

Pascal W. Firges, Tobias P. Graf, Christian Roth, and Gülay Tulasoğlu (eds.),
Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History,
Leiden: Brill, 2014, 307 pp., ISBN 978-9004-274-68-6

This edited volume is a collection of 14 essays, all but two penned by young academicians with a fresh look and innovative approach to Ottoman history. It grew out of a series of workshops in Heidelberg, Princeton, Istanbul and Cambridge as well as a three-day international conference in Heidelberg, all part of a research project entitled “Dynamic Asymmetries in Transcultural Flows at the Intersection of Asia and Europe: The Case of the Early Modern Ottoman Empire” under the umbrella of Heidelberg University’s Cluster of Excellence “Asian and Europe in a Global Context”. The main paradigm of the book is the well-connectedness of the Ottoman Empire, i.e., “the interconnectedness of various regions, groups, and ideas, across several continents and centuries.” Under the influence of new methodological approaches such as connected history, entangled history, *histoire croisée* and transcultural history, this work openly criticizes the Eurocentric historiography that takes Europe as the standard field and relegates non-European fields to mere “area studies.” Moreover, by studying Ottoman Empire not only as a European, but also a “world” empire which had political, economic and religious interests beyond its borders and which participated in and helped shape major historical trends and developments, it accentuates the obsolescence of the civilizational approach, or in editors’ terms, “the bloc paradigm,” i.e., a Pirennian approach to trans-regional history with an unbridgeable divide between a Christian-European and an Islamic-Ottoman bloc.

Part I points out to the interconnectedness of war, trade and diplomacy. The doyenne of Ottoman socio-economic history, Suraiya Faroqhi, opens this part with a concise but informative overview, a panorama one shall say, of Ottoman Empire’s trade relations beyond their borders, pointing out the linkages which, managed by Muslim and non-Muslim merchants of the empire, connected the Sultan’s realm with the world around it.

By focusing on two raids undertaken in 1624 and 1625 by Ottoman corsairs who not only seized European ships but also attacked the Ottoman port of Isken-
derun, Joshua M. White demonstrates how this act of maritime violence resulted in a round of diplomatic negotiations between Ottomans and Europeans and, at

the failure of the former to force their vassals to uphold the obligations set forth by the *'ahdnames*, between Europeans and North African regencies.

We know how European jurists developed an international maritime law; but our knowledge of how Ottomans perceived their sovereignty on the sea is rather limited. In another article that deals with privateering and maritime law, Michael Talbot analyzes how Ottomans perceived and reacted to British violations of their territorial waters during the numerous British-French wars between 1690 and 1790. According to this, Ottomans espoused a *mare clausum* approach and extended their maritime boundaries into the open sea with the intention of acquiring a stronger legal basis for the prosecution of privateers and compensation for their merchants.

In the last article of Part I, Viorel Panaite analyzes unpublished documents related to French consulates in the Ottoman Empire and located in the *Manuscrit Turc 130* at *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. By providing us with details regarding the appointment, status, privileges, functions and the jurisdiction of French consuls, these documents help us bridge the divergence between theory and practice in Ottoman diplomatic history. This is no small feat given that most works in this area repeat the same theoretical information deriving from the formulaic *'ahdnames* and shy away from a systematic study of how diplomacy was actually practiced, especially so when it comes to that conducted in provincial capitals.

Part II deals with the construction and management of identity. Nur Sobers-Khan delves into the social language of slavery and attempt to recreate the “penetrating gaze” of the slave owner, i.e., how he articulated the category of “slave” in early modern Istanbul. Searching for a common language and a shared lexicon across various genres of texts (*itkname*, *şeriyye sicils*, *şürut/sükuk* as well as contemporary works of physiognomy, love poetry and advice literature), she seeks to reconstruct the social meaning of urban Ottoman slavery and illuminate the complex social and psychological relationship between the slave owner and the slave.

In the next article, Gábor Kárman seeks to explain the divergence of the image of the “Turk” in Jakab Harsányi Nagy’s writings. While this Transylvanian diplomat and author presented a dark picture of Turks in his diplomatic correspondence between Istanbul and Transylvania, fifteen years later he made a volte-face and depicted the Turks with a more positive light, as reliable, credible

and pious people in his *Colloquia Familiaria Turcico Latina seu Status Turcicus Loquens*.

Tobias Graf aptly argues that conversion, an act that entailed the convert's "civil death," did not necessarily bring a "social death." A diligent archival research enabled him to shed light on ethnic/geographical solidarity among the renegades in sixteenth-century Istanbul. The new Ottoman/Muslim identity of these converts converged with the former one and they did not completely broke off ties with their past; they instead lived ambiguous "half-lives".

Christian Roth concentrates on the sultan's duty to guarantee justice for all his subjects and tries to account for the imbalance between the frequency with which non-Muslims resorted to sharia courts in Salonica, a port city with a mixed urban population and in Patmos, one of the islands in the Aegean Archipelago with homogenous Orthodox rural communities. According to him, this twenty-to-one difference attests to a difference in the levels of juridical integration of non-Muslims in two regions in the eighteenth century. While in Salonica non-Muslims appealed to the Islamic court in much greater absolute numbers than those in Patmos did, they were still underrepresented in relation to their share of the city's population.

Part III suggests a new approach to the issue of Ottoman modernization efforts in the long nineteenth century, one between Eurocentric teleology that refuses "extra-European" agency and the revisionist extremism that denies global influences and sees the reform process as strictly driven by and a reaction to internal problems of the empire. This approach accentuates the well-connectedness of the challenge brought the Ottomans by the long nineteenth century and the reformist responses to it.

Pascal W. Firges makes an important corrective to the prevalent assumption that it was the Ottoman demand that brought several French military missions to Istanbul in the 1790s. The Revolutionary governments also had a stake in those missions as well; they not only tried to strengthen the military of the Ottomans who were fighting with Austria and Russia until 1791-2, but also sought to form a defensive and offensive alliance with the Sultan against France's many enemies.

Gülay Tulasoğlu rejects the top-down view of modernizing reforms and puts the provinces at the center by arguing that fiscal pressures imposed by the capital compelled the local authorities to implement reforms in order to increase tax revenues. By a case study on the quarantine in 1830s Salonica, a reform undertaken

without the intervention of the center and some years before it was executed in Istanbul, Tulasoğlu also accentuates the role played in the reform process by the British consul Charles Blunt who resorted to a variety of strategies ranging from friendly advice to open threats in order to force the introduction of land-based quarantine in Salonica.

In another article that deals with nineteenth-century Salonica, Sotirios Dimitriadis sheds light on the interplay between the Ottoman administration and local elites regarding the transformation of the urban landscape between 1870s and 1912. He highlights how rigid communal and social barriers eroded in the nineteenth century and gave way to a growing sense of recognition and inter-class solidarity between different urban elites who negotiated the modernization of their city with the imperial center.

Another corrective to centralist approaches to Ottoman modernization is Maximilian Hartmuth's study of a civic initiative for the systematic collection of antiquities and the attempt of founding a museum by a Bosnian Franciscan friar named Ivano Frano Jukić. This far-sighted yet failed project is a testament to the relative openness of the Ottoman-Habsburg border and the centrality of frontier regions for cross-cultural exchanges and the Ottoman adaptation of Western institutions and ideas. Moreover, Jukić's activities as a literary person and a cultural entrepreneur show that not all of empire's Slav intellectuals were secessionists as has long been presumed by Balkan historiography. There were also those who strove for change within the existing system; in short, all civic actions are not necessarily anti-state or nationalist.

In the final article of the book, Aylin Koçunyan contextualizes the First Ottoman Constitution within the framework of earlier legal reforms in 1839 and 1856 which initiated a constitutional debate in the Empire. Drawing attention to the plurality of agents with different ethnic, religious, cultural, ideological and legal backgrounds, she emphasizes how the creation of communal constitutions served as laboratories for Ottoman constitutionalism and how empire's non-Muslim subjects and their constitutional legacy played an important part in shaping Ottoman constitutional discourse and drafting the *Kanun-i Esasi*. Moreover, she states that foreign agency in the making of Ottoman legal reforms should not be reduced to British impact alone; these reforms incorporated elements from a wide range of foreign legal systems, not exclusively Western European, but also including states that were founded on former Ottoman territories.

Two common problems in edited volumes, especially those that spring from conferences, are the lack of coherence between the articles and the problems with scholarly standards. This book suffers from neither. In spite of the fact that fourteen articles deal with different time periods spanning from sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and with different subsections of Ottoman history (political, diplomatic, social, economic, cultural, legal, military, urban), all of them are “well-connected” with the general theme of the book and each is a scientifically solid work based on diligent archival research and offering alternative vistas to studying Ottoman history. It seems like the three-year-long research project achieved a meaningful end.

Emrah Safa Gürkan