

JOSHUA M. WHITE, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2017). Pp 376. \$65.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781503602526

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“The criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law, and with this also the professor who gives lectures on criminal law and . . . the whole of the police and of criminal justice, constables, judges, hangmen, juries, etc.” (Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–1863*). Much like 19th-century English criminals in Marx’s telling, pirates and corsairs in the Ottoman Mediterranean of the 16th and 17th centuries generated law, court cases, compendia of *fatwas*, bilateral agreements, and legal experts. In his original and persuasive *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean*, Joshua White focuses on Ottoman imperial maritime law and Muslim law and on how their application defined an Ottoman maritime space. The eastern Mediterranean—the region east of a line that started at the south-eastern Adriatic, cut south through the Ionian Sea, and ended at the western shores of Egypt—was Ottoman, but not because its regions were under Ottoman control—they were not—but rather because it was an Ottoman legal space.

*Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* approaches the history of piracy and *corso* (privateering) in the eastern Mediterranean from an Ottoman perspective and on the basis of extensive research in Ottoman archives as well as work carried out in Venetian, British, and French archives and libraries. The result is an important book that significantly revises much of what we thought we knew about Mediterranean piracy. In addition to the famous Barbary corsairs, White introduces us to a series of hitherto little-known outlaws who populated Ottoman waters, and delineates shifting relations among these outlaws, between them and their victims, and with Ottoman authorities. The goal is not merely to catalogue the largest possible number of amphibious raids and groups of corsairs but rather to offer a new analytical approach to piracy and law in the early modern Mediterranean.

The first chapter introduces us to pirates and their victims, stressing the fuzziness of the line separating authorized violence from violence carried out by bandits. It seems as if anyone who could engage in maritime piracy did so on occasion—naval irregulars, to whom the Ottomans outsourced maritime security and who on occasion attacked European as well as Ottoman vessels; provincial and district governors who collaborated with irregulars, providing them with safe harbors and markets; and Barbary pirates. In theory, the enslavement of Ottoman subjects, regardless of their religion, was illicit. Yet many Ottoman Greeks joined forces with European pirates or independently raided Muslims subjects, providing irregulars and others with an excuse to assault these Greek Ottomans. The Mediterranean that emerges from this discussion is a chaotic and violent space, one that the Ottoman central government failed to control.

The second chapter begins to substantiate White’s larger argument, namely that Islamic law underpinned the world of ransom in the eastern Mediterranean despite, or even because of, the failure of the Ottoman Empire to secure its seas. It focuses on captive *kadis* (Islamic judge notaries), who due to the itinerant nature of their work (every two years they moved to a new post) were vulnerable to piracy. Captive *kadis* were valuable

commodities but they were also crucial to the world of ransom, as they served captors, middlemen, and other captives by drafting and authorizing ransom agreements according to Ottoman Islamic law. In other words, Christian centers of piracy not only drew their wealth from the Ottoman Mediterranean but also legally speaking formed part of it.

The remainder of the book examines the intersection of piracy, *Kanun* or Ottoman imperial law (Chapters 3 and 4), and *şeriat* or Ottoman Islamic law (Chapters 5 and 6). Ottoman imperial law was embedded in bilateral treaties (*ahdname*) the Ottomans signed with European powers. White suggests that shifts in the articles pertaining to piracy in the treaties the Ottomans and the Venetians signed in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries are indicative of the signatories' inability to regulate piracy. Unlike the Venetians, once the French, Dutch, and English understood that the Ottomans could not defend Mediterranean commerce, they turned to negotiating directly with amphibious raiders, so with Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers. Islamic law, which historically had little to say about maritime piracy and seas in general, had to adapt to the situation. *Kadis*, *muftis* (Islamic jurists), *fatwas* (unbinding illegal opinions issued by *muftis*), and courts expanded Islamic law to define and identify illicit maritime violence, sentence violators, and compensate victims. White's discussion leads the reader from the *mufti* and his staff as they wrote, collected, and circulated *fatwas* to the central and peripheral courts where *kadis* (many of whom later became the same *muftis* whose *fatwas* White studies) applied the law to specific cases.

The idea that the influence of law stood in reverse relation to the effectiveness of political control is compelling. Indeed, in this account, law is almost always symptomatic of a chaotic reality, generated by it, failing to regulate it, and rarely shaping it. However, law is also a resource for some actors. One aspect of White's discussion especially appreciated by this reviewer—whose research focuses on the relations between Spain and the Ottoman Maghrib—concerns the relations between the Ottoman center and Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli (as well as the relations among the latter), about which we have known so little. White claims that the Ottoman Maghrib did not form part of the Ottoman Mediterranean on the grounds that Ottoman law was not respected there. Yet, when interacting with Istanbul, Maghribi actors often used Ottoman imperial law and Islamic law to justify their actions. Their attempts failed—the center denounced them as pirates and punished them when possible—and yet Maghribi actors played in the Ottoman legal space, employing its instruments, even if from the fringes.

The pirate/corsair dichotomy is challenged by the careful reconstruction of the creation, circulation, and application of *fatwas* on illegal violence and by the description of how legal instruments and the courts could be employed and manipulated. For some Ottomans, being a pirate, corsair, merchant, and captive were stages in complicated social trajectories. Similarly, White shows that the claim that the Christian-Muslim divide fundamentally shaped maritime violence within the Mediterranean does not hold water. Much of the piracy he discusses was intra-Ottoman and included Ottoman bandits attacking not only Ottoman Christians but also Ottoman Muslims.

There is much more to say about this rich book, and we must note the productive potential of its argument for studies on piracy in the western Mediterranean—can we define the western half of the sea in similar terms, and if not, why not? This fine text adds to recent valuable research on Ottoman piracy such as that by Emrah Safa Gürkan. White's

contribution here to scholarship is broad ranging, and this book will be of particular interest to scholars researching and teaching Ottoman and Mediterranean Studies, piracy, commerce, religion, and legal and imperial history.

YUVAL BEN-BASSAT, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine*, Library of Ottoman Studies 42 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). Pp. 331. \$135. ISBN: 9781780764573

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Yuval Ben-Bassat's *Petitioning the Sultan* explores the archival corpus of petitions (*arzuhal*) sent from Palestine (mostly Jaffa and Gaza) to Istanbul between the mid-1860s and 1908. It discusses the nature of this kind of document and examines, through their interpretation, crucial questions such as the Ottoman identity of the region, the relationship between rulers and the population, intercommunal relations, as well as the tensions and ambiguities between bureaucratic modernization in an age of reform and the continuation of old practices. One of the most interesting features of this book, in contrast with other studies that tend to anachronistically apply categories and paradigms, is to consider Palestine "from an Ottoman perspective" (p.6).

Ben-Bassat analyzes the role of petitions in late-Ottoman procedures with great precision and situates the nature and usefulness of these sources in contrast with other archival resources like the records of qadi courts (*sicill*). The author also proposes stimulating reflections on petitioning as a social practice and as an instrument of governance. Even if some of his conclusions on this matter can be debated—as when he argues that petitions were an instrument of centralization and that they reinforced the position of the ruler, although they were also an institutionalized expression of locality and a guarantee of the respect of all the decentralized features of governance at the scale of urban, rural, communal, and professional communities—the author's precise work at deciphering the administrative process and political treatment of the petitions, recognizing them as a complex element, is innovative.

As for the content of the petitions, Ben-Bassat proposes a reading of both urban, rural, and Bedouin societies under an original lens. The texts of the petitions allow access to the voices of the people. The passages on petitions sent by Ottoman officials are valuable additions, as they reveal previously underdocumented dimensions, such as the negotiation of Ottoman imperialism and the complexity of the personal identity and careers of such officials. Passages are also dedicated to petitions sent by Templer colonists and proto-Zionist migrants. They limn interactions with Ottoman authorities and the complexity of the categories and identities that other approaches in historiography tend to reify. This book hence constitutes an important contribution not only to the history of Palestine but also to the understanding of the nature of the Ottoman empire and of the dynamics of change that were enacted during the era of the Tanzimat.

Ben-Bassat, while proposing innovative interpretations on this later period, does not insist on the link between practices of this period and the Ottoman classical age in regard to petitions as a crucial tool of governance. Petitions, indeed, were a central feature