

## ‘Levantine’ Dragomans in Nineteenth Century Istanbul: The Pisani, the British, and Issues of Subjecthood

Frank Castiglione\*

*19. Yüzyıl İstanbul’unda ‘Levanten’ Tercümanlar: İngiliz Sefareti ve Pisani’lerin Tabiiyet Meselesi*

Öz ■ 19. yüzyılda yaşayan Kont Alexander ve Frederick Pisani, Pisani dragoman ailesinin İstanbul’daki İngiliz elçiliğine hizmet eden iki üyesiydi. Kont Alexander ve Frederick Pisani Osmanlı başkentinde doğan ve büyüyen İtalyan kökenli gayrimüslimler olduklarından, tarihçiler tarafından genellikle ‘Levanten’ olarak adlandırılmışlardır. Bu makalede, Pisani ailesinin söz konusu iki mensubunun kendi kimliklerine dair algıları, hangi tabiiyetten olduklarını yetkili mercilerle nasıl müzakere ettikleri ve İngiliz elçiliğindeki amirlerinin onların tabiiyetlerini ne şekilde tavsif ettikleri incelenmektedir. Bunlara ek olarak, Pisani’lerin ve İngilizler’in tabiiyet kavramını tanımlarken yaşadıkları çekişmeleri irdelenmekte ve tabiiyet kavramının hukukî olarak tanımlanmasının aslında ne kadar zor olduğu ortaya koyulmaktadır. Çalışmada, İngiltere’de Frederick Pisani’nin *Times* gazetesine karşı açtığı davanın ve Kont Alexander Pisani’nin İstanbul’daki İngiliz elçilik mahkemesine sunulan vasiyetinin muameleli evrakı kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: 19. yy. İstanbul’u, Dragomanlar, Tabiiyet, Levanten, Kapitülasyonlar, Pisani

In February 1842, an article entitled ‘The Libel Law’ was published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. In the context of a discussion on British libel laws, the unnamed author drew primarily on the example of the trustworthiness of Levantine dragomans employed by the British Embassy in Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> The

\* Department of Near Eastern Studies, The University of Michigan, USA. I thank my advisor Prof. Gottfried Hagen, and Dr. Maurits van den Boogert for their helpful comments on a previous draft. I also thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding research that contributed to this article.

1 I use Constantinople and Istanbul interchangeably throughout the article.

unnamed author discussed a recent court case filed by Frederick Pisani, ‘a Greek,’ and Chief Dragoman at the British Embassy in Istanbul. Pisani had presented a case to the British Court of Common Pleas against the well-known daily *The Times* (London). The newspaper published two letters, one in February, and one in March 1837 that criticized the employment of foreign-born dragomans by the British. Although there is no other mention of Frederick Pisani, the author of the ‘The Libel Law’ quoted the testimony of Count Alexander Pisani, archivist at the British Embassy, and Frederick’s nephew.

What is interesting for our purposes is the information that Count Pisani provided about the dragomans employed by the British. He stated that in 1837 there were five active dragomans in the embassy, including his brother Etienne. He described their duties, explaining that the ‘office [of dragomans] was one of responsibility and trust,’ and that they were charged with interpreting and exchanging communications between the embassy and the Sublime Porte. He stated that he was born in Istanbul but was of Italian origin, that he believed that his uncle Frederick was also born in the same place, and that all of the Europeans, or ‘Franks’ as they were known, lived in Pera, a district of Istanbul. His title of Count was passed on to him from a relative in Italy that had it conferred by the Pope. He then told of how he had relatives employed by the Russian Embassy in Constantinople, naming Nicholas Pisani and his second cousin, Paul. Count Pisani added that many Pisanis also lived in Russia. Based on Count Pisani’s testimony, the author of the article accused the dragomans of lack of loyalty to Britain, questioning their reliability in British service, given their familial connections with the Russians. He also queried how secrecy in British affairs was handled.<sup>2</sup>

From this anecdote, a few basic characteristics about foreign-born dragomans employed by the British Embassy can be discerned. The first is the complexity and diversity of cultural interactions that existed on an official and unofficial level through the dragomans. The second is the access that the dragomans had to important and classified information, and finally, that there were members of one family that stretched beyond the service of one single embassy.

This story provides a snapshot of the multiple layers of identity of one particular family that was neither Muslim nor Turkish, but Latin Catholic, and very much active in Ottoman politics and society. Defining groups of people, or specific people is complicated in the Ottoman context because until the late nineteenth century, subjecthood and identity were based upon religious confession, as subjects were organized along religious lines, or the *millet* system, as it is commonly

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2 “The Libel Law,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* vol. LI no. CCCXVI (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes) February 1842, 141-143.

referred to.<sup>3</sup> This also rings true for trying to establish a working definition for those that fell in between the cracks of ‘Ottoman and foreign,’<sup>4</sup> such as so-called Levantines and non-Muslim dragomans in the nineteenth century. As Julia Landweber points out in this volume, people residing in the empire were not necessarily Ottoman subjects, and not all subjects considered themselves to be Ottoman.<sup>5</sup>

Using a case filed in the British Court of Common Pleas by Frederick Pisani against *The Times*, and the process of registering the Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani at the British Consular Court in Istanbul, this article discusses the application of legal categories of subjecthood placed on Frederick and Count Pisani by their British employers. I discuss these categories alongside personal, self-identifying accounts by Frederick and Count Pisani to emphasize that there were conflicting views concerning their subjecthood. Frederick believed that he was not a British subject, and Count Pisani argued that he was a British subject, or at least a quasi-British subject. In both incidents, the Pisanis were able to argue their own claims of subjecthood by using the protection that they received under the Capitulatory agreement between the British and the Ottomans, with mixed success. These two examples provide insight into how members of a so-called Levantine family were categorized by their employers, and how they categorized themselves, while demonstrating that even in the nineteenth century applying such categories was difficult. That the British and the Pisanis struggled with concepts of subjecthood, calls these categories into question. These two examples also raise the issue of the usefulness of the label or category of ‘Levantine.’ The term ‘Levantine’ itself is imprecise, refers to the area known as the Levant, or Eastern Mediterranean, and has very little analytical value in helping to define the identity of the Pisanis.

Some important perspectives, definitions and frameworks have emerged to explain the origins and identities of Levantines, and how some of them were able to straddle or to have completely crossed political, social and cultural boundaries. Alexander H. de Groot believes that Levantine dragomans should be taken for ‘as they were.’<sup>6</sup> For de Groot, it is ‘historically meaningless to try to establish their

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3 On the *millet* system, and the problems of this terminology see Benjamin Braude, ‘Foundation Myths of the Millet System,’ *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society, Volume 1: The Central Lands*, eds, Benjamin Braude, Bernard Lewis (NY: Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc, 1982), 69–88.

4 Christine Philliou, ‘Mischief in the Old Regime: Provincial Dragomans and Social Change at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,’ *New Perspectives on Turkey* 25 (2001), 111.

5 Julia Landweber, ‘Venetian Vagabonds and Furious Frenchmen: Nationalist and Cosmopolitan Impulses among Europeans in Galata,’ in the current volume.

6 Hans-Jürgen Kornrumpf and Jutta Kornrumpf, *Fremde in Osmanischen Reich 1826-*

single national standing and to define them as foreigners, westerners or orientals, or as native Ottomans,' given their complex identities. They were Ottoman subjects, but ostensibly 'binational' because of their status as protégé with a foreign power in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>7</sup> Nora Şeni views Levantines as a 'pure product of mixtures,' mainly between '*francs*' and members of Ottoman-Christian nations.<sup>8</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt argues that nineteenth century Levantines were an ethno-confessional group that was mainly Catholic, yet ethnically diverse.<sup>9</sup>

Jens Hanssen uses a transimperial framework in his analysis of the networks of the Malhamé family from Beirut, just before the outbreak of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. The Malhamés operated among and between Levantine networks, the provinces and the imperial center. Hanssen 'treats the Levant and Levantine actors as a historically evolving, regionally bounded instantiation of transimperialism.' He also notes that there is no evidence of Levantine self-identification by the Malhamé family. Although he is not concerned with uncovering how members of this family viewed themselves, self-identification is nevertheless important for any discussion regarding identity claims, or how to define non-Muslims living and operating in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>10</sup>

These constructs that are used to frame 'identity' or 'identities' are useful but become more complex when identity is forced, negotiated, or appropriated. In the case of the Pisanis, this non-Muslim family has become identifiable as Levantines because of their origin, occupation, religious affiliation, where they lived in Istanbul, and the fact that they shared these characteristics with other non-Muslim families in Pera. But grouping the Pisanis under the category of 'Levantine,' however, is based on a broad definition of a specific group of non-Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire.

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1912/13 (Stutensee, 1998), p. X in Alexander H. de Groot, "Dragomans' Careers: The Change of Status in Some Families Connected with the British and Dutch Embassies at Istanbul 1785-1829," *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Levant from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, eds., Alastair Hamilton, Alexander H. de Groot, Maurits H. van den Boogert (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 246.

7 Ibid, 246.

8 Nora Şeni, "Dynasties Drogmans et Levantinisme à Istanbul," *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel (Montreal: L'Harmattan Inc, 1997), 161.

9 Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Levantiner: Lebenswelten und Identitäten einer ethnokonfessionellen Gruppe im osmanischen Reich im "langen 19. Jahrhundert"*, (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag München, 2005), 15; Section 2 of the book. Jens Hanssen also cites Schmitt.

10 Jens Hanssen, "Malhamé – Malfamé: Levantine Elites and Transimperial Networks on the Eve of the Young Turk Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (1) 2011, 31.

The Pisanis were eclectic. Members of the branch of the family that were employed by the British Embassy in nineteenth century Istanbul were all born in the Ottoman Empire and received diplomatic protection by the British. They were members of the Latin Catholic community in Pera, with Italian heritage. Some were dragomans and others were not, presumably having been involved in commerce.<sup>11</sup> They were similar to other non-Muslim families in Pera in that they built up their own networks and household through marriage with other elites in that community, including the Crespins, a prominent family under French protection.<sup>12</sup> But how can the Pisanis be classified? Were they Ottoman subjects? Italian citizens? British nationals? Levantines? How did their British employers classify them?

### *Being a Dragoman: Privileges, Protection, and Subjecthood*

As intermediaries, negotiators and above-all translators, dragomans shouldered important responsibilities. Their jobs were complex and difficult, and went well beyond the duties of translation and interpretation. On call twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, dragomans were the ‘right hand man’ of the ambassador, and all embassy personnel. They were not marginal, but ‘in the mix’ as intelligence gatherers, mediators, and advisors to the ambassadors, who relied upon their expertise of Ottoman and European cultural, social and political norms and procedures. They could be found at the local *kadı* court or consular court, in the imperial shipyards, at the imperial arsenal, the police houses, the summer homes of Ottoman officials, and at the Sublime Porte. They engaged in almost daily conversation with the Grand Vizier, the *Reis Efendi*, dragomans of the Sublime Porte, and dragomans of other European embassies in Istanbul.

Their business was managing, relaying, and providing information to the embassies and the Ottomans, and they were indispensable links for both. They received daily instructions from the ambassador, and returned with detailed reports on the events of the day, ensuring a constant flow of information needed to maintain a

11 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi HR.H 426/25. Nicholas Pisani (Etienne and Count Pisani’s brother) and Stamatello Volgo, a French subject, lent Osman Efendi, a servant and agent of Princess Sulfiraz, wife of Sultan Abdülmecid I, two separate sums of money in 1858, totaling 2,982,770 piastres. Upon failing to pay his debt, Pisani and Volgo took Osman Efendi and Sulfiraz to court (*Ticaret*, or Tribunal of Commerce). After the accumulation of interest, the final debt amounted to 3,968,373 piastres.

12 Natalie Pisani, the daughter of Etienne Pisani, another dragoman at the British Embassy, married into the Crespin family. See The National Archives, Kew (TNA) FO 780/165 Etienne Pisani Estate, 25/06/1885.

steady diplomatic relationship with the Ottomans. They were professionals and largely devoted to their positions in the embassy, which spanned most if not all of their teenage and adult lives. Count Alexander Pisani, for example, not only worked at the British Embassy for approximately 59 years, he also lived inside of it.

In Istanbul, locally recruited dragomans mainly resided in the European, or Levantine quarter of the city, a community built around Pera and Galata, composed of artists, intellectuals, and merchants involved in trade with Europe. Those that acquired the necessary language skills and that achieved employment with the embassies as dragomans also obtained official protection from the embassy to which they were attached. Unilateral guarantees, or Capitulations, were granted by the sultan to foreign nations, which regulated political, diplomatic and commercial relations. The sultan's pledge also recognized members of foreign nations as legal residents in the empire, and allowed foreign governments to employ non-Muslim subjects of the sultan as interpreters. In return, the sultan received a guarantee of the preservation of peaceful relations from the foreign power.<sup>13</sup>

Although largely considered subjects of the sultan, locally recruited dragomans enjoyed the same privileges and protection given to members of a European nation through the capitulations. Dragomans were issued a *berat*, or deed of appointment, which recognized their status as an employee or functionary of the embassy of a foreign power. The status of a *beratlı*, or licence holder was advantageous for dragomans because of the individual diplomatic protection that they and their families acquired. They were exempt from certain taxes and duties, such as the poll-tax (*haraç*), and the transit and customs taxes that non-Muslims residing in the empire were required to pay.<sup>14</sup> These privileges extended to the sons and servants of dragomans, but not to their brothers. Their protection by a foreign power lasted until the death of the original *berat* holder, unless he lost his position or voluntarily left the service.<sup>15</sup>

The level of protection enjoyed by dragomans and the hereditary extension of their privileges allowed them to create their own networks of influence through intermarriage between prominent non-Muslim families in Pera, such as the Chaberts, Fontons, Testas and Pisanis. These families branched out into positions in the many European embassies in Istanbul, not only as dragomans, but

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13 Maurits van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and Beratlıs in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 6-8.

14 van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 66-67.

15 *Ibid.*, 67-68. van den Boogert points out that some *berat* holders would list their brothers as their servants in order to extend their privileges to family members.

as chancellors and secretaries. The Testas, for example, had family members in the service of Austria, Prussia, Sweden, Tuscany and the Netherlands during the early to mid-nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *berat* system became widely abused by the foreign embassies. Increasingly high numbers of foreigners and Ottoman subjects became protected by consuls and embassies, which sold the deeds of appointment to artisans and merchants, in turn making them ‘honorary dragomans.’ The Ottomans were aware of this practice and attempted to stop it by tightening regulations connected to issuing *berats*.<sup>17</sup> It was only in 1863 when the Ottomans officially curbed the power of embassies in granting *berats* and redefined its terms and conditions. The policy of hereditary extension was abolished for those that obtained patents of protection after 9 August 1863,<sup>18</sup> and the number of dragomans that could be employed by foreign powers was limited.<sup>19</sup> This decision by the Porte did not do much to change the situation, as *berats* continued to be sold, and there was reportedly an increase in the number of Ottoman subjects adopting foreign nationality.<sup>20</sup> On 19 January 1869, the Porte promulgated the Ottoman Nationality Law, through which the naturalization of Ottoman subjects by foreign powers was prohibited, unless they were granted authorization by the Porte. If an Ottoman subject was given permission to take another nationality, then they were not to

16 Roderic H. Davison, “The French Dragomanate in mid-Nineteenth Century Istanbul,” *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel (Montreal: L’Harmattan Inc, 1997), 273.

17 van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 105-108. In 1852, the Porte issued an official note to the embassies in Istanbul stating that the foreign protection of Ottoman subjects would no longer be recognized, unless they were directly attached to the embassies or consulates. P. Dislere, R. de Mouy, *Droits et devoirs des Français dans les pays d’orient et d’extreme orient* (Paris, 1893), 45 in Nasim Sousa, *The capitulatory régime of Turkey, its history, origin, and nature* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1933), 101. In 1860, another note was sent to the embassies announcing that new protégés were to be subjected to Ottoman jurisdiction and that ‘the inheritance of rights for protection’ was abolished. But the efforts put forward by the Porte to control the protection system only produced the creation of a mixed commission to revise the titles of protection. The citation is written as Du Rausas, op. cit., II, 36, but the full title is not listed in Sousa’s bibliography. See Sousa, 102.

18 Sousa, 103.

19 Alexander H. de Groot, “Protection and Nationality. The Decline of the Dragomans,” *Istanbul et les Langues Orientales*, 238-239. The number of dragomans that could be employed were set to four for consulates-general, three for consulates and two for consular agencies. de Groot does not list the numbers for embassies.

20 Sousa, 104.

return to the empire, and if so, they would once again be considered a subject of the sultan. If a person had become naturalized without the permission of the Porte, their foreign status would have been considered invalid, and they would have still been considered an Ottoman subject.<sup>21</sup> The Law also stipulated who was an Ottoman subject, and who could become an Ottoman subject. Article 1 stated that any person born to an Ottoman mother and father, or only of an Ottoman father, was considered to be an Ottoman subject; Article 2 decreed that any person born to foreign parents could rightfully claim to be an Ottoman subject within three years of obtaining [age of ] majority. Article 3 specified that every ‘major [sic] foreigner’ that resided in the empire for five consecutive years could apply for Ottoman nationality. The remaining articles stipulated that all people living in the empire were Ottoman subjects; that an Ottoman woman married to a foreign man may obtain Ottoman nationality within three years of becoming a widow; that a child of an Ottoman subject who became naturalized as a foreigner or who lost that nationality did not keep that nationality and remained an Ottoman subject, while the child of a foreigner who became a naturalized Ottoman subject would not become an Ottoman, and would remain a foreigner.<sup>22</sup>

de Groot notes that the changes in Ottoman policy regarding nationality brought the European naturalization of some dragoman families, who took the nationality of the European power that employed them. These included the Testas, who became Dutch, Austrian, French, Italian, and German citizens, and the Pisanis, British and Russian.<sup>23</sup> This may be true for the Testas, and for the Pisanis that were in Russian service, but it is unclear for the Pisanis employed by the British. Their subjecthood was unclear, and contested.

The concept of British citizenship did not exist in the nineteenth century. People born in Britain and inside its dominions were considered to be subjects of the British

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21 Ibid, 105. Sousa cites the English version of the *irade* from the *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1893, 714. Sousa states that the British passed the Nationality Act of 1870 (see below) in order to avoid difficulties with the Porte over issues of nationality with Ottoman subjects that received their protection. However, J. Mervyn Jones connects the creation of the Naturalization Act (Nationality Act, as Sousa terms it) with a suggestion made by the United States, in order to clear up questions of nationality with Irish immigrants in the United States at that time. See J. Mervyn Jones, *British Nationality Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 75-78.

22 For the full English text, see United States Department of State. *The executive documents of the House of Representatives for the second session of the fifty-third Congress. 1893-'94*. Vol 1. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1893-1894), 714. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS189394vol1>

23 de Groot, “Protection and Nationality,” 254.

monarch, and subjecthood was based on allegiance. British subjects were required to give their full allegiance to the monarch and in return, received all of the rights and privileges that the monarch provided. Subjects were either naturally born, or aliens that became naturalized subjects or denizens.<sup>24</sup> British Common Law distinguished between these two types of subjects, and four types of allegiance. The four types of allegiance were *Ligeantia naturalis*, or people born with allegiance; *Ligeantia acquisita*, or subjects by acquisition; *Ligeantia localis*, an alien person arriving in Britain on amicable terms who, while there, owed allegiance to the monarch in return for the King's protection; Legal obedience, which applied to all legal male subjects aged twelve and up, whether natural born or naturalized, and were required by law to take an oath that reaffirmed their allegiance to the monarch.<sup>25</sup> Natural born subjects were those born inside the dominions of Britain 'within the allegiance' to the monarch. Those born outside of the dominions may also have been born with allegiance to the monarch, such as children of British ambassadors or children of male members of the British forces.<sup>26</sup> Until the passing of The Aliens Act in 1844, the naturalization of an alien could only be achieved through an Act of Parliament, a letter of patent, or the annexation of new territory of the monarch.

A letter of patent gave an alien the status of denizen, bestowing some but not all of the rights of a natural born subject. An Act of Parliament could also grant an alien naturalization, but their rights and privileges could also be limited.<sup>27</sup> Temporary residence in British dominions could also be achieved, but that too, was based on allegiance to the monarch<sup>28</sup> and the maintenance of good relations between the alien's original place of birth and Britain. Therefore, an alien friend could obtain a place of residence in Britain if it were a necessary habitation, but had to maintain allegiance to the monarch because while there, they received protection from the monarch.<sup>29</sup> They were not, however, considered to be British subjects. The Aliens Act of 1844 shelved the system of granting denization letters and Acts of Parliament, and replaced

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24 Jones, *British Nationality Law*, 61. Jones notes that natural-born subjects and naturalized subjects/denizens were the two main types of British subjects.

25 Ibid, 57-61. For a more in-depth discussion on these forms of allegiance, see J. Mervyn Jones, *British Nationality Law and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 34-73.

26 Ibid, 58.

27 Ibid, 58. Acts of Parliament that granted an alien naturalization could be passed to particular individuals, or certain classes of desirable individuals for economic or political reasons. See page 64.

28 Ibid, 58-59.

29 John Scott, *Cases in the Court of Common Pleas and Exchequer Chamber* vol VIII (London: W. McDowall, 1841), 195.

it with a case-by-case decision process by the Secretary of State. If the applicant was considered to be a suitable candidate, the Secretary was empowered to issue them a certificate of naturalization.<sup>30</sup> The Naturalization Act of 1870 did not alter the administrative process for aliens seeking British subjecthood set down in 1844, but there were, however, alterations made in the conditions that had to be met in order to obtain naturalization. For our purposes, these were 'residence in the United Kingdom for no less than five years, or having been in service of the Crown for no less than five years.' Service under the crown or intention of living in the United Kingdom had to be fulfilled after naturalization was granted.<sup>31</sup>

Allegiance to the monarch was the basis for British subjecthood, and Frederick Pisani's case against *The Times* reveals, from the perspective of British Common Law, the complexity and difficulty in classifying foreign aliens in the service of the British Embassy in Istanbul. Frederick's argument did not center on his being or trying to be British, or his allegiance to the British monarch, stipulations with which the court was deeply concerned. Instead, Frederick was able to navigate among and between the conditions of his position as a dragoman, as set out in the capitulations between the Ottoman Empire and Britain.

### *Frederick Pisani vs. James Joseph Lawson (The Times)*

When Frederick Pisani read the first letter that was published in *The Times* on 24 February 1837 he was probably quite agitated. The anonymous author argued that relations between England and the Ottoman Empire had suffered because of the system of translation that had been in place between the two empires. The author criticized Lord Ponsonby for being an inactive ambassador, stating that he had 'retired in his residence in Therapia' ever since he had been in Constantinople, and hardly ever met with officials from the Porte. The author then faulted the British government for employing non-British dragomans that were born and raised in Pera, and offered two separate viewpoints of their character.

The first was from an unnamed French author who stated that the 'Perotes [inhabitants of Pera] belonged to a degraded race.' The second came from Commodore [David] Porter, the American Charge d'Affaires at Constantinople, who described them as 'ignorant,' 'immoral,' and 'only tolerated because of their supposed necessity...to be up to all sorts of tricks and villainy, intrigue and rascality.' The author also wrote that they possessed more facts to prove the 'incapacity and flagrant dishonesty of the interpreters,' but did not provide any other details. The

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<sup>30</sup> Jones, *British Nationality Law*, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, *British Nationality Law and Practice*, 93.

author ended the letter warning that unless this ‘cancer’ [the dragomans] was removed, British affairs in the Ottoman Empire would not improve.<sup>32</sup> A second letter, published less than two weeks later in *The Times*, and signed as ‘O’, was no kinder to the dragomans or to the British government.

The letter continued the attack on the use of non-British dragomans, even noting that ‘every member of the Divan’ did not want to deal with them, which was publicly expressed. The account deepened. The author discussed how the British were behind when it came to training their own nationals as dragomans, as the Austrians<sup>33</sup> and the French had been doing,<sup>34</sup> but noted that the Russians continued to use ‘Perotes.’<sup>35</sup> The author also pointed out the family connections between the Pisanis employed by the British Embassy and the Russian Embassy. Another dragoman at the British Embassy, Francis [François] Chabert, was also mentioned for having a similar situation, as his uncle and brother-in-law were also in the service of the Russians.<sup>36</sup> The author

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32 Private Correspondence. *The Times* (London, England), Friday, Feb 24, 1837; pg. 5; Issue 16348. There were two letters from Constantinople published by the newspaper that day. The first was regarding the dragomans. There was no signature after this letter. Following the second letter, a signature ‘O’ was provided. From the letters published that day, it is unclear if both were in fact written by ‘O.’ But there is reason to believe that these letters, and the second letter about Pisanis and the dragomans published in March were written by the same author. See footnote #39.

33 The Austrians began to train their own dragomans in 1754, and were educated at the *Orientalische Akademie* where they were taught German, French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Arabic and Persian. On the founding of the *Orientalische Akademie*, see Marie de Testa, Antoine Gautier, “L’Académie Orientale de Vienne (1754-2002), Une Création de L’Impératrice Marie-Thérèse,” *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de la Porte Ottomane*. (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2003), 53-61.

34 French nationals were sent to the *L’École des Jeunes de Langues*. For a brief discussion on the creation of the *L’École des Jeunes de Langues*, see Marie de Testa, Antoine Gautier, “De l’établissement des Pères capucins à Constantinople à la fondation de l’école des jeunes de langues (1626-1669),” *Drogmans et Diplomates Européens Auprès de la Porte Ottomane*, 43-46.

35 The British did in fact try to implement a system of training their own nationals once in the 1640s, and once in the early nineteenth century, but were unsuccessful until 1877. See G.R. Berridge, “Dragomans and Oriental Secretaries in the British Embassy in Istanbul,” *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?*, ed. A. Nuri Yurdusev. (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 151-166.

36 Private Correspondence. *The Times* (London, England), Friday, Mar 03, 1837; pg. 2; Issue 16354. The author listed Chabert’s uncle as Mr. Timoni, a Counselor for the Russian Embassy, and his brother-in-law, Mr. Kirico as the Russian Secretary of the Legation.

criticized Ponsonby and his predecessors' unwavering reliance on their dragomans, whose reliability and trustworthiness were questioned.

Their low salary and lack of connection to England, the author argued, meant that the dragomans were prone to 'temptation.' A previous incident of mistrust was cited when the embassy's secrets were given to the Prussian envoy Baron Maltitz [Miltitz], in 1826.<sup>37</sup> The author resumed his criticism of 'Perotes,' and again, used Commodore Porter as an example. Apparently Porter had hired a 'Perote' named [Nicolas] Navoni to act as a dragoman for the American Embassy. Porter learned from Navoni that the *Reis Efendi* stated that the Porte would not officially receive the Commodore, because he did not hold the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, but a lesser rank of Minister. Navoni, in turn, had urged the Commodore to return to America. After some time, Porter went directly to the *Reis Efendi*, and learned that the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs had not relayed such information to Navoni. The dragoman was later discharged of his duties, and the Commodore referred to 'Perote' dragomans as 'worthless.'<sup>38</sup> The writer then described an incident where [Frederick] Pisani failed to procure the Porte's permission for British use of the Euphrates as a passageway to India.

According to the author, Pisani had made numerous applications for a *ferman*, or letter of permission to the *Reis Efendi*, but after months of negotiations the dragoman told Ponsonby that the matter was 'hopeless.' Permission to use the Euphrates was later achieved, however, due to the efforts of an Englishman, Mr. Millingen. The author argued that Pisani misjudged the possibility of the application being approved, and the story was used to strengthen the author's point that there was a real problem with using foreign-born dragomans as intermediaries. Pisani's foreignness was juxtaposed against Millingen's being a British subject,

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37 The incident involved François Chabert, the chief dragoman at the embassy at the time, who was the alleged informant. See Allan Cunningham, "The Dragomans of the British Embassy at Constantinople," *Eastern Questions in the Nineteenth Century: Collected Essays vol. 2*, ed. Edward Ingram (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 9-10, who cites Stanley Lane-Poole, *Life of Stratford Canning vol. 1* (London, 1888), 406-16. G.R. Berridge calls it the 'Chabert Affair.' See G.R. Berridge, "Nation, Class and Diplomacy: The Diminishing of the Dragomanate of the British Embassy in Constantinople 1810-1914," *The Diplomats' World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815-1914*, ed. Markus Mösslang and Torsten Riotte (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 409-410. He too, cites Cunningham and Lane-Poole. Baron Maltitz was actually Baron Miltitz. See Lane-Poole, 412.

38 *The Times*, Friday, Mar 03, 1837.

who ‘was a sincere patriot’ and had the ‘welfare of his country at the forefront of his thoughts.’<sup>39</sup>

Frederick Pisani’s claim of libel hit the British Court of Common Pleas on 12 June 1837,<sup>40</sup> three months after the letters were published in *The Times*. The case continued until 1841. Since the identity of the author of the letters to *The Times* was not known, Pisani sued James Joseph Lawson, the editor of the newspaper, for libel. Pisani argued that he had been the victim of libel because of what had been published about him in the two articles, that he had always been held in high esteem, and had never shown any incapacity in his position as a dragoman for the embassy. The articles, however, tried to ruin his character and employment, and to wholly disgrace him. Pisani claimed that the description of ‘Perotes’ offered by the author in the first article ‘injured his employment,’ and his ‘good name’ and ‘credit,’ and also that of all of the dragomans employed by the embassy.<sup>41</sup> The

39 Ibid. The author was quite clear in explaining that Millingen had dealt with Ahmet Ferzee Pasha [sic], who was said to be the ‘intermediary between the sultan and the *divan*.’ This was Ahmed Fevzi Paşa, the *Kapudan Paşa*, or Admiral of the Navy, who later informed the embassy that permission was granted. Berridge names the author ‘O’ as Dr. Julius van Millingen. Berridge, “Nation, Class, and Diplomacy,” footnote 8, 410. No biographical information about Millingen was provided in the letter to *The Times*. According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Millingen was Dr. Julius Michael Millingen, a surgeon and archaeologist. While serving as a surgeon in the Greek army during the Greek War of Independence, he was taken prisoner by Ibrahim Pasha after the Greek surrender to the Ottomans. He later settled in Istanbul in 1827, and became a court physician to five sultans. See David Cameron Hall, “Millingen, Julius Michael (1800–1878),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/18760>. Lord Ponsonby believed that Millingen was in fact ‘O,’ the anonymous author that attacked him and the dragomans in the two letters to *The Times*. Millingen apparently sent Ponsonby a letter that discussed the arguments that Millingen made to a Turkish Minister in order to obtain permission to use the Euphrates on an expedition, which he was presumably part of. I have not seen the letters, but they are available in the Durham University Library Special Collections in the Papers of John Viscount Ponsonby Collection. For Millingen’s letters, see GRE/E413(1800–1878); On Ponsonby’s suspicions, see Letter Ponsonby to 2nd Earl Grey 6 April 1837, GRE/E270, GREY Charles.

40 TNA C13/1257 22 ‘Answer of Frederic Pisani the defendant to the Bill of Complaint of John Joseph Lawson Complainant,’ 7 January 1841, 1. This source is from the Court of Chancery, and the only one that I could locate in the TNA related to this case. It is a Bill of Complaint against Frederick Pisani. It is not clear if this is an extension of the original case filed by Pisani in the Court of Common Pleas, or if it is a separate case altogether.

41 Scott, *Cases in the Court of Common Pleas*, 184–187.

second article, where the author wrote about Pisani's alleged failure to receive permission from the Porte for passage through the Euphrates, was also libelous, and that this was 'an imposition on his character as chief dragoman.'<sup>42</sup>

Lawson pleaded not guilty, and challenged Pisani's right to even bring the matter to a British court because he was not a British subject. Lawson argued that since Pisani had never been naturalized or domiciled in Great Britain or its dominions, was not a merchant involved in trade with Great Britain or its dominions, had no allegiance to the sovereign, and was not subjected to its laws, that he could not bring the matter to court.<sup>43</sup> Pisani admitted that he was not a formal British subject, was never a resident there, and had never become naturalized. He based his ability to bring the case to a British court on the fact that he had always been under the jurisdiction of England because of his position as dragoman at the embassy, which, according to the treaties between England and the Ottoman Empire granted him all of the rights and privileges of British subjects inside of the empire. He also admitted that he was not in allegiance to the Queen.<sup>44</sup> The court later decided that although Frederick Pisani did in fact live outside of Great Britain and its dominions, the case could proceed because of his being an alien 'friend,' his service to England, and because the alleged offence committed by Lawson and *The Times* took place in Britain.<sup>45</sup>

Lawson based his defence on the claim that the letters were not particularly directed towards Frederick Pisani, or all of the dragomans that worked at the British Embassy in Istanbul. Instead, the letters were directed towards all of the dragomans of foreign embassies, and all of the residents of Pera. He argued that the purpose of publishing the letters was two-fold. The first was to draw public attention and to generate public discussion regarding the employment of foreign-born dragomans at the embassy, and to show how the British system of translation in Istanbul operated. The second was to reveal that this system, and providing the dragomans with sensitive information was harmful to British interests, and that Britain would be better served by employing natural-born Englishmen. The overall intent was not to malign or defame Pisani. After 20 minutes of deliberation, the jury served a verdict in favor of Lawson.<sup>46</sup>

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42 Ibid, 187.

43 Ibid, 187-188.

44 TNA C13/1257 22, 'Answer of Frederic Pisani,' 14.

45 Scott, *Cases in the Court of Common Pleas*, 190-201.

46 *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday, December 22, 1841; Issue 22131. The case was covered rather well in the British press. See for example. *The Morning Post* (London, England), Thursday, November 14, 1839. Issue 21469; *The Standard* (London,

Although unsuccessful, Frederick Pisani's case shows how difficult it was to apply legal categories of subjecthood to foreign-born dragomans, for a few reasons. Pisani, the court, and Lawson had different and contradictory opinions on where Pisani fit in the British legal system. The case was framed as one that had to do with whether or not Pisani could even bring the charge of libel to the British court because his status as a subject was unclear. The fact that the court ended up settling on the legal category of 'alien friend' for Pisani neither defined him as a British subject, nor completely dismissed him or his service as a dragoman to the British Empire. After all, Frederick had never claimed to be an Ottoman either.

Lawson and the British Court of Common Pleas were less concerned with Pisani's argument that he had been the victim of libel and that the published letters did in fact cause him harm in his community in Istanbul. Pisani's 'Britishness' had to be scrutinized, discussed, and then ruled upon for the case to even move forward. As the Common Law laid out, it rested on residency, commerce or trade, and most importantly, allegiance. From the point of view of Lawson and his lawyers, being British, if not born in England or formally naturalized, was conditional. Yet Pisani, as he declared, had not fulfilled any of these requirements, and claimed no allegiance to the British monarch. Instead, his defence rested on his rights under the capitulations. He was more concerned with proving that he was the victim of malice and slander, and in turn, protecting his own image as a dragoman, rather than proving his own subject status. Frederick's ambiguous self-identification, however, was much different than his nephew Count Alexander Pisani's, who believed that he was a British, or at least a quasi-British subject.

### *The Estate of Count Alexander Pisani*

Alexander Bartholomew Stephen Count Pisani dated his Last Will and Testament on 30 May 1876, and paid the £100 fee to have it deposited in the Consular Court in Istanbul. In it, he distributed his wealth between members of his large extended family, all of whom lived in Istanbul. He also provided clear instructions on how his funeral should be conducted, and named his trustees/executors, his

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England), Thursday, November 14, 1839 pg. [1]. Issue 4806; *The Derby Mercury* (Derby, England), Wednesday, November 27, 1839. Issue 5603; *The Morning Post* (London, England), Friday, July 09, 1841; pg. 7; Issue 21990; *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, December 25, 1841. Issue 1769; *The Bury and Norwich Post, and East Anglian* (Bury Saint Edmunds, England), Wednesday, December 29, 1841. Issue 3105.

brother Etienne Pisani, and a solicitor, George Henry Clifton.<sup>47</sup> A third, James Hanson was added as a trustee/executor in April 1882, but it is unclear why. His other brother Charles was also later named as a trustee/executor with Clifton and Hanson in May 1882, because of Etienne's death in that same year. Hanson was temporarily replaced with George Henry Simmons, Secretary and Treasurer of the British Consulate in Istanbul, however, because he left the Ottoman Empire in 1885. Clifton died presumably in 1897, and Charles Pisani and Simmons appointed a barrister, Evelyn Fawcett, as a trustee/executor in that same year.<sup>48</sup>

The process of filing and obtaining probate for Count Pisani's Last Will and Testament at the British Consular Court in Istanbul began in 1886, and is another example of the complexity and difficulty of applying categories of subjecthood to the Pisani family. It reveals how Count Pisani and his brother Charles categorized themselves, how they tied their family's identity to the embassy, and how they negotiated their subjecthood in order to have the Last Will registered. It also shows how Count Pisani and Charles Pisani struggled with their own ideas about how categories of subjecthood applied to them. Neither claimed to be subjects of the sultan, though they were both born in Istanbul, and according to the Ottoman Nationality Law of 1869 they were considered to be Ottoman subjects. Although both acknowledged their Italian heritage, they did not identify with it.

The task of registering and obtaining probate for the Last Will was left to Count Pisani's trustees, who relied on the Pisani family history and a personal account of Count Pisani regarding his subjecthood. As in Frederick's case, there are different points of view on whether or not Count Pisani was or could be considered a British subject. Count Pisani died sixteen years after the passing of the British Naturalization Act, which added conditions to the previous Aliens Act of 1844. While allegiance was still the basis for subjecthood, naturalization was now conditional upon either having been a resident in Britain for at least five years, or having served the crown for at least five years. Count Pisani fulfilled the latter condition, but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever applied for naturalization to become a British subject. Yet, in an affidavit filed by Charles, he tried to fashion his brother as at least a quasi-British subject. In the request for probate by Charles and the other trustees, they argued that Count Pisani's service to the embassy gave him all of the rights of a British subject. There was not a legal

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47 TNA FO 780/217 'Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani,' 30/05/1876.

48 TNA FO 780/217. 'First Codice 17/04/1882; Second Codice 10/05/1882; Third Codice 22/06/1885' 'Appointment of Evelyn Fawcett' 05/02/1897 in this file to the original Will of Count Alexander Pisani, 1876. Hanson did in fact return to Istanbul. His signature is on documents in this file, after Count Pisani died.

category, provision, or statute in British Common Law, however, that recognized a quasi-British subject. The trustees instead used the capitulations as the basis for their argument that Count Pisani's Last Will should be granted probate, and be administered by the Consular Court.

According to Charles Pisani's testimony in his affidavit for filing his brother's Last Will, Count Pisani, the archivist at the British Embassy and nephew of Frederick Pisani, was born in Istanbul in 1802. He never married and after becoming an employee of the British Embassy, he resided in rooms inside the embassy and in the summer residence of the embassy until his retirement in 1876. In the last few years of his life, Count Pisani was brought under Charles' care through a '*Commission de Lunatico Inquirendo*,' or 'an inquiry into the state of mind' that was issued by the embassy, through which he was found to be of unsound body and mind. He died on 27 October 1886 at the home of his brother Charles, at 41 rue Tepebaşı in Pera.<sup>49</sup>

Charles Pisani also provided a detailed account about his brother and his family, including a sketch of their family tree. At the time, Charles was 70 years old, and Count Pisani's only surviving brother. Charles wrote that Count Pisani had entered into the service of the British Embassy in approximately 1819, and remained there for 59 years.<sup>50</sup> During his tenure, he was the Superintendent of the Diplomatic Chancery [Chancery] and a Keeper of the Archives. The Queen also conferred upon him the Companionship of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. He retired due to old age, but remained on the British Foreign Office list until his death. Between his retirement and death, Count Pisani collected a pension of £750/year, and continued to enjoy the protection and benefits of being an employee of the embassy. His brother, Charles wrote, amassed a fortune of £19,000 from savings from his salary over the course of his 59 years of service, and from investments and interest, mainly from the '3 percent consols' in the Bank of England. Charles also noted that his brother remained a bachelor his entire life, and 'was of frugal habits.'<sup>51</sup>

49 TNA FO 780/217 'Affidavit of Filing, Charles Pisani.' Translated from the French original by Alphonse Divioni, 17/12/1886.

50 Count Pisani's years of service are unclear. Although Charles wrote that Count Pisani began his service in 1819, the Foreign Office lists him as starting as a student interpreter on 25 June 1814. He did not become an official dragoman, opting instead to be the archivist of the embassy. See TNA FO 366/569 'Statement of the Salaries of the Dragomans at Constantinople,' 10/05/1850, p.169.

51 TNA FO 780/217 'Affidavit of Filing, Charles Pisani.' In a letter to his trustees Count Pisani listed his wealth as £17,011.26 and wrote that he had investments in the Bank of England. 'Letter to the Executors of My Will,' 12/04/1882 in this file. But this is

Charles stated that over the course of his life his brother took great interest in studying his family history, and was the self-avowed head of the family. Count Pisani maintained papers and writings about his family, and Charles confirmed that in the affidavit. With Count Pisani's writings on the family history, and Charles' own knowledge on the subject, he reconstructed the history of the branch of his family that settled in Istanbul in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Charles, his family hailed from Pisa. Dominique Pisani was taken prisoner by 'the Turks' in 1696 during the Ottoman-Venetian War.<sup>52</sup> Dominique was brought to Constantinople, settled there and later married Victoria Bianchi.<sup>53</sup> Dominique's eldest son returned to Italy and Pope Clement [XI] bestowed him the title of Count, apparently previously given to one of his ancestors, Bartholomew.<sup>54</sup> Dominique's other son, Antonio, was born in Pera and became first dragoman for the British Embassy in 1741, the first member of this branch of the family to do so. Apparently he was awarded the position through a patent signed by King George II and the Duke of Newcastle, when he traveled to England with Lord Faulkner in 1741.<sup>55</sup> Antonio had two sons, Etienne Stefano Pisani (d.1797)

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debatable because the trustees of his Will contested that amount. They stated that Count Pisani's wealth did not add up to £19,000. Presumably the £1,988.74 difference between what Count Pisani listed and what his trustees listed came from the accumulation of interest. Affidavit, 17/12/1886 and 23/12/1886 in this file.

- 52 TNA FO 780/217 'Affidavit of filing, Charles Pisani.' In the Application for Probate, dated 18/12/1886, Count Alexander's trustees added that the family was from Pisa but was 'shuffled to Venice.' See 'Affidavit for Probate' 18/12/1886, 2, in this file.
- 53 Ibid. Dominique's eldest son, who is not named in Charles' account, returned to Italy at some point, and married Amelia Pallavicini [?].
- 54 Ibid. Bartholomew was a friend and relative of a Cardinal Pisani. The title, Charles noted, passed down through the branch of the family that settled in the Ottoman Empire.
- 55 Ibid. The year 1741 that Charles provided is problematic and his claim that Antonio Pisani received the patent is also questionable. Charles stated that the 'records and documents relative to the Family Pisani, especially the original patent... were in the possession of my said brother... and were destroyed in the fires which in 1831 and 1870 destroyed the greater part of Pera... and which the latter fire burnt the British Embassy.' I have not been able to locate evidence that Antonio Pisani actually accompanied Lord Faulkner to England in 1741, but he was appointed first dragoman in 1749, succeeding Luca Chirico, who died. See TNA State Papers 105/118: 134-135 24 January 1749, Levant Company, London to [Ambassador] James Porter, Constantinople. Antonio Pisani later became the 'King's Official Interpreter of Oriental Languages' shortly afterwards. Also See TNA State Papers 105/118: 139-140, 23 March 1749, Levant Company, London to [Ambassador] James Porter, Constantinople. I thank Dr. Maurits van den Boogert

and Bartholomew Pisani, who both served the British Embassy as dragomans. Etienne Stefano Pisani had two sons, Frederick Pisani and Antonio Pisani, who also were employed by the embassy. That Antonio had four sons, [Count] Alexander, Etienne, Charles and Nicholas, and three daughters, Helen, Marie and Beatrice. Count Pisani and Etienne were the only two sons employed by the embassy. Charles wrote that all of the descendants of the eldest Antonio Pisani, including the children of Etienne, Nicholas, Charles and Beatrice, had been born in Istanbul and never became and had never been claimed as Ottoman subjects by the Porte, or by the Italian government.<sup>56</sup>

Charles' narrative highlighted the fact that neither he, nor members of his family ever became Ottoman or Italian subjects. It is unclear what Dominique Pisani's status was after he was brought to the Ottoman capital. There is no indication if he became a slave after being taken a prisoner, if he was ransomed, or if he had been claimed by the Porte as a subject. But the service of his family to the British Embassy, Charles stated, granted them specific protections and immunities which, in Charles' words, made them 'quasi-natural born British subjects with a domicile in England.' He believed this because the Last Wills and Testaments of many of his ancestors were placed and legally certified in the embassy and in the British Consular Court in Istanbul.<sup>57</sup> He also provided a statement made by his brother, explaining Count Pisani's ideas concerning his own subjecthood.

In conversations that Charles had with his brother, he wrote, Count Pisani believed that if his being a resident in Istanbul would have ever meant that he actually acquired a domicile there, or if it had ever deprived his rights as a 'quasi-

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for these references. Also, according to Samuel Medley, the butler to Lord Kinnoull (George Henry Hay), the Ambassador at Constantinople, Antonio Pisani was a dragoman at the British Embassy before 1741. He actually served as first dragoman, then was replaced and appointed second dragoman in 1731, briefly resigned in 1734, but was later reinstated as a dragoman. Kinnoull described Antonio Pisani as a 'Greek of the Latin Church who has family here [Constantinople] and a Turkish subject.' See Nigel and Caroline Webb, *The Earl and his butler in Constantinople: the secret diary of an English servant among the Ottomans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 95-97.

56 TNA FO 780/217 'Affidavit of Filing, Charles Pisani.' These descendants exclude Dominique Pisani's eldest son that returned to Italy.

57 Ibid. The Will of Etienne Stefano Pisani, Charles' grandfather, was also deposited in the embassy when he died on 15 March 1797, and so too was the Will of Antonio Pisani, his father, who died on 20 August 1850. Since no executor was named in Antonio Pisani's Will, his daughter, and Charles' sister Marie Pisani was named to administer it through a judgment in the British Consular Court in 1866. His brother Etienne's Will was also deposited and certified in the embassy.

British natural born subject... gained by having served the British Embassy' he would have left the Ottoman Empire to live in England or elsewhere. He also said that 'he would never have done the least act that would have made him a subject in any sense to the jurisdiction to the Porte.'<sup>58</sup> Although Charles did not have definitive proof, he stated that his father or brothers never tried to become Italian subjects, and that Count Pisani never identified with being an Ottoman or an Italian. Through his position at the embassy, he faced questions concerning nationality and protection by the British government, and therefore had knowledge about how such questions were handled by the embassy. Charles wrote that he (and presumably his other family members) paid the registration fee for their 'certificate of nationality,' or patents, to the British Consulate General. Yet, Count Pisani did not pay that fee because he believed 'that he was an actual British subject.'<sup>59</sup>

In another affidavit, the trustees requested probate of Count Pisani's Will, and focused on the question of his nationality. This had to be done in order for the British Consular Court to file and to administer it. Their main argument was that Count Pisani, by taking a position with the embassy, would have lost his Italian citizenship anyway, and not having been claimed by the Ottomans as a subject, he was without nationality.<sup>60</sup> But his lifetime appointment with the embassy and the jurisdiction that the embassy had over Count Pisani after the '*Commission de Lunatico Inquirendo*,' afforded all of the rights of a British subject that lived in England. They supported much of the information that Charles provided in his affidavit, and tried a number of different tactics to further emphasize Count Pisani's 'Britishness.'

The trustees attempted to present the patent that awarded the position of dragoman to Count Pisani's great grandfather Antonio as one that was possibly a patent for naturalization, or denization as a British subject. They stated that the original patent was apparently burned in the Great Fire of 1870 in Pera. They also

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58 Ibid.

59 Ibid. Charles received written protection by the British Embassy through a patent in 1840, signed by Ambassador Ponsonby.

60 It was not uncommon for people to believe and to declare that they were unclaimed by the Porte as subjects. For example, in 1826 G. Calavro Umberti, a dragoman for the British Embassy wrote to Ambassador Stratford Canning to request clarification on how to handle the issue of granting official documents of nationality to people 'born in Turkey by a Raya [sic] mother.' Calavro noted that other European Ministers in the Ottoman Empire 'never ceased to grant official documents from the embassy to protect such of their people, and it appears that the Porte itself is little inclined to claim them as their own subjects, though it always endeavored to put a stop to marriage taking place between Franks and Rayas [sic].' TNA FO 352/14B Calavro to Canning, 26/07/1826.

acknowledged that it seemed 'highly improbable' that George II and the Duke of Newcastle would only sign a patent to appoint a dragoman, but 'very possible' that this was a patent for naturalization or denization as a British subject for Antonio Pisani and his family.' They also stated that searches were conducted at the Foreign Office in order to understand the exact nature of the patent, but that had been unsuccessful. They did point out, however, that would have done little for Count Pisani. According to British nationality law the patent would not have extended to him unless the capitulations provided that all those born to British subjects inside the Ottoman Empire were also considered to be British, and that 'British jurisdiction might be deemed to them the same nationality and domicile as if any such subject, though born in Turkey had been born in Great Britain.' The executors believed that doing so would be reasonable since British subjects going to the empire did not change or lose their 'domicile of origin,' which was allowed under the extra-territorial jurisdiction of Great Britain, in the empire.<sup>61</sup>

There was obviously cause for disagreement over whether or not Count Pisani could be considered a British subject because he had never lived in Britain, as stipulated in British nationality law. According to the capitulations between the British and the Ottoman Empire, the estates of deceased dragomans fell under Ottoman jurisdiction if the dragoman did not come directly from England. This was especially the case if the deceased had no heir to bestow their estate.<sup>62</sup> Whereas Count Pisani did not come from England, he did leave his possessions to his heirs, as stated in his Will.

There was no doubt that Count Pisani and the rest of the Pisanis in Istanbul were of Italian descent, but the trustees argued that he could not be considered an Italian subject. The executors commissioned a statement from Jean Rosasco, an Italian subject and 'Doctor of Law in the faculty of Genes and at the Consulate General of Italy,' in Istanbul. According to Italian civil law, Italian nationality passed between father and son, and continued through the family line. The Italian citizenship of Antonio Pisani, Count Pisani's great grandfather, passed on to his

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61 TNA FO 780/217 'Affidavit for Probate' 18/12/1886, 2-5. The executors cited a case where the British Consular Court made a decision regarding the nationality of one Padre Agostino. But it is unclear if he was born in the Ottoman Empire to parents that were British subjects or if he received protection by the British Embassy in Istanbul, and then became naturalized.

62 van den Boogert, *The Capitulations*, 175-176. Also see Edward A. Van Dyck, *Report of Edward A. Van Dyck, Consular Clerk of the United States at Cairo Upon Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire Since the Year 1150, Part 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), Appendix 5, 94.

son [Etienne] Stefano, and that nationality passed on to Antonio Pisani, Count Pisani's father. However, their Italian nationality would have become null and void because Italian law also stipulated that if an Italian subject took a position with a foreign government without the consent of the Italian government, they automatically lost their citizenship.<sup>63</sup> The executors explained, as Charles had previously, that Italy or the Porte had never claimed the Pisanis as subjects.

Although the executors pointed out the possibility that Count Pisani and his family could be considered without nationality, they argued that he could have been taken under the jurisdiction of Britain, since he was under the embassy's jurisdiction.<sup>64</sup> They went on to argue that Count Pisani's Last Will, whether under Ottoman or British law, was in good standing, but that it should be administered by the Consular Court. Because of his position with the embassy and the protection that was given to him, they wrote, his Last Will should be validated 'as if he were a quasi-British subject born in England.' Since the Court had administered other Last Will and Testaments of his previously deceased family members, probate should be granted.<sup>65</sup> The executors believed that Count Pisani held a 'higher protection... than could have been enjoyed by other British protected persons' that were not part of the embassy, and because of this and his length of service, that he should be given a 'domicile in Great Britain.'<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, they stated that Count Pisani, by virtue of serving the embassy by choice, abandoned any residence in the Ottoman Empire for that of Great Britain, which he held until his death.<sup>67</sup>

According to the executors, Count Pisani's service and the protection offered through his position as a dragoman (read capitulations) brought with it the rights of British nationality and the rights of British residence. The fact that the embassy issued the '*Commission de Lunatico Inquirendo*,' signed by ambassador Sir William White, meant that Count Pisani's person and estate was brought under the direct jurisdiction of the embassy and the Consular Court, which provided him with all of the rights of a British subject, as if he were a resident of Great Britain.<sup>68</sup> On 30 December 1886, Count Pisani's Last Will and Testament were registered at the

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63 TNA FO 780/217, 'Affidavit for Probate.' For the statement by Jean Rosasco, see 'Dans l'affaire des biens de feu le comte A.B.S. Pisani décédé.' 20/12/1886 in this file.

64 Ibid, 'Affidavit for Probate', 6-7.

65 Ibid, 9-10. These included the Last Will and Testaments of Charles' grandfather Etienne Pisani, his father Antonio, his mother Marie, and his brother Etienne.

66 Ibid, 'Affidavit for Probate', 11.

67 Ibid, 'Affidavit for Probate', 12.

68 Ibid, 11-14.

Consular Court, and the executors were granted probate. The document did not mention anything about his subjecthood, but did note that he was a Count of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>69</sup>

The process of registering Count Alexander Pisani's Last Will and Testament was no less complex than his uncle Frederick's court case, and centered on issues of subjecthood. Unlike Frederick, Count Pisani believed that he was in fact a British subject, or at least a quasi-British subject and made no claim to having any allegiance to the sultan, in spite of his being considered an Ottoman subject under Ottoman law. Without a legal category in British Common Law that recognized 'quasi-Britishness,' and without any formal application for British naturalization by Count Pisani, the executors had to be more pragmatic. They drew on the history of the Pisani family and their lineage, going so far as to prove that Italian citizenship was never on the table for them, and that he never considered himself to be an Ottoman subject, though he fulfilled the criteria of being considered one. Count Pisani and his family members were born in Istanbul, and the British never officially naturalized him. The executors made a case that demonstrated how not only Count Pisani, but also the family in general were integrated into the embassy in life and death, and had always been under its jurisdiction. The executors invoked the capitulations to support the idea that the protection and rights that Count Pisani received, combined with his length of service with the embassy, made him a British subject.

The differences in opinion between Charles and his brother in how they situated themselves in their British, Italian, and Ottoman identities also sheds light on the difficulties of applying categories of subjecthood. Both Count Pisani and Charles did not identify with being Italian or Ottoman subjects, but Charles knew that through his yearly payment to the British Consulate General that he received protection through the capitulations, and only claimed that his family may have been considered 'quasi-British subjects.' Count Pisani, however, was conscious in what he believed his subjecthood to be, and staked his claim in it through his loyalty and service to the embassy, disregarding the principles of British nationality law and Ottoman nationality law. Yet, there is nothing to suggest in the proceedings of filing Count Pisani's Last Will that the British ever recognized him or his family members as naturalized British subjects.

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69 TNA FO 780/217, 8/1/1887. This was a copy of the original grant of registration/probate of 30/12/1886.

### *Conclusion*

Frederick Pisani's court case and the process of registering the Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani in the British Consular Court in Istanbul reveal the complexity and legality of concepts of subjecthood for dragomans in British service, which were very much at the center of both of these cases. These cases also demonstrate that the concept of 'Levantine' as an analytical category is vague, and does not offer any precision in a discussion on the identity of the Pisani family. This is particularly important since the concepts of subjecthood, nationality and allegiance were unclear in the nineteenth century. The fact that there were differing perspectives within the same family is instructive in understanding how individuals or specific groups have been classified.

In both instances discussed here, there is, to use Palmira Brummet's phrase, 'a complex web of intersecting identities,'<sup>70</sup> which does not entirely rest on conceived definitions of spatial, confessional, or social statuses, such as the label of 'Levantine.' Three points of intersecting identities emerged in both of these examples; Frederick, who did not identify with being British; Count Pisani, who claimed to be a British or at least a quasi-British subject by virtue of his service to the embassy; and the British, whose point of view of the Pisanis was connected to their professional status as employees in the embassy, but non-British subjects as defined by British nationality law. It did not matter how Count Pisani, his brother Charles, or the trustees of his Last Will shaped the identity of the Pisani family. Their subjecthood was negotiated among and between their positions at the embassy, but had no impact on how they were legally categorized by their British employers.

There was also nothing monolithic about how the Pisanis viewed themselves. Both Pisanis had very different and diametrically opposed personal positions on who they were and where they belonged. Being a 'Levantine' was not presented as a possible category of subjecthood, and did not factor into Frederick or Count Pisani's sense of identity. Using their status as protected subjects under the capitulations, Frederick, and Count Pisani's trustees were able to argue their own identity claims to try to achieve their respective goals. That does not mean that their self-identification was not and is not important. The two Pisanis discussed here provide a rare instance where self-identification and a first-person narrative exist in primary material.

Fredrick sense of self did not match his nephew's Count Pisani, which was connected to his sense of being a British or quasi-British subject, and even that

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<sup>70</sup> Palmira Brummett, "Placing the Ottomans in the Mediterranean World: The Question of Notables and Households," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 36 (2010), 83.

was impacted by his association with the capitulations. Yet, Frederick and Count Pisani had not felt any connection to their Italian heritage or with being an Ottoman subject, although Istanbul was their place of birth. Neither believed themselves to be, nor could have been legally classified to be binational. Their own definitions and points of view on their subjecthood were as complex as the ones that are and have been placed on them as Levantines and dragomans.

*'Levantine' Dragomans in Nineteenth Century Istanbul: The Pisanis, the British, and Issues of Subjecthood*

Abstract ■ Frederick and Count Alexander Pisani were two members of the Pisani family of dragomans that served the British Embassy in Istanbul during the nineteenth century. As non-Muslims of Italian descent that were born and raised in the Ottoman capital, they are commonly referred to as 'Levantines.' Using a case filed by Frederick Pisani against the British daily *The Times* in the Court of Common Pleas in England, and the process of registering the Last Will and Testament of Count Alexander Pisani in the British Consular Court in Istanbul, this article examines how two members of the same family had different views of who they were, how they were able to negotiate their subjecthood, and how their British employers classified them. It demonstrates how the Pisanis and the British struggled with the concept of subjecthood, and how difficult it was to legally define it in these cases.

Keywords: Nineteenth Century Istanbul, Dragomans, Subjecthood, Levantine, Capitulations, Pisani

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