

ABUDURRAHMAN ATÇIL, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Pp. 260. \$75.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781107177162

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In *Scholars and Sultans*, Abdurrahman Atçil succinctly traces the formation of an Ottoman administrative mechanism that welded sultanic power to scholarly prowess. The book follows the evolution of this mechanism from the post-Mongol origins of the Ottoman dynasty within the fragmentary Anatolian principalities of the early 14th century to its role in shaping the efflorescence of imperial courtliness at the end of the 16th. Atçil adheres to a now familiar timeline and locale of Ottoman early modern state formation, one that posits 1453 as a definitive moment in empire building, and highlights the regions surrounding Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul as key to dynastic developments. Yet his keen focus on the attributes of a sociopolitical order that shaped “scholar-bureaucrats” into one of the Ottoman establishment’s definitive strengths provides necessary precision and coherence to a previously assumed phenomenon. Significantly, Atçil demonstrates “that scholar-bureaucrats fulfilled functions at every level of the Ottoman administration and government” and thus were integral rather than oppositional facets of dynastic power (p. 220).

The gradual institutionalization of a scholarly cohort is also a three-part story of Ottoman bureaucratization realized in *Scholars and Sultans*. This story flows from Part 1’s “variety, uncertainty, and a lack of identifiable order” between 1300 and 1453 to the “system of objective rules” that formed scholars into bureaucrats during the figurative years of Sultan Mehmed II’s reign in Part 2 (1453–81) (pp. 27, 81). Finally, within the “revenue-raising bureaucratic machine” of Part 3 (p. 126), Atçil attends to both the extension of hierarchical norms and the increased specialization and differentiation of those individuals who filled the ranks of an Ottoman “civil bureaucracy” from 1530 to 1600. *Scholars and Sultans* thus provides yet another avenue for assessing a shift from a coterie of household servants attached to the sultan, to an Ottoman sultanate enacted through the distinct institutional norms and hierarchies of its officials. Implicitly, this is also an architectural story, as the construction of imperial madrasas defined a pathway of institutions that trained scholars for lifetime careers in service to the sultan. Thus, despite the “uncertainty” that characterizes Atçil’s arguments in Part 1, his attention to an early investment in madrasa building also indicates carefully implemented projects that helped to transform a Turkmen tribe into an imperial dynasty.

Well-established in Ottoman historiography, this investment in architecture paralleled the initial adoption of immigrant scholars from environs that stretched from Cairo to Samarkand. Polyglot scholars trained within Seljukid, Chinggisid, and Mamluk court contexts outfitted the scribal ranks of the emergent Ottoman dynasty and helped to define its coherence amidst a competitive environment of political volatility. They also assisted Mehmed II in recrafting a regional dynasty into an empire with universalist claims once it was seated within the symbol-laden city of Constantinople. Mehmed II’s focus on design politics, both in terms of reshaping the urban sphere and in crafting a legal lexicon for imperial governance, was also the avenue whereby immigrant scholars became resident

officials. Atçıl manages to avoid, however, a unilinear narrative of augmented sultanic power. Even as newly fashioned military units won spectacular victories and extended the territorial arm of the sultanate, the Ottoman dynasty remained plagued by questions of legitimacy. Without a clear genealogical or spiritual armature for ruling authority, and beset by succession upheavals which Donald Quataert once termed the “survival of the fittest, not eldest, son,” scholars possessed a regalia of authoritative voices that the sultans sought. Expertise in Islamic scriptures and traditions as well as in the expansive domain of the religious sciences imbued scholars with often fiercely independent and authoritative voices. Mehmed II’s effort to curtail this power and shape it into the image of empire via a binding set of legal regulations (*kanunname*) may have set the stage for the institutionalization of a scholarly cohort, but it could not fully confine their individual antics.

Consequently, the most illuminating elements of *Scholars and Sultans* lie in Atçıl’s references to the persistently diffuse nature of scholarly talent and career patterns rather than to his narrative of how this talent was fashioned into an imperial hierarchy. This diffusion is best revealed when Atçıl turns from his primary source for the book, Ahmed Taşköprüzade’s (d. 1561) well-used bio-bibliographical work in Arabic, *al-Shaqa’iq al-Nu’maniyya fi ‘Ulama’ al-Dawla al-Uthmaniyya* and its augmented Ottoman Turkish form in Nevzade Atayi’s (d. 1635) *Hada’iku’l-Haka’ik fi Tekmilet-i Ş-Şaka’ik*, to scattered archival memoranda, *fetva* collections, *vakıf* foundation accounts, and registers of appointments, dismissal, and transfer. These collectively indicate that, even as a grant of novitiate status (*mülazemet*) became a centralizing gatekeeping device for a staged career, this status was often brokered by officials, dignitaries, and established scholars from dispersed geographic and demographic domains (p. 170–211). By extension, Atçıl’s presentation of varied career pathways due to economic needs and/or resources, structured patronage, and geographic locale reveals a level of happenstance in the careers of scholar-bureaucrats. It perhaps even suggests that the “state” itself was a diffuse entity by the late 1600s.

Scholars and Sultans builds on several momentous, but not explicitly acknowledged as such, efforts to assess the symbiotic relationship between power and knowledge in the Ottoman realms. Two monographs published in 1986, R. C. Repp’s *The Mufti of Istanbul: A Study in the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy* (London: Ithaca Press) and Cornell H. Fleischer’s *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), respectively address the centralizing tactics of the sultanate that first created then sought to manage career hierarchies, and to the intersection between scholarly agendas and bureaucratic norms. A decade later Cemal Kafadar in *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), turned his eye to the narrative strategies of these scholars *cum* bureaucrats, argued that their literary productions played a role in “constructing” the Ottoman state, and introduced the term “scholar-bureaucrat” as a means to assess this twinned power. Atçıl tends not to address these previous approaches to the evolving relationship between scholarly cohorts and the Ottoman establishment in the main chapters of *Scholars and Sultans*. Instead, he draws from his collected sources so as to provide extensive examples and details of the individuals who shaped this historical process.

In brief concluding remarks Atçıl does seek to position the book within significant historiographic debates in Ottoman studies. He argues that *Scholars and Sultans* portrays

“developments analogous” to revisionist and postdeclensionist arguments for a “second Ottoman empire” presented variably by Baki Tezcan (2010) and Guy Burak (2015) (p. 217). Specifically, Atçıl’s chapters show that by 1570 three bureaucratic lines emerged that constituted distinct professional tracks with specialized training and legislated norms: that of military administration (*seyfiye*), judicial and scholarly careers (*ilmiye*), and scribal and financial services (*kalemiye*). He thus corrects a tendency in the field to collapse these tracks into each other. Further, he demonstrates that despite this increased specialization, the status of official privilege (*askeri*) was also a form of social mobility. The key shift, Atçıl indicates, occurs as the policing of privilege boundaries placed both sultan and bureaucrat within a set of institutional norms. These norms then became the basis for outcry against the few “outsiders” who climbed their way into the hierarchy without the grant of novitiate status. This outcry, by the likes of Mustafa Ali, marked not a decline but rather an affirmation of a well-heeled social order. And finally, while Atçıl does not investigate nonbureaucratic scholars, or attend in much detail to scholarly networks or judicial systems in Arab provincial contexts, he suggests “sultans, scholar-bureaucrats, and other representatives of the sultan . . . observed the legal landscape from the same perspective and shaped the legal system” (p. 220). He thereby moves beyond “complementarity” when assessing the relationship between sultanic legislative oversight (*kanun*) and the Islamic legal tradition (*shari‘a*). These concluding arguments will be of note to specialists in Ottoman imperial history. Comparativists in early modern court culture will also find in *Scholars and Sultans* a clear outline of how personal retainers of rulers became instead markers of institutional grandeur.

DIDEM HAVLIOĞLU, *Mihri Hatun: Performance, Gender Bending, and Subversion in Ottoman Intellectual History* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2017). Pp. 220. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780815635499

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Take a look at these lines: “This my cruel beloved was my darling once upon a time, with his deceitful eyes, he was lovely and pleasing once upon a time.” Historians of the Islamicate world would recognize such couplets as the stock-in-trade of traditional poetry. A novice would have had to churn out dozens of such couplets before offering anything original—a new poetic idea, a new choice of words, or a slightly altered meter. But this trite verse acquires new meaning when you know it is written by a woman, a poetess who casts herself in the unmistakably masculine role of the lover. She ends it with another provoking couplet: “Now, as Mihri sees his beard upon his cheek, she says / This my cruel beloved was my darling once upon a time” (p. 182). My handsome peach-fuzzed beloved, she implies, has grown a beard and lost his boyish charm. In other poems she assumes the opposite role, that of the beloved which, though often also male, allows more leeway for gender ambiguity: “Oh Hâtemî, you lied [to] Mihri when you played the lover / By God, she loves you better than any boy” (p. 81).

While reading Havlioğlu’s book, I was often reminded of Borges’s short story “Averroes’ Search,” in which, while interpreting Aristo’s work, Ibn Rushd tries to