

Introduction

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Very often, the editors responsible for collections of articles will state that they have joined originally disparate contributions into coherent publications that resemble single-author books. Put differently, these editors claim to have established strong connections between the pieces entrusted to them by individual authors. Often these editors will go so far as to rename the articles at issue, now calling them ‘chapters’. By contrast, the present collection is consciously eclectic, and the editor does not aim at presenting the eight articles appearing here as parts of a unified whole. Rather, I hope that readers will be able to visualise, at least in part, the diversity of approaches to pre-1850s Ottoman social history as practiced today. Moreover, this collection should make visible some trends that may be relevant for the future, the historians at issue—with the exception of the present author—being either young scholars or else in mid-career.

Source Criticism

At present, we confront an avalanche of newly available sources, especially documents in the Archives of the President of the Turkish Republic in Istanbul, which archivists have catalogued and digitised in recent years. Therefore, source criticism has become a prominent concern, with the ‘making’ of documents taking centre stage. Many scholars now make allowance for the political or even financial interests of the bureaucrats that in the 1500s, 1600s or 1700s penned the documents that we use today. In the course of these investigations, it has become clear that Ottoman documents

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(or any other texts for that matter) did not record ‘the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’. On the contrary, they might well serve a palace faction that tried to place its own candidates in lucrative offices.¹ Even more directly, the authors of books and poems might try to induce the high-level patrons to whom they dedicated their works to procure the writers at issue positions as teachers, judges or officials. Success was not a foregone conclusion, as even major poets might find out.²

In the same vein, historians now pay much more attention to the patronage and readership of manuscripts than was customary 30 or 40 years ago: Who had an interest in having a given manuscript copied and translated, or at least in the 1700s, was willing to contribute to the financing of a print run? Activist sultans might personally choose manuscripts for inclusion in their libraries, but other monarchs preferred to have members of the palace/administration make these choices on their behalf.³ In the late 1500s, certain dignitaries ordered lavish illustrations for manuscripts that they presented to the sultans. In the seventeenth century, by contrast, Ottoman rulers might have religious scruples and avoid patronising illustrated manuscripts altogether. As these matters become better known, historians increasingly dwell upon the need to explain both ‘what is there’ and ‘what is not there’ focussing on the concerns of people with the power to make decisions about books and documents.

From a different perspective, Ottoman historians have become interested in the manner in which the sultans’ subjects, ordinary taxpayers as well as officials, used the documents that the latter prepared with growing frequency, especially during the 1700s. For while until the 1990s, the eighteenth century appeared merely as a period of decentralisation and control of provinces by local power-holders, we now know that those same years saw a multiplication of offices and documents, whose implications present-day historians are only beginning to understand. Apparently, certain sultans and officials worked hard to retain some contact with the provinces, by encouraging low-level officials and ‘ordinary people’ to bring their complaints directly to Istanbul. Provincials soon found out which channels of complaint were likely to bring the best results; and

¹ This is one of the important points of Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*.

It is impossible to document all the relevant research in a brief Introduction. Therefore, I present only a small selection of what is currently available...

² İnalçık, *Şair ve Patron*.

³ Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*.

some of the complainants even had a choice of public authorities to which they could appeal, a practice for which Ottoman historians use the term of ‘court or forum shopping’.⁴

However, the costs of appealing might be substantial, and today’s historians try to determine the motives that prompted a person disappointed by the decision of a local judge to go to the trouble and expense of turning to the justice of the sultan. Which documents and/or personal contacts might obtain optimum results?⁵ While our answers to questions of this type often remain tentative, even asking them forces us to remember that no scribe produced records for the convenience of later historians, and that we need to think about the aims that the relevant documents served in their own time.

Given this novel diversity, Ottoman historians have consciously enlarged the spectrum of sources that they employ. Even in the recent past, ‘proper’ historians had almost exclusively focussed on the Ottoman archives. While they occasionally referred to chronicles and sometimes to other narrative sources as well, these non-archival sources definitely took second place. By contrast, some present-day historians now explore legal texts, many of which are not part of archives but of library holdings. Library catalogues have emerged as sources of historical information too: In recent days, a group of Ottoman scholars has published and extensively commented the catalogue of the library of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), who had commissioned a scholar to record the thousands of volumes that he had accumulated.⁶ Given the multiplicity of manuscripts on record, the catalogue in its edited form has implications for many sub-fields, including the history of Ottoman medicine, law, literature and philology.

Imagery has come in for some attention as well: Certainly, images are not as frequent in the Ottoman world as they are in India, but they do exist and have invited research. While it would be naïve to assume that images directly reflect ‘real life’, miniatures or even architectural decorations when studied with care can point to intercultural linkages about which written sources have little to say. Especially when undertaken with the thoroughness customary in Hungary, between the mid-1500s and 1699

⁴Apart from seeking out a judge presumed sympathetic to the plaintiff, a move to which Aykan and Ergene refer in their article, non-Muslims could choose between their communal courts and the Islamic judges.

⁵Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History*.

⁶Necipoglu et al., *Treasures of Knowledge*.

largely an Ottoman province, excavations can, for instance, make visible cultural divisions among the ethnicities inhabiting Hungary when ruled by the sultans.⁷ The use of luxury faience from Istanbul and Anatolia by princely families that continued to reside in this north westernmost province of the Empire has become a subject of detailed investigation.⁸ Palaeontologists have moreover studied the sheep and cattle raised in Hungarian villages during the Ottoman period.

From Primary Sources to Problematics: Migration, Religion and the Environment

While Ottoman historians have sometimes followed wherever (they thought that) their sources took them, they cannot avoid sharing the questions and concerns of their own age. Thus, we will introduce a number of special fields, which at least in part owe their existence to the pressures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, due to considerations of space, we can only present a small selection, and therefore, we briefly discuss studies of migration, environmental changes and religion, the latter viewed both as a set of doctrines and as a support for the arts of reading and writing. We conclude the discussion by briefly introducing the ‘first-person’ narratives, often composed within the dervish milieu and occasionally outside of these circles as well.

It is easy to explain the popularity of studies concerning migration, especially to Istanbul, a city that has grown from 900,000 persons about 100 years ago, to roughly 15 million.⁹ While today’s population size is partly due to the waves of migration that the city has experienced in the 1900s and partly to natural increase, in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, migration probably played a more important role than population growth. After all, particularly during the 1700s, the city suffered severely from recurrent epidemics of plague and other contagious diseases.¹⁰

⁷Dávid and Gerelyes, ‘The Art of the Potter in Ottoman Hungary’.

⁸Gerelyes, *Turkish Flowers*.

⁹For population around 1900: Mutlu, ‘Late Ottoman Population and its Ethnic Distribution’: 3–38.

http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/nbd_cilt25/mutlu.pdf. For current population: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/istanbul-population/> (both sites accessed on 3 December 2019).

¹⁰Panzac, *La peste dans l’Empire ottoman*.

Members of the eighteenth-century sultan's administration considered that the city, which at the time seems to have held between 400,000 and half a million inhabitants, had become so large as to be ungovernable. This reaction was largely due to the uprisings of 1703 and 1730, which had brought down two sultans and ended the lives of their closest advisers. Attempts to limit migration into Istanbul and to expel people, especially unattached males, whom the elite had decided to define as 'surplus' occurred throughout the 1700s, becoming especially dramatic in the reign of Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807).¹¹ Ultimately, the latter lost his legitimacy and his throne, because of his inability to ameliorate the rampant misery among Istanbul's population, difficult to feed because of several lost wars. Moreover, at a time when many people went hungry, Selim III undertook an ill-starred attempt to raise funds for a new army corps, by which he had intended to supplement and finally replace the janissaries, no longer of much military use by the eighteenth century.¹²

We do not know to what extent the scarcities of the years around 1800 had climatic causes, but as twentieth and twenty-first-century global warming has affected Istanbul and Anatolia too, studies on environmental history are making an appearance. Admittedly, the issue has begun to interest Ottoman historians well after becoming prominent in other parts of the world. Sources are especially rich on Ottoman Egypt, and while only the small number of francophone scholars have had occasion to read the fundamental work of Nicholas Michel, the books of Alan Mikhail have begun to attract young Ottoman historians to Yale, where Mikhail is teaching.¹³

Present-day historians have been especially interested in the 'Hungry Forties, Ottoman style'. After all, an attempt, undertaken mostly in 1845, to record the economic assents of certain Ottoman provinces with a view towards tax reform, coincided with a severe drought in Central Anatolia. This catastrophe sent peasants and their flocks to refuge in places that still possessed appreciable quantities of water and other resources, including the surroundings of Istanbul.¹⁴ Another study focusses on southern Anatolia

¹¹ Başaran and Kırılı, 'Some Observations on Istanbul's Artisans': 259–77.

¹² Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*: 178–91.

¹³ Michel, *L'Égypte des villages autour du seizième siècle*; Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt*; *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*.

¹⁴ Erler, 'Animals during Disasters': 333–52. On distress in England and Ireland in the 1840s see <https://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095950840> (accessed on 3 December 2019).

in the later 1500s during another severe drought, when the Ottoman administration attempted to collect sheep for its campaigns and encountered serious resistance. Most recently, a still unpublished study of migration from Central Anatolia into Izmir during the 1600s has thrown new light on the role of drought on the seventeenth-century depopulation of certain parts of the peninsula, which in many cases persisted into the later 1800s.¹⁵

In a world where religion and religious conflicts play a dramatic role, the study of religious practice and disputes connected to religion has become a major field for Ottoman historians as well. Scholars of Islamic divinity and the natural sciences have produced important studies and text editions, apart from bibliographical reference works that make primary and secondary sources more accessible. In addition, historians of Ottoman religion have focussed on the ‘puritanical’ movement of the so-called Kadızadelis, a group called after one of their leaders, whose nickname was ‘the son of the judge’. Given its emphasis on the simplicity of life in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, this movement had many adherents among people on the lower echelons of the religious hierarchy and gained quite a few adherents at the sultan’s court as well. In fact, some of the major representatives of this movement have significant influence among certain Turkish Muslims down to the present day.

However, seventeenth-century critics were vociferous well. Some of the opposition came from dervish circles, whose ceremonies the Kadızadelis attacked as an evil innovation. As for the versatile and scholarly Muhammad b. Abdullah, known as Kâtib Çelebi (1609–1657), he had listened to Kadızadeli sermons as a young man, but later came to think that both these people and some of their dervish opponents were more concerned with worldly gains than with religion.¹⁶ Evliya Çelebi (1611–after 1683), the famous traveller who had pronounced sympathies for dervishes, did not think much of the Kadızadelis either. His attitude may have been due in part to the *joie de vivre* obvious from his travel account and partly to the assumption that people of relatively low status did not have the right to criticise the opinions of ‘their betters’.

Other twentieth and twenty-first-century historians, concerned with religion as practised in the Ottoman Empire, focus on the groups that mainstream scholars of the early modern period considered heretical.

¹⁵ Kuru, ‘Locating an Ottoman Port City’; White, *The Climate of Rebellion*.

¹⁶ Inalcık, *The Ottoman Empire*: 183–85.

The latter concentrated their ire on the people whose piety focussed on ‘Alī, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad rather than on the latter. Often these men and women were inclined to view ‘Alī as an intermediary between the divine and humankind: today they go by the designation of ‘Alevi’.¹⁷ Moreover, conversion to Islam—and the complications that this move might engender—has become a veritable favourite of researchers, a sizeable number of articles supplementing the two recent monographs of Mark D. Baer and Tijana Krstić.¹⁸

From Primary Sources to Problematics: Ways and Means of Writing

In all three monotheistic religions of the early modern period, religion and the art of writing were in close connection. In the Islamic world, after all, calligraphy was the one pictorial art that even the piety-minded accepted, and calligraphers had the unique privilege of enhancing manuscripts of the Qur’an. Perhaps the worry that digitalisation will make books obsolete, accounts for the present interest of Ottoman historians in the constitution and dispersal of libraries. İsmail Erünsal has studied the book trade in addition to libraries. At the same time, Tülay Artan and Zeren Tanındı have focussed on volumes that travelled as gifts, for instance when women of the palace removed volumes from the sultans’ collections to enrich the libraries of the charitable foundations that they had established in the city. In such cases, the donors might commission new bindings featuring the style of their times.¹⁹

Calligraphy apart, the art of writing as practised in non-palatial contexts has come in for some attention too. Thus, the close interaction of many Ottoman historians with their counterparts studying early modern Europe has encouraged the former to investigate what the available sources may say on subjects of the sultans writing about their own persons, perhaps in diaries, memoirs, private letters or even graffiti. We leave aside the endless debate over the possibility or impossibility of ‘autobiography’ in the world outside of Renaissance and post-Renaissance Europe. After all, European Renaissance historians have shown quite some time ago that

¹⁷ Karakaya Stump, *The Kizilbash-Alevi in Ottoman Anatolia*.

¹⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*; Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*.

¹⁹ Erünsal, *Osmanlılarda Sahaflık*; Artan, ‘El Yazmaları’.

in the 1500s and 1600s, many people wrote about their lives not because they considered themselves ‘autonomous individuals’ but because they wanted to provide models of behaviour for their children and grandchildren or even impress possible patrons who might help them find employment.

Cemal Kafadar has introduced two seventeenth-century texts, one the diary of a dervish cum gentleman of leisure, and the other the letters written by a female dervish to her sheikh, whom as a woman she could not easily visit in the flesh.²⁰ Evliya Çelebi’s gigantic 10-volume travelogue is at the same time a first-person account of the author’s life, about which we would not know very much if it had not been for the data that he himself has supplied. As for the graffiti, one of which an overzealous restorer has recently removed, the writer is once again Evliya Çelebi, who has thus left a few records of his travels on site.²¹ Letters by Ottoman soldiers have occasionally surfaced as well: Thus Rhoads Murphey has found a set of texts written by a young officer to his family, in which a major topic is the writer’s desire for a new cloak—he was ashamed of appearing before his friends in the old one.²² Moreover, in the years shortly before and after 1800, a commander of mercenaries has left a memoir, in which he presents himself and his men, who to many subjects of the sultan must have appeared like ordinary robbers, as doughty warriors in the service of Islam and the Ottoman sultans.²³

Presenting the Articles

This rapid overview will—or so the editor hopes—give readers an idea of the multitude of topics on which Ottoman social historians are currently working, as after all, the research covered in this issue is only a rather small selection. We divide the eight articles presented here into three groups, namely ‘Islamic law, public administration and charity’, ‘Relations with the world outside the empire’ and ‘Religion, time and imagery’.

Yavuz Aykan and Boğaç Ergene, who have studied the workings of ‘Shari‘a Courts in the Ottoman Empire before the Tanzimat’ are part of the widening circle of legal historians, who focus less on questions occupying the minds of elite lawyers and in their wake, of historians

²⁰ Kafadar, ‘Self and Others’: 121–50; ‘Mütereddit bir Mutasavvıf’: 168–222.

²¹ Tütüncü, ‘On the Trail of Evliya Çelebi’s Inscriptions’.

²² Murphey, ‘Forms of Differentiation’: 135–70.

²³ Esmer, ‘The Confessions of an Ottoman Irregular’: 313–40.

during the early years of the Turkish Republic. At that time, the problem of how the rulings promulgated by the Ottoman sultans (*kanun*) related to the sharia was a favoured topic of reflection. By contrast, Aykan and Ergene approach Ottoman law from the perspective of everyday practice. In particular, they are interested in the problems confronting court users, including legal and extra-legal payments and the malpractices of judges confronted with shrinking employment opportunities. In addition, the authors discuss the thorny question of document use in legal disputes. For while the sharia in its Hanefi interpretation privileges the testimony of witnesses as opposed to documents, Ottoman courts spent a lot of time and effort on the compilation of records and above all on their preservation: for these registers survive in their hundreds and probably in their thousands, both within and outside Turkey. The authors thus remind us that Ottoman court users may have employed the records in their hands outside the courts, for instance when at a later stage, the disputed issue resurfaced and the two sides preferred arbitration. For in such informal venues, written documents may well have had a higher status than they had in law courts. In addition, copies of court records could be useful if a contender turned to the sultans' administration; for the servitors of the latter, similar to all bureaucrats, preferred to 'have things in writing.'

While Aykan and Ergene focus on the interface between law and administration, Kayhan Orbay, one of the few specialists in early modern Ottoman accounting, has discussed what we might call the interface between public administration and charity. For charitable/pious foundations had a double function, serving both religious and political ends. In his work on the survival of Ottoman royal waqfs, which the sultans and members of their families had instituted over the centuries, Orbay has paid special attention to the manner in which administrators present on site dealt with the deficits that waqfs might experience because of droughts, fires or civil disturbances. After all, it is a commonplace to say that charitable foundations could not cope with such vicissitudes because the original document issued by the founder, often in the remote past, left administrators with few choices in the face of newly emerging crises. Orbay has shown that this claim is often invalid. For an Ottoman treasury received the surpluses (*bakiye*) from all foundations once established by a member of the dynasty, and officials might transfer the surplus enjoyed by a given foundation to another institution, where there happened to be a shortfall. In addition, local waqf administrators received permission to

discontinue certain services for a while, if they urgently needed money for repairs. Thus, this large agglomeration of dynastic charities survived when many smaller foundations went under.

In the section covering relations with the outside world, there are three articles, one of which is concerned with the non-belligose contacts of the early Ottoman sultans with foreign rulers, for which Güneş Işıksel proposes the term ‘diplomatic practices’. In his article ‘Hierarchy and Friendship: Ottoman Practices of Diplomatic Communication’, Işıksel points out that for everyday relations between Muslim and non-Muslim princes, the jurists’ assumption that no durable peace between the two sides was possible, made little sense, as even the expansion of the empire might require long periods of peace with certain powers. Furthermore, from the mid-1500s onwards, it became clear that given the power of the Safavid and Habsburg neighbours, long-term and rapid expansion was no longer feasible. Although his commanders had conquered Cyprus from the Venetians (1570–1573), especially Selim II (r. 1566–1574) tended to emphasise diplomatic practices, which aimed at establishing the sultan as a ruler above rulers, from whom lesser princes were happy to receive their crowns.

One reason for Ottoman interest in relations with foreign polities was commercial; for while the sultans’ territories produced most raw materials needed for warfare, the arsenals needed to import tin. Furthermore, luxuries from China, the Mughal Empire, Iran, Muscovy and Venice were in demand in the sultans’ palace and among the elite. In the present collection, however, the article concerned with trade discusses a different problematic. For many years, nationalist Turkish historians had used the attempts of eighteenth-century non-Muslim merchants to escape Ottoman taxation by becoming more or less fictitious dragomans of foreign embassies, as an argument for the disloyalty ‘on principle’ of the sultans’ non-Muslim subjects. Disloyal subjects being legitimate objects of repression, for some authors this discourse may have had the additional function of legitimising twentieth-century anti-minority campaigns.

İsmail Hakkı Kadı has however approached eighteenth-century non-Muslim merchants from quite a different perspective. Using Dutch archives, he has shown that these men were simply out to make profits, and far from being subservient to their Dutch colleagues, the Ottoman–Armenian importers of Anatolian cotton and mohair into the Netherlands trounced their competitors so badly that the latter left the field. While Kadı had made this point in an earlier book, in the present article he shows

exactly how and why the exportation of cotton and mohair demanded local knowledge, which the Armenians possessed and the Dutch lacked.²⁴ Culled from the archives, his figures show how this knowledge translated into lower transaction costs, and the latter allowed profits of a kind that the Dutch were unable to duplicate. Kadı's article is thus part of the ongoing attempt to liberate Ottoman history from a priori and a-historic assumptions about non-Muslims. His work is particularly impressive as the author does not make large claims, but soberly states what the balance sheets of 'his' merchants tell us.

In the third article of this section, M. Pınar Emiralioğlu discusses intellectual relations between Ottoman geographers and their counterparts in Italy and the Netherlands. The subject is cartography, and in particular, maps showing the Mediterranean, a major concern of Ottoman sultans and viziers interested in expanding Ottoman control of the seas. However, Emiralioğlu investigates the relationship between geographical knowledge and imperial politics in a later period, namely the 1600s and 1700s, when Dutch atlases became available in Istanbul and changed the way in which educated men regarded the world outside of the Ottoman borders. For Emiralioğlu, this concern is part of an Ottoman version of the Enlightenment.

Certain geographers by contrast convinced monarchs and their viziers that it was of advantage to sponsor works in their discipline, as knowledge of the latter was useful in the negotiations determining the delineation of borders, a frequent concern after the numerous wars of the 1700s.

Emiralioğlu has produced an essay on cultural history, and the three articles in the section called 'Religion, time and imagery' fall into this category as well. Suraiya Faroqhi focusses on the views of the Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi concerning Orthodox and Catholic Christians; this issue is part of a much larger question, namely how members of the seventeenth-century Ottoman elites regarded the non-Muslims encountered in varied contexts. Enmity was quite frequent at a time when the sultans' empire expanded, if at all, only after long wars and crippling expenditures: The conquest of Crete from the Republic of Venice, by this time a second-rate power, took more than 20 years. As noted, Evliya was no adherent of the Kadızadeli; however, Faroqhi warns that we should not attribute the author's statements to attitudes constantly held over

²⁴Kadı, *Ottoman and Dutch Merchants*.

decades. Seemingly, many of his comments responded to very specific situations. Thus, when describing the war over Crete, Evliya positioned himself as a ‘warrior for the faith’, although he probably never did much fighting. By contrast, when describing the ‘domesticated’ Christians of Istanbul, the author takes a peaceable stance, including a fictitious history of Constantinople and praising the fish and seafood available in Orthodox eateries.

Orientation in time always had close connections with religion, as apparent from Firat Yaşa’s article on the ‘moonstruck’ Ottoman subjects of the early modern period. For these people, the phases of the moon were mostly important when it came to deciding on the proper time for religious practices, in particular the beginning and end of Ramadan. In addition, even elite figures considered the appearance of the new moon as a good omen for any undertaking, and they arranged the dates of their enterprises accordingly, even when practical considerations would have recommended otherwise. In addition, Yaşa notes that while trained personnel able to interpret astronomical charts served in many large foundations, a sizeable number of people did not turn to them but preferred the observations of locally esteemed persons, whose claim to have seen the new moon had a higher degree of credibility. Records concerning the reliability of witnesses relaying this information thus appear in many qadi registers.

The last article in this collection deals with the interface between religion and the arts of painting and calligraphy. Tülün Değirmenci has studied the decoration of village mosques near the modern city of Denizli in western Anatolia, some of which have originated in the 1700s, although reworkings and new creations occurred throughout the 1800s and even in the first half of the twentieth century. These colourful paintings are of interest to ethnologists and art historians, with Değirmenci focussing on their aesthetic value. Painters used their expertise in calligraphy to create images, in particular of Ali, a focus of popular piety even among Sunnis. Many paintings point to a connection with dervishes, but Değirmenci reminds her readers that it would be reductive to connect all images of Ali, his sword and his horse to the Bektashi order of dervishes, although the latter was influential in the region. In addition, the author has shown that poems praising the Prophet Muhammad were a favoured subject of calligraphic elaboration on mosque walls, but that these texts were of interest not so much because of their content, but because they served as signs warding off misfortune and ensuring the fertility of fields and flocks.

Despite its obvious limitations, our collection thus encompasses legal studies, the administration of charity, diplomatic practices, and non-Muslims in inter-empire trade and in the perceptions of an elite Muslim. In addition, we present studies concerning orientation in space and time, and the manner in which villagers in a peripheral region connected art and religious practices. We can only hope that this brief glimpse will invite historians working on other parts of the globe to undertake comparative projects.

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