## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Avner Wishnitzer. *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, xii + 312 pages.

From sociology via anthropology to social and cultural history, time as an aspect of social relationships has recently become an object of empirical scholarly inquiry. *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca* is the first extensive study that brings the insights from these fields to bear on Ottoman history. It is a study of the changing temporal regimes, daily rhythms, and the meaning of time among the Ottoman state elite from the eighteenth century to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. At the center of the discussion lie two parallel stories: one of how a legal-rational temporal system of time organization gradually took the place of a patrimonial tradition of time, and one of how the particular Ottoman way of using clocks that emerged in the eighteenth century was displaced by European methods of time-keeping.

As mechanical clocks became widespread in the eighteenth century, elite Ottomans began to rely on the equal hours of their timepieces in preference to the old seasonal hours. By this method, clocks would be reset at sunset every day, and used as mere indicators of "real time," which was determined by the movement of the sun. This method of time reckoning was called *alaturka saat*—"Turkish time," or the "Turkish clock." In the middle of the nineteenth century, the European mean time system began to spread, first in commercial circles and later among the state elite. This became known as "European time," or *alafranga saat*, where hours were counted in two rounds of twelve from noon until noon the following day. The *alaturka saat* divided both daytime and nighttime into twelve hours each. Since the period of sunlight varies with the time of year, the day hours and the night hours were not only of unequal length, but also varied with the season. *Alafranga* hours, on the other hand, were of equal length day and night throughout the year.

Although the *alaturka saat* was a specifically Ottoman response to questions of modernity, in the discourse of the late nineteenth century *alafranga* time and

 

*alaturka* time became associated with modernity and tradition, respectively. The book's main argument is as follows:

> [T]he concurrent use of the *alaturka* and *alafranga* hours down to the end of the Hamidian era was emblematic of the effort made by the palace and many of the leading intellectuals of the time to patch together foreign and indigenous elements in search of a distinctly Ottoman path of progress. While the use of the European system was deemed necessary for interacting with the outside world, the abolition of the indigenous hour system, associated with old traditions, was not seriously considered. New time-related values such as punctuality, productivity, and efficiency, which were considered crucial for making this progress, were cultivated relying on the *alaturka saat*. (pp. 151–152).

The existence of two competing sets of time-keeping method was one of the challenges of how to relate to European-dominated modernity, which was increasingly pervasive in all aspects of Ottoman life as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Wishnitzer sucessfully puts the state of the art of research on temporality to good and unobtrusive use. The narrative is framed by Johannes Fabian's claims about the "denial of co-evalness," whereby non-Europeans are said to live in a different time (pp. 156, 196, 232). This is connected to the concept of progress and the notion that the Ottomans lagged behind, where inadequately implemented or observed temporal practices became metaphors for their standing in the "race between nations" (p. 152). Questions of progress and catching up were central to debates about the reform and survival of the Ottoman state, and Wishnitzer successfully shows how everyday practices of time-keeping were discursively connected to historiosophical questions that made their way into Ottoman political debates.

After an introduction that ties the discussion to the wider literature on temporality, the first empirical chapter (pp. 17–44) concerns the patrimonial tradition of time-keeping—time kept with reference to the rhythms, whims, and demands of one's superiors—and how time was connected to a cosmological and political order. The author subsequently devotes chapters to what I would call social sites, in turn treating conflicting temporal regimes in the state bureaucracy, in the military, in schools, and when using public transport. Finally, in the conclusion (pp. 183–192), he discusses how the legal-rational regulation of time became the dominant temporal culture within these sites, and later became part and parcel of the sociability of the state elite as well. Instead of individuals' lives and the order of the state being determined by the movement of the cosmos, self-discipline and individual time management

became the basis for the nation's ability to compete with other nations, thus forming the basis of a global (while not cosmological) order.

What Wishnitzer does well is to show that the conflict between the *alafranga* and *alaturka* temporal regimes was not a simple dichotomy where the former superseded the latter in a seamless manner, but rather that the two co-existed in competition both within and between social sites as well as within individuals' lives. Moreover, he shows that *alaturka* temporal regimes were also modern, produced, reproduced, and adjusted by the rationalizing nineteenth-century Ottoman state. However, by privileging the İstanbul state elite, the bureaucracy, and technologies and artifacts of modernity—ferries, trains, mechanical clocks, and so forth—Wishnitzer leaves out how different Ottoman communities related to these temporal practices in different ways.

As he recognizes, but hardly goes into, the shared rhythms of life have a broader significance not just for questions of synchronicity, but also for questions of community and for inter-communal relations. This is a central topic in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*; namely, how nations come about in part by imagining they inhabit the same time and by acting out the same temporal rhythms, with individuals going through the same rites of passage and having their life experience laid out in the same temporal manner. Never mind the tribes of Libya or Yemen and the challenges of integrating the empire as a social whole—this multiplicity of temporal regimes existed side by side in İstanbul itself, and not only between "Turkish" and "European" time within the lives of elite Ottomans. Muslims have Friday as their day of rest and prayer, Jews have Saturday, and Christians Sunday. Furthermore, the communities have different religious holidays, and some of those who celebrate the same holidays (e.g., Christmas) nevertheless have different calendars for fixing them. In İstanbul, these communities co-existed, but with different temporal regimes shaping their inter-communal relations, as well as possibly forming the basis of nation-building efforts. Even if one does not shift attention to different sources and communities, this must have been part of late Ottoman statesmen's and clerks' temporal repertoires and concerns—possibly not in terms of clocks, but in terms of historical time with a shared past and a shared future.

While *Reading Clocks* is a study in social history, it is highly relevant for scholars working in other fields as well. In particular, it would make excellent accompanying reading for anyone wishing to assign Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's newly (re)translated *The Time Regulation Institute* for a university course. No other secondary text does the same job of contextualizing the conflicting temporal regimes with which the protagonist of Tanpınar's novel struggles. To Wishnitzer's credit, he does not make much use of Tanpınar's retrospective treatment of conflicting Ottoman temporal regimes, but instead ties his discussion

to other sites—the clerical office, the military, schools, and transport—and genres of nineteenth-century Ottoman society.

While reading the book, a great number of questions and avenues for further investigation came to my mind. Throughout the narrative, the author nods in the direction of a number of different topics that he does not fully explore, such as the Andersonian "time of the nation," historical time, and the relations between different İstanbul communities, between women and men, and between center and periphery within the Ottoman Empire. The fact that the book left me hungry for more is a sure sign that Wishnitzer has succeeded in his endeavor. Rather than being a definitive account, his book opens a new topic of inquiry for Ottoman historians, and his many unanswered questions can be read as a call for a research program on Ottoman temporality. I hope that the book gets widely read, and that students and scholars follow his lead in tackling these questions.

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## Y. Doğan Çetinkaya. *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement: Nationalism, Protest and the Working Classes in the Formation of Modern Turkey*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014, xi + 291 pages.

*The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement* investigates the emergence of the boycott in the late Ottoman Empire as an economic and sociopolitical tool, examining various boycott movements between 1908 and 1914. These movements are shown to be spontaneous mass mobilizations occurring within the expanding Ottoman political and public spheres during the Second Constitutional Period. Çetinkaya is eager to render the history of the boycotts a strategic entry point for engaging with broader historiographical discussions. This is not surprising for those readers who have had the opportunity to follow Çetinkaya's work in Turkish.[1] In *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement*,

1 See Doğan Çetinkaya, *1908 Osmanlı Boykotu: Bir Toplumsal Hareketin Analizi* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004); *Toplumsal Hareketler: Tarih, Teori ve Deneyim*, ed. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (İstanbul: İletişim, 2008); *Ortadoğu: Direniş, Devrim, Emperyalizm*, ed. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014); *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi, 1839–2014*, ed. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya and Mehmet Ö. Alkan (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015).