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Michael Epkenhans

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BOOK REVIEW

Yorulmaz, N. (2014). *Arming the Sultan. German Arms Trade and Personal Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire Before World War I*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 349 pp., $110, £61.20.

The Ottoman Empire has always been a very interesting subject for scholars. Whereas the majority of scholars have concentrated their interests either on its decay or, for example, on the importance of the Bagdad Railway for international relations, very few have so far taken a deeper look into the role of the arms business for in Ottoman as well as European history. The lack of access to the sources in the respective archives was, of course, one of the main reasons to make research more difficult than in other cases.

Against this background this study breaks new ground. Based on a wealth of archival material the author is able to throw a new and very interesting light on the role of the arms business in Ottoman policy towards European countries and vice versa. One of the most important questions he tries to answer is why German armament firms dominated the Ottoman market from the 1880s onwards until the outbreak of World War I, even though their products were neither always better nor cheaper than those of other competitors in Britain or France. It is striking to see how much the Germans could sell: guns from Krupp, rifles from Mauser/Oberndorf and warships coming from the Schichau yards at Danzig and Elbing. In the event, war materials made up almost two-thirds of Germany's exports into the Ottoman Empire throughout the whole period under investigation here.

His answer is convincing: in his eyes the Ottoman Empire serves as a very good example of the intertwined relationship of political, military and business factors, as well as "a good measure of personal interest" (p. 254). A closer look shows that arms sales were, at least from the German point of view, indeed a very good means to combine political, economic and military expansionist interests. That is why the German government supported German arms firms after unification in 1871. From the politicians' point of view the arms business was an influential tool to get access to the circles of foreign military decision-makers and the politicians behind them. Subsequently, even the German "Iron Chancellor," Otto von Bismarck, supported this business despite his claim that the Balkan states, as he stated in 1876, was "not worth the bones of a single Prussian grenadier." However, political backing is only one factor which explains this success story. Without clever planning and, moreover, the dispatch of a military mission consisting of high-ranking and highly qualified German officers such as Colmar von der Goltz-Pascha, this success would hardly have been possible. This strategy was accompanied by the attempt to make the sultan believe that Germany was a friend and a supporter of his policy, which had attracted sharp criticism from other European powers. Unlike Britain, France or Russia, Germany made no attempt to take over parts of the empire of the "sick man on the Bosporus". Rather, Germany had a great interest in stability in this region, at least as long as it was not strong enough to receive the lion's share in case a partition of the Ottoman Empire was unavoidable. Consequently, for the time being, this meant keeping up good relations with the Ottoman government and, more importantly, with its military. Without this special relationship which both sides developed within an incredibly short period of time the arms business would not have flourished in the way it eventually did. Astonishingly, this relationship was strong

enough to overcome problems about higher prices or technical deficiencies if compared with the products offered by British or French arms firms. Even British diplomats accustomed to successfully support British political, military, and economic interests in the nineteenth century due to the great weight of the Empire in international relations, were surprised about this development in the 1880s. "Never [had] a great European power acquired so rapidly and with so little apparent effort a position of authority and privilege in a decadent Oriental state with which its previous connections and actual community of interests seemed so slender," Sir Valentine Chirol complained in a letter to his government.

In his case study the author affords a deep insight into an important aspect of both Ottoman and European history. Based on broad archival research he remarkably describes Germany's expansionist strategy in the Middle East based on the success of German arms dealers who, backed by politicians in Berlin, quickly gained a stronghold no other power was able to question before 1914. Thus the author makes an important contribution to our understanding of the political, military, and economic developments before 1914.

Michael Epkenhans
Potsdam

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