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Christine Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: The Ottoman and French Alliance in the Sixteenth Century*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011. 274 pp. Map, bibliographical references and index. \$100 U.S. (cl). £55 U.K. ISBN 1848857284.

Review by Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Tufts University.

The 1536 strategic alliance between the French court and the Ottoman Sultan is often remembered for the first concessions that allowed French commerce within the Ottoman Empire. While never viewed negatively, this treaty has long been portrayed as scandalous and even sacrilegious, chiefly by the Habsburgs. These views of this alliance form the focus of this revisionist book. Christine Isom-Verhaaren argues that the sixteenth-century commercial ties between François I of France and the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman were welcome by both the French and the Ottomans, who allied together in the military campaign of 1543-44. In *Allies with the Infidel*, the author carefully deconstructs views of the alliance based on French and Ottoman sources. This is a complex and accomplished study that presents the Ottoman and French perspectives and deciphers Ottoman sources about the wintering of the Ottoman fleet in Toulon for the first time.

The book aims to uncover multiple views in order to expose both the Habsburg bias and the fallacy of a monolithic Christian world in the West confronting a uniform and equally monolithic Islamic World in the East. This aim is repeated many times in different parts of the book. She refers to Edward Saïd's work in an effort to dismantle any notion of "clash of civilizations." [1] She analyzes the discourse *érudit* school of history as she delves deeply into primary sources to bring to life an account of the sentiments reflected both in the sixteenth-century French historical tradition and from surviving Ottoman accounts. In her introduction, she offers a brief overview of the evolution of history writing in France, which for her explains why the French sources describing 1543-44 have been neglected (p.18). The two traditions she points to for the sixteenth century were the birth of the *érudit* tradition with Guillaume Budé and a second literary tradition which eventually prevailed. She argues that the waning of the legal scholarship of the *érudits* in the seventeenth century partly caused the neglect of the French primary sources about the alliance. She goes on to describe the evolution of history writing in France all the way to Michelet in the nineteenth century when the literary and *érudit* traditions united to legitimize the nation-state. The three succinct pages on the subject lead her to Beverly Southgate's work in the hope that post-modernist history would provide room for multiple views, none of them privileged. [2] This is the task the author sets herself, gleaning these views from neglected French and Ottoman primary sources.

The second argument she offers for the neglected views held in French sources is that the waning of Ottoman power in the nineteenth century made it difficult to acknowledge the French had ever sought Ottoman help (p. 5). For these two reasons, she writes, the Habsburg view has come to dominate French history writing in France itself: "The shock of Christian fighting Christian with the help of Infidels was shocking...but there was worse to come...The transformation of a Christian town into a Moslem one...[François] began to find the Turkish presence embarrassing..." (p. 3). This view of the Ottomans in Toulon is from a biography of François I. From the very start, she believes that this was a welcome allegiance. Although she does say *in passim* that a crusading discourse coexisted next to this welcoming

attitude to the Ottomans, there is a clear choice of sources here showing that religion was carefully and willfully set aside. Isom-Verhaaren contends that these neither constituted a religious episode, nor were the views in her sources based on religion. Using diplomatic documents, letters, narratives and histories, the author points out that, in fact, it is the European sources that have stressed that the Ottomans viewed Europeans as “despised infidels.”

Most welcome is a first time scrutiny of Ottoman sources about what has been sometimes called the Ottoman “occupation” of Provence. She deconstructs this thesis, stating “the Ottomans agreed to spend the winter in the port of Toulon because the French also hoped to use the fleet during campaigns in 1544” (p. 14). Sources written by two Ottoman eyewitnesses are highlights of the book. The difficulty of reading Ottoman Turkish and the lack of cataloging explain why these sources have escaped scrutiny. She uses two eyewitness accounts for 1543-44, when the Ottoman fleet agreed to spend the winter in Toulon. The first is attributed to Muradi, a companion of Hayreddin, who led the Ottoman fleet and focuses on the French campaign of Hayreddin, known as Barbarossa in Europe. The second is an illustrated account of a “probable” (p. 14) participant in the sea campaign, Nasuh Matrakçi, with manuscript paintings of Toulon, Marseilles, Nice and Genoa.

In chapter one, she unravels and classifies a tangled web of allegiances that preceded the Ottoman-French alliance. Her *forte* here is to demonstrate that traditional historiography has artificially separated events in the Muslim and Christian world of the Mediterranean. The next chapter stresses the importance of individual views and examines a few cosmopolitan figures to show the complexity of identity in the early modern world. For the Ottoman Empire, she relies on Cemal Kafadar’s work and his finding that the category ‘Turk’ should be studied according to time and place and that in the early modern period there was a “fluidity of identities” that the modern historian often has problems comprehending.[3] She uses Charlotte Well’s work on early modern French citizenship to show that just as in the Ottoman Empire, foreigners were employed and assimilated quickly.[4] The author then concentrates on individuals, two Greek cousins from the Palaeologus family, one called Georges Palaeologus Bissipat Le Grec, who went to France, and his cousin Hüseyin, who served the Sultan. She also chooses individuals who served two rulers in their lives, such as Andrea Doria of Genoa, who served both François I and later his enemy Charles V. Hayreddin Barbarossa’s identity is explored through several sources. These biographies and some others are brief but do make a point about dynastic loyalty. She concludes that “loyalty to an individual ruler” was “the key to elite political identity in this period” (p. 81). The biographies also serve the reader when one reaches chapter four, where many of these elite figures are discussed who played major roles in the alliance or in military campaigns.

A precedent for the contacts between François I and the Sultan Süleyman can be found in chapter three’s exploration of the fascinating fate of Sultan Cem, brother of the reigning Sultan Bayezid II, a captive in France and Italy from 1482 to 1495. Her exploration of this Ottoman source about Cem’s captivity adds a new perspective to an episode that has heretofore been described using European sources alone. An account written by an eyewitness who had shared Cem’s captivity in Europe, the *Vaki’at-i-Sultan Cem*, gives a dark view of the Knights of Rhodes who betrayed Cem to the French, despite their promise, but holds favorable views of Charles VIII of France. This was a moment of high diplomacy, and the Ottoman author wanted compassion and remembrance for Cem as he sought to justify why Cem acted as he did, fleeing to take refuge with the Knights of Rhodes. In the *Vaki’at* the Christians are described “in a manner reminiscent of how Christians described the Turks...as avaricious, uncivilized and untrustworthy” (p. 111). The story of Cem, whom popes and kings hoped to see head their crusade against Sultan Bayezid, opens the way to the heart of the book: chapter four, devoted to the French Ottoman alliance in support of François I’s claim to become Holy Roman Emperor rather than Charles V.

Chapter four relies on a varied group of French primary sources and on two Ottoman sources: the eyewitness account of Nasuh Matrakçı, and the *Exploits of Hayreddin Pasha* by Muradi, a companion of Hayreddin. Both were written shortly after the fleet spent the winter in Toulon. In addition, a report from a man sent from France to the Sultan is used to address the events as another eyewitness. The most fascinating part about this cooperation is how the Ottomans were accommodated in Toulon. Royal *lettres patentes* sent to the governor of Provence by the French king commanded the people of Toulon to leave the city. The city council raised the funds which the king lacked, and Hayreddin negotiated the displacement, saying that artisans and heads of households could stay in place and that the Ottoman presence should not inconvenience the inhabitants. Nevertheless, the king's order to lodge 30,000 Ottoman members of the fleet in 637 small houses certainly became a heavy burden on the region.

Chapter five is devoted to the views each side held of the other. The author contends that the distorted views of the Ottoman-French alliance originated from the pen of Paolo Govio (1483-1553), writing from the Duchy of Milan as a supporter of Charles V. In 1581, his work *Comentarii delle cose di Turchi* was translated into French. Here Nancy Bisaha's work on Italian humanists and their secular attitudes towards the Ottomans would have been useful to set a larger context.[5] In fact, one of the rare but serious criticisms of this book is the narrow focus on primary sources and the lack of attention to recent major secondary works on the cross-cultural relations between the Ottomans and Europe that sometimes share the views Isom-Verhaaren claims as novel. The point she makes about a multiplicity of voices has been argued by several scholars, and this chapter is marred by the omission of this previous scholarship.[6]

For Paolo Govio's text, she dismisses his description of the Ottomans ravaging and plundering Toulon by stating that this contradicts the writings of the "inhabitants of Provence." Here there is a problem, as the sources she quotes are from the elites of Provence in charge of the evacuation of the city of Toulon and not the displaced inhabitants of the city. Despite a ten-year tax break, it is difficult to imagine that the "inhabitants" welcomed this eviction. She is, however, able to argue based on her sources that there was no plunder. The Ottomans customarily used their pay to buy provisions, something they had expected to do but could not as the pay promised by the French was not forthcoming. Süleyman had wisely asked whether the promise of pay was the king's or the ambassador's alone. The author squarely and rightly puts the blame on the French court's lack of funding, despite which the fleet was successfully fed that winter. The view that the inhabitants of several towns were delighted to trade with the Ottomans and glance at Barbarossa comes not from the writings of the inhabitants of Provence but from the *Gazavat*, the *Exploits of Hayreddin*, where it is written that Barbarossa, the French king's officers, and the civic leaders of several towns paid for extra supplies to keep the 30,000 men of the fleet fed throughout the winter.

The joint Ottoman-French campaigns made no real conquests, and the complex diplomacy behind the alliance highlights a lack of commitment from François I, who not only failed to supply provisions to the fleet he invited, but failed to supply troops and famously concluded a peace treaty with Charles V behind Sultan Süleyman's back. Could this too not account for the fact that many French sources about this episode have fallen into oblivion? That question is never asked here, but is a good one. That this episode of failure and treachery surely adds little to the glory of the king of France is certain. François I never obtained the title of Emperor, even though his quest for it was at the core of his alliance with the Ottomans. History is often written by the winner, and in this case it is no surprise that the Habsburg version of events dominates even French sources. Charles V, or "Charles Quint" as he is called in French school rooms, is not seen only as a Habsburg, nor even as a foreign figure, but as the Holy Emperor of Europe in French texts. Just like Charlemagne, he too has been assimilated.

The strength of this book is to rehabilitate the reputation of the Ottomans in Toulon, once maligned, according to the author, in Habsburg sources. Isom-Verhaaren demonstrates that the Sultan always controlled his fleet through Hayreddin, that the fleet was not sent out by the French king as some

Western sources argued, and that it was not due to French initiative, but to Hayrredin's displeasure with French disorganization and leadership that he sent to the Sultan to return to Istanbul. The sources about this episode are carefully studied both on the French and Ottoman side, and both point to the orderly presence of well-trained troops used to their regular pay.

Isom-Verhaaren's book, despite a weak last chapter, is a major contribution and an enjoyable read as she illuminates one of the most obscure and misrepresented episodes of the history of the Mediterranean. In fact, what she has accomplished is a *tour de force* that demonstrates that this alliance lay well beyond the classifications of traditional historiography as simply French or Ottoman. It was not a sacrilegious aberration, nor just a fleeting alliance. Instead, it should be read as part of the *longue durée* history of cosmopolitan elites at the service of Empires that competed for power within a common web of related events in the Mediterranean.

NOTES

[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

[2] Beverly C. Southgate, *History, What and Why? Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[3] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[4] Charlotte C. Wells, *Law and Citizenship in Early Modern France* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[5] Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[6] Among the works stressing such approaches are: Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), Bernard Heyberger, Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, Emanuele Colombo, Paola Vismara, eds., *L'Islam visto da Occidente: Cultura e religion del Seicento europeo di fronte all'Islam* (Genova-Milano: Marietti, 2009), and Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2011).

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