CHAPTER 8

Ḥālet Efendi's Second Audience with Napoleon*

The Turkish Ambassador Meḥmed Saʿīd Ḥālet Efendi, who had been residing in Paris since September 22nd 1803, wrote a report to the Porte shortly after July 7th 1804 which has as its subject his second secret audience with Napoleon. His first secret audience with Napoleon Bonaparte, who at the time was First Consul, took place on February 26th 1804.[1] In the meantime – on May 18th 1804 – France had changed its form of government and Napoleon had been proclaimed hereditary Emperor of the French. His envoy in Istanbul, General Brune, had informed the Porte of this in June 1804, and a war of nerves had arisen in which France pressured the Porte formally to recognize the new title of Emperor, whereas Russia and England threatened to respond to such a step by breaking off their relations with the Ottoman Empire.[2]

Ḥālet Efendi was a man of great intelligence and eloquence, an administrative generalist with a literary education. He had risen to the ranks of the "bureau chiefs" (*ḫācegān*), and his career took another upward turn as he was appointed ambassador to France with the rank of *baş muḥāsib* (chief accountant).[3]

Ḥālet Efendi's report, entitled *Qāʾime*,[4] which will be discussed here, was entirely composed as an *aperçu de conversation*, thus making use of direct speech. The writer refers to himself in the third person singular with the conventional expression of debasement (*çāker*). The change of tone from plain and simple language to the florid rhetoric of the concluding observations makes the *qāʾime* a good specimen of the complexity and elegance of Ottoman Turkish prose. By his nonchalant speech the dragoman, "that person" (*mersūm*),

* Translated by John O'Kane.

1 Examined and published in abridged form in Enver Ziya Karal, *Halet Efendinin Paris Büyük Elçiliği* (*1802-1806*), Istanbul 1940, pp. 57-63; and cf. Ercümend Kuran, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı İkamet Elçiliklerinin Kuruluşu ve İlk Elçilerin Siyasi Faâliyetleri* 1793-1821, Ankara 1968, p. 49.

2 Kuran, p. 50; Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New. The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807*, Cambridge, Mass. 1971, p. 332.

3 Ercümend Kuran, "Ḥālet Efendi," EI III (1971), p. 90-91, for Ottoman scribal culture and careers see Carter Vaughn Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922*, Princeton 1980; idem, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom. A Social History*, Princeton 1989.

4 The *qāʾime*, an official document written on one large, long sheet of paper (in this case 535 + 375 mm), is preserved in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Hs. orient. 2370. Catalogue entry Flemming, p. 178, no. 218.1. The word *qāʾima* was later used for paper money in Turkey; see Roderick H. Davison, "Ḳāʾime" in EI IV, (1978), p. 460-461.

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is labelled a man of lower rank. The writer's own calm response and final remarks combine irony with subtle policy statements.

Ḥālet Efendi's second interview with Bonaparte was one station on the long diplomatic road from Napoleon's proclamation as Emperor to Ottoman recognition of that title. Ḥālet's second audience with Napoleon was connected to the first one of February in so far as Bonaparte had in the meantime sent a communication written in his own hand to Sultan Selīm III.[5] In response to this, the courier Istefanaki had delivered to the Turkish ambassador in Paris a sealed letter from the Sultan, apparently the one dated 27 Muḥarrem 1219/8 May 1804,[6] along with a second encoded copy of the letter for Ḥālet Efendi as well as additional papers containing instructions for the ambassador.

As earlier in the case of his predecessor Seyyid ʿAlī Efendi[7] and the ambassador extraordinary Ġālib Efendi,[8] to a great extent correspondence with the Porte apparently took place in code.[9] Ḥālet Efendi himself deciphered the documents he received and immediately submitted a note to the Foreign Minister Talleyrand (a copy of which Ḥālet sent to the Porte along with his report). An hour later the First Dragoman of the French legation, Antoine Franchini,[10] arrived and coolly announced to Ḥālet Efendi:

> A note from you which I have translated has reached Talleyrand. You have requested to meet secretly with Bonaparte. But his Excellency Talleyrand thought that no audience would be granted as long as a letter with recognition of the title of Emperor failed to appear.

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5 Cf. Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, Siebenter Theil, Gotha 1863, VII, p. 362.

6 Kuran, p. 49. The Sultan's letter is in the Başbakanlık Arşivi under H. H. 35065; French translation in Baron de Testa, *Receuil des traités de la Porte Ottomane…*, Paris 1864-1911, II, p. 256 (cited from Kuran).

7 On him see İsmail Soysal, *Fransız İhtilâli ve Türk-Fransız Diplomasi Münasebetleri* (1789-1802), Ankara 1964, pp. 338 f.

8 Soysal, pp. 340 f.

9 The documents I-IV and VIII in Enver Ziya Karal, *Fransa-Mısır ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu* (*1797-1802*), were encoded; cf. Soysal, p. 333, with reference to İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, "Âmedî Galib Efendi'nin murahhaslığı ve Paris'ten gönderdiği şifreli mektupları", in *Belleten* I (1937), pp. 357-410.

10 In 1802 the French chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, Pierre-Jean Marie Ruffin, had seen to it that his agent Franchini was appointed as secretary and translator in Ġālib Efendi's embassy to Paris (Shaw, *Between Old and New*, p. 280). About a month after the interview discussed here, Franchini delivered an expensive gift to Ḥālet Efendi from Napoleon: Karal, *Halet Efendi*, p. 24. For Ruffin the orientalist see "Goethe and Diez" in this volume, no. 28.

> Ṭaleyrana bir teẕkereñiz geldi terceme eyledim Bonaparteyi maḫfī görmek maṭlūb eylemişsiz derḥāl teẕkereñiz tercemesiyle Bonaparteye irsāl olundı ancaq Ṭaleyran cenābları taḫmīnim imparaṭorluġuñ taṣdīqnāmesi gelmeyince mülāqāta müsāʿade etmezler dėdi.

Ḥālet Efendi contented himself with a cool reply:

> I (His Majesty's servant) said: 'Let the note reach his Excellency Bonaparte first; if he responds in that way, I assume that we by then, explaining its necessity to his Excellency Talleyrand, will receive consent.' – I said not another word "

> çākerleri teẕkere Bonaparte cenāblarına varsun da ol vecihle cevāb vėrirler ise ol zamān iqtiżāsı Ṭaleyran cenāblarına ifāde ile müsāʿade taḥṣīl ėderiz ẓann ederim dėyüp āḫir söz söylemedim

In fact the invitation arrived by return post, and Talleyrand even wrote in his own hand that he [Bonaparte] would expect Ḥālet Efendi the morning of the following day, a Saturday, i.e. the 7th of July 1804, in his castle Saint-Cloud located an hour from Paris.[11] Ḥālet rode there alone in his coach and was received by a general and served refreshments. Ḥālet Efendi had assumed that he would speak Napoleon alone,[12] and had prepared himself accordingly. That Franchini would be there was a disappointment. Contrary to his expectations, he learned that Franchini was commissioned by His Majesty the Emperor to be their interpreter during the conversation, thus rendering superfluous the report he had previously prepared; he resigned himself to the inevitable and along with the dragoman entered the room in which Bonaparte, standing up with his hat in his hand, received him in a most cheerful manner.

> Franchini came and said: "This time His Majesty the Emperor has appointed me to translate your private interview.' This meant that the introductory notes which I had prepared had become useless and of no avail because that person would be privy to the interview; (however,)

11 Ms. SNQLY. *Senqlū nām saray* was the place where Ḥalet Efendi's letter of dismissal was written on 11 September; cf. Karal, *Halet Efendi,* p. 88. It was in Saint-Cloud that Bonaparte announced his assumption of the title Emperor.

12 The Phanariot dragomans had been excluded from the first interview, which then, in the absence of competent translators, had been conducted in Arabic; Karal, *Halet Efendi*, p. 60. For the Phanariot Greek community see Carter Findley, *Officialdom*, p. 73.

> non-acceptance by your humble servant being impossible, I went into another room together with the dragoman (*tercümān*) Franchini. Bonaparte had stood up, hat in hand, and displayed the utmost cheerfulness; the inquiries after health etc. having been completed...
>
> Frankini gelüp bu defʿa olan meclis-i ḫāṣṣıñizı tercemeye Imparāṭor cenābları beni meʾmūr ėtdiler dėyü ifāde ėtmekle...istiḥżār eyledigim muqaddemāt mersūmuñ vāqıf-i meclis olacaġı cihetle laġv u hebā olmuş ise daḫı ṭaraf-i çākerīden ʿadem-i qabūlı mümkin olamamaġla...tercümān Frankini ile berāber āḫir bir odaya varup Bonaparte şapqası elinde qıyāmen ḍurmuş ve kemāl-i beşāşet iẓhār ėderek istifsār-i ḥāl u ḫāṭır tekmīl olduqdan ṣoñra...

Ḥālet Efendi began the interview by delivering the sealed letter of the Sultan, asking Bonaparte to open the seal. He then read out the entire communication, paragraph by paragraph, so that Franchini could translate it literally.[13]

> While that person translated, the expression of the concord and friendship with the French that had been handed down from His (the Sultan's) great ancestors filled him (Bonaparte) with extraordinary pleasure; he positively beamed with joy and gratitude. When it came to the passage: 'Thank God that in protecting our lands we never harbor any mistrust towards our friends', he asked for clarification. When I (your servant) said: 'There is no reason to mistrust anyone because of our lands; were there the slightest doubt on our part, by [the Sultan's] express command we would take appropriate security measures (we would not hesitate to enforce safeguards to protect our lands),[14] he (Bonaparte) [answered}: "But all means! Who can interfere in his national territory. Everyone does as he wishes in his own territory. Read on up to the end! There is something I want to say."
>
> mersūm daḫı terceme ėderek Françaluile ecdād-ı ʿiẓāmımdan mevrūˇs olan müsālemet ve muṣāfāt taʿbīrinden beġāyet maḥẓuẓ olup bayaġı iẓḥār-i sürūr ve teşekkür eyledi baʿdehu elḥamdülillāh memālikimizi

13 Kuran, p. 49, fn. 11: *"bend bend okudu ve Fransa tercümanı Antoine Franchini bunları aynen tercüme etti."*

14 Kuran, pp. 49 f., notes that Selīm III, after his bitter experiences in the past, appreciated the friendship of the French but did not intend to fall out with England and Russia who since Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign had become his allies.

> muḥāfaẓada dostlarımızdan aşlā vesvesemiz yoqdur taʿbīrine geldikde tekrār suʾāl ėdüp çākerleri daḫı memālikimizi kimseden vesvese iqtiżā ėtmez ednā mertebe şübhemiz olsa ʿādetā esbāb-i muḥāfaẓaya ihtimām ederdik dėmek irāde buyurulur dėdigimde hay hay mülklerine kim qarışabilür her kes kendü mülkinde istedigi gibi eder hele oqu bitsün de söyleyecegim var.

In his response Napoleon firstly expressed that he felt great affection for Sultan Selīm III and followed his efforts at reform with sympathy.[15] Secondly, that France was not a neighbor of the Ottoman Empire and therefore they shared common interests:

> If one of your neighboring states should occupy however small a piece of your national territory, that would be so harmful to us that the resulting harm could not be compensated even were we to conquer a large country somewhere else.
>
> Hemcivārıñız olan düvelden biri mülküñüzden ednā bir yere müstevlī olsa bize olqadar mużırr olurki āḫir yerden biz bir büyük ülke ẓabṭ ėtsek andan olan żararımıza muʿādil olmaz.

Bonaparte warned emphatically against Russia that had recently got a foothold on Corfu and now intended to acquire a port and a fleet in the Mediterranean. Now if the neighbors of the Ottomans proceeded to expand their territories, he could hinder the Austrians but:

> After it has emerged that you are also not making it clear where you stand and are concerned about your defense, each will follow the path that serves his own interest. Precisely because they did not take account of this outcome of affairs, I maintain that the ministers of your state are not loyal.[16]
>
> lākin siz de ṭavr alup müdāfaʿa qaydında olmadıġıñızı taḫqīq ėtdikden ṣoñra herkes kendü maṣlaḥatına elverecek ṣūrete sālik olur işte böyle

15 It is known that in 1795 Bonaparte proposed his dispatch to the *Porte* at the head of a military delegation; Karal, *Fransa-Mısır,* pp. 35 f., with earlier relevant literature.

16 During the year 1804, when official recognition was late in coming, General Brune in Istanbul expressed this view in ever more rude notes in which he finally accused the Ottoman ministers of venality; cf. *Zinkeisen*, VII, p. 377.

> şey'iñ encāmına diqqat ėtmedikleriyçün vükelā-yı devletiñize ṣādıq degildirler dėrem dėdi.

At this point Ḥālet Efendi declared that he had fulfilled his task of making known the friendly contents of the Sultan's letter; if it were permitted, however, he would like to give a reply, not on behalf of his country, but simply as it occurred to him. Bonaparte: "Please do so! It was not my intention to presume to pass judgement on you but in a friendly manner I wanted to alert you to the danger that is confronting you." Ḥālet Efendi:

> After the said Corfu had become one more republic[17] in this way, at the time it was most expedient for the Ottoman Empire to become its protector and for Moscow to stand as surety and guarantor for its protection. And since it is one of the points that served as a basis for mutual understanding in entering a general peace agreement, to change it would not only be contrary to the treaty but how can the Ottoman Empire now attempt to find reasons for changing this arrangement, given that you and we have friendship pacts with Russia?
>
> He [Bonaparte] understood the meaning concealed under these explanations and, after clearing his throat a bit, he replied: 'My intention when I went to Egypt was not to cause damage to Egypt in any way,[18] but I went there in order to reach India.[19] However, since you suddenly declared war and imprisoned our ambassador,[20] one could not risk once again dispatching an ambassador from here. I myself many times wrote letters to be sent everywhere there and in order to win over the people... I went to Syria. The entire population submitted to me. But at the time I was not able to make clear to your ministers in detail that my intention was to go to India – otherwise, neither would these things have happened, nor would it have been necessary for you to conclude such a pact with Russia and England.' Since this was no explanation that creatures endowed with reason could accept and, on the other hand, to reply with the truth

17 The Free State of the Seven United Islands was created in 1800. Cf. Karal, p. 45; Soysal, pp. 321 and 361, with earlier literature; Shaw, p. 270.

18 Bonaparte affirmed this in writing to Selīm III: Soysal, p. 322.

19 On Bonaparte's plan concerning an Indian campaign for which the Syrian expedition was meant to be a kind of rehearsal, cf. Soysal, pp. 269-73. On the other considerations which led to the French expedition to Egypt, cf. Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, pp. 37 ff. and Shaw, pp. 254 f. The Turkish ambassador in Paris, 'Alī Efendi, was deceived for a long time; Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, p. 129; Soysal, pp. 212 ff.; Shaw, pp. 255 f.

20 Ruffin; on him see Soysal, pp. 351 f.

> ran the risk of provoking disputes, I was obliged to follow the path of ingeniousness"

And so Ḥālet Efendi explained that the affair of Egypt was "as if it had never happened" and everything would be facilitated, given that both sides were disposed to continue their friendship. But for this to succeed from now on it would be necessary to deal with matters of this kind with careful consideration and not to lend one's ear to the first opinions that come along.

Ḥālet Efendi indicated that Bonaparte might have based his view on false information when he warned against the Greeks in the earlier audience (without the presence of the Greek interpreter). Bonaparte insisted, however, that the Greeks were virtually auxiliary troops of the Russians. He praised the recently deceased Ottoman Grand Admiral, Ḥüseyn Paşa, who had been completely loyal to him and the Ottoman Empire,[21] and uttered words of regret for the death of Cezzār Paşa.

Ḥālet Efendi took the opportunity to inform Bonaparte that the Ottoman fleet would sail for ʿAkkā; "since this coincides with the naval movement of the Russians who are bringing soldiers and ships from the Black Sea for the defense of Corfu, I wish to tell you now so that those weaving intrigues cannot once again impute all kinds of reasons for this." Bonaparte: "'This causes me no fear, but it suits her [Russia] to occupy Corfu completely', and then turning to me with a smile, added: 'Isn't that so?'"

Bearing in mind his instructions to avoid everything that might have kindled "the fire of jealousy", Ḥālet Efendi preferred silence which Bonaparte supposedly interpreted as agreement and responded with praise for Ḥālet Efendi's talents, predicting that he had a splendid career ahead of him. Finally, Bonaparte asked – obviously thinking of his title of Emperor – whether Ḥālet Efendi had anything else to report. Ḥālet had to answer in the negative and was only able to refer to the fact that the complete sincerity of both sides emerged from the Sultan's letter... In the closing remarks of his report Ḥālet Efendi criticizes Bonaparte's negotiating style and then touches on something which had not been directly dealt with in the audience: the alleged or real split within leading Ottoman circles between a pro-French and a pro-Russian party. Whereas Ḥālet Efendi had not wanted to go into the role of the Greeks – in any case not in the presence of Franchini – here he intimates that Ottoman statesmen had among their following "riffraff" inclined to irresponsible talk and that traitors existed who were in the service of the French:

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21 On him see Shaw, pp. 276 f.

Although he [Bonaparte] had not engaged his dragoman [Franchini] in the previous audience because of the latter's many friends in Istanbul, this time he had allowed him to be present. After having first said that his intention with regard to the Egyptian campaign had been to go to India, the next moment he maintained he could have gone to Syria and won over the people, which completely places this event in a ridiculous light. One exploits the gossip of a kind of riffraff and rabble from among the following of Ottoman statesmen in order to maintain that in their opinion from the viziers all the way down to the servants (*ḫademe*)[22] there is a division into one group which is loyal to them and the Ottoman Empire, while another group is inclined to Russia; but no names are revealed concerning who the latter group is meant to be. Certain indications, however, lead one to believe that their intention is to transform the evil in their heart into action and bring about an estrangement between the Ottoman Empire and Russia and England if with such common and unpleasant subjects, which are inappropriate for intercourse between countries, they can trouble the ear of the Ottoman government and deceive the Ottoman Empire, and that – although such talk has been current in the mouth of the French nation since the start of their republic – this does in part stem from a band of sycophants that they have taken into their service.

muqaddemki meclisde bizim tercümānıñ āsitānede dostı çoq déyü anı maḥrem etmemişken bu defʿa maḥrem eylemesinden ve Mışıra gitmekden ġarazim Hinde gitmek idi dedikden ṣonra Şāma gidebildim ehāliyi celb eder idim söziyle bu qażīyeyi bütün bütün tezyīf eylemesinden ve ricāl-i devlet-i ʿalīyeye müteʿalliq baʿżı erāzil ve evbāş maqūlesiniñ aġızlarından alınma sözleri esās-i ittiḫāẕ ėderek vüzerādan ḫademeye varınca ʿindlerinde ikiye taqsīm ile bir ṭaqımı kendülere ve devlet-i ʿalīyeye ṣādıq ve bir ṭaqımı Rusyaluya mā'il olmak üzere söylemekden ve bunlar kimler olduqlarını ketm ṣūretiyle isim beyān ėtmediginden böyle rüsūm-i düvelden ḫāric qaba ve bārid zemīnler ile sāmiʿa-i salṭanat-i senīyeyi teḫdīş ėderek devlet-i ʿalīyeyi iġfāl ėdebilürler ise derūnlarında olan fesādı icrā ve Rusyalu ve İngilterelü ile devlet-i ʿalīye beyninde bir bürūdet ilqā ėtmek fikrinde olduqları ve bu maqūle sözler Fransa milleti aġzında ibtidā-yı cumhūriyetlerindenberü var ise daḫı biraz da istiḫdām

22 For several types of servants (*ḫademe*) found in – or just outside – government offices see Carter-Findley, *Officialdom*, pp. 58-59 and p. 219.

> eyledikleri bir alay ḫavaneden neş'et ėtmiş oldıġı baʿż-ı qarā'inden iḥsās olunur.

The attitude of the Sublime Porte regarding the question of the title of Emperor, which was one of continued stalling, must have had an effect on Ḥālet Efendi's mission. In January 1805 he had to give up his activity as ambassador but he was allowed to remain in Paris[23] which he only left in September 1806. Given over entirely to conservative Islamic viewpoints, he considered it his duty to warn against everything European and to speak with irony about all the so-called achievements of the French Republic.[24] In his aversion to his host country precarious financial circumstances must also have played a role in making him experience more painfully the neglect in protocol and the impertinent talk he was exposed to in the audience he describes. Toward the end of his sojourn once again he came to be treated with greater consideration, and he was dismissed and sent back with an affable letter to Istanbul where a successful career did in fact await him.[25]

His successor, ʿAbdurraḥīm Muḥibb Efendi, to begin with could have had an easier time of it since he did bring with him recognition of the title of Emperor. The Porte had decided to take this step under the influence of the Battle of Austerlitz (2 December 1805) and the Treaty of Pressburg (now Bratislava, 26 December 1805). But Muḥibb Efendi's inaugural visit on the 5th of June 1806 almost turned into a fiasco because of an oversight of the Ottoman chancellery and the unnecessary inflexibility of the ambassador – the title of "King of Italy" had been omitted and Muḥibb refused to add it on his own authority. Muḥibb Efendi provoked his sovereign's wrath but was able to remain in his post and from this vantage point recorded in extensive reports his diverse observations on institutions in France and facts of every kind.[26]

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23 Zinkeisen, VII, p. 380; Karal, p. 80; Kuran, p. 51. His predecessor, ʿAlī Efendi, was also unable to exercise his office for a while because of the Egyptian campaign.

24 Karal, pp. 32 ff. and 38 f.; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford 1961, pp. 69, 103 and 128.

25 Under Maḥmūd II Ḥālet Efendi became enormously powerful, but the events leading to the outbreak of the Greek Revolution led to his downfall; accused of being the cause of the event, he was executed in 1822. Kuran, "Ḥālet Efendi", p. 93.

26 Cf. Faik Reşit Unat (ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal), *Osmanlı Sefirleri ve Sefaretnameleri*, Ankara 1968, with a description of the embassy narrative by Muḥibb Efendi (mentioned in the second essay of this volume, pp. XX-XX).