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Book Review

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MADNESS, POLITICS AND SOCIETY: TOPTAŞI ASYLUM 1873-1927

Delilik, Siyaset ve Toplum: Toptaşı Bimarhanesi 1873-1927

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ABSTRACT

This book review examines Fatih Artvinli's *Madness, Politics, and Society: Toptaşı Asylum 1873-1927*, which offers a crucial perspective on the history of psychiatry in Turkey. Artvinli wants to shed light on the political and social history of an empire that was in an effort to modernize by examining the institutional history of Toptaşı Bimarhanesi, which was one of the essential mental hospitals in the last period of the Ottoman Empire. The Mental Hospital, which was established as a product of the modernization process, had a leading role in the adoption of modern psychiatry understanding and methods, from keeping records of people with mental illness to methods of their treatment in the Ottoman Empire. Although Toptaşı Bimarhanesi was transferred to Bakırköy in 1926 as a result of the structural problems of the institution, the psychiatry discourse and practices adopted by it continued to exist within the new institution. Thus, Toptaşı Bimarhanesi has a critical role in shaping the psychiatry understanding of the new regime. This book review claims that despite some limitations, Artvinli's work makes an important contribution to the literature by presenting a critical perspective, unlike the dominant linear and progressive historiography in Turkey.

Keywords: madness, history of psychiatry, asylum.

ÖZ

Bu kitap incelemesi, Fatih Artvinli'nin Türkiye'deki psikiyatri tarihine önemli bir bakış açısı sunan *Delilik, Siyaset ve Toplum: Toptaşı Bimarhanesi 1873-1927* isimli çalışmasını incelemektedir. Artvinli, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son dönemindeki en önemli akıl hastanelerinden biri olan Toptaşı Bimarhanesi'nin kurumsal tarihini mercek altına alarak modernleşme çabası içinde olan bir imparatorluğun siyasal ve toplumsal tarihine de ışık tutmak istemektedir. Modernleşme sürecinin bir ürünü olarak kurulmuş olan bu akıl hastanesi, hastaların kaydını tutmaktan tedavi yöntemlerine kadar, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda modern psikiyatri anlayışının ve yöntemlerinin benimsenmesinde öncü bir role sahip olmuştur. Kurumun yapısal problemleri sonucu, 1926'da Toptaşı Bimarhanesi, Bakırköy'e transfer edilmesine karşın, onun benimsediği psikiyatri söylemi ve pratikleri de yeni kurumun içinde var olmaya devam etmiştir. Böylece, Toptaşı Bimarhanesi, yeni rejimin psikiyatri anlayışının da şekillenmesinde önemli bir role sahip olmuştur. Bu kitap incelemesi, çalışmanın bazı sınırlılıkları olmasına rağmen, Artvinli'nin çalışmasının Türkiye'deki dominant çizgisel ve ilerlemeci tarih yazımının aksine, eleştirel bir bakış açısı sunarak literatüre önemli bir katkı sunduğunu iddia etmektedir.

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Anahtar Szckler: delilik, psikiyatri tarihi, bimarhane.

Fatih Artvinli's *Delilik, Siyaset ve Toplum: Toptaşı Bimarhanesi 1873-1927*, in the history of psychiatry in Turkey, is mainly written within the Westernization and Nationalist paradigm, tries to go beyond these dominant paradigms and examines the institutional history of Toptaşı Bimarhanesi, which was one of the most famous mental hospitals of the Ottoman Empire, from the second half of 19th century to early republican period. In addition to distinguishing itself from the dominant paradigms in the study of the history of psychiatry in Turkey, I suggest that this book offers essential contributions in at least three crucial aspects. One of them is that it provides an extremely sophisticated institutional history of the first mental hospital established in the modern sense in the late Ottoman period. Secondly, it relates the history of the institution to the development of modern psychiatry in Turkey. Finally, it demystifies how the relationship between the political transformations in the process from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic and discourses and practices about madness.

The book consists of three chapters following the timeline from the establishment of the institution to its closure, and the division of the book follows the political period division (the Tanzimat period, First and Second Constitutional era) generally accepted in Ottoman-Turkish historiography (p. 31). The first chapter explores the efforts to transform Sleymaniye Darşşifa, one of the largest hospitals of the Tanzimat period, into a mental hospital along with the Western asylum model and the reforms this mental hospital made to address some of the emerging administrative problems. Although it is not possible to evaluate the Sleymaniye Bimarhane as a fully modern mental hospital, some violent traditional treatment methods such as Zincirleme have been abolished by the administration. Moreover, the control of health professionals over patients, which will become more widespread in the future of Bimarhane, started to increase during this period (pp. 42-60). It had to be closed due to the cholera epidemic and the rising patient population. Toptaşı Bimarhanesi, which replaced it, was established in 1873.

The second chapter, which examines the process from the foundation period of Toptaşı Bimarhane to the Second Constitutional Period, is devoted to the acceleration of the existing reform efforts and how these efforts were interrupted by the re-emerging employment problem and epidemics. In this period, despite the Bimarhane administration did not have a binding regulation on how and where people with a mental health conditions were to be treated, Nizamname (regulations) tried to fix this issue by using more detailed records began to be kept regarding the people who were hospitalized (pp. 72-79). Furthermore, the relationship between patients and health personnel transformed due to this code. For instance, the authority of the state-appointed officers over the patients was fur-

ther increased. However, because of the increase in the number of patients, the lack of economic power, and some other structural problems, the regulations became only desirable ideals that did not work in practice (pp. 88-99). Another critical development was the medicalization of mental illness. The institution has started to give more place to medical discourse and practices in diagnosing and treating mental illness. Furthermore, this transformation of the institution began to permeate society so that the medicalization of madness did not remain an institution-specific phenomenon.

The third chapter, which covers the period from the Second Constitutional Era to the first years of the Republic, discusses Bimarhane's ongoing reform efforts and its efforts to establish a much larger and modern mental hospital outside the city and how this project failed. Two points are striking in the discourses circulating about mental illness in this period. One of them is that people with mental health conditions are now considered individuals who can be integrated into society. Thus, the Ottoman Empire developed a mental hospital project outside the city, which classified the mentally ill according to the types of illness and included workshops and benches to improve their abilities (Artvinli, 2017: 188-201). It can be said that the discourse regarding mental illness also affected the physical structures of the Ottoman Empire. The second significant point is that, for the first time, the mental illness category and security concerns openly converged in the Ottoman Empire. For example, some local actors opposed this project as they believed it could create security problems and disrupt social control (Artvinli, 2017: 206). However, this project attempt and the desired reforms were also inefficacious due to the institution's pre-existing structural issues in this period. Nevertheless, even though Toptaşı Bimarhanesi was transferred to Bakırköy mental hospital with the emergence of the republican regime, the practices/discourse on mental illness and problems of the institution continued to live in the new institution as well. As a result, it shaped the new regime's understanding of psychiatry in Turkey (Artvinli, 2017: 270-278).

I suggest that one of the key contributions of Artvinli's book is that it provides an original and essential questioning of Turkish psychiatry history literature rather than considering the development of psychiatry in Turkey as the success of Westernization and Modernization. For this purpose, throughout the book, Artvinli examines how the modernization process changed the discourse of mental illness from the late Ottoman period to the early Republican period, how this process relates to the political and cultural context, and how the transformation of this institution has shaped Turkey's future psychiatric discourse and practices. I argue that another crucial contribution of the work that differs from previous studies is that it benefits from exceptionally diverse primary and secondary sources that include demographic information of hospitalized patients and gives an idea about their daily lives. In order to analyze the discourses and

rumors about the institution, besides examining the magazines and newspapers of the period, the memoirs of doctors from abroad about the hospital and second-hand sources written later about the institution are also used. At the same time, the statistics of the mental hospital are one of the primary sources to evaluate the daily life experiences of the patients staying in the hospital and demographic information such as gender, ethnicity, and class (Artvinli, 2017: 29).

On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the study has some limitations. Although I agree with the author's views that the modernization process shaped the definition and treatment of insanity, it is open to criticism that he excludes the market economy, which was intertwined with the modernization, from his analysis. Considering that the development process of the market economy in the Ottoman Empire led to radical changes in social, economic, and political dimensions, there is no reason to think that it did not affect the discourses about madness. Therefore, it can be said that the process of marketization has an essential role in shaping modern psychiatry. However, Artvinli neglected this issue in his research. Secondly, as the author admits, I think that some parts of that work are too descriptive in explaining the nuances in the institution's history (p. 30). Thirdly, while the study touched on the common aspects of the Ottoman and European developments, it did not spare any room for the unique features of the Ottoman psychiatry understanding. Therefore, just a suggestion, I believe that a comparative analysis that highlights the differences can broaden the perspective of the study. However, such criticisms cannot overshadow the contribution of the work to the history of psychiatry in Turkey.

Overall, despite some limitations, *Delilik, Siyaset ve Toplum: Toptaşı Bimarhanesi 1873-1927* is an insightful book that examines the development of modern psychiatry in Turkey in the context of modernization, focusing on the history of one of the most important mental hospitals from the late Ottoman period to the Early Republican period. Furthermore, it encompasses fruitful empirical historical data drawn from highly diverse sources. Thus, it can pave the way for future studies on this subject with a more robust conceptual framework. In light of all this, it is a recommendable book for those who are curious about the history of psychiatry in Turkey.

References

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