The *jeunes de langues* in the eighteenth century

Spain's first diplomatic interpreters on the European model

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This article explores the history in Europe of the training of interpreters specialized in diplomacy, which began in the Renaissance Venetian Republic, when this European power started to train the so-called *giovani di lingua* in its embassy in Constantinople. The Venetian model was imitated and developed by other European powers, especially by France and the Austrian monarchy, trying to strengthen their relations with the Ottoman Empire by training their own *jeunes de langues* and *Sprachknaben*, respectively. In Spain the equivalent figure, the *joven de lenguas,* emerged later, in the last third of the 18th century, and there is evidence of several proposals to create a Spanish school to train these youngsters. The profile of the selected *jóvenes* who would serve at the Spanish embassies and consulates in foreign regions is also analyzed. Finally, the Spanish example is compared with the pioneering European models, especially with the Venetian, the French and the Austrian ones.

Keywords: history of interpreting, diplomacy, training of interpreters, jóvenes de lenguas, Sprachknaben

1. The origin of Europe's diplomatic interpreters

Almost since the dawn of history the figure of the interpreter has emerged as a mediator in diplomatic negotiations. Roland (1982) and Kurz (1986a, 1986b) have both found the presence of interpreters attested in ancient Egypt, where they even enjoyed a certain prestige. Judging by the multilingual inscriptions on clay tablets found by archaeologists, there can also be no doubt that in the ancient oriental civilizations of the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Hittites

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functionaries were entrusted with the task of facilitating communication. Roland and Kurz have also documented the presence of interpreters in ancient Greece and Rome.

The role of the interpreter has been linked historically to that of spy or traitor. Indeed, generally speaking, the interpreter is depicted as a person who arouses suspicion and is admired and shunned in equal measure (Andres 2008: 38–39). Thus, doubts regarding the loyalty of interpreters towards the authorities they served have been a constant throughout history. Considering the importance that the authorities attributed to the interpreter's allegiance as intercultural mediators in diplomacy, they went to great lengths to select the methods of training and recruiting these individuals. It is this background that informs the three-fold aims of this article: to trace the origin of diplomatic interpreters in Europe, to explore their evolution, and to compare the different systems developed for the training of interpreters in Venice, France, Austria and Spain.

Broadly speaking, diplomatic interpreters first came into being in Europe, more exactly in the Venetian Republic of the Renaissance, where they were known as *giovani di lingua* (the French used the terms *jeune de langue* and *enfant de langue*, the Germans *Sprachknabe*, the Spaniards *joven de lenguas*).[1] Despite this Venetian origin in the mid-sixteenth century, the term most widely used in Europe to denote a fledgling interpreter posted in a foreign country appears to have been *jeune de langue*, the name given to these young men in the Parisian School of Oriental Languages.

A *jeune de langue* was a boy or young man between the ages of approximately eight and thirty who was sent to another country (generally oriental, most often a territory of the Ottoman Empire) in order to learn its language and culture with a view to later acting as a professional interpreter in the service of the local administration, a consulate or an embassy. Interpreters specializing in diplomacy were known in this area, the Levant, as *dragomans*. The term "Levant" itself started to be used towards the end of the fifteenth century: meaning "to the east of Italy", it encompassed the whole of the eastern Mediterranean area. The Levant was a crucial trading area with different routes joining the Mediterranean coast with countries in the Middle East. It was the job of the dragomans to mediate in commercial and diplomatic transactions between European countries and the Levant region. This required not only an excellent command of Turkish, Arabic and the most widespread European languages (French and Italian), but also a flair for negotiation and broad knowledge of Islamic culture and economics.

The population of the Ottoman Empire was multicultural and polyglot, with the Muslims in positions of authority. Other groups included the Greeks (orthodox Christians), Armenians, Sephardic Jews and the so-called "Latins" (Levantine Catholics descended from Venetian, Genovese and Cypriot merchants). As well

as Turkish, the official language, Arabic was widely spoken, as were Armenian, Greek, Italian, some Slavic languages and Persian (Groot 2005; Masters 2001).

On account of their respective geographical locations, at the end of the fifteenth century Constantinople and Venice began to vie for commercial power. Because all European powers wanted to be represented in Constantinople, there was a migration of traders to the area who needed the support of a diplomatic network in their relations and negotiations with the Sultan's administration (Masters 2001: 70–71). During the sixteenth century the western powers represented at the Ottoman Porte in Constantinople (Venice, France, the Netherlands and England) generally made use of local interpreters — the dragomans, who were almost always Sephardic Jews or Catholic Latins. In addition to knowledge of Turkish and Arabic, these individuals needed to be familiar with the law and culture of the land and to be skilled mediators (Groot 2005). European ambassadors had to be able to trust fully in these interpreters for much of the success or failure of their diplomatic or commercial missions depended on them. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries other European powers came to be represented in Constantinople: the monarchy of the Austrias, Russia, Prussia, Spain and Denmark.

The local dragomans were non-Muslim subjects of the sultan who, as employees of a foreign embassy, enjoyed his protection. He granted them a patent called the *berat*, which entitled them to the same rights as foreigners and entailed some fiscal benefits as well. The fact that these dragomans served Ottoman and European interests at the same time — thus converting many of them into double agents — soon led to their falling under suspicion. Consequently, the western powers began to train interpreters of their own nationality, sending locally born youngsters abroad so that they could learn *in situ* both the local languages and diplomatic practices. The hope was that by using only individuals of their own nationality the authorities would be assured of the dragomans' full loyalty. The pioneers in this regard were the Venetians who in 1551 chose two twenty-year old notaries to be sent from the chancel to the Venetian embassy or *bailo* in Constantinople (Lucchetta 1989). Besides wanting to secure the dragomans' loyalty, the Venetians also took this measure because what was needed were interpreters who could read, write and translate whereas the local ones knew the spoken language only (Lucchetta 1989: 21). These young men would be called *giovani di lingua*.

The Venetian lead was followed and perfected by France which created an *École des Enfants de Langues* in Constantinople in 1669 on the orders of Prime Minister Colbert. The school's apprentices came to be known as *enfants de langues*. By the first half of the eighteenth century France had two schools: the original one in the Capuchin convent in Pera[2] and another in the *Lycée Louis-le-Grand* in Paris. At the start twelve Armenians received training in Paris, but at some point the decision was taken that the two schools should cooperate and that only French Catholics

— whether French by birth or descendents of French settlers in the Levant — might attend. A stay in Paris became obligatory for all the young trainee interpreters (Balliu 1997: 258) who would later be known as *jeunes de langues* on the foundation of the Parisian *École de Langues Orientales Vivantes* (1795). Meanwhile, in 1754, the so-called Theresianum or *Akademie der Orientalischen Sprachen* was set up in Vienna and began sending its best *Sprachknaben* to Constantinople after a period of apprenticeship to perfect their diplomatic training. As an outcome of all this, young and lonely European men in the Orient began to marry the daughters of local interpreters, thus giving rise to a *sui generis* group or caste of dragomans specialised in cultural transfer between East and West (Groot 2005: 479).

2. Attempts to create a School of Oriental Languages in Spain (1781)

Notwithstanding several earlier attempts to train translators specializing in oriental languages, the first *jóvenes de lenguas* or *agregados* (see below) were appointed in the last third of the eighteenth century. The training included stays abroad, as reflected in the correspondence between Miguel Casiri, official state translator of oriental languages, and the State Administration. In 1781 Casiri wrote in reply to the Count of Floridablanca, Carlos III's[3] prime minister, who had asked him to suggest two "able lads to go to Morocco and Constantinople, so that one could learn Arabic and the other Turkish" (AHN, leg. 3416–12). Casiri says that many years before (he doesn't give the exact number) he had proposed a project similar to that of the French King Louis XIV: to train four *jóvenes* in Madrid under his own supervision. Casiri goes on to suggest a profile of these *jóvenes* and of their training programme. They should be "of docile wit, good manners, and highly conscientious" (AHN, leg. 3416–12), and should study Latin grammar and logic before proceeding to Arabic and Turkish grammar. After this initial phase, lasting several years, the *jóvenes* would perfect their knowledge of oriental languages "with all the characteristics of the people of those countries" (AHN, leg. 3416–12). In his letter Casiri emphasizes two points:

1. The training should be carried out in Madrid and not abroad in order to avoid contact with Greek and Jewish interpreters, whom he deeply distrusted. According to Casiri it was the treachery of such interpreters which had led to the foundation of the Paris school. He is also anxious that no students from the so-called *Colegio Propaganda Fide* of Rome (a seminary where Jesuits were trained as missionaries to propagate the faith) should be brought to the Spanish court. Although it was habitual for future employees of the Spanish administration to be recruited from the Roman seminary, in Casiri's opinion

the training it provided was insufficient since only rudimentary Latin and vulgar Arabic were learnt, not the classical Arabic which he felt was essential for an interpreter. In short, Casiri proposes that basic training should be given at home and then perfected abroad.

2. The project is a long-term one and it is vital for the *jóvenes* to be able to demonstrate their capacities. He regrets earlier experiences with four Arabs[4] in the Royal Library who, in his words, "never achieved anything" and warns that the extreme difficulty of Arabic puts many students off since it requires great efforts and the rewards are slow in coming.

Adducing reasons of time, overwork, his advanced age and fragile health, Casiri finally turns down the proposal to train the *jóvene*s and confines himself to recommending that the presbyter José Banqueri, whom he regards as well-educated, be sent to Constantinople for a year to learn Turkish (Banqueri would later be appointed translator of oriental languages in the service of the state). But in September 1782, the Secretary of State Floridablanca decided to assign two pupils to Casiri: the military cadet José Dávila and a certain Bartolomé Barcelá, of whom little is known.

Dávila was serving in the Lisbon regiment and spoke and wrote various dialects of vulgar Arabic which he had learned as a child in Algeria. Under Casiri he spent some months studying classical Arabic and attending the classes of Mariano Pizzi,[5] Spain's first professor of Arabic, at the School of San Isidro. He was then sent to Tangiers, together with the consul Juan Manuel Salmón, to continue his education under a native teacher and to learn how to write letters in Arabic. Four months later, in 1783, suffering from mange, Dávila returned to Spain and decided to carry on his studies in classical Arabic with Casiri and to serve the state ministry. To account for his return, Dávila adduced among other things the difficulty of finding books and his reluctance to share schools and libraries with Moslems for the purposes of study:

> … such is their fanatic zeal that no Christian should see their books that one has only to pass in front of what one of them is reading for them to close the book. Nor is anyone but a Mohammedan permitted to enter a public school (AHN, Estado, leg. 3419–1).

Dávila also recounts that his studies with the native teacher had to be conducted at night and kept a secret. The cadet held his position as interpreter of oriental languages until 1796, the year of his death. The file that informs us about Dávila notes that Barcelá attended Pizzi's classes too, but because of his negligible progress his training was abandoned.

3. The appointment of *jóvenes de lenguas*: The origin of the diplomatic service

In point of fact, the cases of Dávila and Barcelá are examples of a more ambitious scheme launched in the mid-eighteenth century when the Spanish government realized that their diplomats lacked training, particularly in foreign languages, and resolved to remedy this situation.

According to Ozanam (1998: 97) it was then that the figure of the so-called *agregado* or attaché appeared — a young man who accompanied a diplomat on a training mission. Initially, the terms *agregado*, *joven de lenguas* or *oficial agregado* were used interchangeably, but in 1796 a clear distinction began to emerge, with *agregado* referring to a higher post on the scale. Floridablanca's experience as ambassador in Rome played a vital part in shaping his vision of future Spanish diplomats. As a minister who had sought to solve international conflicts by means of mediation, he appreciated the value of proficiency in foreign languages in the conduct of diplomatic affairs. As Badorrey (1999: 214) states, with Floridablanca as minister a diplomatic corps began taking shape. It grew from the bottom up, training *jóvenes de lenguas* who would later become professional diplomats. A letter dated 14 April 1792 from Floridablanca to his successor, the Count of Aranda, reads as follows:

> …among the many things that must have slipped my mind in this account of affairs, I now recall two: one is the appointment or attachment to the embassies and ministries of some young men of good birth, sound principles and solid education, in order to learn languages and acquire the demeanours of the foreign nations and those of their practices which are most notable and worthy of learning, imitating or repudiating. During the recent war with England, among the many articles and important papers we took there were countless ones in various languages which no one knew how to interpret since at that time, apart from French, Italian and a smattering of German, no one knew perfectly the other languages which cropped up frequently such as Swedish, Dutch, Danish, Russian, Turkish, Swiss, Arabic and Hebrew. This ignorance was to our detriment on many occasions.
>
> The attempt, then, was to form a nursery for those young men, in accordance with their several circumstances, for the Secretariat of State, for the Secretariat of the Council of State and for the Secretariat of the interpretation of languages, the offices of which were intended to be established and equipped as befits such a great Monarchy which embraces the greatest relations and interests of the universe. (cited in Rumeu de Armas 1962: 193–194)

Floridablanca is fully aware of the importance of fluency in foreign languages for the proper functioning of diplomatic and administrative relations, and he expects the young men to come from good families and have a good education.

Where the *joven de lenguas* seems to have achieved the highest profile was in the Turkish legation, where the origin and evolution of the position was bound up with the person of Juan Bouligny y Paret. Bouligny was a trader born in Alicante to a French father and a Spanish mother. In 1779, he was commissioned to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Porte and became Spain's first permanent representative in Constantinople when he was sent on the mission to negotiate a peace agreement and commercial accords. Underlying this mission was the desire of the enlightened King Carlos III to normalize relations with the Ottomans in order to be able to deal with them without intermediaries on the one hand and to protect Spanish ships and ports from North African attacks on the other (Tabakoğlu 2008: 344). Thus commenced a long period of negotiation between Bouligny and the Ottoman authorities (a process involving the Swedish dragoman Ignatius M. D'Ohhson [Tabakoğlu 2008: 345]), with Bouligny seeking an alliance with Spain against Russia in exchange for the peace agreement and commercial deals. In September 1782, the Peace and Trade Treaty was finally signed, permitting the Spanish monarch to establish consulates in Ottoman ports through the offices of the minister resident in Constantinople. Both the minister and his staff (consuls, interpreters, etc.) were to enjoy the same rights and privileges as other powers; that is to say, they were to receive all of the sultan's decrees and to obtain the *berat* mentioned earlier. Also guaranteed were the rights of the Spanish traders and vassals, who were to be assisted by a Spanish dragoman in legal proceedings. Worth noting is the fact that the treaty itself came complete with the most important Turkish diplomatic terms glossed into Spanish.

Once all these obstacles were surmounted, Bouligny became established as ambassador before the Porte and asked Floridablanca to send *jóvenes de lenguas* to him in Constantinople, as they were indispensable for any dialogue with the Ottoman authorities. In fact, the dragoman was considered "the most important of the ministry's subalterns in that court" (AMAE, Personal, exp. 087621). On 29 March 1784 the Count of Floridablanca duly appointed José Martínez de Hevia attaché to the secretariat of the Turkish legation with the mission to "learn to perfection the Turkish and French tongues, so that he will be in a position to understand them and speak and write them properly" (AHN, Estado, leg. 3427). The notification of appointment also provides information about the relationship between the young men and their superiors: the former depended entirely on the ambassador, were to live in his house and eat at his table. They would receive a salary of 60 *reales de vellón* (a modest amount) and travel expenses ("ayuda de costa"). Martínez de Hevia was also given passage in a boat that sailed from Cadiz with the assurance that he would receive the same treatment as the ambassador's wife and family. Finally, it was the ambassador's responsibility to inform the king of the young men's progress.

The letter from the royal palace to Bouligny informing him of Hevia's appointment revealed once again the Spanish project of instructing *jóvenes de lenguas* not only in oriental languages but in European languages in general. The letter begins: "Having decided to send to different countries various young men to devote themselves specifically to the study of the living languages in Europe, Asia and Africa, the King has posted Don José Martínez de Hevia…" (AHN, Estado, leg. 3427). Martínez de Hevia was a young man from Puerto de Santa María, who had been educated for seven years in the French military school of Sorèze where he had learnt Latin, French and English, as well as a smattering of German and Italian. He was the only son of a recently deceased minister of the Treasury of the Indies. He died of the plague at the age of twenty-five, shortly after reaching Constantinople. The next *joven de lenguas* posted to the Turkish legation was Juan Montengón, appointed in April 1785, with another four attachés being designated to cover positions in the embassies in Vienna, Sweden, Denmark and Russia (Ozanam, 1998: 99). In fact Montengón proved something of a duffer when it came to learning Turkish and Greek, but as Bouligny found him useful for corresponding with the Spanish vice-consuls, he kept on as attaché in the legation's secretariat (AMAE, Personal, exp. 08761), but eventually had him sent home (in July 1792) for reasons of health.

At first, as Jurado (2002) explains, Bouligny had to contract the services of foreign dragomans, non-Muslim Turks and Italians. In fact there were three individuals who collaborated with the Spanish embassy: a dragoman from the Porte who acted externally as an intermediary for the ambassador with the all the Porte's ministers;[6] a Palace dragoman or second dragoman, Cosme Comidas Carboñano,[7] who was an Armenian Turk with a Hispanised name who had gained experience as a dragoman in the Naples legation, and was entrusted with the embassy's internal affairs; and a third dragoman specializing in customs and marine affairs. There is no mention of any dragoman for attending court rooms and tribunals, though such a figure existed and was used routinely (Jurado 2002: 231–233). Also on record is a certain Andrés Angeli Radovani, born in Albania to an Italian family which traded in the Levant. According to Ozanam (1998: 156), from 1784 he was in charge of Spanish correspondence with the Ottoman court until 1788, when he was appointed vice-consul.

4. New proposals for the creation of a Spanish school of *jóvenes de lenguas* in Constantinople (1785 and 1792)

As time passed Bouligny's embassy grew in size since it acted as a hub for the Spanish consuls and vice-consuls in the Levant; and as it grew, so too did the

scope of its correspondence and negotiations. Because of this, in a letter dated 15 November 1785 to Floridablanca, Bouligny presented a scheme which consisted in founding a school in Constantinople "like those established by France, Germany, Venice and, since two years ago, Russia" (AMAE, Personal, exp. 08761), the aim being to train *jóvenes de lenguas* who would understand, speak, translate and write in Turkish. Bouligny noted that there were already some interpreters from Armenia, Aleppo and Greece, but that they only understood Italian; as for the "Hebrews" (Sephardic Jews) who spoke Spanish, they were considered untrustworthy. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, Bouligny had to contract foreign interpreters. The same letter indicates that Bouligny had already contracted as palace dragoman Cosme Comidas de Carboñano, mentioned above, but he in turn needed a Turkish teacher to be able to translate written documents into Turkish: in other words, translation into Spanish was done through a mediating language, Italian or French. In order to overcome the difficulties attached to learning Turkish, Bouligny set Comidas the task of writing a Turkish grammar and spelling guide which might be of use to Spanish *jóvenes de lenguas*. His intention was to train these young men under the supervision of Cosme Comidas in a house apart from the embassy, where he thought they would make greater progress. As a place of study he proposed the *Hospicio de Tierra Santa* ("Hospice of the Holy Land") which was under French protection; this, he argued, was due to the fact that Spain had signed no peace agreement with Turkey, but since the Hospice already existed, protection could be afforded by the French ministry just as well as by the Spanish one. In this fascinating letter Bouligny also offers information about the future prospects and importance of the *jóvenes de lenguas*, who might become dragomans, consuls or attachés to the Secretariat. But above all, his overriding intention was to prevent foreigners from entering the Spanish diplomatic service, something which "neither France nor Germany" permitted.

As if that were not enough, Bouligny preaches by example, informing Floridablanca that he is training his own twelve-year-old son, Dionysius, who already speaks and writes French and Italian thanks to a Bolognese tutor, and who will later study Latin and then Turkish with a view to his future appointment as a *joven de lenguas*. He mentions in passing, without giving his name, a young Valencian from a good family who has completed his studies in Valencia and is already studying Turkish. According to Jurado (2002: 230) the young man in question was Luis Josef de la Torre who had arrived in Constantinople in 1784 as part of the expedition entrusted with delivering the presents from the Spanish King to the sultan. De la Torre would later accompany the mission of Ottoman ambassador Vasif Efendi. At the end of his letter, Bouligny recommends a nephew of his in Alicante, Lorenzo Mabily, to be a *joven de lenguas*; Mabily had studied law and lived for several years in Marseille.

Thus, in imitation of French and Austrian initiatives, Casiri's proposal of four years earlier resurfaces with Bouligny, even if their approaches differ, the former wanting the school to be based in Madrid, the latter in Constantinople. Answering in the name of the king, Floridablanca authorized Montengón to continue serving as attaché and appointed Bouligny's nephew Lorenzo Mabily to serve in Constantinople until 1799, before being appointed consul in Corfu. But he gave express instructions that should Bouligny meet the French ambassador, he was not to raise the issue of the Hospice or enter into details but only to extend to him the cordiality required by protocol. Bouligny was also to avoid getting onto friendly terms with the Prussian and English ambassadors (AMAE, Personal, exp. 08761), which suggests that Spain sought a neutral position in the complex balance of powers. In short, Floridablanca cannot have been convinced by the idea of creating a school in Constantinople since its location would have entailed negotiating with France, something which he wished to avoid.

Interpreters were also required in Spain to fill posts of State translators. On the death of Miguel Casiri in 1791, Floridablanca needed a good Arabist to take his place in the Royal Library of El Escorial and turned to Bouligny for help. Bouligny recommended Elias Scidiac, a presbyter born in Aleppo who had studied at the *Colegio Propaganda Fide de Roma* and was therefore a Catholic. According to his file, he knew Arabic, Syrian, Turkish and Italian, this last being the language he used to write his memos at the start of his stay in Spain (AHN, Estado, leg. 3447–12). Judging by his reply to Floridablanca, written in Italian, on 3 September 1787, the latter seems to have suggested the creation of a School of Oriental Languages, which implies the idea had not been ruled out altogether. Scidiac supported the plan and gave details of how it might be organized:

- He cites the schools in Paris and Vienna as models and considers that the Academy of Oriental Languages should comprise just ten students and two teachers, one of whom would be responsible for Arabic, the other for Turkish and Persian. Both could be sent from Constantinople.
- The recruitment could be made from among the best "of his Majesty's pages".
- The Academy could be located in a wing of the *Real Seminario de Nobles*[8] and have the same timetable as the one followed by the other students.
- Training would last two years and, after a screening exam, the best four students would be sent to Constantinople as *jóvenes de lenguas*.
- In Constantinople the young men would need a further training period of 4 or 5 years before finally acting as interpreters in Constantinople or the consulates of Alger, Tripoli, Tunisia and Morocco.

Scidiac ended up filling the position left vacant on Casiri's death but predictably, the academy was not founded, probably because Floridablanca retired as Secretary

of the State Office in February 1792. In 1808 Scidiac refused to take his oath of allegiance to the government of José Bonaparte and requested permission to return to his homeland. In addition to Scidiac, a certain Pascual Stefani, born in Jerusalem and nephew of an interpreter of the Roman court in Constantinople, was sent from the Ottoman Porte to Spain. His job was to translate from Turkish and Arabic, and to teach Turkish to two young men. He carried out various commissions as interpreter, for example in Barcelona, where he interpreted for the Turkish minister, and in 1789 he accompanied the Spanish consul Manuel de Heras to Algeria (AHN, Estado, leg. 3414–10).

5. The profile of the *jóvenes de lenguas*

Between 1784 and 1808, during the reigns of Carlos III and Carlos IV, a total of seventy *jóvenes* with missions abroad were appointed. The first appointments in Turkey were followed by others in Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Prussia, Portugal, Great Britain, the Holy See, Saxony, France and, finally, the United States (Ozanam 1998: 100). The *jóvenes* had to learn the language (speaking, understanding and writing it perfectly), the customs of the country, its culture and its commerce. In principle they were posted for a period of three years, acting on the orders of the ambassador. On their return they had to report whatever might be of use to the Spanish government; thereafter, depending on their flair and circumstances, they would either work as interpreters in the Secretariat of State or as diplomats (Badorrey 1999: 394–395).

In most cases the Spanish *jeunes de langue* were between twenty and thirty years old and, of the forty-eight cases analyzed by Ozanam, approximately half had received secondary education and the other half higher education. Five had received their schooling abroad, in Great Britain, France or Italy. It is rather surprising that better training in foreign languages and a predisposition to learning them were not systematically applied as requirements when recruiting these *jóvenes*, who were supposedly going to become interpreters. It therefore comes as no surprise that several of them failed in the attempt: besides the case of Montengón mentioned earlier, there was Joaquín López Perella, who had to leave Stockholm in 1794 because of his inability to learn Swedish.

The social provenance — which had to be "honourable" — of the *jóvenes* was a key factor in the recruitment process. In most cases their fathers or some other relative worked for the State, whether in the armed forces, as councillors or secretaries of State, or as high-ranking civil servants; or they were nobles who might use their contacts to influence the appointment of the *jóvenes*. What all of them had in common was that they were men of honour, loyal to the State, the Crown and

Catholicism. It is also clear that they all belonged to the same milieu, for it is not uncommon to find brothers, cousins, uncles and nephews in the diplomatic service. Indeed there were marriages between *jóvenes* who aspired to some position abroad and the daughters of their patrons: the *joven de lenguas* Alfonso de Aguirre y Yoldi, for instance, married Elena, daughter of Juan Bouligny. Nonetheless, there were some exceptions to all this such as Pedro Suchita, a Corsican who seems to have been enslaved by the Berbers and later obtained Spanish nationality in Cadiz. Over time, many of them were awarded titles of the various orders of chivalry, for which they had to demonstrate their "pure blood", a prerequisite for promotion in the Spanish diplomatic service or administration since it guaranteed that there would be no Moorish, Jewish, heretical or criminal ancestors.

Some *jóvenes* managed to proceed into the diplomatic service, others returned and achieved middle and high-ranking positions in the state administration. Starting out as a *joven de lenguas* was one way of securing oneself a future in the administration, even if the level of success also depended on one's talents. However the diplomatic service was not free of danger: the long journeys put the health of the *jóvenes* to the test, and plagues made cities like Constantinople fearsome. In fact, as mentioned earlier, some attachés like Martínez de Hevia died and others had to be sent back home because of illness. Long terms abroad also caused melancholy and some *jóvenes* found it hard to adapt to life overseas.

6. A brief comparison of the European models for training *jeunes de langues*

As we have seen, the different European powers adopted *three models* for training future interpreters and dragomans. The *first model*, introduced by the Venetians, consisted in training them in the embassy itself under the supervision of the ambassador or some other official. While learning Turkish and Arabic, generally under native teachers, and familiarizing themselves with Ottoman culture, they were used for attending to correspondence. They were paid an annual salary of 50 ducats, and their training lasted five years (Lucchetta 1989). The French and Austrians were quick to imitate this model but, as we have seen, in 1669 Colbert decided to set up a school in Constantinople as part of the foreign policy of of Louis XIV, which included extending his influence beyond the shores of the Mediterranean, particularly to the countries of the Levant and to China. It is therefore possible to regard the French and Austrian school as the *second model*. The selected *jeunes de langues*, between the ages of eight and ten, did not reside in the embassy but in a convent, where the training was carried out by clergymen. According to Balliu (1997), the training they received was insufficient to prepare them for work as

dragomans since the Capuchins did not have enough knowledge of Turkish or Persian to be good teachers. As a result, the decision was taken to train other *jeunes de langues* in Paris. To this end twelve Armenians were selected, who, after a period of training, were sent back to Constantinople. This amounted to the *third model* consisting in the creation of a school in the country of origin and entailing a first phase of linguistic training followed by a practical period for perfecting skills in the embassy in Constantinople. Later on it was decided that both schools should only accept French nationals since the teachers believed it was easier to learn another language than to take on a different nationality. Also, the number of students was limited in order to guarantee higher quality and the teaching was professionalized: the classical languages were taught by Jesuits, while the oriental ones were the responsibility of laymen, most of whom had been *jeunes de langues* and had lived in the Levant (Balliu 1997: 258–259).

While some Venetian ambassadors tried to found a school in Constantinople, one of the Turkish teachers proposed the creation of a school in Venice itself, but the model that prevailed was always that of using the embassy. In the late sixteenth century the *bailo* faced a shortage of *giovani di lingua* because no Venetian wanted a career as dragoman, whereupon it was suggested that the sons of Turkish dragomans be admitted. In 1625 four Venetians were recruited, however, and permission was given to the *bailo*, as had happened in the past, to employ non-Venetian dragomans in cases of emergency, on condition that they were trustworthy (Lucchetta 1989: 26–28). By the mid-seventeenth century there were up to thirteen *giovani di lingua* in the Venetian embassy, with reports of some disciplinary problems. Although they were learning Turkish, they were criticised for over-adapting to the Ottoman environment and losing their Venetian essence. Yet, as Lucchetta (1989: 34) affirms, in the seventeenth century the Venetian dragomans were the envy of all other European nations, who for their part had to resort to Jews. It is clear that, although they faced some difficulties in finding loyal and sufficiently professional interpreters, the Venetians already boasted a tradition in training which the other nations lacked.

The Austrian monarchy, which already had a tradition of training *Sprachknaben* in its own embassy, was the third power to set up its own school, in Vienna. This reform was due to the alleged negligence and dissolute living of the *Sprachknaben* in the Austrian embassy. It was argued that several of them were proving quite incapable of working as interpreters even after a lengthy period of training. The imperial internuncio Penckler acknowledged that, on occasion, talentless *Sprachknaben* had been admitted thanks to the influence of persons in high places (Petritsch 2005: 492–493). It was also hoped that this change of tack would lead to significant financial savings.

The Spanish, who for centuries had regarded the Ottoman Empire as their enemy, were not formally established in Constantinople until 1784 when the first

commercial treaty was signed. As we saw, they adopted the Venetian model, following various attempts to create their own school. The Spanish also adopted the Venetian practice whereby the *jóvenes* sat at the same table as the ambassador, a circumstance which illustrates the measure of esteem in which they were held. However, the Spanish concept of the *jeune de langue* was different, as they were not limited to Eastern regions, but covered European territories as well.

The four powers required that the *jeunes de langues* be Catholic, the Austrians and Spanish additionally insisting on the vital importance of prior training and social status. As Petritsch (2005) puts it, the parents of the *Sprachknaben* would have demonstrated their loyalty to the service of the crown. The Spanish *jóvenes* themselves would be considered to be of upright and honourable origin, and generally came from large families. But the primary requirement of the eight candidates mentioned by Petritsch, who were selected in 1753, was a good academic record and diligence (cf. Wolf 2005). Of these eight candidates, at least three already possessed a knowledge of foreign languages. At the Viennese Theresianum a wide-ranging and highly disciplined training programme was taught which covered Latin, calligraphy, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, French and Italian, as well as other subjects including geometry, natural history, literature and universal history. They also learned the rudiments of dancing, fencing and drawing.

As far as age is concerned, the French seem to have tended to select the youngest candidates, from the age of eight. It was their theory that to pronounce oriental languages correctly "un gosier d'enfant, non d'adolescent" was necessary (cited in Balliu 1997: 259). Age was also a criterion in Vienna where the *Sprachknaben* were expected to be neither too young nor too old for both the "palate and the throat" (Pfusterschmied-Hardtenstein 2008: 12) to grow accustomed to the Turkish language. Thus the youngest *Sprachknabe* was also eight years old. What is of particular interest here is that in language learning both the French and the Austrians set great store by phonetics and knew that the ear is trained in the first few years of childhood. As we have seen, the embassies encountered some difficulties with the *jeunes de langues*, some of whom did not manage to learn enough to become dragomans despite many years away from home. Perhaps this was the case of the older boys, or perhaps they had a lesser gift for languages or were less willing to learn. However, the excessive youth of the *jeune de langue* also had its drawbacks for the Western diplomatic system: they over-acclimatized to the uses and customs of the Ottomans, lost all notion of their true origins, mixed with Levantine dragomans (who were also their teachers), and married their daughters.

As for Spain, it is clear that until the nineteenth century was well under way and the *Carrera Diplomática, Consular y de Intérpretes* (Organic Law for Diplomatic Corps) had been regulated, there was no systematic scheme to train state interpreters, nor any stringent recruitment policy, unlike other countries, which had

introduced better developed models. This was due on the one hand to the relative recentness of the initiative introduced by Floridablanca and, on the other, to an over-reliance on the criterion of honourability when selecting would-be *jóvenes de lenguas*. Nor should it be forgotten that with the arrival of José Bonaparte in 1808, Spain was plunged into a crisis which affected the whole system of state organization. All in all, it is surprising that no greater knowledge of foreign languages was required in the first phase; had it been otherwise, the periods spent abroad would have been more beneficial. There were almost certainly no candidates who met all the requirements, which meant a problem for all of Spain's European embassies as well as giving rise to different models for training *jeunes de langues*. Thus, in the absence of any dedicated school, the training of Spanish interpreters and diplomats was a matter of trial and error, involving a mixture of social status, individual flair for learning languages, and high doses of self-discipline and will-power. It is possible too that people somehow assumed that the young age of the language learners, of itself, implied a greater predisposition to learning. But despite everything, some of Spain's best-trained and most talented *jóvenes de lenguas* did manage to build brilliant careers in diplomacy.

Notes

1. I am unaware of any equivalent term in English. According to Bruce Masters (1998), the Italian term *giovani di lingua* was used; Wilss (1999: 11) adopts the calque "language boys" when explaining the origin of the German term "Sprachknaben".

2. Pera was the "western" quarter in Constantinople.

3. Carlos III (1766–1788) is considered a proponent of enlightened absolutism. He tried to modernize Spain by introducing far-reaching social and economic reforms.

4. Among others Casiri probably refers to the Arabic scribes working under his supervision in the library of El Escorial: Paul Hodar, a Maronite monk of Syrian origin and Juan Amón de San Juan, from Aleppo. Both were involved in forging a patent. Amón also taught Arabic to Mariano Pizzi, physician and later Professor of Arabic at the Reales Estudios de San Isidro, Madrid. Amón and Pizzi circulated a translation of an Arabic treatise on medicinal waters which was also false (Torres 1998).

5. See previous note.

6. From a letter sent by Bouligny to Floridablanca on 1 February 1789 (AMAE, Personal, exp. 08761) it seems that the dragoman in question, referred to as "dragoman of the Porte", was Henrique Giuliani.

7. On Comidas' philological work, see Jurado (2002).

8. Learning centre for young Spanish aristocracy, initially run by the *Compañía de Jesús*.

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