

Allies with the Infidels, the Ottoman and French Alliance in the Sixteenth Century

By Christine Isom-Verhaaren

London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2011, 274 pages, ISBN 9781848857285, £52.20.

Christine Isom-Verhaaren's book is not a history of the Franco-Ottoman alliance in the 16th century; rather its aim is to show how the Ottomans and French of the time saw this alliance, which has so often been presented by later historians as exceptional and shameful, and why its real meaning and historical context were misunderstood. Chapters one to five describe what she calls the "traditional historiography". In consequence what she says is not always new for Ottomanists and the book is clearly meant for a broad Anglophone readership.

The main point in the first five chapters is that Charles V's, the Holy Roman Emperor, anti-French propaganda against the impious collaboration of a Christian king with a Muslim sovereign was so successful that this Imperial view was accepted at face value in the 20th century, even in French historiography. French (and Ottoman) sources show a different version of those facts compared to the Imperial presentation, but they were not taken into sufficient account even in France, where the interest in the subject waned in the 17th century, while a taste for beautiful prose created a gap between the antiquarians' work on sources and a literary and philosophical history which despised them. This gap began to disappear in the 19th century, but by then it was too late as the Ottoman Empire had become so feeble that it seemed shameful and humiliating to imagine a 16th century France needing the Sultan's help.

Chapter one summarizes how the Ottoman Empire became a crucial element in the balance of powers after the fall of Constantinople. The petty Italian states made use of the great powers, France and Spain but also the Ottoman Empire, to solve their internal affairs. This was enhanced by the rivalry of the French and the Holy Roman Empire in Italy and by the unprecedented power of Charles V, whose world imperial ambitions compelled the encircled French to seek the help of a strong ally. This was not new as the Italian states' policies had already paved the way for France's Francis I to contact the Ottomans.

Chapter two removes another misconception of the relationship between Christian Westerners and the Muslim Ottomans in the "traditional historiography." Chapter five argues that it is anachronistic to think in terms of ethnicity about so-called (by historians) "foreigners" employed by 16th century sovereigns as the important point at the time was the fidelity to an individual prince. We can't but agree. But Isom-Verhaaren perhaps underestimates the weight of religion as she herself reminds us by saying that becoming a Catholic in France or a Muslim in the Ottoman Empire was necessary to make a career. What is more, it would not have been advisable to renounce Islam in Istanbul ("Religion as an element of political identity could be changed when the need arose", p. 58). The similarities between France and the Ottoman Empire seem a bit

over blown: the *kul* system had nothing in common with the employment of Christian aristocrats coming from another European country; the renegades in North Africa are a very different case as well. Chapter three deals with Cem, a brother of Bayezid II who was compelled to flee the empire in 1482 and spent 13 years in Europe. She rightly writes that this famous affair provoked a growth of the Ottomans' presence in European diplomacy, and that the Franco-Ottoman alliance of the 1530s was the result of an old process. After some pages about Cem's life and its political meaning, she summarizes the *vâkı'ât-ı Sultân Cem*, a biography of the prince by a man who travelled with him which gives a first-hand account of the events and a unique description of France and Italy at the end of the 15th century. The text is well known, but available only in Turkish or in French. This section stresses that its author wanted to show Cem's piety, and was critical of the Christian society, although some individuals were seen as good.

Chapter four is based on French sources (published in the 19th century) and two important Ottoman chronicles, one of which is still unpublished. Although its existence was well known, this book is the first to make a thorough use of it. Criticizing the "traditional historiography," the author reminds us of important facts: the joint campaign of 1543-44 was the consequence of years of Franco-Ottoman collaboration; while the French initiated the collaboration, the Ottomans were not their puppets; the Ottomans spared the French and their lands, Provence did not suffer from their wintering in Toulon and they paid for what they took; there were tensions between the allies, particularly for the French as they were not as organized

as the Ottomans hoped and, which was worse, proved to be unable to use the opportunity, but the French did profit from Ottoman help.

Chapter five develops the themes presented in the introduction about the historiography, and analyzes the views of the protagonists: the matter-of-fact point of view of the Ottoman chronicles, the Habsburg propaganda especially from Paolo Giovio, and the French answer asserting that one had the right to seek help against one's enemies.

Why did the Habsburgs win the propaganda war? The argument presented in the first five chapters seems convincing. Nevertheless, one could add some perspectives or questions. Giovio's success is probably not only due to political manipulations. He wrote a well-written comprehensive history and this surely contributed to its wide diffusion, even in France. Giovio could not have been convincing if his arguments had been of no value as even if he had lied about Ottoman depredations, the public apparently was willing to accept them as true. As for the religious argument, the French tried to reply, a fact which proves that the Habsburgs's thesis was echoed in European opinion. Had Louis XI not refused to let any Muslims come to France? Even if mentalities had changed during the following decades, and even if collaboration with Muslim powers was not a new phenomenon, and even if the presence of Barbarossa in Marseilles inspired more curiosity than terror in 1543, the cooperation with Muslims against Christians could be embarrassing, at least for some. As far as the 19th century French historiography is concerned, I wonder if the feeling of superiority that was insisted upon is enough to explain why some his-

torians told a history which was partly in contradiction with sources published by French scholars. One probably should as well take into account philhellenism and

the Romantic movement to explain why the Turk's villainy was taken for granted.

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The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals

By Stephen F. Dale

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The comparative study of empires is undoubtedly one of the fastest growing fields since the end of the Cold War. Dominic Lieven was among those who paved the way with his *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), which was followed with some later additions such as Karen Barkey's *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Jane Burbank and Frederic Cooper's *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Indeed the field of empires is so vast that the combinations and permutations of comparative studies are endless.

What has been forgotten through this latest wave of comparative empire studies is the standard comparison between the triplet empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughal. All were land-based, "early modern" empires where a variant of Islam was claimed as the dominant religion and blueprint for a polity. Marshall Hodgson's term "gunpowder empires" that together constituted an "Islamicate" has until recently been the predominant association that comes from such a comparative framework. Stephen Dale, professor

at Ohio State University and a specialist in Mughal history, has reintroduced this comparative framework with his *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, and in so doing has written a solid primer on the three "Muslim" empires for students and scholars alike.

Dale explains early on why Hodgson's "gunpowder empires" is not a satisfactory term to link these three state formations. He claims that, while gunpowder was crucial to Ottoman power against Europeans and others, it was not as integral to Safavid or Mughal trajectories of empire. Specifically, he maintains that "The suggestive idea that firearms triggered fundamental changes in the organization of a particular Muslim empire is often alluded to but rarely demonstrated in a systematic fashion, and has not yet been applied to these three states" (p. 6). Neither does he favor the term "early modern," arguing that it is vague and many of the supposed hallmarks of an "early modern state" are not unique to those empires. Dale further differentiates his study from Hodgson's with his self-proclaimed focus on political history (using a treatment of individual rulers as a stylistic device) and the "aristocratic elite" (p. 7) rather than on the military-fiscal systems. Dale offers "a short histo-