

**Donald Quataert, Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration, New York: New York University Press, 1983, xxii + 205 pages.**

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*"Half a century has now passed since the movement for a "history from below" first opened up new paths for research in social history... In fact, recent scholarship on late Ottoman social history has substantially broadened the scope of research, to a large extent due to the path-breaking work of the late Donald Quataert."* (Gara et al., 2001, pp.1-4)

While Donald Quataert's *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908* is primarily concerned with the resistance of some people in the Ottoman Empire to the Europeanization and capitalization process, the accommodation of other groups and how they benefited from the process is also emphasized. In Quataert's words, it discusses "the twin themes of resistance and disintegration that characterize the encounter of the Ottoman Empire with the European economy" (Quataert, 1983, p. 155). In other words, the basis of the study is the effect on Ottoman society of the penetration of Western economics in what Marx called a feudal empire. For him, the intrusion of the Europeans was a disruptive force that fractured the Ottoman polity both horizontally and vertically.

Five case studies that are used to illustrate the interactions between state, society and Western economic forces are the Régie, the cultivator-miners of Zonguldak and the Ereğli Coal Company, Anatolian Railway, the Port Worker Guilds and the Istanbul Quay Company, and The Ottoman boycott against Austria-Hungary. For Quataert, these particular case studies can open windows which to look both inwards upon local society and outwards upon the world.

In the "Introduction" of the book, Quataert elucidates the European economy that battled and ultimately transformed existing political, social and economic institutions. Here, he also places the Ottoman Empire and its incorporation into the European economy into the general world history. The first chapter of the book, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Economy", delves into the process of the incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the European economy, in general, and the European trade and investment activity in the Ottoman Empire, in particular, and specifically mentions improvements in transportation, and The Ottoman Public Debt Administration, which is the symbol and vehicle of expanding European activity in the Ottoman Empire. Although interconnected, these two chapters deserve separate titles due to the focus of each. While in the "Introduction", incorporation process of the Ottoman Empire is discussed in the context of the global expansion of the European economy, first chapter deals with the unique transformation process experienced by the Ottomans.

The second chapter of the book and also the first case study, “Régie, Smugglers, and the Government”, examines tobacco, the most important export crop, the formation of the French-controlled Régie tobacco monopoly in the Ottoman Empire, and the company’s efforts to pressure the government to enforce its monopoly. Moreover, the emergence of smuggling as a response to the Régie, the identity and motives of the smugglers and the role of the states are detailed. One of the most remarkable aspects of this chapter is that Quataert accepts smuggling and smugglers as subjects or actors of history. Considering that it was among the few studies that included smugglers as subjects of history in the period the book was published, it can be asserted that Donald Quataert offered a considerable example of “history from below” approach.

The third chapter of the book, “The Cultivator-Miners of Zonguldak and the Ereğli Company”, describes the French takeover of coal production in the 1890s, when it was the major resource, by means of the Ereğli Company. This chapter begins with a survey of nineteenth-century Ottoman mining, the importance of coal, and relevant Ottoman legislation; and then discusses the discovery and initial exploitation of the Ereğli mines and production trends until the establishment of the Ereğli Company. It is also emphasized that most of the worker resistance before the First World War occurred in firms owned by foreign capital. The most prominent point in the chapter is the depicting of “construction of labor”. In other words, Quataert explains how peasants and villagers were transformed into workers through the regulations: “...to secure the needed coal, villagers in the 14 districts of Ereğlisancak were obliged to fulfil certain tasks at the mines. (...) Each village in the 14 districts was assigned to provide labor for a particular mine. Villagers were compelled to haul coal in baskets from the mine face to surface and direct as well as provide animals for mining operations.” (Quataert, 1983, p.55) On the other hand, in this part, tensions and conflicts between workers of different ethnic identity, including Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, Turks and Montenegrins, are analyzed.

Most of the final three chapters are devoted to transportation, recognizing the logistic importance of European investment in the sectors that literally connect the Ottoman and world economies. One of these chapters is “Working on the Anatolian Railway”, which concerns transportation and studies a group of workers whose jobs were created by European capital in the 1890s. In this chapter, Quataert meticulously discusses the diplomatic, political and military aspects as well as the social importance of the railroads. However, the strongest aspect of this chapter is that the experiences of workers are included under the heading of “Working on the Railroad”. Moreover, in the same regard, the problems between European workers and Ottoman population are also subject of this chapter. “Italian workmen felt that it was necessary to walk through the streets of Konya armed on Christmas Day 1895. They may have thought that occasionally was leveled against them.” (Quataert, 1983, p.75) For Quataert, the fact that, unlike the Muslim Turks who were employed on railroad at lower managerial level, the Ottoman Greeks and Armenians were qualified attitudinally and educationally for the middle management positions and this stratification prevented the emergence of an integrated working class.

The following chapter, “The Port Worker Guilds and the Istanbul Quay Company”, examines a French corporation gaining monopoly exploitation rights and its direct conflict with the porters and boatmen, perhaps the most powerful of the surviving guilds. It also analyzes the successful struggle, almost over

two decades, against the adoption of labor-saving technology at Istanbul docks. For Quataert, this struggle among the concessionaries, the government, and the guilds typifies the disintegrative effect of European commerce and investment in the Ottoman Empire (Quataert, 1983). This section on the port worker guilds shows the persistence and strength that one group in Ottoman society displayed when directly confronted by European intrusion into its spheres of activity. On the other hand, he provides detailed information on ethnic composition of labor, organization of the workforce, and their strong rural links.

The last chapter of the book examines the Ottoman boycott against Austria-Hungary in 1908 as an example of the political result of the incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the world economy. This chapter begins with the instance of some boycotts as a weapon of the weak against the stronger all around the world. According to Quataert, the 1908 boycott of imports from Austria-Hungary organized by merchants and supported by port workers demonstrates how foreign economic penetration, labor, the press, and the evolution of socio-political and “nationalist” movements were conjoined in the early twentieth century (Quataert, 1983). This case study also investigates the disappearance of Christians from the commercial and industrial life of the Ottoman Empire by highlighting the different interests of the non-Muslim and Muslim merchant communities.

The dominant foundational debates of the period in which the book was written, such as Subaltern, British Marxist historians and Wallerstein’s “world-system theory”, have definitely an impact on Quataert’s work. Although it is possible to say that Quataert is a labor historian influenced by Marxist thought, in the analyses of the five case studies, he does not only refer to the workers and the resisting people, but also to the smugglers, the workers and the lumpen proletariat that accommodate with the new economic and social order. That is to say, Quataert, on a parallel line with Subaltern Studies, has rejected Eurocentric universal historiography and the fact that non-Western geographies define themselves according to Europe, which is also known as “history of absence”. Further, he defined the “differences” of non-Western territories as their own uniqueness not as an absence.

Another considerable point is methodological and related to the analyses of the primary and secondary sources. This work is explicitly based on an exhaustive review of the available original sources. Each chapter is meticulously researched and solidly anchored in archival and primary sources. One of the reasons why Quataert’s *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908* is a reference guide in social and economic history could be that archival sources are at the center of this work. This book is an important work reflecting the spirit of the time it was written, and today, the book itself is a piece of history.

## REFERENCES

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