

Suraiya Faroqhi. *Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire: Employment and Mobility in the Early Modern Era*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. xxii + 296 sayfa.

Faruk Yalıçımen

SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research). yaslicimen@gmail.com

Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire consists of fourteen chapters, an introduction and a brief conclusion. There are three main parts entitled “Elite Travelers,” “Ordinary People and their Products on the Move,” and “Staying Put.” In this book, the author encourages leaving the fragmentizing perspectives aside and adopting a “new mode” of writing history. She tries to interrelate diverse compartments of Ottoman society by creating broader frameworks crosscutting religious, ethnic and class boundaries. Keeping her spotlight on people, be they ordinary men or elites, the author searches for “human” stories. The special emphasis is on ordinary people, who always constitute the silent majority in history. Ordinary men including lower-ranked bureaucrats and servitors, slaves and young workers, artisans and shopkeepers all had gone unnoticed as they left few-to-no written material behind. Therefore, the chief attempt of the author in this book is to shed light on their lives as much as possible.

The first chapter tells a diplomatic history, based on the experiences of Ottoman ambassadors dispatched to Vienna during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Faroqhi is concerned with the question of how ambassadors perceived and reported the political conditions; how skillful they were to collect information about the ongoing political situations as well as their breadth of knowledge. She argues that a common feature of reports written by the Ottoman ambassadors sent to Vienna and its surroundings was their non-anonymous character, meaning that they were not professionals educated for that purpose, thus everything they wrote reflected their personality. Faroqhi further argues that the ambassadors’ perspectives became more and more encompassing towards the late eighteenth century—not in the early nineteenth, as thought by many—and that these ambassadors reflected different social, political, historical, economic and geographic aspects in their reports.

Material culture, as perceived and narrated by Ottoman ambassadors and travelers, is the subject of the following chapter. Faroqhi underlines

the fact that these people showed interest for material culture to varying degrees. Later on, this interest culminated into a curiosity due to the political and military defeats of the Ottoman Empire. A salient change in the image of Europe since the second half of the eighteenth century was observable in their writings, and these observations of European material culture, according to the author, constitute a good source for European history as well.

Experiences of asylum seekers in the Ottoman lands are told in the third chapter. Among them were the Jewish communities, forming the largest group of refugees; Morisco refugees from Spain; Central Asian dervishes, passing through the Ottoman territories on their route to Mecca; Spaniards and Italians looking for a better life; members of royal dynasties like a Safavid prince or the Tatar aristocracy in Crimea; Indian princes, usually exiled to Mecca under Ottoman rule; and those escaping from religious persecution from the East and the West. All are showing the Empire's ability to attract "qualified renegades." (p. 62) Faroqhi's favorite author Evliya Çelebi, whose works she uses in her various articles and books, is the subject of the fourth chapter. She talks about Evliya Çelebi's observations of Cairo and focuses on the issue of cultural differences that emerged in comparison to Istanbul.

In addition to the numerous envoys of the Ottoman Sultans appearing in Venice, Faroqhi deals, in the fifth chapter, with several hundreds of Ottoman merchants from the Balkans, Istanbul, and Anatolia. Here, the author highlights the "worries and aims of 'ordinary' Ottoman subjects," an important but equally hard achievement due to the predictable paucity of sources. (p. 85) Faroqhi argues that during such inter-cultural encounters, there emerged an overarching discourse emanating from the natural necessity of consensus and cultural cohabitation, referring not directly to a specific religion but to a set of moral values emphasizing humanly qualities such as honor and fairness. Faroqhi notices similar social bonds, cross-cutting ethno-religious divides in the eighteenth-century Ottoman world, describing it a "cosmopolitan crowd." The example she describes in the fourteenth chapter is Muslim and Christian traders from the same locality, who immigrated to Istanbul for trade, and supported one another.

A colorful and detailed picture of trade goods changing hands in the cosmopolitan crowd of Mecca is depicted in the sixth chapter. These materials include keepsakes and trade goods such as vessels to transport *zermem* water, depictions of the holy cities, coffee cups, etc. Various kinds of goods coming from India, China and Africa all denoted a fascinating level of wealth in the period before 1683, after which the massive wars ruined the prosperity of the Ottoman Empire. Following Mecca, the author turns to Bursa, whose diversity of population and goods likewise is a salient aspect

of its history. Informing the reader that traders and a significant number of slaves inhabited the area, such as Florentine and Iranian merchants, local silk workers and women, Faroqhi details a world in which producers and purchasers from different geographies and cultures interacted, and their commercial products exchanged hands.

A history of Üsküdar and stories of its inhabitants during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are told in the eighth and ninth chapters. According to the author, Üsküdar was a small town with few inhabitants in the early fifteenth century. As “a gateway to Istanbul,” it was home to a number of escaped slaves, boatmen and muleteers. Then, she concentrates on the sixteenth century slaves of Istanbul: experiences of male and female slaves, who were imported, freed, auctioned, kidnapped, escaped and hunted. The author draws on court records to dig up the lives of “ordinary people” who appear in their plain clothes, worries, hopes, and with their crafts.

After introducing a short history of *fez* manufacturing, prices, types and qualities before the eighteenth century, Faroqhi tells the stories of Tunisian *fez*-sellers in eighteenth-century Istanbul in the following chapter. There were *Maghribi* (North African) merchants, who imported fezzes from Tunis and sold them in Istanbul. They formed a sizeable guild of their own in the mid-eighteenth century. As a guild of North Africans, they were located around the still existing Arab Mosque in Karaköy. There were also shopkeepers and *torbacs*, the latter selling the low quality products on the streets. To the group of people moving in the Ottoman Empire belonged also the young workmen of Istanbul. Faroqhi shares, in the eleventh chapter, the example of young boys, mostly Albanian in origin and living in Istanbul, that were sent to remote places as a workforce to undertake construction projects. Their records reflect a picture of their physical features, crafts and even, in certain cases, their wardrobes. She discusses from where these large groups of labor were collected and from which religion and ethnic background they might be coming.

Alongside those who constantly moved, there were those who stayed put in their localities—when they were mobile, this was within the city. Faroqhi speaks, in the twelfth chapter, of the lives of *helvacı* artisans in Istanbul in the eighteenth century and the geographical distribution of *helva* shopkeepers. In the following chapter, the author again concentrates on shopkeepers and artisans of Istanbul in the eighteenth century, giving information about certain trade goods produced for the local market, consumed by ordinary people, and sold on the streets or in the shops of Istanbul. Faroqhi claims that this topic had escaped from historians’ attention, since historians were concerned with the goods produced either for interregional trade or for the Sultan’s palace.

Overall, the author has the inspiring idea of depicting the lives of ordinary people, who either constantly moved or stayed put in their localities. Already exists in the introduction, Faroqhi manifests her adoption of this approach. She combines experiences of people from different social and economic backgrounds in order to narrate “human” stories. To this end, she mines the historical records through lucrative counterfactual readings and speculative thinking that is both the strength and the weakness of the book. Clothes, textiles and varieties of other goods reflect daily lives of people indirectly, as they represent visible and colorful aspect of human stories. This is not an ideological emphasis, but rather a preference that merges both a humane conscience and a scholarly concern of filling a gap in the historiography. This contribution cannot be categorized exclusively as a “history of below” or “history for below,” but surpasses such fragmental outlooks. Methodologically, this is not a wholesale social history, but rather a socio-economic one, always considering the watchful eye of the government officials as they were indispensable as record keepers.

One criticism for the work under review can be the absence of the interpretation of beliefs, emotions and religion that are supposedly immanent parts of the social and economic life. Except for the chapter on pilgrimage to Mecca, which is an extraordinary period in peoples’ lives, mosques, *tekkes*, *zaviyes*, churches, synagogues and the life around them are not satisfactorily represented. It would reflect other intersecting and cross-cutting points of both ordinary and elite people’s daily life experiences. Mosques, for example, appear and disappear immediately as empty buildings. It remains unclear whether the source material did not allow her to delve into this aspect or if she just preferred not to direct her attention to the subject.

Faroqhi’s interest in, and support for, young scholars can be seen across the book. A great merit of hers is that she encourages young colleagues by mentioning their names and works, also enabling the wider community of Ottoman historians to discover the forthcoming or recently finished dissertations in the field. Skillful insertion of anecdotal information into the main text displays the level of her scholarly erudition and makes reading the work enjoyable.

All the articles in *Travel and Artisans*, except two of them—the ninth and thirteenth chapters—were published before in English, German or Turkish. However, the book can still be regarded as a novel contribution and offers more than a compendium of articles for three reasons: (1) the author edits her previously published articles, especially the ones translated into English; (2) there are two new chapters that have not appeared elsewhere; and (3) the author’s elaboration on perspective and methodology in writing the articles provides a coherence to the work.