François de Beaucaire de Péguyillon and the Ottoman Empire:
Perceptions of a Sixteenth-Century Militant Bishop

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In 1568, a French ecclesiastic closely connected to the Guise and the ultra-Catholic faction set out to write a history of France of the past one hundred years. After twenty years of work, the author, François de Beaucaire de Péguyillon, finished the *Rerum gallicarum commentarii* (*Notes of French Affairs*), which he described in the subtitle as *An Historical Treatise Drawn from the Opportunity and Various Places of Italy, Germany, Spain, Hungary, and Turkey.*¹ As such a description would suggest, the Ottoman Empire loomed large on the European continent in the *Commentarii*, and Beaucaire paid significant attention to the Islamic Empire and its alliance with France throughout the work. Indeed, the Ottomans receive almost as much attention as Charles V. Yet, Beaucaire’s views of France’s Muslim ally remain uninvestigated.

Traditionally, historians have drawn a strict division between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe. These scholars, however, have come to this same general conclusion through one of two ways. Some assert the primacy of cultural differences; others, religious distinctions. Nonetheless, the traditional narrative asserts that Europeans saw the Ottomans as wholly other.² For instance, one

¹ Francisco Belcario Puguilione, *Rerum gallicarum commentarii accessit ex occasione, variis locis, Italicae, Germanicae, Hispanicae, & Turcicae historiae tractatio* (Lyon: Claudii Landry, 1625); Albert Lesmaris, *Un Historien du XVIe siècle: François de Beaucaire de Puyguillon, 1514-1591, sa vie, ses écrits, sa famille* (Clermont-Ferrand: G. de Bussac, 1958). All of the translations contained in this paper are my own unless otherwise indicated. Also, I would like to thank Charles Lipp and Nadejda Popov for their insights and comments throughout this research project.

historian has asserted that Europeans viewed the Turks as “different in kind from the Christian princes.” Works focusing on specifically French perceptions have largely agreed that France differed little from other European states despite the Franco-Ottoman alliance. The French, Clarence Rouillard argued, saw the Ottomans as the “epitome of the Orient.” Yet these works tend to focus on French images of the Turk rather than the Ottoman Empire and how it interacted with the rest of Europe. Furthermore, these works pay little attention to French views during the second half of the sixteenth century, a period of particularly staunch religious intolerance in France.

However, French perceptions of the Ottoman Empire and its relationship to Europe during the latter-1500s deserve specific focus. The public defense of the Franco-Ottoman alliance, its continued duration, and the particular religious contexts of the period combine to make the French views of the Ottomans in the last decades of the sixteenth century especially interesting. After the alliance became public, the royal court patronized the publication of apologetics that justified positive foreign relations with the Ottomans—some of these were published multiple times. In addition, the Franco-Ottoman alliance continued throughout the French Wars of Religion. As the diplomatic historian De Lemar Jensen argued, the Ottoman Empire became an important part of what he called France’s “diplomacy of survival” during the religious wars. So, how the French cultural differences, see Gerard Delanty, Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 35-8; John Hale, The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 38-50.

3 Baumer, 27 (emphasis in original).


5 Rouillard provides a chronological history of the diplomacy between France and the Ottoman Empire, but his study of the image of the Turks remains thematic; Alexandra Merle, Le miroir Ottoman: une image politique des hommes dans la littérature géographique espagnole et française (XVIe-XVIIe siècle) (Paris: Presses de L’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003) argues that the French and Spanish did not hold fundamentally different perceptions of the Ottomans in spite of fundamentally different diplomacy toward the Turkish Empire. When Merle discusses historical factors that may have influenced French perceptions, they center around events that impacted Europe as a whole, like the Battle of Lepanto, rather than particularly French factors like the Wars of Religion.


7 De Lemar Jensen, “The Ottoman Turks in the Sixteenth Century French Diplomacy,”
viewed their Ottoman ally during these times of religious violence tells us much about how they perceived their geo-political world and the Ottoman Empire's place in it. The connection between Beaucaire and the ultra-Catholic faction makes the *Commentarii* particularly illuminating in these matters since he maintained an especially religious world-view centered around traditional Christendom. This article argues that despite his staunchly religious mentality, the views of Beaucaire present a vision of the Ottoman Empire that was not strictly separate from the rest of Europe, but part of a common geo-political community that could accommodate the Islamic Empire's continued presence on the continent and in Christian European affairs. Certainly, Beaucaire continued to maintain the ideal of a united Christendom, but this ideal did not preclude him from recognizing the Ottomans as an important part of European and French diplomacy.

Even though the *Commentarii* would not be published until 1625 – after Beaucaire had died – the bishop wrote the historical treatise during the last decades of the sixteenth century. Thus, it provides us with a useful window into French views of their Muslim ally during a period of religious and domestic turmoil. Indeed, it was Beaucaire's position during the religious tumult that makes his views so remarkable. He was a respected ecclesiastic and nobleman in France. Beaucaire dedicated much of his political and religious life to the fight against heresy. In the 1530s, he associated himself with Charles de Guise, the future Cardinal of Lorraine, as a close counselor and collaborator. The relationship served Beaucaire well as he became the Bishop of Metz in 1555 and later attended the Council of Trent as a member of the Cardinal's retinue. The two were so close that there were whispers that the bishop wrote some of the orations the cardinal delivered at Trent. Beaucaire, however, fervently denied such accusations. When the Wars of Religion erupted, he aligned himself with the militant Catholics and remained an ardent member of the Guise's clientele network. As the Bishop of Metz, Beaucaire took it upon himself to push for a policy against religious pluralism. He emphasized the necessity to prevent Protestantism from slipping into his flock. At a general synod at Vic in 1560, where various regional ecclesiastics met to discuss the religious troubles, Beaucaire took a hard line toward heresy. He asserted to the magistrates at the Synod that anyone tolerating heretics would be banished. Moreover, he also participated in the public attack against Calvinism, publishing a scathing pamphlet against Calvinist dogma in 1567. In short, Beaucaire was a man of

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9 Lesmaris, 5.

10 Francisco Belcario Penguillone, *Adversus Impium Calvini ac Calvinianorum Dogma de*
strong and militant opinions, and men like Charles Cardinal of Lorraine, the
Guise family, and other ecclesiastics respected him for both his intellectual
capabilities as well as his staunch support for the traditional religion.

Thus, it would seem by his militant Catholicism that Beaucaire would see
the Ottoman Empire as completely separate and distinct from the rest of
Christian Europe. Certainly, in many ways he did. As his ecclesiastical position
and connection with the Cardinal of Lorraine would suggest, Beaucaire
maintained a religiously centered world-view in the face of religious plurality. He
held on to the ideal of a united Christendom. It was this religious division
between Christian princes of Europe and the Islamic Ottoman Empire that
separated the two in his mind. He saw the Ottomans as the “longest and most
dangerous enemy of the Christian persuasion.”

This division becomes especially
clear in his discussion of the alliance between François I and Suleiman the
Magnificent that was consummated in the middle of the 1530s. Beaucaire
depicted clearly what he described as the dangers of making alliances with the
Ottomans in opposition to other Christian principalities. As he stated, François I
“undertook an impious action, and encouraged Suleiman… to invade Italy not
remembering that all Christians who had implored the aid of this kind were cut
down unluckily, thrown into miserable slavery, or expelled from their own
dominions.” Although the fall of Byzantium (1483) came a hundred years
earlier, it still resonated with the bishop, and he provided the fallen Empire as an
example of the states conquered by the Ottomans after maintaining regular
diplomacy with them. Such examples provoked fear and trepidation within
Beaucaire of the Franco-Ottoman relationship, and he feared the impact of such
an alliance on all of Christian Europe.

The ideal of a unified Christendom in opposition to the Ottomans was
ever present in Beaucaire’s worldview. Beaucaire demonstrated this religious
dichotomy through the way that he referred to the major political players in his

Infantium in matrum uteris sanctificatione & pleraque alia clavini etiam dogmata brevis
commentarius (Paris: Claudium Fremy, 1567).

11 “Christianae persuasionis hoste infestissimo longissimis.” Peguilione, Rerum gallicarum
commentarii, 737.

12 Beaucaire dated the beginning of the Alliance as 1537, but official diplomacy began in
1535 with the institution of the first French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. In 1536,
the two powers formally concluded the alliance after they negotiated the Capitulations.
See Jensen, 455-56.

13 “impium facinus aggressus est, & Solymanum...ad invadendam Italiam incitavit haud
memor Christianos omnes qui huiusmodi auxilia implorarent infeliciter caesos, aut in
miseram servitutem coniectos, aus suis ditionibus expulsos.” Peguilione, Rerum
gallicarum commentarii, 685.

14 Ibid., 685.
treatise. He did not write of Europeans and Asians or the West and the East, and such assertions would have been difficult to maintain since the Ottomans controlled significant lands in Europe during the time that the bishop was writing. Instead, the distinctions were religious for Beaucaire. He wrote of all Christians and the Respublica Christianna in opposition to the Mahomates or Muslims. To be sure, Beaucaire used non-religious cultural identifiers, but these were limited to the principalities – French, English, Turks, etc. – rather than common trans-regional identities. The point is that the division was religious more than cultural in the mind of Beaucaire.

Nonetheless, cultural distinctions that separated the Ottomans from the Christian princes still figured prominently in the Commentarii. Indeed, the militant bishop produced a vile portrait of the Ottomans. He viewed them as tyrants, untrustworthy, and ignoble. For Beaucaire, the “tyranny of the Ottoman Turks… [was] the most immense” and the “most hideous” in Europe. He was appalled that the ascension of an Emperor to the throne could be coupled with the execution of his brothers and other kinsmen. Moreover, the Bishop of Metz lamented the lack of limits during the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. As he recalled, “no type of cruelty was withheld against the besieged.”

So Beaucaire would seem to support the traditional narrative that the Ottoman Empire was viewed as wholly other from the rest of Europe. Yet, cultural and religious differences were not impassible even for this militant Catholic, nor did Beaucaire depict the Turks as the epitome of the Orient. On the contrary, he praised some of the qualities that he associated with the Ottomans. The strength of the Ottoman military was particularly impressive to him. Not only was it sizable and mighty, it was also efficient and well prepared. He regularly wrote of the “amazing industry of the Turk” and the “great army of Suleiman,” who had such “great virtue at war.” The praise from Beaucaire went beyond military prowess as well. For instance he praised the Ottomans for their sobriety as opposed to the “the drunkenness of the German.”

The discussion of the joint Franco-Ottoman siege of Nice in the

16 Ibid.
17 “nullo crudelitatis genere in obsessos omisso.” Peguilione, Rerum gallicarum commentarii, 1.
18 See, Baumer, 27; M.S. Anderson, The Origins of the European State System (New York: Longman Group, 1998); Also see Merle, Le Miroir Ottoman, 225, which argues that the views of the French and Spanish demonstrate that the East was the invention of the West.
20 “Germani crapulae.” Ibid., 1012.
Commentarii shows that the bishop’s praise of the Turkish military was not simply a product of the Ottoman peril, although, as we have seen, fear of the Ottomans cannot be completely discounted. In the 1540s, Nice was under the control of Savoy, an ally of Charles V. François I negotiated a joint campaign with the Sultan to attack the city through the French ambassador, Antoine Escalin des Eymars, or as he was known, Captain Polin. Although the siege failed to take the citadel and was subsequently abandoned, the campaign and the resulting wintering of the Ottoman fleet in Toulon was a dramatic demonstration of Franco-Ottoman cooperation against Charles V and his allies. Beaucaire did not neglect to discuss this exceptional event. He praised the Ottoman military during the joint campaign. He even drew stark comparisons between the French and Ottoman armies, clearly privileging the Turkish prowess. He stated that the Ottomans had “so great a fleet,” and the French soldiers were “few” and unprepared, compared to the “foreign power.” The siege of Nice was an exceptional moment for the bishop, for “it proffered occasion that they [the fierce pirates] united with France in war.”

While he certainly acknowledged that the Ottomans were not part of Christendom – and certainly in that way, they were “different in kind” – it did not prevent Beaucaire from starting to see them as part of his geo-political world. He even defended France’s interactions with them. In this way he prefigured the almost universal perception of the Ottoman Empire as a European state that Daniel Goffman argues existed by 1700. His ideological conceptualization of Europe was forced by the diplomatic and political reality to accommodate the Ottomans within his world-view. In many ways, he presented them as a part of the same regional, diplomatic, and political world. Ottoman policy and actions directly influenced France and the rest of Christian Europe. Excluding the Islamic Empire outright from the European community, even conceptually, was becoming increasingly difficult. Indeed, for Beaucaire the history of French affairs from 1461 to 1562 could not be written without including extensive

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22 “tantam classem” … “rari errant milites, qui navies conscenderent” … “hostes vires.” Peguilione, Rerum gallicarum commentarii, 747. Because Beaucaire was discussing the Ottomans as allies, he is using “hostes” in terms of a foreigner rather than an enemy.

23 “Piratica immanitas Franciscum Regem in Germanorum odium maxime induxit, & vt in bellum Gallicum liberalius contribuerent, occasioem praebuat.” Peguilione, Rerum gallicarum commentarii, 758. By “piratica immanitas,” Beaucaire was referring to Barbarossa and his men.

24 Baumer, 27 (emphasis in original).

discussions of the Ottomans. In other words, while Beaucaire viewed his world in religious terms as Christendom in the face of the collapse of that ideal, he also accommodated a place for the Ottomans as part of a broader regional world-view.

Unlike other countries of the Orient, the Ottomans directly influenced European affairs, and the Bishop of Metz was aware of this fact. For all of the ideological distaste for the Ottomans, Beaucaire nonetheless treated them in an inclusive manner in his historical treatise. To a certain extent, the Commentarii as a whole charted the Ottoman Empire’s process from the aftermath of its conquest of Constantinople to its push into the system of alliances in Europe and finally to its inclusion into common geo-political community. Beaucaire knew that the Ottoman Empire could not be ignored from within European diplomacy. Nor could they be run off the continent, as his great praise of Ottoman military would indicate. The constant presence of the Ottomans throughout the Commentarii is evidence of this, and the manner with which the author discussed their activities, especially the Franco-Ottoman alliance is further telling. The Ottoman Empire was not always considered the enemy, as Beaucaire highlighted the prowess of the Turkish fleet and its contribution to the Franco-Ottoman siege of Nice in 1543. The events of Mediterranean and Eastern Europe were of a significant interest to him, and the Turks played no small role in drawing his eye in that direction. Throughout the treatise, he focused on the many interactions between the Ottoman Empire and other European states, not least of all the French.

Even while Beaucaire criticized Christian alliances with the Ottomans, he recognized that the French alliance was just one “of many others with the Turks” that had existed. He specifically defended the French alliance against Charles V’s rhetoric, whose accusations Beaucaire categorized as “the gravest” in respect to the Ottomans. The French were not the first Christian kingdom to ally with the Ottomans. Although the Turkish Empire was a religious enemy whom he detested, he must not have seen that as strong enough grounds to prevent the alliance. As such, he agreed with arguments that defended the alliance on theological grounds as well. Beaucaire wrote, “he [François] proves that neither in the old nor in the new testaments are alliances with idolaters forbidden with the examples of David, of Solomon, and of the other Kings of the Jews.”

26 Peguilione, Rerum gallicarum commentarii, 686-90, 736-8, 746-7, as well as numerous other instances.
27 Ibid., 746-7.
28 “nonnullorumque aliorum cum turcis.” Ibid., 736.
29 “gravissimus.” Ibid.
30 Ibid., 736-37.
31 “neque veteri, neque novo instrumento piorum cum idololatris interdicta esse foedera Davidis, Salomonis, caeterorum Iudaeorum Regum exemplis probat.” Ibid., 736.
Beaucaire seems to have been referring to an oratory by Jean du Bellay published in 1544 that defended the Franco-Ottoman alliance. Du Bellay used the examples of David and Solomon as well as others to justify the rights of monarchs to participate in commerce and military communications (intelligences) with whomever they like.\textsuperscript{32} The Franco-Ottoman alliance brought about the need to defend François I’s actions, and those works that did just that permeated into the discourse of this militant Catholic. To be sure, Beaucaire himself was not an apologist of the alliance, but as his discussion of the alliance shows, even some of the arguments defending it persuaded even the militant Beaucaire.

Even if the religious concerns colored the views of Beaucaire, it was increasingly difficult for him to maintain the ideal of a unified Christendom in the face of such disunity. He even provided the Ottomans with a firm place in the regional, diplomatic, and political world of his time. The bishop of Metz accepted them as the inheritors of the Byzantine Empire, although he did so in no happy manner. In the final pages he asserted as much. He wrote, “thus the Turks descending from the Tatars, Greek Emperors, and later the Hungarians arising to power they seized the Greek Empire and Hungary.”\textsuperscript{33}

So how can we account for this seemingly contradictory in the world-view of Beaucaire? The ideal of a united Christendom was clearly disintegrating in the second half of the sixteenth century, and this was especially evident in France. Between the 1570s and 1580s, the period in which this militant Catholic wrote, France experienced some of the bloodiest years of the Wars of Religion. For example, the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, one of the bloodiest episodes of the wars, transpired in 1572 after the failed assassination attempt on the Huguenot Gaspard de Coligny. Fear of Huguenot retribution led to the coordinated killings of several Protestant leaders in Paris, which sparked a wave of popular violence against the Protestants throughout France. The event set off another civil war that year.\textsuperscript{34} Almost a decade later, the year 1584 brought one of the most destructive civil wars when François, the Duke of Anjou and successor to the throne, died. The Protestant Henri of Navarre became successor by right if Henri III (1574-1589) died, which propelled the construction of the Catholic League to prevent a Huguenot from ascending to the throne. Anjou’s death


\textsuperscript{33} “sic turcae a tartaris oriundi a Graecis Imperatoribus, & postea ab Hungaris ad opem invitati Graecum Imperium, Hungariamque occuparunt.” Peguilione, Rerum gallicarum commentarii, 1012

brought about the Eighth Civil War, which lasted more than a decade.\(^{35}\) So, not only was Beaucaire writing during an era of violent schisms within all of European Christendom, but the reality of religious disunity was readily apparent in France during this time of sectarian warfare as well.

Moreover, the Franco-Ottoman alliance formed in the 1530s did not disappear despite civil war. In fact, France continued diplomatic relations with its Muslim ally throughout the turmoil. They even negotiated the Capitulations with the Ottomans during the third civil war in 1569 and renewed them again in 1581.\(^{36}\) Essentially, just before France would be shaken to its core by civil war over religious pluralism at home, the Most Christian King was forced into an alliance with the Turkish infidel in order to preserve the state against Charles V.\(^{37}\) As Géraud Poumarède has argued, the Franco-Ottoman alliance was a “turning point” in the diplomacy between Christian princes and the Ottoman Empire. The relationship intensified the lines of diplomacy and commerce between France and its new ally, prefiguring “other peaceful and perennial relationships” with the Ottomans.\(^{38}\) As has already been discussed briefly above, domestically the alliance provoked a discussion that would produce defenses of its benefits to France and that attempted to legitimize relations with the Turks.\(^{39}\)

Beaucaire realized this shifting diplomatic situation even in the middle of France’s Wars of Religion. In fact, Christian disunity and failure to unite against the Muslim Turk colors much of the *Commentarii*. Beaucaire began the treatise with the failure of the Council of Mantua to bring about war against the Turks, which he blamed on inter-Christian dissension.\(^{40}\) One of the thirty books that comprise the *Commentarii* is dedicated to the joint French and Ottoman military campaign against Nice and the Ottoman fleet wintering in Toulon between 1543 and 1544. Beaucaire understood that the alliance François I initiated with

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\(^{35}\) See Holt, 123-77.


\(^{39}\) See du Bellay, Sagon, and Dolet for examples of the apologetics that followed the creation of the Franco-Ottoman alliance. All three in different ways legitimate cross-religious diplomatic relationships, especially concerning the Ottomans. Sagon, and du Bellay both do so using theological arguments and examples from the bible. For more on this topic, see Poumarède, *Pour en finir avec la Croisade*, 619-28.

\(^{40}\) Peguilione, *Rerum gallicarum commentarii*, 1-4.
Suleiman the Magnificent was a product of Christian disunity. He wrote that the alliance was conceived through “the deep anger and enraged jealousy” of François I against Charles V, and he recognized the alliance as a catalyst for other treaties with the Turks.\textsuperscript{41}

The gap between the ideal and reality was especially apparent to Beaucaire, and he struggled to reconcile the two. At one point he listed off a foray of rhetorical questions, some challenging, others defending, France’s alliance with the Ottomans. Yet, he never fully answered them himself. For instance he wrote, “But if he wishes to keep the hereditary nickname of the most Christian King, how did he seek a union with the most dangerous enemy of the Christian persuasion of all tyrants… separated by the longest stretches of land and sea unless he was offered the neighboring provinces and islands of Caesar, Ferdinand, and other Christians as plunder?” In a moment of defense of François I, he asserted that the collapse of “Christian unity” and that the development of factions in Western Europe caused François to “run for succor to Suleiman.” But also, he questioned, “can there be any fraternity or union for a Christian man with this monstrosity?”\textsuperscript{42} The Bishop of Metz, however, provided no response to this last question. Whether it was because he was unwilling to categorically attack the Franco-Ottoman alliance or he just did not know how to respond to it himself, is unknown. Nonetheless, the tension between the ideal of the Respublica Christiana and the political reality is clear.

In conclusion, the world in which Beaucaire lived was changing both domestically and abroad. Christian unity had broken down, which could not have been more apparent to the Bishop of Metz. At the same time the Ottoman Empire was forcing its way into European diplomacy, and the Franco-Ottoman alliance was a catalyst in this process. Although this militant bishop clung to a world-view that placed Christendom at the center, his inclusive, although fairly negative, approach toward the Ottoman Empire was a means of accommodating the Ottomans into his conception of the European world that better reflected reality. Certainly, France’s alliance with the Ottomans was a contributing factor since the defensive arguments of the alliance made their way into the Beaucaire’s work, and he found some of them persuasive. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire played a central role in his history of French events, both positively and negatively.

\textsuperscript{41} “alte concepto in caesarem odio, invidiaque accensus.” Ibid., 685.
\textsuperscript{42} “At si Christianissimi Regis haereditarium cognomen tueri vult quomodo cum Tyranno Omnium, quorum historiae meminerunt, teterrimo, Christianae persuasionis hoste infestissimo longissimis terrae marisque spatiis separato societatem coivit, nisi ut vicinas Caesaris, Ferdinandi, Caeterorumque Christianorum provincias, atque insulas illi in praedam obiceretur” … “Christianorum coetu” … “ad Solymanum itidem confugerent” … “cum hoc monstro ullane homini Christiano fraternitas, aut societas esse potest?” Ibid., 737.
Beaucaire even recognized the merits of the Franco-Ottoman Alliance, and he placed the Turkish Empire in the same realm of action as France, Germany, and Italy. The views of Beaucaire demonstrate that the French viewed the Ottomans in a more nuanced manner than as the epitome of the Orient. It should be reasserted that these were the views of a militant ecclesiastic who actively participated in the fight against religious pluralism, yet even he did not view the Turks as completely separate from his geo-political community. Instead, they were an integral part of European and French political and diplomatic affairs, even as he viewed them in a very negative light at the same time.