoman Council and to comprehend the main determinants of the Ottoman mind.

In the second model, there was an 'outlying' department required to be served by agents not recognised as belonging to the Embassy. The persons working in this can be categorised as secret agents. They fulfilled three important functions: they acted as secret go-between the ambassadors and the influential Ottoman Officials; obtained political intelligence by cultivating friendships with leading Turks and helped to extend the British influence in important quarters of the Ottoman Empire.

In the third formation, there were unofficial negotiators who acquired the sympathy and confidence of the Ottomans. They were the critical actors of the confidential business and acted as the medium of communication between the British ambassadors and the Ottoman high officers, -including the Sultan himself. With this mechanism, the ambassadors were able to convey their messages to the persons directly, without the interference of the em-

bassy dragomans and the cognizance of the rival powers. In addition to their negotiating ability, and position as secret go-between the two sides, these people also furnished the embassy with very important information about the particular events and subjects. Because of the origins and authenticity of the sources, the information obtained through these channels formed the crucial part of the embassy reports.

Certainly, the intelligence gathered by covert instruments was much more difficult than the information obtained by uncovered means, especially, in the slippery grounds of the Ottoman politics and the intricate circumstances of the Empire. It is evident however that the British ambassadors used the covert means quite effectively. Many important documents obtained and events learned through these mechanisms.

Obviously the information obtained through different channels and supported by variety of sources increased the effectiveness and versatility of the embassy and, at the same time, enabled the ambassadors to write valuable, well-organized and extensive political reports about the internal affairs and international relations of the country. Therefore, it would be no exaggeration to assume that the British representatives at Constantinople helped the formation of the British policies towards the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century.

