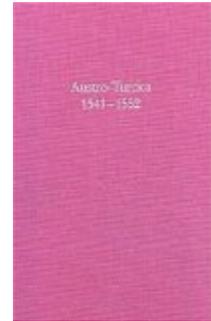




Karl Nehring, ed. *Austro-Turcica, 1541-1552: Diplomatische Akten des habsburgischen Gesandtschaftsverkehrs mit der Hohen Pforte, im Zeitalter SÖ¼leymans des PrÖächtigen*. Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1995. xi + 771 pp. DM 148,00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-56167-8.

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Magnificent Obsession: King Ferdinand, Sultan Suleiman, and Hungary

It has been 155 years since the Hungarian archivist Antal Gevay published the first three volumes of a monumental *Urkunden und Aktenstuecke zur Geschichte der Verhaeltnisse zwischen Oesterreich, Ungarn und der Pforte im XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderte*. Not surprisingly, the ambitiousness of Gevay's undertaking and his own meticulousness in carrying it out prevented him from advancing beyond the first fifteen years of a relationship that began with the Ottomans' annihilation of the Hungarians at the battle of Mohacs in 1526. This attractively produced and carefully edited volume contributes an additional decade of published documents. The editor himself points out that the edition is far from comprehensive, consisting almost exclusively of diplomatic correspondence between King Ferdinand I and his representatives in Constantinople currently housed in Vienna's Haus-Hof und Staatsarchiv. Most of the volume's 244 letters are in Latin, although a few are written in German and a great many in the native Italian of Ferdinand's various envoys. The editor prefaces all of the documents with helpful German-language synopses. He has also appended a detailed glossary and bibliography.

Obviously the correspondence will be useful to students and scholars working on sixteenth-century Habsburg-Ottoman diplomacy. If there is a single thread that ties the collection together, it is Ferdinand's decade-long quest for a peace treaty that secures Turkish recognition of his claims to Hungary, including the strategic principality of Transylvania. Of course, Ferdinand was obliged to settle for a partition that left him with barely

a third of the Hungarian kingdom and the obligation to pay his legendary adversary, Suleiman the Magnificent, a tribute of 30,000 ducats. Unfortunately, the editor has opted not to reproduce the peace treaty, which has been published elsewhere. But it is clear from the second quinquennial of correspondence that it was the king's dissatisfaction with the loss of Transylvania that drove him to military intervention and a consequent renewal of the Habsburg-Ottoman hostilities at the end of 1551.

The volume sheds considerable light on far more than Ferdinand's *Tuerkenpolitik*. For example, it highlights the role that other diplomatic and military theaters played in the Habsburg-Ottoman conflict. There are numerous allusions to Emperor Charles V's naval operations and interests in the Mediterranean theater, especially Ferdinand's assiduous attempts to enlist Suleiman's help in preventing the peacetime depredations of Ottoman corsairs like Dragut. The Habsburg-Valois rivalry is also well represented in reports of intercepted French diplomatic correspondence and other reconnaissance that outlines Francis I's assistance to Turkish corsairs and continuous efforts to frustrate the Habsburg-Ottoman peace talks.

The French king's intensive activities in Constantinople contrast markedly with Ferdinand's relatively passive stance toward Persia. Whereas Suleiman was always in the position to play his French card by threatening to coordinate simultaneous operations against his Habsburg enemies, Vienna's diplomats were never able to do more than convey rumors of peace talks, war preparations, or

actual military encounters between the Turks and Persians. If this volume's letters demonstrate Vienna's evident appreciation of Persia's value as a common enemy of the Turks, they cannot tell us why neither Ferdinand nor his successors ever established meaningful ties with the shah. What it does do is show the reader how Suleiman amused Ferdinand and his envoys during those periods when his armies were tied down on the Persian front with hints of an undivided Habsburg Hungary and promises that he would restrain or punish Dragut's corsairs until that moment in May 1550 when news of battlefield triumphs over the Persians permitted him to reject Ferdinand's pretensions outright, while promoting Dragut to the rank of *Sandjakbeg*.

Of course, dissimulation and double-dealing are the common currency of diplomacy everywhere. Constant allusions to the greasing of all negotiations with money, falcons, and other forms of *baksheesh* lend a special

flavor to this collection of diplomatic correspondence. Less appetizing are the punishments meted out to Ferdinand's emissaries following the king's military intervention in Transylvania, which include their incarceration in the formidable Fortress of the Seven Towers. The volume ends abruptly with Ferdinand penning a letter to his desperately ill and imprisoned envoy, Johann Maria Malvezzi, not knowing for sure whether he is dead or alive. Hopefully we will not have to wait another 150 years to find out if he ever got the letter.

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