

Beshara B. Doumani. *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 346 pages.

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Beshara Doumani's book deals with the family dynamics in the Ottoman Arab lands before the Western hegemony ruled over there, focusing on "three of the areas usually ignored in the scholarship: provincial regions, the middle centuries of the Ottoman rule, and middling propertied urban groups." (p. 39) Challenging "big isms" such as Orientalism or Islamism, he aims at historicizing family in Nablus and Tripoli in order to offer a new and better frame for family, gender and property of this time and freeing them from stereotypes. The relatively large time period of this study is two centuries spanning from 1660 to 1860 on the ground that "family life is best measured by generations, not decades." (p. 40) The author primarily relies on the Ottoman court records and utilizes stories of people derived from these records as the skeleton of the chapters. To him, these registers create a "communal textual memory," therefore worthy of attention of not only legalists, but also of social historians to delve into daily life of ordinary individuals.

Indicating the centrality of waqfs in Muslim daily life, the author examines family waqfs and lawsuits between kin as a way to understand property devolution practices which is, to him, fundamental for shaping a family. His main argument is that "the family waqf is the most flexible, expressive, and enduring legal instrument for governing long-term property relations between kin, and that it can be viewed as a charter or mini-constitution that also governs the moral-disciplinary order of kinship." (p. 22) Individuals who had different desires apart from the established legal division of the property after death endowed their property by appointing some family members as beneficiaries according to his/her wishes.

Keeping property away from legal inheritance law is not the only function of endowments. Doumani devotes a separate chapter to questioning

the identity of the endowers and their motivations in endowing their properties. It is important to note that he does not degrade endowment practices into being merely economic tactics to preserve wealth or, adversely, into being mere religious deeds. His conception of family waqf is broad: “Legal, pious, economic, and affective motivations are an integrated whole in the family waqf: a social act productive of the social fabric of urban life, of local political economies, of spiritual practices, and of modes of imperial governance through the shari’a court.” (p. 137) Considering this multi-functional nature of the waqfs, he offers a tripartite categorization of waqfs that allow multi-layered explanations, based on their functions or motivations behind them: constitutive, supplemental, and disciplinary. The first one accounts for primary concern of the author due to its significance in “constituting family as a corporate unit in the society” (p. 139) by its wide spectrum, and serves as a “declaration to the community of a family’s ascendancy into prominence.” (p. 174) While the second category designates waqfs targeting to supplement family members in need, the third group of waqfs are established on good deeds such as distributing food or recital of Qur’an which help to create a discipline within the family. About the identity of the endowers, he divides them into three hierarchical categories: the people who are recorded with multiple titles due to their official duties or wealth, the people who are titled as *hājj* or *sayyid*, and lastly the individuals who hold no title.

While tracing dynamics between family members in property distribution through waqfs in court records of Tripoli and Nablus, Doumani discovers major and systematic differences in these two cities that astonish him to the point that understanding the divergence in concept of family despite their geographical proximity and chronological contemporariness became central question of this study. The primary distinction is in the level of female appearance in endowment processes. In Tripoli, women are consistent parts of the lawsuits and endowments either as endowers or beneficiaries during the whole period whereas in Nablus, the already low ratio of the women participation faces a steady decline until the mid-nineteenth century. To make a sound comparison the author determines four patterns to devolve the property: women get equal share with men, men get twice a share of women, women’s children are excluded, women (as the daughters of the endower) are excluded. The first one is almost always true in Tripoli, third and fourth patterns demonstrate the endowment practices in Nablus. This difference demonstrates that excluding females from endowments cannot be a product of an Islamic traditional approach to women.

After presenting two distinctive portraits of women as part of family waqfs in Tripoli and Nablus, Doumani looks for the reasons behind this di-

vergence. His explanation of the difference primarily lies in the economic activities of the two cities. Tripoli's residents derived their wealth from the privately-owned orchards which are used in silk industry. As for the people of Nablus, due to the lack of private lands, agriculture was not an option for the entrepreneurs. Instead, they made forward-purchase moneylending contracts (*salam*) with the peasants who had the usufruct rights in the public (*miri*) lands. Moreover, Tripoli's lands were irrigated naturally, while in Nablus the terrain was dry. Therefore, Nablus's way of obtaining wealth required a more intensified socializing including complex processes of establishing networks with peasants, sometimes personal travels which were outside of the traditional women behavior limits. For the same purpose, developing a reputable household appeared as a big advantage among these networks which could be broken by passing into female member's ownership who would probably get married to a foreigner and take the wealth with her. In short, families in Nablus used family waqfs to establish a monolithic, patrimonial rule over the property of the family to provide "concentration of wealth" under a reputable name whereas in Tripoli, property owners did not have such a powerful motivation.

Doumani's unusual organization of the contents deserves attention. He organized the whole work in seven chapters centralized around particular stories that are representative of the main argument of the chapter and in most of them rendered into chapter titles. The chapter entitled "Maryam's final word" serves the function of the introduction to the work with the overview of the chapters and explanations on methodology, while "Fatima's determination" stands as a conclusion with remarks on possible further studies. In addition to the first and final chapters, he distributed various elements of introduction in every part of the book such as the explanations about the target audience of this study in Chapter 4. This style renders book more attractive by divorcing it from dullness of the academic texts, however, at the same time depriving it of the order that enhances clarity and facilitates reading. Another remark regarding the organization would be on repetitions of some arguments in almost every chapters. The most frequent one is the difference between Tripoli and Nablus regarding female appearance. The reason for this is probably that the chapters develop around on singular events that are related with all interconnected problems of different chapters. However, these points do not harm soundness of the content.

Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean constitutes an exemplary work about how to utilize court records to reach meaningful historical arguments with solid evidence. Doumani reads these records as the accumulation of myriad instances from lives of ordinary people. By making a

considerable number of lawsuits in Nablus and Tripoli accessible, his work becomes illuminating for scholars with diverse interests. The chapters are full of tables, charts and diagrams presenting various remarkable statistics. This abundant material, alongside with the author's interpretations provides a fertile ground to reconsider several conventional views in the Ottoman historiography. For example, the legal aspect of his conclusions regarding waqfs constitutes a good representation of the dynamism of the Islamic law as opposed to its monolithic and restrictive images that are still likely to be encountered although outdated. It is also a good demonstration of emergence of various practices based on different geographical, local and historical conditions. More importantly, it proves that there is much work to be done and more stories to be explored in the court records waiting for the researchers who want to shed light on the uncharted territories of the history of Ottoman societies and families.