



Levantines of the Ottoman World: Communities, Identities, and Cultures

Ed. Erik Blackthorne-O'Barr, Burhan Çağlar

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Levantines of the Ottoman World Communities, Identities and Cultures is a collection of nine unique studies edited by Erik Blackthorne-O'Barr and Burhan Çağlar under three main headings (Communities, Identities, and Culture) and published by Ibn Haldun University Press (IHU) in 2023.

The book begins with an extensive and comprehensive literature review by one of the editors, Eric Blackthorne-O'Barr, "From Compradors to Cosmopolitans: Historiographic Currents in Contemporary Levantine Studies." The author introduces the basic questions in Levantine studies: Who Levantines were in the past, who they are now, and who they are likely to be. The writer continues by describing the past and present of Levantine studies, as well as the prevalent paradigms and concepts. According to the author, "total histories," world systems, cosmopolitanisms, convivialities, globalities, borderlands, crossed histories, entanglements, and encounters are central concepts to Levantine studies. On the other hand, as the author explains, there have been two major paradigms in Eastern Mediterranean History and Levantine studies, and there were "world system analyses and cosmopolitanism." Stating that the analytical fragility of these paradigms has emerged in recent years, the author emphasizes that in the world system theory which was the dominant paradigm in Mediterranean and Levantine studies from the 1970s to the 1990s, Ottoman Levantines were considered the most important comprador "class" that enabled the non-capitalist Ottoman economy to penetrate the capitalist European economy. On the other hand, the works of Daniel Goffman, Elena Frangakis-Syrett, Roger Owen, and Fatma Müge Göçek,

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which are characterized as transitional studies in the early 1990s, deepened and expanded the world system paradigm. The author emphasizes that there was a paradigm shift in Levantine studies towards the end of the 1990s and that classes and the world system were replaced by concepts associated with cosmopolitanism such as culture, identity, hybrid identities, urban culture, and so on. However, according to the author, the academic hegemony of cosmopolitanism could only last until the early 2010s, when global financial crises and the Arab Spring forced the academic community to re-evaluate classes, subalterns, and economic imperialism within the framework of the Levantines and the Mediterranean. As the author emphasizes, in recent years there has been an increase in neo-Braudian studies that take the Mediterranean as a unit of analysis, academic studies that reconsider the Levantines and the Mediterranean from an imperial perspective, studies on the epistemological legacies of the Levantines, and biographical studies that reveal the complexities of Levantine culture and societies, with memoirs and diaries published in recent years.

In the last part of the Introduction, the author argues that collective work that brings together scholars with different perspectives, methodological approaches, and conceptual frameworks and builds meaningful relationships between them has shaped Levantine studies and that academic collaboration has oriented the evolution of Levantine studies. Finally, the author reviews and introduces nine different articles in three different sections of the collection, highlighting that the articles in the “Communities” section focus on the question of how social networks and ties of affiliation emerge and are consolidated; the articles in the “Identities” section are analyses of processes of self-fashioning and self-definition; and finally, the articles in the “Biographies” section have a strong emphasis on the micro-scale examination of individual lives and a methodological focus on the broader historiographical and theoretical implications of their particular perspectives and narratives.

The first article of the Communities section is “Marginality and Boundary-Making Among Latins of 19th century Ottoman Istanbul” by Gabriel Doyle. The main sources of the research are the correspondence, memoirs, and letters of missionaries in Istanbul. In his study, Doyle attempts to determine which groups or societies were included or excluded from the Latin configuration of nineteenth-century Istanbul through the concepts of marginality, inclusion, and exclusion. The author begins by emphasizing that there is an “archival bias” in the assumptions that the Levantines of Istanbul were merchants and diplomats who lived a prosperous life thanks to the capitulations. Then, in addition to the ethno-confessional, ethno-linguistic, self-identification, and imperial identification methods used to define Levantine identity, the writer touches upon the concepts of “boundary-making” and “boundary maintenance” and builds his study on these two concepts. According to the author, understanding those who are considered marginal means determining the boundaries of Latinity.

Focusing on the change in the face of Galata and Pera with the Slavic, Croatian, and Maltese immigration and the nationalist tendencies of these ethnic groups and their association with crime, prostitution, and moral decadence, the author brings an answer to the question of who Latinos were not. Moreover, the

author emphasizes that the poorer workers residing in the Uskudar region lost their Catholic identity through inter-denominational marriages and that the marginalization of families formed by the marriages of people belonging to Orthodox and other churches worried the Catholic Church and made it difficult to identify these families with a religious identity. Finally, the author emphasizes that the fact that railway workers living in the suburbs of Istanbul wanted to send their children to German-language schools and rejected French, the dominant language of Istanbul's Latin Catholicism, and the Francophone priest in favor of a German-speaking priest was interpreted as marginalization by the Catholic authorities. From this point of view, the author identifies the limits of the Latin configuration and the ways of not being marginalized as obeying the representative of the Vatican in religious celebrations, being connected to the French language, sending their children to French-medium missionary schools, and being closely associated with the French community, marrying only Roman Catholics in choosing a spouse and not having nationalist tendencies.

The second article in the Communities section is “Mediterranean Criminal Networks: Diplomacy and Illicit Connections Between Constantinople and the Italian Peninsula (1856-1861)” by Giorgio Ennas. This study investigates an inter-imperial counterfeiting gang that had a great number of Italo-Levantine members operating in the Ottoman Empire. Main sources of the study are the correspondence between Rüstem Bey, chargé d'affaires in Turin, and Sigmund Spitzer Efendi, chargé d'affaires in Naples, with the Ottoman government. It examines the diplomatic relations, cooperation, and developing ties between the Ottoman Empire and the Italian city-states through this gang organization. In his study, Ennas discusses how such counterfeiting operations undermined Ottoman financial reform and legitimacy, how Ottoman diplomacy attempted to cooperate with Italian governments to counter such illegal operations, and how counterfeiting operations initiated international diplomatic collaborations and began a new era in Ottoman-Italian relations. In addition, by touching upon the cooperation of Ottoman diplomats Rüstem Bey and Sigmund Spitzer Efendi with the Italian authorities, the intensive efforts made to bring the perpetrators to justice, the failure of some of these efforts, the author sheds light on a period that can be considered a turning point in Ottoman-Italian relations. Thus, it addresses the economic, diplomatic, and legal dimensions of counterfeiting activities, offering valuable insights into the interplay of crime and international diplomacy.

The third and last article in the Communities section is “Dilemma and Risk Among Smyrna’s British Levantine Community: September-November 1922” by Joanna Hyslop. Hyslop's article closely looks at the British Levantine community's experiences during these years concerning Smyrna's 1922 fire and the social, political, and individual events that ensued. Looking at the impact of political and social upheavals in the closing stage of the Greco-Turkish War, the article addresses the conundrums experienced by such a community during evacuation and complications arising out of returning to the city afterward. Hyslop provides a comprehensive analysis by combining individual and social perspectives centering on the biography of his grandfather, Charles Dobson, a priest in the Anglican

church of Smyrna at the time. The article mentions uncertainty in the society during a period starting with the retreat of the Greek army in Anatolia. Hyslop draws on a variety of primary sources, including official naval and consular reports, personal letters, diaries, and testimonies, to create a multidimensional narrative. These documents allow us to understand both individual experiences and social collapse. Examining the correspondence and diaries between September 9, 1922, and November 1922, the author shows how and to what extent senior British officials and the Anglican church were concerned with the safety of life and property of the British Levantine community living in Smyrna. According to author, Sir Harry Lamb (British Consul-General at Smyrna), Robert Urquhart (British Vice-Consul) Grace Williamson (one of the directors of the English Nursing Home at Smyrna), and Alexander Maclachlan (President of International Collage at Smyrna) played a key role in the evacuation of the British by meeting with both the Ankara Government and British government officials.

The first article of the Identities section is “The Levantines of Aleppo City and Countryside: Changing Aspects of Identity and Belonging Among a Foreign Elite in 19th Century Syria” by Mafalda Ade. Mafalda Ade's article examines the Levantine merchant community in nineteenth-century Aleppo through the Poche and Marcopoli families, focusing on the socio-economic life of this foreign elite in Ottoman northern Syria, their identity problems, and whether they adapted to the region. The central questions of Ade's article are to what extent the Levantines in Aleppo had become part of the social structure of the city in the late nineteenth century, to what extent they maintained their connections with Europe, and to what extent these connections played a role in their daily lives. According to Ade, these families aimed to integrate into Ottoman society, particularly into Aleppo society, while at the same time preserving their European identity and continuing to benefit from the advantages that this identity brought. Ade makes an original and valuable contribution by drawing on the private archives of the Poche and Marcopoli families and uncovering previously unexamined primary sources such as correspondence, legal documents and business records. The article consists of three main sections. In the first section, “The Rising Foreign Merchant Elite,” Ade focuses on the social structure of foreign merchants in Aleppo and their role in urban life. Ade draws attention to how these families used their European connections and consular posts to advance their social and economic position. In the second section, “The Austrian Connection,” the author considers the cultural and familial ties of the Porche and Marcopoli families to Europe and their proximity to European culture through the education, marriage, traditions, and lifestyle. Ade emphasizes that even as they integrated into Ottoman society, these families maintained their European connections through language, religion, and consular networks. In the third and final section of the article, “The Law of the Land: From the Old City to the Countryside,” Ade focuses on the economic investments and rural expansion of these families. In this context, the writer analyzes how the Poche family acted in terms of real estate ownership, legal disputes, and trials in Ottoman courts. The author attempts to show how the Levantines shaped the economic structure of the city and its surroundings not only through trade but also through real estate investments and rural expansion.

The second article of the Identities section is “The Smyrna Mail and the Construction of British Levantine Identity in Ottoman Izmir (1862-1864)” by Alexandra Solovyev. According to Solovyev's article, the Smyrna Mail newspaper, published in Ottoman Smyrna between 1862 and 1864, played an important role in shaping the identity of the British Levantine community living in the city. The author argues that the newspaper played two roles at the same time, acting both as a cosmopolitan and a nationalistic medium, to reconcile disparate reading publics. According to Solovyev, Smyrna Mail, being the first and only English-language publication to appear in such an environment, attempted to cover British commercial and cultural life in Smyrna, both locally and transnationally. According to the article, in its identity construction, the publication skillfully utilized both nationalism and cosmopolitanism in its actions. On one level, the publication sought to consolidate British society in Smyrna and promote its commercial success at the same time, and in a complementary manner, build a working relationship with the Ottoman administration.

The author makes this apparent through the Newspaper's reactions to the poll tax and the example of a British citizen committing a crime against the law. According to the author, these attitudes of the newspaper editors show that they viewed the relationship of British society with the Ottoman administration from a pragmatic framework. According to the author, this attitude of the newspaper editors shows that they viewed the British community's relationship with the Ottoman administration in a pragmatic framework. As Solovyev's research has revealed, the Smyrna Mail is an important source for understanding how British Levantine identity was constructed in 19th-century Ottoman Izmir.

The third and final article of the Identities section is “International Elites in Ottoman Salonica: The Commercial and Diplomatic Portfolios of the Hadjilazaro Family” by Kaleb Herman Adney. The article examines the commercial and diplomatic activities of the Hadjilazaro family in Ottoman Thessaloniki from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century by analyzing how the family combined the Ottoman legal system with European financial mechanisms and integrated into international commercial and diplomatic networks. In the article, Ottoman Archive documents, commercial court records in Thessaloniki and Ottoman yearbooks of the period in the provinces have been used as primary sources. The study discusses how the Hadjilazaro family was positioned not only as commercial actors but also as members of an international elite group shaped by the Ottoman modernization process. The study argues that the Hadjilazaro family occupied an important place in the history of Ottoman trade and diplomacy and that the family utilized Ottoman institutional structures, and European financial and diplomatic mechanisms to create a regional elite class. The family's success in this process is seen because of the interactions between the Ottoman and European economic systems, a status that was weakened by the end of Ottoman rule, and the incorporation of Thessaloniki into Greece.

The first article of the final section, Biographies, is “Pen and Politics: The Intellectual Legacies of Two Levantine Journalists” by Burhan Çağlar, one of the editors of the book. The article focuses on the journalistic activities and intellectual influence of James Carlile McCoan and Edgar Whitaker, the

founders and publishers of the Levant Herald newspaper, in the Ottoman Empire. By analyzing both two personalities' writings and journalism, the author touches upon their contribution to shaping political relations between the Ottoman and British governments. In particular, the intellectual heritage of James Carlile McCoan and Edgar Whitaker about the Ottoman state through publication in the Levant Herald is discussed in detail. The author reveals what ideas these two journalists pioneered through their writings and journalistic activities on issues such as the reform process in the Ottoman Empire, Western influence in the region, and Russian expansionism, and how these ideas had a historical impact. The author draws attention to McCoan's more liberal approach while Whitaker adopted a more conservative stance. However, according to the author, both journalists agree on the need to preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. While McCoan supported the Ottoman modernization efforts, Whitaker took a tough stance against Russian expansionism. The article examines both Western and Ottoman journalism in both camps and their political and intellectual consequences in Ottoman lands. Çağlar's research makes an important contribution to the study of Ottoman modernization and its relations with Western powers in the context of journalism.

The subsequent article in the Biographies, is “Levantine Prince of Izmir: Charles Salzani (1825-1919)” by Süleyman Uygun and Hakan Güngör. In the article, the life and work of Charles Salzani, a key figure in Ottoman Levantine society in Izmir, have been analyzed. In this study, the authors aim to reveal the role played by Charles Salzani and his family in creating the Levantine community and strengthening the French commercial and cultural presence in Ottoman Izmir by investigating the commercial, social, and political activities of the Salzani family and their contribution to the economic and cultural development of Ottoman Izmir. In the article, Ottoman archive documents, French archival documents, relevant commercial and legal documents related to the Salzani family, documents from the French Chamber of Commerce, and newspaper archives of the period have been used as primary sources. The article emphasizes that Charles Salzani became a prominent figure among the French Levantines by establishing the French Chamber of Commerce, strengthening commercial relations between Marseille and Izmir, and trying to protect French interests in the French Levantine community of Ottoman Izmir and increase the commercial share of French goods. Supporting their conclusions with concrete examples, the authors explain in detail the political and commercial initiatives taken by Salzani to protect French interests in Izmir and emphasize that these activities contributed to the institutionalization of the Levantine society. The article makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the importance of Western trade and Levantine identity in Ottoman geography.

The third and last article of the Biographies is “The Whittall Family and Making of British Commercial Interests in the Ottoman Empire” by Semih Gökatalay. The article comprehensively examines the commercial and economic influence of the Whittall family in the Ottoman Empire. It aims at investigating the significant role played by the family in British commercial relations with the Ottoman Empire, particularly in relation to British Chamber of Commerce of Turkey (BCCT). The author seeks

to reveal how British interests in Ottoman territories were preserved and developed through intervention by the Whittall family. The article is a critical analysis of events in a contextual background, supported through both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involve Ottoman archives documents, British Chamber of Commerce documents, trading reports, and newspapers during that period. All these sources cover family activity in a variety of sectors and reveal family members' role in acting as a bridge between Ottoman and British governments in terms of trading activity. Secondary sources are based on historical analysis and academic studies on the Whittall family.

According to the author, the Whittall family played an important role in safeguarding British commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through the BCCT, family members helped to maintain an effective channel of dialogue between the British and Ottoman governments and played a role in the finance, mining, and shipping sectors. Specifically, during William Whittall's presidency of the BCCT, family influence reached its height and played a key position in commercial life. In its examination, the article considers how relations between family and Ottoman and British governments translated into commercial opportunity and explains how such relations helped shape Western-based commercial development in Ottoman geography and the salience of the Levantine identity.

To sum up, instead of viewing Levantine communities as a homogeneous structure, the study examines them with their internal differences and conflicts. In particular, articles such as “Marginality and Boundary-Making Among Latins of 19th Century Ottoman Istanbul” reveal the divisions, exclusions and identity crises of the Levantines within themselves. Similarly, the social and economic integration processes of the Levantines in different cities such as Aleppo, Izmir and Thessaloniki reveal the multi-layered structure of these communities.

On the other hand, articles that touch on relatively less-covered topics such as counterfeiter networks and crime allow us to evaluate the Levantines' relations with the Ottoman bureaucracy and European states in a broader context. In particular, the article “Mediterranean Criminal Networks” by Giorgio Ennas prompts us to rethink Ottoman-Italian diplomatic relations through criminal activities.

The biography section focuses on the individual stories of the Levantines, revealing their contributions to both the Ottoman modernization process and commercial and cultural interactions with the West. Figures such as James Carlile McCoan, Edgar Whitaker, Charles Salzani, and the Whittall family are depicted not only as commercial actors but also as intermediaries who played a role in shaping Ottoman-Western relations.

One of the most striking strengths of the book is the variety and richness of the archival material used. Almost all of the articles are based on primary sources such as Ottoman archives, consular correspondence, and family archives. This gives the study both originality and academic credibility. In addition, the work adopts an interdisciplinary approach and is at the intersection of different fields such as history, sociology, and political science. This diversity positions the Levantines not only as historical

actors but also within cultural and social dynamics. In addition, the book creatively uses concepts such as cosmopolitanism, border construction, identity construction, diaspora, and integration, thus broadening our theoretical horizons in terms of Levantine studies.