

Kemalist project, but also a resort to the same authoritarian measures and spatial strategies that Kemalists employed earlier, this time putting them in the service of a new, Islamist construction of national identity. This irony is not lost on Kezer, who concludes the book with a short Epilogue (written after the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013) in which the republican desire to homogenize, discipline and (re-) shape the population transcends its historical time frame and re-emerges as very much alive and well today. Ultimately, it is to this enduring statist impulse for authoritarian national identity construction in Turkey that the book offers a scathing critique.

Sibel Bozdogan

Kadir Has University and Harvard University

VANESSA GUÉNO and STEFAN KNOST (eds):

Lire et écrire l'histoire ottoman.

(Beiruter Texte und Studien.) vi, 226 pp. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, with Orient-Institut Beirut, 2015. ISBN 978 3 95650 147 0.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X16000689

This volume of fine and impressive articles seeks to make a contribution to the study of Arabic court records of Syria in Ottoman times.

The editors say in the introduction that the purpose of the book is to present studies by younger scholars, who suggest new paradigms for the study of Ottoman *sijills*, or *qadi* court records, hailed as the best source for the study of Ottoman law. The main paradigm shift suggested is to criticize and go beyond the older generation of Ottoman *sijill* scholars, who are said to have made the mistake of treating the *sijill* documents as transparent, that is, as a data bank and no more. This was problematic, since the *sijill* was not a source intended for historians, and hence should itself be a text to be analysed. Stronger versions of this criticism claim that it was a grave mistake to assume that the *qadi* was a benign judge, interested mainly in justice for the simple folks. The *qadi* had his own agenda in each and every case brought before him, and it was the main task of the historian to unlock this code. This writer comes from the Ottoman Turkish culture area of *sijills*, but belongs to the same generation of obsolete historians, and is also a target of critical comment in several of the papers in the book. This is perfectly legitimate, but it is perhaps too soon to forget scholars such as Andre Raymond, Abdul-Karim Rafeq and Abraham Marcus, to name just a few. What I argue in defence of the old guard is that generally I am not at all against the “new (*sijill*) historians” on a theoretical level. But it seems to me that what they have assumed is next to impossible to achieve and, more importantly, that their obsession with it blocks from sight a whole range of important topics that will have to wait another generation before returning to fashion (the status of minorities; the nature of Ottoman–Islamic substantive law, its relation to Islamic law in general and to change in particular, to name just a few). Indeed, the *sijill* was not an intended source; an intended source was the chronicle, for example those early Ottoman chronicles that portrayed the house of Othman as reaching all the way back to Biblical Noah! (All sources are biased.) More concretely, exposing the personal agenda of an Ottoman *qadi* – if such existed, which for the most part I doubt – would be practically impossible, since the *sijill* is based on summaries, not verbatim reproduction of what went on in court. If the *qadi* was subject to pressures by litigants, witnesses and court employees, or Ottoman officials, these are never reflected in the text we are given to read.

To add your own version of the truth as the truth is a procedure I, for one, do not accept.

In the remaining space I will survey just a few of the papers in the book, those more relevant to the aforementioned discussion of the *qadi*.

In Chapter 3 Brigitte Marino deals with the problem relating to the division of an estate between three heirs, when it becomes apparent that the deceased had, before his death, sold half a house to his wife, and the other heirs tried to challenge this transaction. They failed in this, and the author suggests the interpretation that they succeed because they come better prepared with the right documentation and witnesses. This is clearly an example of a straightforward approach, without searching to find fault with the work of the *qadi*.

In Chapter 5 Charles Wilkins studies the role of witnesses in the workings of the *qadi* court of late eighteenth-century Aleppo, where court employees such as bailiffs, and others, fulfilled their roles and then went on to serve as *shuhud al-hal*, court witnesses. The author is led to conclude that the *shuhud* in Aleppo were not like those of seventeenth-century Kayseri, people who happened to be in court on the day of the trial, but rather, like the *shuhud* of Ayntab, who were among the notables of the town, who may well have controlled the court as well.

In Chapter 6, Stefan Knost discusses the usual question of whether the *qadi* operated rationally and by the law, or whether actors working behind the scenes swayed him in this or that direction. The discussion is on a *waqf* in late eighteenth-century Aleppo, which had been a *waqf* in favour of a *takiyya* since time immemorial. Three people challenge that assumption and claim that the famous Uzun Hasan has dedicated this *waqf* to their family. The *qadi* decides in favour of the *takiyya*, eliciting from the writer the comment that perhaps in the psychology of the city dwellers, public *waqfs* enjoyed an advantage over private ones (a hint that the *qadi* here did not enforce the law faithfully). But the old custom was of sacred legitimacy in Ottoman law. Was this the source of the *qadi*'s decision?

In Chapter 8 Christian Sassmannshausen discusses the complex issue of a conflict within a notable family of late Ottoman Tripoli over the possessions of a family member who was considered mentally challenged and incapable of taking care of his own interests. That member hence needed a guardian to look after his affairs. In the case under review, the *qadi* was not of the opinion that the "natural" family member in line for the job was the most appropriate, and opted to nominate someone else. Hence, a series of legal conflicts arose that lasted for years, which gave an opportunity for the writer to offer several statements on the procedure of the *qadi* court, and the role of the *qadi* in relations between the law and society. As someone with experience of the seventeenth-century *sijill*, I am struck by the extraordinary length of nineteenth-century legal cases, a point deserving further study.

Haim Gerber

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

FRANÇOIS GEORGEON, NICOLAS VATIN and GILLES VEINSTEIN (eds):

Dictionnaire de l'Empire Ottoman.

1332 pp. Paris: Librairies Fayard, 2015. €170. ISBN 978 2 213 62681 9.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X16000963

This exceptional work of collaborative scholarship provides a fascinating and insightful view into the state of Ottoman studies, and asserts the continuing