

# An Ottoman Intelligence Report concerning Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots: Damsel in Distress

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## Context

The intelligence report from the Topkapı Palace Museum Archive shared below (TSMA E. 5873/1) provides insight into the interests, intelligence sources, and reach of the Ottoman Empire. It contains the names of key players in Ottoman foreign policy during the reign of Süleymân the Magnificent and covers a wide variety of themes. Interestingly, although it does not explicitly mention her by name, it contains information about Mary, Queen of Scots. The archivists assigned the document the date of September 7, 1566, the day Süleymân passed away during the Siege of Szigetvár. However, internal evidence suggests that the archive's document date is incorrect. Since the betrothal between Mary and Francis II occurred on April 24, 1548, the Sublime Porte must have gotten the news in the latter part of that year. The information shared in the document about the political climate in Europe also confirms the date I suggest.

The three decades preceding the mid-sixteenth century witnessed a significant struggle between two great emperors, Süleymân the Magnificent and Charles V. Both claimed that their power was spread throughout the universe. Claiming that they were the *Şāhib-ķırān* (universal ruler),<sup>1</sup> *Romanorum Imperator* (Emperor of the Romans),<sup>2</sup> and *Mehdī-yi āħir üz-zamān* (Messiah of the Last Age),<sup>3</sup> they engaged in an imperial image-making duel. Although they never faced each other on the battlefield, they continually provoked each other by their actions. In this rivalry, naturally, information-gathering activities were of the utmost importance. Consequently, intelligence became an indirect yet pervasive form of conflict. Both emperors used espionage and intelligence networks as a means of indirect conflict and a form of soft power against each

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<sup>1</sup> *Tabakātü'l-memâlik ve derecâtü'l-mesâlik*, Istanbul, Istanbul University Library, Rare Books Section, MS 5997, F 165b.

<sup>2</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, "Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman Hapsburg Papal Rivalry," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no.3 (1989): 409.

<sup>3</sup> Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân," in *Soliman Le Magnifique et Son Temps*, edited by Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Rencontres de l'École de Louvre, 1992), 169. and, Ángeles Jordano, "The *Plus Oultra* Writing Cabinet of Charles V: Expression of the Sacred Imperialism of the Austrias," *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 9, (2011): 14.

other, collecting information on military affairs, internal and external political events, and any other knowledge that might give them an advantage.<sup>4</sup>

Ottoman intelligence activities were not centralized but rather were closely tied to the Ottoman *kapus* (households) in the early modern period. Besides the sultan's imperial government members in Istanbul, many other noble households were also involved in espionage.<sup>5</sup> In other words, information in the capital was not gathered solely by the Sublime Porte itself, since the court received significant information from various sources, including households of the Ottoman nobles. At the same time, the Sublime Porte also urged its vassals (*haraçgüzârs*) and allies to share information with Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> The “friends” of the Sultan, the French, and the Republic of Venice were major suppliers of information to Ottoman policy-makers.<sup>7</sup>

The document under consideration is a translated intelligence report. It reveals that the French resident ambassador in Venice wrote the report and dispatched it to Istanbul, emphasizing the vital role of “friends” in Ottoman intelligence. While the French ambassador authored the document, the Serenissima facilitated this flow of information to the Sublime Porte. The French ambassador's involvement underscores the importance placed on intelligence provided by the French. The document must have been delivered to the Ottoman court by the French ambassador in Istanbul, Monsieur d'Aramon, who served in Istanbul between 1547 and 1553, and must have then been translated into Ottoman Turkish by court dragomans. It includes the names of the significant actors in Ottoman foreign politics during Sultan Süleymân I's reign and covers a broad range of topics, such as the political actions of the French King

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<sup>4</sup> Gábor Ágoston, “Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed. Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Emrah Safa Gürkan, “Fooling the Sultan: Information, Decision-Making and the ‘Mediterranean Faction’ (1585-1587),” *The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 45 (2015): 57-58.

<sup>6</sup> Emrah Safa Gürkan, “Espionage in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean Go-Betweens and the Ottoman Habsburg Rivalry” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, April 2012), 400-423.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Isom Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: The Ottoman and French alliance in the Sixteenth Century*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012): 39.

Henry II (r. 1547-1559), the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V's (r. 1519-1556) endeavor to provoke the French monarch, France's help to Mary, Queen of Scots, the Pope's uneasy position in the conflict, and King Ferdinand's (r. 1521-1564) actions and his undercover correspondence with Berata (Friar Giorgio Martinuzzi). Although the individuals named in the document are frequently mentioned in sixteenth-century Ottoman intelligence reports, archival documents, and chronicles, the mention of Mary Stuart is extraordinary.

While the document does not reveal the name of the "daughter of the late Scottish monarch," it clearly refers to Mary, the only surviving legitimate child and successor of James V Stuart. Mary, the infant Queen of Scots, had been betrothed to the *dauphin* of France after her father's death and sent to France, where she spent thirteen years. The document includes details related to predominant themes in Ottoman foreign policy, suggesting that including information regarding Mary serves a purpose. The war of the Scotland-France alliance against the English crown, with Mary at the center of the conflict, likely attracted the Ottoman government's attention. To summarize, TSMA E. 5873/1 not only contains significant intelligence but also reveals the information the French considered necessary to report to the Sublime Porte, as well as the sources of Ottoman intelligence, its nature, potency, and range.

## Transcription

- (1) *'arż-ı bende-i bî-miḳdâr budur ki Venedik' de sâkin olan France elçisinden bu faḳîre mektûblar vâşıl oldu yazılalı iki ay olmış*
- (2) *haberleri bunlardır ki France pâdişâhı Peyamonte nâm serḥadden ḳalkub Liyon şehri cānibine teveccüh eyledi*
- (3) *oradan Martçelyayı ve sâir yarar ḳal'alarını gezüb görse gerekdür ve İspanya serḥaddinde olan ba'z-ı ḥalḳ*
- (4) *İspanya iḡvâsıyla serkeşlik idüb France pâdişâhınıñ ol cānibde olan beglerine ve ḥâkimlerine itâ'at*
- (5) *eylemediler zîrâ Ḳarlo anlara çok nesne adamaḡla kendüye mâyil itmek isterdi France pâdişâhınıñ teveccüh itdiği*

- (6) *taraf ol cānibe olub mezkūr tā'ife anı göricek boy başlarını gönderüb gadrıların dileyüb kendülerini France*
- (7) *pādişāhına tefvīz eylediler ve İngiltere elinden İskotcya vilāyetini hālāş eylemek-çün mu 'āvenet eylemeye France pādişāhı*
- (8) *tonanma göndermişdi hayli fetḥler idüb hālāş eylemiş hemān bir ḳal'a ḳalmıḫ anı daḫı muḫāşara idüb almaḫ üzereymiş*
- (9) *ve mezbūr İskotcya vilāyetinüñ ḳralı mürd olub bir kızı ḳalmıḫdı ol kız France pādişāhınıñ aḳrabāsından olmuḫdı*
- (10) *İngiltere ḳralı ol kızı ḫātūnluḡa almaḫ murād idünüb ol-vechle memleketi ḳaplamāḫ isterdi ol ümīdini ḳat'*
- (11) *eylesün deyü France pādişāhı ol kızı kendü memleketine getürtdi Ḳarlo France pādişāhınıñ bu fütūḫına*
- (12) *ḫased idüb İngiltereye ḳuvvet-i ḳalb olsun France pādişāhı maşlahatlarında muzāyaḳa üzerine olsun*
- (13) *deyü Fiyandore cānibine yürüdi dā'imā cehdi bu emn ü emānı bozmaḡa bir sebep zuhūra getürmekdür ki*
- (14) *kendüden olmadı deyü behāne eyleye ve Rim Papa Ḳarloyla muḳābele eylemek-çün France pādişāhıyla ittifāḳ eylemek murād idinüb*
- (15) *tālib oldı amma France pādişāhı Ḳarlo ḫikāyet idüb 'ahde muḫālefet Franceden oldı dimemek-çün ve yüce pādişāh*
- (16) *ḫazretleri ḫāliyā sefer-i hümāyūnda olmaḡın rāzī olmadı lākin Ḳarlo ḳādir olduḡı ḳadar mu 'āhedeye muḫālif*
- (17) *France'ye ve dōstlarına zarar eylemekden ḫāli degildür Rim Papa daḫı bu aḫvāli görüb ne-ümīd olıcaḫ Ḳarloyla kendü*
- (18) *maşlahatlarını bir vechle ber-taraf eyledi ki mā-beynlerinde eyü dōstlık ve bārışıklık oldı ve daḫı Ferandoş Erdel vilāyetinden olan*
- (19) *Beratayla maḫfi meşveretler idüb Erdel vilāyetin kendü eline getürmege cehd ider anlara ḫayli ḫehrler ve ḳal'alar teklif ider*
- (20) *Berata daḫı maşlahata muḫkem muḳayyeddür ve mezbūr Ferandoş Egri ḳal'asını ve serḫadde olan sāyir ḳal'alarını muḫkem berkitmek*

- (21) *üzerinedür ve Andreyā Dori cümle tonanmasıyla İspānya kralınıñ oğlını İtālyaya getürmek-çün Bartçelona nām şehri*
- (22) *limānından gemiye koymağa gitmişdi bu güz eyyāmında gelüb erişse gerekdür hāliyā alınan haberler bunlardur.*

## Translation

It is the submission of this worthless slave that letters came to this poor [soul] from the French ambassador who is resident in Venice. It has been two months since the letters were written. They report that the French king departed from the frontier region called Piedmont and headed for the city of Lyon. From there, he is expected to go to Marseille and other prominent fortresses. Some people on the Spanish border disobeyed the French king's lords and governors there, for Charles had promised them many things to cultivate their inclination towards himself. The direction the French king is heading in is close to that border. When the abovementioned people saw the French king, they sent their leaders to him, asked for his mercy, and ceased their disobedience.

The French king had sent a fleet to help free Scotland from the English rule. [This way] he conquered and liberated many places, except one castle, which he is also about to besiege. The king of Scotland had died, leaving behind one daughter, who is a relative of the French king. The English king wanted to marry that daughter to take over that country. To put a stop to his [the English king's] wishes, he ordered that girl to be brought to his realm. Charles was envious of the conquests of the French king and marched toward Flanders to help the English and to hinder the affairs of the French king. His [Charles'] goal is always to create a pretext to break the peace.

The Pope wished to side with the French king and requested this so as to oppose Charles. However, the French king did not consent to this alliance, both because he did not want to give a pretext to Charles for complaints about any French breach of peace and because his majesty, the Supreme Padishah is on an imperial campaign. Nonetheless, Charles never stops opposing the peace and harming France and its

friends. The Pope, seeing this situation, lost hope, and hence he settled all his matters with Charles, and a close friendship and peace arose between them.

Finally, Ferdinand had secret meetings with Fráter, who is in Transylvania, and, in an attempt to have the province of Transylvania delivered into his hands, offered many cities and castles [to Berata and Hungarian magnates]. Fráter also strongly follows this policy. The same Ferdinand is strengthening the castle of Eger and other castles on the border. Andrea Doria sailed to the port of Barcelona with his entire navy to transport the son of the Spanish king to Italy. He should arrive this autumn.

This is the news that we have received so far.

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*Tabakâtü'l-memâlik ve derecâtü'l-mesâlik*. Istanbul. Istanbul University Library, Rare Books Section. MS 5997.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi. Nr. E. 5873/1.



## Facsimile

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عرضین بیقتار بود که وندکن ساکن اولان فرایجه الحسد بوفقیه مکتوبلر واصل اولدی یازلا دی ای آیش  
 خبری بونلدر که فرایجه پادشاهی پیامونته نام سجددن قاقوب کیون شهری جانبته توجه ایلدی  
 اوران مارتیلیای وسایر برار قلعلر کزوب کورسه کرکدر و اسپانیه سجددن اولان بعض خلق  
 اسپانیه اغواسیله سرکشک ایدب فرایجه پادشاهنک اول جانبند اولان بکلر و حاکملر اطاعت  
 ایلدر زرا قاروانلر چوق نسنه ادامغله کندریه مایل ایتمک استردی فرایجه پادشاهنک توجه ایتدی  
 طرف اول جانبته اولوب مذکور طایفه انی کورچک بوی باشارنه کوندری غدرلر دیلوب کندولر فرایجه  
 پادشاهنه تفویض ایلدر و انکلازا الندن اسقوتچی و لابتنی خلاص ایلکون معاونت ایلکه فرایجه پادشاهی  
 طوانته کوندر مشدی خلی قنظر ایدب خلاص ایش هان برقله قالمش انی دخی محاصر ایدب انق اوزرنه مش  
 و مزبور اسقوتچی و لابتنک قرل مرع اولوب برقی قالمش اول قیز فرایجه پادشاهنک اقریاسندک اولمشدی  
 انکلازا قرالی اول قری خاتونلغه المق مراد ایدنوب اولوجه ملکتی قیلاق استردی اول امیندی قطع  
 ایلسون دیو فرایجه پادشاهی اول قری کندر مملکنه کتورتدی قارلو فرایجه پادشاهنک بونقونه  
 حسد ایدب انکلازیه قوت قلب اولسون فرایجه پادشاهی مصلحتلرین مضایقه اوزرنه اولسون  
 دیو فیاندور جانبته یورودی دایما جهدی بو امن و امان بوزماغه برسبب ظهور کتورمکدر که  
 کندودن اولدی دیو بمانه ایلیه ویم پاپا قارویله مقابله ایلکون فرایجه پادشاهیله اتفاق ایلک مراد ایدنوب  
 طالب اولدی اما فرایجه پادشاهی قارلو شکایت ایدب عهد مخالفت فرایجه دن اولدی دیو مچکون و بوجه پادشاهی  
 حضرتلی حالیا سفرهما یونن اولماغین راضی ولما دی لکن قارلو قادر اولدی قده معاهدیه مخالف  
 فرایجه دوستلر ضرر ایلکدن خالی دکدر ریم پاپا دخی بو احوالی کورب نومیند اولجا قارویله کندر  
 مصلحتلر بر وجهه بر طرف ایلدی که مابینلرین ایودسلق دبارشفاق اولدی و دخی فراندوش اردل ولایتند اولان  
 براتایله مخفی مشورتلر ایدب اردل ولایت کندر الیه کتورمکه جهد ایدر انلر خلی شهر و قلعلر تکلیف ایلدی  
 براتادخی مصلحه حکم مقیددر و مزبور فراندوش آری قلعینی و سجدده اولان سایر قلعلر حکم برکینت  
 اوزرنددر و اندر یوروی جمله طوانته سیده اسپانیه قرالک اوغلی ایسالیه به کتورمچکون بازچکونه نام شهر  
 لیماندن کی به قوماغه کتشدی بوکوز ایامند کلوب ایشسه کرکدر حالیا النان خبرلر بونلدر

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