

starters). Indeed, Smith's work stands in an interesting dialogue with scholarship in this area—for certainly, he makes a strong claim for the value of high medieval Latin literature as a source for study in the historical dissemination of Welsh materials in England.

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MICHAEL TALBOT. *British-Ottoman Relations, 1661–1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017. Pp. 256. \$120.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.107

Michael Talbot's study of British-Ottoman relations in the long eighteenth century is a well-researched, well-written, and detailed analysis of diplomacy in its varied forms and in context. Talbot assesses the evolving diplomatic practices of the British ambassador in Istanbul and the ways in which those practices intersected with finance, law, and cultural accommodation. His sources, highlighting correspondence and petitions, are predominantly English, juxtaposed to a selection of Ottoman narratives and archival documents on commerce and foreign affairs. Importantly, Talbot provides Ottoman Turkish glosses for critical terminology, and includes selected texts in both their English and Turkish forms. He argues that the British conformed to Ottoman diplomatic practice in order secure their commercial objectives while the Ottomans sought British friendship (*dostluk*). As the eighteenth century progressed, however, that system began to rupture.

Individual chapters progress logically and provide significant details on the form, nature of, and responses to British-Ottoman diplomacy. In the introduction Talbot lays out his approach and outlines the historiography and types of sources employed. He points up “the importance [for the English] of conforming to Ottoman values and practices for the benefit of trading subjects and not simply for state politics” (15). Talbot emphasizes the task of the early British ambassadors as, above all, “to serve and protect the merchants and their commerce” (23). This is not a new argument, but Talbot provides a systematic picture of the setting up of a diplomatic system via the granting of privileges and the appointment of consuls. He treats the Capitulations as an evolving set of commercial agreements that provided a framework for a complex set supplementary practices, commands, and legal negotiations.

Talbot's analysis of the office of ambassador has interesting resonances to the role of the *baile* in Eric Dursteler's *Venetians in Constantinople* (2006). He divides ambassadorial appointments into four phases between 1660 and 1807, from an early period, when Crown and Levant Company jockeyed for control, to a final phase, when the ambassadorship was dominated by career diplomats primarily attuned to peace negotiations. A key point here is that the Ottomans, like the British, “far from pursuing some supposed ‘Islamic’ diplomacy, took a pragmatic approach to foreign relations” (67).

British customs ledgers and other financial documents serve to provide insight into trade volume, goods, exchange rates, and commercial income and expenditures. Talbot notes a gradual decline in the volume and value of British trade by the mid-eighteenth century and a resurgence at century's end. He juxtaposes accounts of British ambassadors trying to maintain a suitable level of financing for the embassy with those detailing the struggles of Ottoman ambassadors abroad to receive their required subsidies. Talbot highlights the predicament in the 1795 case of Robert Liston attempting to cover the costs of supporting a large household and provide the requisite displays of British “magnificence” on subsidies that were half what was required (99).

While gifts and bribes are an old topic in studies of diplomacy, Talbot provides a wealth of specific detail. He notes Ottoman costs incurred shipping horses as a gift to the English king, and the “tradition” of the British ambassador presenting the Ottoman *kapudan pasha* (admiral) with Cheshire cheeses and strong beer. Gift exchange was based on “a sophisticated and long established set of conventions” that are illustrated in the detailed records of the Levant Company (117). Talbot argues that there was a shift in attitude regarding gift giving during the ambassadorship of James Murray in the second half of the eighteenth century: the British embassy attempting to avoid excesses; the Ottomans exercising some reserve in receiving gifts; and various European ambassadors agreeing to stop giving many of the customary gifts.

Talbot rightly argues, as Gülru Necipoğlu has shown in *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (1991), that diplomacy involved a carefully choreographed performance of Ottoman (and British) worldviews. Charting changes in the ceremonial experiences of British ambassadors at the Porte, however, he adopts a model of ritual “tension” that seems somewhat forced, or unnecessary (143, 148). Instead, Talbot makes his case as he details British descriptions of coffee and other goods used to entertain Ottoman officials, or reports that Ottoman “haughtiness” diminished after 1730 (151). He avoids the common trap of exoticizing or demeaning Ottoman conventions of entertainment. But while he proposes that there was a “degree of equality” implied in English and Ottomans’ sharing the same table and food at Ottoman banquets, I would suggest that such hospitality reflected Ottoman strategic interest (159). Talbot expresses the relationship better when he calls the ambassador a “pseudo-subject” of the sultan (160).

The final chapter focuses on dispute resolution. Talbot argues that Ottoman documents suggest two main areas in which ambassadors intervened on behalf of British subjects: “to ensure the freedoms of person and movement guaranteed in the Capitulations,” and “to pressure the Ottoman government in cases of contentious commercial disputes” that could “not be resolved at a local and consular level” (174). For example, in 1749 the governor of Baghdad seized a highly valuable cache of British merchant-owned goods in order to pay his garrison troops, thus provoking an extended round of demands for compensation. Talbot richly illustrates the increasing involvement of the ambassador in such provincial disputes, illuminating the critical relationships among dispute resolution, gift giving, and ceremonial.

Talbot makes good use of the secondary literature, but his treatment would have been enriched by more commentary on the ways in which British commerce and diplomacy in the sixteenth century plugged into the well-established relations of other European nations with the Ottomans. Nonetheless, read in conjunction with Jerry Brotton’s *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (2017) and Daniel Goffman’s *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642–1660* (1998), Talbot’s detailed study provides a decidedly more nuanced picture than we have had to date of British-Ottoman relations in the long eighteenth century.

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CHRISTOPHER THORNTON, JENNIFER WARD, and NEIL WIFFEN, eds. *The Fighting Essex Soldier: Recruitment, War and Society in the Fourteenth Century*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2017. Pp. 189. £18.99 (paper).  
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A compilation of papers from a conference organized by the Essex Record Office in 2014, *The Fighting Essex Soldier* appears to be aimed, at least in part, at a nonspecialist readership.