

Two Voices of Diplomacy: A Comparative Analysis of Ottoman and French Correspondence during the Franco–Ottoman Alliance (1553–1560)

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Abstract. *This article compares representations of the Franco–Ottoman alliance, in correspondence from 1553 to 1560. The two collections of correspondence studied here are the historical narrative of the Franco–Ottoman alliance from the Ottoman point of view, *Münşe’âtü’s-Selâtîn* by Feridun Ahmed Bey, and from the French point of view, *Négociations de la France dans le Levant* by Ernest Charrière. This article does not intend to study the two historical documents as two ‘national’ views on a period in history. Instead, the two documents will be studied in parallel. They can be read as two parts of one single historical narrative of the diplomacy of a period under review, or as two historical narratives of equal value, together presenting a full and accurate view of the relations between the Ottoman Empire and France in the sixteenth century. The article in particular focuses on how both collections of correspondence represent four topics: friendship, military co-operation, intelligence collected and intelligence transmitted. The article also studies the language of negotiation and the language of alliance as presented in both collections of correspondence. Above all the study establishes the unique historical value of the *Münşe’âtü’s-Selâtîn* as the only existing collection of Ottoman correspondence that is complemented by a virtually complete collection of correspondence written in the language of the other side.*

Keywords: *Franco–Ottoman Alliance, *Münşe’âtü’s-Selâtîn*, Ottoman diplomacy, French diplomacy, diplomatic correspondence, sixteenth century*

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Diplomatiyanın iki səsi: Fransa-Osmanlı ittifaqı dövründə Osmanlı və Fransa yazışmalarının müqayisəli təhlili (1553–1560)

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Xülasə. Bu məqalə 1553–1560-cı illər arasında Franko–Osmanlı ittifaqının məktublaşmalarda necə təsvir olunduğunu müqayisəli şəkildə araşdırır. Tədqiq olunan iki məktub toplusu Osmanlı baxış bucağından Franko–Osmanlı ittifaqının tarixi hekayəsini əks etdirən Firidun Əhməd Bəyin “Münşeat üs-Səlatin” əsəri və fransız baxış bucağından Ernest Şarrierenin “Fransanın Levantda diplomatik danışıqları” əsəridir. Məqalənin məqsədi bu iki tarixi mənbəni müəyyən bir dövrə dair iki “milli” baxış kimi tədqiq etmək deyildir. Əksinə, hər iki mənbə paralel şəkildə araşdırılır. Onlar nəzərdən keçirilən dövrün diplomatik tarixinin vahid bir tarixi rəvayətinin iki hissəsi kimi və ya bərabər dəyərə malik iki tarixi rəvayət kimi oxuna bilər; birlikdə isə XVI əsrdə Osmanlı İmperiyası ilə Fransa arasındakı münasibətlərin tam və dəqiq mənzərəsini təqdim edirlər. Məqalə xüsusilə hər iki məktub toplusunda dörd mövzunun necə təqdim olunduğuna diqqət yetirir: dostluq, hərbi əməkdaşlıq, toplanmış kəşfiyyat məlumatları və ötürülmüş kəşfiyyat məlumatları. Bundan əlavə, tədqiqat hər iki mənbədə əks olunan danışıqlar dilini və ittifaq dilini də təhlil edir. Ən başlıcası isə, araşdırma Münşeat üs-Səlatin əsərinin unikal tarixi dəyərini ortaya qoyur; belə ki, bu əsər qarşı tərəfin dilində yazılmış demək olar ki, tam məktub toplusu ilə tamamlanan yeganə mövcud Osmanlı diplomatik yazışmalar məcmuəsidir.

Açar sözlər: Franko–Osmanlı İttifaqı, Münşeat üs-Səlatin, Osmanlı diplomatiyası, Fransa diplomatiyası, diplomatik yazışmalar, XVI əsr

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Introduction

The Franco–Ottoman alliance was unique to early modern international relations, for it was the relationship between the most powerful Muslim state of the sixteenth century and a major Catholic power. Although the alliance was concluded by Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) with the French kings Francis I (r. 1515–1547) and Henry II (r. 1547–1559), it continued after the death of the French kings. The alliance had its roots in shared opposition to the Habsburgs in Europe and the Mediterranean (İnalçık, p. 134), but evolved into a relationship of correspondence, of occasional military cooperation, of exchange of intelligence, and of diplomatic consultation. Thus the Franco–Ottoman alliance was not a simple military pact, but rather a continuing process of diplomatic communication.

The Franco–Ottoman alliance has been studied in great detail from the Ottoman and the European points of view. However, the overwhelming majority of the existing research on the alliance has been conducted almost exclusively on the basis of European sources, and in particular of French sources.

(Christin Isom, p. 63) Of these sources the most famous collection of reports of French ambassadors is *Négociations de la France dans le Levant* published by Ernest Charrière. By means of the letters of the French ambassadors resident at the Ottoman court – Gabriel d’Aramon (1507–1590), Michel de Codignac (d. 1571), Jean de La Vigne (d. 1559), Jean de Dolu (d. 1585), and others—the historian is able to follow the intricacies of Franco–Ottoman relations during their joint military campaigns as well as their diplomatic correspondence and views concerning events in the Mediterranean (De Lamar, p. 457; Veinstein, p. 36).

This section follows the history of the correspondence with France during the period of the alliance’s greatest activity, i.e., until approximately 1560. The letters are arranged according to subject. Thus there are letters dealing with the two powers’ joint naval campaigns against the Spanish, the military aid the Ottomans gave to France in the Italian wars, the two powers’ joint efforts in the Mediterranean and in Central Europe (Henderson pp. 23–35) after the Cateau-Cambrésis peace of 1559 (Romier, p. 4). The letters here are compared to the account of the same events in the French archive, *Négociations de la France dans le Levant*, collected by Ernest Charrière.

Methods

This study focuses on a comparison of two sixteenth-century letter collections from two powerful states that had allied themselves in the century before: The official correspondence from the chancery of the greatest of the Ottoman sultans, Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566), to the French crown, the principal power in Western Europe, during the period of their alliance, 1547–1569. The principal Ottoman source for this study is Feridun Ahmed Bey’s *Münşe’âtü’s-Selâtin*, special value to this study are the letters in this collection to and from the French crown between 1553 and 1560. Other relevant corresponding documents are in the archives of France, especially in the collection of correspondence of Jean de la Forest, the first French ambassador at the Ottoman court (Kartal, p. 67).

A Comparative Textual Analysis of Franco–Ottoman Correspondence in the Reign of Süleyman the Magnificent. This study takes a unique approach to two of the principal sources for Ottoman and French history, analyzing the corresponding between the two states. Thus, the study attempts to recreate the Franco–Ottoman alliance not merely as a series of events, but also as an ongoing process of diplomacy and highlights the value of the *Münşe’âtü’s-Selâtin* as a primary source to be studied in conjunction with French sources of corresponding periods.

Constructing Friendship and Alliance

As was the case with the Ottomans’ other allies, the French found themselves having to prop up the image of friendship they had with the Ottomans (Ursu, p. 53). Yet the diplomatic correspondence of the two powers defined the alliance between them. The correspondence of the Ottomans and their French allies presented their alliance in light of the two powers’ respective political traditions. Thus, while the Ottoman correspondence presented the alliance with France in the framework of the Sultan’s sovereignty, the French correspondence portrayed the alliance with the necessary partnership of two powers for Europe to maintain a balance of power (Piccirillo, p. 58).

Even though in historical analysis of relations between states temporary alliances are far more typical than long lasting friendship, the Sultan, as well as the secretary of the Porte, in their correspondence with kings of France never failed to present the relations between the Porte and the French crown as friendship, and base them on trust and mutual loyalty.

In a letter to the King of France the Sultan wrote:

"Sizin kadimden bargâh-ı a ‘lâmızda olan muhabbet ve ihtisâsınız kel-şems fî veseti’n-nehâr lâmi ‘ ve âşikâr olup" (Freidun Bey, p. 497).

"The friendship and sincere devotion that you have long shown toward our exalted court is as evident as the sun at midday".

We see a statement of an ongoing political friendship as opposed to a single occasion of war is of great significance. A bond of friendship between peoples is a continuous affair and is founded on trust. All of the Ottoman correspondence with France throughout the period characterized relations with France by using terms such as muhabbet (friendship), ihtisâs (special attachment), ittihâd (union) and i'timâd (confidence) and these terms made up a considerable part of the Ottoman diplomatic vocabulary as regards France (Feridun Bey, p. 494).

On the other hand, the French king in his respond when refers to Sultan his words will be: "Très hault, très excellent, très puissant, très magnanime et invincible prince le grand empereur des Montssuramans, sultan Soliman" which means: Most exalted, most excellent, most powerful, most magnanimous, and invincible Prince, the Great Emperor of the Muslims, Sultan Süleyman (Charrière, p. 346). Tradition states that official correspondence was used to document diplomatic correspondence and express appreciation for the friendship existing between two states. The Ottoman sultan in his letter to the French king referred to the French monarch as his "ally", "ittihâd-ı tarafeyn" (Feridun Bey, p. 500). This approach was also used by the Ottoman sultan in another letter where he hoped that cooperation between the two states would bring them victory over their enemies.

In a similar manner the Sultan in his letter to the French king expressed his hope to overcome his enemies together with the French king as his friend.

"...Ümiddir ki ittihâd-ı tarafeyn ile adüvvlerimiz pâymâl ve dostlarımız şâdmân ola" (Feridun Bey, p. 501).

"It is hoped that through the union of both sides our enemies will be defeated and our friends will rejoice".

In the Ottoman perception of foreign policy towards France, friendship is equivalent to shared political objectives. The solidarity of two states at war with a common enemy is the cornerstone of the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire towards France. Joint actions of both countries in war against their enemies bring to the fore the depth of this alliance. A ring of hostile powers is encircling France. A declaration of war by the Ottoman Porte to the King of France was to list one after the other the hostile powers opposed to France's interests and thus to the interests of the Ottoman Empire as well.

These letters are documented in the following example:

"Ümidimiz dergâh-ı Hak Teâlâ'dan budur ki hamîşe dostlarımız mansûr ve düşmanlarımız makhûr ola" (Feridun Bey, p. 500).

"Our prayer before Almighty God is that our friends may always be victorious and our enemies forever defeated".

French diplomacy too preserved correspondence concerning the alliance. The published correspondence of the negotiations of France in the East (Négociations de la France dans le Levant) contain numerous documents on the efforts to maintain friendly relations with the Ottoman Porte and to obtain military assistance from the Sultan against the Habsburgs.

French ambassadors repeatedly referred to the help they received from the Ottomans. In their correspondence they generally portrayed favorably the cooperation they received from the Ottoman commanders and the way they were received in the Porte.

Military Cooperation and Naval Strategy

Time and again in the Ottoman correspondence the provision of naval assistance was represented as an act of the Sultan as emperor. When the French, in their turn, asked for military support (Ceran, p. 419), Sultan Süleyman replied to the French king that he would send his troops as soon as seemed appropriate:

"Her vakit ki yüce Âsitanımızdan muavenet ve muzaheret iltimas ve rica oluna bi-avni Allah Teâlâ dahi sefâyin-i nusret-karîn ile asâkir-i zafer-müeyesser irsâl olunup" (Feridun Bey, p. 499).

"Whenever assistance and support are requested from Our Exalted Court, God willing, victorious fleets and triumphant armies shall be dispatched".

The French had no fleet to match that of the powerful Spaniards, who dominated the Mediterranean Sea. The French were at the mercy of the sea of the Spanish Monarch and had no ally at sea except for the Ottoman Empire (Labib, p. 445). The Ottoman Empire was well aware of this strategic fact and was only too happy to be of assistance to France. The French were subsequently encouraged when the Ottomans sent a large fleet to the south coast of France (Veinstein, p. 38). The joint campaign of the French and Ottoman fleets of the sea and the capture of the principal city of the island of Corsica, (Bastia) in the year 1553 (Emecen, p. 259). The letters regarding that campaign explained the request of the French and the Ottoman Empire agreed to that request and ordered Turgut Reis to go to the sea with a sufficient number of ships with the means of victory for the French: "My servant Turgut Reis shall go to the sea with enough ships with the means of victory for you" (Feridun Bey, p. 495).

This operation was as important to France as was the letter written by King Henry II of France to Turgut Reis in 1553. The letter was written on 3 June 1553 and contained the words "Magnifique Seigneur". King Henry II thanked Turgut Reis for his personal services to France in the war at sea and told the corsair that he and the French would never forget these services (Charrière, p. 259). In 1553 the Ottoman–French fleet had fought and won a battle on the island of Corsica. (Veinstein, p. 37) The Sultan then appointed Turgut Reis as Beylerbeyi of Algiers (Bostan, p. 418). The King of France was equally satisfied, because in his letter to the Baron de la Garde and M. d'Aramon of 18 November 1553 he stressed the value that Turgut Reis was bringing to the Ottomans in the war against Spain, and underlined the importance of the naval alliance with the Ottoman Empire and the necessity of maintaining relations with them (Charrière, p. 260).

The Ottoman commander Turgut Reis was one of the great figures of this period, but the letter is from the Sultan to the supreme commander of the operation: "Appointing my Kapudan Piyale Pasha, the pride of the noble commanders and the chosen one among the eminent leaders, as commander-in-chief" (Feridun Bey, p. 496) during the 1555 campaign. It was during this campaign that Piyale Pasha and Turgut Reis jointly operated with the French fleet of the French king in a campaign against the Spaniards. Accordingly, the French must be responsible for the Ottoman supplies during the operation (Christine Isom, p. 153).

The other letter was written by M. Decodignac French representative in Istanbul to Henry II. The letter was written during the 1555 campaign. From that letter we can gather that the French government was highly satisfied with the part that Piyale Pasha took in the naval operations.

It is well known that Piyale Pasha was in contact with the French. The French ambassador for instance called him Cappitaine nommé Piali Aga in his correspondence (Charrière, p. 329).

Intelligence Exchange as a Diplomatic Instrument

Intelligence exchange was another key factor behind the Franco–Ottoman alliance. The Ottomans' diplomats were highly dependent on the information about Western Europe provided by the French

ambassadors. The French envoys in turn were continuously providing their government with information on the military actions and policies of the Ottomans. Thus, the Franco–Ottoman alliance was not merely based on the joint military operations of the two parties; rather it was sustained by an efficient network of intelligence for diplomatic purposes.

An example of the Ottomans' information needs is provided by the following letter, in which Sultan Süleyman tries to persuade the French to keep him informed on European affairs:

"Siz dahi saâdetimiz canibine olan dostluk ve ihtisâsınız mûcebince ol taraflara göz ve kulak olup" (Feridun Bey, p. 501).

"According to the friendship and devotion you bear toward Our Imperial Court, you too should serve as our eyes and ears in those regions".

It is of particular interest because it assigned France the role of monitoring intelligence for the Alliance. As the ally of the Ottoman Empire the French were expected to report on the political and military happenings of Europe and thus keep the Porte informed, just as the author was expected to inform the Porte of the Transylvania problem. It was not till France turned to the East that her greatest problem would come from the King of Transylvania, but of all people. He was ruler of a region on the Eastern border of Austria, where the principal concern of France was to be settled (Bourrilly, p. 274). Monsieur de la Vigne laid this before Henry II in a letter of 26 February 1559, in which he wrote: "The Grand Seigneur will keep his promise to you and settle the matter of Transylvania. The throne shall be given to the King and Queen of Transylvania" (Charrière, p. 552).

The French ambassador was constantly writing to the King of France, of the great activity of King John II (János II) of Hungary and of his mother writing to the Ottoman court day and night. Because the Holy Roman Empire was not satisfied with Ottoman intervention in Transylvania that is why the French were always curious about that region (Ágoston, p. 130). A letter from the Ottoman court to King John II is contained in Feridun Bey's collection. This letter stated that on the Ottoman side sufficient forces were posted on the borders, particularly in Wallachia's Voivodeship, ready to offer any sort of protection when required (Feridun Bey, p. 501).

M. de la Vigne also wrote to the King of France that the Ottoman troops in Moldavia and Wallachia were ready to help the King of Transylvania, and that they would be able to do a great deal if the Austrians intervened (Charrière, p. 552). As it has been shown the information exchange specially about the geopolitics in Europe was one of the main concerns in the Franco-Ottoman correspondence. Ottoman court also asks for further information anytime which is possible:

"...Yüce dergâhımıza ahabâr-ı hayır mâlinizi ilâm etmekten hâlî olmayasız ki sebeb-i izdiyâd-ı meveddettir" (Feridun Bey, p. 503).

"Do not cease informing Our Exalted Court of favourable news, for this will strengthen the affection between us".

Intelligence in this context means not only military information, but also a sign of political friendship. So, the constant flow of news strengthened the confidence of the two governments, but above all the relationship between them. Further evidence of Franco-Ottoman collaboration can be found in the correspondence about the Battle of Djerba (1560). This analysis includes a section on France's correspondence about the Battle of Djerba (1560), in which before the campaign the latest information was passed to the Ottoman government, the progress of the Ottoman fleet was monitored by French diplomats and its victory reported in a series of detailed dispatches to the French court (Charrière, p. 405). Despite the Franco-Spanish peace of 1560 still being in force the French and the Ottomans continued to exchange intelligence on the Habsburgs' power in the Mediterranean. Ottomans were worried about their alliance with the French course so they caution them by saying:

"İmdi İspanya kralın ve karındaşı işleri hile ve hud'a olup asla i'timâd edecek hâli yoktur" (Feridun Bey, p. 503).

"The King of Spain and his brother conduct their affairs through deceit and treachery; therefore, they are never to be trusted".

Diplomatic Language: Hierarchy and Reciprocity

This study compares sixteenth century correspondence between the Ottoman Empire and France. The main features of the two documentary traditions are laid out in terms of the language of diplomacy employed by both sides. While both the Ottomans and the French were eager to defend the Franco–Ottoman alliance, they portrayed their views on the matter within the parameters of the respective cultures' conventions of diplomacy. Thus, in contrast to the Ottoman chancery's consistent emphasis on the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire and its strictly hierarchical organization, correspondence between the French and the Ottomans was more reciprocal and above all more practical.

The letters of the Ottoman Porte which opened with grandiose imperial titularies generally presented the sultan as the sovereign of his allies whose favor and protection he granted. Even when agreement was reached for the Porte to supply French armies with military assistance, the Porte represented this favor of the sultan to be granted to his allies. The letters presented the sultan's support of his allies to be at the Porte's discretion and on the request of the latter. The sultan's support of his allies was an act of the sultan's imperial authority which he granted his allies of the sultan in his favor.

The closing formula of the Ottoman letters is usually a prayer for the health of the ally and for the downfall of his enemies. For example:

"...Ümiddir ki ittihâd-ı tarafeyn ile adüvvlerimiz pâymâl ve dostlarımız şâdmân ola" (Feridun Bey, p. 501).

"It is hoped that through the union of both sides our enemies will be defeated, and our friends will rejoice".

The subject of the letters which were exchanged by the Ottoman government and Francis I; is not a question of the Ottomans viewing the whole of Europe as a political entity in order to converse with it as such. Rather, the Ottomans recognized the importance of the Christian religion to the various European rulers, and in addressing King Francis they were attempting to communicate with him based on concepts which were meaningful to him within the parameters of his own religious and political environment. In one letter, the Ottomans are recognizing the Christian community as a whole and the various Christian princes of the various regions of Europe as well as the depth of religious crises in France (Morton Beame, p. 107). The various Christian rulers of Europe were referred to by the Ottomans of the period as Mefâhir-i Ümerâ-yı Mesîhiyye, or leaders of the Christians, and Merâci'-i Küberâ-yı Tâife-i Nasrâniyye, or the highest of the Christian community (Feridun Bey, p. 503). Thus the Ottoman government of the period was well aware of the religious confessional make-up of Europe and was trying to take account of these realities in its own relations with the continent.

By presenting the French king, Francis I, as the head of the Christian community, the letter betrays an interest on the part of the Ottoman government in the confessional conflicts going on in Europe. The letter was, no doubt, written at a time when the alliance between the Ottoman Empire and France was under attack from a number of Catholic powers (Anvievias, Nişancıoğlu, p. 95), and it was the intention of the Ottoman chancery to provide the French king with a Christian mandate, thereby challenging the universal pretensions of the Holy Roman Emperor and giving him a basis for his claim to leadership of the Christian community. In short, the letter betrays an interest on the part of the Ottoman government in the rivalries between Christian and Muslim princes, and in the various

questions of legitimacy that were currently engaging the energies of European rulers. The Ottoman government was not indifferent to these conflicts and rivalries and made good use of its knowledge of them in its correspondence with European rulers.

Conclusion

This study provides a comparative analysis of the correspondence contained in Münşe'âtü's-Selâtin and *Négociations de la France dans le Levant* in order to demonstrate that the Franco–Ottoman alliance of the sixteenth century was more than mere military alliance. The correspondence provided by the two sources of study, here considered within the broader framework of political communication, reveals the major role of friendship, of intelligence exchange, and of cooperation to achieve a series of strategic objectives on the part of the two allies. In addition, the use of the Ottoman, as well as the French, sources of study for the sixteenth century will become increasingly more apparent as the early modern international political culture is studied through the medium of the diplomatic correspondence of the era. Moreover, the above-mentioned correspondence of the two allies in Münşe'âtü's-Selâtin refutes the assertion that it is a literary work and clearly establishes the primary-source nature of the study of the Ottoman diplomacy of the era.

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