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Narrativity and Dependency: The Captivity of an Ottoman Official in Saint Petersburg (1771–1775)

1 Introduction

War captivity is a very special form of asymmetrical dependency. However, if we define the concept of asymmetrical dependency in a broader sense, we have to include structures and phenomena related to this type of social relationship, and to analyze them beyond the simple dichotomy of *slavery* and *freedom*.¹ Based on this assumption, we must understand the phenomenon of war captivity first of all as a shared practice in warfare among early-modern political powers.

In what follows, my analysis is based upon an Ottoman captivity account and its narrative peculiarities.² The source I discuss here to demonstrate this relation is a unique captivity narrative written by Mehmed Necâti Efendi, an Ottoman official, after his release from captivity in 1775 in Saint Petersburg. Of his memoirs, at present seven manuscripts are extant, which form the basis of a complete edition which is currently under preparation.³ This account is of particular interest as its narrative can provide us with first-hand information on the experience of captivity in the second half of the eighteenth century in Russia. While there are some extant studies on the phenomenon of war captivity during this period,⁴ these works do not tell us much on officials as captives.

1 For a theoretical discussion of this issue, see Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen, “Slavery is Not Slavery: On Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire: Introduction,” in *Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2020): 11–27.

2 This article has been written within the framework of the project “Transottoman Semiospheres: Pavel Levašov’s and Necâti Efendi’s Imaginations of the Other,” which in turn is part of “Transottomanica,” a Priority Program of the German Research Foundation. Compare the chapter by Alexander Bauer in this volume. Some results have been published here: Gül Şen, “Between Istanbul and Saint Petersburg: War Captivity as a Part of Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Proceedings of the III International Symposium on Turkey-Russia Relations*, ed. Vefa Kurban, Hamit Özman, and Recep Efe Çoban (Ankara: Gece Kitap, 2023): 338–353.

3 The comprehensive edition with annotations is prepared by Sevgi Ağcagül, Henning Sievert, Caspar Hillebrand, and myself. For the present contribution, I have used the manuscript in Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi-Collection, no. 2278 [hereafter: EEC 2278].

4 For the Ottoman captives and their return, see Fatma Sel Turhan, “Captives of the Ottoman-Russian War: 1768–1774,” *International Journal of Turcologica* 13, no. 25 (2018): 5–36; for the Russian captives’ conversion and regulations of exchange, see Will Smiley, “The Meaning of Conversion: Treaty Law, State Knowledge, and Religious Identity among Russian Captives in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *The International History Review* 34, no. 3 (2012): 559–80.

Taking a narratological point of view as a vantage point, I consider this text as a literary one, i.e., I am interested in questions such as: has the author assembled his material in a specific way, and why did he make deliberate choices in selecting historical facts (*res gestae*) in order to create a particular narrative (*narration*) and emplotment of his memoirs?⁵ Furthermore, I would like to discuss some of the determinant factors in writing these memoirs, such as the author's personal experience of war captivity, his imagination of *self* and *other*, genre-related patterns and conventions, and his perception of *space*.

2 An Ottoman Official and the Setting of his Narration: War and Captivity

The historical background of Necâti's account is dominated by the Ottoman-Russian War (1768–1774). A conflict between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman state over the control of Eastern Poland escalated into a full-fledged war, in which the Russian army soon launched a number of offensives towards the Caucasus, the Balkan, and into the Mediterranean. A Russian naval squadron under the grand admiral Alexei Grigoryevich Orlov entered the Mediterranean Sea and established Russian naval hegemony by defeating the Ottoman navy at Chesme in 1770.⁶

A peace treaty, the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji (*Küçük Kaynarca*, *Kjučuk-Kajnardžijskij* *Кючук-Кайнарджийский*), was only signed in July 1774, due to joint mediation efforts by Prussia, Austria, and Great Britain, who aimed to prevent a further expansion of Russia. The most important result of the war was the Ottoman loss of the Crimea (along with the two important ports of Azov and Kerch), a territory which had been under Ottoman suzerainty since 1475; it was also the first loss of a territory with a predominantly Muslim population. Furthermore, the Ottoman state had to cede the authority over its orthodox subjects on the Balkan to Russia. As stipulated by the treaty, the Russian state had the right to maintain a permanent embassy in Istanbul, consulates in all major ports, a merchant fleet in the Black Sea, and access to the Mediterranean through the Marmara Sea. During the following five years, there were frequent encounters between the Russian and Ottoman navies in the Mediterranean.⁷ Only nine years after the signing of the

5 On emplotment and arrangement of facts in historiography, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973): 7–29.

6 Among the numerous studies on the reasons for and the course of this conflict, see Brian L. Davies, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768–1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) and Virginia H. Aksan, “Whatever Happened to the Janissaries? Mobilization for the 1768–1774 Russo-Ottoman War,” *War in History* 5, no. 1 (1998): 23–36.

7 Marcin Marcinkowski, *Die Entwicklung des Osmanischen Reiches zwischen 1839 und 1908: Reformbestrebungen und Modernisierungsversuche im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur* (Berlin: Schwarz, 2007): 13–15.

treaty, military conflict was reignited by Catherine II's annexation of the Crimean Khanate in 1783.

Necâti Efendi was an Ottoman official and served as the registrar of cadastral survey (*defter emîni*) to Silâhdâr İbrâhîm Pasha, the Ottoman commander in chief of the Crimea during the war. Together with a group of Ottoman officials he was held as a war captive for almost four years (1771–1775), until the amnesty brought by the peace treaty of Kuchuk Kainarjî.⁸ Back in Istanbul in 1775, Necâti continued in his profession as a member of the Ottoman bureaucracy at the imperial record office of land property (*defter-i hâkânî*) and wrote his memoirs, which was an act of remembering dependency.⁹ The historian Erhan Afyoncu corrected the assumed date of Necâti's death (variously "after 1776" or "1785") in the literature to 1793, following the appointment records.¹⁰ Based on a newly discovered document I can confirm that Necâti spent an active professional life until his death in 1793.¹¹ According to this document, a petition was submitted by the registrar of land property, 'Alî Râif, on March 27, 1792. The document states that Necâti Efendi had served for forty years as administrator of documents (*kîsedar*) of the imperial record office of land property, and that he had also served as deputy registrar of cadastral survey at the imperial court. After his captivity, which had lasted four and a half years, he was reappointed as administrator of documents. During his absence due to his duty in the military campaign in Vidin (in today's Bulgaria), a certain Meḥmed Yesârî Efendi replaced him as administrator of documents. Obviously, he obtained the position through intrigues and annoyed his colleagues with permanent grievances. Mentioning complaints by the scribes and their assistants 'Alî Râif submitted his petition at the court asking for Yesârî's dismissal and Necâti's reappointment. The petition not only reveals that Necâti was still acting as a state servant in 1792, but also indicates that he was a well-known and highly-regarded official who enjoyed the patronage of a number of influential court officials.

Before I turn to the phenomenon of war captivity, let me make some general reflections. War captivity has several dimensions, from a legal, i.e., normative discussion to actual practices. Although it was, normatively, forbidden to take co-religionists as war

⁸ At an earlier time than Necâti's group, the Ottoman court chronicler Aḥmed Vâsîf Efendi was also captured during this war while on duty at the Crimea. Having been taken to Saint Petersburg, Vâsîf was released by Catherine II after a few months to submit her peace proposals to the Ottomans. See Ethan L. Menchinger, *The First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vasif* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 27–42.

⁹ During the same time a Russian group was held as war captives in Istanbul, and one of their members, Pavel Levašov, also wrote memoirs. See the chapter by Alexander Bauer in this volume.

¹⁰ For the five documents on Necâti's appointments, death, and the appointments of his son and grandson, see Erhan Afyoncu, "Osmanlı Müverrihlerine Dair Tevcihat Kayıtları II," *Belgeler* 30 (2005): 173–76.

¹¹ Presidency of State Archives of the Republic of Turkey, Ottoman Archives (BOA), C.DH. no. 54 - 2698 - 0; 23-07-1206 [Marc 27, 1792].

captives and/or slaves, the Ottoman sources, such as court registers, tell a different story.¹² To understand these practices, we have to let go of the modern differentiation between the terms *prisoner of war* (POW) and *war captive*: The former is defined a legal person subjected to international law, with a clearly defined status. The latter term comprises two rather different groups: those captives who were held for ransom and enjoyed a remarkable degree of agency at their place of detention, and those who were put to work as unfree labor along with convicts. However, this distinction does not necessarily apply to the early modern period; bilateral peace treaties, such as the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji, comprise articles dedicated to the exchange of war captives. The Ottoman-Turkish term *esîr* (pl. *üserâ*) does not differentiate between enslaved individuals and war captives. Whenever the term is used in the sources, we must infer from the context which form of dependence is actually meant. In most passages related to warfare, *esîr* indicates the initial legal status as war captive, i.e. when the person in question was recorded in the registers for the specific tax for war captives (the so-called *pençik* or *pençik resmî*). After registration, some groups were sent to the imperial naval arsenal (*tersâne-i amîre*) to work on the galleys in the service of the state (called *mîrî esîr*), where they continued to keep their status as war captives.¹³ Other captives were distributed among the military and officials, thus entering a different status as enslaved people, for example as household slaves. Their new masters, however, were compelled to pay taxes for each captive they received according to the register mentioned above.

3 The Captivity Narrative and the Question of Genre

Since the narrativity of a text is very much dependent on its genre, I would like to discuss the issue of literary genre at this point, in order to situate Necâî's memoirs in the broader context of Ottoman historiography: Unlike in the case of modern literary writings, we cannot speak with certainty of absolute genre categories with premodern Ottoman texts.¹⁴ Instead, many interwoven types can be found in a single work, as is the case with the text under study. Moreover, a closer approach to the issue of genre might contribute to a better understanding of premodern texts and their purpose in a wider sense – provided that the analysis takes into consideration the intellectual and literary concepts and conventions of the period in which the text was produced,

¹² For legal discussions, see Will Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and the International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 24–30.

¹³ Gül Şen, "Between Two Spaces: Enslavement and Labor in the Early Modern Ottoman Navy," in *Comparative and Global Framing of Enslavement*, ed. Stephan Conermann, Youval Rotman, Ehud Toledano and Rachel Zelnick-Abramo (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2023): 144–45.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of genre for Ottoman historiography see Gül Şen, *Making Sense of History: Narrativity and Literariness in the Ottoman Chronicle of Na'îmâ* (Leiden: Brill, 2022): 68–81.

rather than anachronistic expectations from a modern perspective. Based on Helmut Utzschneider's and Stefan Ark Nitsche's definition of literary genres, a genre is characterized by a certain range of topics and the presence of certain formal elements within a text (these features are called a "genre framework").¹⁵ Such topics and elements can be detected in Necâti's memoirs as interwoven into his narration, from which we may conclude that the text in fact reflects the conventions of various genres. First of all, its author has titled the text as the *History of Crimea (Tārîḫ-i Kırm)*. Necâti Efendi preferred to describe his text as a historical work, as this was the most common and most respected category of genre within the Ottoman knowledge system, although the term "history" was in fact an ambiguous one in that context. In one way, the text is indeed a history, in that it contains chapters on the Crimea and its history as well as on the events of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1768–1774, which, as we have seen, was ended by the Peace Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. To that extent, I argue that Necâti Efendi, as a learned man and bureaucrat, was aware of the literary conventions and genre categories of his own time. However, the work also contains sections which are written as ego documents, in a first-person narrative. At the very beginning, Necâti refers to his situation as a captive, his profession as an official at the imperial record office, and his appointment as registrar of the cadastral survey for the Crimea. These are typical features both of an ego document in general and of a captivity narrative in particular. The work can also be analyzed in accordance with the parameters of another genre, the Ottoman embassy reports (*sefâretnâme*), as the text contains a number of topical similarities, such as route itineraries, diplomatic encounters, observations about state-run institutions, and eating habits. Though the author did not actually act as an official envoy, he still wrote down his observations as if he had acted in this function.¹⁶ At present, we know of four extant reports on embassies to Russia from the eighteenth century. The envoys were Nişli Mehmed Agha (who went to Russia in 1722), Mehmed Emnî Pasha (1740), Derviş Mehmed Efendi (1754 and 1763), and Şehdî 'Osman Efendi (1740 and 1757).¹⁷ While Necâti's captivity narrative shows some similarities to these earlier reports, his memoirs cannot be assigned fully

15 Helmut Utzschneider and Stefan Ark Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch literaturwissenschaftliche Bibelauslegung: Eine Methodenlehre zur Exegese des Alten Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005): 118.

16 For similarities of Necâti's memoirs to the embassy reports, see Christoph Neumann, "The Russian Experience: Necati Efendi in Captivity," *Südost-Forschungen* 71 (2012): 23–24.

17 For the embassy reports to Russia see Denise Klein, "The Sultan's Envoys Speak: The Ego in 18th-Century Ottoman *sefâretnâmes* on Russia," in *Many Ways of Speaking about the Self: Middle Eastern Ego-Documents in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (14th–20th Century)*, ed. Ralf Elger and Yavuz Köse (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010): 89–102; for a list, see Caspar Hillebrand, "Ottoman Travel Accounts to Europe: An Overview of their Historical Development and a Commented Researchers' List," in *Venturing Beyond Borders: Reflections on Genre, Function and Boundaries in Middle Eastern Travel Writing*, ed. Bekim Agai, Olcay Akyıldız and Caspar Hillebrand (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2013): 61–62.

to this genre. Just like the authors of the above-mentioned *sefāretnāmes*, Necāti, a learned official – though of a lower rank – must have made conscious use of genre-related patterns and conventions of his time. However, unlike his fellow writers, he did not travel to the Russian Empire voluntarily, but experienced forced mobility under completely different circumstances. Although his writing contains embassy report-like elements, his memoirs reflect his experience of war captivity; I therefore prefer to define this text as a captivity narrative (*esāretnāme*), a common term for first-person narratives written by former captives. Such ego documents of captivity are, however, rare in Ottoman literature, while narratives of captivity in the Ottoman realm written by (Christian) European authors are abundant. Aside from the Ottoman captives Hindi Maḥmūd and Macūncuzāde Muştafā, who had been in captivity in Rome in the 1570s and in Malta in 1599 respectively,¹⁸ the most celebrated captivity narrative comes a century later with ‘Osman Agha’s memoirs, written in 1725, on his time as a war captive in the Habsburg domain from 1688 to 1700.¹⁹ A less-known account is the narrative of Köle (“Slave”) Süleymān, a former Janissary, on his eight years of captivity in France from 1785 to 1793.²⁰ Necāti’s account remains the only known example of this genre from the last decades of the eighteenth century on Russia, and is quite unique in its description of that country under the rule of Catherine II. By contrast, the genre had become popular in early-modern Europe, where a considerable number of such accounts was published to fulfill the demand of a large audience with political and commercial interests.²¹

In terms of its content, Necāti’s work is rich on historical events, descriptions of spaces/places and institutions, and on the names of individuals and geographical-administrative units. In terms of the organization of contents, I consider the overall arrangement as an emplotment, since it explains the issue of genre(s), the way the author writes, and the process of the narration. Hayden White defines emplotment as

18 For captivity narratives, see Cemal Kafadar, “Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature,” *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989): 131–34; Erhan Afyoncu, “Esaretnameler ve Mehmet Necati’nin Esaretnamesi,” in *Uluslararası Türk Savaş Esirleri Sempozyumu Bildiri Kitabı*, ed. Okan Yesilot et al. (Istanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2018): 13–28; Gül Şen, “Galley Slaves and Agency: The Driving Force of the Ottoman Fleet,” in *Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2020): 148; Selim Karahasanoğlu, “Ottoman Ego-Documents: State of the Art,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53 (2021): 305–6.

19 *Der Gefangene der Giauren: Die abenteuerlichen Schicksale des Dolmetschers Osman Ağa aus Temeschwar, von ihm selbst erzählt*, trans. Richard Franz Kreutel and Otto Spies (Graz: Styria, 1962).

20 For Süleymān’s narrative, see Belkıs Altunış Gürsoy, “Siyasetname Hüviyetinde Bir Esaretname,” *Erdem: İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi* 60 (2011): 77–142.

21 See Joshua M. White, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017): 72.

“the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.”²² In this sense, the text segments can be understood as independent genres if we analyze them individually. However, as a whole, they display a particular emplotment, “a story of a particular kind.” Obviously, the author did not arrange his narration in a well-conceived structure, but with the intention to give it a particular significance as a whole. Accordingly, we find various elements and narrations assembled in the text:

- praise of God and the Prophet; his appointment as registrar of cadastral survey to *Silāhdār* (arms bearer) İbrāhīm Pasha, the Ottoman commander-in-chief of the Crimea
- sojourn in Caffa (today Feodosia) in the Crimea; conflicts with the Crimean Nogais, who had failed to deliver the requested four thousand carts for the Ottoman army; food shortage due to the lack of carts
- defeat of the Ottoman army in the Crimea by Russian troops
- beginning of captivity; six-month journey to Saint Petersburg
- captivity in Saint Petersburg; banquets and receptions attended by Necāti; opera; masked ball; eating habits
- an account of Pugachev’s Rebellion of 1773–1775, a general uprising of serfs and religious minorities
- imperial gardens in Saint Petersburg; palaces outside the city; jewelry production; the palace of Catherine II; the naval arsenal in Saint Petersburg; the Russian systems of customs and taxation; Russian villages; orphanage; fires in Petersburg and Moscow; the Russian army
- return from Saint Petersburg to Istanbul; itinerary of the route
- Necāti Efendi made head of department of the imperial chancery; his appointment to the imperial record office; his following appointment to Chotin (today in Ukraine)
- reasons for the defeat of the Ottoman army by the Russians: defection of Tatar units to the enemy, secret negotiations of Giray Khan with the Russians, which results in his handing over the Crimea to them for material gain; shortcomings of the Ottoman military, poor administration of the navy; desertion of soldiers.

Thus, Necāti Efendi presented to his Ottoman contemporaries a historical account, a diplomatic report, and a captivity narrative in one and the same text. Observations on Russian courtly society and politics are embedded into reports of his personal experiences of war captivity.

22 White, *Metahistory*: 7.

4 Narrating Asymmetrical Dependency

Narratology insists on distinguishing between the author and the narrator of a text in order to understand the narratological peculiarities of a text.²³ In the present case, this distinction provides us with some interesting insights: The latter makes an appearance only on the textual level, in order to create a mode of narrativity. Thus, while speaking of textual-narratological analyses, when I refer to Necâti I mean the narrator in the text and not the historical author. Necâti mentions his captivity at the very beginning, so that the reader is made aware that the account will report this circumstance. From a transcultural perspective, he makes a number of remarkable and insightful observations. The details of these observations reveal that he had the opportunity to visit many places and collect information, although he could not speak Russian – at least at the beginning of his captivity. After all, as a war captive, he still enjoyed a privileged status as member of the Ottoman elite.

4.1 The Narrative Mode of Representing Space

In a narrative text, space can be represented or imagined by different techniques. In Necâti's text, the overall space is that of his war captivity, i.e., the territory of the Russian Empire. In his narrative, Necâti attempts to paint a full picture of this overall space by highlighting a number of particular aspects, e.g. the detailed description of places or activities related to the imperial sphere of power. This selective description, which entirely ignores rural Russia, for example, is determined by the author's intent; he has selected those aspects which would be of greatest interest for his readership of Ottoman officials.

An illustrative example for this narrative technique is his description of the ballroom in the hall of the Winter Palace at Saint Petersburg. The description is focused only on the furnishings which are relevant for the interaction of the protagonists. The function of the ballroom is that of a *space of action*, not only for musical and artistic performances, but also for important diplomatic negotiations. Therefore the description devotes less room to the interior, and much more to the activities going on there.²⁴ As spaces are also defined by their boundaries, the doors of the ballroom play an important role in the narration: they not only separate the ballroom from the

²³ For an analysis of different types of narrator, see Sven Strasen. "Zur Analyse der Erzählsituation und der Fokalisierung," in *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse: Kategorien, Modelle, Probleme*, ed. Peter Wenzel (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004): 111–40; for a discussion concerning Ottoman historiographic texts, see Şen, *Making Sense of History*: 192–93.

²⁴ For an introductory discussion on and an analysis of space see Birgit Haupt, "Analyse des Raums," in *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse: Kategorien, Modelle, Probleme*, ed. Peter Wenzel (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2004): 69–87.

other chambers, but the guards posted there also separate those who are permitted to enter (the sphere of power) from those who are not. Thus, these boundaries are defined not only by space, but also by rules and conventions. This is exemplified in Necāti's description of the imperial court theater:

The audience is permitted to access only upon invitation, and the [written] invitations, which are marked with a stamp, are issued to groups of three to five individuals. When they arrive at the Palace, they produce the stamped invitation to the guards at the entrance, submit them, and only then are they allowed to enter. These rules apply for all who attend regardless of rank. For each event a separate stamp is issued.²⁵

Here, Necāti's text reveals another relevant dimension of spatial boundaries: they are defined not only by rules, but also by the persons (i.e. protagonists) who are permitted to cross them: within the sphere of the court, only courtiers, dignitaries, and foreign envoys are present at the empress's palace while common people are excluded (Fig. 1). In addition to its factual aspect, this description is also a conventionalized *topos* by which the imperial palaces in and around Saint Petersburg are presented as symbolic spaces of power, whose meaning can be understood across cultural and political boundaries.²⁶ Catherine II's palace serves as a symbol of Russian imperial rule, just as the Sultan's palace in Istanbul does for the Ottoman world. Ultimately, both spaces are narrated as spheres of protocolary matters, diplomatic encounters, artistic performances, as representations of glory and wealth.

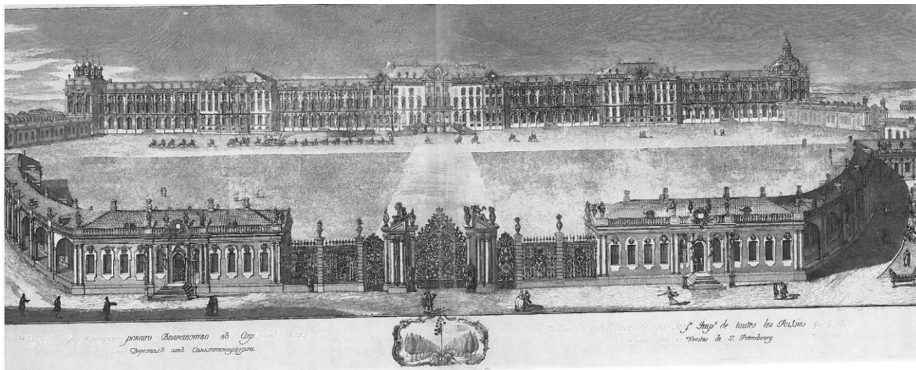


Fig. 1: View of Her Imperial Majesty's Palace at Tsarskoye Selo, 25 versts from Saint Petersburg (1761). Source: *Sankt Petersburg und Umgebung in Russischen Veduten 1753–1761: Zwei Kupferstichfolgen nach Michail Ivanovic Mechaev*, hrsg. von der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Sankt Petersburg. Exhibition Catalogue of Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich, 1992, No. 16. Reproduction courtesy of Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich.

²⁵ EEC 2278, 24r.

²⁶ For the conventionalizing of a narrative space, see Haupt, "Analyse des Raums": 82–83.

Thus, the narrative space created by the author performs an important function in the emplotment of the text, as the structures of space correspond with the structures of emplotment. Necâti must have remembered the Bosphorus when he first saw the river Neva in Saint Petersburg. This may explain the explicit comparison of the Russian capital to Istanbul: “Its width is comparable to that between Eminönü and Üsküdar; on the other side of the river, a city is located, just like Galata. It is named Peterhof (*Petrehof*). In the summertime, it is crossed by boats and there is a big bridge from one side to the other. They cross it by carriages.”²⁷ In this description, Saint Petersburg does not appear as a place that is *other*; here, it is in fact a real place, the author Necâti is in fact there. However, his perception of the Russian capital is defined by his cultural background and the imaginations presumably formed by it. Thus, the river Neva becomes the Bosphorus, its banks the neighborhoods of Istanbul (Fig. 2).

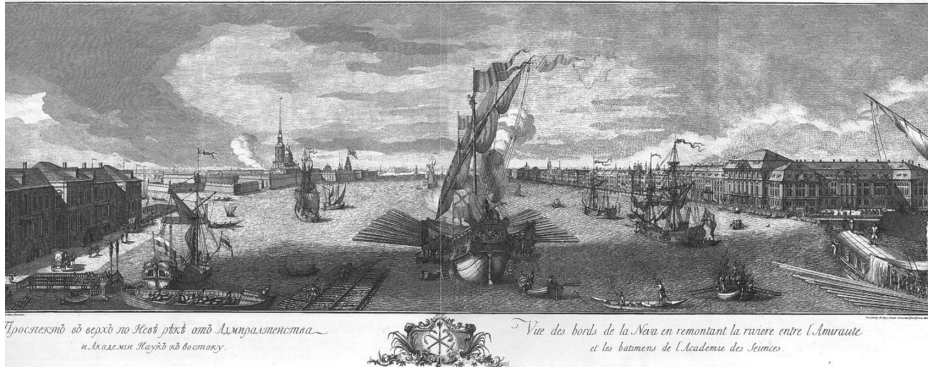


Fig. 2: View of the River Neva Between the Admiralty and the Building of the Academy of Sciences (1753). Source: *Sankt Petersburg und Umgebung in Russischen Veduten 1753–1761: Zwei Kupferstichfolgen nach Michail Ivanovic Mechaev*, hrsg. von der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Sankt Petersburg. Exhibition Catalogue of Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich, 1992, No. 3. Reproduction courtesy of Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich.

After pointing out the similarities between the two places, Necâti turns to a place which is obviously alien to him and which he calls the “anatomy hall” (*teşrîkḫâne*). Exhaustively, he describes the glass vessels in which human and animal organs and body parts are preserved.²⁸ He is astonished by the variety of objects, among which are embryos in various stages of development. Even more astonishing to him than this exhibition hall was the practice of applause during courtly events. Narrating a

²⁷ EEC 2278, 32v–32r.

²⁸ EEC 2278, 32r. Şehdî Osman Efendi mentions this exhibition only in a sentence. Faik Reşit Unat, “Şehdî Osman Efendi Sefaretnamesi,” *Osmanlı Tarih Vesikaları* (1942): 310, 303–20.

night at the opera, Necâti describes his amazement as Catherine II clapped her hands after each performance:

It is remarkable that the queen, when she likes the performances and dances, gave them a strong applause as a gratuity (*bağış*). Both men and women [were so pleased] as if they were receiving gold. Gratuities and presents are unknown to them. What an inexhaustible treasure are these [shouts of] ‘bravo’! To put it differently: Were the queen to offer *akçe* (silver coins) instead of her applause, not just the 400 *akçe* she provides to his excellency İbrâhîm Pasha, as his daily allowance, but even four thousand *akçe* would not equal it. As for this humble [person], 25 *akçe* were stipulated. And they boast that such allowances would be paid in any other kingdom. No one can evade the aforesaid generosity [the applause] by any means, so we all applauded. When we asked the interpreter assigned to us, he told us that this was allowed.²⁹

Obviously, Necâti is completely unfamiliar with the whole practice, and he can only compare it to a phenomenon familiar in his own cultural space, i.e. the offering of tips, which was an immensely important practice in Ottoman society, in particular at the imperial court. Moreover, it is striking that he tells that the actors received their gratuities in *akçe* (instead, as we must assume, in rubles), a fact of which he must have been aware. Obviously, what counts most to him is to underline his observation that at the Russian court, just as in the Ottoman State, imperial favor was expressed by silver coins. Comparing two imperial spaces, i.e., court cultures, he also gives a hint to his own, and his fellow captives’ status of asymmetrical dependency by using the phrase “by any means” (*çare yok*), i.e. the fact that they could not evade the practice of clapping hands. Eventually, he had to submit to the customs of his courtly environment, even though he could not find any meaning in the act of applauding the artists. From a narratological point of view, the narrator demonstrates here his own and his fellow captives’ status as esteemed war captives: They could attend a courtly performance like the opera together with the empress and all other high-ranking officials. He further makes use of *comparatio* as a textual strategy in order to explain unknown practices.³⁰ We can observe a similar approach in the author’s description of the Russian system of serfdom, something that did not exist within the Ottoman system of enslavement. The author compares this phenomenon with tax farming, thus making an alien and incomprehensible phenomenon understandable for himself and his readers by relating it to a familiar practice from the Ottoman context. While keeping an objective distance to serfdom, Necâti employs the neutral term *re’âyâ* [“tax-paying subject”], which did refer to the taxable population of the Ottoman state regardless of religion and ethnicity:

²⁹ EEC 2278, 24r–25v.

³⁰ For an example of extensive use of this ancient rhetorical device of *comparatio* in a historiographic text see Şen, *Making Sense of History*: 110–14.

In order to make clear to which tax farmer they belong, these *re'âyâ* [subjects], no matter how many there are, wear a horseshoe-like, perforated iron on which the name of the tax farmer, the subject's name and their home village has been stamped. This iron is attached to the subject's lapel.³¹

He displays mild surprise when explaining that the tax farmers sold their serfs among themselves, how they supplied two or three hundred of their serfs as soldiers in times of war, and would supply other serfs in times of peace to replace fallen soldiers: "However, these subjects will not see their place of birth ever again. If they get injured and unfit for service during that time, they will be left to beg without pay or pension. This is the mercy they show towards their soldiers."³²

Another description of a place which Necâti regards to be of interest for his intended readers is a state-run institution whose name may not be rendered correctly:

Praise for the Institution for illegitimate Children

This brothel (*kârḥâne*) is [administrated by] appointed officials and custodians. Nursing prostitutes [sic; i.e. wet nurses] live there. When street prostitutes bear children, these children are brought to this institution and [the person who brings them] receives 200 *ağçe* from the officials. Wenn these children are five or six years old, priests are appointed to teach them to read, write and dance. When they attain [their] majority, the Empress visits them one or two times per year. Since [this institution] is her invention; the boys are brought to the military barracks and the girls to her palace. In this way, many children enter [the palace] every five or ten years.³³

Although Necâti misinterprets this institution, which is an orphanage and not a brothel, and mistakes wet nurses for prostitutes, it is striking that he does not criticize this "brothel" on moral grounds. Obviously he is interested in the new practice implemented by Catherine II. Within the framework of her reform attempts in the field of popular and elite education,³⁴ a recruitment mechanism for military personnel and court servants reminds the author of the Ottoman mechanism of *devşirme*, the "child

31 EEC 2278, 35r: *bu re'âyâlar her kimiñ muḳâṭa'asında olduḡın beyân için kaç nefer ise birer bârgır na'li mişillü ve eṭrâfı deliklü temür üzerine muḳâṭa'a şâhibi ve re'âyânıñ ismi ve ḳaryesi ismi sikkeye urulmuşdur ol temür ol re'âyânıñ yaḳâsına dikilüdir.*

32 EEC 2278, 35r–36v: *lakin bu re'âyâlar bir daḡı vilâyetlerin görmezler 'askerlikde yâ mecrûḥ olur bi-lâ yevmiye ve-lâ ta'yinât taḳâ'ud olur ki encâmı sâ'il olurlar 'askerine merḥameti bu günedir.*

33 EEC 2278, 37v.

34 This orphanage was founded in Saint Petersburg in 1770 and was – along with the orphanage in Moscow, founded 1763 – the first institution of this sort in Russia. At the time of Necâti's visit, the orphanage suffered from poor management and a high mortality rate, also caused by false scientific ideas on infant nutrition. The situation was only improved by reforms during the 1780s. See Jan Kusber, *Katharina die Große: Legitimation durch Reform und Expansion* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022): 152; Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981): 491–93; Jan Kusber, *Eliten- und Volksbildung im Zarenreich während des 18. und in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Diskurs, Gesetzgebung und Umsetzung* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004).

levy”, a source of personnel both for the Ottoman army and the sultan’s court.³⁵ Therefore, our author does not criticize or condemn the existence of what he perceives as a state-run brothel, but simply describes it as an effective recruitment method.³⁶

4.2 Further Stylistic Devices

By using a range of stylistic devices, the narrator communicates with the text’s intended recipients. The mode of the text includes distance and focalization. The aspect of distance indicates whether the presentation of the narrative is direct or indirect, i.e., whether it evokes a narrative or a dramatic mode.³⁷ By employing direct speech, the narrator creates a dramatic mode, since there is then no or only little distance to the story. The narrative function of the dialogues embedded in the text is not only to add vividness; they are also crucial parts of the plot, since they provide a structure to the text, as is revealed by many dialogue passages. In the following short section on the masked ball, the narrator ends his story with a dialogue that serves both to conclude the narration and to adapt it to a dramatic mode, i.e. giving a more thrilling touch to his account for the reader:

This they call ‘playing a comedy.’ In their opinion, the masked ball is a great art. It takes place a few times a year, though not every year, because of the high costs. It is a staged event for which they meet at the empress’ palace, where three large halls are brightly lit with candles. Dancers give a lot of performances until the early morning while wearing masks. Men and women walk hand in hand from one hall to the next and hide their faces behind masks. A man is dressed like a woman, a woman dressed like a man, with a brightly painted piece of wood before their faces and looking at each other. Once, the commander in chief [pasha] was invited, and while he was sitting on a chair, the empress approached him disguised as a man. She had on one side the commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, Çalık (sic) Orlov,³⁸ and on the other the aforesaid Panin;³⁹ both men were wearing Algerian costume. In this way [the empress] approached the pasha and asked the interpreter: ‘Has the pasha recognized us?’ The Pasha replied: ‘I have not recognized [you].’ The Empress laughed, took off her mask and said: ‘It is called a masked ball.’ When the

35 On the system of child levy, see Gülay Yılmaz, “Body Politics and the Devşirmes in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire: The Conscripted Children of Herzegovina,” in *Children and Childhood in the Ottoman Empire from the 15th to the 20th Century*, ed. Gülay Yılmaz and Fruma Zachs (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021): 239–63.

36 As emphasized also by Neuman, see Neumann, “The Russian Experience”: 30.

37 Other terms employed to explain the “dramatic mode” in a narration are “showing” or “mimesis”, see Matias Martinez and Michael Scheffel, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, 7th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2007): 47–49.

38 The grand admiral Alexei Grigoryevich Orlov.

39 Nikita Ivanovic Panin was a statesman and political mentor to Catherine II.

Pasha said: 'I have never seen anything like it,' the Empress replied: 'This is a spectacle which you are going to remember once you all will have returned to your native country.'⁴⁰

Furthermore, since this dialogue is held between subalterns, i.e., the Ottomans, and masters, in this case the Empress and her courtiers, i.e. in a situation of asymmetrical dependency, the function of the dialogue becomes more revealing. When the Empress says in the concluding sentence: "This is a spectacle which you are going to remember once you all will have returned to your native country," it is obvious that it is she – as their current master – who decides on the forced stay of the Ottoman war captives but also holds out the hope that they will be able to return home some day. Here, again, we see that the author tends to describe unknown practices as precisely as possible, such as explaining a mask as "a brightly painted piece of wood before their faces." He must be aware that all these practices were solely practices of the court and did not reflect the culture of ordinary Russian society. Thus, the mask appears as a symbol for Russian court culture.

Use of the dramatic mode, which reduces distance, can also be seen in the following dialogue between the Ottoman commander in chief, İbrāhīm Pasha, and the Russian lieutenant colonel (*podpolkovnik*, *подполковник*) – whose name is not mentioned – after thirty-eight days of custody at the fortress of Crimean Tula:

A dispute broke out. The commander of [the unit of] 700 men said: 'Do you want to stay in this fortress with all your remaining men? Or do you want to leave with 21 men, as ordained in the letter which has arrived? Give me an answer, so that I can inform my authorities accordingly.'

His excellence [İbrāhīm] Pasha gave a firm answer by saying: 'Write down [what I am saying]. I am a captive anywhere, no matter where I am being held. But I cannot leave any of my men behind, because I do not need your authorities and king, nor do I need to meet [them]. Whatever fate decides will happen.' The aforesaid [colonel] was not able to make any objections to that.

Thereupon, the commander of the fortress and other officers understood the situation, and they all went to the commander-in-chief [İbrāhīm Pasha], took off their hats, bowed their heads, asked about his well-being and said: 'If you do not accompany this [Russian] lieutenant colonel [to Saint Petersburg] but stay here instead, it would be very unfair [towards him]. He has been appointed for your service [for this task] and if he can proceed to the local commandant [in Saint Petersburg] without any dispute, the state will bestow on him the rank of a general. Thus, if you honor him and take [only] twenty-one men with you, everything you desire will be granted as soon as we meet the Empress. [In this case] it will be possible for the remaining men [of your retinue] to join you later.' [İbrāhīm Pasha] reluctantly agreed.⁴¹

⁴⁰ EEC 2278, 26r–27v. *cevāb eder ki bir gün ola ki bu oyunlar ki hatıra gelür deyüb gitdi*. A decade earlier, in 1763, Ahmed Resmi Efendi, the envoy to Berlin, described a masked ball in his report. This is obviously the first narration of a masked ball in Ottoman literature according to Abdullah Güllüoğlu. See his "Die Wahrnehmung des Anderen in den Berichten des osmanischen Gesandten Ahmed Resmi Efendi (1694/95–1783)," in *Orientalische Reisende in Europa: Europäische Reisende im Nahen Osten: Bilder vom Selbst und Imaginationen des Anderen*, ed. Bekim Agai and Zita Ágota Pataki (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2010): 84.

⁴¹ EEC 2278, 21r–22v.

First of all, it is striking that Necâti emphasizes the respectful way in which the Russian officers, i.e. the enemy, approach the Ottoman commander-in-chief, displaying forms of courtesy that were common in their own as well as in Ottoman culture, such as taking off their hats, bowing their heads and asking about the pasha's well-being. Regardless of cultural differences, we can observe here a conversation of men regarding each other as socially equal. In telling this story, the narrator's position can adopt two forms: *heterodiegetic* and *homodiegetic*. In the first case, the narrator is exclusively tangible on the level of narrative transmission and does not participate in the events described, i.e. on the story level. The narration is in the third person. This heterodiegetic narration dominates throughout the text since it tends to be associated with a higher degree of authority. A homodiegetic narrator is present and participates directly in the events as a protagonist, and the narration is thus in the first person.⁴² Necâti employs a first-person perspective, when he refers to himself in the third person as "this humble [person]" (*bu fakîr*). At the end, when Necâti mentions that he was sent to Istanbul to deliver the commander in chief's letter to the grand vizier, he refers to himself as *bu 'abd-i 'âciz*, "this incapable slave." It is remarkable that he defines himself as "this humble [person]" not only in a scene related to the Ottoman world, but also when referring to his Russian superiors during his captivity. For example, when he mentions the daily allowance which he and his companions received from the empress, he writes, "[The Empress] provided twenty-five *akçe* to this humble [person]." This expression is a topos of modesty, a literary convention of Ottoman literature in which the third person is employed instead of the first.

5 Conclusions

Necâti Efendi, an Ottoman official, experienced four years of captivity in Saint Petersburg during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1768–1772, and wrote his memoirs after his return to Istanbul. While I regard this factual text as an ego document, I place his narration in the genre of captivity narratives. In his text, the author provides a relatively neutral view of his experiences and observations during his Russian captivity. Abstaining from creating an alterity/otherness discourse, he does not use asymmetrical binary pairs of *self* and *other* relating to his own cultural space and the space of his captivity.

Necâti and his fellow captives were certainly privileged prisoners of war, in the way that they were middle- or high-ranking officials who could expect to be treated according to the rules of diplomacy. Although the war was still going on and no one knew for how long it would continue, the captives' holders had to adhere to diplomatic regulations relating to war captives, who would be exchanged immediately

⁴² Martinez and Scheffel, *Erzähltheorie*: 81.

once hostilities had ended. Thus, regardless of what was happening on the battle ground, Necâti and his fellow captives in Saint Petersburg found themselves deeply involved into diplomatic practices: They received a daily allowance; they were invited by Catherine II several times to court events such as balls, operas, and banquets. As we have seen in the content of his work, his detailed descriptions of many places in Saint Petersburg and insightful explanations of a variety of institutions and practices reveal that the group of Ottoman officials was given purposefully access to all these institutions by the Russians: It was obvious that these war captives were kept only temporarily in Saint Petersburg. Upon their return home they would be able to pass on the knowledge on the Russian empire which they had obtained during their long captivity.

This background may explain Necâti's narrative, i.e., what he wrote, how he wrote (and also why he omitted some information) and why he selected this particular style and structure. All in all, it is a narrative of self-justification, although he did not serve as a diplomat or envoy to Russia and was not obliged to submit a report on a foreign country. He had done his job; he was neither a traitor nor a deserter. He adds also a *lessons learnt* to his narrative, in order to explain what had gone wrong in the war theatre to prevent the same mistake to be made again (the next war with Russia was to begin only 15 years later). With Russia as the biggest military threat to the Ottoman state, court circles in Istanbul must have been most interested in his unofficial report. Finally, he had been in the core area of the enemy's power, which enabled him to provide information on how the Russian state was functioning and especially how Catherine the Great could finance the war (Necâti's answer: the tax system was well-organized). The description of the naval arsenal in Saint Petersburg was of crucial importance, giving a hint at the technological resources Russia had at hand and in which way they could be turned into military prowess.

Focusing on the question of *how* the narrative is told, Necâti's narrative strategies in the text reveal his dependent situation as a war captive in the Russian capital, and how he attempted to deal with his experiences by drawing upon his own cultural background and perceiving the surrounding foreign space. Maintaining a distanced and neutral point of view in most cases, Necâti does not use the *other* as projection surface for his own desires and imaginations. Rather, he presents pictures both of his own culture and the culture of others in an interwoven context, thus initiating a dynamic process of knowledge production. Addressing asymmetrical dependency, Necâti's captivity narrative depicts a structure of dependency on an elite level which is, however, significantly different from the experience of war captivity suffered by ordinary soldiers or civilians.

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