

## BOOK REVIEW

### TURKISH JERUSALEM (1516-1917): OTTOMAN INSCRIPTIONS FROM JERUSALEM AND OTHER PALESTINIAN CITIES

By: Mehmet Tütüncü

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The city of IslamicJerusalem embraces one of the ancient civilisations of the world. Its history has been shaped by the continuous political and religious struggle over this unique city and region in the past decades. One of the long and distinct dynasties that ruled IslamicJerusalem is the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The holy city is a clear example of Ottoman presence and identity. The Dome of the Rock, at the heart of the holy city illustrates a façade of Ottomans. The Ottomans defeated the Mamluks in 1516 CE in the battle of Marj Dabiq and entered the region of IslamicJerusalem months later under Sultan Salim I. Ottoman Sultans held a special relationship with IslamicJerusalem as a holy place not only to Muslims but also to Christians and Jews throughout their four hundred year rule. Mehmet Tütüncü's 'Turkish Jerusalem' is an attempt to research the Turkish presence in IslamicJerusalem in this period. The focus of the book is Ottoman inscriptions particularly in the holy city. Tütüncü has recently published another book that focuses on the wider region of Turkish Palestine.

Tütüncü argues that the involvement of the Turks goes back to decades prior to the Ottoman rule. To Tütüncü, the Turkish rule goes as far back as the Seljuqs, and Mamluks. He also argues that

despite the long rule of the Turks, their 'heritage and contribution to Jerusalem is often overlooked or underestimated in the literature' in spite of the major changes the region witnessed in a number of aspects such as the social, economic, architectural and religious life. 'Turkish Jerusalem' demonstrates the Turkish/Ottoman presence in the holy city through the illustration of numerous architectural work and visible inscriptions of the Ottoman Sultans.

The inscriptions which were found all around the city, acted as the royal stamp which highlights the unique relationship that was in place. The Ottomans contributions to the construction of the city have shaped it in the way we see today. The Ottomans were able to make the city a secure and attractive place for visitors and pilgrims. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent gave the city its present wall which was previously destroyed in 1219 CE. Moreover, there was a large number of rebuilding the infrastructure of the city through to the last Ottoman Sultan. One of these contributions was the railway from Jaffa to the holy city opened by sultan Abdul Hamid II.

The book is divided into two main sections; inscriptions from the holy city and the inscriptions from other places in Ottoman Palestine. Tütüncü records the inscriptions in the book by identifying details about each inscription. He gives each inscription a catalogue number along with the catalogue number in Berchem's book which is one of the main sources for this book. Tütüncü also gives the size of the inscription and the number of lines of the inscription. The date and place of the inscription are also given where possible. Lastly, the language of the inscription which was mostly in Arabic but Tütüncü adds a significant number of inscriptions written in Turkish. Tütüncü also comments on each of these inscriptions where he states where the inscription has been mentioned if it has. Each inscription is accompanied by a photographic reproduction photo taken in 2004 and 2006 by the author. Pictures of the inscriptions signify that 'Turkish Jerusalem' is adding to our understanding of these inscriptions and allows the reader to depict how these inscriptions appear.

In recording these inscriptions, Tütüncü relies on the work of Max Van Berchem's famous 'Corpus of Jerusalem' inscriptions which contains most inscriptions in the city but not all. Berchem collected inscriptions from the holy city during his visit to the city in 1894 and 1906. His work remains reference work in this area. 'Turkish Jerusalem' is thus a continuation to complete this data. Tütüncü was at an advantage for his use of the Turkish language in comparison with Berchem. Tütüncü was able to add eleven new inscriptions which were written in Turkish in the region.

'Turkish Jerusalem' describes the one hundred and four inscriptions engraved during the Ottomans primarily on stones in the holy city and eighteen inscriptions from other cities in the region. These inscriptions are found on walls, gates, entrances, minarets, wells, windows, tiles, doors, schools and mosques. The inscriptions are of two types: the Royal inscriptions especially the Suleimanic inscriptions and the inscriptions from high officials. During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, Tütüncü proves that there was an overwhelming thirty five inscriptions bearing his name in the holy city. In comparison with other cities such as the capital Istanbul, the inscriptions in the holy city are visible in abundance and are well preserved. The other eighteen inscriptions sited from other cities were only samples of Ottoman inscriptions outside the holy city. As 'Turkish Jerusalem' focuses on the holy city, it was impossible for the author to include all inscriptions visible in other cities in Ottoman Palestine, which he has now published in another book.

The one hundred and twenty two inscriptions examined in this book are indeed contemporary evidence of the Ottoman presence in the city. Suleiman's 'imperial patronage' of the city has indeed preserved its 'character and integrity'. After the reign of Suleiman, the number of inscriptions reduced and what is still present is almost destroyed or has been lost. Nevertheless, 'Turkish Jerusalem' is one of the first books published on this topic. Tütüncü succeeds in portraying the Ottoman presence in the region and especially in the holy city by examining the inscriptions

that are visible to us today. Readers should however be sensitive to the author's understanding of the text of the inscriptions. While the book is focused on the Ottoman presence in the region from 1516-1917, the title misguides readers on the period covered to include the Turkish rule in the eleventh and twelfth century. Consequently he contradicts himself by calling the book 'Turkish Jerusalem' rather than 'Ottoman Jerusalem'.

The aim behind writing this book was to encourage research on the heritage of the Turks in holy city. Indeed, 'Turkish Jerusalem' was able to set the visible foundation to the Ottoman presence and contributions. 'Turkish Jerusalem' is an important book to students of Islamic Jerusalem Studies as it gives an overwhelming record of inscriptions particularly in the holy city. This book is certainly one of the well researched primary books on Ottoman Islamic Jerusalem. It is also a significant contribution to the literature on Ottoman presence in the holy city. Students and academics concerned with the Ottoman rule in the holy city and the wider region of Islamic Jerusalem would benefit to begin their reading with this important contribution to the field.

**Sara El-Awaisi**