

KARL A. ROIDER

Austria's Eastern Question, 1700-1790



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EASTERN QUESTION

1700-1790

Karl A. Roeder, Jr.

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For my parents

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A Note on Form

For the spelling of most place names I have relied on the forms used by the National Geographic Society in their various publications. Because some of these names are not always familiar to students of eighteenth-century history, I have included in parentheses spellings often found in the secondary literature. A few names have become so common in the scholarly world that I have used the traditional spelling rather than the modern offering of the National Geographic Society. Some examples include Belgrade, Carlowitz, Passarowitz, and Sistova. For personal names, I have used the English form for rulers and the forms used at the time for most others. Throughout I have avoided the use of the term "Empire" as an equivalent for the Habsburg Monarchy; "Empire" here refers to the Holy Roman Empire.

Monetary values and their equivalents are a hazardous business in eighteenth-century studies, especially when covering a topic over a period of ninety years. Instead of trying to find a common value for all of the currencies, I have used instead the amounts contained in the original documents and offered equivalents only when I thought they would especially clarify a point for the reader. For tables showing general equivalents, see Robert and Elborg Forster, eds., *European Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1969), p. 410; and Lavender Cassels, *The Struggle for the Ottoman Empire, 1717-1740* (London, 1966), p. 208.

Austria's Eastern Question



INTRODUCTION

The struggle between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire is one of the great dramas in the diplomatic and military history of the early modern period. After the battle of Mohács in 1526, which brought the houses of Habsburg and Osman into direct conflict, these two mighty states engaged in repeated wars to determine which one would ultimately dominate southeastern Europe. The rivalry was far more than a struggle of great political powers; it became in the popular mind a contest between Christianity and Islam, between gods and prophets. The ability of the Habsburgs to halt and eventually to roll back the advance of the Moslem Turks won for them the title of defenders of Christendom. Without Habsburg troops forming battle lines and manning fortresses only a few miles east of Vienna, many villagers and townspeople of central Europe were convinced that hordes of unbelievers would overrun their homes and property, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

Such an image was popular in early modern Europe, and it has remained so among historians. As early as 1498, as Hans Sturmberger has pointed out, Emperor Maximilian I listed fear of the advancing Turks as a major reason for reforming his administration. From that point onward, although Habsburg policy was not always trusted by all Christians or by all the political figures of central Europe, the duty of the Habsburgs to defend Christianity was increasingly emphasized in public ordinances and official statements. In the early eighteenth century, when Charles VI called upon his lands to recognize the Pragmatic Sanction, he stressed that its acceptance was essential because "Against the ever present Turkish might one can do nothing else than maintain a powerful central control over the patriarchal kingdoms and lands."¹ In 1732 the Reichstag of the Holy Roman Empire accepted

the Pragmatic Sanction, in part because Austria represented the "bastion of Christianity" against the Turks. In his study of the last years of the Empire, Karl Otmar von Aretin noted that, after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the "true purpose" of the House of Habsburg in the eyes of the German princes was to protect them and their lands from the Turks.²

That "true purpose" underwent its severest test in 1683. The advance on Vienna by Grand Vizier Kara Mustapha and his mighty army, the ensuing siege, the salvation of the city, and the flight of the Turkish army constituted a high point in the history of the Monarchy.³ The strategically significant consequence of the victory, however, was the subsequent expulsion of the Turks from Hungary. So often before, Habsburg victories had been wasted by an inability or unwillingness to exploit them, but in 1683 the opportunity was seized. The war with the Turks continued until 1699 when the Treaty of Carlowitz (Karlowitz, Sremski Karlovci) confirmed the Habsburg triumph. Turkish Hungary and Transylvania, with the exception of the small region in the south known as the Banat of Timișoara (Temesvar), came under the scepter of the Habsburgs. More importantly, the treaty initiated significant changes in the atmosphere of Austro-Turkish relations. For two centuries the Habsburgs and their subjects had stood in fear of the Turks; henceforth the Turks expressed a growing dread of the Habsburgs.

By the opening of the eighteenth century, the Austrians for the first time in almost two hundred years could feel some confidence in their military superiority over their dangerous foe. Although relations remained somewhat strained, the Austrians could find consolation in the great victories achieved between 1683 and 1699, victories that would surely make the Sublime Porte reluctant to take up arms soon without good cause or serious provocation. Within fifteen years of the Treaty of Carlowitz, the Austrians came to believe that the Ottoman state had in fact grown even weaker than they had imagined. In 1715 an Austrian envoy in Constantinople informed Vienna that Turkey had become so enfeebled that a

Habsburg army could march with ease to the Ottoman capital and, in the process, expel the Turks from Europe altogether. The Ottoman Empire seemed to possess but a shadow of its former power.

One would imagine that such an assessment would have brought comfort to the Austrian policy-makers who had lived so long with the fear of the Turks. Such was not the case. Even before assessments of Ottoman weakness became common, the Habsburg statesmen had become aware of a new and formidable participant in the struggle in southeastern Europe: Russia. Although not until 1677 had Russian and Ottoman regular troops clashed for the first time in over a century, not long afterward full-scale wars became common between them. The aggressiveness of Russia and the emergence of its able ruler, Peter the Great, in the late seventeenth century persuaded Vienna that the fortunes of southeastern Europe would not be decided by the Habsburg and Ottoman states alone. The participation of Russia could bode ill for the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1710 the Privy Conference, the body most concerned with high policy in Vienna at that time, expressed worry that, if the tsar's army should defeat the Turks in battle, it could march to the Danube River and possibly to Constantinople itself. Should that happen, the conference warned, Austria would face a far more formidable opponent in the Balkan Peninsula than the Ottoman Empire, an opponent that would pose a grave danger to the Monarchy itself.

These two issues, the growing weakness of the Ottoman Empire and the growing strength of Russia, constitute what historians and diplomats have called the Eastern Question. For most scholars of diplomatic history, the Eastern Question did not emerge until the latter half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the major historian of Austro-Turkish relations, Adolf Beer, selected the Russo-Turkish Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca) of 1774, in which Austria was not directly involved, as the beginning of a new era of Austrian concern with southeastern Europe.⁴

Yet a closer examination of Austrian policy reveals that in Vienna the Eastern Question became a serious issue as early as the second decade of the eighteenth century. From then on, the major dilemma facing Austrian policy-makers in southeastern Europe was precisely what to do about Ottoman decline and Russian expansion. Essentially, three alternatives emerged: the Monarchy could join the Russian state in expelling the Turks from Europe and then divide the Balkan lands between them; it could initiate its own effort to establish Habsburg rule over most or all of the old Ottoman possessions in Europe; or it could preserve the status quo by keeping Russia out of the Balkans—by force if necessary—and by bolstering the ever weaker and increasingly docile Ottoman state. During the eighteenth century, the policy-makers in Vienna considered all three alternatives at one time or another. The most preferred was maintaining the status quo, but the growing aggressiveness of Russia throughout the century made that policy difficult to follow. Moreover, no decision regarding the southeast could be divorced from Austrian concerns elsewhere. An aggressive Russia might be a threat to Austrian interests in the Balkans, but a boon to Austrian interests in western or northern Europe, especially after 1740 when its aggression might be deflected toward Prussia.

Throughout the century, survival of the Habsburg state depended on a foreign policy that avoided unnecessary dangers. Such a foreign policy, however, sometimes missed opportunities. And the eighteenth century offered the only opportunity for the Habsburgs to resolve the Eastern Question largely on their terms.



CHAPTER ONE

The Art of Diplomacy

On 7 December 1699 the Ottoman ambassador Ibrahim Pasha and the Austrian ambassador Count Wolfgang Öttingen, each accompanied by a substantial military escort, approached the Austro-Turkish border somewhere between the Turkish fortress of Belgrade and the Austrian fortress of Petrovaradin (Peterwardein). At the place of meeting stood three stakes, the center one marking the border itself, the other two ten paces on either side, one in Habsburg and one in Ottoman land. Some weeks before, each embassy had left its capital on the same day; each had journeyed to this spot where it was now to cross into the land of its former enemy.

On this day the Austrian commander of Petrovaradin, Guido Starhemberg, mounted on a handsome steed and bedecked in a gorgeous uniform bordered in gold, advanced toward the stake on the Austrian side. He was followed by 200 richly accoutred cavalymen and two companies of infantry. Toward the stake on the Ottoman side proceeded the Turkish commander of Belgrade, as splendidly dressed as Starhemberg and leading an armed force of equal size and magnificence. Before each commander rode trumpeters and drummers and marched servants, lackeys, and pages dressed in costly liveries and leading richly mantled ponies. When both retinues were about sixty paces from the posts on their respective sides, the impressive escorts stopped. Both commanders and eight or ten fellow officers walked their horses at the same gait toward the center post. When the two had reached a spot three paces from the center post, they halted their mounts and began to converse. Because the wind was roaring so loudly in the trees, the translators had some difficulty making themselves heard; thus the Ottoman commander ordered one of his servants to bring two chairs covered with silver brocade for the generals to sit on.

Each officer then dismounted—being extremely careful that his foot did not touch the ground before that of his counterpart—and seated himself, again making certain that he sat at the same instant as his fellow. For an hour the two conversed and, to make the time pass more quickly and more cordially, Starhemberg ordered pastries and bottles of wine brought to him on silver serving dishes. To the Turk he offered the pastries but not, of course, the wine, since he knew that the man was forbidden by Moslem law to consume alcohol.

As the generals talked, the two ambassadors advanced with their retinues, moving increasingly slowly, looking one another directly in the eye, and making certain that neither approached more quickly or more slowly than the other. At the two outer poles the ambassadors dismounted, each again making certain that his foot did not touch the ground before that of the other. Each general then took the hand of his sovereign's ambassador and, as the Turkish and Austrian bands played different tunes concurrently, led him to the middle post and presented him to his opposite number. The two ambassadors then greeted one another, offered their hands, and exchanged a few friendly words. At that moment the soldiers on both sides let out a simultaneous cheer and fired their weapons in a deafening salvo, drowning for an instant the cacophony created by the two bands. Such a ceremony must have convinced each ambassador that he was entering a civilization decidedly different from his own.

An exchange of ambassadors between Vienna and Constantinople was a rare occurrence. They were dispatched only for special duties such as negotiating final drafts of peace treaties (Öttingen's assignment in 1699), delivering important messages, or sending congratulations to sovereigns upon their accession. They journeyed to the foreign capitals, stayed long enough to perform their assigned function and to engage in some social pleasantries, and then returned home.¹ The daily, monthly, and yearly business of the Austrian state at the Sublime Porte was performed by the permanent envoys, who were by no means so exalted as, but a good deal more important

than, the ambassadors. In the early eighteenth century, they held the rather low rank of "resident," a title that had its origin in the early seventeenth century. When the first permanent envoy was assigned to Constantinople in 1612, he enjoyed the rank of "internuntius," a title just below that of ambassador. His successor, however, was simply called resident because he had "resided" with the internuntius until the latter had left for home.² Resident continued to be the most common title through the remainder of the seventeenth and during the first half of the eighteenth century, after which it gave way more and more to internuntius again.

No post in the Habsburg foreign service required a person with more skill and endurance than did the one in Constantinople, and none was less desirable. Besides the low rank, it posed language difficulties, cultural obstacles, and physical strains unlike those anywhere else. The post demanded a familiarity with the Ottoman language, that mixture of Persian and Turkish written in Arabic characters that was completely foreign to civilized society in the West. Throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century the Habsburg monarchs, like other European rulers, had relied for their negotiations at the Porte primarily on translators either supplied by the Turks or hired in Constantinople. Because such people often proved untrustworthy, the Austrians began to train and employ *Sprachknaben*, boys who accompanied envoys to the Ottoman capital to learn not only the language but Ottoman customs as well. The exact origin of this practice is difficult to determine—the first *Sprachknabe* being perhaps Peter von Wollzogen, who accompanied the minister Joachim von Sinzendorf in 1578—but in 1640 Resident Johann Rudolf Schmid received funds to hire a couple of Croatian youths, to teach them Ottoman, and to retain them as translators.³ For the next 100 years, one of the functions of the residents was to oversee the training of the *Sprachknaben* and to assign them to various duties as translators.⁴ While their primary task was to serve in Constantinople, they also were employed at border towns, sent to the Barbary States when agreements with them

were negotiated, used in Vienna when Turkish delegations arrived, and assigned to translate various works from Ottoman into Western languages.

In the eighteenth century, graduates of the school for *Sprachknaben* often became residents themselves, for, besides their skill in languages, no one in the Austrian service knew better than they the ins and outs of Ottoman affairs. The first envoy in the eighteenth century, Michael von Talman, began his career as a *Sprachknabe*, as did his son Leopold (period as envoy, 1729-1737), and the able Heinrich Christoph Penkler (1740-1755). In the eighteenth century the residents took translators with them to meetings with Ottoman officials only as a formality.

The school for *Sprachknaben* existed until 1753, when the training of boys for duty as translators was transferred to the newly established Oriental Academy in Vienna. The academy was conceived by the famous Wenzel Anton Kaunitz, chancellor to Maria Theresa and Joseph II and master of Austrian foreign policy from 1753 to 1790. Kaunitz recommended the establishment of the academy because the school for *Sprachknaben* had become too expensive to maintain. Besides the cost, he advised the empress, the school was not producing particularly competent graduates. "All of Pera had for a long time gossiped that the *k. k. Sprachknaben* were the most costly in numbers and in the ten, twelve, or sixteen years of schooling; however, in their ability, practice, learning, and general improvement they found little to praise."⁵ On Kaunitz's recommendation, the Oriental Academy was established in Vienna and admitted its first students in 1753. From then on the academy enjoyed an illustrious history, counting among its few but select graduates Franz Amadeus Thugut, envoy to the Porte from 1769 to 1776 and principal adviser of the Habsburgs in foreign affairs from 1793 to 1801, and Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, probably the most renowned scholar of Ottoman history and literature.

Aside from the obstacle of learning a difficult foreign language, the Austrian envoys at the Porte had to perform their

functions in an alien cultural atmosphere as well. Unlike European courts, including Russia, where ambassadors had the opportunity to speak to foreign sovereigns regularly and often informally, in Constantinople the resident usually held audiences with the sultan but twice, to be introduced by the man he was replacing and a second time to introduce the man replacing him. In the early eighteenth century the resident had to wear a Turkish robe over his clothes when appearing before the sultan to spare him the sight of Christian attire, but this practice ended in 1719 when an Austrian ambassador appeared in European garb before the Ottoman sovereign.⁶ The resident rarely saw the chief minister, the grand vizier, either; but he discussed matters often with the Ottoman foreign minister, the *reis effendi*, and even more frequently with the chief translator of the Porte, called by the Austrians the *pfortendollmetsch* and generally a Greek from the famous Phanar district in Constantinople. Dealing with the *pfortendollmetsch* was often a delicate business, because many enjoyed considerable influence and were often anti-Austrian.

Whereas an Austrian ambassador to a European court could always be assured of negotiating with men of similar education, social origin, and culture as himself, a resident often encountered Turkish officials with attributes unlike those in the West. Leopold von Talman reported on one occasion of the appointment of a grand vizier, "who can neither read nor write, which in this land is of little or no consequence because there have been many grand viziers who could do neither." "7 On another occasion in early 1772 Thugut had to cut short an all-night session with a *reis effendi* when the Turk, "one of the great lovers of opium," took a huge dose and passed out.⁸

Another obstacle faced by the Austrian envoys was the frequent turnover in Ottoman officials, who could lose their posts and sometimes their heads for any number of reasons including policies that failed, intrigue in the harem, personality clashes, displeasure among the religious authorities, whims of the sultans, or disapproval voiced by crowds in the streets.

While proceeding to Constantinople in 1740, an Austrian embassy heard that the current grand vizier had lost his post, an event that required a new letter of introduction with the proper greeting so that the new appointee would receive the Habsburg delegates. A member of the entourage remarked that the news caused little serious concern since "one knew that at this time grand viziers changed more often than the coiffures of the women at Versailles."⁹

A prominent feature of working in Constantinople was the prevalence of bribes and tips—the baksheesh for which the Ottoman Empire was so famous and whose legacy still exists in that part of the world. Bribery was common in all the courts of Europe as a means of securing favors and information, but it seemed especially rife in the Ottoman capital. Officials at all levels expected gifts or payments at every opportunity, and a resident was frequently at a disadvantage if he had nothing to offer or if what he offered was considered inadequate. Even when visiting an Ottoman official at the Porte or at his home, the resident had to distribute tips among the servants and lesser officials. During one period when negotiations required a large number of strenuous sessions, Thugut complained that his money was running short since every visit to the Ottoman foreign minister required him to distribute thirty piasters in tips and gratuities.¹⁰

If dealing with Ottoman officialdom was demanding, so was living among the Ottoman subjects. The residents, their families, and staffs were, after all, Christians and as such viewed with suspicion by the Moslems. From the time an envoy entered the Ottoman Empire, he was accompanied by guards to protect him from depredations of bandits and of Moslems who resented Christians in their midst. Upon arriving in Constantinople, the envoys were assigned guards and servants, plus an official who provided food, firewood, and clothing and who maintained the envoy's offices, which were also his living quarters. In Austro-Ottoman relations the host governments paid for the maintenance of the other's representatives; the Austrians usually came out ahead financially

since the Porte sent no permanent envoys to Vienna but only special embassies that stayed short periods of time.¹¹

The suburb of Pera, across the Golden Horn from the central part of Constantinople, was the location of the Austrian residence as well as many of the other European delegations, although it had not always been so. From 1700 to 1719 Austrian quarters were in the Christian district of Galata, and prior to that they were located in Stambul, the central district. In the summer the staff usually moved to villages outside of the city because of the prevalence of disease in Constantinople. In Pera social intercourse was usually confined to the personnel of the other European embassies. Although the Turks officially forbade European diplomats from speaking to one another except for a formal introduction when one envoy replaced another, even in the seventeenth century this restriction had lapsed, and by the early eighteenth century envoys were entertaining each other regularly.¹²

The embassy personnel rarely ventured into the Moslem areas of Constantinople except on official business. That great observer of Ottoman life in the early eighteenth century, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, noted that foreigners avoided the Moslem streets because "Christian men are loath to hazard the adventures they sometimes meet with among the levents [*sic*] or seamen (worse monsters than our watermen) and the women must cover their faces to go there, which they have a perfect aversion to do."¹³ One envoy, Franz Anton Brognard, did experience an adventure in the Moslem districts which nearly cost him his life. In March 1769 he and some staff members went to a house in Stambul to observe the famous parade of the Holy Flag of the Prophet, which was part of the city's preparations for war with Russia. As they were observing the procession, a Moslem religious official recognized them in the windows and cried to the crowd that no Christian should look upon the Prophet's banner and live. The people attacked the house where Brognard and his staff were located; half of the Westerners fled back to Pera while the other half, including Brognard, found refuge in the house of an Arme-