

YAYIN TANITIMI / BOOK REVIEW

Pınar Emiraliođlu, *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, xx + 184 pages. ISBN 9781472415332.

This book consists of an introduction entitled ‘Eye of the World: Textual and Visual Repertoires of the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire’; four chapters entitled respectively ‘Negotiating Space and Imperial Ideology in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire’, ‘Mapping and Describing Ottoman Constantinople’, ‘Charting the Mediterranean: The Ottoman Grand Strategy’ and ‘Projecting the Frontiers of the Known World’ and an epilogue entitled ‘Ottoman Geographical Knowledge in the Long Eighteenth Century’.

The Introduction first narrates Piri Reis’s presentation of his world map to Selim I in Cairo. Then, Emiraliođlu states that the book is a story of Ottoman geographers and “the rich body of geographical literature they left behind for future generations” (p. 2). While narrating that story, the writer intends to show that “Ottoman Empire was an active participant of the Early Modern period and of the Age of Exploration” (p.4). In order to prove this, Emiraliođlu tries to demonstrate that the Ottoman Empire had a “heightened sensitivity to geographical knowledge” to claim the Empire’s universal sovereignty just like the other “contemporary and previous world empires” (p. 5). Emiraliođlu organized the book just like how Ottoman geographers designed the known world in their works. According to this model, Istanbul was the nucleus of the world; the Mediterranean was the core “where Ottoman sultans had to substantiate their imperial claims” while the Indian Ocean and the New World were peripheries beyond the main concern of the Empire (p. 8-9).

In the first chapter Emiraliođlu examines the creation of Ottoman imperial ideology during Selim I’s reign (1512-1520) by focusing on the struggle and interaction between two empires, namely the Safavid and the Habsburg. The expansion towards the East during Selim I’s reign, triggered the production of new geographical works. The pioneer of this new era was Piri Reis who was aware of the necessity of latest knowledge to compile a reliable geographical work (p. 25). Thus, Emiraliođlu claims that this awareness shows that there was an Ottoman renaissance in geographical knowledge (p. 25).

The second chapter is dedicated to the endeavors for making Constantinople the nucleus of the universe and its impact on generating a political ideology and geographical works in the 16th century (p. 58-9). In order to prove this, Emiraliođlu gives the details of architectural projects such as the

building of the *badastan* in Istanbul along with the geographical accounts placing the capital city at the center of universe. While doing this Emiralioğlu examines several works including Mustafa b. Ali al-Muvakkit's *İ'lâmü'l- 'İbad fî A'lami'l-Bilad* (Public Instructions for the Distances of Countries) in which he presented the distances of 99 cities to Constantinople, and *Tuhfetü'z Zaman ve Haridetü'l Avan* (The Gift of the Time and the Pearl of the Epoch) in which distances of 150 cities to Constantinople are provided. The writer interprets the choice of Mustafa b. Ali of placing Constantinople at the center of the universe as a challenge against the "several Muslim and European geographical traditions" which had placed Baghdad, Mecca, Rome and Jerusalem at the core of universe. By doing this, al-Muvakkit "epitomizes a geographical consciousness specific to Ottoman court in the service of its imperial ideology" (p. 81). Another work on which Emiralioğlu focused in order to back Istanbul's centrality is Matrakçı Nasuh's *Beyan-ı Menazil-i 'Iraqueyn-i Sultan Süleyman Han*, an itinerary book of the two campaigns led by Süleyman I to Irak.

Third chapter aims at addressing "how the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry over the Mediterranean influenced the geographical knowledge in Istanbul and Madrid in the 16th century (p. 90-1). Having mentioned the difference between Habsburg and Ottoman official cartography, Emiralioğlu gives a detailed account on Piri Reis's cartographical works, particularly on the *Kitâb-ı Bahriye* (Book of Sea Lore) which is a product of *isolarii* genre. She draws the attention to the fact that %85 percent of Piri Reis's two hundred charts are focused on eastern Mediterranean and North Africa (p. 99). By this work Piri Reis "did more than just describe and map different sites in the Mediterranean" but he "recalled and highlighted the importance of the Mediterranean, especially the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa for Ottoman imperial aspirations" (p. 101). In this chapter Emiralioğlu also examines three other 16th century atlases including charts of the Mediterranean. Although that was a period "when Ottoman territorial expansion had begun to slow", those three atlases, named *Walters Deniz Atlası* (Walters Sea Atlas), *Ali Macar Reis Atlası* (Ali Macar Reis Atlas) and *Atlas-ı Hümayun* (Imperial Atlas), show the "Ottoman court's rising awareness of the expanding world" (p. 112-3). Besides, these cartographical works indicate that Ottoman court and mapmakers searched for the latest knowledge about the Mediterranean where the imperial power is claimed in 16th century (p. 115).

Fourth chapter approaches the periphery of Ottoman Empire, namely, India, Indian Ocean and the New World. Emiralioğlu analyzes Seydi Ali Reis's work and those of a few other Ottoman geographers to show the little interest given by Ottoman court and elites to these areas. By examining Seydi Reis's *Kitab-ı Muhit* (The Book of Ocean), *Mirat-ül Memalik* (The Mirror of Lands), *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbî* (The History of the West Indies) of an anonymous writer,

the world map of Tunuslu Hacı Ahmed, Seyfî Çelebi's *Kitab-ı Tevârih-i Padişahan-ı Vilayet-i Hindu ve Hitay* (Book on the Histories of the Rulers of India and China), Emiralioğlu deduces that Ottoman court, elites and geographers were aware of the importance of those areas and were following the new discoveries.

The Epilogue tries to show the state of the Ottoman geographical knowledge after the failure of the imperial project in late 16th century. Wars with Habsburgs and Jalali rebellions in Anatolia at the end of the 16th century had caused a profound transformation which led to an increase in the intellectual production starting from mid-seventeenth century. (p.145). By mentioning Katip Çelebi's 'Cihannüma' and his translation of *Atlas Minor*; Dimashki's translation of *Atlas Maior*, Seyyid Nuh's *Kitab-i Bahri'l-Esved ve'l Ebyaz* (Book of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean), İbrahim Müteferrika's effort for publishing geographical works and the Turkish translation of Faden's *General Atlas*, Emiralioğlu concludes that, were it not for the works of Mustafa b. Ali, Piri Reis, Seydi Ali Reis and so forth, the compilation of these works would not be possible (p.155).

Emiralioğlu's work brings up the so far scarcely asked questions about Ottoman geography and cartography. Its discussion of the relationship between 'geographical consciousness' and 'imperial ideology' is an inspiring one. However, it also contains some problems. In the Introduction, Emiralioğlu mentions the richness of geographical works in the Ottoman Empire at least four times (pp. 2, 3, 6, 8), yet does not propound the criteria for 'richness'. One needs some criteria to label something 'rich'. For instance, comparison may be a way of it. However, if one compares the 16th century Ottoman and European geographical works, it is not possible to argue that the former constitute a rich corpus. The recurrent references to richness, confuse the reader and seems to be an exaggeration. In my opinion, this body of geographical works does not render it easy to reach Emiralioğlu's conclusion. If her work had incorporated more studies investigating the cultural relations between the Ottoman world and Europe, her argumentation about "Ottoman geographical consciousness" could have been more persuasive. As it stands, the writer's evaluation seems as an example of 'over-interpretation' and it needs to be improved in the future by further studies. In the last instance, Emiralioğlu's book opens a new understanding into Ottoman geographical and cartographical tradition and has the potential of being a source of inspiration for furthering researches on the topic.

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