

Mehmet Genç. Osmanli Imparatorlugunda Devlet ve Ekonomi Istanbul: Otuken Yayinlari, 2000. Pp. 368.

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Historical research on the Ottoman Empire in the Turkish Republic may be divided into two distinct periods. Nationalism set the tone in the first period. In harmony with the aspirations of a new nation-state, historians, most notably Fuat Köprülü and Ziya Gökalp, pioneered research on cultural and political topics with particular reference to the region of Anatolia. Omer Lutfi Barkan, whose research began in this period, also straddles the second period of historical studies with his works on historical demography and the debates surrounding the Price Revolution. It was this second phase of Ottoman historiography in Turkey in which Barkan himself led a more social, economic and legal approach to the Ottoman past using archival sources.

Under Barkan, who was inspired by the French Annales school, a new school of historiography attempted to apply social scientific methods, such as statistics and demographic analysis, to economic history. Among the scholars emerging from the newly founded Institute of Turkish Economic History established and supervised by Barkan was Mehmet Genç, the author of the present book and a scholar distinguished by his versatility. Before arriving at Istanbul University, he studied in the Department of Political Science at Ankara University. At the Institute, he joined a group of extremely talented young scholars who today rank as the foremost economic historians in the field, including Halil Sahillioglu, Cengiz Orhonlu, Lutfi Güçer, and Mübahat Küçükoglu.

Combining interests in developmental economics and historiography, Genç turned his attention to the causes of Ottoman "underdevelopment" (or resistance to capitalism). He was particularly unsatisfied with the standard approaches to the empire's late or failed industrialization. From 1962, his research took him into uncharted territory. He would spend decades in the Ottoman archives attempting to answer his initial question. In the process, he has become one of the world's authorities on the economic history of the Ottoman empire, and certainly the expert on the eighteenth century. Without finishing his own dissertation—the book on early Ottoman industrialization remains to be written—he passed along his profound knowledge of the archives, of social and economic theory and methodology to students in Istanbul University, Marmara University and Istanbul Technical University. Students of the eighteenth century from many other countries have also trained at his side. Through his teaching and supervision of doctoral candidates, as well as through his essays, Genç's research has transformed our understanding of the Ottoman eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Without a doubt, he is one of the most original thinkers in Turkey today.

As we can see from this collection of essays, Genç's contributions to Ottoman history range over many topics and periods. Although his work always has been highly empirical, like Witold Kula who developed a novel model of feudalism, Genç, too, realized that one could only interpret the paradoxes of the Ottoman economic system by simultaneously creating a working model to explain the state's role in development. For Genç, influenced

by Romantic philosophy, the Ottoman Weltanschauung was characterized by three cardinal principles: provisionism, traditionalism, and fiscalism. ("Osmanlı İktisadi Dünya Görüşünün İlkeleri," pp. 43-53). These principles both guided Ottoman policies and served as a means of legitimating them.

By provisionism, Genç refers to the state's objective to maintain an abundant supply of goods and services in the marketplace. To that aim, the Ottoman state carefully monitored supply and set prices, and controlled production and trade. It is this principle that helps explain Ottoman trade policy as well. Unlike the philosophy of mercantilism in Western Europe, the Ottoman object was to create abundant supply by restricting export of certain goods and by using tariffs and quotas to encourage imports. Ottoman provisionism contrasts with the similar policies in European states by virtue of the fact that Ottoman policies cover almost all kinds of goods, regardless of whether they were raw materials or manufactures.

The relatively conservative nature of Ottoman economic policies may be attributed to the second principle, that of traditionalism. In Genç's definition, traditionalism means conserving the status quo, or even, at times, returning to ancient practice (*kanun-i kadim*)¹ rather than adjusting policies to suit new circumstances. In plain words, its main function was to maintain the order and practices based on provisionism.

This principle actually reinforced the third pillar of the Ottoman mind, namely, fiscalism. By this term, Genç means a policy that is highly bureaucratic in nature, a reflexive effort to maximize state revenues regardless of their consequences. Although one might cite many examples of this behavior, its most negative impact was during times of war. Just as the economy was most burdened by the effort to provide goods and services, bureaucrats often added new stress by direct exactions of goods and new taxes. One might add that the fiscalism depicted by 4 such principles that the Ottoman state-controlled capital and labor. The result of its emphasis on controlling the factors of production and the mechanisms of distribution was a discouragement of accumulation of capital, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the state's control lessened, these processes were reversed.

In approaching the broad sweep of Ottoman history, Mehmet Genç also has reconsidered the periodization of Ottoman history in terms of larger historiographical debates ("19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İktisadi Dünya Görüşünün Klasik Prensiplerindeki Değişme," pp. 87-96; "Periodization of Ottoman history," unpublished paper). Genç's own research into Ottoman economic Weltanschauung allows him to arrive at novel conclusions regarding its periodization. On one hand, instead of accepting Braudel's concept of a long "sixteenth century," Genç lays stress on a long "eighteenth century," an era in which military, fiscal, political, and economic transformations were more drastic, extensive and permanent. On the other hand, so long as the governing principles of state and economy (provisionism, traditionalism and fiscalism) remained in effect, he thinks that the Ottoman system must be considered "classical." To this extent, the term does not carry either negative or positive connotations; for him, the classical period is neither progressive nor regressive in nature. Rather, it is a period in which decadences and advancements simultaneously

¹ The term *kanun-i kadim* refers to rules and practices that were valid not only during the reigns of Süleyman the Magnificent or Mehmet II the Conqueror, but also in previous ages.

existed. As a *zeitgeist*, the Ottoman system must be judged differently according to its own objectives and standards. The classical age lasted, therefore, until the early nineteenth century. From that time forward, severe social, political, and economic pressures forced the Ottoman elite to alter course, without, however, completely abandoning these ideals.

As a period apart, the second half of the nineteenth century should be considered a new era. Traditionalism was abandoned because it was an impediment to reforms. Notwithstanding that the others fell into disfavor in the reform age, they would survive more or less even after a new Turkish Republic was established. As such, his periodization effectively and implicitly invites the reader to rethink nineteenth century Ottoman modernization without referring to concepts such as center-periphery, world-system or dependence. Secondly, he tries to approximate the transition from the traditional to the modern in the Ottoman empire in a new pattern.

As one important example of Ottoman practice during the long eighteenth century, Genç examines the Ottoman tax farm system ("Osmanlı Maliyesinde Malikane Sistemi," pp. 99-153). Pointing to the problem of interpreting the annual figures for tax farms which remained constant (or almost unchanged) over the course of a century, he looks to the transition from three-year tax farming to life-term tax farming (that is, *malikâne*). As an exploration into the principles guiding fiscal practice as much as an exercise in elucidating institutional features, Genç's approach to the *malikâne* raises new questions about social and political aspects of the domestic debt. The application of *malikâne* depicted by Genç enables us to explain the slowdown in Ottoman industrial performance, the blinders on bureaucrats with regard to the economy, as well as the tensions between state and locals, the structure of Ottoman meritocratic class, and the militarization of the Ottoman economy.

In order to carry out these studies and measure the changes in the economy in the eighteenth century, Genç was forced to improvise. It is well known that European sources, particularly quantitative sources are far more abundant and accessible than Ottoman sources. However, they themselves are only partial and do little to help us plot the internal rhythm of the economy. In his essays "Osmanlı Arşivinde Yararlanma Yöntemi" (pp. 343-350) and "18. Yüzyıla Ait Osmanlı Mali Verilerinin İktisadi Faaliyetin Göstergesi Olarak Kullanılabilirliği Üzerinde Bir Çalışma" (pp. 153-186), Genç advances an innovative method for using such government financial records as indicators of economic activities or industrial output. Since annual amounts (*mal*) of lifetime tax farms (*malikâne*) paid by tax farmers do not follow real changes in production and trade, he devised another method² This entailed creating a formula using the surety or initial payments on new life-

² Genç's innovative method has inspired many others. For example, Murat Cızakça, following this method, published studies on textiles production in the Ottoman empire; see his "Price History and the Bursa Silk Industry: A Study in Ottoman Industrial Decline, 1550-1700," *The Journal of Economic History*, 1980, pp. 533-51, and "Incorporation of the Middle East into the European World Economy," *Review* 8.3, 1985, pp. 353-377. By using Genç's method, Jean-Pierre Thieck also relied on Genç's method in trying to model the functioning of the *malikâne* application in Aleppo in the eighteenth century; see his "Decentralisation ottomans et affirmation urbaine a Alep a la fin du XVIII siecle," in Guy Leonard, ed., *Mouvements commanautaries et espaces urbains au Machreq*, 1985. Arid Salzmänn, inspired by the same method, developed an original and different approach to the nature of relations between center and periphery in the Ottoman social and financial history; see her unpublished dissertation entitled "Measures of Empire:

term tax farms (*muaccele*) after auction. Since the prices reflected competition and estimated rates of profit, they more accurately indicate fluctuations in production and domestic and foreign trade, at least, as tendency. Applying this method to cases from domestic and foreign trade and industrial sectors, Genç was able to evaluate the expansion and contraction in the eighteenth-century economy as well as parallels with growth in foreign trade. It is from such analysis that we now know that it was only from the third quarter of the century that the Ottoman economy went into a recession.

In "18. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Ekonomisi ve Savas" (pp. 226-255), Genç turns once again to the large question concerning the impact of state policies on economic development. Here, the concern is to link war in the eighteenth century with the cycles of industrial growth. By correlating two different phases in the Ottoman economy in the eighteenth century, he concludes that Ottoman measures, such as extraordinary taxes (*avarız*), purchasing for war provisions (*miri mubayaa*), debasement of coinage and confiscation, to meet fiscal exigencies, actually led to a reduction in quantity and quality of production, inflated prices and, in the end, increased budget deficits. Although the state did not take measures to stimulate investments, to protect producers, and to increase productivity and supply of goods and services, especially during the wars of the second half of the eighteenth century, as we learn in "Osmanlı İmparatorlugunda Devlet ve Ekonomi," it also did not welcome the impact of Western economic expansion. Therefore, although the Ottoman attitude may be considered "irrational" according to conventional development theory, this phase can not be seen as a case of peripheralization (à la world-systems), either.

Ottomanists long have recognized the singular importance of Mehmet Genç's scholarship for our understanding of the Ottoman past and Ottoman economic history in particular. Those fortunate enough to read the present volume, the product of four decades of research in the archives, also will see that the essays collectively form a sort of manifesto which brings new perspectives to the study of the early modern history of the Ottoman empire and a plea to liberate the Ottoman past from history from "outside." Social scientists also will realize that, although his research addresses a specific case, he has put forward theories to explain the paradox of an economy which, though unable to propel itself into the Industrial Age, nonetheless resisted western expansion into the nineteenth century. With these multiple contributions in mind, a translation of the present volume would not only help other historians to understand the Ottoman past, but also would benefit scholars in fields as diverse as anthropology and economics in reexamining theories of development.

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