

# Islam in the Early Modern Protestant Imagination: Religious and Political Rhetoric of English Protestant– Ottoman Relations (1528-1588)

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**Abstract:** *After the Reconquista of Spain in 1492, it was the Ottomans who presented the greatest external threat to Christian hegemony in Europe. Consequently, Western scholars often presume that sixteenth century European Christians only perceived Muslims in a negative light. The Papacy, the Holy Roman Emperor, and Protestant theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin are all found warning Europe of the imminent threat of Ottoman conquest. However, this is not the complete story. Warnings against this threat only appeared in the works of Luther after the 1529 Siege of Vienna. When Ottoman domination was not a martial threat to Protestant states, Protestant theologians were kind, if not outright laudatory, in their assessment of Muslim piety. Meanwhile, rhetoric within the Ottoman Empire was similarly pro-Protestant. Both Protestants and Muslims understood their common, greater enemy to be the Catholic Church. Because of this, political and economic arrangements mutually beneficial to Christian Europeans and Ottoman Muslims were made possible through a rhetorical rapprochement. By the 1580s, when it became clear that England was leaving the Catholic Church once and for all, Queen Elizabeth I endeavored to create just such a relationship with Sultan Murad III in their shared desire to repel the Catholic–Hapsburgian hegemony in Europe. In this way, despite the anti-Islamic rhetoric of the early Protestant reformers, the English and Ottoman sovereigns became commercial and political partners specifically because England possessed a Protestant identity, religiously unrestricted trade practices, and a set of religious commonalities with the Islamic Ottoman Empire.*

**Keywords:**

Religion, Early Modern, History, Empire, Hegemony, Colonialism, Protestant, Islam, Hapsburg, Elizabeth I, Murad III, Martin Luther, John Calvin

Two significant political realities of the medieval period came to a head in sixteenth century Europe. The first reality was the emergence of modern states. After the medieval Church had laid the foundations of mercantilism and aristocratic landownership as the keys to economic power in Europe, these two social forces amassed so much wealth that economic and political self-interest became virtues of the modern world.<sup>1</sup> The second reality came from the Ottomans by way of seventh century Arabia. Throughout the medieval period, 'Islamdom' had stood at the doorstep of Europe.<sup>2</sup> After the Reconquista of Spain, the Ottoman Turks presented the greatest external threat to Christian hegemony. For this reason, the view is often assumed that sixteenth century Christians had nothing positive to say about Islamdom or Muslims.<sup>3</sup> The Papacy, the Emperor, and Protestant theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin are all found warning Europe of the imminent threat of Islamdom. In light of this, the attempted alliance between Queen Elizabeth and Sultan Murad III, though mutually beneficial, would have been unusual to say the least. The first step in such a direction would necessitate a rhetorical rapprochement if there were to be any political deals between Christian Europeans and Ottoman Muslims. By the 1580s, when it became clear that England was leaving the Catholic Church once and for all, it became incumbent on Queen Elizabeth to find ways of reaching out to Sultan Murad III. This paper explains that, despite the anti-Islamic rhetoric of the early Protestant reformers, the English and Ottoman sovereigns were

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this see Robert B. Ekelund, Robert F. Hébert, Robert D. Tollison, Gary M. Anderson, and Audrey B. Davidson's *Sacred Trust: The Medieval Church as an Economic Firm*, Oxford University Press, 1996. The "Church" herein referenced is the Latin or Western Church.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Islamdom' is analogous to Christendom and is described as "the society in which the Muslims and their faith are recognized as prevalent and socially dominant in one sense or another" (Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, Volume 1, p.58).

<sup>3</sup> Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe: A Thousand Years of Western Myth-Making*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

able to become commercial and political partners specifically because of England's Protestant political identity, trade practices, and beliefs.

Historically, the Pope's ninth century coronation of Charlemagne had set Europe on a course to unite geopolitically under the banner of one catholic and apostolic religion. The medieval period of Europe represents a time when networks of socio-political relationships thrived between the aristocracy and the Church. This was the *parish* system, wherein European villages and towns were organized around the social services of the local church. The church was responsible for replenishing the town market, ensuring property rights, and preserving the general well-being of its parishioners. In this way, the Catholic Church, headquartered most often in Rome, maintained order and reinforced the power of local aristocrats.<sup>4</sup> The aristocracies, in turn, accumulated wealth through regional trade and defended the region as needed. When both institutions became powerful enough and had co-mingled long enough, the Pope called on the twelfth century pan-European aristocracy to colonize the Levant in the name of Christendom. Despite numerous campaigns spanning over a hundred years, medieval Europe never had a lasting success in the region. In 1291, Acre, the last Crusader stronghold in the Levant, was sacked.

In the following decades, the first major 'Islamicate' encroachment of Christian lands since the eighth century Umayyad takeover of Spain was underway - this time in the Balkans and Asia Minor.<sup>5</sup> Led by Osman I, the subsequent Ottoman Empire

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<sup>4</sup> The Church headquarters was temporarily relocated during the Avignon Papacy from 1305-1378 during which time seven different French Popes resided in Avignon, France.

<sup>5</sup> The term Islamicate references that which refers "not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims" (Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Venture*

eventually extended the borders of Islamdom to the Christian cities of Nicea (1331), Pristina (1389), Constantinople (1453), and Belgrade (1521). The Mediterranean was next, with the conquest of Rhodes (1522), Malta (1565), and Cyprus (1571). The Ottomans eventually made it to the gates of Venice (1423) and Vienna (1529). The power of the Ottoman Empire was indeed palpable to sixteenth century Europeans. Christian theologians imagined a great enemy closing in on Europe, while the ever-contentious political sphere saw both threats and opportunities.

### **The Ottomans and the Protestant Reformation**

By the sixteenth century, the religious discourse of Europe was going through dramatic, paradigmatic shifts. Christianity was no longer one catholic faith, and denominations from Lutherans to Anabaptists sprang up across the continent — each professing their own to be the truest religion. Meanwhile, the steady encroachment of the Ottoman Muslims continued; they had taken Hungary, the Balkan Peninsula, and looked to soon take parts of the Italian Peninsula as well. Martin Luther and John Calvin, the principal founders of the Protestant Reformation, show a marked hostility in their theological disputations against Islam after the 1529 Ottoman siege of neighboring Vienna.

For the German Luther, the Prophet Muhammad was unambiguously the “Son of the Devil”, yet remained “second in wickedness to the Pope”.<sup>6</sup> Luther mocks Muhammad by depicting him as usurping and corrupting narratives from the Gospels. “‘Oh,’ exclaimed Muhammad”, he writes, “‘Christ has ascended into heaven; I must have

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*of Islam*, Volume 1, p.59). The first ‘encroachment’ being the Umayyad crossing of the straits of Gibraltar into Spain in 711.

<sup>6</sup> Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe*, p. 128.

an angel through whom God communicates with me!”<sup>7</sup> Luther’s Protestant belief in *sola scriptura* emphasized the Christian Bible as the lens through which one ought to determine and judge moral behavior. In this way, Luther attempted to denigrate Muhammad’s character by scriptural means. For example, Luther attributes the apparent success of Islam to the deceit of Muhammad, citing Daniel 8:25, “by his cunning he makes deceit prosper under his hand”.<sup>8</sup> This speaks not only to Muhammad’s character, but presents an explanation as to how Islam was able to flourish so successfully.

The deceit of Muhammad was a fundamental concern for Luther as he feared that a false prophet might tempt Protestant Christians to falter — much as the practice of indulgences had done for Catholics.<sup>9</sup> For a modern man like Luther, the antidote for such deceit was knowledge. The Protestant Reformation was founded on the principle that any Christian could pick up a Bible in the vernacular and make sense of it for him or herself. In like manner, Luther promoted the study of the Qur’an so that Christians would be prepared should they ever have a direct encounter with Islam. Three works illustrate this hermeneutic: his foreword to the *Tract on the Religion and Customs of the Turk* (1530); his introduction to the German translation of Ricoldo’s *Confutatio al-Koran* (1542); and the preface to the Swiss publication of the Qur’an (1543).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Luther, 1537-1538 Exposition on the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Gospel of John, 69, quoted in Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe*, p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> Luther’s First lectures on the Psalms, quoted in Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe*, p.129.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, Roland E. *Muslims and the Gospel: Bridging the Gap*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2004, p. 210.

These works illustrate Luther's belief that the Turkish people had been led astray by Muhammad's deceit, and his hope that, as with Catholics, the Turks would eventually convert to Protestant Christianity through an honest exchange of theological dialogue. Luther went his entire life without actually meeting a Muslim, Turkish or otherwise, and had only second-hand knowledge of their beliefs and practices. Reflecting his optimism that the Protestant truth of the Gospels remained available to the Turkish people, Luther was careful not to paint the Ottoman Turks with too wide a brush. He took measured pains to treat Islam and the Ottomans as separate categories, leaving open the opportunity for the Turks to eventually convert.

Luther's early writings concerning the threat of Islamdom focused more on the Ottoman Turks as a military threat to Europe rather than as ideological opponents.<sup>11</sup> In the late 1520s, Luther wrote two works specifically addressing the Ottoman Turks: *On War against the Turk* (1528) and *Sermon against the Turk* (1529). In both of these works, Luther implored the Emperor, the German princes, and the German people to defend the principalities against Suleiman, the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>12</sup> In his 1528 *On War against the Turk*, Luther promotes a live-and-let-live policy. "Let the Turk believe and live as he will, just as one lets the papacy and other false Christians live".<sup>13</sup> In fact, Luther sounds outright amiable toward the Turks when he states, "It is said that the Turks are among themselves faithful and friendly, and careful to tell the truth. I believe and I think that they probably have more fine virtues than that".<sup>14</sup> In the following year, however, with the siege of Vienna and the march on Hungary, Luther changed his tune.

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<sup>11</sup> Jonker, G. and Thobani, S., Eds. *Narrating Islam: Interpretations of the Muslim World in European Texts*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010, pp. 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, *Muslims and the Gospel*, p. 208.

<sup>13</sup> Luther, *On War against the Turks*. quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

With the new geographic threat, Luther, in his subsequent *War against the Turks* (1529), declares that the Turk is the clear “enemy of Christ”, a man who “despises women and marriage”, and is “nothing but a murderer or highwayman”.<sup>15</sup> In the face of an impending military threat, Luther felt no compunction in leveling his quill at the people he had a mere year before called ‘virtuous’. Broadly speaking, Luther wanted no part of statecraft or politics and considered the Ottoman incursion of Europe to be a matter best solved by politicians, not the Church. In fact, Luther directly states that he opposes “religious war”.<sup>16</sup>

By 1529, Luther was an established 46 year old theologian in Wittenberg. He had translated the New Testament into German, defended Protestantism against the will of the Emperor at the Diet of Worms, and had come to see later in his life the Ottoman Turks pose a serious threat to German Christendom. In the same year, John Calvin was a 20 year old student of New Testament Greek at the University of Bourges. Over the next few years, he would have a very different vision of the Ottomans—one that always assumed imperial intentions.

From his life in France and later in Switzerland, Calvin had only a “very casual” knowledge of Muhammad and almost no opportunity to converse with actual Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Jan Slomp acknowledges that, like Luther, many of Calvin’s complaints about Muslims were “really an occasion to vent his obvious criticism of Roman Catholics”, rather than actual commentaries on the beliefs and practices of Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Luther, *War against the Turk*, p. 79-124.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Muslims and the Gospel*, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup> Slomp, “Calvin and the Turks.” *Christian Muslim Encounters*. p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Calvin states that Muhammad is “the companion of the Pope who has done his very best to seduce those poor people who were enraged and saturated and poisoned by his false doctrine”.<sup>19</sup> Calvin condemns Muhammad and the Pope as the two horns of the Antichrist described in Daniel’s prophetic seventh chapter.<sup>20</sup> For Calvin, both the Pope and Muhammad seduced potential Protestant Christians away from the true path through false teachings and idolatrous practices.

After witnessing Suleiman reach Vienna in 1529, both Luther and Calvin came to fear the influence of Islam and denigrated Muhammad as a consequence of that fear. Calvin in particular condemned Islam for its veneration of Muhammad as a prophet and claimed that Muslims set Mohammed apart from other men as an idol. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin condemns the treatment of Muhammad as that of an idol. “The Turks in the present day”, he states, proclaim “with full throat that the Creator of heaven and earth is their God”, yet they reject the sovereignty of Christ and “substitute an idol in His place”.<sup>21</sup> The replacing of Jesus with Muhammad is a grievous action for Calvin.<sup>22</sup> He proclaims in a sermon, “[the Turks] set their Mahomet in the place of God’s Son”, for which he questions, “ought such a one be put to death, without forbearing?”<sup>23</sup>

Calvin took the position that Islam was not merely a threat to European Christendom, but to potential Christians all over the world. Slomp finds Calvin believed that

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134. See also Calvin’s *Opera*, Sermon 28.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, Deuteronomy 18:15.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. II:6:4.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Calvin’s commentaries on Deuteronomy 13:1-11 and *The Gospel According to St. John*. II:261. 1 John 2:23.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*. Deuteronomy 13:1-11.



Muslims were former Christians “deceived by Muhammad”.<sup>24</sup> In this way, Calvin placed the blame for Islam as a false religion that sentenced souls to damnation solely on one man, Muhammad. In Calvin’s *Opera*, Sermon 26 on Daniel 9, he explains that “Muhammad had corrupted the greater part of the world, setting an example for other sects which always want to say and invent something new. All sects that exist today ... have come out of this mud puddle.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Muhammad is not merely responsible for Islam as a false religion, but all other sects that have developed since then that mislead the people who, in Calvin’s mind, rightfully belong to Christ. Calvin blames Muhammad for the damned state of all Muslims, citing Muhammad’s “deceitfulness” that has “bewitched” Muslims to idolize him instead of worshiping Christ.<sup>26</sup> With such clear condemnation, it was inconceivable in the 1530s that a Protestant state might ally itself with the Ottomans on the grounds of religion, but fifty years of history produced just such an opportunity.

### **The Ottomans and the Political Realities of a Rising Europe**

By the latter half of the sixteenth century, the former unity of Catholic Europe was gone. The common culture that Charlemagne and the Pope had once envisioned for Europe was now irreversibly consolidating into increasingly powerful states. At the 1521 Diet of Worms, Martin Luther famously railed against the Catholic authority of the Holy Roman Emperor — the very crown that Charlemagne had established and Spain’s branch of the powerful Habsburg family now possessed.

The reign of England’s Henry VIII brought about the end of Catholic monasticism and papal interference in England. When he divorced his wife Catherine of Aragon in

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<sup>24</sup> Slomp, “Calvin and the Turks,” p. 133.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*.

1533, Henry effectively cut England's political ties with Habsburg Spain.<sup>27</sup> Henry's Tudor dream of English independence from Catholic hegemony was the final nail in the coffin of the old medieval parish system — his children would be left to pick up the pieces. Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth all struggled back and forth with Catholic and Protestant visions of England until Queen Elizabeth's *Act of Uniformity* in 1558 set the Church of England down its famous *via media*.

The growing power of the European aristocracy no longer required the social network engendered by the Church to distribute trade goods. In fact, with the presence of the Ottoman Empire now blocking Western Europe's trade routes to India and China, the Atlantic became the defining avenue of European dominance and economic progress. The older, heavier, more expensive *carracks* were replaced by ingenious developments in naval technology that led to the building of faster, lighter, and cheaper *galleons* that could be retrofitted for warfare or trade.<sup>28</sup>

For Spain, galleons served two chief purposes. First, they were used commercially to ship gold from the New World and expand trade worldwide. This was the key to Habsburg economic dominance in the sixteenth century. Secondly, since the demise of Catherine of Aragon and her daughter Mary, England had been politically and economically cutoff from Spanish and Habsburg influence. So the development of the galleon enabled the rich and powerful colonial empire of Spain to plot the destruction of Elizabeth's reign and the restoration of a Catholic English state. In 1582, Spain began construction of a new Armada.

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<sup>27</sup> Henry's childhood tutor, Thomas More, had been a devout Catholic and Humanist. More implored Henry to seek Catholic solutions that would benefit the Church and all Europeans. It is perhaps telling that Thomas More invented the word "utopia" in his writings. More's dogma and idealism, however, did not sit well with Henry, and More was executed in 1535.

<sup>28</sup> E. T. Dankwa, "The Galleon", <http://www.in-arch.net/Sqrigg/squrig.html>. 20 Dec. 1999, Accessed 21 April 2011.

In light of Spain's new military project, and with no imminent Turkish threat to English soil, Elizabeth I made the daring move to send the first English ambassador to Constantinople to bargain with Sultan Murad III of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup> William Harborne was chosen for the task, having travelled to Constantinople throughout the 1570s with British merchants in the Levant Trading Company.<sup>30</sup> Through her ambassador, Elizabeth and Murad corresponded back and forth in Latin, each concerned with Spanish and Habsburg dominance. Murad was quite beguiling in his treatment of the sovereign of England, referring to Elizabeth as:

The pride of women who follow Jesus, the most excellent of the ladies honored among the Messiah's people, the arbitress of the affairs of the Christian community, who trails the skirts of majesty and gravity, the queen of the realm of Ingiltere, Queen Eliz'ade.<sup>31</sup>

Ambassador Harborne, in turn, referred to Murad as "the most august and benign Caesar" — illustrating Elizabeth's view that England did not perceive the Ottomans as conquerors, while also diplomatically casting Murad as the rightful successor of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>32</sup>

Elizabeth's ultimate goal was to persuade Murad to attack Spain as a diversion, so that England would have time to prepare for Spain's assault of the English coast.<sup>33</sup>

While Elizabeth's proposed Anglo–Ottoman alliance was never quite realized, trade between England and the Ottoman Empire flourished under the Levant Company.

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<sup>29</sup> John Goody, *Islam in Europe*, Malden: Polity Press, 2004, p.162.

<sup>30</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, New Haven: Cambridge: University Press, 2007, p. 39. When in Ottoman waters, Harborne had traded under the French flag.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Goody, *Islam in Europe*, p. 42.

The English traded woolen goods and weapons with the Ottomans, while the Ottomans traded in sugar and fruit from their own colonies.<sup>34</sup> England even exported tin, lead, and ammunition to the Ottoman Empire for use in cannon casting.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, the tin and scrap-metal that Protestant England sold to the Ottomans came from their recent dismantling of Catholic buildings, bells, and metal statuary.<sup>36</sup> With trade came a market for stories of the exotic East, and England's finest writers and playwrights rose to the challenge. Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1587), George Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* (1594) and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1588), *Merchant of Venice* (1596), and *Othello* (1603) are all indications of the growing exposure of England to Islamic identity and culture. English writers in the early seventeenth century praised the Ottomans as being majestic, powerful, and civil — one stating that the English traveler “could not find a better scene than Turkey”.<sup>37</sup>

The Ottomans had been concerned about the regional dominance of Spain for some time. In 1533, Murad's famous grandfather, Suleiman I, sent the king of France 100,000 ducats to finance a never-fully-realized coalition between France, England, and the German princes against Charles V.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans maintained banking relations and investments with France in solidarity against Spanish hegemony.<sup>39</sup> When Elizabeth came calling to Murad in the 1580s, it was, in part, a symbol of England's growth as a major European economic power. In the late sixteenth century, England was still a relative

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1640. Cited in Anna Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation: Travel Writing and National Identity in Early Modern England*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2008. p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Halil Inalcik, “The Turkish Impact on the Development of Modern Europe”. *The Ottoman State and Its Place in World History*. Ed. Kemal H. Karpat. Leiden: Brill, 1974: 51-60. p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

unknown to the Ottomans. English pilgrims in Ottoman Jerusalem routinely called themselves 'Frenchmen' because the local Turks had no idea what an 'Englishman' was.<sup>40</sup> Two decades afterward, English investors would fund charters for the British East India Company and British colonies in the New World — paving the way for the eventual dominance of the British Empire.

European commercial relations with the Ottomans flourished across Europe as different nations saw the advantage that could be gained from Ottoman support. France and England independently sought alliances with the Ottomans against Catholic Spain. With Suleiman's siege of Vienna in 1529, the Lutherans were placed in a favorable position to force concessions from the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.<sup>41</sup> Feeling pressure from the Lutherans within, the French to the west, and the Ottomans to the east, Charles V sought a truce with the Ottomans in 1539.<sup>42</sup> This indirect relation of power between the Lutheran Protestants and the Ottoman Muslims is typical of the Islamicate–Christian relations of the period. Typically, it was Catholic forces and funds that resisted the advance of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the anti–Islamic and anti–Muhammad rhetoric of theologians like Luther and Calvin, Islam was the best thing to happen to the Protestant cause, *qua* Catholic hegemony. Luther's struggle with Charles V could have gone very differently had Suleiman's armies not been knocking at Germany's door.

The Catholic Church's actions only made matters worse for themselves. When the Ottomans and Persians went to war in 1578, Pope Gregory XIII issued a papal ban on Christians trading arms with Muslims.<sup>43</sup> This had the effect of restricting Spain, France, and the Holy Roman Empire from an otherwise thoroughly lucrative

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Goody, *Islam in Europe*, p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

commercial opportunity. At the same time, this ban reinforced stronger ties between the Ottomans and Protestants, like England, who felt no compunction to obey the geopolitical orders of the Vatican. After England's defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, England expanded its trade and colonization to the Americas, India, and China, due in large part to their financial success through Ottoman trade. Other Protestant nations, namely Holland and Germany, found global economic prosperity in the coming centuries by continuing the Protestant willingness to trade arms with Muslims and other non-Christians.<sup>44</sup>

### **Religious Justification for Political Maneuvering**

With the desire for mutual protection, economic advantage and cultural exchange with the Ottomans came the diplomatic necessity of establishing a rhetorical baseline of similarity between Muslim and Christian ideologies — lest their shared political and economic ambitions falter. Making such political and military agreements required a great deal of finesse, especially given the fact that religious leaders like Luther and Calvin were so vehemently opposed to Islam. Thus, the objective of European politicians and diplomats was to find a way around this opposition, a way to show that Muslims were not the villains that Luther and Calvin had described after the 1529 siege. To accomplish this, English and Central European politicians appealed to the perceived similarities of Islam and Protestantism, while simultaneously demonizing their common political and religious foe, Catholicism.

Early Protestants found several ways to compare themselves to Islam in a positive light. First, both Protestantism and Islam rejected the notion of monastic orders — a prominent feature of Catholicism.<sup>45</sup> Alongside Henry VIII's famous dissolution of the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> L. Colley, *Captives, Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850*. London: Cape. 2002. p.122.

English monasteries, the Prophet Muhammad is supposed to have once declared, “We shall have no Monk–ery”.<sup>46</sup> The two also shared an iconoclast view with concern to religious imagery in places of worship.<sup>47</sup> Such images, for both Protestants and Muslims, detracted from the proper worship of God, who is an abstraction and therefore cannot and ought not be reduced to an image. Both the Ottomans and the English made repeated political use of religious rhetoric by demonizing the perceived idolatry of the Catholic Church.

The shared iconoclasm between Protestants and Muslims can be traced back to Luther’s 1528 tract, where he speaks of the “Turk’s holiness, that they tolerate no images or pictures”, commending Muslims as being “even holier than our destroyers of images” who still tolerate images on rings and ornaments — while “the Turk tolerates none of them and stamps nothing but letters on his coins”.<sup>48</sup> In the 1580s, Queen Elizabeth utilized this shared iconoclast ideology when she reminded Murad in her diplomatic correspondence that both Protestants and Muslims shared a religious rejection of icons.<sup>49</sup>

In their political correspondence, the English and the Ottomans used the argument that they “were alike haters of the ‘idolatries’ practiced by the King of Spain”.<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth I wrote a letter to Murad calling herself the “most mighty defender of the Christian faith against all the idolatry of those unworthy ones that live among Christians, and falsely profess the name of Christ”.<sup>51</sup> So, in essence, Elizabeth

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<sup>46</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Luther, *On War against the Turk*.

<sup>49</sup> Goody, *Islam in Europe*, p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth I, quoted in Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624*. University of Delaware Press, 2005. p. 64.

framed her hopes of political alliance as being a partnership between the pious monotheists of England and Turkey against the idolatrous Spanish Habsburgs.<sup>52</sup>

For Murad, the policies set forth by his grandfather, Suleiman, anticipated future political opportunities that early Protestant leaders simply did not foresee.<sup>53</sup> Support for Protestants was fundamental to the foreign policy of Suleiman's Empire. In 1552, six years after Martin Luther had died, Suleiman wrote to the Protestant German princes with the goal of inciting a rebellion against Emperor Charles V, in order to assist Suleiman's march into Germany.<sup>54</sup> In that letter, he swore an oath to the Protestants that they would not be harmed in a proposed Ottoman Germany.<sup>55</sup> In a later letter to the Lutherans of the Low Countries, who were at the time subject to Spain, Suleiman offered his assistance to them on the basis that they did not worship idols, believed in one God, and were enemies of both the Emperor and the Pope.<sup>56</sup> In turn, Suleiman granted those and all Protestants freedom of religion, should they decide to immigrate to Ottoman territory as many Reconquista Jews and Muslims had done in 1492.<sup>57</sup>

In 1574, it was Murad's turn to seek greatness. When he wrote to the Low Country Lutherans, he used the same tactic as Suleiman — appealing to the similarities that might foster a friendship between Ottomans and the Lutherans subject to Spain:

As you, for your part, do not worship idols, you have banished the idols and portraits and “bells” from churches, and declared your faith by stating that God Almighty is one and Holy Jesus is His Prophet and

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<sup>52</sup> Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987. p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Inalcik, “The Turkish Impact on the Development of Modern Europe”, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



Servant, and now, with heart and soul, are seeking and desirous of the true faith; but the faithless one they call Papa does not recognize his Creator as One, ascribing divinity to Holy Jesus (upon him be peace!), and worshiping idols and pictures which he has made with his own hands, thus casting doubt upon the oneness of God and instigating how many servants to that path of error.<sup>58</sup>

So it was that in 1585, with the Anglo–Spanish War nearly upon Elizabeth’s shore, Elizabeth and Murad discussed an Anglo–Ottoman alliance against Catholic Spain grounded in religious commonality. Though the alliance never came to fruition, the resulting trade agreements between the two peoples gave England the impetus to become a worldwide empire of its own. Because England was a Protestant state, outside of papal authority, it was in a favored position to seek an alliance with the Ottoman Empire. Further, as a consequence of ignoring the 1578 papal ban on Christians dealing in arms with Muslims, England was in an ideal position to trade prosperously with the Ottomans — to the neglect of the Catholic states. Finally, the commonalities between Protestantism and Islam, while lost to Luther and Calvin after 1529, gave both England and the Ottomans plenty of rhetorical room to ground their commercial and political aspirations in a mutual religious discourse.

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<sup>58</sup> Murad III, quoted in Burton, Jonathan. *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624*. University of Delaware Press, 2005. p. 62.

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