Kitap Tanıtma:

ALİ YAYCIOGLU, *The Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions*, 347 pages, bibliography, notes, index. Stanford University Press: Stanford CA, 2016. ISBN 978-0804796125

Introduction

Ali Yaycioglu, who is an assistant professor at Stanford University, may be regarded as a follower of the trend of the new generation Ottoman historiography in the last decades. Yaycioglu has already proven his competence and originality with recent studies, particularly on the Ottoman provinces. In *the Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions*, he tries to go beyond the ordinary and exhibits the possibilities of the Ottoman Empire in the context of global age from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. On the contrary previous Ottoman studies and the perspectives of respected Ottoman historians, Yaycioglu proposes handling the crisis of the Ottoman Empire without separating the soul of age (*zeitgeist*). Thus, the focus range of his study is between 1760 and 1820, which is described as the age of revolutions. Besides, the study covers the period of Selim III in detail, specific to the Ottoman Empire, between 1789 and 1809. The stipulating question of the book is that: In the age of revolutions, how the Ottoman Empire contributed a global phenomenon with its own story? It means that the possibility of considering the Ottoman modernization/enlightenment experience as part of a global age of revolutions. Is it possible to mention the original and typical Ottoman experience having a universal idea? As known, the mainstream thesis is proposed that there was a both of the models of the American and French revolutions, which have been believed to inspire other revolutions all over the world until the twentieth century. Yaycioglu defends this narrative refers to the revolutionary progressivism or the progressivist revolutionism.

The author attracts attention to the historiography of the Ottoman decline before discussing the Ottoman crisis in the age of revolutions. Especially the historical approach of Edward Gibbon, who was an English historian, was rise-and-decline narrative. One of the primary motivations of Ali Yaycioglu is the rise-and-decline narrative falls short for clarifying the Ottoman reality in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Alternatively, Yaycioglu suggests and explains in detail the approach of Albert Hourani, Halil Inalcik and Avdo Sućeska, which they have showed "the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not a period of total breakdown for the Ottoman Empire, but the multifaceted transformation that introduced new actors, institutions, and relationships". (p. 10) According to the Ali Yaycioglu, the studies on the Ottoman eighteenth century for almost fifty years have been focused on the regional cases, military and fiscal transformation

of the Ottoman polity and the political culture or the politics of reform. The studies, which focus on the political culture and the politics of reform have contributed to the decline narrative's change that it was indeed a transformation beyond the military reforms. This methodological debate provoked by Ali Yaycioglu is critically vital to understand the Ottoman reality. Besides, Yaycioglu refers to *The Second Ottoman Empire* written by Baki Tezcan and *Empire of Difference* written by Karan Barkey, in order to understand the new reality of the Ottoman Empire. Yaycioglu expresses the importance of Tezcan's the concept of "proto-democratization". Additionally, Barkey's two major evaluations for the period between 1760-1830 that are "the empowerment of the politics and the consolidation of networking society" should be seen as the new dynamics of the unconventional reality of the Ottomans. As well Yaycioglu pays attention to Tezcan's and Barkey's conceptual opinions, he suggests beyond both of these visions. In his book, Ali Yaycioglu proposes that new actors came to the central organization were the partners of the Empire, which was a unique phenomenon in the eighteenth century. It means also the transformation from the vertical to horizontal empire, implying the collapse of the absolute power of the Sultan gradually. By this means, it had become possible emerging network society and empowering politics. On the one hand, Yaycioglu states that the relationship between the imperial center and the provincial magnates cannot be considered in the context of the center-periphery discussion. It is better to look to the Ottoman Empire as a holistic structure, which all relations, institutions, and actors found an opportunity to exist and to move in this articulated organization. In this review, the layout of chapters in the book will be followed.

The Classical Order, Crisis, And The New Order

The book seems like establishing a Turkish word called *devrân*, which is cited in the poem of Selim III. Ali Yaycioglu makes a great connection between the Ottoman crisis and the linguistic meaning of *devrân* referring to the rotation of times, periodic movements of heavenly bodies in astronomy, the revolution in the political realm. As it was written by Selim III, *devrân* had signified to the collapsing and then rebuilding. Without a doubt, the desire and imagination of Selim III would be meant the New Order (Nizâm-ı Cedîd) in the following years.

In *the Partners of the Empire*, the author explains the fundamental dynamics of the classical order flawlessly in order to understand what the crisis was. The Ottoman imperial order in the classical age having authority over the Ottoman center and provinces is so significant to discuss the Ottoman crisis. What was the changed? Why did the Ottoman classical order fail to satisfy the necessities of a new age? Because answering these kinds of questions, the classical order and its main dynamics should be clarified. Therefore, Yaycioglu explains traditional Ottoman politics and the Ottoman land system, which would be broken down and changed in the following centuries. Besides, the Ottoman tax system and

judicial mechanisms are explained in detail. As likely as not, the essential feature of the classical order is the Janissaries and the networks shaped around the Janissary members in Ottoman urban life. The Janissaries were dominant almost every side of the Ottoman society. They were able to reach also high and low elements of the society together. It was astonishing to influence and to shape public opinion during the time of crisis, same as before.

What was the crisis? Indeed, this simple question has an immense potential to discuss. If it is tried to answer it generally, it may be possible to mention some political, economic and social facts in the Ottoman late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. First, the Ottoman-Russian war of 1768-74, which was resulted in the Kucuk Kaynarca peace treaty, caused to political instability in addition to financial insufficiency. It was pushed to initiate new fiscal measures. Secondly, the Janissaries were represented to deterioration in Ottoman society. On the one hand, the Janissaries were adhesive element keeping together to the society. On the other hand, the interests of Janissaries' members had become the interests of the Empire. By all means, it created a serious obstacle for any improvements or reform. Lastly, the Ottoman crisis was a kind of pain of the New Order. As it is each revolution is a potential crisis, the New Order was the crisis with all the sides.

The Notables: Provincial Entrepreneurs

In terms of provincial entities and their power relationships with the center, the works of Ali Yaycioglu are inspirational for thinking distinctively to the Ottoman order. He remarks that the power of provincial magnates in front of the Ottoman Sultan was so efficient and determinative for the domestic and international politics in the age of revolutions. It is substantially the Ottoman Sultan (Mahmud II) needed the assistance of the provincial magnates politically and economically in the conditions of crisis. Yaycioglu mentioned particularly two powerful magnates, who were Ali Pasha of Tepelene and Muhammad Ali in Egypt, had control autonomously in the counter shore of the eastern Mediterranean. It is possible to say there was considerable interconnectedness under the roof of the Ottoman Empire. It was exclusively the characteristic feature of the Ottoman world. It had provided a good chance to administrative entrepreneurs in order to find opportunities as outsiders. After a time, these people could establish a partnership with local elements through marriage beyond an interaction. (p. 75) Furthermore, it is significant to understand that the magnates in the Ottoman provinces had consolidated their powers and wealth by degrees and their households became magnificent in their palaces resembling the Topkapi Palace of the Ottoman dynasty. In the age of revolutions, it was so ordinary situation that foreigner envoys and pilgrims visited the palaces of the magnates dealing with them directly, respecting their honor and glory. Therefore, Ali Yaycioglu tries to demonstrate how the provincial magnates were the part of Ottoman political organizations cooperating with the Ottoman central governance and had become entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, some provincial magnates, who had the strongest connections, might utilize to the foreign powers with some methods like collaborating them in order to force the Ottoman administration as a part of the decision-making mechanisms. (p. 81) The cases similar to that the foreign powers took the initiative testifies to the absolute power of the Ottoman Sultan was indeed related to several dynamics and the balances of power.

Apart from all these, it should be reminded that these provincial magnates were not part of the hierarchy of the Ottoman imperial order, not the servants of the Sultan or bureaucrats, which they took orders in the top-down processes. It means that the provincial magnates were administrative, martial and financial entrepreneurs of the Ottoman Empire, who were in conflict, negotiated, attempted to the political barter. Ali Yaycioglu states that the magnates in the provinces were not servants, but they were people of services. (p. 67) Furthermore, it is a significant point that the authority on the provincial magnates pertained to the Ottoman Sultan. It means that any official from the Ottoman imperial palace should not ask for support from the magnates. Therefore, it should be commented the entrepreneurial relationship of provincial magnates was related to the Sultan's individual impact.

Additionally, another subject on the notables is the organizational structure of the magnates in the Ottoman provinces. Yaycioglu examines them in depth with unnoticed significant details. As noted above in a few words, almost every provincial magnate had an own household in their dominance region. As long as they had increased their prosperity, many of them had built their own palace in time. In this way, there were emerged small local dynasties (*hânedân*), which emulated the Ottoman dynasty in the imperial center. In this sense, the Ottoman dynasty was an overarching roof of the all minor dynasties all over the empire. It is proved that they had tried to imitate Istanbul (Topkapi Palace) as an imperial center in addition to local figures in their ornaments and decorations of the palaces. (pp. 72-73) However, he suggests a different viewpoint about *hânedân*(s) in the empire: "Did the expansion of the term hânedân signify a tacit acknowledgment that the Ottoman dynasty was no longer the only dynasty in the Empire? (…) that provincial 'dynasties' were equals to peers of the Ottomans". (p. 76) This approach may be considered surely the Ottomans was not only dynasty hereafter in the wake of rising the provincial magnates, but it seems mostly the Ottoman dynasty had constituted a superior envied model to the provincial magnates for establishing their *hânedân*(s). After these observations on the Ottoman provincial organizations, these lines provide to rethink the relationship between the center and the province of the Ottoman Empire. It is possible to say he accomplishes it successfully.

It is a well-known debate there is a tendency to compare the provincial magnates in the Ottoman Empire with the notables in Europe in the context of feudalism. However, *the Partners of the Empire* contains also detailed information about the Ottoman notables' status.

The provincial magnates had no rights and privileges as an inheritance from generation to the following generation in legal terms. In other words, there was no legal basement of the provincial magnates as good as the Ottoman fief system. Both Islamic law and Ottoman imperial conventions were obstacles continuing powerful wealthy families along long generations, similar to the aristocrat classes, in the Ottoman Empire. (p. 75) But, the provincial magnates sought to surpass these obstacles against accumulating wealth. As may be needed, they negotiated to the Ottoman Sultan depending on the conditions attaining to the right of inheritance when the leader member of a provincial dynasty died.

While discussing on the provincial magnates, Ali Yaycioglu's inspirational contribution to the literature is the term of the *partnership*. With the narrative of partnership, he describes the provincial magnates as entrepreneurs and explains the network around them. As remarked by the author, "stormy times provided opportunities to become integrated into the empire on favorable terms". (p. 82) Consequently, each crisis had provoked to the necessity of integration. In point of fact that it is doubtful it was a *partnership* or *game* because it was not unconditioned cooperation. But, Yaycioglu is aware of this circumstance. He says that "in these games, various calculations, political and economic priorities, and concerns about trust, reputation, and credibility were involved, offering different actors in different circumstances". (p. 83) Therefore, the concept of the *game* can clarify better than *integration* to the Ottoman politics of this period.

Communities: Traditional Collectivity

In terms of the Ottoman eighteenth century, there was a distinctive fact such as bottom-up collective practices in the provinces. One of the most prominent contributions of *the Partners of the Empire* is revealing the collective decision-making mechanisms in the Ottoman society as distinct from public opinion. As well-known in the discussions of the late Ottoman politics, the public opinion was the concept of the second half of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, it is possible to notice a different kind of collectivity among Ottoman communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the work of Ali Yaycioglu. Ottoman urban collectivity during the age of revolutions was a different pattern certainly from the public opinion in a modern sense. But, this collectivity implying common interests was still exclusive experience in the urban life.

About the bottom-up collective practices, it is possible to express there were two ways of collective participation in the Ottoman provinces. First, it was communal deliberations. Another way was related to electoral practices. During these practices, it was supposed to reach unanimous consent in the decisions of assemblies. (p. 126) Also, about the representation of the collective practices in districts, Ali Yaycioglu expresses that it was "flexible, ad hoc, organic, fluid, and communal". (p. 126) Lastly, the general tendency in the decision-making mechanisms in the provinces was emerged around of three principles: a)

in accordance with "previous practices", b) with guidance from "men of knowledge", c) with "unanimous agreement". (p. 128) Additionally, there were stimulating information about the communities in the book. For example, communities had followed also several strategies forcing to the central state. These attempts were petitioning, lobbying in Istanbul or other central towns, expressing the collective will through demonstrations in the town, threatening the authorities with emigrating to another region and jeopardizing the district economy. These strategies for the persuasion contributed also to the negotiations. (pp. 143-44) Yaycioglu looks to the both of ways within the internal dynamics of the Ottoman Empire. His statement is noteworthy: "There was profound continuity between the pattern of collective participation and democratic experience in municipal politics in the Ottoman lands in the eighteenth century and the later parliamentary process in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries". (p. 118) On the contrary of the mainstream viewpoint, this effort to understand the historical succession in the Ottoman lands is respectable and so beneficial for the future of the studies on the late Ottoman Empire.

The collective participation of people in the decision-making processes gives also an opportunity to discuss again the Ottoman historiography and to compare classical approaches and new perspectives for the Ottoman eighteenth and nineteenth century. Ali Yaycioglu expresses the general tendency is that "historians have depicted the Ottoman Empire as an omnipotent power that imposed institutions on passive or unruly local communities". (p. 118) However, he proves indeed that the conventional approach is probably false and includes several ignorance because of bottom-up collective practices in the Ottoman provinces. On the other hand, Yaycioglu builds also a new narrative, which arrives sometimes some marginal claims. But, Yaycioglu's effort should be considered as alternative possibilities for thinking exhaustively.

What Was The Crisis?

As noted above, each revolution is a potential crisis. The Ottoman crisis also emerged around the New Order in the age of revolutions. It was expected the New Order became a reform movement and embraced by people and several political groups in the troublesome times of the Ottoman Empire. Hopes of Nizâm-ı Cedîd were satisfied relatively. Some bureaucrats in the Ottoman imperial center, some provincial magnates like Seyyid Tirsinikli Ismail Agha and Bayraktar Mustafa Agha had supported the New Order, but ultimately there were so many people all-around of the Empire against Nizâm-ı Cedîd. The reasons for this opposition may be talked about broadly, but the crisis was beyond its failure. Particularly the sumptuous efforts of Mustafa Bayraktar and his challenge with the Janissaries meant the times, which the Ottoman Sultans found no way out. In the age of revolutions, the clash was the decisive factor beyond the challenge of the old (the Janissaries with their allies) and the new (the New Order of Selim III and Mustafa Bayraktar).

The book proposes also comprehensive methodological analysis on the narratives of the crisis. Ali Yaycioglu criticizes the view of Ottoman and European historians of the nineteenth century because both of viewpoints had considered the events between 1806 and 1808 as a conflict between the old and the new. This narrative, which put forward a battle between progressive forces and reactionary response, would be continued until the foundation of the new regime of the Turkish Republic in the twenty-first century. (p. 161) Under such circumstances, *the Partners of the Empire* gives an opportunity for the interpretation of the Ottoman crisis again, without the settled conventional approaches.

The Deed Of Alliance

As a scholar studying on the provincial magnates in the Ottoman Empire, Ali Yaycioglu has comprehensive works on the Deed of Alliance (signed in September 1808). In *the Partners of the Empire*, he allocates a chapter to the Deed of Alliance within the context of partnership based on trust. In this chapter, he explains the process resulted in the Deed of Alliance in detail, the motivation of Mahmud II while signing the Deed and its tacit announcement unusually as different from other imperial edicts. Moreover, each article of the Deed is analyzed with their interpretation. Peculiarly, members of the assembly that signed the Deed of Alliance, who were from twenty-two imperial people from the top-down hierarchy and only three provincial magnates, are listed utterly. (p. 219) It is a significant point because it is seen that only three provincial magnates under the tacit leadership of Mustafa Bayraktar Pasha were the signatories of the Deed. This circumstance had signaled some special conditions in terms of the future of the Deed of Alliance. Although it is not indicated obviously by Yaycioglu, it is possible to deduce from the text that the Deed of Alliance may be considered as the power grab attempt of Mustafa Bayraktar, who became the grand vizier of Sultan Mahmud II. (pp. 221-238) Because it is known that many notables did not sign the Deed although they were informed. Again, some people who were invited to the assembly from the imperial hierarchy did not cognize the details of the Deed. (pp. 221-222) Briefly, the meeting of the Deed was not "an all-inclusive assembly". (p. 222) Therefore, Bayraktar would like to deal the Deed of Alliance a death blow probably for gathering all power to himself. Again likely, Mahmud II had played a double game circumspectly in his politics against the threat of Bayraktar Mustafa.

In a word, the analysis of the Deed of Alliance in the book moves beyond a regular evaluation. With the wide range of comments about the Deed, the book leads a possibility to a contemplation for making sense of the events with all possibilities.

Conclusion

In *the Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions*, there were three empires of the Ottomans in terms of the eighteenth centuries realities offered

by Ali Yaycioglu: a) the new order of empire, b) the order of notables, c) the order of communities. (p. 240) These three orders should be considered as new realities of the Ottoman Empire, which would be continued in the nineteenth century even if it seems the crisis caused the death of the New Order. One of the significant contributions of the Yaycioglu's study is showing this reality, which the Ottoman Empire entered an irreversible direction in the age of revolutions and its effects would be gone on along the nineteenth century.

On the one hand, Ali Yaycioglu submits three reformist concepts concerning the Ottoman late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in this work. These concepts referred also different possibilities, configurations, and combinations, which came from all three kinds of orders. First, it was top-down organizations implied the centralized and bureaucratic empire. The second one was the horizontal empire, which is decentralized and contractual. The order of communities including participatory and democratic mechanisms was seen as a bottom-up organization. (p. 240) So indeed, Yaycioglu's three alternatives for the Ottoman crisis age provide a great visionary perspective in order to rethink and reconsider the Ottoman Empire's reality, as an alternative to the rise-and-decline narrative.

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