

Arming the Sultan-Caliph

How Militarism Spread in the Middle East

Turkish historian Yorulmaz examines the symbiotic relationship between the relatively new empire of Kaiser Wilhelm II's Germany and the Ottoman Empire under Abdul Hamid II in the period before the conflagration of World War I. In the trade boom of three decades following 1884, Berlin managed to push aside the French, British, and Russians and gain unprecedented influence on the geo-political and economic policies of the Ottoman leaders.

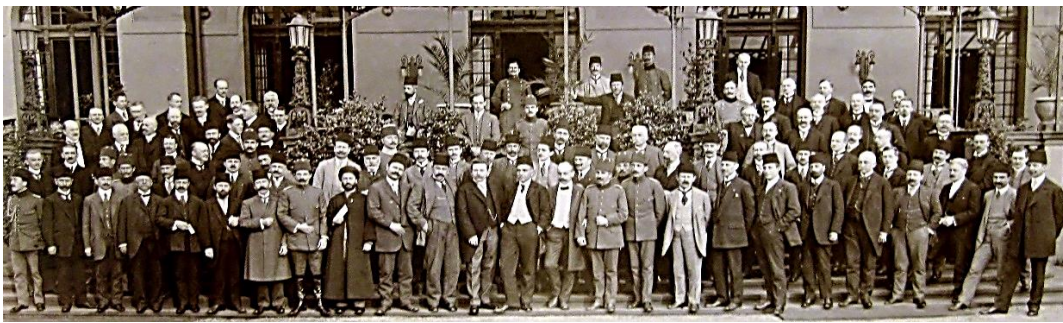


Photo: Ernst Jäckh Papers, PArchWGS

The Ottoman Study Mission at Krupp's with Ernst Jäckh: 1st row, 12th from the right, in Essen, July 5, 1911

In essence, the kaiser wanted raw materials and markets for his industries; the sultan needed machinery to modernize his state and army. But events on the ground played a major role in effecting both leaders' thinking. The relatively late birth of the German empire (1871) meant that Wilhelm had to watch the scramble for Africa by Europeans from the sidelines. He wrote of his uneasiness at being "squeezed in the heart of Europe by colonizing neighbors" and sought outlets both for his own ambitions and those of his industrialist subjects.

From the Turkish angle, closer relations with nascent Germany were precisely what the sultan felt necessary. He had lost two-fifths of his realm and one-fifth of his populace by an 1878 treaty orchestrated by the French, British, and Russians. Earlier outreach for military assistance to the former two was sidelined in favor of greater and greater German influence. Baron Colmar von der Goltz was dispatched by Berlin to help reorganize the Ottoman army, and his students led Turkish troops in World War I. German-manufactured guns were shipped through Ottoman areas on German-made rails and boats by Krupp, Krause, Loewe, Mauser, and Maffei. Jäckh Pasha's 1911 guests also visited a Krupp factory (pic.).

Yorulmaz offers a worthy comparative study with a rich multitude of sources. This book is solidly based on diverse Ottoman, German, British, and U.S. primary documents and should appear on the shelves of any scholar interested in this period, which gave birth to the contours of a Mideast whose realignment we are witnessing. Wolfgang G. Schwanitz

Naci Yorulmaz, *Arming the Sultan, German Arms Trade and Personal Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire before World War I*, London, Bloomsbury, I.B. Tauris 2014, 349 pp.

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