

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged

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PAGES: 137-140

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2268508>

customs, and that *qiyâs* was employed to compare legal maritime problems to situations on land. The author also concludes that Muslim jurists, be they of the same or different law schools, disagreed amongst themselves on several issues. According to the author, these differences might have stemmed from personal legal opinions as well as from differences between different local maritime customs.

The pioneering character and the considerably detailed information that is included on the laws, customs and practices of Muslim merchants and seafarers makes this monograph a must for university libraries for the use of Oriental and Medieval studies' readership.

Finally, this book is not only welcome in its own right, but it heralds the way to new publications on a number of relevant topics, such as the interaction of Islamic maritime law with other laws and customs in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, and the implementation of Islamic maritime law under the Ottomans up until the nineteenth century.

İsmail Hakkı Kadi

Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged

Virginia H. Aksan

London: Pearson Education Limited, 2007. xviii + 599 pages.

Historians in the West acknowledge that the period from 1750 to 1850 is the first age of global imperialism, when Britain and France, after internally refreshing their military and economic power as a result of the scientific and industrial revolution, fought one another for world domination in many places, including the territories of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, this era, for the Ottoman historians, is recognized as the age of transformation, in particular a search for renewal in the military system, as the Imperial Engineering Schools and new fighting forces began to evolve with the defeats and economic crises that necessitated certain radical reorganization and dramatic changes in the Ottoman *ancien régime*. The challenges to the classical system of the Ottoman thesis of rule began around 1730 and ended with a new order in around 1830. In this era, while the Ottomans were busy transforming from the inside on the one hand, they also confronted the rock of British economic imperialism and the relentless pursuit of Russian and other European territorial ambitions along the northern frontier.

In this book, Virginia H. Aksan primarily explores the wars in which the Ottomans engaged of this era, when the empire was besieged in many aspects. The Turkish audience knows the author well for her earlier important book entitled, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi 1700-1783*. Aksan starts her latest book from 1700, right after the treaty of Karlowitz, and following the years after the defeat of Vienna in 1683, when the deficiencies of the empire in military technology and training, which the Ottomans had managed to conceal for quarter of a century became apparent.

Virginia Aksan basically establishes her study on the warfare of the Danube, Crimean and Caucasian battlefronts during the years between 1700 and 1870 with a method that compares the Ottomans to its neighbors. The empire had to deal with various armies of different calibers on the northern, western, southern and eastern frontiers, but it was the Danube frontier fortress line, as Aksan affirms, to which the Ottomans devoted most of their energy. The empire, however, eventually paid a heavy price for their negligence of the other frontiers (if we are to accept Greater Syria as a 'frontier' in military terms), once the Safavid Persian hegemony dissolved in the 1720s. As we learn about the differing attitudes that the Ottomans portrayed as far as the frontiers are concerned in Aksan's work, it is hard to avoid remembering, while reading these lines, the observations made by Falih Rıfki in *Zeytinadağı* while he was in Lebanon: "...neither the Turks nor the Turkish language managed to go below Aleppo."

Moreover, the author makes some striking observations about the shades of reform in the empire as she touches upon how the diplomatic triumph of the treaty of 1739, which gave Ottomans control of Belgrade, misguided the capital into complacency regarding their outmoded military system, and thus, the reforms were delayed, with catastrophic consequences in later years. After the period of "perfect apathy" (*şahane rehavet*, as some Turkish historians call it), which lasted almost thirty years, practically a generation, following 1739, the Ottomans were right to put a great effort in the northern frontier, as the Russians had replaced the Habsburgs as the major foe, threatening the entire arc, from Belgrade to the Caucasus after 1768. It seems that the more the Ottomans concentrated a great deal of resources on the northern frontier, the more the southern tier was ignored, and people in the region drifted even further away from imperial surveillance, as the author suggests.

While most of the accounts in the book come from the northern frontiers, the southern echelon appears in the narrative after the second half of the 18th century; this becomes especially critical when Napoleon invades Egypt

towards the end of the century, in 1798. This was a place that Napoleon had always found captivating, and he had been well-prepared since his teenage years, taking extensive notes on Marigny's *Historie des Arabes* when he was young. The fall of Egypt was an invasion that traumatized not only the Ottomans in the capital, but the entire Muslim world. Historical documents narrate how shocked and furious Sultan Selim III was when news of the invasion and the message from his ambassador to Paris, Seyyid Ali Efendi, arrived on the same day. In the note to the capital, Seyyid Ali apparently reported that everything was fine in France, and there was no need of an emergency or a contingency plan for the southern tier. It should not be surprising, however, as skillfully described by the author, that such a person, who was not familiar with the language of the country to which he had been appointed, who was adept at the ceremonial but uneducated in the subtleties of European diplomacy, and who relied on a staff of translators, usually drawn from the Greek community of Istanbul, should miss such a critical development of his time.

Aksan successfully adopts integrative and comparative perspectives in her book to draw the Ottoman Empire into the historiography of Europe and the Mediterranean. Accounts and backgrounds of each campaign that took place between the years of 1700 and 1870 incorporate a short examination of the origin, causes, progress and results of the battles. It is also important to point out a coincidence at this juncture; Feridun Emecen also has been working for a long time on another book, soon to be published, that covers the major wars of the Ottoman Sultans from the beginning of the empire until the end of the 17th century; that is, Aksan starts her work where Emecen ends.

In addition, Aksan draws attention to major wars during the period, discussing the treaties and their geopolitical repercussions along with the illustration of Ottoman mobilization, an assessment of how the wars were financed and supplied, their leadership and strategies, and she underlines the continuity and change, as well as the establishment of alternative fighting powers that would replace the ineffective, unruly Janissaries. After conclusion, the author also provides a useful guide to further reading and discussion of recent works by and large in English on the complicated theme that the book covers, and an appendix where a reader may find some interesting excerpts from *Travels in Turkey, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt* by William Whittman, Surgeon with the Anglo-Ottoman forces as they crossed the desert from Gaza to Alexandria in 1801.

Much has been written about the reforms that took place at the center of the Empire, but little has been understood. In particular, the transformation

from 1792 to 1830 has not been properly interpreted; what is covered in this book is that both bureaucratic and military classes were educated in European styles and languages, and it was these who eventually became the representatives of the new imperial elites with their new aspirations and tendencies. The cover image of the book perfectly conveys this mode of change in the Empire, which was struggling to find a way out between the old and the new. Aksan partly engages in her investigation to find out who these elites were and what the driving motive behind their reform agenda was.

That the book starts in 1700, that is, right after the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, when the Ottomans recognized Habsburg rule over Hungary, with Belgrade thus becoming the next frontier after the retreat, is apt. However, I am not sure whether the book ends at the right time, i.e. 1870. Given the scope, classification and the contents of the book, it covers the major wars and transformations experienced by the Ottomans, but it seems that nothing significant occurs after 1856 when the Crimean War ends, and I must admit that the reader feels abandoned and rudderless after this date. Although a reader may experience such feelings towards the end, this, however, does not cast a shadow over Aksan's meticulous and painstaking work. There is no doubt that her book makes a significant contribution to the history of Ottoman wars in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century not only for Turks, but also for Europeans and residents along the Mediterranean during the most dramatic phases of the Ottoman Empire, events that still bear implications in certain geographies even today.

Seyfi Kenan

Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle Son Dönem Osmanlı Hayatı: Aşçı Dede'nin Hatıraları

[The Ottoman Life in the Later Period of the Empire through the Eyes of a Multi-Dimensional Sufi: The Memoirs of Aşçı Dede]

Prepared by Mustafa Koç, Eyüp Tanrıverdi

Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2006. LV+1965 pages. (4 volumes)

The general assumption within the Ottoman historiography is based on the poverty of "self-narrative" texts by the Ottomans contrary to the richness