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Article abstract

In this article, I examine the relationship between mobility and trust in the work and life of a wide range of early modern diplomatic interpreters. I address this relationship by bringing together archival material unearthed by literary scholars and social historians: specifically, historians of diplomacy, translation, and interpreting. I seek to address these documents from the perspective of occasional dragomans who found themselves performing the often-dangerous role of intercultural mediation in exchange for money, an improved social status, or freedom.

Interpreting in Early Modern Diplomacy: Occasional Mobility and the Liminal Spaces of Trust

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In this article, I examine the relationship between mobility and trust in the work and life of a wide range of early modern diplomatic interpreters. I address this relationship by bringing together archival material unearthed by literary scholars and social historians: specifically, historians of diplomacy, translation, and interpreting. I seek to address these documents from the perspective of occasional dragomans who found themselves performing the often-dangerous role of intercultural mediation in exchange for money, an improved social status, or freedom.

Dans cet article, j'étudie le rapport entre mobilité et confiance dans le travail et la vie d'un grand nombre d'interprètes de la première modernité ayant œuvré dans le domaine de la diplomatie. J'aborde ce rapport en convoquant des documents d'archives mis au jour par des spécialistes de la littérature et de l'histoire sociale, en particulier des historiens de la diplomatie, de la traduction et de l'interprétation. Je m'efforce d'analyser ces documents du point de vue de truchements occasionnels qui se trouvèrent précipités dans le rôle souvent risqué de médiateurs interculturels en échange d'argent, d'un meilleur statut social ou de leur liberté.

Introduction

In his *Commentarios reales de los Incas* (1609), Garcilaso de la Vega narrates the story of the Indigenous dragoman Felipe, who accompanied the Spanish captain Francisco Pizzarro to his meeting with the Incan emperor Atahuallpa at Cajamarca in 1532. Felipe had learned Quechua in the coastal town of Túmbez from Indigenous people who did not speak the language well. At the Cajamarca meeting, the Dominican friar Vicente Valverde was tasked with addressing the emperor so as to expound the Christian doctrine, propose a relationship of vassalage between Atahuallpa and the Spanish and Christian rule, and threaten that a refusal to accept such an offer would result in death and destruction. In his account, de la Vega notes that Valverde's speech was harsh and abrupt, and the translation even worse, since the interpreter's knowledge of both Quechua and Spanish was poor.[1] In his reply, Atahuallpa eloquently expressed his dismay

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1. Don Paul Abbott, *Rhetoric in the New World: Rhetorical Theory and Practice in the Colonial Spanish America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 93–95. This article builds on my recent,

that the Europeans had not made sure to address him "through a more skilled and faithful translator."[2] According to de la Vega, the emperor conveyed that his chagrin was occasioned not by the performance of the interpreter per se, but because the Conquistadores had altogether failed to ensure that the diplomatic communication would be as respectful and effective as possible.[3]

Moving from Peru to Croatia, and a century later, Lorenzo Capessich of Sebenico (Šibenik, Croatia) wrote to the Venetian Board of Trade in 1621 to petition a brokerage license:

> While I, Lorenzo Capessich of Sebenico, sojourned in Turkey on the occasion of business for the entire course of twelve years, I have mastered perfectly the Turkish language, such that it adds to the Slavic and Italian that I know very well, making me fit to act for the public and private benefit in commerce, especially having acquired many friends in the country, which I have kept for the dependency that they have with our house in Sebenico, where I could make myself a fruitful subject and servant of Your Serenity in diverse affairs […]. I petition reverently Your Serenity that it deign to grant me the favor that I be appointed Regular Broker, [so] that I will not stop laboring in that position to forever give preference with public service to the satisfaction of merchants for the growth of commerce.[4]

Capessich also asserts his "deserving parentage."[5] His father was Dalmatian, and his mother was from Nauplion, Peloponnese, a Venetian colony until 1540. In her formative contribution to the field of new diplomatic history, Natalie Rothman uses this example to illustrate the case of a trans-imperial subject offering his services as intercultural broker to the Venetian Republic. A subject with proven language skills, mercantile credentials, and years of experience

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2. Abbott, 93.

3. Abbott, 93.

4. Natalie E. Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 57–58.

5. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 57.

in public service as go-between, Capessich "aligned his life trajectory with the fortunes of the Republic in a move not unlike that of patrician self-representations."[6] The Republic endorsed his petition enthusiastically because of his mastery of language, his previous services as spokesperson for Venice with the Ottomans, and his maternal pedigree.

Both cases, outlined above, reveal the strategic importance of intercultural mediators, who could assist governments and leaders (military, political, mercantile) in advancing their economic and geopolitical aspirations. Mediators, brokers, diplomats, or interpreters were intercultural agents working for a variety of government institutions and authorities, as well as merchants, or for themselves with various degrees of recognition and agency.

In this article, I begin to investigate the relationship between mobility and trust in the work and life of a wide range of early modern interpreters. I address this relationship by bringing together archival material unearthed by literary scholars and social historians: specifically, historians of diplomacy, translation, and interpreting. I seek to begin to consider these documents from the perspective of occasional dragomans who found themselves performing the often-dangerous role of intercultural mediation in exchange for money, an improved social status, or freedom. In particular, I focus on diplomatic interpreters, or dragomans, *meturgeman*, *tercümāni*, *truchemen*, or *turcimanno* among other variants of the same term.[7] These were often highly peripatetic individuals who could fulfil different roles depending on their employers' needs or circumstances. Early modern European documents seldom distinguish between the translation work carried out by multilingual secretaries or diplomats, and the diplomatic interpreting performed by a wide range of occasional or official dragomans.[8] As the field of new diplomatic history is

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6. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 58. The translation quoted here is Rothman's; a transcript of the original petition can be found in appendix 1.3 of her monograph.

7. On the origin and use of "dragoman" and cognate terms, see Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19; Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 167–68; and Natalie E. Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021), 4–6, dx.doi.org/10.1515/9781501758485.

8. On the lack of distinction between these roles, see Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 165–70. See also Edward Wilson-Lee, "Killing the Messenger: Diplomatic Translators in Late Elizabethan Culture," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 82.4 (2019): 579–95, 585, dx.doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2019.0024.

revealing ever more clearly, these early modern mediators could be "outlaws" such as renegades, *degredados*, *lançados*, Christian slaves, or Moriscos—that is, technically excluded from the benefits and protection of juridical status and formal citizenship.[9]

Their role as go-betweens forced them to inhabit the spaces of both the conqueror and the conquered, and experience both "sides" by means of intercultural mediation. In relevant scholarly literature, the term "liminality" can tend to serve as a synonym for marginality. Yet the less privileged individuals discussed in this article occupied a central place in the mediation and communication processes that they enabled. They were socially if not socio-legally marginalized or oppressed individuals forced by their language skills and reputed trustworthiness into inhabiting the in-between spaces of encounter and negotiation.[10] We know that the Portuguese Crown sent male and female subjects to unexplored lands to serve as scouts; they could be sent against their will. Some were *conversos*, renegades, and lepers.[11] European powers relied on

9. *Degredados* refers to criminal exiles, whereas *lançados* were Portuguese or mulatto individuals who "threw" themselves into African communities to eventually work as go-betweens for the Portuguese Crown and traders.

10. In this article, I make few references to dragomans who cannot be described as "outlaws"; although belonging to a relatively low social class, some of these dragomans were eventually trained and recognized and rewarded for their work as official interpreters. I also discuss succinctly a case of merchants working as occasional interpreters. As I point out below, I present these cases to support and integrate the scant archival evidence available of conversos or renegades acting as occasional interpreters. It is also worth pointing out here that in some cases dragomans inhabited both the high and low ranks of society. See for instance Giacomo de Nores, discussed in Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 174–176 and in Natalie E. Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51.4 (2009): 771–800, 787–90, dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0010417509990132. On liminality see Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living through the In-Between* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 4–6. I follow Arnold van Gennep's notion of liminality as a transitory condition while also considering the performative nature of liminality as fitting the performative nature of interpreting. See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage: A Classical Study of Cultural Celebrations* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960 [first published in 1909]) and Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 2.4 (2004): 527–73, 527–29, dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0735-2751.2004.00233.x.

11. They were called *lançados* and *degradados* and were sent to territories in East Africa or the Atlantic to learn customs, languages, and religion. See Joseph A. B. Jackson-Eade, "The Role of Interpreters during the Early Portuguese Presence in East Africa," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies: Indian Ocean Trajectories*, 4.3–4 (2018): 179–203, dx.doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2018.1507245. The new

these diverse men and women because it was difficult to recruit "professionally" trained dragomans. For instance, the Venetian Republic set up a program for the training of skilled interpreters ("giovani di lingua" or "young language experts"), but very few enrolled.[12] Throughout the Mediterranean there were also official interpreters such as high-ranking Muslim representatives of state. These are just beginning to attract close scholarly interest.[13]

Capessich acquired language skills and "fitness" as a broker in the course of twelve years spent in Turkey. His story evidences the temporary mobility of interpreters in early modern Europe. Mobility was a social and cultural practice involving the geographical displacement of individuals or groups from a homeland: the experience of sojourning and working in a foreign environment, and the "reception of that mobility by both foreign counterparts

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approach to the study of the history of diplomacy is fittingly called "New Diplomatic History": see John Watkins, "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38.1 (2008): 1–14, dx.doi.org/10.1215/10829636-2007-016. On women as occasional and non-official diplomatic go-betweens, see Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 151–85 and, by the same author, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 48–72. There is a substantial literature on the famous Nahua woman interpreter Malinche: see most recently María Laura Spoturno, "Revisiting Malinche: A Study of Her Role as an Interpreter," in *Translators, Interpreters, and Cultural Negotiators: Mediating and Communicating Power from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era*, ed. Federico M. Federici and Dario Tessicini (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 121–35, dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137400048_8. More broadly on Indigenous women as go-betweens in early sixteenth-century Brazil, see Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 85–86 and 270–72. In her excellent study of Italian diplomacy, Isabella Lazzarini focuses only marginally on unofficial and occasional interpreters: Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350–1520* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 244–48, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof: oso/9780198727415.001.0001.

12. Francesca Lucchetta, "La scuola dei 'giovani di lingua' veneti nei secoli XVI e XVII," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 7 (1989): 19–40. See also Rothman, "Interpreting Dragomans."

13. A major step forward in the study of these transnational, trans-imperial mediators in early modern Mediterranean diplomacy is a special issue of the *Journal of Early Modern History* 19.2–3 (2015) on "Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean," edited by Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić.

and compatriots."[14] Evidence suggests that, in early modern diplomatic brokerage, experience of mobility in this multifaceted sense—that is, mobility at once geographical, linguistic, cultural, and financial—was a key basis for claimed and perceived trustworthiness.

A paradoxical status of liminality

Studies in global migration history have shed much light on temporary mobility in the early modern world.[15] Early modern historiography has focused on seasonal labour (harvesting and similar manual labour), and skilled labour (official diplomacy, and artistic and literary work at court, or in city states), while "occasional" skilled labour is yet to receive sustained attention. Here I use "occasional" to refer to temporary labour, and also to the chance nature of the diplomatic role performed by outlaws, less privileged members of early modern society, or professionals such as merchants seeking extra income and opportunities.[16] Many of these subjects became interpreters first on the basis of their language skills and second because—for pragmatic purposes, at least— they were deemed trustworthy by their employers.

To be sure, diplomatic interpreting could be a dangerous business. Often, the circumstances that led an individual to become a diplomatic interpreter were challenging, at best. This is true for Hasan al-Wazzan (1488–ca. 1532), called "Leo Africanus" by Europeans. Having been captured by Spanish pirates in 1518, he spent nine years in Italy and reshaped his career from that of official North African diplomatic interpreter to teacher, translator, and informant in

14. David Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 1.

15. This list is not meant to be comprehensive: Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, "The Mobility Transition Revisited, 1500–1900: What the Case of Europe Can Offer to Global History," *The Journal of Global History* 4.4 (2009): 347–77, dx.doi.org/10.1017/S174002280999012X; Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, and Patrick Manning, eds., *Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 3–38, dx.doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004180314.i-287; Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe: The Drift to the North Sea* (London and Wolfeboro, NH: Croom Helm, 1987).

16. "Occasional labour" is defined by Dominic Rathbone as "those employed on an ad hoc basis to cope with the seasonal demands for extra labour or to provide particular services," in his *Economic Rationalism and Rural Society in Third-Century AD Egypt: The Heroninos Archive and the Appianus Estate* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88.

Italy.[17] Ancient histories record interpreters being put to death for making missteps or wrong inferences in their work. Plutarch tells of a Greek interpreter being put to death for daring to use his first language to communicate the demands of Persians. Whether in the ancient or early modern worlds, being so frequently of low social ranks, diplomatic interpreters were easily subjected to the wrath of their employers.[18] In 1600, Andalusian diplomatic translator and member of the distrusted Morisco community Abd el-Dodar accompanied the king of Morocco and Fez to England at the court of Elizabeth I. He did so as a member of the Morisco community—a community widely distrusted by the Spanish authorities. It seems that because Abd el-Dodar had expressed his appreciation of the English customs publicly, the interpreter was poisoned by the Moroccan entourage. This example, together with others recently and vividly discussed by Edward Wilson-Lee, for instance, shows that it was not unusual for rulers to treat low-ranked interpreters as scapegoats.[19]

Early modern diplomatic interpreters held a paradoxical status: their skills as mobile and multilingual speakers gave them direct access to the "antechambers of power," even if their background was often disadvantaged. Their experience of mobility, together with their rhetorical claims about their

17. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), and Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Leo Africanus' and his Worlds of Translation," in Federici and Tessicini, eds., 61–82, dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137400048_5.

18. Ruth A. Roland, *Interpreters as Diplomats: A Diplomatic History of the Role of Interpreters in World Politics* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), 12. For a history of diplomatic interpreting, see Metcalf, *Go-Betweens*; Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth, eds., *Translators through History* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1995); Simon Schaffer, *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2009); Frances E. Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Andres Höfele and Werner von Koppenfels, eds., *Renaissance Go-Betweens: Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110919516; Roberto A. Valdeón, *Translation and the Spanish* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2014); and Cynthia Giambruno Miguélez, "The Role of the Interpreters in the Governance of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Colonies in the 'New World': Lessons from the Past for the Present," in *Crossing Borders in Community Interpreting: Definitions and Dilemmas*, ed. Carmen Valero-Garcés and Anne Martin (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2008), 27–50.

19. Wilson-Lee, "Killing the Messenger." See also Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits, and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

own trustworthiness, made it possible for strangers, slaves, or renegades to be trusted, at least temporarily, for strategic reasons. As Tamar Herzog points out, the question was never "who was a Spaniard, who was a Frenchman, or who was a citizen of a local community. At stake was always the question of who could enjoy a specific right or be obliged to perform a certain duty."[20] The duty of early modern intercultural mediators (translators, interpreters, brokers, and editors or publishers) was to build trust with at least one other party before any reliable transaction could take place. Various degrees of trust or distrust existed between, say, merchants, states, and the commercial broker. Understanding these degrees of trust or distrust helps to illuminate the unequal relationships between parties in intercultural communication and the consequences of such relational dynamics. Overarching among these consequences, are, of course, the processes of early modern empire-building and state formation, which include colonization—whether through translation strategies of foreignization or domestication; whether through misunderstanding or silence.

The liminal spaces of trust

Trust was fundamental to relations between early modern Europeans and their diplomatic interpreters. Dragomans' *bona fides* could not rely on linguistic skills, as we have seen in the story of Felipe with which this article begins. In order to be trustworthy, interpreters and translators more broadly needed to rely on "a set of discursive strategies."[21] However, the visibility and language skills of the go-betweens herein put these mediators in situations of constant risk; they were at risk of being distrusted, and therefore punished, even killed. Invaders of new frontiers such as representatives of the early modern Portuguese Crown relied on their interpreters to navigate in a world they could not understand, or could grasp only partially. As a result, these mediators were entrusted to provide a reliable rendering of what was being said and seen. While being both prudent and "transparent" in what they were communicating, they were also required to be neutral or invisible throughout the exchanges. Expectations concerning neutrality or invisibility are evidenced by the fact that, in the long history of

20. Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 4, dx.doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300092530.001.0001.

21. Claire M. Gilbert, *In Good Faith: Arabic Translation and Translators in Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 5–6.

dragomans, interpreters are seldom explicitly acknowledged, especially when they performed their role occasionally; in most cases, literary accounts of events or archival material refer only to "certain people" who acted as interpreters.[22] Their central role in the mediation process and their invisibility or anonymity in archival records of the same intercultural transaction are further evidence of the paradox of liminality discussed above. Names of outlaw go-betweens are rarely mentioned, and there is scant evidence of how their work was received by their employers, unless they made a plea, or sought to defend themselves.

Given the scant evidence of how the interpreter's intercultural mediation was performed and received, how can trust or distrust be gauged? Trust has been defined by Charles Tilly as "a historical product rather than a phenomenon whose variation we can explain without reference to history."[23] Clearly, then, notions of trust change as they travel between cultures and communities.[24] Detailed empirical study is needed for us to appreciate the specific ways in which trust is produced through cultural and linguistic textual mediation. With reference to interpreting, by "trust" I mean not only who was *entrusted* to convey or relate messages across languages and contexts, but also how *trustworthy* a go-between was considered to be.

Trust is based on a complex web of "discursive and social strategies" which include rhetorical, emotional, and attitudinal factors: signalling or promise making, sincerity, and the reception of audiences to speech acts and agents.[25] Not always a functional and rational practice, as Niklas Luhmann has observed, "trust is a solution to a specific problem of risk."[26] And, as this article seeks to illustrate, there were considerable risks borne by diplomatic interpreters of the early modern period. Poor (and poorly rewarded) interpreting affected critical

22. Roland, 32.

23. Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26, dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618185.

24. Irene Van Renswoude, "'The Word Once Sent Forth Can Never Come back': Trust in Writing and the Dangers of Publication," in *Strategies of Writing: Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages*, ed. Petra Schulte, Marco Mostert, and Irene van Renswoude (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 393–413, 398, dx.doi.org/10.1484/M.USML-EB.3.4275.

25. The quote is from Gilbert, 6. A very similar understanding of trust in early modern Spain is expressed by Gilbert through the concept of "fiduciary translation" (Gilbert, 4–10).

26. Niklas Luhmann, "Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives," in *Trust Making and Breaking: Cooperative Relations*, ed. Diego Gambetta (New York: Blackwell, 1988), 94–107, 95.

political and cultural exchange between rulers and the ruled, leaders and societies. Interpreters risked their reputations each time they accepted a task. With reference to the intended recipient or audience for a message or outcome, employers accepted the risk that the services offered by an interpreter may not be reliable or accurate. Hence, detail concerning context, expectations, and the conventions that inform "good" mediation for a specific culture and society are essential for understanding the role and practices of translation historically.

An interdisciplinary perspective on trust and translation highlights interpersonal and institutional levels of trust.[27] For the purposes of this article, interpersonal trust can denote the strategic and social relationship between diplomatic interpreters, merchants, governments, and local communities. This relationship is based on skills and feelings of trust: contracts and agreements inform the ways in which these collaborations are performed, and there are also "states of minds" between partners (goodwill, or fear and ignorance, for instance) that are expressed more or less openly.

Beyond the personal, intercultural mediation also involves an institutional level of trust. Trust in the skills, experience, reputation, and claims to trustworthiness of early modern diplomatic interpreters would belong to the kind of trust Ferdinand Tönnies presents as typical of a *Gesellschaft* community.[28] Governments or merchants do not need to know interpreters personally: they may have enough confidence in their reputation or language skills to be satisfied that the product or service will be of adequate standard. In this case, the employers will show a "strong thin trust" or impersonalized confidence based on the reputation of an institution or profession (diplomat, secretary, teacher, and so forth.).[29]

Trust regimes constitute a third level of trust. Here I follow Peter Burke's understanding of regimes as "cultures of translation": a system of conventions or practices adopted by interpreters or expected by their employers.[30] This third level of trust can also be seen as *habitus*, expressed by Barbara Misztal as

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27. See Rizzi, Lang, and Pym, 12–17.

28. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (London: Routledge, 1988 [first published 1887]).

29. On "strong thin trust," see Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Trust: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 47, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198712381.001.0001.

30. Peter Burke, "The Circulation of Historical and Political Knowledge between Britain and the Netherlands (1600–1800)," in *Translating Knowledge in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Harold John Cook and Sven Dupré (Berlin and Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2012), 41–52, 41. See also Peter Burke and

"habit and its social forms—that is, custom and tradition."[31] With the foregoing in mind, which levels of trust (interpersonal, institutional, conventional) can be inferred from evidence for early modern intercultural transactions? Still relatively little is known about how these levels of trust or distrust played out in early modern commercial and political intercultural mediation. As such, there is much value in seeking to examine what types of trust were invoked and expected by early modern go-betweens and their employers and patrons.

We can glimpse a picture of the unequal relationships between these different levels of trust and the occasional and liminal space occupied by diplomatic interpreters in the unusually rich evidence of go-betweens working in early modern cities such as Venice and Constantinople. In some of these cases, we can gauge ways in which dragomans made claims about their identity, roles, and skills—and about how these claims were received by their employers. We can also gauge the fluidity and complexity of these mediators' lives and pleas, particularly when they sought to protect their liminal status in early modern society. These subjects adopted contingent strategies to reassure or convince Venetian or Ottoman officials of their good service, and of their right to live or work in Venice and its territory. The ways in which dragomans signalled their interpersonal and institutional trustworthiness to their employer and beyond can reveal their personal life exigencies and, simultaneously, the cultural values assumed by their rulers.

Take, for instance, the petition made in 1608 by Teodoro Dandolo, who asked the Venetian State to employ him as official interpreter of Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and "Indian." He had lived in the Uzbek city of Bukhara, and had recently moved to Aleppo, and then Venice (where he was converted to Christianity), and Rome.[32] His application to be trained as a public dragoman was turned down. This is because some members of the Venetian Board of Trade doubted his trustworthiness: although he had converted to Christianity, it was feared that he could still favour Muslim nations. Despite this fear, four months later the same board approved Dandolo's application to become a commercial broker to the "Turks and Levantines" trading in Venice. Why did the board

R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11, dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497193.

31. Barbara A. Misztal, *Trust in Modern Societies: The Search for the Bases of Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 102.

32. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 89.

not trust Dandolo as a dragoman but find him trustworthy as a commercial broker? Did a diplomatic interpreter rely on interpersonal and institutional trust, while a broker needed only thin trust relationships? Were the two roles subjected to different expectations? Answers in this case lie in the instability of the political and legal reliability of converts in early seventeenth-century Venice. The board's eventual approval of Dandolo's application to become a commercial broker shows a tension between varying degrees of interpersonal distrust and the demand for more interpreters working in an official capacity in the service of the Venetian State. This example points to the inequality of trust in intercultural mediation, and shows how trust and distrust may coexist in the same web of unequal intercultural relationships.

Social mobility and mutual interest

Historians of diplomacy and power have recently examined some of the multiple types of social mobility articulated by sociologists.[33] Early modern diplomacy was a "flexible and multiple communicative system" involving actors (exiled people, political actors, *condottieri*, and suchlike), agents (proctors, *commissari*, ambassadors), practices, and languages of diplomatic interaction.[34] The ontological and geographical mobility of occasional go-betweens is tied to geopolitical, diasporic, and social contingencies. The forced or voluntary mobility of such individuals could facilitate either stable or unstable communication between rulers and subjects, as indeed between equal powers.

It was essential for a dragoman to be reputed a trustworthy cultural broker. Trustworthiness was a matter of life or death, as we have seen with the story of Abd el-Dodar. Early modern translators often spent time studying or working away from their homelands. For example, Antoine Gazet, Claude de Bassecourt, and Antoine de Balinghem all spent time living in Italy to pursue their classical studies. By doing so, they could claim to have acquired

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33. On social mobility in sociology see Richard Breen, ed., *Social Mobility in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), dx.doi.org/10.1093/0199258457.001.0001. For medieval Italy, see Sandro Carocci and Isabella Lazzarini, eds., *Social Mobility in Medieval Italy (1100–1500)* (Rome: Viella, 2018).

34. Isabella Lazzarini, "Italian Diplomacy: An Open Social Field (1350–1520ca.)," in Sandro Carocci and Isabella Lazzarini eds., 185–98, 186.

the necessary language skills and cultural knowledge to translate a new type of religious literature for the benefit of their fellow countrymen.[35]

Similarly, diplomatic interpreters were expected to travel and spend time in different regions to acquire the necessary information or skills for the success of their employers. Take, for instance, the case of one of the formally recognized Venetian dragomans, Michele Membré (born about 1509). A descendant of Christianized Circassian Mamluks, he reached Venice from his native Cyprus after working in the Levant for the noble merchant Bernardo Benedetti (who was a relation). Thanks to Benedetti's recommendation, and his claim to having been born from Circassian parents, his peripatetic life continued during the Ottoman-Venetian war of 1537–40, when he was sent by the Venetian Republic to Tabriz, with the task of forming an alliance with the Safavid Shah Tahmasp I (1514–76). Membré took a long route back to Venice: Hormuz, India, Lisbon, Valladolid, Avignon, Marseilles, and Genoa. In 1550, he took over the role of public dragoman. Hence, from that moment until his death, no broker working with Ottomans could draw up a contract without paying Membré a tax and receiving his authorization.[36]

Membré's story reveals the success with which one particular diplomatic interpreter discursively and socially presented himself "as loyal and useful to the state beyond [his] mere linguistic competence."[37] Clearly, the key to his successful trust-signalling was a willingness and a proven ability to move effectively across different social and linguistic borders. The experience acquired by brokers such as Membré through their mobility was well recognized by their employers. In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese monarchy forced condemned prisoners to live in exile in Africa, Asia, and Brazil so that they could become diplomatic

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35. Alexander Soetaert, "Translating and Distributing Italian Religious Literature in the Ecclesiastical Province of Cambrai (late 16th, early 17th century)," *Incontri* 30.2 (2015): 29–40, 39.

36. Maria Pia Pedani ed., *Inventory of the* Lettere e Scritture Turchesche *in the Venetian State Archives* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), xxiv, dx.doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004179189.i-232, and Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 172–73. See also Maria Pia Pedani, "Between Diplomacy and Trade: Ottoman Merchants in Venice," in *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Gilles Veinstein (Paris, Louvain, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2008), 3–21. See also Benjamin Arbel, "Translating the Orient for the *Serenissima*: Michiel Membré in the Service of Sixteenth Century Venice," in *La Frontière Méditerranéenne du XVe au XVIIe siècle. Échanges, circulations et affrontements*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Bernard Heyberger (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 253–82, dx.doi.org/10.1484/M.ER-EB.4.00190.

37. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 172.

interpreters in the service of the monarchy. In a similar fashion, the Spanish rule considered mestizos, who lived in liminal spaces between the Spanish and the Indigenous worlds, as crucial intermediaries. The occasional mobility and liminality of these intermediaries was seen as uniquely useful to the colonizers.[38]

Often, the forced or semi-voluntary displacement of renegades, slaves, or convicts represented the best chance for these individuals to gain the trust and respect of their rulers. In 1441, before the Portuguese expansion in the Atlantic, Prince Henry "the Navigator" commanded Captain Antão Gonçalves, who was exploring the northern coast of Western Sahara, "to go as far as [he could] to try to take an interpreter from among these people."[39] As a result, Gonçalves returned with eleven Azanegue captives, including Adahu, a man who spoke Arabic. Eventually, Adahu negotiated his freedom by providing information about those regions that the Portuguese were interested in conquering.[40]

Mutual interest could guarantee the success of the ruler and freedom for the intercultural broker. It was a mutual interest and unequal status that allowed Vasco da Gama's Arabic-speaking interpreter Fernão Martins, during his expedition to East Africa, to be rewarded with the title of Idalgo as well as a grant of money upon his return to Portugal in 1499.[41] This mechanism of material reward was designed to build mutual trust (and, correspondingly, perhaps to pre-empt dissent). Another instance of this reward strategy is documented for Hürrem Bey, a renegade from Lucca who worked as official dragoman or *tercümanu* in Constantinople for the Ottoman government. During the turbulent years 1573–77, while being paid by his master Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, he was also generously rewarded with material means for his services to Philip II of Spain. Bey was also generously rewarded for assisting the Austrian ambassador in Constantinople, and received several gifts from the Venetians.[42]

38. Metcalf, 8.

39. Joseph A. B. Jackson-Eade, "The Role of Interpreters during the Early Portuguese Presence in East Africa," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 4.3 (2018): 179–203, 179, dx.doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2018.1507245.

40. Jackson-Eade, 179.

41. Jackson-Eade, 182.

42. Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560–1600," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19.2–3 (2015): 107–28, 112–13, dx.doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342453. On Bey see also Malcolm, 144–47.

These examples show that material reward in support of mutual trust was fundamental in intercultural transfers that involved three parties or more. One key element of this trust was the expectation that the interpreters' mobility (past or present) ensured their competency and reliability. So many ancient or early modern diplomatic interpreters were slaves or low-class subjects forced into mediatory roles as a means to survive, yet their geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic mobility demanded and received expressions of trust. Such evidence of trust in the third party—even when the mediator is anonymous or invisible—was a dealmaker or dealbreaker for every party involved.

Trusting networks

The case of Teodoro Dandolo suggests a tension between reliance on strangers or, in some cases, potential enemies, and the demand for skilled and mobile go-betweens. For practical reasons, the Portuguese Crown recruited several interpreters from Jewish communities and converts to Christianity, since Jewish communities tended to master a wide range of languages. For instance, for his 1511–13 expeditions to Malacca and Aden, the Portuguese general and Duke of Goa Afonso de Albuquerque availed himself of two Jewish interpreters who could speak Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Gujurati, and Kanara. Records allege that one of the two managed to learn Malay in a matter of few weeks.[43] Jewish individuals who petitioned or were asked to act as occasional brokers or diplomatic interpreters occupied the same paradoxical liminal status discussed above. Often marginalized in restricted areas of urban centres, they were also often considered by governments as key agents for the physical and material preservation of cities such as Venice. This institutional trust was, however, often unstable and could be revoked suddenly and dangerously for the Jewish go-betweens.[44]

Jewish interpreters could rely on strong community networks that helped to make them extremely useful and reliable emissaries and informers. Another significant factor that made Jewish interpreters more appealing to their Portuguese employers was that several displayed an obvious "cultural

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43. Dejanirah Couto, "The Role of Interpreters, or *Linguas*, in the Portuguese Empire during the 16th Century," *E-journal of Portuguese History* 1.2 (2003): 1–10, 4.

44. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 49–52.

proximity," being also Portuguese, Castilian, or North African-born.[45] They were not deemed strangers, yet their religious bonds could sometimes instil distrust. In 1512, Afonso de Albuquerque imprisoned his Jewish interpreter Francisco de Albuquerque under the accusation of having known his employer's secrets. Other dragomans were charged with being corrupted by "the other side," a broad reference to unknown culture, customs, or language.[46] A key pattern for *línguas* or interpreters was that they were recruited fortuitously by the Portuguese invaders, uprooted from their homes, and eventually settled in a foreign urban centre with attractive rewards. This is the story of Isaac of Cairo, who was displaced from his place of origin to serve the Portuguese Crown as *línguas*, and travelled extensively as an emissary before being offered by the king the office of official interpreter in the city of Diu, in India. We do not know whether Isaac had travelled widely before being co-opted by the Portuguese. We do know, however, that he knew several languages, was appreciated for being a "discrete man and versed in many languages," and was certainly selected to serve the monarchy on the basis of these important skills.[47]

Clearly, discretion and language skills would have given these go-betweens the chance to inhabit the liminal spaces of trust, be rewarded financially, and in some cases receive the opportunity to turn a peripatetic life into a stable, urban-based life as official dragoman or *língua*. However, as seen in the case of Dandolo, language skills were not sufficient to land a prestigious position as an official broker. Sometimes, merchants, adventurers, mercenaries, or renegades bolstered their earnings by carrying out temporary work as interpreters or informers. In 1540, two merchants, Antonio Ferreira and Antonio de Fonseca, worked for Bhuvaneka Bahu, King of Kotte (present-day Sri Lanka) by working as interpreters and officials.[48] Several of the less privileged go-betweens discussed in this article worked closely with merchants. It is therefore interesting that both diplomatic interpreters and merchants shared similar concerns about signalling trustworthiness. Signalling the qualities of trustworthiness and diligence was crucial in premodern economic exchange. Thus, with reference

45. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 4.

46. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 2.

47. Garcia de Orta, *Coloquious dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1895 [first published in 1563]), 2:204. Translation is mine.

48. Couto, 6.

to trans-imperial trading hubs, these qualities were vital to the success of the intercultural mediation involved in commerce, and required for protecting commercial interests and networks across distances. In 1732, Ergas and Silvera, two Sephardic traders based in Livorno, wrote to another Sephardic merchant in Venice that what most mattered to them was to be able to rely on a "trustworthy and diligent person" ("persona de confianza y deligente").[49] Such a statement intimates that a lack of perceived trustworthiness and diligence would make business impossible. In 1596, one Hans Thijs of Antwerp wrote to his brother in Lübeck advising him against entrusting a consignment of grain to a certain Andries Fagel: "You should not trust Fagel too much, for he has had rye here and forgot to make a profit from it."[50]

According to Francesca Trivellato, these two cases demonstrate that merchants' trustworthiness was not an intrinsic attribute. Rather, when it was ascribed or perceived, trustworthiness was built on concrete information about an individual's past conduct; it could also suffer from stigmas attached to the group to which a merchant belonged. How did a merchant or dragoman's employer trust or not trust "too much"? Recent studies have made abundantly clear that merchant diasporas did not share an ethos of trust but relied instead on complex networks of mediators beyond their diasporic community. There were no strictly identity-based regimes of trust. For example, Hasan, a sixteenth-century interpreter working for the Ottoman court in Aleppo, was dismissed by the *qadi* of Aleppo and given a *berat* (official document) to the effect that he would no longer be employed as an interpreter. However, Hasan went to the Sublime Porte to complain that he had been serving with honesty and dignity, and that the people he served were satisfied with him, as attested by documents. The Imperial Council dispatched an affidavit to allow Hasan to continue his services as an interpreter if he was still preferred by the people and not harmful to anyone. This case suggests that reputation rather than proven language skills was the deciding factor in employing one mediator instead of another. Other cases of interpreters working for the Ottoman rule in Cyprus show that the social background and identity of Greek, Armenian, or Turkish interpreters

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49. Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 153.

50. Trivellato, 174.

working at the Ottoman court did not matter as much as their perceived skills and values.[51]

Between the years 1529 and 1630, the Spanish Crown promulgated several ordinances aimed at establishing a clear ethics of interpreting. The goal was to address the distrust deriving from the fact that the vast majority of their Indigenous *línguas* were not formally trained, provided their services under duress occasionally, and had little accountability. The perceived foreignness of the interpreters' identity and language was technically made less suspicious by these regulations. It is for this reason that ordinances were published to establish institutional trust and a system of trust rules or conventions. These ordinances perhaps tried to address the paradox of liminality by weakening the potential risks deriving from the go-betweens' paradox of liminality: their social and economic marginality on the one hand, and their risky central role in intercultural mediation on the other.

Some of the rules in the ordinances prohibited interpreters from accepting gifts from their own people, tried to identify and punish potential misdeeds or misinterpretations, and made functional suggestions about how to acknowledge and compensate for the interpreters' travel, time, and local and material needs when rendering their services. The ordinances can be described as a veritable code of ethics. They assert the need for language skills to be complemented by trustworthiness and competence ("demás de la inteligencia de la lengua, sean de gran confianza y satisfacción").[52] A decree of 1630 attests that trustworthiness can be checked by testing interpreters before their employment, and by confirming their trustworthiness with their fellow community.

A 1583 ordinance goes even further in detailing the qualities of the interpreters: they need to possess the "loyalty, faith, and goodwill that are required" ("fidelidad, cristiandad y bondad que se requiere").[53] These terms point to distinctly medieval and early modern concepts of trust. The *fides* (in Latin) or *fidelitad* (in Spanish) refers to what Archbishop Balduin of Canterbury († 1190) describes in his *Liber de commendatione fidei*: a call for interpersonal trust, in which a friend believes in a friend (*fidem exquirit amicus ab amico*),

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51. Kemal Çiçek, "Interpreters of the Court in the Ottoman Empire as Seen from the Sharia Court Record of Cyprus," *Islamic Law and Society* 9 (2002): 1–15, dx.doi.org/10.1163/156851902753649252.

52. Giambruno Miguélez, 33–49. The quote is at 46.

53. Giambruno Miguélez, 37.

a comrade believes in a comrade, a master believes in a slave.[54] In influential works of later authorities, *fides* is set within a context of love (*dilectio*) and truth (*veritas*) aimed at mutual trust. The "required" loyalty, faith, and goodwill in the 1583 ordinance flag the belief that the interpreter does not wish to be untruthful. The Dominican Thomas Aquinas († 1274) discussed *fiducia* as believing the sincerity of something or someone. More broadly, in the medieval lexicon, *fidelis* referred to a faithful, constant, sworn, trustworthy, reliable, or loyal subject or vassal.[55] In other words, the word "fidelitad" refers to an unequal relationship in which the occasional dragoman is expected to be trusted. Trustworthiness and religious faith are, according to this 1583 document, the key qualities that allowed dragomans to occupy, albeit temporarily, the early modern liminal spaces of trust.

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The case of Lorenzo Capessich of Sebenico shows a diplomatic interpreter who successfully established himself as a formally recognized and protected member of the Venetian public service and Venetian society. Capessich appealed to Venetian regimes of trust: a set of values around identity and loyalty underpinned by an interpersonal relationship of trust. These values did not rely on an "on-or-off membership," or internal or external relationships, but on a performative understanding of trustworthiness.[56] Through his plea, Capessich established an affective relationship of interpersonal and institutional trust with the Venetian Board of Trade that influenced the Venetian government's decision to accept his services as a go-between. The case of Teodoro Dandolo is more complicated, as we have seen, and shows that interpersonal and institutional trust and distrust may coexist in the same web of unequal relationships. In this case, the trust bestowed upon the liminal interpreter was ambiguous, partial, uncertain.

Conversely, the case of Felipe discussed at the beginning of the article illuminates the liminal and precarious space occupied by the interpreter, and the

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54. Petra Schulte, *Enleitung*, in Schulte, Moster, and van Renswoude, eds., 1–14, 2–3.

55. Ian Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), dx.doi.org/10.23943/9781400890132.

56. Anthony Pym, *Method in Translation History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014 [first published 1998]), 184, dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315760049.

importance of discursive strategies of trustworthiness that went beyond real or claimed linguistic skills. The diplomatic exchange between the Conquistadores and the Incan emperor Atahuallpa was set up to fail. Indeed, as is now well known, the exchange ended with the killing of some five thousand Incans. The interpreter in this case could only use his coarse and incorrect skills in Quechua and the trustworthiness supposedly ascribed to him by the Conquistadores on the basis of his Indigenous identity, as well as his willingness to collaborate at Cajamarca.

All the cases discussed in this article show dragomans signalling their trustworthiness by negotiating their liminal role and their allegiance (or not) to contemporary regimes of trust: loyalty, identity, and the commercial or political ambitions of their employers. Signalling is persuasion—it involves strategies at once rhetorical, or discursive, and psychological, intended to reassure or convince an audience. The signalling that we find in documents concerning the work and life of a wide range of early modern interpreters helped their employers to render a level of trust that supported intercultural mediation and brokerage; this in turn profited the employers, and could yield profit or advantage to the interpreters themselves.

The study of the liminal and occasional spaces of trust negotiated and occupied by diplomatic go-betweens can shed light on what was bartered, sold, appropriated, or lost in the communication—and on the cultural, political, and linguistic violences underpinning the end result.