

Opera and Diplomacy from the Ottoman World to Papal Rome

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Don Juan Archiv Wien (www.donjuanarchiv.at) commenced in 2007 to research the mutual influences of the Ottoman Empire and European Theatre through annual international symposia held yearly both in Vienna and Istanbul and through publications of symposia proceedings.

A research direction under the project “Ottoman Empire & European Theatre” is *Opera and Diplomacy*, a theatre and opera-historical research project which concerns itself mainly with the cultural role of diplomats between the Ottoman Empire and European states. The project brings together on a cultural-historical level the fields of opera and diplomacy which date back to a long history in Europe; explores their correlations and examines the extent to which the field of diplomacy has been influential on opera history in Ottoman and European frameworks. This has up to today been a neglected area in the field of cultural-historical studies.

Focusing on Istanbul, Vienna and Rome as three imperial capitals, the key aspects of the subject matter are; the relevance of European diplomacy and opera/theatre in the Ottoman Empire; the Ottoman diplomacy in Europe mainly in the 18th century with focus on the Ottoman ambassadors to Vienna, followed by an emphasis on the *sefâretnâmes* –embassy reports by the Ottoman diplomats; and the correlation of opera and diplomacy within the European context, with the investigation of opera and European diplomacy in the Italian opera history, thus the presentation of ‘diplomats’ operas’ as a ‘forgotten genre’.

European diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire played an important role in the encounter of Ottoman world with opera as well as with European theatre. The earliest examples for a ballet (16th century), a drama (17th century) as well as an opera performance (18th century) in the Ottoman world are all realized by the European diplomatic existence in the Ottoman Capital.

Vienna bears a crucial significance for the history of Ottoman diplomacy in the 18th century, as Vienna is the capital which the most number of Ottoman envoys were sent to and the most number of *sefâretnâmes* were written on, where the Ottoman envoys reported on their theatre and opera experiences which they frequently visited.

A third aspect to the interrelation of opera and diplomacy are ‘ambassadors’ operas’ in the Italian opera tradition. In the history of the Italian opera, it is possible to find more than two hundred such operas which are in various ways connected with ambassadors. As the printed libretti of the Italian operas reveal, the most striking tradition of ambassadors’ operas had prevailed in papal Rome between 1683-1740, that is, from the Second Siege of Vienna by the Ottoman army until the death of Emperor Charles VI.

This paper will illustrate the outcome of this research project which contributes to the understanding of the cultural aspect to the Ottoman-European reciprocal diplomacy mainly in the eighteenth century and which aims to introduce the genre of diplomats’ operas to academia.

