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CAPTIVES OF THE SULTAN: A CAPTIVE CAMP IN ISTANBUL (1715)

Cemal Çetin (2015). *Sultanın Esirleri: İstanbul'da Bir Esir Kampı (1715)* (Captives of the Sultan: A Captive Camp in Istanbul 1715). Konya: Palet Press, 234 pp.

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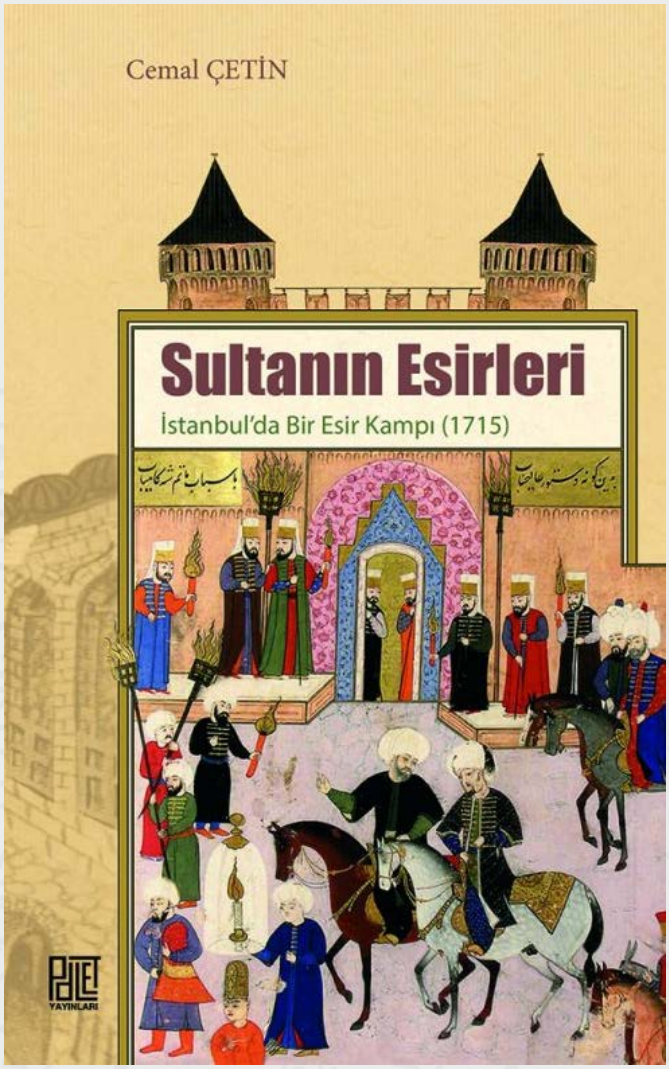

Cemal Çetin's book *Sultanın Esirleri: İstanbul'da Bir Esir Kampı (1715)* consists of an introduction, two chapters, and a brief conclusion. The two main chapters are entitled "Captivity in the Ottoman Empire" and "A Camp of Captives and its Organization (1715)".

At the beginning of his study, the author attempts an overview of research into the concepts of slavery and war captivity in the Ottoman Empire, entering into the varied social and economic dimensions of these complicated issues. For this purpose, he analyzes Islamic and sultanic laws, in order to figure out the official perceptions of captivity and the rules and regulations concerning captives, as emitted by sultans, judges and muftis. Studies of slavery in the Ottoman Empire have gained more importance in recent years, as the cataloguing of archival sources proceeds apace and more documents open up for researchers, thus making studies in microhistory possible. The author has analyzed and interpreted a primary source not previously known and thus made a significant contribution to slavery studies relevant to the Ottoman Empire.

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As a case study, Çetin focuses on the slaves captured in 1715 during the Mora (Peloponnese) campaign. These people were especially unfortunate. During the war of 1683 to 1699, which the Venetians joined on the Habsburg side, the Republic of San Marco managed to conquer the Peloponnese, governing the province with such a heavy hand that when the Ottomans retook the peninsula in 1715, the local population expressed its satisfaction at returning to the Ottoman realm. However, Ahmed III (r. 1703-30) and his viziers decided to treat the event not as a retrieval of lands previously under Ottoman rule, but as a new conquest. In this manner, it became possible to reassign revenue sources without reference to previous rights and prerogatives. Moreover, as by 1715, the inhabitants of the Peloponnese were Christians who had been the subjects of a non-Muslim sovereign, the mass enslavement of the local population was legal. For the captors, mostly simple soldiers, collecting captives must have been a source of substantial enrichment.

The captors took their booty to Istanbul, where they organized a slave camp in a location called Elçi Hanı, the 'Expense Register' (Masraf Defteri) of this camp has survived. In the sixteenth century, the locale had housed ambassadors, especially those of the Habsburgs. By 1715, however, it had lost this function, and the building, several times damaged by fire, was therefore available for housing captives and slaves. (Eyice, 1995, p. 15-18)

By discovering and interpreting an 'Expense Register' covering this site, Cemil Çetin has revealed aspects of Ottoman slavery hitherto unknown. After all, apart from Esir Hanı, where the sale of slaves regularly took place until Sultan Abdülmecid forbade it in the mid-1800s, no other Istanbul slave markets had entered the documentary record. By writing the first detailed and extensive study about the captives in the Elçi Hanı, Cemil Çetin has become a pioneer in the emergent field of Ottoman slavery studies.

Çetin starts by explaining the difference between the terms of 'slave' (*köle*) and 'captive' (*esir*). On this issue, he seems to be of two minds; for at the beginning of his study, he claims that the Ottomans did not perceive much difference between the two categories. People used both terms to refer to men and women who had lost their freedom in the course of war. However, later on, in his concluding remarks, the author apparently has changed his mind; for now he emphasizes the difference between captivity and slavery. Captivity is the first phase of losing one's freedom and is generally of short duration. A captive either gains his freedom by paying his ransom or else by benefiting from an exchange of captives. In the absence of either ransom or exchange, the captive turns into a slave, sold and bought in the slave market. Slavery is a long-term condition and may last until the death of the slave.

Later on, the author emphasizes the lack of academic studies about the captives captured by the Ottomans. Although recently there has been an increasing academic interest in the subject, the ensuing studies are mostly theoretical because of the difficulty in finding primary sources. Certainly, the captives are on record in official registers that historians can consult. However, after a short time, these men and women must have gone to the slave market or else entered the imperial palace. If

fortunate, they may have arranged for their ransom. In all these cases, we lose sight of them.

In the first chapter, Çetin mostly asks critical and analytical questions about the institution of slavery in the Ottoman Empire. The author discusses the legal foundation for capturing people as accepted in the Ottoman world, and since Islamic law is decisive in this matter, Çetin examines the approach of Islam towards slavery. Moving to the practicalities, he introduces the most common ways and means of enslaving people. As the next step, the author examines the types of work that slaves had to undertake and discusses the possibilities of manumission.

As a central topic, the author focuses on the treatment of slaves by their masters. He points out that there is not a single verse about slavery in the Koran. However, it is known that the Prophet Muhammed has encouraged his people to perform good deeds by manumitting their slaves and he himself freed all of his slaves. Thus, he has mitigated the harsh treatments, to which slaves had been subject in the past, their life chances greatly improving as a result. Despite the absolute control that masters exercised over the bodies of their slaves, killing a slave would make a Muslim 'guilty'.

Moreover, certain rules and regulations, enshrined in Islamic law and edicts of the sultans, governed the capture and sale of slaves. It was common practice for high officials to question all captives, to avoid enslaving the non-Muslim population of the empire. After all the latter, being the sultan's subjects, were under the protection of the monarch. However, some skepticism is surely in order: The Ottoman archives record many complaints about illicit enslavement, especially of young people, whom the kidnappers often took to a province where they were strangers and would have had difficulty proving their free status. (Vatin, 2001, p. 149-190)

There is a huge debate among modern Ottoman historians about the role of *gaza*, the difference of this practice from the idea of *jihad*, and the importance of *gaza* and jihad in the emergence of the sultans' empire. It is impossible to bypass this academic discussion when researching slavery, as many slaves were captured in warfare that the captors regarded as *gaza.* Çetin thoroughly analyzes the debates between Paul Wittek, Fuat Köprülü, Rudi Paul Lindner, Ronald Jennings, Colin Imber, Heath Lowry, Halil Inalcik and Cemal Kafadar. Çetin concludes that the words '*akın*' and '*gaza*' should be evaluated and understood together, since the early Ottoman author Ahmedi (1334-1412) in his work the *İskendername* has used the two words in the same sentence with similar meanings.

In Çetin's perspective, we should understand *gaza* not only within religious parameters; for after all, the taking of booty had a very worldly dimension. *Akın*s were military raids or campaigns conducted by Muslims against non-Muslims to obtain booty including slaves, or conquer new lands; and *alps* were the warriors who participated in those raids. However, Christians might fight in these campaigns as well, side by side with the Muslim warriors. Thus, Çetin takes a position similar to that of Cemal Kafadar (Kafadar, 1995, p. 99-141): As these *alp*s did not think that they were negating their *gazi* status if they admitted Christians into their army, we should not

question their *gazi* status either. If it was not a concern for the early *gazi*s themselves, why should we impose our own opinions upon them?

A study of slavery needs to include both slavers and enslaved. To approach the latter, Çetin emphasizes the importance of memoirs as primary sources, which sometimes indicate the emotions of the captives. How did they feel at the time of capture? Although writing such memoirs was not common in the 1500s or 1600s, some memoirs of this kind survive and are invaluable sources. (Yaşa, 2018, p.198-211) If read in a critical spirit, the memoirs of Temeşvarlı Osman Ağa, Macuncuzade Kadı Mustafa Efendi, Konstantin Mihail Konstantinoviç, Baron W. Wratislav and Michael Heberer, from the town of Bretten in southwestern Germany, convey valuable information about the daily lives of enslaved people.

In the second chapter, which is the most innovative, the author uses registers of the slaves lodged in a slave camp that imprisoned the captives, taken during the Mora campaign of 1715, they either came from Ayamavra Island or from the fortified town of Benefşe (Monemvasia) on the southern tip of the Peloponnese. Kept in the Elçi Hanı camp for fifty-one days, this group of civilians later sold as slaves, included women, children and men. By analyzing the registers documenting these seven weeks, it is worth repeating that the author has made an innovative contribution to the slavery literature. (Costantini, 2003, p. 229-241)

In the first section of the second chapter, we find information about the origins of the captives, as well as their numbers, ages, belongings, and later fates. In the second subsection, the author discusses the location and functions of the Elçi Hanı. As for the regulations and methods by which the officials categorized and registered the slaves, they are the subject of the third subsection. In this context, the author provides information about the daily needs of the slaves, including food, water, candles and medical treatments. This section of the register provides information about death rates as well.

Unfortunately, we do not possess a register summarizing the information about all enslaved captives taken in the Mora campaign. However, Çetin makes an estimate, using records documenting the so-called *temessük* tax, paid to the treasury by the slave-owning soldiers and amounting to 330 *akçe*s per slave. According to these registers, the imperial treasury collected a total of 3.309.180 *akçe*s. Thus, we can conclude that in Mora, the soldiers captured about 12,500 slaves. According to a Venetian estimate of 1689, the entire population of the peninsula apart from Corinthos and Mani amounted to 89,000, which by 1709 supposedly had increased to a quarter million, although neither figure is reliable. If we accept the lower figure, about one seventh or 14% of the total population should have suffered enslavement. If we assume a population of about 250,000, about 5% should have ended up as slaves. (Malliaris, 2007, p. 98) However, the Expense Registers, the principal source for Çetin's study, record only 700 slaves temporarily accommodated in the Elçi Hanı. We do not know what happened to the others.

Overall, Çetin's work is enjoyable to read. He has described the daily lives of the slaves with great care, and his lucid explications of the rules and regulations

concerning slavery, according to Islamic law and the sultans' orders are very instructive. One might however criticize the author for generally avoiding to take a clear position in the debates mentioned throughout the book. At the same time, Çetin has several strong points: he is well aware of the relevant secondary literature and of the tools of historical methodology. Most importantly, he has asked the right questions when examining the extant primary sources.

Çetin has collected a great deal of information on the treatment of captives in the early 1700s. However, when he accepts without question the data given by the Expense Registers, I think that some skepticism is in order. The registers tell us that the slaves in the camp ate well and received medical treatment when needed; they even enjoyed alcoholic drinks to keep up their spirits. First, it is impossible to claim that good treatment of the slaves was universal, as the sultan's domains were huge, and in many places, whatever the good intentions of rulers and viziers, governmental control was not very strong. Second, as anybody who has ever eaten in a student cafeteria knows all too well, a dish may look great on the menu but be inedible when it comes to the table. It is quite possible that at least some of the guards kept the best food and drink for themselves, and let the prisoners go hungry.

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