

# Islam in the Early Modern Protestant Imagination:

## Religious and Political Rhetoric of English Protestant– Ottoman Relations (1528-1588)

Jae Jerkins (Florida State University)

**Abstract:** *After the Reconquista of Spain in 1492, it was the Ottomans who presented the greatest external threat to Christian hegemony in Europe. Consequently, Western scholars often presume that sixteenth century European Christians only perceived Muslims in a negative light. The Papacy, the Holy Roman Emperor, and Protestant theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin are all found warning Europe of the imminent threat of Ottoman conquest. However, this is not the complete story. Warnings against this threat only appeared in the works of Luther after the 1529 Siege of Vienna. When Ottoman domination was not a martial threat to Protestant states, Protestant theologians were kind, if not outright laudatory, in their assessment of Muslim piety. Meanwhile, rhetoric within the Ottoman Empire was similarly pro-Protestant. Both Protestants and Muslims understood their common, greater enemy to be the Catholic Church. Because of this, political and economic arrangements mutually beneficial to Christian Europeans and Ottoman Muslims were made possible through a rhetorical rapprochement. By the 1580s, when it became clear that England was leaving the Catholic Church once and for all, Queen Elizabeth I endeavored to create just such a relationship with Sultan Murad III in their shared desire to repel the Catholic–Hapsburgian hegemony in Europe. In this way, despite the anti-Islamic rhetoric of the early Protestant reformers, the English and Ottoman sovereigns became commercial and political partners specifically because England possessed a Protestant identity, religiously unrestricted trade practices, and a set of religious commonalities with the Islamic Ottoman Empire.*