

A FURTHER NOTE ON THE FRENCH NEWSPAPERS
OF ISTANBUL DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY
PERIOD (1795 - 97)

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In his 'Note sur les journaux français de Constantinople à l'époque révolutionnaire'¹, L. Lagarde threw important light on a hitherto obscure aspect of the propaganda effort of the Directory within the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of this additional note is to amplify and, in certain respects to correct, Lagarde's earlier contribution on the basis of the reports, now in the Public Record Office in London, of the British Minister to the Ottoman Porte, J. Spencer Smith².

For inevitably, during the crucial years immediately before Bonaparte's Egyptian expedition of the summer of 1798 and the consequent Ottoman declaration of war on France, Spencer Smith kept a close watch on the activities of his French rival in Istanbul and the Levant. Succeeding Sir Robert Liston in 1795, Spencer Smith showed himself markedly fearful of what he termed 'the destructive doctrines so progressive in the present day' and the threat posed by French propaganda activities in the Levant. He even saw the hand of the French behind the so-called Izmir 'rebellion' of March 1797, an extremely destructive urban riot which led to the massacre of some 1500 Greek *raya* and the destruction of much of the property of the Frank merchant community in the city. It was, he commented, 'a singularity offering awful abundance of reflection' that the French tricolor cockade had served as 'an inviolable safeguard' during the

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, CCXXXVI (1948), 271-276. See also the same author's 'Note sur les journaux français de Smyrne à l'époque de Mahmoud 11', *Journal Asiatique*, CCXXXVIII (1950), 103-144.

² Extracts from documents in the Public Record Office are published by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

riot³. Not surprisingly, then, he viewed with particular suspicion the productions of the printing press established at the French Embassy in Istanbul. Originally established as 'L'Imprimerie du Palais de France' during the Embassy of Marie Gabriel Florent Auguste Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier⁴, the press was reactivated, or more accurately, reorganised, following a decision of the Comité du Salut Public early in April 1795, and new personnel were sent to Istanbul to organise the press⁵.

This reorganisation of the press coincided with the arrival of Citoyen Raymond Verninac as envoy of the Republic in Istanbul in the spring of 1795. This was marked by the printing of a *Relation de l'audience d'admission chez le grand Visir du Citoyen Raymond Verninac Envoyé Extraordinaire de la République Française près la Porte Ottomane, A Constantinople. De l'Imprimerie de la République Française*. A copy of this pamphlet was included with one of Spencer Smith's despatches⁶.

Verninac was unable to publish, as he had intended, in Turkish as well as in French, but in the autumn of 1796 he did commence publication of the *Gazette Française de Constantinople*. Lagarde thought

³ P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice) F(oreign) O(ffice) 78/18, Spencer Smith to Grenville, 16 April 1797. Spencer Smith's predecessor Sir Robert Liston had been horrified by his French counterpart Descorches who 'admitted the lowest rabble to his table and to his parties, and has made the wives of the more opulent citizens solicit as their partners in the dance hairdressers, common sailors, and menial servants', Liston to Grenville, 25 April 1795, PRO FO 78/16. Spencer Smith and Liston may have had some grounds for their suspicions for Hortolan reported to Descorches from Bucharest on 15 October 1793 that 'presque tous les négociants de Janina et de l'Albanie, établis ici, sont des sans-culottes. Ils ont traduit les Droits de l'Homme; tous les savent par coeur', E. de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor*, suppl. 1, vol. ii, 1781-1814, *Documente culese din Archivele Ministeriului Afacerilor Străine din Paris*, ed. A. I. Odobescu, Bucharest 1885, 94, quoted in A. Elian, 'Conspiratori greci în Principate și un favorit mavroghenesc: Turnavitu', *Revista Istorică*, XXI (1935), 362.

⁴ F. Babinger, *Stambuler Buchwesen in 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1919, 27ff. cited in Lagarde, op. cit., 271. One of the productions of this press was Pierre François Viguier's *Éléments de la langue turque, ou tables analytiques de la langue turque usuelle, avec leur développement*, printed in 1790. Cf. S. N. Gerçek, *Türk Matbaacılığı 1. Müteferrika Matbaası*, İstanbul 1939, 103-4 and S. J. Shaw, *Between Old and New. The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim 111, 1789-1807*, Cambridge, Mass., 1971, 195-196.

⁵ Lagarde, op. cit., 271-272.

⁶ PRO FO 78/16.

that it was very probably only after the replacement of Verninac by Aubert Dubayet in the autumn of 1796 that publication of the *Gazette* commenced. In fact Spencer Smith's despatches to Grenville, the British Foreign Secretary, make it clear that publication began shortly before Aubert Dubayet's arrival. In a despatch of 25 September 1796 to Grenville he wrote that at the moment of finishing he had been 'interrupted by the appearance of an extraordinary specimen of M. Verninac's typographic industry', a copy of which he enclosed. Unfortunately this 'extraordinary specimen' no longer survives in the archives, but it must have been the first issue of the *Gazette Française*.

For, in his next despatch, that of 10 October 1796, Spencer Smith announced not only the arrival of Aubert Dubayet in Istanbul, but added that he had sent a copy of a 'republican bulletin' with his last despatch. 'I continue', he went on, 'to send your Lordship a copy of this same gazette. Not as may be supposed for any valuable information it contains: but as a curious specimen of the present style of these people: and in which a certain difference may be observed from their last indecent philippic, in consequence, as I have reason to know, of an insinuation from the Porte'. This was the second number of the *Gazette Française de Constantinople*, dated Quintidi 15 Vendémiaire, an 5 (6 Octobre 1796 e.v.), which, among other items of news, announced the arrival of Aubert Dubayet incognito in Istanbul 'primidi dernier'. In his next despatch to Grenville, dated 1 November 1796, Spencer Smith wrote Aubert Dubayet 'continued the Gazette of his predecessor but in a more moderate strain'⁷.

The next issue which Spencer Smith sent back to London seems to have been no. 7, dated Decadi, 20 Ventôse an 5 (10 Mars 1797 e.v.), which he enclosed with a despatch of the same date. 'At the moment of concluding this,' he wrote, 'a new number of the French Republican gazette has unexpectedly come fresh from the press; which, as it contains a more ample dose than usual of General Aubert Du Bayet's own literature, I give a place to in this packet'. This number included an 'Ode sur la prise de Mantoue' composed by a

⁷ PRO FO 78/17. Despatches of 25 September, 10 October and 1 November 1796.

French citizen 'transplanté ainsi qu'Ovide sur les rives de la mer noire'⁸.

Two months later, on 10 May 1797, he again referred to the *Gazette*. 'Having been led', he wrote, 'to annex to some of my late correspondence a copy of the French Constantinopolitan gazette, remarkable for the characteristic mode in which the ascendancy of the British arms, on the 14 of February was noticed; I cannot forbear transmitting a farther specimen of the discreditable style of the same publication in the treatment of the recent successes of his Majesty's forces in the West Indies. And the more so as the annexed Prospectus seems to indicate a speedy intention in General Aubert Du Bayet to transfer the functions of Gazetteer for the provincial factories to private hands, as a lucrative speculation'. With this despatch he enclosed no. 9 of the *Gazette Française* dated Septidi, 17 Floréal, an 5 (6 Mai 1797, e.v.).

Also included with the despatch was an advertisement calling on 'les Fabricans, Négocians, Banquiers et Commissionaires', wishing their wares to be known in Europe, Asia and the ports of the Levant to contact 'Citoyen Martin-Joseph Arnould, Marchand Orfèvre, demeurant a Péra-lez-Constantinople' and supply the necessary information, prices and addresses for inclusion in the *Mercure Oriental* 'sans autres frais que le cout du port des lettres'. It was dated 'à Péra-lez-Constantinople Novembre 1796'. A prospectus for this *Mercure Oriental* was also enclosed. This was entitled 'Prospectus d'une feuille périodique, intitulée le Mercure Oriental, publié à Constantinople, par le Citoyen Marion'. 'On se persuade', the prospectus maintained, 'que les personnes qui, par goût ou par état, se plaisent à suivre pas à pas la marche tortueuse de l'ambition, à en épier les desseins, à pénétrer le mystère de ses procédés, accueilleront avec satisfaction un ouvrage périodique, qui, en leur offrant un tableau des évènements, tracé avec suite, exactitude et impartialité, pourra alimenter leur curiosité, devenir la base de leurs travaux et le stylobate de leurs conjectures'. It would contain the results of the researches of the naturalists and antiquarians who frequented the Levant and Asia as well as commercial intelligence and shipping news. On account of poor communications, excessive printing costs, the expense of

⁸ PRO FO 78/18.

paper and the difficulty of procuring news, the subscription was fixed at 25 *livres tournois* for three months, with publication twice a month⁹.

The two numbers of the *Gazette Française de Constantinople* specifically mentioned by Lagarde were nos. 6, 13 Pluviôse an v (1 February 1797) and 8, 1 Floréal an v (20 April 1797) and he suggests that the *Gazette* apparently continued to appear, albeit erratically, at monthly intervals for about two years until the French invasion of Egypt in July 1798¹⁰. But in view of Spencer Smith's remarks in his letter of 10 May 1797 about Aubert Dubayet transferring 'the functions of Gazetteer for the provincial factories to private hands' and his later description (10 July 1797)¹¹ of the 'Oriental Mercury' as having appeared 'for upwards of three years under different privileged titles', and his references to 'its new form', it may be that no. 9 was the last to appear under the title of *Gazette Française de Constantinople*.

This conjecture is perhaps further strengthened by the fact that two weeks after sending no. 9 of the *Gazette*, Spencer Smith wrote to Grenville on 25 May enclosing the second number of the new periodical *Mercurie Oriental*, dated 21 May 1797 and edited by Citoyen Marion. Yet if the functions of the *Gazette nationale* were hived off to private enterprise 'as a lucrative speculation', the Embassy press continued to be used for propaganda purposes.

For, later in the summer and shortly after the news of the liberation of Venice by French armies had arrived in the capital, Spencer Smith reported to Grenville on 26 June 1797 that on the 22 June 'the first democratic assembly of the Venetian nation here' had taken

⁹ PRO FO 78/18.

¹⁰ Lagarde, *op. cit.*, 275. The copy of the *Gazette Française* reproduced by S. N. Gerçek, *Türk Gazeteciliği, 1831-1931*, İstanbul 1931, pp. 10-14, is no. 8, 1 Floréal an v (20 April 1797), Cf. B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London 1961, 63 and S. J. Shaw, *op. cit.*, 453. Shaw records having seen nos. 1 (2 Vendémaire an v (23 September 1796)), 3 (7 Brumaire an v (28 October 1796)), 4 (3 Frimaire an v (3 December 1796)), 6 (13 Pluviôse an v (1 February 1797)), 7 (20 Ventôse an v (10 March 1797)), 8 (1 Floréal an v (20 April 1797)), 9 (17 Floréal an v (6 May 1797)). If my conjecture is correct and no. 9 was the last to appear under the title *Gazette Française de Constantinople*, an almost complete series of the *Gazette* appears to survive, i.e. nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9.

¹¹ All subsequent quotations from Spencer Smith's despatches are taken from PRO FO 78/18.

place. His endeavours to collect intelligence of this event had 'been rendered superfluous by a publication this moment produced from the indefatigable French press which after making proper allowances for the unfairness of party spirit is sufficiently authentic with respect to most facts for me to avoid trespassing upon your Lordship's time by superfluous repetition'. This was an eight page announcement of 'la régénération de la République Vénitienne' and of its union with the French Republic and it reported the public meetings held at the Venetian and French embassies in Istanbul to celebrate the event. The leaflet included a speech by the Venetian Ambassador Vendramini which ended with the stirring peroration 'Vive notre régénération! Vive la Liberté et l'Egalité! Vive la souveraineté du peuple vénitien! Vive la République démocratique de Venise! Vive la République Française!'

So horrified was he by these proceedings that Spencer Smith could not forbear to add his own account of them. 'I have to confirm every part of the French general's share in the transactions; and particularly his interchanging individually *kisses* and embraces with hundreds of the most filthy vagabonds that the eye of a traveller can figure to itself. And I have to add that 572 national cockades (differing from the French only by the substitution of the colour green to blue) were distributed at the meeting. And that a dinner of 60 covers was given yesterday by the Venetian mission to the French and Dutch legations where toasts were copiously drunk to all "present" republics. When the company rose from table they were instantaneously replaced by the attendants: with whom they thus changed places, and continued walking round the table during the second repast, in apparent, rapturous emulation of such fraternity'. The Porte, he added, 'must begin to view with anxious jealousy Parisian principles at length joining hands across the Adriatic with the native mutineers of the Levant: of such an endless catalogue as Croats, Bosnacs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Arnauts, Mainots, Cerigots, Candiots, &c, &c, &c, with blood hardly dried up at Smyrna¹²; and the metropolis itself in a ferment and frequently in flames'.

¹² A reference to the İzmir 'rebellion' of the preceding March. In his article on İzmir in the *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* Besim Darkot, following *Cevdet Tarihi*, VI, 220ff. and J. W. Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, VII, 13ff., writes:

Some days later, however, Spencer Smith had the satisfaction of reporting what he hoped would be the imminent demise of the *Mercurie Oriental*. 'Having been in the habit', he wrote on 10 July 1797, 'of affording your Lordships the perusal of the occasional literary productions of the French here, I may trespass once more in the same way, particularly as it is likely to be for the last time by an account of the fate of the shortlived Oriental Mercury: which after having been for upwards of three years under different privileged titles a continued libel against almost every nation in Europe has at length met with a final check in consequence of risking some political speculations unpalatable to the Prussian minister, in the 6 number: which in deference to a complaint from that personage to General Du Bayet, will prove the last of a publication which if decently conducted might have become in its new form of some use in the Levant; where literature is so scarce. I procured the annexed copy with the fatal paragraph, which occasioned the sentence of suppression, marked by the editor, who complained bitterly of being treated by his Ambassador like a "*Prévôt Martial*". The proceeding is perhaps better explained by supposing the General glad of a decent pretext either to give a s(n)ub to Mr. Marion who is no favourite of his, (and is in fact a *mauvais sujet*) or to polish the past indecency of the national tone a little as a popular demonstration towards the diplomatic society of the place than as the result of particular complaisance for M. de Knobelsdorff; otherwise it is only remarkable as one of the most recent incongruities by which the revolutionary faction makes its way in every quarter and by every means'. The copy of the offending issue is unfortunately no longer in the archives.

It is not clear whether in fact the *Mercurie Orientale* ceased publication at this time but Spencer Smith's troubles with the French press were certainly not yet over. For on 10 August 1797 he wrote to Grenville that Vendramini had formally been confirmed in office as Venetian Ambassador and that he was warming to the French cause under

14 mart 1797'de İzmir'de kefalyonyalılar ile hırvatlar arasında vukua gelen bir mukatele, şehir için çok zararlı olmuş ve bir yangın ile sona ermiş idi'. Cf. also N. K. Kh. Kostis, 'Smyrnaika Analekta. To en Smyrni rebellion tou 1797 kata neas anekdhotous pigas,' *Dheltion tis Istorikis kai Ethnologikis Etairias*, VI (1901-05), 358-372 and N. A. Veis, 'To "Megalo Rebelio" tis Smyrnis (Martios tou 1797) kata neotatas erevnas', *Mikrasiatika Khronika*, IV (1948), 411-422.

'the tuition of one his Secretaries of Embassy', a certain Alberti, 'who has suddenly developed an uncommon and innate talent for democratical administration'. Moreover, he added, 'the contagion of printing has also gained the Venetian Legation under such auspices: and they have availed themselves of the French press for the publication of the annexed paper'. This, with the heading 'Liberta' and 'Eguaglianza' was entitled 'Estratto di Notizie pervenute alla Legazione di Venezia. Pera di Costantinopoli 5 Agosto 1797 (vecchio stile) anno primo della Libertà Italiana', with the colophon Dalla Stamperia Francese di Costantinopoli. Also included was a copy of a pamphlet in Italian which had been sent to Aubert Dubayet by way of Bosnia and which, according to Spencer Smith, the French were 'industrious in the translation and dissemination of here for the use of this nation.' This was entitled *Lettera ad un Amico di Costantinopoli sugli attuali pericoli del Turco. Venezia 1797. Anno 11 della Libertà Italiana. Reg. al Comitato di Pub. Istruzione, a sola salvezza della Proprietà*, with the colophon a 3 Iuglio 1797.

During the year that was to pass before the Ottoman declaration of war against the French Republic which had, in the words of the firman of 11 September 1798, been engaged in the 'senseless pursuit of wishing to overturn the Universe', Spencer Smith made no further references to the activities of the French press. Perhaps these simply ceased, or perhaps Spencer Smith was increasingly preoccupied with more important matters as French republican propaganda in the Levant was translated into fact, with the occupation of the Ionian Islands in June 1797 and Bonaparte's expedition against Egypt in July 1798. Nevertheless up to the summer of 1797 Spencer Smith's reports on the activities of the French press in Istanbul contain much valuable information about the press and more generally about French propaganda activities in the Ottoman capital during this period. Spencer Smith's preoccupation with the press and its publications would seem to indicate that its activities were not without effect.

Ö Z E T

L. Lagarde, 'Note sur les journaux français de Constantinople à l'époque révolutionnaire' (İhtilâl döneminde İstanbul'da çıkan Fransız gazeteleri üzerine not) adlı yazısında, Direktuvar hükümetinin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu içinde yaptığı propaganda çalışmalarının bugüne kadar karanlıkta kalan kısımlarına ışık tutmuştur. Bu ek yazının amacı ise, Osmanlı Hükümeti nezdindeki İngiliz elçisi J. Spencer Smith'in bugün Londra'daki Public Record Office'te (İngiliz Devlet arşivi) bulunan raporlarına dayanarak, L. Lagarde'ın bu konudaki katkılarını genişletmekte ve bazı noktalarda da düzeltmektir.

1795 yılı başından, 1798 yazına yani Bonaparte'ın Mısır seferine ve bunun sonucunda Osmanlıların Fransa'ya savaş ilânına kadar geçen sürede S. Smith, Fransızların İstanbul'daki ve Akdeniz'in doğusundaki eylemlerini dikkatle izlemiş, Fransa İhtilâli fikirlerini Osmanlı İmparatorluğuna basın yoluyla aktarmaları ve bu propagandaların etkileri karşısında duyduğu endişeleri Londra'ya gönderdiği raporlarında belirterek, raporlarına eklediği gazete örnekleriyle de bunları kanıtlamağa çalışmıştır.

Spencer'in Fransız basınına dayanarak verdiği raporlara göre, 1797 yılındaki İzmir ayaklanması Fransız propagandasının etkisiyle olmuştur. İstanbul'daki Venedik Elçiliğinin faaliyeti de Fransızlarınkiyle aynı paralelde veya bunların devamı şeklinde yürütülmüştür. Venedik, Fransızlar tarafından Osmanlılardan alınınca, Venedik Elçiliği, Fransız Devriminin ortaya attığı demokrasi, eşitlik, hürriyet gibi fikirlerin savunuculuğunu yapmıştır.

Fransızların propaganda çalışmalarının başında, İstanbul'daki Fransız Elçiliğinde bir gazete matbaasının kurulması gelmektedir. İlk önce Fransa Saray matbaası olarak Elçilikte çalışmaya başlayan matbaa, basının gelişmesinde önemli rol oynamıştır. 1795 Nisanında Halk Selâmeti Komitesinin kararıyla basının yeniden canlandırılması için İstanbul'a personel gönderilmiş ve basın, Raymond Verninac tarafından, yeniden organize edilmeğe başlamıştır.

S. Smith'in raporlarında söz konusu edilen Fransız gazetelelerinden biri olan *Gazette Française de Constantinople*, M. Verninac tarafından çıkarılmağa başlanmış, Aubert Dubayet Verninac'ın yerine geçince, 2. sayısından itibaren gazetenin yayımını sürdürmüştür. *Mercure Oriental* adlı gazete ise, Fransız tebasından Marion tarafından çıkarılarak ayda iki kez yayımlanmıştır. Bu gazete, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda, doğa bilimiyle uğraşanların ve antikacıların yaptıkları araştırmalar, gemicilik ve ticarî konularda bilgi vermekteydi. *Mercure Oriental* üç yıl süre ile çeşitli adlar altında yayımlanmıştır. Venedik Elçiliği de 'Estratto di Notizie pervenute alla Legazione di Venezia' başlığını taşıyan gazeteyi İtalyanca olarak çıkarmıştır.

Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Fransa Cumhuriyetine savaş ilân ettiği 11 Eylül 1798 tarihinden önceki yıl içinde, S. Smith artık Fransız basınından söz etmemektedir. Bu yayımlar belki bu tarihlerde sona ermiş, belki de Smith artık bütün dikkatini, Fransa'nın Akdeniz'in doğusundaki cumhuriyetçi propagandasının fiiliyata dökülmesi demek olan İyon adalarının işgali (Haziran 1797) ve Bonaparte'ın Mısır Seferi (Temmuz 1798) gibi daha önemli olaylara vermiştir.

Sonuç olarak: S. Smith'in, 1797 yazına kadar, İstanbul'daki Fransız basını üzerine raporları, basın hakkında ve ayrıca bu dönemde Osmanlı başkentindeki Fransız propaganda çalışmaları konusunda çok değerli bilgileri içermektedir.