

The Politics of Space: Reconstructing the Diplomatic Residences of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires in the 18th Century

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The concept of space in early modern transcultural diplomatic encounters is an understudied phenomenon. While extant studies have focused on the architectural qualities and design of the imperial palaces, our knowledge of the diplomatic lodgings of Ottoman and Habsburg delegations in Vienna and Constantinople in the first half of the 18th century remains to be limited. This paper examines the residences of Ottoman and Habsburg ambassadors, delegated after the peace treaties of Carlowitz, Passarowitz, and Belgrade, in Pera and Leopoldstadt respectively. My discussion of diplomatic space centers on the interior decorations of reception halls at these diplomatic lodgings, including their physical features and the political semantics of the symbolic value of the objects within. While Ottoman diplomatic agents furnished their reception rooms with sofas and stools, decorated the walls with sultanic monograms (tuğra), and military equipment such as bejeweled swords and daggers, the Habsburgs had both European as well as Ottoman-style seating objects in their residences and adorned their reception rooms with the portraits of their rulers. Furnishing allowances (mefruşat baha) granted to the diplomats and the accouterments of Habsburg agents which they brought from Vienna offer us a window into the material culture of diplomacy, the everyday lives of diplomatic agents, and their level of interaction with the host culture. Studying these reception halls allows us to explore the relationship between the physical form of the objects and their sociocultural and political meanings and to examine how broader concepts such as hospitality, foreignness, and the representation of court culture developed in these newly-constructed diplomatic ecosystems. The research is based on Viennese and Ottoman archival sources, including diplomatic correspondences, ambassadorial reports, architectural plans, copper engravings, and financial records.