

With other recent work on this period (books by Ernie Tucker and Michael Axworthy on Nadir Shah), perhaps the eighteenth century will enjoy a surge of interest as it has in Ottoman and South Asian historiographies in recent years.

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MAFALDA ADE:

Picknick mit den Paschas. Aleppo und die levantinische Handelsfirma Fratelli Poche (1853–1880).

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Non-governmental sources have for a long time been understudied in the historiography of the modern Middle East. The, in part, turbulent political history of the region, demographic movements, and changing use of languages are among the reasons that the study of documents from personal archives has not received the attention it might have. Mafalda Ade's study on the Aleppine trading company Fratelli Poche reveals the potential of such personal documents for enriching our view of the modern history of the region. It is based on the private archive of the families Marcopoli and Poche which was created by Tübingen University following the discovery of the documents in the 1990s and which now, according to the author, constitutes the largest personal archive in the Middle East. It contains principally commercial correspondence and accounting books from the two families' businesses, but also documents from a large variety of vice-consulates that had been represented in Aleppo by members of the Marcopoli and Poche families, as well as personal letters.

Ade concentrates on the company founded by the Poche Brothers. Her study is subdivided into three parts that have rather different foci, but all in all it indicates the various questions that can be successfully addressed using the archive. The first section concentrates on the Poche family's life and place in Aleppine society; the second traces their commercial network in the region; and the third investigates their attempts at collecting debts as a micro-study on the efficiency of *Tanzimat* (Ottoman reform) institutions.

Following an introduction to the general history of residents with West or Central European roots in Aleppo, Ade recreates the Poche family history based on their private letters. Joseph Poche, born in Northern Bohemia, came to Aleppo as a trade representative in 1819. His sons Frédéric and Adolphe founded a long-lasting company in the mid-nineteenth century. The second generation was no longer fluent in German, but better versed in Italian and French, and later on Arabic. Most family members intermarried with other local families of foreign origin, but some also wed Arab Christians from among the local business families. In continuation of a century-old tradition, they lived in a *han*, but had adapted its interior to European design. Ade summarizes that the Poches became classic representatives of "Levantine" society: although only vaguely connected to their region of origin, they understood themselves to be Europeans and simultaneously strongly identified with their place of residence and were locally well connected.

The second section moves on to the wider region and the company's commercial network. Their letters reflect relatively intense contacts and in some cases

formalized partnerships for the region from Harput in the North to Homs in the South and from Mersin in the West to Baghdad in the East. A statistical overview of the correspondence gives a first impression of which cities and regions were important for an Aleppo Levantine trade company that negotiated between the wider region surrounding it and the global market. More in-depth sections deal with the Poche family's interest in wool from Urfa and yarn from Diyarbakır, where they established local partnerships. The local partners appear quite diverse, most often Muslims, Armenian Christians, or foreign traders – it seems the Poches preferred whoever proved most efficient at serving their interests. However, we find that the Levantine family did not shy away from mobilizing communalist ties and even outright racism: when vying for the post of Austrian honorary consul in Aleppo against Moïse Picciotto in 1858, the Poche-Marcopoli family appealed to Catholic solidarity and utilized anti-Semitic slander against their rival (without success).

The remainder of the book is dedicated to forms of payment and collection of debts. Transactions in this region of the late Ottoman Empire were invariably connected to the issuing of credit. *Kambiyale* (promissory notes), frequently for a number of months, enabled customers to collect on their investments, while *poliçe* (bills of exchange) were intended to minimize the circulation of cash between different towns, as such transport was dangerous and costly. In practice, credits led to numerous conflicts and the chapter traces the various paths to their resolution. The question is whether the new institutions of the *Tanzimat*, the commercial or mixed courts (*Mahkeme-i Ticaret*, 1847) and the trade law (*Kanunname-i Ticaret*, 1850/1860), ever became effective instruments in the various provinces. The correspondence gives ample examples of a difference in law and practice. For example, when the Poche Company urged their local partner in Urfa to consult the authorities for a *protesto*, a necessary legal step to uphold rights on an overdue debt, their local contact informed them that protest was not practised in Urfa and would only insult the local merchants (p. 137). Nonetheless Ade concludes that from the 1870s onwards the courts played an increasingly large role in ensuring payments. This is reflected not only in actual appeals to the courts, but also in the Poches' increasing use of threats to take debtors to court. She sees the continuity of informal channels for pressuring debtors not as a contradiction to the institutionalization process, let alone a failure of the judicial system, but believes that legal and extra-legal strategies by creditors complement each other.

Ade's study is well written, based on a thorough reading of the family papers and additional materials in archives in Aleppo, Paris, Istanbul and Nantes. The study successfully intervenes in several ongoing debates in the history of the Ottoman Middle East concerning the social and cultural role of foreign passport holders, the outreach of different forms of economic integration, and the efficiency of reform beyond the empire's core. The choice of topics is to some extent dictated by the documents available in the Poche-Marcopoli Archive. The issue of debt collection might have been somewhat shorter (it takes up over half the book) to the benefit of a more in-depth study of the cultural and network aspects made visible by the family archive. But readers interested in any of the three aspects will find well-researched and informative chapters illuminating various trajectories of research based on this unique pool of material in the family archive of a nineteenth-century Levantine company in Aleppo.

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