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Amaury Faivre d'Arcier, *Les Oubliés de la Liberté; Négociants, consuls et missionnaires français au Levant pendant la Révolution (1784-1798)*. Brussels and New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 266 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, biographical notices, glossary, bibliography, and index. €21.50 Europe; \$25.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-90-5201-339-8.

Review by Julia Landweber, Montclair State University.

In the late eighteenth century, the number of identifiable French expatriates located within the Ottoman Empire was miniscule: a mere six hundred or so individuals lived in isolated communities spread across the principle ports of the empire. Significant ports such as Constantinople (modern Istanbul) or Smyrna (modern Izmir) claimed the lion's share of this group, with populations of well over 100 each. Smaller communities were much more common: Rhodes, Cairo, Alexandria, and Aleppo were each home to a scant thirty or so French nationals in the 1780s (pp. 15-16).

One might naturally ask, of what importance are such tiny settlements to the history of the French Revolution? An indication is given by the flippant but plausible claim of the comte de Choiseul-Gouffier, France's ambassador to Constantinople from 1784 to 1792, that these few hands collectively managed "one of the richest colonies of France."<sup>[1]</sup> In *Les Oubliés de la Liberté*, Amaury Faivre d'Arcier argues convincingly that this group, though small in numbers, was both necessary to the well-being of revolutionary France's international economic strength, and yet misunderstood and mishandled by the revolutionary government to the point of seriously damaging a delicate international economic and political relationship hundreds of years in the making.

*Les Oubliés de la Liberté* is divided into an introduction and two parts. Part one, which is chiefly descriptive rather than analytical, covers the French experience in the Levant during the pre-revolutionary period 1784-1789. The first chapter describes the various roles and professions open to Frenchmen (the only women mentioned are wives of the men concerned) legitimately established in the Ottoman Empire during the course of the eighteenth century. Chapter one also addresses the quality of life experienced by these transplants, with descriptions of the urban environment, the social life, customs and habits, and the sanitation of Levantine communities where Frenchmen could be found. On this topic Faivre d'Arcier takes a more personal interest than is commonly seen among pre-modern historians. By profession a French consul in the Sri Lankan city of Colombo, he observes, "My experience of being posted [abroad] has helped me to understand certain realities of the expatriate life" (p. 9).

Chapter two focuses more closely on the diplomatic and commercial interactions, customs, and practices observed by the French in Ottoman territory. The expatriate communities of the Ottoman Empire, which had grown up organically over several centuries, shared a common purpose, to protect and forward French economic interests in maritime trade and commerce with the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>[2]</sup> By the late eighteenth century—as Faivre d'Arcier's subtitle indicates—most of the Frenchmen present belonged to one of three categories: merchants and their representatives from Marseilles, who by tradition had charge of all French trade with the Levant; consuls and dragomans (translators) appointed by the royal government to act as liaisons with the Ottomans; or Catholic

missionaries, the smallest group. The rest were support staff including servants, cooks, bakers, wigmakers, and watch-makers. It was also normal to find a rather sizable group of Franco-Levantine *protégés* living alongside the expatriates. These were local families with a recognized claim on the protection of the French government, often Christian descendents of Europeans who had settled in the Levant long ago. The entire far-flung network was overseen from Constantinople by the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, with additional monitoring from Marseilles.

Faivre d'Arcier reserves his analysis for the second part of the book, which covers the revolutionary years 1789-1798. Curiously, the author frames his choice of dates in Ottoman terms rather than French, as lasting from the advent of Ottoman sultan Selim III to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. The purpose of part two is to demonstrate the surprising continuity of French diplomatic and mercantile practices in the Levantine trade during this period. Surprising, because this continuity entailed the preservation of a highly regimented and decidedly undemocratic system of governance and regulation established by the deposed royal government. Surprising as well, because it no longer worked.

Chapter three examines how the early stirrings of revolutionary fervor were felt by Frenchmen living abroad in the Ottoman Empire and what effect the overthrow of Louis XVI had upon the Levantine world.[3] In chapter four, we see that the revolutionary government hesitated to overturn *all* conventions: when it came to Franco-Levantine commerce, they decided not to disturb the status quo. Over a century of privileges had accumulated to the Marseillais trade with the Ottomans, and the liberals who initially dominated the National Assembly hesitated to dismantle such a profitable system. Yet the end of France's dominant role in the eastern Mediterranean was in sight. Even before Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt formally destroyed the centuries-old bond between France and the Ottoman Empire, revolutionary fervor among the French diplomatic and commercial representatives sent east were straining the goodwill necessary to peaceful relations between the two countries.

In chapter five, Faivre d'Arcier argues that the war between France and Great Britain begun in 1793 became the final destabilizing factor which ruined French commerce in the eastern Mediterranean. Rather than continue under the old royal system of extremely tight control of their actions and movements, a number of expatriate merchants defected, as it were, from the aegis of the French Republic, even while maintaining ties to their "maisons mères" in Marseilles and continuing to declare their support of the French nation (p. 161). Their actions entailed some odd ramifications because, despite their professions of French loyalty, they had to turn to other European powers, like Prussia and Austria who were enemies of the Republic, for continued protection against Ottoman pressures. This is where Faivre d'Arcier finds his book title, as these men, denied the fruits of democracy by their homeland had become "forgotten by liberty."

Finally, in 1796 a small group of Franco-Levantine merchants who had remained loyal to France (at great cost to their business) pushed the Directorate to end hundreds of years of secular friendship with the Ottomans by invading Egypt. This action, which shocked the Ottomans so much that at first they refused to believe it was happening, quickly became the catalyst for the forced imprisonment or removal of all members of the French commercial communities of the Levant. It also heralded a decisive break in the history of Franco-Ottoman relations, as the occupation of Egypt became an unfortunate model for future French colonial interventions elsewhere.

*Les Oubliés de la Liberté* is primarily a work of synthesis, and only secondarily a work of analytical history, yet it does both things nicely. In part one, Faivre d'Arcier provides a clear introductory description of French consular, commercial, and maritime life in the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The dates of the title are in fact somewhat misleading: d'Arcier's cited sources and descriptions range from the 1720s into the 1830s. Such a span renders this portion of the book useful to all students of the eighteenth-century Franco-Ottoman relationship, not just those interested in the end of the period. However, as works of synthesis go, the author is sometimes overly dependant on very old and

out-of-date scholarship, occasionally placing him at odds with the conclusions of more recent works. In particular, he makes no use of Edhem Eldem's authoritative *French Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, a surprising omission given the focus here on French merchant life in the Ottoman Empire.[4]

In part two, the author focuses the analytical portion of his study on how the revolutionary ferment of the 1790s affected not just the French in the Levant, but in turn all of Franco-Levantine commercial relations. This is the most significant contribution of Faivre d'Arcier's work, in that he expands our understanding of the Revolution's impact on French international relations, both political and economic. Overall, *Les Oubliés de la Liberté* provides a valuable contribution to questions previously neglected or overlooked both by scholars of the Franco-Ottoman relationship, and by scholars of the French Revolution.[5]

## NOTES

[1] Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1911), p. 279.

[2] Indeed eighteenth-century Levantine trade with Europe was heavily dominated by Marseillais merchants; see Edhem Eldem, "Capitulations and Western Trade," in Suraiya N. Faroqi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey. Vol. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 311-317.

[3] The difficulties in maintaining the old relations between France and the Ottoman Empire is clearly evident from the frequent turnover in the position of French representative to the Ottoman court during the revolutionary period, as seen in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, Simon Kunalalp, and Frédéric Hitzel, eds., *Représentants permanents de la France en Turquie (1536-1991) et de la Turquie en France (1797-1991)* (Istanbul and Paris: Isis, 1991), pp. 37-45. Rather surprisingly, this work makes no appearance in *Les Oubliés de la Liberté*.

[4] Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999).

[5] Works addressing the influence of the French Revolution in the eastern Mediterranean usually focus only on its effects on eastern peoples and politics, e.g. Greek or Ottoman, rather than on its impact on France itself. See, for example, François Vinot, "Les ambassadeurs français à Constantinople témoins des crises de l'Empire ottoman (1687-1808)," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 1(1992):27-46; Centre de Recherche Néohellénique, *La Révolution française et l'hellénisme moderne, Actes du IIIe colloque d'histoire* (Athens, 1989); and Bernard Lewis, "The Impact of the French Revolution on Turkey," *Journal of World History* 1(1953):105-125.

Julia Landweber  
Montclair State University  
landweberj@mail.montclair.edu

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