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	<h2>Gifts of the French Consular Authority on Official Occasions of the Ottoman Regime in Algiers during the 18th Century – An Interpretive Reading of Transformations and Significations through French Consular Correspondence</h2>	
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Abstract This study investigates the role of occasional gifts presented by French consuls during the Ottoman Regency of Algiers' official celebrations throughout the 18th century; it seeks to analyze their transformations and the diplomatic and cultural significations embedded therein, employing a historical methodology complemented by an anthropological approach and drawing extensively upon archival materials from the Marseille Chamber of Commerce and consular correspondence. The findings reveal a distinct hierarchy wherein political investitures ranked first, followed by military victories and social celebrations—whilst religious occasions were conspicuously absent; French consuls strategically selected gifts to captivate Maghribi recipients through displays of European technological superiority, thereby transmuting obligatory exactions into symbolic offerings. Moreover, consuls extended benefactions beyond the Pasha to include high dignitaries and the ruler's familial network; occasional gifts thus served as instruments of diplomatic rapprochement and arenas for negotiating power and commercial privileges.		
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Introduction

Gift exchange carries complex symbolic meanings that extend beyond the material value of the object itself. As argued by Mauss (1925/2011), gifts represent social, moral, and cultural relationships between the giver and the recipient. Although a gift may appear as an inanimate object, it embodies the cultural identity, political intentions, and social expectations of the donor. Consequently, the recipient interprets the gift not only in terms of its intrinsic value but also as an indicator of the status, intentions, and goodwill of the giver.

Within this framework, the Ottoman authority in Algiers accorded considerable importance to gifts and ceremonial benefactions. Gift-giving became an integral component of official occasions across religious, political, diplomatic, military, and social spheres, reflecting administrative traditions inherited from the Ottoman imperial center (Devouls, 1865; Grammont, 1890).

This study focuses specifically on the diplomatic dimension of gift exchange, examining the presents offered by foreign consuls—particularly French representatives—to the rulers of Algiers and members of the governing elite. These gifts

accompanied peace negotiations, commercial agreements, and the formal presentation of consular credentials. In addition, long-serving consuls were required to provide periodic offerings, known as the “biennial gift,” which gradually became a customary obligation. As noted by the American consul William Shaler, the consular present and the biennial gift were treated as separate and compulsory financial responsibilities (Shaler, 1982).

Beyond these formal obligations, consuls also presented seasonal or ceremonial gifts, including food supplies and luxury goods, particularly at the beginning of the Gregorian year. Such practices demonstrate that gift exchange functioned not merely as a ceremonial act but as a structured mechanism within diplomatic relations.

Despite the historical importance of these practices, the role of gifts in the political and diplomatic culture of the Ottoman Regency of Algiers has received limited scholarly attention. Previous research, such as the work of Belil (2011), has examined the structure of consular institutions and their relations with Ottoman authorities, while references to gifts have remained descriptive and secondary rather than analytical.

In contrast, the present study introduces the concept of “**occasional gifts**,” defined as those presented during official celebrations of the Regency, including political, military, and social events. Particular attention is given to French consular practices as expressions of French diplomatic strategy within the political framework of Ottoman Algiers.

The research is based on an extensive body of primary sources, including the archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce and consular correspondence, complemented by memoirs and contemporary local accounts. These materials allow for a detailed reconstruction of consular perceptions, strategies, and interpretations of gift exchange (Archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce [ACCM], n.d.).

Research Problem

The central research question guiding this study is:

To what extent did official occasions in the Ottoman Regency of Algiers provide opportunities for French consuls to advance diplomatic objectives and manage political or commercial challenges?

This question is further explored through several subsidiary inquiries:

- Which official occasions involved consular gift-giving?
- What types of gifts were presented, and who were their intended recipients?
- What political, economic, and symbolic meanings can be inferred from these practices?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a historical methodology combining descriptive, analytical, and comparative approaches. The objective is to identify patterns and transformations in the practice of gift exchange between French consular authorities and the Ottoman administration in Algiers.

In addition, an anthropological perspective is employed to interpret the symbolic and relational meanings embedded in diplomatic gift practices, following the theoretical framework of gift exchange proposed by Mauss (1925/2011).

Study Objectives

The research seeks to:

1. Identify the official occasions during which French consuls presented gifts.
2. Analyze changes in the nature, value, and circumstances of these occasional gifts.
3. Examine the networks of political and administrative actors targeted by consular gift strategies.
4. Assess the role of gift exchange in strengthening diplomatic relations, securing privileges, and managing crises.

Official Occasions and Consular Gift Practices

The Ottoman authorities in Algiers organized a wide range of official celebrations, including religious, political, military, and social events. However, consular gifts were not presented at all such occasions. Archival evidence indicates that, among political ceremonies, the investiture of Pashas constituted the principal event that prompted diplomatic gift-giving. For example, French Consul Jean de Clairambault presented gifts during the investiture of Pasha Ibrahim in 1710, and Consul Antoine-Gabriel Durand did so at the investiture of Abdi Pasha in 1724 (ACCM, n.d.; Grammont, 1890).

Military and Social Occasions and the Hierarchy of Consular Gifts (Rewritten – APA 7)

With regard to military celebrations, archival evidence indicates that consular gifts were limited to occasions marking the Regency’s victories over external adversaries. Among the six military events officially commemorated by the Ottoman authorities, only two prompted diplomatic gift-giving: victories over European powers—referred to in contemporary sources as “infidel” states—and successes against neighboring Muslim polities. For example, the English consul presented a gift following the reconquest of Oran in 1708, while the French consul Philippe-Jacques Durand offered a present to

Dey Mustafa I on 30 November 1700 after the latter's victorious campaign in Tunisia (Archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce [ACCM], n.d.; Grammont, 1890).

In contrast, internal political stabilization—such as the suppression of domestic revolts—was regarded by consuls as routine administrative activity and did not warrant ceremonial gifts.

Social occasions, however, constituted another important category of diplomatic interaction. French consuls presented gifts during the marriage of the Pasha, marriages within the ruling family, and circumcision ceremonies. For instance, Durand offered a gift to Dey Mustafa I on the occasion of his marriage, while Jean de Clairambault presented gifts in September 1709 for the marriage of Muhammad Bekdash's daughter and later for the circumcision of his son (ACCM, n.d.; Devoulx, 1865).

The distribution of consular gifts across official occasions reveals a selective diplomatic strategy. Although the Regency recognized sixteen official celebrations across religious, political, military, and social categories, only a limited number received consular attention. Religious ceremonies, despite their importance within the Ottoman ceremonial calendar, did not receive any diplomatic gifts. Instead, consular benefactions focused primarily on political investitures, selected military victories, and major family events within the ruling elite.

Overall, approximately 60% of the categories of official occasions identified in archival records were associated with consular gift-giving, while only about 31% of the total number of officially commemorated events received such presents. The relatively modest proportion can be explained by the broader financial obligations imposed on consuls, including the initial consular present, the biennial gift, treaty-related payments, commercial facilitation expenses, and ransom payments for captives. Consular correspondence frequently reflects complaints regarding the financial burden of these multiple exactions (Belil, 2011; ACCM, n.d.).

To better understand consular priorities, it is necessary to compare the three principal categories of gift-receiving occasions—political, military, and social—through the monetary value of the presents. Table 3 compiles gifts offered by French consuls between 1698 and 1773, allowing for an assessment of their relative importance.

The data reveal a clear hierarchy. Gifts presented following military victories ranged from approximately 279 to 1,860 francs, although the higher values were exceptional and declined significantly in later cases. Gifts associated with the Pasha's marriage ranged between 323 and 976 francs, while those connected to marriages within the ruling family did not exceed 598 francs. Birth celebrations involved gifts valued between 558 and 1,116 francs, and circumcision ceremonies reached approximately 1,232 francs.

By contrast, the investiture of the Pasha consistently received the highest and most stable level of diplomatic expenditure, with values ranging from approximately 1,157 to 1,453 francs. Moreover, investiture gifts were repeated on multiple occasions, indicating their central diplomatic significance. This pattern establishes the following order of importance:

1. Investiture of the Pasha
2. Military victory over external enemies
3. Circumcision of the Pasha's son
4. Birth of a son
5. Marriage of the Pasha
6. Marriage within the ruling family

The exceptional status of investiture ceremonies is further illustrated by the actions of Consul Jean de Clairambault, who presented identical investiture gifts twice within the same year—first for the appointment of Ibrahim Pasha and again for that of Ali Chaouch. The identical value and composition of these gifts indicate that investiture was regarded as a formal diplomatic obligation performed on behalf of the French Crown and directed specifically toward the person of the ruling Pasha (ACCM, n.d.; Grammont, 1890).

Transformation in the Value and Composition of Consular Gifts (Rewritten - APA 7)

The data presented in Table 3 allow for a further analytical perspective, namely the evolution of the monetary value of consular gifts in relation to the nature of the occasion. Over the course of the eighteenth century, a general upward trend in the value of gifts can be observed. This increase appears to reflect broader structural changes in Franco-Algerian relations, including the growing institutionalization of protocol obligations within diplomatic practice and the decline of corsairing revenues, which heightened the fiscal expectations of the Regency (Belil, 2011; Devoulx, 1865).

Nevertheless, a closer examination reveals that this overall escalation was neither uniform nor linear. Fluctuations occurred depending on political circumstances, the symbolic weight of the occasion, and the broader diplomatic context. At the same time, the composition of the gifts remained remarkably consistent, raising the question of the criteria that governed both their selection and their valuation.

Standardization of Gift Types and Diplomatic Strategy

Consular correspondence frequently reflects dissatisfaction with the obligation to provide gifts, both because of their compulsory nature and their increasing financial burden. Despite such complaints, the practice persisted throughout the eighteenth century, indicating its structural importance within diplomatic relations (ACCM, n.d.; Belil, 2011).

An examination of the material composition of the gifts reveals a high degree of standardization. Typical items included luxury textiles, jewelry, firearms of specialized manufacture, confectionery, alcoholic beverages, and other French manufactured goods. This homogeneity suggests the existence of a coordinated strategy developed jointly by the consular authorities and the Marseille Chamber of Commerce.

By the eighteenth century, French policy makers had concluded that maintaining peaceful relations with the Regency was more beneficial to commercial interests than pursuing confrontation. Consequently, gifts were designed not only to satisfy protocol but also to enhance French influence by appealing to elite tastes and demonstrating European technological and artisanal superiority (ACCM, n.d.; Grammont, 1890).

Archival correspondence illustrates the existence of specific guidelines. In a letter dated 20 December 1724, Consul Durand emphasized that presenting gifts without firearms would be poorly received, as such items attracted particular admiration from the Pasha. The principle underlying gift selection therefore rested on novelty, prestige, and symbolic distinction. This approach aligns with the broader anthropological interpretation of gifts as instruments of prestige and influence rather than mere economic transfers (Mauss, 1925/2011).

At the same time, the Chamber of Commerce repeatedly advised consuls to control expenditures while improving the symbolic effectiveness of presentation through appropriate timing, ceremonial framing, and diplomatic language. In this sense, the perceived value of the gift depended as much on its presentation and symbolic resonance as on its monetary cost (ACCM, n.d.).

Factors Influencing Variations in Gift Value

Despite the standardized composition of gifts, their monetary value varied significantly according to contextual factors. First, consular correspondence indicates that gifts were carefully inspected and evaluated by the Regency's officials, effectively transforming them into a form of negotiated fiscal obligation. Consuls therefore sought to ensure that their offerings appeared sufficiently prestigious to withstand comparison (ACCM, n.d.).

Second, rivalry among European consuls played a significant role. For example, Consul Thaibout deliberately enhanced the value of his gift during the marriage of Pasha Ibrahim in order to distinguish it from that of the English consul, whose offering he described as ordinary. Such competition reflects the broader diplomatic objective of securing privileges and maintaining political influence (Devoulx, 1865; Grammont, 1890).

Third, the political significance of the occasion influenced gift value. Major military victories, particularly those with broad symbolic impact—such as the reconquest of Oran in 1708—prompted exceptionally high-value offerings. Conversely, less significant events received more modest gifts (ACCM, n.d.).

A fourth determinant was the presence of diplomatic or political tension. Gifts were frequently used as instruments of crisis management, whether to ease misunderstandings between the consul and the Pasha or to prevent the deterioration of bilateral relations. For example, Consul Thomas increased the value of a gift following tensions related to the fortifications at La Calle, seeking to counter English influence and restore favorable relations (Belil, 2011; ACCM, n.d.).

Diplomatic Context and Long-Term Trends

The frequency of occasional gifts also varied over time. A higher concentration of gifts during the early eighteenth century corresponds to a period of fragile Franco-Algerian relations following the failed military expeditions of Louis XIV. After the Peace Treaty of 1689, France increasingly adopted a policy of conciliation, recognizing that stable relations with Algiers were essential for protecting its Mediterranean commerce (Devoulx, 1865; Grammont, 1890).

Consul Clairambault's correspondence reflects this strategic shift, emphasizing the importance of personal relationships with influential figures and the necessity of avoiding actions that might provoke conflict. In this context, gifts functioned as tools of diplomatic stabilization and commercial protection (ACCM, n.d.).

4. The Gift and Its Diplomatic Functions: Was the Pasha Enough?

By the eighteenth century, the Pasha and Dey were accustomed to receiving ceremonial gifts on major occasions, and the omission, delay, or perceived inadequacy of a gift could trigger personal resentment and diplomatic tension. Consular correspondence shows that failure to meet established expectations could lead to humiliation of the consul and, in certain cases, punitive measures affecting the commercial interests of the consul's state—interests that constituted the primary purpose of consular presence in the Regency (Archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce [ACCM], n.d.; Belil, 2011; Devoulx, 1865).

Episodes recorded in the sources indicate that diplomatic disputes were sometimes escalated by the manipulation of rival consuls. In a case involving the French consul René Lemaire (1690–1697), the investiture gifts presented to Pasha Hadj Ahmed (1695–1698) were reportedly considered inferior to those of other consular representatives, while the escape of French captives from the port aggravated suspicion toward France. Consular accounts suggest that the English consul exploited this conjuncture to obtain permissions for competing coral fisheries at La Calle, and that Lemaire’s subsequent protest contributed to his temporary imprisonment (ACCM, n.d.; Belil, 2011).

Conversely, multiple reports imply that the appropriate use of gifts could stabilize relations and protect long-term commercial interests. Such dynamics are consistent with the broader logic of gift exchange described by Mauss (1925/2011): gifts can function as instruments of alliance-making, symbolic obligation, and negotiated reciprocity. In the Algerian context, occasional gifts operated as a mechanism for maintaining “peaceful coexistence” and for preventing competitors from acquiring dominance in local markets (ACCM, n.d.; Devoulx, 1865).

Yet the evidence also demonstrates the limits of gift diplomacy. Even exceptionally costly gifts did not guarantee the fulfillment of strategic objectives. For instance, the high-value gift presented by Consul Clairambault after the 1708 reconquest of Oran did not immediately secure French authorization to trade there; archival correspondence records that the request was refused, and the desired commercial arrangement was only achieved later through subsequent negotiations (ACCM, n.d.; Grammont, 1890). These cases suggest that gifts were best understood as *facilitating conditions*—tools for preserving access, goodwill, and negotiation channels—rather than direct transactional purchases of privileges.

5. The Pasha’s Entourage as a Pivotal Diplomatic Actor

The evidence indicates that French consuls did not concentrate exclusively on the Pasha as the sole decision-maker. Instead, gifts were strategically extended to the Pasha’s entourage—particularly the familial network in social contexts and senior administrative figures (Divan-related dignitaries) during political transitions such as investitures. This pattern reflects a pragmatic understanding of governance in the Regency: authority was not entirely personalized, but shaped through networks of influence surrounding the ruler (ACCM, n.d.; Devoulx, 1865).

5.1. Family recipients in social and selected political occasions

Archival records show that social gifts frequently targeted the ruler’s immediate household. Gifts were given, for example, to wives, sons, sons-in-law, and sometimes influential relatives connected to marriage or childbirth occasions (ACCM, n.d.). Such practices indicate that consuls recognized the political value of domestic networks even within a predominantly military and masculine political order. The extension of gifts to women—especially the ruler’s wife—should be understood as a diplomatic strategy aimed at stabilizing influence within the household sphere, where access and persuasion could indirectly affect political decisions (ACCM, n.d.; Belil, 2011).

5.2. Divan dignitaries and bureaucratic intermediaries

During investiture ceremonies, gifts were often distributed beyond the Pasha to key officials and intermediaries, including the Khaznadji (treasurer), Khodjas/secretaries, the Agha, dragomans, and other senior officers. This practice reinforces the consuls’ assumption—explicit in consular commentary—that diplomatic outcomes depended on influencing the broader council around the ruler and not merely the ruler himself (ACCM, n.d.; Devoulx, 1865).

Moreover, the sources indicate that gifts were not confined to “state occasions” alone: consuls also offered gifts during the personal celebrations of influential officials, reflecting an ongoing investment in the relationship network that supported commercial and diplomatic negotiations (ACCM, n.d.). In some cases, reciprocal gift exchanges occurred, suggesting that these relationships operated within a recognized system of prestige, reciprocity, and alliance-building (Mauss, 1925/2011; ACCM, n.d.).

5.3. Evidence of influence and anticipatory diplomacy

Two broader findings emerge regarding entourage-focused gifting. First, the sources contain multiple episodes in which intermediaries facilitated conflict resolution or shaped decisions. Second, consuls sometimes treated rising officials as future rulers and invested in them early—anticipatory diplomacy intended to secure continuity of favorable relations in the event of political succession (ACCM, n.d.; Belil, 2011). This strategy is consistent with the logic of patronage and alliance formation embedded in ceremonial exchange.

Narratives of Spanish diplomacy after the O’Reilly expedition (1775) also illustrate the perceived effectiveness of influencing key intermediaries. Accounts attributed to Al-Zahhar report the use of gifts to sway officials involved in mediation and decision pathways, culminating in a peace settlement in the 1780s (Zahhar, n.d.; cf. Toumi, 2016).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that official celebrations in the Ottoman Regency of Algiers functioned as structured arenas for diplomatic performance, where consuls projected the prestige of their states and advanced commercial and political interests through ceremonial participation and gift exchange (ACCM, n.d.; Belil, 2011). The evidence points to competitive dynamics within the consular corps, with representatives seeking to surpass rivals in the distinctiveness and symbolic effect of their offerings (ACCM, n.d.).

Second, the pattern of occasional gifts reveals a consistent hierarchy. Political occasions—especially the investiture of the Pasha—received the most stable and recurrent consular expenditures, followed by selected military victories against external powers, and then major social events. Religious celebrations did not attract consular gifts, and several internal military occasions (such as suppressing rebellions) were treated as routine and therefore unworthy of ceremonial benefaction. This selective pattern suggests that gift-giving was guided not only by the official calendar of the Regency but by diplomatic calculations concerning symbolism, perceived legitimacy, and the expected political “return” (Devoulx, 1865; Grammont, 1890; ACCM, n.d.).

Third, French consular practice demonstrates a refined identification of influence structures within the Regency. Gifts were extended beyond the Pasha to senior Divan dignitaries and to the ruler’s family, reflecting the consuls’ view that decision-making was collective and networked rather than purely personal. Consuls also invested in these actors during their private occasions, confirming that gift exchange was embedded in longer-term relationship management rather than limited to isolated ceremonial moments (ACCM, n.d.; Belil, 2011).

Fourth, the sources reveal an enduring tension over the meaning of the “occasional gift.” Over time, the Regency increasingly treated gifts as quasi-fiscal obligations subject to inspection and comparison, a process that resembled a form of negotiated taxation. In response, consuls—often guided by the Marseille Chamber of Commerce—attempted to shift the meaning of gifts away from compulsory levy and toward symbolic offering, emphasizing novelty, craftsmanship, and the performative power of presentation. This dynamic illustrates how gifts operated simultaneously as economic burdens and as diplomatic instruments of persuasion, consistent with anthropological interpretations of gift exchange as structured reciprocity and social obligation (Mauss, 1925/2011; ACCM, n.d.).

Finally, while consular gifts could stabilize relations, manage crises, and preserve negotiation channels, they did not automatically secure privileges. Their primary diplomatic function was to maintain access and reduce friction, enabling bargaining under conditions of rivalry among European powers and fluctuating political pressures (ACCM, n.d.; Devoulx, 1865).

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on historical archival materials, published sources, and documentary evidence obtained from institutional archives, including the records of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce and French consular correspondence. The research does not involve human participants, personal data, or sensitive contemporary information. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

All archival materials were consulted and used in accordance with the regulations and access policies of the respective archival institutions. The author has ensured accurate citation, responsible interpretation of historical sources, and adherence to principles of academic integrity and research ethics.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and the author has no financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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