

Dogs, Elephants, Lions, a Ram and a Rhino on Diplomatic Mission: Animals as Gifts to the Ottoman Court

Hedda Reindl-Kiel

In 1582 Haydar Pasha, formerly governor of Algiers (Ceza’ir), sent his ruler two lions, two tigers, a caracal (*siyah guş*) and a ram (*koc-i ganem*), along with twenty-seven silver vessels and a lavish collection of fancy fabrics and turbans.¹ This ‘package of gifts’ was only one among the numerous items of that kind received by Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595) for the circumcision festivity of his son Prince Mehmed, later Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603). While exotic animals were rare and valued very highly by the Ottoman court, silver vessels as well as luxury fabrics and turbans were by no means unusual presents either.² All these offerings had been chosen according to the usual canon that governed gift-giving by Ottoman grandees to the court of their sultan. A very similar canon determined the gifts submitted by foreign rulers; thus we can subsume offerings from provincial governors and presents arriving from abroad under the common heading of diplomatic gifts. In fact, the Porte at least around 1500 apparently considered the rank of semi-autonomous princelings like the *voyvoda* of Walachia as equal to that of an Ottoman provincial governor (*mirmiran/beglerbeği*).³

¹ Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (henceforth: TSMA), D. 9614, fol. 7 b.

² Suraiya Faroqhi, “Exotic Animals at the Sultan’s Court,” in *eadem, Another Mirror for Princes: The public image of the sultans and its reception* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2008), pp. 87-101.

³ The *voyvodas* may even have ranked somewhat lower, as apparent when we compare the carefully graded allotments of food to be given to various dignitaries on divan days, as recorded in an undated court register TSMA, D. 4628, fol. 2 b (cf. Hedda Reindl-Kiel, “Simits for the Sultan, cloves for the mynah birds: Records of food distribution in the Saray,” in *Filiz Çağman Armağanı* (forthcoming)). At that time the Porte intended to organize the territory of Walachia similarly to the province of Egypt: Mihai Maxim, “An introduction to the juridical-legal foundations of the relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Romanian principalities,” in *idem, Romano-Ottomanica: Essays & Documents from the Turkish Archives* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2001), pp. 11-22, see p. 17.

Gift exchanges played a major role in pre-modern Ottoman society, as was true in most other parts of the world as well. In Islamic cultures however the situation was somewhat special, as there was a constant tension between the Islamic ideal of unity and equality on the one hand and on the other, a socio-political structure that was emphatically hierarchic.⁴ In response to this situation people established group identities with strong inner solidarities; and to maintain these bonds a regular exchange of gifts and favours was evidently of great importance. In this respect we must keep in mind Marcel Mauss' observation in his classic *Essai sur le don* that all systems of gift-giving comprise an obligation of reciprocity.⁵

With a few exceptions, official gifts in the Ottoman context were more often than not rather impersonal items attuned more to the donor's and the receiver's social standing than to the preferences of the individual person thus honoured. This formal attitude was part and parcel of a system of distribution and redistribution, which has been identified by Karl Polanyi as common in societies with prevailing symmetries and an institutionalized centricity, but without developed market economies.⁶

Animals, mainly horses with their sometimes extraordinarily sumptuous trappings formed one of the standard categories of status-marking gifts, and were thus often part of diplomatic exchanges between Ottoman sultans and foreign princes.⁷ In 1623, for example, two horses were sent to Shah 'Abbās I in Isfahan: one was chestnut with a dark mane and tail and fetlocks of the same colour (*dori*) and the other sorrel (*al*); both were equipped with jewelled bridles and trappings decorated with silver.⁸ A 'gift package' to Sultan (Deli) İbrahim from Shah Safi I (1051/1641) contained no less than

⁴ Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The author has traced the theoretical bases of this tension, emphasizing the Sassanian influence.

⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*, translated by Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1954). See also Paul Dresch, "Mutual deception: Totality, exchange, and Islam in the Middle East," in *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Wendy James and N. J. Allen (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), pp. 111-133.

⁶ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), pp. 45-58.

⁷ For the practice of Ottoman diplomatic gift exchanges with other states see Hedda Reindl-Kiel, "Der Duft der Macht: Osmanen, islamische Tradition, muslimische Mächte und der Westen im Spiegel diplomatischer Geschenke," *Wiener Zeitschrift zur Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 95 (2005), pp. 195-258.

⁸ TSMA, D. 5903.

fourteen horses.⁹ Another rich offering to the Ottoman court arrived one year later, officially registered on 8 Şevval 1052/30 December 1642. In all probability the gifts came from the new ruler of Iran, Shah 'Abbās II, and once again the assemblage included fourteen horses. Five of the latter were on record as *esb-i bedavi*, apparently thoroughbred Arabs, while the other nine were *esb-i yorga*, palfreys (?). No less than sixty she-camels (*maye deve*) also were part of this gift.¹⁰ Although these animals occur in the official gift inventory as well, they must have been of rather minor importance. Tommaso Alberti, referring in his travelogue to the gifts that a Safavid envoy brought in November 1620 to the Ottoman sultan, mentioned fifty camels carrying silk, twenty-five of these animals transporting porcelain and another twenty-five that brought the most beautiful carpets. The animal section of the Safavid diplomatic 'gift package' also included an extremely beautiful horse, superbly equipped.¹¹

In 1665, after the peace of Vasvár (1664) the Hapsburg emperor Leopold I (r. 1657-1705) received seventeen horses, costly jewellery, a tent, as well as carpets, robes of honour and horse equipment.¹² Rather similar was the Ottoman 'gift package' sent in 1699 after the peace of Karlowitz (Karlofça) when once again, twenty-five horses were dispatched to Vienna, this time accompanied by two leopards. The leopards might originally have come as presents from the Safavid court, since on their backs they wore embroidered Persian coats. An undated document, probably from the seventeenth century, listing gifts from the court of Vienna to the Ottoman sultan (*Nemçe kralın pişkeşleridir*) recorded, next to tableware, clocks, silver vessels and ivory, six horses with velvet blankets and a carriage adorned with crystal.¹³

⁹ TSMA, D. 7998/2. There must have been a very noble race of Persian horses in existence, since in 1668 the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) sent two dapple-grey Persian stallions to the Shogun in Japan (Margot E. van Opstall, "Kamelen op de landweg. Dieren als geschenk voor de shogun," in *In het spoor van de liefde: Japans-Nederlandse ontmoetingen sinds 1600*, ed. Willem Robert van Gulik (Rotterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1986), p. 71).

¹⁰ TSMA, D. 7998/5 and D. 7998/6.

¹¹ Alberto Bacchi della Lega (ed.), *Viaggio a Costantinopoli di Tommaso Alberti (1609-1621)* (Bologna: Presso Romagnoli dall'Acqua, 1889), p. 57.

¹² For details see Murat Uluskan, "Osmanlı Diplomatik Hediye Gelenegine Bir Örnek: Avusturya İmparatoruna Gönderilen Hediye ve Bunların Temini (1665-1699)," in *Hediye Kitabı*, ed. Emine Gürsoy Naskalı and Aylin Koç (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2007), pp. 72-82. I would like to thank the author for providing me with his work when still in manuscript.

¹³ TSMA, E. 3957/11.

It is easy to enumerate case after case of horses used as diplomatic gifts; but we have already made our point: horses very frequently occurred in diplomatic gift-exchanges, in Islamic cultures as well as in other parts of the world. This custom went back a long way: an eleventh-century Arabic book on gifts and treasures related that the Prophet Muhammad had received from the Byzantine governor of Egypt, al-Muqawqis, a mule, a donkey and a horse in addition to gold, textiles and honey, four slave girls and a eunuch. The horse became the Prophet's favourite mount, the famous Duldul.¹⁴

Throughout history Chinese emperors were very much interested in receiving horses as diplomatic gifts or – as they called it – tribute. Timurid embassies to Ming China, for example, brought large numbers of horses to the Son of the Heaven, although the animals mainly went to the army and not to the imperial stables.¹⁵ Similarly the Tokugawa Shoguns were intent on obtaining horses from the Dutch, in order to breed better chargers.¹⁶ When the Margrave Francesco II Gonzaga of Mantua established diplomatic contacts with the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) he had a similar purpose in mind: as a counter-gift for the Ottoman horses desired and received, the Margrave sent Italian mules.¹⁷

While Ottoman horse breeding was at a very high standard, we unfortunately know very little about the techniques utilized, and even less about horse breeds or the characteristics that made horse-lovers consider a particular animal as a noble creature.¹⁸ When Ottoman dignitaries sent gifts to the sultan's palace, the records mainly mention *Rumi* and *Misri* horses.¹⁹ Occasionally we also find references to *Şam atlari*.²⁰ A gift register probably from the eighteenth century listing riding equipment, mentioned several

¹⁴ Ghâda al-Hijjâwî al-Qaddûmî (ed.), *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitâb al-Hadâyâ wa al-Tuhâf): Selections compiled in the fifteenth century from an eleventh-century manuscript on gifts and treasures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 63-65.

¹⁵ Ralph Kauz, *Politik und Handel zwischen Ming und Timuriden: China, Iran und Zentralasien im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 2005).

¹⁶ August Mathijsen, "Des chevaux pour le Shogun. Importation des chevaux et des connaissances vétérinaires dans le Japon du XVIII^e siècle," in *Les animaux exotiques dans les relations internationales: espèces, fonctions, significations*, ed. Liliane Bodson (Liège: Université de Liège, 1998), pp. 107-131, see pp. 113-114.

¹⁷ Hans Joachim Kissling, *Sultan Bâyezîd's Beziehungen zu Markgraf Francesco II. von Gonzaga* (Munich: Hueber Verlag, 1965).

¹⁸ See Suraiya Faroqhi's article in this volume.

¹⁹ TSMA, E. 3960/43 (dated Zilhicce 1181/19 April-17 May 1768); E. 3960/50 (dated 1159/1746); E. 3960/53 (undated; 18th century?); E. 3960/55 (undated; 18th century?). Many documents refer only to: *donanmış at or at, ra'sı*.

²⁰ TSMA, E. 3960/10 (undated; probably 1047/1637-38).

takım-ı Türkmen.²¹ Apparently a prestigious race of horses was known by this name.

As we have seen, by diplomatic gifting donor and receiver intended to demonstrate status; in other words, gift-giving in the pre-modern Ottoman Empire was a special form of conspicuous consumption. Taken together, clothing and horse trappings functioned as the major means for the upper echelons of society to show distinction in public. More often than not however the luxury textiles presented to the monarch and members of the ruling elite surpassed horses, bridles and trappings in terms of value and popularity. Yet noble mounts were not only elegant, quick and more or less comfortable means of locomotion, they also served as markers of rank and especially as vehicles for silver, golden or jewelled trappings. If the elite thus valued horses because they served socio-political aims, we may in a sense compare the animals' role to that of the Topkapı Sarayı as a whole. In this location, power was not expressed through architectural monumentality. Rather, the palace served as a ceremonial arena in which the sultan and his court displayed supremacy by deploying manpower, i.e. great numbers of well-fed and well-dressed servants.²² Instead of being valued for their intrinsic costliness, horses and palace grounds thus were mainly 'sites' suitable for deploying high status.

When Western rulers presented animals to the Ottoman court, they rarely chose horses; probably because European breeds normally did not reach the quality standards of Ottoman mounts. Less exceptional were dogs, mainly mastiffs (*sansun*). In 1619 the German emperor sent two of these animals to the sultan, and a year later the king of England dispatched four such beasts.²³ As Muslims consider dogs impure and Ottoman rulers saw themselves as supreme protectors of the Islamic faith, and even as God's shadow on earth, such gifts appear as egregious faux pas, characteristic of Western ignorance of Islamic culture. Yet things were not so simple: in January 1618, the governor of Buda, Vizier Hasan Pasha, paid honour to the newly enthroned Mustafa I by presenting him with a Koran manuscript in two volumes, precious weapons, clocks, silver vessels, opulent textiles, thirteen slaves, twelve horses, five mastiffs and three hounds.²⁴ In Buda, close to the Austrian border, procuring mastiffs must have been easier than elsewhere in the Empire. Hence it was almost a tradition for the governors of

²¹ Another set of horse utensils was called *takım-ı Misri* (TSMA, E. 3960/49).

²² Cf. Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries* (Cambridge, MA, London: The MIT Press, 1991).

²³ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (henceforth: BOA), K. Kepeci 666, pp. 228 and 395.

²⁴ BOA, K. Kepeci 666, p. 227.

Buda to send some of these dogs as presents to the court. In 1582 an extremely rich 'gift package' dispatched by 'Ali Pasha from Buda for the circumcision of Prince Mehmed included three mastiffs, five falcons (*şahin*) and one hound.²⁵ Almost a century later, in 1681/1670, Vizier İbrahim Pasha, then governor of Buda, also sent three of these enormous dogs together with other costly presents, in honour of the circumcisions of the princes Mustafa and Ahmed, sons of Mehmed IV (r. 1648-1687).²⁶ Hence if not the ruler, at least the ruling elite must have viewed mastiffs as suitable presents. In May 1578, the Protestant cleric Stephan Gerlach noted in his diary that his master, the German emperor's envoy, had presented the sultan with four "beautiful English dogs, which are hardly seen here".²⁷

Among the upper echelons of Ottoman society quite a few people apparently liked hunting wild boar; and mastiffs because of their size and strength were useful in this type of chase.²⁸ Was this perhaps a vague echo of ancient Sassanian royal practices?²⁹ Greyhounds (*tazi*), also used for hunting in ancient Iran, participated in Ottoman royal hunts as well, but they did not often serve as diplomatic gifts.³⁰ The relevant imagery might have been

²⁵ TSMA, D. 9614, fol. 2 a. The reading for "hound" (*zagar*) is questionable, though.

²⁶ TSMA, D. 154, fol. 27a.

²⁷ Stephan Gerlach, *Stephan Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch/ Der von zween Glorwürdigsten Römischen Kaysern/ Maximiliano und Rudolpho, Beyderseits den Andern dieses Nahmens/ Höchstseeligster Gedächtnijs/ An die Ottomanische Pforte zu Constantinopel Abgefertigten/ ...Gesandtschafft* (Frankfurt am Main: published by Johann-David Zunner, printed by Heinrich Friese, 1674), p. 492.

²⁸ Big dogs and those that had been taught tricks were also a very welcome gift in Japan; Van Opstall, "Kamelen op de landweg," p. 69.

In his diary Stephan Gerlach reported that in the royal stables young wild boars co-habited with horses in a kind of symbiosis, which was considered beneficial to the mounts. When these pigs grew older they were put into the royal gardens, where the sultan shot them with arrows. Their meat would then be sold (Gerlach, *Tage-Buch*, pp. 336-337). In 1496 Firuz Beğ, then governor (*sancakbey*) of İskenderiye (Scutari), wrote to Margrave Francesco Gonzaga that he needed large dogs (*chani grossi*) to hunt huge wild boars (*maxime de porchi selvatij*) (Kissling, *Sultan Bâjezîd's Beziehungen*, pp. 61-62).

²⁹ Kurt Erdmann, "Eberdarstellungen und Ebersymbolik in Iran," *Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landesmuseums in Bonn und der Gesellschaft der Freunde und Förderer des Rheinischen Landesmuseums in Bonn*, CXLVII (1942), pp. 345-382; Dorothy G. Shepherd, "Banquet and Hunt in Medieval Islamic Iconography," in *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner*, ed. Ursula E. McCracken, Lilian M. C. Randall and Richard H. Randall, Jr (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1974), pp. 79-92.

³⁰ A. Shapur Shahbazi, "Hunting in Iran: i. In the pre-Islamic period," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. XII (New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2004), pp. 577-580, see p. 578; Gerard Cornelius von den Driesch, *Historische Nachricht von der Röm. Kayserl. Groß-Botschafft nach Constantinopel, welche auf allergnädigsten Befehl Sr. Röm. Kayserlichen und Catholischen Majestät Carl des Sechsten nach glücklich*

conveyed through Firdousi's *Şâhnâma*, which was rather popular among the Ottoman elite.³¹ In all cultures hunting, if not undertaken for survival, apparently involves a projection of power over life and death and serves thus as a symbol of lordship. Although in the Ottoman Empire hunting was not forbidden to commoners like in the West, it still counted as a gentlemanlike pastime for which dogs and hounds were needed.

Falcons were also frequent hunting partners, but their story was different.³² Many raptors needed for the royal hunt came to the Ottoman court as gifts, although more often than not it makes more sense to regard them as tribute. Apart from Ottoman governors the donors were vassals like the princes of Moldavia, Walachia or Transylvania. The *voyvoda* of Moldavia, for instant, had to deliver as part of his annual tribute twenty hawks, together with fifty "voluntarily" presented peregrines.³³ Peter II, *voyvoda* of Walachia, in 1560 received a command to send twenty very fast falcons (*bad-rev şahinleri*).³⁴ In this context it is interesting to note that in the sixteenth century, the chief falconer (*ser-çakircıyan*) was one of the Ottoman dignitaries to install the *voyvoda* of Walachia on his throne.³⁵

vollendetem zweijährigen Krieg, der Hoch- und Wohlgeborene des H.R. ReichsGraf Damian Hugo von Virmond rühmlichst verrichtet (Nuremberg: Peter Conrad Monath, 1723), p. 121.

³¹ Erdmann, "Eberdarstellungen," p. 357. Sometimes copies of the *Şâhnâma* were offered as gifts; cf. for the circumcision of Prince Mehmed in 1582, TSMA, D. 9614, fol. 3b (two copies); D. 5649, fol. 2b and 4b.

³² See the article by Gilles Veinstein in this volume.

³³ BOA, Mühimme 48, p. 342, No. 1004 (27 Safer 991/22 March 1583). According to Dimitrie Cantemir, *Beschreibung der Moldau* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1973; reprint of the edition Frankfurt, Leipzig 1771), p. 252, every year the princes of Moldavia had to deliver a "token of gratitude for their fief" to the Ottoman court; this present consisted of 4,000 ducats, 40 horses and 14 falcons.

³⁴ T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı (ed.), *3 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri: Tipkibasım* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1993), p. 350, No. 1035; *Özet ve Transkripsiyon* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1993), p. 460, No. 1035 (2 Şâban 967/28 April 1560). Such orders seem to have been issued regularly, cf. T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı (ed.), *12 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (978-979/1570-1572): Tipkibasım* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1996), p. 645, No. 1221; *Özet - Transkripsiyon ve İndeks* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1996), vol. II, p. 272, No. 1221.

In the case of Walachia, the tradition of supplying the court with falcons continued into the 19th century (BOA, Cevdet Saray 6627 (15 Şâban 1197/16 July 1783); Cevdet Saray 3832 (16 Muharrem 1234/15 November 1818).

³⁵ Cf. Mihai Maxim, "Nouveaux documents turcs sur les cadeaux protocolaires (*peşkes*) et les insignes du pouvoir (*hükümet alâmetleri*)," in *idem, Romano-Ottomanica: Essays & documents from the Turkish archives* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2001), pp. 69-151.

Hawks frequently appeared at the sultans' court along with the annually delivered poll tax of Walachia (*cizye*); sometimes Ottoman documents even speak of *harac şahini*, tribute falcons.³⁶ In 1619 the Prince of Transylvania, Gabor Bethlen, also sent twelve silver goblets (*kupa*) and ten hawks (*doğan*).³⁷ Ordinary Ottoman governors also were "requested" to contribute an assortment of birds to the royal aviary. In 1583 Vizier Ibrahim Pasha, governor of Egypt, had to hand over sixty *zağanos* and twenty *balaban* falcons to be brought to Istanbul by one of the chief falconers (*doğancıbaşı*).³⁸ Other dignitaries, like the governor and the *defterdar* of the Crimea in 1631, also needed to satisfy the court's demand for hawks.³⁹ But most surprising is the discovery that foreign power-holders perceived as future vassals received orders to deliver falcons as well, as happened to the "Lords of Cyprus" (*Kibris beğleri*) in 1560.⁴⁰ At that time the island was still Venetian territory, although the Serenissima paid the sultan the tribute originally due to the Mamluk rulers, defunct since 1517.

These orders show that the court had a seemingly insatiable appetite for hawks and could not be adequately supplied by the servitors of the royal falconry establishment or else the free market. Moreover, the commands to vassals and governors also involve a symbolic element: the servitor offered to his lord an esteemed and trusty "servant", thus emphasising his own subordinate position. Maybe the sultan also expected the donor to perform like a good hawk: to be vigilant, aggressive and obedient at the same time.

Vassals and provincial governors, eager to please the court of course also occasionally made voluntary gifts of predator birds to the Porte. Thus for the circumcision festival of Prince Mehmed in 1582, the prince of Moldavia dispatched six *şahin* falcons along with silver vessels and four

³⁶ Maxim, "Nouveaux documents turcs," pp. 87-88.

³⁷ BOA, K. Kepcici 666, p. 325. In 1618 Gabor Bethlen had sent 20 silver goblets and twelve white *şahin*-falcons (*ibidem*, p. 151). For an earlier order to the Prince of Transylvania to send falcons see BOA, Mühimme 52, p. 116, No. 288 (19 Şevval 991/7 September 1583).

³⁸ BOA, Mühimme 49, p. 110, No. 382.

³⁹ T.C. Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü (ed.), *85 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (1040-1041 (1042) / 1630-1631 (1632))*: *Tipkibasım* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001), p. 215, No. 529; *Özet - Transkripsiyon - İndeks* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002), p. 319-320, No. 529 (22 Zilhicce 1040/22 July 1631). Among the gifts of the Crimean khan to the sultan in 1627 there were four *sungur* falcons, apparently a voluntary gift, not a tributary obligation (BOA, K. Kepcici 667, p. 26 (3 Rebi' II 1037/12 December 1627)).

⁴⁰ *3 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (966-968/1558-1560)*: *Tipkibasım*, p. 339, No. 991; *Özet ve Transkripsiyon*, p. 444, No. 991 (25 Recep 967/21 June 1560). 15 *zağanos*- and 10 *balaban*-falcons were on order.

mastiffs.⁴¹ For the same event the *beğlerbaşı* of Çıldır, Mustafa Pasha, sent silver bottles, costly textiles, nine slaves, three *doğan* and two *şahin* falcons.⁴² As for the governor of Batum, Ahmed Pasha b. İskender Pasha, he presented two goshawks (*çakır-i ispir*), eighteen slaves, in addition to silver bottles and luxury fabrics.⁴³

Horses, dogs and falcons were of practical use for the recipient; but the lions, tigers or caracals just mentioned served purely for display. Yet among the gifts presented to the sultan, exotic beasts of this kind were not exceptional. Elephants and giraffes had a long-established tradition in diplomatic gifting as well. Already in 807 CE, Harun ar-Rashid had sent an elephant to Charlemagne; however the poor animal died on the way.

Throughout the pre-modern centuries transporting exotic animals must have remained a problem. In 1512 Qansuh al-Gawrī received two elephants from "the King of India"; originally four such beasts had been dispatched, but only two of them survived the journey and arrived in Cairo.⁴⁴ As a courtesy one of the surviving animals was then passed on to Istanbul.⁴⁵ For, apparently, only elephants could provide the splendour needed by a properly magnificent Islamic court.

In India elephants were a symbol of the power and nobility of the ruler; this had been true in pre-Mughal times and continued to be so in the Mughal period. Popular Indian imagery emphasized mainly the animal's wisdom and strength.⁴⁶ But presumably when Western potentates both Muslim and non-Muslim wished for elephants, they hoped to enhance their own 'power and nobility' by acquiring the appropriate status symbols. As for the Ottomans and Safavids, they also used elephants and other exotic beasts as a means of impressing foreign ambassadors. In 1531 the envoys of Emperor Charles V (r. 1517-1554/55) Joseph von Lamberg and Niklas Jurischitz reported to their sovereign that while on their way to the audience chamber, in the first

⁴¹ TSMA, D. 9614, fol. 2b.

⁴² TSMA, D. 9614, fol. 7a; D. 5649, fol. 4b.

⁴³ TSMA, D. 9614, fol. 7b.

⁴⁴ Celia J. Kerslake, "The correspondence between Selim I and Kânsuh al-Gawrī," *Prilozi za Orientalnu Filologiju*, 30 (1980), pp. 219-233, see p. 227.

⁴⁵ The animal arrived in Istanbul in 1515; cf. Ludwig Forrer (translator), *Die osmanische Chronik des Rustem Pascha* (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1923), p. 43 and Faroqhi, "Exotic Animals."

⁴⁶ Jürgen W. Frembgen, "Der Elefant bei den Moghul," in *Rosenduft und Säbelglanz: Islamische Kunst und Kultur der Moghulzeit*, ed. Jürgen W. Frembgen (Munich: Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, 1996), pp. 167-181, see p. 167.

court of the palace they had seen many horses and two elephants.⁴⁷ When Hans Ludwig von Kuefstein, the Kaiser's envoy in 1628, arrived in Edirne he was met by an imposing contingent, including two elephants, which again served the following day at a spectacle staged for the ambassador during his official meal.⁴⁸

These two gigantic animals might have come to the Ottoman court in November 1620 with a Safavid envoy, who had brought along a veritable small zoo: four exquisitely caparisoned elephants, two enormous tigers, a rhino and a superb horse with jewelled equipment.⁴⁹ In pre-modern times, when zoos with exotic animals were exclusively a princely privilege, having the opportunity to watch such animals in a non-public setting was definitely a sign of honour. This is the context in which Silahdar Mehmed Ağa described a scene involving Mustafa II (r. 1695-1703), two days after his accession to the throne. Visiting the pavilion across from the Av Kapısı, the young sultan made his choice among the horses of the imperial stables and then had the elephants brought in and "watched them for a while".⁵⁰

Apparently all elephants offered to the Ottoman court were of Indian origin, including the animal sent to the Ottoman ruler in 1738 by Nâdir Shah, along with a complete set of equipment (*takım-ı mükemmeli*).⁵¹ The taming of African elephants seems to have been rather difficult, and therefore they did not play a role in diplomatic gifting.

Other beasts from Africa made more successful gifts. Giraffes were especially popular at the sultans' court and on occasion even made it into Ottoman historiography. Thus the chronicler Oruç reported that in Ramazan 900/May-June 1495 a "living giraffe" arrived as a present from the Seyyids of Medina.⁵² As he gave no description of the animal, presumably giraffes

⁴⁷ Anton von Gévay (ed.), *Urkunden und Actenstücke der Geschichte der Verhältnisse zwischen Österreich, Ungern und der Pforte im XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderte: Gesandtschaft König Ferdinands I. an Sultan Suleiman I. 1530* (Vienna: Schaumburg und Comp., 1838), pp. 39-40.

⁴⁸ Karl Teply, *Die kaiserliche Großbotschaft an Sultan Murad IV. 1628: Des Freiherrn Hans Ludwig von Kuefsteins Fahrt zur Hohen Pforte* (Vienna: A. Schendl, 1976), pp. 40-41.

⁴⁹ Bacchi della Lega, *Viaggio a Costantinopoli di Tommaso Alberti*, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁰ Findikli Silâhdar Mehmed Ağa, *Nusretnâme*, translated into modern Turkish by İsmet Parmaksızoglu (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1962), vol. I, p. 6: "Ayn 25inci Çarşamba günü Padişahımız, Av Kapusu karşısında bulunan köşke gelerek, Hasahurdaki atlari egerleterek, hoşuna gidenleri kendisi için ayırtti. Sonra, filleri getirerek biraz da bunları seyretti."

⁵¹ BOA, Bab-ı Asafi Teşrifat Defteri 348, fol. 3b.

⁵² Richard F. Kreutel, *Der fromme Sultan Bayezid: Die Geschichte seiner Herrschaft (1481-1512) nach den altosmanischen Chroniken des Oruç und des Anonymus Hanivaldanus*

were already well-known to the inhabitants of Istanbul and Edirne. On the other hand, the name of this animal obviously caused problems to the scribe who had to list the incoming gifts for the circumcision festivity of 1582, since he made two separate attempts. Once he wrote: *jernaka: 1*, and three lines further into his list, he settled for: *zurnapa, ra's 1*.⁵³ Together with six slaves (*gilman*), five black eunuchs and five horses, the giraffe was part of the sumptuous gifts from Haydar Pasha, former governor of Tripoli (Trablus-Garb) in today's Libya.⁵⁴

But other potentates sent giraffes as well. In 1581, in other words well before the great circumcision feast, the Venetian special envoy to Istanbul Jacopo Soranzo recounted seeing a giraffe in "Scluzza", a place with a long wooden bridge (maybe Çatalca?). He described the beast in detail, claiming that it had come from India (!) to be presented at the circumcision festivity. "It is altogether a beautiful animal, but not able to carry a burden;" he continued, "it is so tame that one can give it bread not only by hand but also from one's mouth, and it will take the bread with great skill..."⁵⁵

Giraffes seem to have been a permanent part of the sultans' menagerie. In 1487, Bayezid II dispatched as a token of his high esteem a number of "rare animal gifts" to Lorenzo di Medici, including a giraffe.⁵⁶ The Ottoman court obviously did not have the same respect for the Emperor Maximilian II (r. 1564-1576), since in 1568 the grand vizier refused the imperial envoys' request for a giraffe to be sent for Maximilian's menagerie. The Ottoman dignitary let it be known that the sultan's zoo currently had only one giraffe, which was needed to train the horses not to shy at the sight of giraffes.⁵⁷

(Graz, Vienna, Cologne: Styria, 1978), p. 81. Ruhi Edrenevi (whose chronicle is largely based on Oruç) has the story too (Ruhi Edrenevi, *Tarîh-i al-i 'Osman*, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, ms. or. 4 Nr. 821, fol. 167a).

⁵³ TSMA, D. 9614, fol. 5a.

⁵⁴ From a parallel reference in TSMA, D. 5649, fol. 3a; visibly we are dealing with only one giraffe.

⁵⁵ "Qui vedemmo la giraffa portata dalle Inde, per menarla in Costantinopoli alle feste. ... È in somma animale bello, ma non atto a portar pesi; è domestico, tantochè non solo gli porgevano il pane con le mani, ma con la bocca ancora; ed era preso da lui con tanta destrezza..." (Eugenio Albèri (ed.), *Relazioni degli ambasciatori Veneti al senato*, series III, vol. II (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 1844), p. 222).

⁵⁶ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches, grossenteils aus bisher unbenützten Handschriften und Archiven*, vol. II (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1828), p. 296.

⁵⁷ Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. III (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1828), p. 516.

Hence, giraffes and other exotic animals must have been an established part of royal self-representation to the public. Miniatures depicting the arrival of diplomatic gifts therefore often highlight elephants, lions and rhinos. A typical example is a miniature in the “Şahnâma-e Selîm Hân”, a court chronicle written in Persian by Lokman and illustrated mainly by Nakkaş ‘Ali and Nakkaş ‘Osman. This miniature depicts a hippopotamus at the Hippodrome (At Meydanı) which had been brought in from Egypt.⁵⁸ The Hippos must have been rather little known in the West, for in his “Itinerarium”, Maximilian Brandstetter described in great detail two hippos he had seen in the sultan’s palace garden in 1608, but he did not know the animal’s name.⁵⁹

Another miniature illustrates vividly the significance of such offerings.⁶⁰ It shows a rhinoceros given as a diplomatic gift by an Abyssinian grandee to the Porte (see illustration). The animal, apparently a white rhino (*ceratotherium simum*) from East Africa, stands in a mobile showcase to be carried around and marvelled at by the capital’s population. More than a century after Dürer’s famous woodcut (1515) rhinos in the West were still so little known that Tommaso Alberti, reporting the arrival of the Safavid envoy with exotic animals as gifts to the Ottoman court in 1620, felt it necessary to describe the rhino in detail. According to Alberti, the creature had a big body like that of an ox, but short legs and no pelt; its colour resembled that of a buffalo, and its moustache was like that of an ox, but a bit longer; on its nose it had a horn like a sugar loaf. As for the animal’s ears they were small and not accompanied by horns, and its neck was short.⁶¹ Thus, the animal was evidently an Indian rhinoceros (*rhinoceros unicornis*) and had in all probability originally been a gift from the Mughal court to the Safavid ruler. Such redistribution of presents once received – as we have seen – was common practise in pre-modern Ottoman and Middle Eastern gift exchanges, entirely in harmony with the relevant etiquette.

Gifting large cats, such as tigers, panthers and lions also was part of a long tradition. They mainly came from Ottoman governors in the Arabian lands, such as Haydar Pasha of Algiers, or else from foreign Muslim courts,

⁵⁸ Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi (henceforth: TSMK), A. 3595, fol. 65a. For the manuscript see Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Farsça Yazmalar Kataloğu* (İstanbul: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1961), p. 273, No. 788. For the miniatures cf. Filiz Çağman, “Şahname-i Selim Han ve Minyatürleri,” *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı*, V (1972-1973), pp. 411-442.

⁵⁹ Karl Nehring, *Adam Freiherrn zu Herbersteins Gesandtschaftsreise nach Konstantinopel: Ein Beitrag zum Frieden von Zsitvatorok (1606)* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1983), p. 135.

⁶⁰ TSMK, A. 3595, fol. 152a.

⁶¹ Bacchi della Lega, *Viaggio a Costantinopoli di Tommaso Alberti*, p. 57.

as for example the 1620 Safavid dispatch referred to above. Especially lions played a central role in the Ottoman court’s ritual intended to impress foreign ambassadors. In this context a note in Brandstetter’s “Itinerarium” is especially remarkable, concerning a courtesy to the imperial ambassador: after the official audience in the palace (16 September 1608) Ahmed I (r. 1603-1617) sent “two chained lions” and the royal musicians to the Elçi Hani for the members of the embassy to enjoy during their meal.⁶²

An ancient Oriental tradition may account at least in part for the Ottoman attitude towards lions; after all lion sculptures often appeared in front of the palaces of ancient Mesopotamia, and nearer in time, also in the Çehel Sotûn Palace in Safavid Isfahan, where the column bases of the *tâlâr* (open column hall) are lion figures.

Two late sixteenth-century Ottoman miniatures, however, reveal yet another aspect of lion imagery. The first depiction, from the “Şema’il-name-i al-i ‘Osman” by the *şehnameci* Ta’likizade, is at first glance somewhat enigmatic. The miniature shows a lion hunt of Selim II in Haramidere (Üsküdar); but neither sultan nor lion look aggressive, while many of the courtly spectators make gestures of astonishment. Furthermore the ruler does not carry a weapon, while his sword-bearer next to him has kept his sword in its sheath.⁶³ The message of this miniature becomes easier to understand when we examine one of the pictures in another court chronicle, written some ten years earlier by Seyyid Lokman and illustrated by Nakkaş ‘Osman.⁶⁴ Here we find a scene in which a lion, brought in from Baghdad, licks the boots of ‘Osman’s I.⁶⁵ Now the message is evident: even a lion, the king of all animals, a dangerous predatory cat and a symbol of ultimate royal power, submits to the Ottoman ruler, thus making him a “king of kings”. Therefore the lions and tigers as well as the caracal which Haydar Pasha of Algiers offered to his ruler served to emphasize sultanic omnipotence.

Although caracals are mainly nocturnal, they can easily be tamed, have an imposing appearance and were definitely a rarity in the Ottoman capital.

⁶² Nehring, *Herbersteins Gesandtschaftsreise*, p. 127.

⁶³ Mehmed b. Mehmed el-Fenari eş-şehir bi Ta’likizade, *Şah-name veya Şema’il-name-i al-i ‘Osman*, TSMK, A. 3592, fol. 39b. Cf. Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu*, vol. II (İstanbul: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1961), p. 371, No. 3030; Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, *Topkapı Sarayı Museum Islamic Miniature Painting* (İstanbul: Tercüman, 1979), figure 56.

⁶⁴ Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Yazmalar Kataloğu*, vol. I (İstanbul: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1961), pp. 225-226.

⁶⁵ Hüner-name I, TSMK, H. 1523, fol. 57b.

Rarity always played an important role in gifting within the Ottoman elite.⁶⁶ An apposite present for a ruler or a high-ranking official always had to be a costly, luxurious and rare item, as suggested even by the title of a twelfth-century Arabic treatise, "Book of Gifts and Rarities".⁶⁷

The last item in Haydar Pasha's animal collection, namely the ram (*koç*, *ı ganem*) was however an ordinary everyday beast, whose meat was eaten by many of the city's inhabitants. As the scribe did not refer to any special characteristics, probably the animal was indeed just a normal ram. Compared to Haydar Pasha's other gifts this ram might, at first glance, seem incongruous, analogous to the naive addition of a rough copper ring to exquisite jewellery. Yet the composition of the 'gift package' clearly indicated that the animal had been chosen with the utmost care.

Considering the occasion at which the presents were offered, namely a circumcision, the ram was indeed a very appropriate choice. Even in present day circumcision celebrations, rams have an important role as sacrificial animals preferably if they are *kinali*, i.e. bear a dark mark on their forehead.⁶⁸ Animals with this feature are seen as especially propitious. In all likelihood Haydar Pasha's ram belonged to this latter species. Thus the seemingly everyday beast was in fact nothing other than a demonstration of religiosity, an element that we find frequently in gifting within the Islamic world. More often than not the piety of donor and recipient manifested itself by the inclusion of a Koran manuscript or the calligraphic rendition of lines from the Holy Book, although rosaries (*tesbih*) or prayer rugs (*seccade*) were favoured paraphernalia as well.

We have stated above that gifting in the pre-modern Ottoman Empire was a special form of conspicuous consumption. After introducing a whole series of animals that our sources mention as gifts, we can now go a step further and differentiate between the functions of these different animals. Gifts of horses with their costly trappings are part and parcel of conspicuous

⁶⁶ A typical example was Semiz 'Ali Pasha's farewell gift to the Kaiser's ambassador Busbecq: "He also gave me a really beautiful robe interwoven with gold and a box full of antidote to poison of the finest quality from Alexandria, and lastly a glass vessel full of balm, which he praised very highly. 'The other gifts which he had given me did not,' he said, 'value very greatly, because they could be bought with money, but this was a rare present, than which his master could give nothing more precious to a friendly or allied prince.' (Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562*, translated by Edward Seymour Forster (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968; reprint of the edition Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 230).

⁶⁷ Al-Hijjâwî al-Qaddûmî, *Book of Gifts and Rarities*.

⁶⁸ I thank my colleague Durdu Fedakâr for this information.

consumption in a narrow sense. On the other hand, presents of dogs or hawks for hunting belong more accurately to the sphere of conspicuous leisure.⁶⁹ By contrast 'conspicuous courtly splendour' seems the most appropriate way of categorizing exotic animals like elephants, giraffes, rhinos or hippos, while lions are covered best by a concept like 'conspicuous power'. The ram, however, points to another vital element in the image of the Ottoman sultan, which the ruling elite was particularly careful to stress, namely 'conspicuous piety and religiosity'.

Hence we may conclude that animal gifting was by no means something outlandish or uncommon, but rather a response to the core cultural needs of the court and the ruling elite. In this sense dogs, elephants, giraffes, lions, hippos, rhinos and even rams certainly fulfilled a 'diplomatic mission'.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An economic study of institutions* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924).

⁷⁰ Both the author and the editor thank Caroline Finkel for the following reference, which concerns horses used as part of ransom payments: Zsuzsanna J. Úyvári, "A Muslim Captive's Vicissitudes in Ottoman Hungary," in *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Early fifteenth-early eighteenth centuries)* ed. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007), pp. 141-166, see pp. 148-149.