

**The Intellectual Career of an Ottoman
Statesman:
Sadık Rifat Pascha (1806-1858) and his
Economic Ideas**

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As regards the intellectual life in the Ottoman Empire, either in the center or in provinces, the rough demarcation line can be drawn by the proclamation of Tanzimat. In the pre-Tanzimat era, the formation of Ottoman intellectuals was flourished by the accomplishment of several ways of learning. The most apparent one is obviously the formal way, that is medrese education. Concomitantly, the face to face learning must be taken into account which is mostly appeared where either the formal way is lacked or it is found insufficient. The freshman (mubtedi) attends some special tete-a-tete courses and in some cases student's home turns up as his school where his father becomes his first teacher. In these special courses, the preliminary necessary lessons consisted mostly of Arabic, Persian and Islamic catechism. So far as we have probed that freshmen take up these lessons from different masters. Most likely a freshman follows the courses of one teacher who is specialized on one particular book. As soon as the study of that particular book is completed he moves elsewhere, there attends another master's private courses. This type of education also penetrates contrasted fields of interests, such as Turkish classical music, poetry, Arabic calligraphy and reading of masterpieces of Islamic mysticism, such as Mewlana's Mesnevi. In the last echelon an icazetname (a diploma showing that he is authorized to teach) is bestowed upon him.

On the other hand, we must emphasize the validity of another cultural stream existed among the people who lived in provinces. They seemed to have developed a latent way of learning in which some definitive books were being widely read throughout the centuries. The famous Ottomantraveller, Evliya Çelebi, provides some valuable clues regarding the latent way. In the light of his writings we learn that the books

entitled as "Muhammediye", "Envaru-l Asikiyn", "Gulistan" and "Bostan" of Hafız-ı Sirazi, and also "Divan" of Nizami were in large circulated almost in 17th century of Ottoman provinces¹.

Close probing of the contents of books studied in different strata of Ottoman educational tradition will let us to speculate that all were in the service of Islam, strengthening the religious belief. In contrast, the perception of matter, or dealing with mundane wants and worldly problems had not been in the foreground by Ottoman intellectuals of the pre-Tanzimat era. And hence, the refrain of Ottoman intellectuals from matter or worldly problems with a considerable length brought about no scientific attempts and breakthroughs in the direction to the change of material life of the Ottoman society. This was the striking point in comparison to what took place in the world vision of the pre-Tanzimat intellectuals in Turkey.

The close approximation to Ottoman intellectuals' fermentation in the pre-Tanzimat era can not come to light unless we consider the impact and the contribution of the Palace school and agencies of the administration to the comprehension of worldly matters by Ottoman officialdom. It seems to be apparent that the bureaucratic tradition in the center redirecting Ottoman intellectuals' mind brought into foreground politico-economic problems which were desideratum for the Empire to be settled down.

As the years approaching to the threshold of Tazminat, the Ottoman administration wily nilly accepted the material superiority of Europe. In the mean time, close contacts had created piece-meal transfusional bands through which European ideas and institutions began to creep into the Ottoman intellectual climate. As a matter of fact, these gradual and unsystematic processes were seeking a solid ground for the modernization of economy and society. However, before the tricle-down effect comes into being, the early traces of modernization emerged in some agencies of the Sublime Porte, such were "the Dragoman's Office" and "the Treasury Chamber" where the classical works of the West read and also political and economic ideas debated by their clerks (hulefa). More forcibly, the economy's backwardness and financial bottlenecks and crises were discussed and some fruitful reform suggestions produced by the clerks of these

agencies. Let us note that in the very eve of Tanzimat, there had been two flatly narrowly contrasted ideas occupying the minds: the transfused ideas from the West on one hand, and on the other, the traditional solutions taken up by the captains of the Ottoman administration.

The international diffusion of ideas which had risen its impact after 1840 in the intellectual fermentation of Ottomans have found different channels, one of which is of some importance. To be able to speak any European language, most likely French, opened up a new cultural horizon in Ottoman intellectual world vision. Secondly, contacts with foreigners and non-Muslim minorities being scattered either in the center or elsewhere in provinces, such a İzmir, Selaniko and Beyrout. The last but not least, it is to spend a considerable length of time in any European country as being either a bureaucrat (holding a post in embassies since the late 18th century), or as a student (prevalent since 1830s), or as an exiled intellectual-opponent politician (which was to be seen after 1860s), or as a traveler (which began as late as 1890s)².

In this paper of mine, I shall be taking up the intellectual career of a remarkable Ottoman statesman, Sadik Rifat Pascha and his economic ideas. In my judgment the impressiveness of his intellectual incubation does not emanate only from his equal footing in the different educational strata provided by 19th. century Ottoman Empire, but also his awareness of the rising power of the West led him instinctively to recognize its basic dimensions. In consequence, Sadik Rifat Pascha's brilliant intellectual calibre enabled him to bring out some memorandums to the Ottoman administrations out of which his economic ideas are strikingly discernible.

Sadik Rifat Pascha was born in İstanbul, in 1806. He was a son of a high official, Hacı Ali Bey³, whose intellectual environment offered him preliminary necessary education mainly Arabic, Persian and Islamic sciences. After having completed informal way of learning, Sadik Rifat Pascha, under the guidance of his father, entered the Treasury Office as a clerk⁴. This specific bond clearly imprints that at the beginning of 19th century those who staffed in agencies of the Sublime Porte, mainly in scribal services,

belonged to the ruling class of the Empire⁵. After the initiation to the service of the Ottoman Sultan, Sadik Rifat Pascha attended the Pace school where he took purely literary and intellectual dimensions of the classical tradition. As a rule, the lessons were based on Arabic, Persian, geography and the promulgated laws of the State⁶.

Although we have had no historical support, we reckon that Sadik Rifat Pascha's friendly conversations with other clerks of different agencies, oriented him, even in embryo, to embrace the concrete problems besieging the Ottoman State. Particularly, the current conditions of the economy which were incurably succumbed since Selim III was discomforting the Ottoman administrators, including the young candidates of the high officialdom. Among those who were trying to find reliable solutions for economic disequilibria was Sadik Rifat Pascha who paid a great deal of attention to the policy prescriptions valid in the Classical Age of the Ottoman State, such were as land-tenure system, adulteration of coin, inflexibility of prices and various taxes including confiscation.

Sadik Rifat Pascha seemingly reached to the idea that unless the security in business transactions is established, the Ottoman economy would be adrift to a blind alley, there it is to be soon petering out.

Therefore, he urged at the very first hand that the application of confiscation must have been abolished. None the less, as to be seen, his personal observations and contacts in Europe caused to fade away his superficiality. In this context, we must add that this does not imply that Sadik Rifat Pascha is a staunch believer or an ardent supporter of emulating the policy prescriptions produced in the West.

The second turning point in his intellectual life begins with his appointment as a minister to Vienna in 1837, than in 1841 ranked to ambassador⁷. Quite understandably, his ambassadorial days passed in Austria contributed considerably to his dexterous management of the political and economic issues, thus enlarged his intellectual diameter. His observations were ever so helpful broadening his perception in front of Europe's material will being. At first sight, Sadik

²Cf., H.E.Allen, "The Turkish Transformation", (Illinois, 1935), p.1.

³For his life story see Mehmed Sureyya, "Sicill-i Osmani", III, (İstanbul, 1311), pp.564-565.

⁵Cf., C.Findley, "Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire", (Princeton, 1980), pp.5-6.

⁶Cf., *ibid*, p.11.

Rifat Pascha was not impressed and stunned by what he saw, contrastingly his ambition led him to understand what were holding beneath the surface of this seen magnificence. As a passing note, for example, rather surprisingly, Sadık Rifat Pascha displayed a clear idea about the conceptual frameworks of 'rationalism' on one hand, and 'empiricism' on the other⁸. Such a brilliancy demarcating the former from the latter did not exist among the intellectuals of 1840s.

Additionally, it is hard to deny the impact of his conversations either in the center or in Europe with his diplomatic counterparts were also conducive. In particular, the Austrian Prince Matternich who acted like teacher on a friendly basis drew Sadık Rifat Pascha's attention to the economic development of the Ottoman State⁹. What Sadık Rifat Pascha learnt from these conversations with the Prince was the significance of economic liberty by which the security in business transactions via price mechanism was to be spontaneously achieved together with private property and individual enterprise. However, regarding as the standards of the economy in 1840s, there were two major stumbling blocks for economic development one of which was the lack of entrepreneurial spirit among the Muslim population, and the other was the insufficiency of capital accumulation. Therefore, Sadık Rifat Pascha's talk with Prince Matternich opened up a new vistas in his system of thinking and sharpened his acumen most emphatically to the problems which were holding a prominent place in his mind ever since he entered the service of the Ottoman Sultan. Meanwhile, he also reaped some benefit as the result of his contacts with other European colleagues through which some obscure and contradictory ideas in his mind became crystal clear. Thus, Sadık Rifat Pascha outlined an economic protectionism within the framework of economic liberty. In this connection, we can not neglect his integration of the Ottoman solution of solidarity with economic protectionism. At least he overtly identified the role and significance of economic protectionism for the survival of the Ottoman economy with respect to what the British architects of the 1838 Free Trade Treaty signed with England had

defended¹⁰. The British diplomats, Lord Palmerston, Lord Porsonby and David Urquhart were the ardent supporters of laissez-faire economics for the revitalization of the economy. Among the British mission, David Urquhart was actively propagating the efficacy of economic liberalism and acting as a middle-man in the transfusion of Smithian optimism to the top grade Ottoman statesmen.

Sadık Rifat Pascha returned home overloading his mind by politico-economic problems. He had also learnt the sanction power of economics¹¹. He held several top rank duties in the Sublime Porte and prepared various memorandums for it, also wrote some treatises. In the light of his writings which were collected and printed under the title of 'Muntehabat-ı Asar' (Selected Writings) we regard Sadık Rifat Pascha as a champion bringing into forefront the idea of economic liberty, a basis for the behavioral framework of economic units. As a matter of fact, he proposed "procuring law and order and comfort" which was, as to him, the very essence of European culture and material civilization. Sadık Rifat Pascha was a gifted statesman excelled with his masterly warnings, especially in economic matters, to the Sublime Porte. For example, he strongly advised the various governments not to indulge with adulterated coin, though it was officially accepted as a panacea. But he flatly rejected and falsified the validity of this idea. In the same manner, he stood firmly by the Mercantilistic idea that exports should exceed, or at least equal to, imports. Moreover, his defense of price stability is to be achieved through price mechanism, but not by government intervention determining price level as inflexible. He also, under the guidance of economic protectionism, overburdened the role taken up by the State to support individual initiation and baby industries as against the cheap and abundant goods of the West.

Let u not forget that Sadık Rifat Pascha's economic ideas were not the result of an academic incubation, but they were the by-products of his common-sense and inquisitiveness, emanated from his age-long nearness to financial problems. His acumen paved the way for such an excellence. Nevertheless, he is not to be thought as a strict follower or a blind believer of any school of economic thought. For, he was a man of practice, therefore he was far

⁸Sadık Rifat, "Muntehabat-i Asar", I, (İstanbul, 1290).

⁹Cf., S.Mardin, "Türkiye'de İktisadi Düşüncenin Gelişmesi, 1838-1914", (Ankara, 1962), p.19. In the mean time, Prince also helped to the crystallization of Sadık Rifat Pascha's reform policies as the years approach to Tanzimat [Cf., S.Mardin, "The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought".

¹⁰For detail see my "Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çatılaşması", (İstanbul, 1986), pp.218-220.

more inclined policy prescriptions rather than theoretical economics.

As a consequence, we must add that Sadık Rifat Rascha was never satisfied with what the traditional system had provided for him in face of worldly problems. His curiosity was restless, because wherever he went in Europe, he could not stroll as an arm-chair traveler, and could also never display his naive enchantment, as his country-fellows did, in front of Europe's superiority over Ottomans. In contrast, he was deeply concerned with the very essence or the basic foundations from which Europe's unchallenged economic growth was erupted. So, we celebrate him as a conscious and thoughtful statesman and point out that prospectively, some of his economic advice are still await application in Turkey's current economic problems.