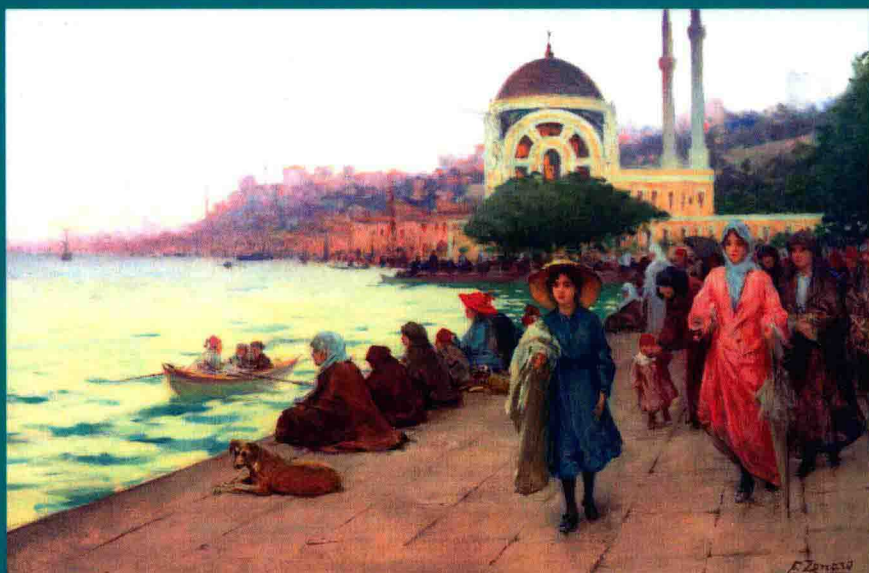


A Social History of Late Ottoman Women

NEW PERSPECTIVES



EDITED BY

DUYGU KÖKSAL AND ANASTASIA FALIEROU



BRILL

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ITS HERITAGE

书馆

A Social History of Late Ottoman Women

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A Social History of Late Ottoman Women

The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage

Politics, Society and Economy

Edited by

Suraiya Faroqhi, Halil İnalcık and Boğaç Ergene

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To all the Women who Inspired Us ...

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIU	Alliance Israélite Universelle
BCA	Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi–Prime Ministry Republican Archives
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi–Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives
DH. İD	Dahiliye Nezareti, İdare Evrakı–Ministry of Internal Affairs, Administrative Documents
DH. MKT	Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi–Ministry of Internal Affairs, Chief Secretary
HR. TO	Hariciye Nezareti, Tercüme Odası–Ministry of External Affairs, Translation Office
HV	Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden
Y.A. HUS	Yıldız, Sadaret, Hususi Evrakı–Yıldız, Prime Ministry, Private Documents
Y. PRK. ASK	Yıldız Perakende, Askeri–Yıldız Retail Documents, Military Affairs
Y. PRK. DH	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Dahiliye–Yıldız Retail Documents, Interior Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF LATE OTTOMAN WOMEN

Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou

This volume aspires to bring together new and developing outlooks in Ottoman women's studies as part of a new generation of scholarship on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Signaling new theoretical tendencies, topic areas, and approaches in studies on late Ottoman women, the chapters in this book will, we hope, contribute to debates connecting work on women in Ottoman history to that on women in other places and times. Undoubtedly, the studies here build upon and are indebted to a remarkable body of literature on women in Ottoman, Middle Eastern, and European societies. Inheriting from this corpus a number of themes and approaches, the present chapters attempt to go further afield, unearthing new sources, and extending the realm of discussion in research on late Ottoman and early Republican women.

Academic work on late Ottoman women deals with a certain number of inevitable themes. Much of the twentieth-century scholarship has been dominated by the all-embracing context of Islam; the practices of seclusion/segregation and veiling; institutions such as polygamy, extended households, and the harem. In this tradition 'particularity' and 'difference from the West' are typically emphasized, reducing late Ottoman society to another representation of the East, albeit a 'less pure' one. In this picture, the Ottoman Empire is perceived as part of the Islamic world or Orient, or the Middle East. Studies on the Empire also suffer from familiar prejudices afflicting Middle Eastern studies in general, driven as they are by an emphasis on Islam as both belief system and way of life. These established themes were, of course, situated within the larger paradigms of European imperialism, Orientalism, westernization, and the rise of nationalism and the nation state.

It is now widely accepted that scholarship on women in non-western settings must take into consideration a long list of external and indigenous factors that combine in varying ratios in local settings. For example, the histories of non-western women cannot be understood without weighing the effects of both Western domination on local milieux and a wide

range of subtle and not-so-subtle responses by local actors to this hegemonic pressure. Thus, studying Ottoman women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries means locating them in the wider history of the Empire, which was characterized by the loss of territories, contesting nationalisms, and deepening ties with world capitalism and European states. Recent work testifies that investigation into the late Ottoman Empire cannot afford to ignore European history. The challenge is not simply that of writing the larger history of Europe, but rather factoring in individual histories within the Ottoman geography as informed by co-eval developments in Europe, the Middle East outside the Empire, and, where relevant, other regions.

Being mindful of “co-evalness”¹ or “equivalence in terms of time” requires that we regard developments in the late Ottoman Empire (or anywhere) on that region’s own terms; that is, as neither ‘behind’ or ‘belated’ nor ‘ahead’ or ‘advanced’ with respect to other contexts. ‘Co-evalness’ in history demands that we study geographies related with each other in a given time frame as co-temporal entities, sharing the same world historical environment. These geographies are part of a larger system of power relations, by which they may be effected in different but related ways. We have thus come to use terms like ‘alternative modernities’ or ‘non-western modernities’ in deference to the need for “co-evalness” in our analyses of both past and present in non-western geographies.² Social sciences and history scholarship have taken major steps in imagining and conceptualizing modernity in non-western contexts; yet much remains to be done in the area of approaching a context—the ideas, acts, and practices of a particular society—in ‘its own time.’ The studies in this volume present late Ottoman and early republican women as figures in a

¹ It was Johannes Fabian’s important work which brought to our attention the concept of “co-evalness.” Johannes Fabian, *The Time of the ‘Other’* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Co-evalness has been taken up by several other writers contemplating Western and non-Western modernities. See for example Arif Dirlik, “Is there History after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Post-colonialism and the Disavowal of History,” in *Postmodernity’s Histories: The Past as Legacy and Project* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 63–89.

² For critical discussions of these concepts, see Harry Harootinian, *Overcome by Modernity, History, War and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially the Preface; and Nadir Özbek, “Alternatif Tarih Tahayyülleri: Siyaset, İdeoloji ve Osmanlı-Türkiye Tarihi,” *Toplum ve Bilim* 98 (2003), 234–254; Nadir Özbek, “Modernite, Tarih ve İdeoloji: II. Abdulhamid Dönemi Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (2004), 71–90.

co-temporal history with women of Western geographies, responding to similar developments.

A fundamental question for historians relates to the ways in which various actors in a given setting react to irritants or impediments in their environment. We see, of course, that varying sets of ideas and practices were offered as solutions to problems by different sectors or communities of different periods in late Ottoman society. Problem-solving should be understood in its widest sense here, as adaptive responses to the social, economic, and political environment. In the non-Western setting of the late empire, actors' responses and proposed solutions to challenges in their environments were most often inspired by ideas and practices from the West, although we should remember that interpretations and assessments of the Western and capitalist way of life varied as well.

Resolutions to everyday challenges encountered by various groups or individuals in non-western contexts display broad combinatory variation in elements from three fields of experience: 1) traditional beliefs and practices; 2) the material demands of daily life; and 3) new ideas and behaviors traveling across frontiers (in this case, mostly from Europe). None of these fields can be frozen into a fixed or stable form, of course, since they constantly interact and change over time. Maneuvering among them, 'solutions' to problems offered by the different actors—groups and individuals—can be translated as 'politics' in its most comprehensive, perhaps existential, sense.

'Politics' in this overarching sense may, depending on the context, refer to the politics of the state, of the ruling elite or majority; to the politics of the dispossessed, of ruled masses or minority groups; and finally to the everyday practices of various groups, movements, and individuals. Of course, equating politics to various actors' proposed solutions/responses should not be understood as implying a 'rational choice' approach where every solution is equal as long as it is rational and interest-seeking. In other words, a 'solutions-centered' approach should not bring us to adopt a relativist, apolitical theoretical stance. To the contrary, it is crucial to keep an eye open for hegemonic, hierarchical, and oppressive relationships as well as for resistant oppositional, evasive, or anarchical forces if we, as scholars, truly seek to penetrate the specific setting under analysis. A 'solutions-oriented' outlook on late Ottoman society need not and cannot stand neutral in the face of prejudices, injustice, or violence.

Such an outlook may enable us to keep a useful distance from the modernization/westernization paradigm in addition to opening the door to the "co-evalness" perspective. Writing co-eval history in the context of late

Ottoman women's studies means bringing together questions raised by Middle Eastern, European, or other relevant contexts (the Mediterranean, the Balkans), and focusing on 'solutions,' 'responses,' or 'remedies' devised by the group, individual, or section of society under examination. In this regard, it seems clear that historical studies need to show more sensitivity to anthropological matters if they wish to operationalize the "co-evalness" principle in their work. Late Ottoman women's studies, too, can be usefully motivated by an anthropological disposition, taking greater pains to read the actors' minds, circumstances, and responses 'in their own time.' Women's actions, positions, and practices need to be studied as everyday solutions to problems created by material needs as well as by ideas, emotions, and beliefs.

Recent scholarship is apparently moving in this direction since it appears to be increasingly mindful of the complex constellations of responses to different environments. As noted above, neither traditional beliefs and ideas nor new ways introduced through contact with the West or "Westernness" and the rise of capitalism exist in pure form. Late Ottoman women's studies, therefore, must ultimately pay closer attention to how Islam, patriarchal relationships, ethnic conflicts, capitalist and other relations of power were 'actually' being experienced at a certain moment in time. Visualizations of late Ottoman women's lives, in fact, offer snapshots of a solution or a set of solutions by various actors to a perceived environment. Articles in this book, too, can be read as offering a multitude of solutions, sometimes contesting one another, to the hardships, transformations, and tensions in women's lives. These everyday remedies or solutions might be limited, marginal, or doomed to failure. Yet women's agency cannot be unearthed without narrating how women were involved in shaping their own and others' lives, even in the most unexpected areas of their existence. In this sense they do not simply reflect modernizing trends or westernizing attitudes—or their defensive denial. They provide an array of local responses where 'the local' can never be found (and should never be conceptualized) in its initial, unchanged, or authentic state.

Recent studies on Middle Eastern and Ottoman women exhibit sensitivities and concerns similar to those noted above. This scholarship has revitalized women's studies as a result of its re-working of major theoretical concepts which had dominated the field. It is through a determined reconsideration of theoretical assumptions regarding Islam, the impact of the West (modernization), and nationalism/nation building that recent scholarship has opened new debates.