

IKMET ÖZDEMİR:

The Ottoman Army 1914–1918: Disease and Death on the Battlefield. (Utah Series in Turkish and Islamic Studies.) xiii, 274 pp. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2008. \$25. ISBN 978 0 87480 923 7. doi:10.1017/S0041977X09000159

In this book, İkmət Özdemir aims to discuss the effects of epidemics and diseases on the Ottoman army and population during the First World War. Since the available historiography on the Ottoman army in this period is scarce, this work should be welcomed. The principal focus of the book is the relationship between wars and epidemics, and the author investigates the number of Ottoman soldiers deceased, and the causes of death, during the First World War. Özdemir argues unequivocally that the Ottoman army suffered more casualties due to disease and infection than it did combat-related fatalities.

First, Özdemir presents a short but effective history of infection and disease in relation to the Ottoman army in the nineteenth century, arguing that the continuous state of war and movement of troops, from the Crimean War in the 1850s to the Balkan Wars at the beginning of the twentieth century, produced a massive outbreak of various diseases, which became the primary cause of death for both the military and civilians in war zones. The author relies on diaries, memoirs and, partly, on official sources; nevertheless Özdemir does not critically assess the sources used, as in the case of the “Regulations on the Infectious Diseases and Epidemics”, issued by the Ottoman government in 1914 (p. 26). The document sheds light on a very interesting aspect of the Ottoman military machine, but is presented without any particular comment.

The author discusses all fronts of the First World War but his focus is directed mainly towards the Caucasian front. Assessing the performance of the Ottoman army, Özdemir takes into account the status of the transport and supply within the Empire. Unsurprisingly, he claims that the failure of the Ottoman army in the Caucasian region was more the result of deficiencies in the organization than of Russian military superiority. He quotes from several diaries of Turkish doctors which report the health conditions along the routes leading to the fronts. Özdemir demonstrates the doctors’ awareness of the problem on the one hand, and the almost complete negligence of the Ottoman government regarding the terrible conditions suffered by the Ottoman troops on the other. Introducing the issue of casualties, the author focuses on the so-called eastern front, which included Erzurum and Sarıkamış where, in 1915, the Ottoman army was decimated. According to Özdemir’s sources, the fighting caused fewer casualties than the rapid spread of typhus which was affecting the region, and which rapidly spread to the rest of Anatolia.

Looking at the other fronts, Özdemir presents a picture of the different situations across the Empire. An interesting collection of data shows the impact of a long list of diseases and epidemics upon the population of cities and provinces; these data cover not only the military troops, but also the civilian population, *de facto* reinforcing the idea that disease and not war was the major cause of death in the Ottoman Empire. The author also engages in discussions of each individual major disease, again offering fascinating data with little analysis.

In the central chapter of his work, Özdemir makes an impressive effort to show figures on the victims of the war. He claims that the Ottoman army was particularly badly affected by the inefficient treatment of wounded soldiers and transmission of disease. Discussion of these figures is offered on a comparative basis; nevertheless, the focus is on Turkish casualties and the process of reconstructing the figures. Although this work of statistical collection is highly impressive, due to the

difficulties of navigating a vast and sometimes inaccessible range of sources, it seems that all this effort has been directed towards answering whether it was the war or the epidemics which were the real disaster for the Ottoman army. Özdemir does not aim to use this data for other purposes, or to answer other questions.

The author does not omit to discuss the relocation of the Armenians and other subjects of the Empire. However, he does not engage in any debate as to the reasons for these deportations; he argues that the Armenians were severely affected by epidemics encountered on their way to new places of settlement, while shortages of food and water accounted for the other deaths. He does not take any particular position with regard to the Armenian issue; he nevertheless suggests that, in fact, diseases and epidemics were often spread by refugees and deportees, thereby attributing a negative role to those who were forcibly deported.

In the last, possibly most interesting, chapter, Özdemir discusses the performance of Turkish doctors during the wars fought by the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, the Balkan Wars and the First World War. The author offers readers a unique perspective on an often-ignored corner of Ottoman history. He briefly discusses the work of three Ottoman doctors, their struggle against epidemics and their attempts to promote some form of vaccination. Unfortunately, this chapter ends abruptly, leaving the reader with the feeling that it could have been expanded upon with various questions.

One of the greatest achievements of this book is the fact that Özdemir raises several interesting issues, such as the role of medicine and doctors in the Ottoman army, and, in the author's words, he helps to lift a "blackout of war" imposed on the history of military and civilian losses caused by infections and diseases (p. 203). Furthermore Özdemir fills a gap, which still remains to be fully explored, in the shape of the Ottoman army in the First World War. But there are also a number of problems: sources are often discussed at face value and not critically assessed or contextualized. The author sets the stage for many interesting debates, but these are not fully explored and sources are just shown and not analysed in greater detail. Özdemir does not really assess the relationship between epidemics and the policies adopted by the Ottoman government, and seems to imply that the main responsibility for the extremely high mortality rates from diseases is due to refugees and deportees: scientifically correct, but not explained in political terms.

Although some issues remain unanswered and some problems unsolved, Özdemir's work is an important contribution to military history and to the history of the Middle East in general.

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RHOADS MURPHEY:

Studies on Ottoman Society and Culture, 16th–18th Centuries.

(Variorum Collected Studies Series.) xvi, 322 pp. Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2007. £65. ISBN 978 0 7546 5931 0.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X09000160

Studies on Ottoman Society and Culture 16th–18th Centuries is a Variorum collection of articles by Rhoads Murphey published between 1980 and 2001. The collection is divided into three parts. The first section is on cultural relations and exchange of ideas and includes four articles on medicine and transculturalism, westernization, European writing in the Middle East and the Ottoman attitude to the adoption of Western technology. Section two, on urban living, contains articles on provisioning