

A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century, by Marinos Sariyannis (Handbook of Oriental Studies / The Near and Middle East, 125) (Leiden & Boston: Leiden, 2018), xii + 596 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-37559-8, €149.00 / \$179.00

The absence of a comprehensive list of Ottoman manuscripts on political thought poses a serious obstacle to using and analyzing sources in the field in a consistent fashion. Modern catalogues exist for various geographies and periods of the Islamic world, yet they lapse into silence when it comes to Ottoman political thought. Chief among the reasons for this silence are the relative paucity of Turkish-speaking scholars compared to Persian and Arabic and the scattered manner in which political texts have been categorized under different disciplines in Turkish libraries, especially in the Süleymaniye Library.

A book to fill this gap has finally been published. *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century*, the first comprehensive study on the history of Ottoman political thought as a whole, was written by Marinos Sariyannis, who has long been working in this field. Ekin Tuşalp Atıyas also contributed to the book by writing Chapter 6. This nine-chapter book is a highly-expanded version of an earlier study of Sariyannis, namely, *Ottoman Political Thought up to the Tanzimat: A Concise History*, which was published as an e-book by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/Foundation of Research and Technology – Hellas. The final part of the book offers researchers a detailed thematic study of some central notions in the Ottoman political vocabulary. The book also contains two appendices: the first a “comparative timeline of historical events and political works, with reference to the chapters-cum-ideological categories,” and the second “samples of translated texts from representative works.”

In the introductory part of the study, in which Sariyannis presents his methodology, he sets out the scope of political thought as follows: “All Ottoman texts and ideas pertaining to governance (which is a

more accurate and less anachronistic term) to be political, whether they are specific or philosophical.” Sariyannis describes his approach which is based on emic-etic distinction in the anthropological jargon. According to him, an “emic” approach is a viewpoint from the perspective of the subject rather than of the observer. An “etic” approach to Islamicate political thought is one based on what the researcher considers to be political thought. The second, would enlarge the scope of the study in disproportional dimensions, since almost all Islamic law would have to enter the equation. On the other hand, it must be noted that an “emic” paradigm often “reproduces on [sic] order of domination and does so by excluding the oral, the subaltern, and (very largely) the vernacular” (p. 6). This methodological approach is derived from the Cambridge School of Historiography led by Quentin Skinner. The author himself points out this influence saying that his purpose in writing the book is “to approach Ottoman political thought (or discourse) from the perspective of a historian rather than a political scientist, with no claims or attempts whatsoever to interpret modern-day eastern Mediterranean politics” (pp. 9-10).

Sariyannis categorizes the texts surrounding Ottoman political space under the main headings of “*ablak*, *fikh*, *tasawwuf* or Sufi perspective, and *islahat* or reform literature” and also proposes that there are texts (intertwined with different genres (p. 7). While the author acknowledges that many non-textual sources (i.e. historical context) outside these genres must be encompassed in order to fully examine political thought, he thinks that this issue should be compensated by other studies (pp. 7-8).

Sariyannis aims the book to be “a reference book” that presents a thematic analysis of Ottoman political thought. Each chapter is devoted to a particular period and to a particular ideological approach that defined it, with different sections throughout the chapter laying out particular manifestations of that approach.

The first chapter, “The Empire in the Making: Construction and Early Critiques,” in its first part deals with the texts which has anti-imperial complaints, attitudes, and criticisms of the allegedly marginalized *ghāzī* environment during the process of the Ottoman transition from principality to state. This is partly done by utilizing the fictions of “anti-imperial” historians of a later period such as Yahşi Fakih, Aşıkpaşazade, and Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican. The second part

of this chapter mainly analyzes the texts *Kenzü'l-kübera* [*Kanz al-kubarā*] of Şeyhoğlu Mustafa, who is said to have played a role in the transmission of the Persian political tradition to the Ottoman Empire, and *Ma'arifnāmah* of Sinan Pasha. While Sariyannis devotes a central place to the analysis of these two texts, he also analyzes some other texts of 14th and 15th-century authors which emphasize the justice of the sultan.

Entitled “Political Philosophy’ and the Moralism Tradition,” the second chapter examines the significance of moral philosophy texts for politics. It focuses on various thinkers, from Amasi to Kinalzade, and works on ethical-political philosophy to trace the evolution of practical philosophy in Ottoman political thought, as well as the afterlife of the genre in later periods.

The author argues that with the conquest of Istanbul the developments that followed it, the Ottoman understanding of politics, which was largely nourished from the *adab* literature, “needed something more: a comprehensive theory that would encompass all of human society, raising the moral virtues demanded of a ruler to a universal system explaining both the individual and society at large” (p. 66). According to Sariyannis, this need was met by a tradition of political philosophy under the influence of al-Ṭūsī and al-Dawwānī’s philosophical centered lines.

The third chapter, “The Imperial Heyday: the Formation of the Ottoman System and Reactions to It,” begins with an analysis of the legal aspects of the rapidly increasing number of political texts in the period of Süleyman the Magnificent. It continues with Celalzade Mustafa, who represents the literature of *adab*, and then devotes a special place to Lütfi Pasha and especially his *Āşafnāmah*. After an examination of the literature on the construction of imperial legitimacy giving Süleyman a central position, the chapter touches upon the criticisms of the legal and political structure through writers like Şehzade Korkud and Çivizade Muhyiddin Mehmed Efendi.

The fourth chapter is titled “Mirrors for Princes’: the Decline Theorists.” The chapter focuses on works criticizing the major political and social changes at the beginning of the 17th century as deviations from the old law (*qānūn-i qadīm*). The texts in this genre were discovered and analyzed by the Western academy much earlier than others. The chapter addresses the ideas of the anonymous writers of such works as *Kitāb Maşāliḥ al-Muslimīn* and *Ḥirz al-*

mulūk, as well as the works of such writers as Mustafa Ali, Mustafa Selaniki, and Hasan Kafi Akhisari.

The fifth chapter is devoted to “The ‘Golden Age’ as a Political Agenda: the Reform Literature.” As an extension of the previous chapter, here the author analyzes texts regarded as embodying a kind of search for the golden age and defending a return to the ancient law (*qānūn-i qadīm*). These texts include the anonymous *Kitāb-i Mustafāb*, the treatise of Koçi Bey, and the *Talkhīş* of Veliyyuddin. These texts were all written during the reign of Ahmed I in a period that, following the defeat of the last major Celali forces by Kuyucu Murad Pasha, seemed to mark a new rise in Ottoman power, or at least a turning of the tide (p. 188).

Written by Ekin Tuşalp, the sixth chapter, “The ‘Sunna-Minded’ Trend,” treats the fundamentalist tradition represented by the Kadizadellis as a dominant element and focuses on the discussions within this framework. Tuşalp, in this chapter, tries to place “sunna-minded trends” on the historical map of Ottoman political thought (p. 233). According to her, “Sunna-minded trends did not pose the same theoretical challenge as did the older genres of Ottoman political thought but instead served as a discursive field that covered as many issues as possible, ranging from promiscuity to the corruption of judges” (p. 278).

The seventh chapter is entitled “Khalidunist Philosophy: Innovation Justified.” In this chapter, the text of *Dustūr al-‘amal* by Katip Çelebi is evaluated in the context of Ibn Khaldūn’s vision of states, as Çelebi had utilized the perspective of Ibn Khaldūn in writing the work, which blended different philosophical-political traditions – such as *al-akblāṭ al-arba‘ah*, self-theory, body-country metaphor, and the circle of justice – in search of solutions to the economic crises of the period. Later in the chapter, Sariyannis discusses the theory developed by Naima, which he also claims was influenced by Ibn Khaldūn’s point of view. Sariyannis emphasizes that Naima, who devoted an unprecedentedly large portion of his history to the Hüdabiyah peace treaty, proposed peace as a means of ending Ottoman decline.

The last two chapters focus on two different aspects of the same century. The eighth chapter, under the title of “The Eighteenth Century: the Traditionalists,” deals with the views of authors such as Defterdar Sarı Mehmet Pasha and Nahifi Süleyman Efendi in relation

to the army, land system, and economy, and analyzes the concrete solutions proposed by these and other writers. The ninth and final chapter, "The Eighteenth Century: the Westernizers," focuses on the writings of authors who aimed at the modern restructuring of the army. He also discusses the approaches of İbrahim Müteferrika, which Sariyannis says paralleled those of the translation movements of the time, especially those based on Western literature.

In the conclusion, the author returns to the themes of the preceding chapters to elucidate the relationship between political ideas and power politics in the Ottoman state. He discusses the development of several political concepts, including justice (*‘adālah*), law and the old law (*qānūn*, *qānūn-i qadīm*), innovation (*bid‘ah*), world order (*nizām-i ‘ālam*), keeping one's place (*ḥadd*), and consultation (*mashwarah*).

This detailed book, undoubtedly quite comprehensive and a product of intense efforts, has however several problems. To start with its methodology, even though the author claims to adopt the emic approach that privileges the perspective of the subject over that of the analyst, he fails to deliver on his promise. For he often interprets the primary sources based on different (and sometimes conflicting) assumptions and arguments derived from the modern scholarship, particularly the English-language secondary literature which leads at times to consistency problems as well as distancing him from the emic approach. In addition, although the author sets out to cover an extremely wide time span and pool of sources, the primary sources he utilizes were mostly selected from among the already well-known and mostly published books that may not necessarily represent the Ottoman political thought, ignoring many potentially important manuscripts in Arabic and Persian. This is probably unavoidable, since he is limited to sources in circulation.

A case that exemplifies several of these issues is the book's discussion of the secularism debate. On the one hand, the study mentions that there is a sharp secular distinction in the Ottoman Empire (pp. 100-101); on the other hand, another part within the same chapter states: "A cautionary remark seems useful here: there can be a tendency to revert to an oppositional, religious vs. secular understanding of the world in the post-Enlightenment sense. However, for the sixteenth-century Ottoman this opposition simply did not exist" (p. 114). These contradictory statements stem in part

from the secondary literature which constitutes the source of the chapters and the interpretations it contains. But it is also due to the author's use of the emic-etic distinction without internal consistency.

For instance, the author explicitly utilizes the emic approach while expressing his conviction that there was no distinction between the secular and the religious in the sixteenth century. However, the following question arises: Is the emic approach adopted selectively for counter argument purposes? While the author rightly says that all the laws of both *sharī'ah* and the sultan were understood in a religious framework, why is the sultan's imagination not taken into consideration? Whether or not a secular approach really existed at the time is left unclear in the book. Similarly, if Çivizade is considered as an extension of the emic approach, then what is the position of Ebussuud?

Another problematic issue is the categorization of the book's chapters according to particular genres of literature. While the author himself appears to recognize this issue, he does little to help his readers on this point. For example, the seventeenth century is depicted as sharia-minded, which suggests to the reader that the following centuries were not. While this is not the author's intent, the general flow and impression of the book causes the reader to think that the irrelevant prevailing imagery represents different centuries.

Yet another issue is that the work neglects discussion of the context of the texts, it focuses on and largely ignores newly discovered texts that do not represent the main themes of the book's chapters. This is undoubtedly understandable for a study that is a first in its field.

Apart from these issues, another point worth mentioning is that the author is perhaps overly quick to generalize and has a tendency to rush to judgment. A case in point is his claim that "from the late sixteenth-century *adaletnames* to the early seventeenth century 'declinist' authors, justice was increasingly identified as meaning following the old laws on taxation in order to protect the *reaya*" (p. 440). The principle of maintaining/observing the *ra'āyā*, which is at the center of almost all the texts of Islamic political thought, cannot be ignored by the Ottoman political thinkers who follow this tradition. Such claims need more substantive evidence.

The author also appears to have prioritized the sources produced and/or influenced by the Persian ulema, implying that the Ottoman political thought was an extension of the Persian one. (This seems to be a general problem in the wider literature, mainly caused by the fact that many of the available sources from the formative period of the Ottoman political thought were translated from Persian). In doing so, he neglected the Egyptian/Cairene experience in particular. He also failed to use the texts of Ottoman political thought written in Arabic as direct sources, and to treat the texts of the *'ulamā'* and their works in Islamic sciences, particularly in the field of *fiqh*, as political texts. In addition, few of the many jihad treatises written in almost every century find any place in the book, yet it is impossible to produce a complete picture of Ottoman political thought, at least as it is represented in the primary sources, without sufficiently considering these texts.

There are also grave mistakes caused by not having a mastery of classical Islamic sciences and literature. His claim that the Muslim conquest of Constantinople was “an ancient Islamic dream foretold in the Quran” (p. 63) is an example of these mistakes. Anyone with minimum knowledge of the Islamic sources knows that there is no Qurʾānic verse that Constantinople will be conquered and that this expression is instead mentioned in the hadith sources. There are also some typographical and information errors in the book which raise questions about the author’s facility with Arabic and Ottoman Turkish: Ulemaya, not ülemaya; ahiret, not ahret (p. 38); *Mirsâd al-ibâd*, not *Mirshâd al-ibâd* (p. 48); *al-ulûm gayr an-nâfia*, not *ulumî'l-gayrin-nafia* (p. 58); hikmet-i medeniyye, not hikmet-i medeni; ilm-i tabîî, not ilm-i tabiiyye (p. 75); kuvve-i nazariyye, kuvve-i ameliyye, kuvve-i şehevîyye, kuvve-i gazabiyye, not kuvvet-i nazari, kuvvet-i amelî, kuvvet-i şehevi, kuvvet-i gazabi (p. 77); saltanat-ı suriyye, not saltanat-ı suri (p. 95); *Risâla fî mâ yalzamu*, not *Risâla fî mâ yelzim* (p. 125); *al-Siyâsa al-sbar'îyya*, not *siyasat al-shariyya* (p. 254, 441); *Kitâb al-siyar al-kabîr*, not *Kitâb siyar al-kebir* (p. 277); Ibn Khaldunist, not Khaldunist (p. 278); *al-shubuhât al-qâsima*, not *al-shibhat al-qâsima* (p. 499, and also this book is not Birgivi's); etc.

As this book, the first comprehensive study of the history of Ottoman political thought, shows that Ottoman political thought encompasses the practical philosophical literature, the theological-*fiqhî* literature, and the mystical and moral literature, as well as the

Islamic political thought corpus. In addition, a number of other sorts of works can also be evaluated within this field, including chronicles/history books, *işlāḥātnāmah* and *adab al-wazīr* books (which can be seen as an extension of the *adab* literature), *lāyiḥas* of different types, official documents, works of art/architectural works, and *silsilahnāmahs*. Therefore, with a variety of sources waiting to be studied, the question of how Ottoman political thought can be understood and examined through texts and practices continues to stand out.

Özgür Kavak

İstanbul Şehir University – Istanbul -Turkey

ozgurkavak@sehir.edu.tr

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1769-5668>