

BOOK REVIEW

Fırat YAŞA (ed.) 2022. *The Other Faces of the Empire: Ordinary Lives Against Social Order and Hierarchy.* Trans. by Esra Taşdelen. Istanbul: Koç University Press. 320 pp. ISBN: 978-605-7685-68-1

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The Other Faces of the Empire is a welcome contribution to the growing literature of microhistory studies in Ottoman historiography. This volume is the English translation of *İmparatorluğun Öteki Yüzleri*, which was initially printed in Turkish by Koç University Press in 2020. Edited by Fırat Yaşa, able to reach a broader readership, *The Other Faces* uncovers what ordinary people went through in their lives from different perspectives. Relying on selected archival sources, historians excavated ordinary people's extraordinary lives through their engagement in violence and crime but also hierarchy and social order. Consisting of three parts and fourteen engaging papers, *The Other Faces* allows us to better comprehend socio-economic problems, the justice and investigation system, and the bureaucratic and administrative mechanisms of the Ottoman Empire through case studies in different times and spaces.

Suraiya Faroqhi penned an illuminating introduction to the book entitled 'Ordinary Subjects of the Sultan, Confronted with the Social and Political Elites'. Her piece prepares the reader for the individual stories examined throughout the pages. Faroqhi meticulously analyses each persuasive paper in its context, highlighting its arguments, and indicating the magnitude of its contribution to the literature.

Section I 'Assessing People Through Their Crimes' is respectively composed of articles by Nurcan Abacı, Zeynep Dörtok-Abacı, Fırat Yaşa, Cemal Çetin, Saadet Maydaer, Emine Dinceç, and Zübeyde Güneş-Yağcı.

With its quite idiomatic title, Nurcan Abacı's paper 'Sitting in a Stable while Singing Palace Songs' stands out from all the other papers in terms of style. Having been inspired by his own daily experiences, Abacı deals with a subject that chiefly concerns psychologists and sociologists: horse possession amongst the early Ottomans. Focusing on the life of Halil of Kütahya whose

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horse had been stolen in seventeenth-century Ottoman Bursa, Abacı points out that the horses that we mostly encounter in the fields of logistics, military, and taxation have always been more than that. In fact, horse ownership tells us more in regards to self-presentation and one's desire to display a certain social status, as Abacı notes. Horses determined people's positions in society, in what the author names 'the Pecking Order.' The only quibble could be the titles of the author's subsections, which are absolutely beautiful but might lack harmony with the content of the paragraphs.

Zeynep Dörtok Abacı's contribution 'An Ill-Behaved, Illegitimate Son and a Tattling, Restless Soul: The Suicide Attempts of Deli Şaban' highlights a social phenomenon, the free-will choice between life and death. The article zooms in on a person who repeatedly attempted to self-harm and suicide in early eighteenth-century Ottoman Ankara. Her work differs from the rest of the contributions since it pinpoints the potential motivations of Deli Şaban that led him to harm himself and attempt suicide, rather than on punishments. To better comprehend his actions, the author proposes the implementation of the 'Dark Triad'; a theory to 'identify the darker character traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.' The protagonist may have successfully suicided due to depression or a lack of empathy, as the author rightly notes; however, we can never know the concrete reason.

Under the title of 'From the Marshes to the Qadi's Court' Fırat Yaşa draws our attention to the story of a timar holder's armed servant named Hamza, who resided in sixteenth-century Ottoman Bursa. Abusing his privileges, Hamza gained a bad reputation in the village amongst his fellow villagers by engaging in violence and crime. He was eventually summoned to the qadi court of Bursa; however, Hamza could keep himself out of trouble for a while. As Yaşa interprets, the pitcher will go to the well once too often. Observing Hamza's wrongdoings from a micro perspective, the author further analyses Hamza in a broader picture too, linking his actions to the sixteenth-century crises in Ottoman Anatolia when the empire was experiencing ecological pressures due to extreme cold and drought. What happened to Hamza at the end? Yaşa presents the categories of crimes and makes proper guesswork to demonstrate the likely punishments Hamza would receive in theory, as there was no clue shedding light on the final verdict.

Thus far the articles have covered some of the trials and tribulations of male Ottoman individuals. Just when you ask yourself "where are all the women?," Cemal Çetin's article pops up. 'The Guiles of Men Outsmart Mâryem' unveils the story of an Armenian woman from eighteenth-century Ottoman Konya. In light of a court entry, Çetin discusses how the society reacted when prostitution and murder were committed in an Ottoman city and how the detection mechanisms of the kadi court operated. The author satisfactorily speculates the gaps in the court document by coming up with possible scenarios. In line with the theme of the book, Çetin's examination concentrates on the relationship between the officials representing the central government in the provinces and the ordinary people. Perhaps, it could have been better if Mâryem's actions were assessed from the perspectives of gender and intersectionality.

The following two articles concentrate on the sixteenth-century Ottoman world. Saadet Maydaer's article, 'Partnership in Mischief in the 16th Century,' closely examines two families of thieves living in sixteenth-century Ottoman Bursa. Did they know that their wives were thieves before they got married? If they knew, would or could they change their minds? Maydaer discovers that the leaders of the gang of robbers, who were never caught red-handed, were both a man and a woman. Through the documented case of theft, one can find answers to more general inquiries regarding the mechanisms of the qadi court such as how to file a lawsuit in a qadi court



and how to prove one's claim. A remarkable aspect of the text is that the author provides a list of stolen items found in the robbers' houses, which allows us to learn what items were light in weight but heavy in value.

Emine Dengeç's article named 'The Case of Gülpaşa of the Gurbet Taifesi at Bor in the 16th Century' tackles a significant social misperception of Roman women in early Ottoman Anatolia: the association of Roman women with adultery and prostitution. Emine Dengeç takes a stance against this perception that some Ottoman bureaucrats and scribes took for granted. As scribes recorded, a group of men confessed they had sexual intercourse with a Roman woman named Gülpaşa 'without coercion.' In this case, Dengeç draws attention to the silence of Gülpaşa and the lack of details in the court entry, showing a little suspicion toward the court case, especially after comparing it with other adultery cases in the same registry.

Zübeyde Güneş-Yağcı's article named 'Have Some Mercy, Sir!' brings an end to the first section of the book. The author explores the concept of loyalty in a particular slave-master relationship from a traditional binary viewpoint. As the author uncovers, in nineteenth-century Ottoman Manisa, an African-origin slave named Selim failed in his escape attempt; as a result, his owner cut off his penis and hands with a hatchet. When Selim's wounds healed, he sued his owner in the qadi court and demanded justice. Selim's complaint reached *Meclis-i Vâlâ* in Istanbul, and Selim's owner was fined in the end. For the betterment of the text, what happened to Selim could have been contextualized by taking into consideration nineteenth-century slavery and slave trade conditions. The article raises a significant question, however, leaves it unanswered or discussed, that is the reason why complaints from abused or mistreated slaves were relatively rare in the court records from previous centuries.

Section II, 'The Operations of Ottoman Bureaucracy: Helpful or Not?', respectively consists of articles by Yasemin Beyazıt, Filiz Yaşar, Özlem Başarır, Faruk Yalıçimen, and İsmail Yaşayanlar. The essays shift our focus to the ways in which Ottoman bureaucracy operated through individual cases of people that, in contrast to the previous section, did not commit crimes.

Yasemin Beyazıt's paper 'Alaeddin from Uskup (Skopje)' reveals the unfortunate story of a young man who was well-educated as a scholar and bureaucrat in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire. On his way to Baghdad to conduct an internship in judicial and religious institutions, he encountered an unprecedented chain of events including getting abducted by pirates during his journey and his professor's retirement. In the bigger picture, Beyazıt presents us with the system used to appoint young scholars and the role of their professors in shaping their career paths, as well as the challenges of mobility in the early modern Ottoman world.

Using Greek archives, Filiz Yaşar concentrates on the implementation of a social practice called *demogerontia* in her article titled 'The Demogerontia Elections.' Having discussed the very nature of the practice, inquiring whether it was a cultural or social phenomenon, Yaşar thoroughly discusses the ways in which *demogerontias* were elected, their responsibilities, and their role in Ottoman society. Standing out as the main actor in her narration, 'Papaz Nikola' was elected to be a part of the *demogerontia* in seventeenth-century Chios, acting as an intermediary between the Ottoman central government and the people of Chios.

Özlem Başarır's article titled 'Two Steps Forward, One Step Back' focuses on early nineteenth-century Diyarbakır with a close eye on the local notables. The author begins by describing the provincial system of Diyarbakır including the historical conditions of the area, the changing dynamics, and the presence of local power-holders, underlining the instability and lack of public order. Out of the desire to have a sphere of influence similar to that of his grandfather and father,



Mehmed Bey took advantage of the chaotic atmosphere and created trouble in hopes that this would enable him to be needed in administration or tax collection. As a result, he was eventually dragged into exile. That's why Mehmed Bey took 'one step forward, one step back.'

In his paper titled 'Are We Not Ottomans?', Faruk Yaşlıçimen deals with the exile story of two brothers, Nureddin and İbrahim, who were Shiite subjects living in the late nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire's city of Baghdad. The author carefully analyses the petitions sent by these two brothers in which they expressed their grievances and drew a persistent profile. In this process, they mentioned the names of their networks and also used the telegraph, the communication tool of the period. Petitions, as Yaşlıçimen rightly puts them, indicate the hierarchy between the Ottoman state and society.

The last contribution of the second section, 'Why did Süreyya, Vasfi, Mehmed, and İdris become Runaways?' by İsmail Yaşayanlar, investigates the reason why four pupils skipped *Mekteb-i İdadî-i Mülkî* high school in Ottoman Bursa in 1901. Through a truancy case, Yaşayanlar eloquently examines the relationship and lack of communication between the Ottoman central government and the province from a central and peripheral perspective. Yaşayanlar points out that Ottoman officials did not interfere with the routine functioning of state institutions unless there was a complaint.

Section III, 'Out of Category: The Adventures of a Dubious Broker,' consists only of Buket Kalaycı's article entitled 'Nicolò Algarotti: A Life Shaped on the Border of Conversion.' At the beginning of the seventeenth century somewhere between Egypt and Alexandria, an Italian expatriate named Nicolò who had been trading on and off with Egypt was entrusted by Venetian merchants to sell their products. Broker Nicolò, who had a lot of debt and sold products as though they were his own property, converted to Islam to extricate himself from a situation that eventually became unresolvable. Although the Venetian government chased after the goods following the contractual agreements (*ahidnâmes*) between Italy and Ottoman Empire, it remains unknown what happened afterward since Nicolò died.

In a nutshell, *The Other Faces of the Empire* is a well-edited and significant contribution to Ottoman microhistory studies. If one looks closely at the profiles of the contributors, one will see the nuance in the selection of the writers in that they are Ottoman historians working in different cities, not solely Istanbul, just like the individuals whose stories are told in this book. The book's catchy title and striking, vivid cover image depicting a horse body made up of people are appropriate for the book's aim, as it reveals 'ordinary lives against social order and hierarchy.' A minor criticism would be the very nature of the book. Since it is an edited book, some of the articles tend to be overshadowed, while some stand out more. Apart from that, I reckon that this pioneering collection of papers, which records the names of ordinary people one by one and makes space for them in the Ottoman history literature, fills a necessary gap in the literature. Last but not least, I believe the book is helpful for both junior researchers and senior history professors who fancy teaching how to read 'between the lines' in terms of how to properly use archival sources.

