
BUCHBESPRECHUNGEN

Charles L. Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities. Ottoman Aleppo (1640–1700)*, Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2010, 323 S.

Rezensiert von
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With this study on Aleppo during the second half of the 17th century, Charles Wilkins not only proposes a detailed vision of the evolution of this urban society in Ottoman times, but also a reflection on the relationship between what happened at the scale of the Empire, notably a series of wars, and the re-organization of taxation at the scale of the city, with a series of decisions which had a huge impact on urban neighbourhoods, guilds, notables and merchants. This is probably one of the major originalities of this book: focusing on the entanglement of scales between geopolitics and urban life in a complex organization like the Ottoman Empire. As war in Europe and the Balkans (with Venice between 1644 and 1649; with Poland between 1672 and 1676 and with the Habsburg Empire between 1663 and 1664 and again between 1683 and 1699) knew developments at an inedited scale, requir-

ing inedited shares of the imperial budget, cities of the Empire were submitted to a series of taxations which not only affected their economy, but also durably changed the general organization of taxation and commerce in an Ottoman urban context.

In his introduction, the author situates his own work in the wake of studies which have promoted a new vision of the 17th century in the Ottoman Empire. Elaborating on the work of Halil Inalcik, Metin Kunt, Rhoads Murphey, Jane Hathaway and Linda Darling, Wilkins argues that this century was in no way a mere transition between the glorious 16th century and an inevitable decline, but on the contrary a period of major innovation, notably in the relationship between cities, the military and the central government. In his opinion, wars were one of the major factors in such transformations. The authors also underlines the necessity of examining transformations in the very nature of the Empire, in the wake of the analyse proposed by Karen Barkey, but in notable contrast with the view she expressed in “Bandits and Bureaucrats” (1994), under the perspective of urban societies. For doing so, he cites studies on Jerusalem by Dror Ze’evi (1996) and Ayntab by Hülya Canbakal (2007) as possible models for an understanding of the nature of the 17th century urban ottomanization process. His central hypothesis

is that “warmaking, an activity initiated by the central government, reshaped relations between the state and local populations in terms of social, political and institutional change” (p. 5). Just like Charles Tilly argued that wars make states, Wilkins thinks that they also make cities, even in non-war zones. In order to examine the effects of the war context on urban society in Aleppo, a city known to Ottomanists through the work of Bruce Masters for the 17th century and Herbert Bodman, Abraham Marcus or Margaret Meriwether for the 18th century, he chose three indicators: the residential quarter, the military garrison and guilds and the manner in which within this framework extraordinary taxation became ordinary for the sake of war financing, with lasting effects on the very organization of the Empire and of the city. His research is based on the study of 20 local “sijill” court registers of the period 1640–1700 as well as on the reading of the summary of petitions sent to Istanbul and found in the BOA and on the Evâmir-I Sultâniyye registers of imperial orders found in Damascus.

Chapter 1, based on the fiscal surveys of 1616 and 1678, aimed at reforming basic fiscal units (*‘avârîzhânes*) for the calculation of the *‘avârîz* taxes, focuses on residential quarters (*mahallas*) as basic administrative units in the city and on the evolution of the administrative apparatus during the 17th century. Wilkins illustrates how the second of these surveys was instrumental in reducing the number of tax exemptions and in fixing a broader picture for permanent tax assessments. He also studies how the local court of justice served as a chamber of negotiation of the implementation of the new fiscal policy and how

the local city administration, through the figure of the sheikh al-balad, had role in implementing, and even embodying, the imperial policy at the scale of the city and its quarter. This even provoked conflicts, resulting in the replacement of a chief of the city accused by the fellow notables he owed his power to of being too keen to perform a tax survey for the imperial authorities. What Wilkins has the evidence of in his study, but does not always interpret fully, as he often underestimates the degree of organization of the local urban society, is indeed the moment of a renewed pact between the imperial sphere and urban notables, with the delegation of reformed imperial fiscal duties to those notables in exchange of a confirmation and even reinforcement of their traditional powers, of medieval origins (and sometimes in exchange of tax exemptions too). This is the moment of construction of the Ottoman imperial old regime. What is not always clear in Wilkins’ study is however the role of the wartime context. If one can easily agree with the importance of war as a general incentive for fiscal reform and efficiency, the author gives little evidence at this stage of his study of the penetration of this wartime feature into the urban society. But the elements he provides on the functioning of this society are fascinating.

Chapter 2 is on the different responses, both individual and collective, to new taxation patterns at the scale of the neighbourhood, between applications for tax exemption, resistance to taxation and the re-organization of hierarchies and social roles. In this chapter, based upon extensive archival research and illustrated by a series of very useful tables, the author is able to track strategies invented by inhab-

itants in order to alleviate the effects of the new taxation system on their properties. From accusing a tax-collector of rape (p. 63) to petitioning (p. 70) or to buying properties to which tax exemption rights were attached, such strategies were diverse. As people belonging to the military cast (*askeri*) were also exempt (in contrast with merchants and artisans (*re'âyâ*, the rest of the population), Wilkins shows how strategies were invented in order to obtain exemption by assisting military tasks. People of noble descent (*ashrâf*), theoretically exempt, also had to negotiate confirmation of their privileges, as the fiscal reform was intended at enlarging the fiscal base for the payment of property taxes. At the scale of the neighbourhood, as Wilkins illustrates, taxation was also an incentive for a reinforcement of patronage, as rich tax payers regularly paid for their less wealthy fellow inhabitants. Elaborating on such phenomena, the author proposes reflections on the fundamentals of civil society in Ottoman Aleppo.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the question of the role of the military within the city: their spatial distribution and their progressive implication into civilian social roles. Wilkins argues in this chapter that during the 17th century, military cadres used their privileges in order to enhance their internal cohesion as a group and their social prerogatives. He builds a precise map of residential patterns of military personnel and illustrates how through home ownership they progressively mingled with the rest of the population. Wilkins also shows the growing role of the military in economic life: “they exploited both their authority as administrators of designated tax sectors and their superior legal status and privi-

lege to exercise influence, if not control, over certain urban institutions and thereby supplement their income” (p. 200). This is the passage in which the author’s central theory on the role of war in social transformations is the most convincing.

The last chapter (4), elaborated on the basis of the reading of two court registers of the 1650s and 1660s, is dedicated to the world of guilds, and deals with the way in which professional organizations were reshaped in war times under the effects of both external and internal influxes. In this chapter, the author examines the social nature of guilds and the role of hierarchy within them and asks the question of the role of the wartime context on their evolution, underlining the ambiguities of the relationship between artisans and the State when wartime requisitions constituted an element of stagnation but when in the same time the most enterprising guild members were able to benefit from the context of strong demand. Wilkins’ work on the guilds of Aleppo also allows him to take part in ongoing debates about the degree of autonomy guilds were granted and on the dimension of self-government they embodied. Following the work of Haim Gerber, Bruce Masters, Abdul-Karim Rafek, Suraiya Faroqhi Randi Deguilhem and Eunjeong Yi on Ottoman guilds, he argues that in Aleppo, guilds were granted “extensive autonomy by state authorities” and that they expressed “egalitarian and socially conservative values” even if challenged by the new social order (p. 221). Elaborating on the examples of the butchers and of the tanners, Wilkins also suggests that guild leaders were neither mere “compliant instruments of the state” nor “entrepreneurs driven solely by ambition”

(p. 225) but rather something combining those two extremes. He also provides a detailed list of Kasapbasis of Aleppo for the period 1640–1707 and of the Akhî Bâbâ for the period 1642–1690. The chapter finishes with considerations on the relationships between guilds, either of yamak style (asymmetric) or collective: a quest for the understanding of the nature of guild solidarity: “guilds functioned as an important component of what we call today civil society, asserting leadership in spheres of action that in effect limited state authority. Although guilds were too heterogeneous and dynamic a form of professional organization to allow permanent agreements among all of them, the demonstrated patterns of the Yamak relationship and inter-guild cooperation show that broad-based temporary agreements, founded on common interests, were possible” (p. 286).

In his conclusion, Charles Wilkins underlines how one of the effects of the fiscal reforms he studied has been the reduction of discriminations against non-Muslims, a better distribution of the tax burden, and better correspondence between the reality of property and taxation: “In the broader trajectory of Ottoman history, we might see the war-making of the 17th century as enabling real political and social integration, continuing a movement that had begun in the 16th century but accelerating it as the material and human needs of the Ottoman state shifted, and as the social basis of Ottoman polity broadened” (p. 291). If one can only agree with this description of the rationality of the imperial effort of creation of a reformed Old regime state, and with the thesis of the urban nature of its local implementation, the mechanical link the author builds between

war-making and social transformations is not totally convincing, except when related to the urban trajectories of members of the different military casts: Wilkins study is indeed an excellent study of urban and imperial history, and demonstrates the fact that the 17th century has been a crucial period in the construction of the Ottoman old regime but the entanglement of urban affairs with war is never really the main focus. This study should however help refining reflections on the transition with the 18th century and also interpretations about the reforms of the 19th century: they were not just the modernization of a medieval heritage, but rather that of a dynamic old regime system with a rich 17th century history: what 19th century reformers found was not a sleepy empire dominating Arab cities just by military presence, but rather a situation in which the pact between local elites and the empire had been dynamically constructed since the 17th century under the form of an imperial old regime system negotiated at the scale of every neighbourhood, community and guild, all elements of an articulated form of local civil society. As for the impact of the wartime context, it seems to have been important in a city like Aleppo, just like for the whole Empire, as incentive for the creation of a more efficient tax system, but not necessarily as a general determinant for social evolution as the author sometimes states. But anyway, this study provides stimulating elements for a debate about it, and most of all, very important elements for a renewed understanding of the functioning of Ottoman urban societies, with a reassessment of the civic role of guilds and of the consistence of the local system of urban governance, based upon the delegation of urban pow-

ers to notables. For these reasons, Charles Wilkins study should now be part of all bibliographies on Aleppo and on Ottoman urban societies.

Davide Rodogno: Against Massacre. Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914. The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, 391 S.

Rezensiert von
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Davide Rodogno's "Against Massacre" explores European humanitarian interventions in the late Ottoman Empire, the principal site for such interventions. The interventions are part of a larger history of Ottoman-European interaction that came to its climax in the 'last and longest Ottoman century', in which time frame the book is placed. These efforts were launched in the name of a common humanity with victims of atrocities. The victims supported by armed intervention were, however, exclusively Christian groups; others, including Muslims and Jews, Alevis and Druze, could at best case profit from humanitarian aid or some diplomatic steps.

One reason for this was that Ottoman Christians possessed little or no military, political, and symbolic power in a Muslim empire and, once suspected as disloyal or in open revolt, were crushed by the state, regional lords, or armed locals. This was

not the case when Muslims – for instance, Kurdish chiefs – rebelled, because the Porte and provincial Muslims did not consider that the latter's acts fundamentally questioned Ottoman Muslim legitimacy. This larger asymmetry of power must be kept in mind when seeking 'balanced' accounts of massacres, and in such instances as when, as Rodogno rightly insists, British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli rhetorically reduced large-scale massacres to local disturbances in order to avoid the call to humanitarian intervention.

Another reason for pro-Christian intervention was cultural and religious. The Ottoman world, ruled by Muslims, was not considered to be part of the 'civilized', de facto culturally Christian family of nations that intervened in the 19th century in the name of humanity. Even when dire situations called for action, there was a fundamental problem of how to conceive of a common humanity; cultural and religious rifts penetrated modern humanitarian discourse. Rodogno is perspicacious in insisting on the centrality of the modern Eastern Question for understanding humanitarian intervention. He could even have elaborated further on the modern European projection of humanity "in negative" that pointed at foreign Ottoman "lèse-humanité" but remained unable to produce a positive global project of and for humanity.

In his first two chapters, Rodogno elaborates on the exclusion of the Ottoman world, the roots of and conditions for intervention in the Holy Alliance of 1815, the latter's notion of a Christian family of civilized nations, and the nineteenth-century context of humanitarian intervention in the Ottoman Empire. His analysis is