

## KİTAP ELEŞTİRİLERİ / BOOK REVIEWS

HASAN BAKTIR, *Sör Paul Rycaut'un Hâlihazırdaki Şarkiyatçılığı: Sultan, Devşirmeler, Harem* (Ankara: Tiydem,2013), 179 pp.ISBN 978-605-1510-6140

Paul Rycaut (1628–1700) is one of the most important of early modern English writers about the Ottoman Empire. His book, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, appeared in 1667 and was constantly reprinted, sometimes more than once in the same year. It was also expanded as Rycaut added new information. By the time Rycaut died, the book had been translated into various European languages and had grown to twice its original length.

Rycaut was the first English writer to present a detailed description of the Ottoman government, history, religious culture, social groups, and trading potential. What was unique about his work was that it was written by an Englishman who had lived in Smyrna and Istanbul for years, and who had befriended a long-time resident of the court whom, he claimed, furnished him with first-hand and inside information. Rycaut wrote from experience, which is why he was celebrated in England for his information, especially his attentiveness to England's commercial dealings with the Empire.

Important as he was, Rycaut has not received enough critical attention in the scholarship about early modern Britain and the Ottoman Empire. True, he is frequently quoted and no study can afford to ignore him. But there is still a vast opportunity for examining Rycaut critically, in regard to the experience he described and the sources he used. After all, he was so influential that Restoration Britons came to see the Empire through his eyes.

Dr. Baktır, Associate Professor of English at Erciyes University, notes that there are thirty-one plays written during the Elizabethan period about "Turks," twelve of which are about Ottomans. In this respect, Baktır's book fills an important niche. As I do not know Turkish but was very eager to learn of the contents of this book, I asked Dr. Baktır to furnish me with a detailed description of each chapter. The book focuses completely on Rycaut, furnishing a detailed biography and situating *The Present State* in the long trajectory of English (and Continental writings in English translation) about the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic World at large. One of the areas that fascinated English readers was the absolutism of the Ottoman Sultan, an absolutism that would come to an end in England with the "Glorious Revolution." Baktır examines this topic as well as the topic of the harem about which Rycaut wrote, after admitting that he never set foot in it.

Baktır's book, therefore, shows the extent to which Rycaut can be seen to have been reliable (and sometimes unreliable) in his information. It also demonstrates how much Rycaut indulged in the kind of Orientalism that would reach its apogee in the 19th century. In the first chapter of his study, Baktır gives an extensive analysis of what he identifies as "Ottoman Literature". This category includes a variety of works written by English scholars and playwrights along with a considerable sum of books translated into English language from the works of various continental writers and travelers. Baktır further argues in this chapter that this popularity of Turks and the interest in the Ottoman World continued for about eighty years in England.

The second chapter of the study focuses on Sir Paul Rycaut's life. Referring to the Hugonot and Spanish background of Rycaut, Baktır writes about Rycaut's intellectual development. Quoting from Rycaut, Baktır emphasizes that Rycaut's most important gain from his father was "the liberal education". The journey to Spain with his brother to claim his father's credit from the Spanish king allowed him to pursue further education at a Spanish University, Alcalá de Henares. Baktır shows how Rycaut's learning, reliability and diligence made him the right person for Heneage Finch to appoint him private secretary to the ambassador of the English Levant Company between 1559 and 1565. Constantinople was a turning point in Rycaut's life: a sociable man, Rycaut easily found friends from among members of the higher

Ottoman society who provided him with what he needed for his masterpiece *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*.

Baktır argues that Rycaut's discourse bears some resemblances to Knolles and Sanderson. Like Knolles, for instance, Rycaut describes the Ottoman Sultan as tyrannical and absolutist. Yet, Rycaut is different from Knolles in the sense that he writes based on his experience. Furthermore, and unlike Knolles, he also argues that England would certainly benefit from a good economic relation with the most powerful "Empire of the World". Baktır refers to Rycaut's argument that to keep the peace and to improve the trade with the Turks would bring wealth and prosperity to England.

In the last chapter of the study, Baktır discusses Rycaut's claim to "truthfulness" in *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*. Drawing attention to discursive resemblances between Rycaut and other contemporary European Ottomanists like Knolles and Sanderson, Baktır highlights Rycaut's orientalist attitude. In the context of this argument, Rycaut's claim that he accessed the Ottoman Saray via his so-called intimate friend of Polish origin becomes untenable. Baktır identified this so-called friend as Albert Bobowski (Ali Ufki Bey), who was the head of the dragomans at the Ottoman Court. But, as Baktır notes, referring to Berktaş's biography of Ali Ufki Bey, Bobowski left Constantinople for Cairo in 1655 and could have met Rycaut no more than a few times during Rycaut's stay in Constantinople.

Dr. Hasan Baktır has written an informative book and is now working on another monograph about the early decades of the English Levant Company for which he spent 2014-2015 conducting research at the University of Minnesota.

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EDNA LONGLEY (ed.), *The Bloodaxe Book of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Poetry: From Britain and Ireland* (Eastburn: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2013), 368 pp. ISBN 978 1 85224 514 6

Bloodaxe Books, established in 1978, injected new spirit into British poetry by printing works by young and so far neglected authors. It has since acted also as an agent supporting women poets from Britain and Ireland, other English-speaking countries as well as European countries. With a similar mission in mind, *The Bloodaxe Book of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Poetry* presents an anthology garnered from England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

The title *Book of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Poetry* is a bit tricky; such a title is chosen either in order to tune down the grandiose and ambitious associations of an anthology or intended to answer possible criticism in terms of its questionable content. The cover title is far from being self-explanatory because it might imply a collection of poetry written all over the world, a collection of essays on poetry, or poetry written in English speaking countries. Only on page 3 does one get a clearer picture with the added subtitle "From Britain and Ireland". This may be due to cultural and political implications of such nomenclatures as English, British and English speaking. After all, the idea of Englishness is itself a contested term since 20<sup>th</sup> century English poetry is like an airport waiting room where poets from an astounding number of different countries and nationalities meet and depart.

The publisher's web page introduces the editor as follows: "Edna Longley is a Professor Emerita in the School of English, Queen's University Belfast. Her publications include an edition of Edward Thomas's prose writings, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed* (1981) from Carcanet, and four critical books: *Louis MacNeice: A Study* (1988) from Faber, and *Poetry in the Wars* (1986), *The Living Stream: Literature & Revisionism in Ireland* (1994) and *Poetry & Posterity* (2000) from Bloodaxe. She also edited *The*