Reviews of Books

The Cambridge History of Turkey. Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839. Edited by Suraiya N. Faroqhi. pp. xxi, 619, 14 illustrations, 5 maps, 15 tables. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

doi:10.1017/S1356186308008730

Over a century after the first volumes appeared, the Cambridge History Series has begun to publish its long-awaited history of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. Volumes 3 and 4 (1840 to the present) have already appeared; Volume 1 (1071–1453) is due out in October 2008, and Volume 2 (1453–1603) appears to have no publication date as yet. An unfathomable editorial decision has dictated that these volumes be collectively called the Cambridge History of Turkey – with mention of the extensive state of which the modern Republic is but one of many heirs relegated to the subtitle in the middle volumes and omitted elsewhere.

Not so many years ago it would have been inconceivable that the era encapsulated here would have been thought to merit an independent volume. Research on these some two and a half centuries was negligible, and histories of the empire written by an earlier generation accorded a bare minimum of pages to the long years between the 'classical age' of the sixteenth century and the Tanzimat of the nineteenth. Implicitly or otherwise, this was the era of 'decline', which by definition had little claim on our attention. There is now a critical mass of studies available on many aspects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it is a measure of the transformation that a joined-up narrative of events during these years can be taken as read. It is now possible to sustain a thematic treatment that reaches beyond the anecdotal. The contributions here are for the most part well chosen and the offerings engaging. Inevitably, though, some writers have succeeded better than others in making their scholarship accessible.

The earlier chapters are perhaps the least revelatory to read, if only for the reason that they deal with material that, although undeniably essential, is at the more familiar end of the spectrum. It is Suraiya Faroqhi's editorial privilege to write the Introduction, which is followed by Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth's essay on the ecology of the Ottoman lands. The Balkans features most prominently in Hütteroth's discussion, a geographic lop-sidedness that, given the research tendency towards regional specialisation, must be excused – although it were better otherwise in a survey volume such as this. His paper is striking however, for his Canute-like refusal to subscribe to the anti-decline *Zeitgeist* – he insists on the now unfashionable notion of post-classical 'stagnation'. Christoph Neumann writes on political and diplomatic developments, and Carter Findley on political culture and the great households. Virginia Aksan summarises her considerable research on warfare and diplomacy – the navy as usual gets short shrift – while Linda Darling tackles the complex matter of state finance.

In a chapter on the historiography of relations between the central state and provincial elites, that in fact covers only the Arab lands, Dina Khoury discerns not decentralisation and loss of control by

Istanbul – as the received wisdom would have it – but instead 'localisation' of Ottoman authority. The history is discussed in Fikret Adanır's informative essay on semi-autonomous forces in the Balkans and Anatolia, while Bruce Masters mirrors Adanır, with equal confidence, for the Arab provinces.

Madeleine Zilfi has written widely on her two chosen topics – the *ulema* and Ottoman women. She traces the development of the institution of the 'legal learned', as it became increasingly restricted to Istanbul insiders and, in the eighteenth century, aristocratic – the preserve of dynasties that paralleled the military and bureaucratic households discussed by Findley. Thematic gaps are as inevitable as geographic, but it is a pity that *sufi*s, and the puritan *Kadizadeli* preachers – the latter a subject that Zilfi pioneered the research of – are omitted from consideration.

Obedience and unobtrusiveness were the watchwords for Ottoman women. Mehmed Birgivi, the late-sixteenth century inspirational ideologue to the *Kadizadeli* preachers, considered women sinners if they did not carry out the domestic tasks required of them. Zilfi looks at women's social and sexual personae, their position in the family and as domestic slaves, and the recourse that individuals had in law to ameliorate the constrictions imposed by their collective status. Two other less than equal groups were Christians and Jews. Bruce Masters writes of the changes experienced by Christian communities as the seventeenth century became the eighteenth: Christian merchants and bankers were enjoying boom times; western-style, secular education became increasingly available; and intense political struggle among different Christian sects produced the *millet*s, whose structured religious hierarchy fostered ethnic and ultimately national consciousness. The concomitant downturn in the fortunes of Ottoman Jews may account for the timeless quality of Minna Rozen's chapter, which emphasises organisation and downplays the cut and thrust of political history. The queen mother Turhan Sultan's expulsion of the Jews of Eminönü from the site of her new mosque in the mid-seventeenth century rates a mention, but that they were apparently threatened with execution if they did not leave is not. Around the same time the Jews were railed against by the *Kadizadeli*s. Were relations between the Ottoman state apparatus, or its individual members, really as untroubled as Rozen suggests?

In one of the strongest essays in the volume – on the so-called 'capitulations' and western trade – Edhem Eldem criticises the teleology that posits a direct line between western presence in the Ottoman economy, and later domination of that economy by western powers. Arguing that the host economy was less impacted by the vicissitudes of western trade than is usually accepted, he traces the uneven course of east-west trade relations, and succinctly sets out a revised narrative that corrects the misconceptions of the old. Suraiya Faroqhi's pre-eminence in studies of Ottoman subjects is demonstrated in three chapters: on guildsmen and handicraft producers, textile production, and rural life.

Of particular note, as much for their intrinsic interest as for the fact that Ottoman historians tend to be ignorant of the cultural manifestations of music and literature, are essays by, respectively, Cem Behar and Hatice Aynur. Behar discusses the Ottoman/Turkish [*sic*] classical musical tradition from its origin in the mid-sixteenth century, and writes of the richness and creativity of what until the late nineteenth century was an oral tradition. He offers a crash course in forms and instruments, and highlights the 'stunning diversity' of works produced in the dervish milieu. 'Diverse' aptly describes the range of Ottoman literature. Aynur concentrates on poetry in its variety of genres, and those who made it – among whom thirty-two women are known to have left collections. She writes of rivalry among poets, and of satirists – such as the unfortunate Nef'î, who met his end at the hands of Murad IV for persisting in puncturing the pretensions of his superiors and fellow versifiers alike.

Art history, by contrast, has become well integrated into Ottoman history *sensu stricto,* and Tülay Artan writes about painting and architecture – but not textiles, ceramics etc. – in a period when 'decline' was supposed to be almost palpable and the artistic world bereft of ideas. Artan discusses much more than the art itself, writing of individual artists' motivations and setting the works and their creators in the context of their times. The quality of the illustrations to this chapter does her text no service (and the same is true of the maps, generally).

The last time the Ottoman Empire had an outing in the Cambridge History Series it was in the Cambridge History of Islam (1970), whose stated rationale was to "attempt to view Islam as a cultural whole". It is a measure of how attitudes have changed that we now seek the diversity inherent in our subject matter, rather than attempt to impose a spurious uniformity.

Sultan and commoner, centre and periphery, politics and the arts, Muslims and non-Muslims: the topics may be the traditional matter of Ottoman history-writing, but the treatment they receive here will be novel to the non-specialist reader for whom the series is intended. Specialists will also learn much. Purists might hope that Cambridge Histories should be *the* definitive companion to a scholarly field. However, this is barely possible for the history of the middle years of the Ottoman empire – albeit that the title refers to the 'Later Ottoman Empire' – that until recently was a blank canvas. This volume goes far towards filling in the history of the forgotten centuries.

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Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town; 'Ayntāb in the 17th century. By Hülya Canbakal. pp. xii, 213. Leiden, Brill, 2007.
doi:10.1017/S1356186308008742

In this book Hülya Canbakal examines Ayntab (modern Gaziantep in south-eastern Turkey) in the seventeenth century from the perspectives of social and political hierarchy, the power of the urban elite and their relationship with the common people, a relationship which is "one of least explored aspects of Ottoman provincial life" (p. 123). These issues "cut across a number of research agendas in Ottoman/Middle Eastern history" (p. 2), including the politics of centre-periphery relations and the related questions of decentralisation/integration and the rise of local power groups; urban history, particularly the questions of urban administration, autonomy and identity; and the politics of everyday life.

In explanation of her choice of this particular town, Canbakal notes the location of Ayntab on the frontier between Bilad al-Sham and Rum which results in "interesting questions in relation to the historical traditions of the post-Ottoman world, which are based on linguistic and nation-state boundaries" (p. 4). Its position makes it "a city between two worlds" (p. 181). She also argues that Ayntab was interesting because it was a medium size town of no particular importance which makes it more typical of the Ottoman provincial world in many respects than the big cities which have been very much more widely studied, and have shaped our view of urban traditions in the Ottoman empire. While true that such a choice does have the potential to throw a different, and possibly more realistic, slant on the way we perceive Ottoman provincial urban life, it also brings with it its own difficulties, for, as Canbakal herself says, Ayntab was "an ordinary town no more or less significant for the historian than dozens of others located in the interior periphery of the empire" (p. 53), and was one which never received special attention from Istanbul. This can clearly make sources a problem.

The sources on which the research is based are 20 court registers from 1645–1699 and a register of probates compiled between 1682 and 1694. She acknowledges that using probate records in studies of wealth distributions "poses major methodological problems" (p. 91), noting also that the tax data for the late seventeenth century is possibly misleading (p. 31). She similarly accepts the difficulties of court registers, drawbacks which "significantly circumscribe the methodological possibilities that registers offer" (p. 14), but nevertheless argues, reasonably, that court registers still remain "irreplaceable" for any study of Ottoman social history. They are, in any case, the "only source which offers a close-up view of daily life" (p. 179). It remains the case, however, that the sources for this study of the social history of Ayntab are comparatively restricted and of necessity leave much either unknown or speculative. One