

KİTÂBİYAT / BOOK REVIEWS

Betül Başaran,

Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century. Between Crisis and Order,

Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014, 281 pp., ISBN 978-900-4246-07-2.

The year that Selim III ascended the throne in 1789, assuming the title of sultan from his uncle Abdülhamid I, was the year that the revolutionary movement in France had begun. What followed the revolutionary turmoil in France spread throughout Europe, intrinsically changing the structure and absolutist regimes of European states. It is this particular period in time that Başaran chooses to begin her account—namely the first three years of Selim III’s reign—to better elucidate the Ottoman Empire’s reaction to the radical changes surrounding it. In modern historiography Selim III was primarily recognized as the “reform-minded” sultan who pioneered the modernization of the Ottoman military and administrative by turning to contemporary Western models. This modernizing attempt was only to be hindered by the successive wars with Austria and Russia, and internal discord, eventually resulting in Selim’s deposition and subsequently costing him his life. Until the last decade, the limited scholarship on Selim III’s vision of reform persisted on portraying him as a heroic figure who was a traditionalist and prudent ruler. This is where Başaran’s work offers a novel perspective on Ottoman reformism and

modernity of the late eighteenth century. Building her narrative on the relationship between the state, its policing authority, and the inhabitants of Istanbul, the author attempts to offer an insight into the beginnings of experimentation with radical structural change. Based on Başaran's doctoral dissertation, the book's primary purpose is to redefine the changing concept of sultanic power during a period when its meaning was confronted with the ultimate challenge.

The central theme of the book is a reconsideration of the question of Ottoman modernity, in particular the non-military reforms introduced by Selim III which Başaran deems to have been overlooked by recent scholarship on the late eighteenth century reforms. The author's particular focus on Selim's policies regarding the maintenance of public order in the city serves to credit her larger thesis that this transformational phase was made possible through experimenting with both old and new. She concludes that while a complete modernization of the bureaucracy was not in effect during this period, there was a conscious effort in reconstructing the central administration and restructuring such customary practices as the *kefâlet* (surety). She argues that these were among the integral factors that signal the beginnings of modernity from within rather than as an end result of the impact of the West. For instance, Başaran identifies the early nineteenth-century empire as one that evolved into a "statistical" state through the keeping of methodical registers. She explains the increasing need for the state's surveillance by the beginning of "a new understanding of society as a knowable entity over which social control is integral." (p. 5) That said, Başaran points out that the systematic changes in governance may not solely be reduced to the subjective rule of Selim III. Agents preceding Selim III and following his reign exerted a certain amount of social control which contributed to this systematization. In that respect, she identifies Selim's approach to reform as more conventional than radical.

Başaran's study builds on the views of a generation of scholars that challenged and problematized the paradigm of Ottoman decline. The book consists of five chapters and two respective appendices of the list of shops and trades, and the distribution of inns according to location in the southern Golden Horn. In her brief introduction, Başaran explains that she will be exploring the Ottoman state's transformation by scrutinizing the execution of a systematized population control and crisis management by Selim III in Istanbul. The author presents her sources, which primarily consist of inspection registers, court records, police records, registers of important affairs, and imperial edicts roughly pertaining to the years 1789-1793, the initial phase of Selim's reign. The author explains her decision

for restricting her research to these particular years due to the shifting of Selim's reform program toward military reforms after 1793.

In the second chapter entitled "The Eighteenth Century: Defining the Crisis," Başaran addresses the components that gave rise to what could be considered as "crisis" since the Ottoman state was engaged in two financially straining wars, there was a substantial influx of migrants to the capital city, and the state was imposing new measures in taxation to substantiate for its wartime deficits. In the section about immigrants, Başaran especially deals with the wrongful association of immigrants and vagrants with crime and disorder in the city. She suggests that this faulty assumption was a possible result of the fear and social threat caused by the 1730 and 1740 rebellions. Her comparison with other studies investigating the correlation of violence, crime, and population increase in early modern Europe offers a wider perspective. Hence, Başaran suggests that though they were perceived as the main source of unrest and disorder, the archival sources indicate no real connection between the flow of immigrants to the city and the rise in crime rates. She also adds that the population pressure was indeed a "perceived" matter rather than an actual concept.

The third chapter entitled "Wartime Crisis and the New Order," scrutinizes the scope of Selim's administration of public order and peace. The author takes issue with approaching Selim's rule as one that solely generated military and diplomatic reforms. Though in one passage she states, "it is possible that Selim was also inspired by the cahiers in revolutionary France" (p. 81), Başaran does not substantiate the accuracy of this important assumption. Her postulation is attributable to the establishment of a council of notables (*meclis-i meşveret*) that the author believes had similarities with the council of grievances in revolutionary France. While an in-depth analysis of Selim's reaction to the values that instigated the revolutionary movement in France could have informed our knowledge of his approach to reform, it is unfortunate that the author only treats this specific issue incidentally. Her main concentration is on the sultan's aggressive legislation to safeguard the inhabitants of the capital city. Başaran argues that increased punishments and police violence irretrievably transformed the way the subjects accessed the Imperial Council. Başaran views the restrictions imposed by Selim's new legislation and the limitations on the rights of subjects as a revitalization of the system of "just rule," considering it as part of a larger plan of institutional change.

In the fourth chapter titled "The Inspection Registers of 1791-1793", the author investigates a sampling of inspection registers encompassing two years,

specifically focusing on one register that provides accountable information on numerous commercial shops, stalls, and bachelor's chambers, including types of shops, names and titles of shopkeepers, apprentices (mostly numbers), and title of the guarantors. These inventories are invaluable for they seemingly project an urban fabric that indicates the kind of permeability and fluidity in social boundaries between immigrants, janissaries, and artisans, which Suraiya Faroqhi has formerly termed as "décloisonnement." In an era when there was no systematized conduct of comprehensive population censuses Başaran utilizes alternate archival material for a meaningful analysis on the city's otherwise imprecise population estimates. In this context Başaran's use of the inspection registers enables her to evaluate the increase in population control and crisis management in the formative years of Selim's rule. Essential to her argument are the statistical indications produced by these registers. She concludes that the empire was evolving into a "statistical" state comparable to its European contemporaries in the early nineteenth century.

One of the most intriguing parts of this book is the author's use of the correspondence analysis technique. This is a program that allows for the arrangement and categorization of large data pools into meaningful maps and figures. By using this tool, Başaran produced significant findings, such as an intensity and diversification of economic activity on the southern banks of the Golden Horn (see. Maps 4.1 and 4.2), ethnic and religious divisions in the marketplace, and networks of co-regionality which appear to be extant as early as the late eighteenth century. Başaran argues that the systematized and regular keeping of *kefâlet* registers demonstrate the state's increasing need for inspection and surveillance as a tool for reviving its former strength. In the final chapter entitled "'We Have No Security': Public Order in the Neighborhood," the author uses court records mainly from 1789-1793. These records provide information on the responses of city's inhabitants to a perceived lack of order and security. They also specify evidence about the segment of society that does not appear regularly in the inspection registers. This chapter addresses the bureaucratic changes within the central administration. The author views the building of new administrative structures supported by police authority as one of the ways in which the sultan was experimenting with both old and new. The government's excessive use of the *kefâlet* system to maintain public peace at the neighborhood level generated the trend that communities began to police themselves. This type of renewal of old methods is, according to the author, Selim's "New Order."

As a final point, Başaran suggests that with the structural and functional changes made to the Imperial Council, "oligarchic" rule replaced the absolutist authority of the Sultan. The principal theme of modernity and transition could have been supported by the author's own views about the concept of the politicization of Islam, which in the opinion of Virginia Aksan, had begun as early as Selim's reign. Other than the incorporation of inspection registers and their evaluation through correspondence analysis technique, the author has kept the manuscript very similar to her original dissertation. That said, Başaran's is an important contribution to studies focusing on the later part of the eighteenth century, especially in terms of putting into perspective the social reforms of a ruler that is much more documented for his military reforms.

Leyla Kayhan Elbirlık

Cem Behar,

Bir Mahallenin Doğumu ve Ölümü (1494-2008): Osmanlı İstanbulu'nda Kasap İlyas Mahallesi,

İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014, 321 pp., ISBN 978-975-0829-41-3

Cem Behar'ın 2014 yılında Yapı Kredi Yayınlarından çıkan kitabı "Bir Mahallenin Doğumu ve Ölümü: Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Kasap İlyas Mahallesi (1494-2008)" daha önce İngilizce olarak "A *Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul – Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Mahalle*" başlığıyla 2003 yılında yayımlanmıştı.¹ Ancak araştırmacı, kitabın Türkçe baskısı için eserin tamamını yeniden ele aldığını, kitabı adeta baştan yazdığını önsözünde belirtirken, aynı zamanda 2008 yılında İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediye Meclisi'nin aldığı karar ile tüzel kişiliği ortadan kalkan Kasap İlyas mahallesinin ölümünü de Türkçe baskıda ilan ediyor. Bu bağlamda Yapı Kredi Yayınları tarafından basılan bu kitap sadece Osmanlı başkentini ele almakla kalmıyor, bir megakent haline gelen günümüz

¹ Cem Behar, *A Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Neighborhood* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 2003.