

BOOK REVIEWS*

Ottoman Archives: Yıldız Collection, The Armenian Question, Vols. I-III, Istanbul, the Foundation for Establishing and Promoting Centers for Historical Research and Documentation, 1989, 371+441+391 pp.

It is generally acknowledged that the Ottoman archives are one of the richest historical treasures of the world. For years, they have been utilized by a number of Turkish and foreign scholars, who are qualified to handle the documents. Research on the Ottoman Empire is becoming one of the leading disciplines in a number of foreign universities. One reason is that the Ottoman archives are, not only nationally, but also internationally significant. They constitute an invaluable source of the history of many centuries and peoples situated on three continents. About two dozen nation-states have been formed as successors to the Ottoman Empire. Hence, the documents in question are indispensable sources for the study of the history of all these peoples. Turkey has already assumed, under several cultural agreements, the responsibility of cooperation on the utilization of archive material on a reciprocal basis. The Ottoman documents frequently shed decisive light even on contemporary issues that need solution. Such conflicts range from ownership of land to former court decisions or frontier disputes. The Turkish side wishes to make those manuscripts available to all qualified scholars interested in any aspect of mutual history.

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What are the kinds of documents that a researcher may look for in the various archives referred to above? They include orders (*irade-i seniyye*), commands (*emir*), decrees (*ferman*), imperial discourses (*nutk-u hümayûn*), imperial announcements (*nâme-i hümayun*), decisions (*hüküm*), treaties (*ahidnâme*), laws (*kanunnâme*), land registers (*tapu tahrir defterleri*), court registers (*şer'iyye sicilleri*), public endowments (*vakfiye*), memoranda (*takrir*), writings (*tahrîrât*), certificates (*tezkiye*), communiqués (*muhtura*), notes (*nota*), statements (*lâyiha*), secret reports (*jurnal*), communications (*tamim*), declarations on a point of Islamic law (*fetva*), victory announcements (*fetihnâme*), patents (*berat*), letters (*mektup*), writs (*i'lâm*), registers of important affairs (*mühimme defterleri*), tax registers (*vergi kayıtları*), vouchers (*sened*), receipts (*ilmühaber*), substitutes (*tahvil*), notebooks (*defter*), permits (*icazet*), population registers (*nüfus kayıtları*), payments to janissaries (*mevacip defterleri*), maps (*harita*) and the like.

There are other numerous, diversified sources that help one to write history. They range from annals (*vekâyînâme*) or books of travels (*seyahatnâme*) to memoirs (*hatîrât*) or ancient monuments. None of the latter sources may be compared to archive material in terms of breadth and reliability. For instance, 265 volumes of *mühimme defterleri*, in which the daily decisions and orders of the imperial Council are recorded, have been handed on to our generation. Efforts are still continuing to publish them all in facsimile form. One volume is reported to have already appeared in of Germany.

The Ottoman archives are also rich in terms of socio-economic history. They include many statistical data, ranging from land ownership and taxation to income of various groups of people. Many diversified information within this scope is chronologically reflected in the Court Registers. For years they had been kept in the court cellars but finally assembled in 1941 in several museums. They are now situated in several centers, including the Topkapı Palace and some *vilayets* of Anatolia. There are 9901 such registers in İstanbul, (2751 being at Topkapı), and 1013 in the Ethnographic Museum in Ankara. The rest may be found in the following *vilayets*: Adana (449), Diyarbakır (252), Hatay (101), Konya (320), Niğde (22), Afyon (158), Sivas (121), Kütahya (90), Bursa (827), Manisa (297), İzmir (179), Antalya (46), Kastamonu (207), Sinop (23) and Tokat (107). The Court Registers, thus, total 16,973.

The Court Registers (*şer'iyye sicilleri* as mentioned above, but also known as *kadı defteri*, *mahkeme defteri* or *zabut defteri*) constitute one of the most important sources of Ottoman history. Their significance has increased parallel to the growth of the responsibilities of the judges (*kadı*), or dispensers of justice in accordance with Islamic law. It is well-known that the *kadis* were appointed since the time of Osman Gazi (1258-1324), that the status of the chief military judge (*Kadı-asker*) was established at the time of

Murad the First (1326-1389), that the office was later divided to encompass Rumelia and Anatolia separately and that the *kadıs* of Bursa, Edirne and İstanbul, as long as they served as state capitals, were appointed among the "learned" (*ulema*). The verdicts, of the *kadıs*, rendered in the courts, were registered chronologically. The Court Registers are indispensable sources for an analysis of any subject in Ottoman history within a broader context.

The archives of the Ottoman foreign affairs, on the other hand, house official documents pertaining to the international relations of the state. The archives of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry are still kept in İstanbul. The archives in several embassies and consulates abroad are also part of the same huge collection. There are a number of depots in İstanbul which house those documents.

Depot No. 4 is the Yıldız collection encompassing 1512 files and 17073 registers pertaining to topics that Sultan Abdülhamid II was interested in during his reign (1876-1909), and applications made to him during the same period as well as those belonging to deceased statesmen but later transferred to the Yıldız Palace. They are classified as the Yıldız Principal Papers (*Yıldız esas evrakı*), official applications to the same (*Sadaret hususî ma'ruzatı*), various other applications (*mütenevvi ma'ruzatı*) and the like.

The three volumes referred to in the headline contain documents pertaining only to the Armenian question. One of the subjects which needs to be researched further in the Ottoman archives is Turkish-Armenian relations throughout history. It is interesting to note that some foreign writers who urge the opening of the Ottoman archives are the very ones who disregard Turkish source material, including those already printed. The so-called "Armenian question" happens to be a part of Ottoman history, and as such first-hand Turkish source material is of primary importance. Methodologically, it cannot be sound to analyze French history on the basis of German sources or *vice versa*. If the question is to determine what the official Ottoman policies were in respect to the Armenians, the Ottoman archives are indispensable. The Ottoman sources need to be considered first and foremost if the point is to define Ottoman governmental attitude.

Several governmental and academic centers in Turkey have published volumes of genuine documents pertaining to the "Armenian question". For instance, the Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies, under the Chief of General Staff's Office, published several special collections, since the early 1980s, on the same issue. Copies of the films of many documents have been presented to the leading Western libraries of the world.

The three volumes constitute the initial books of a planned series of fifteen volumes, which will cover all aspects of the Armenian community

between the years 1860 and 1919. They will place at the disposal of the readers the documents photographed in their original unaltered form, together with their transcriptions and translations into modern Turkish and English. The first volume brings together documents on the "Talori incident" (1894), the second volume stresses the political developments after those incidents, and the third volume is a collection of governmental opinions concerning the terrorism of some Armenian circles.

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Machiel Kiel, *Art and Society of Bulgaria in the Turkish Period*, Assen (The Netherlands), Van Gorcum, 1985, xxii+400 pp.; _____, *Ottoman Architecture in Albania: 1385-1912*, Istanbul, Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1990, ii+342 pp.

Machiel Kiel, born in 1938, served for seventeen years as restorer at the National Service of Historical Monuments of the Netherlands. He studied art history and Ottoman Turkish (language and literature) at the University of Amsterdam and received his doctorate there. He published some sixty studies, mostly in English and German, concerning the monuments of Turkish-Islamic architecture and historical topography of the Ottoman Balkans. His works were published in Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Turkey and Yugoslavia. He also worked as a collaborator of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (London-Leiden-Paris) and as the representative of the Netherlands in the Standing Committee for International Congresses of Turkish Art as well as the Dutch Committee for Byzantine Arts at the "Association International des Etudes Byzantines". He is also the President of the Kornwerderzand Foundation for the protection of historical fortifications.

Dr. Kiel, who taught Ottoman Turkish paleographics at Utrecht State University, travelled to the Balkans every year since 1959. This enabled him to keep account of the changing situation of the Turkish-Islamic buildings in the area. The first book above pertains to Bulgaria, and the second to Albania.

Some Bulgarian writers assert that the Ottoman conquest had been "catastrophic" for the economic and cultural life of the country. They also say that the Bulgarians, who had already reached a high level of science and art, refused to be assimilated and preserved their national identity but that their development was thrown back for centuries. In the publications of some Bulgarian authors, belonging to different decades, the Ottoman period is referred to as *robstvo* (slavery) or *igo* (yoke). Although the Bulgarians were the first Slav peoples to form a state, they had suffered so much under their own landlords, in the last century of their independence, that Ottoman rule that followed looked like a blessing, not only in Turkish historiography, but also in various important foreign sources.

Machiel Kiel proves, in his *Art and Society of Bulgaria in the Turkish Period*, that the Turks' presence in that country did not, first of all, cause a sudden and violent break in the old cultural traditions of Bulgaria. Sizable pro-Turkish factions had already been formed in the Balkans when the Turks were approaching. Even Stephan Tomasevic, a Bosnian King, admitted that his people did not support their own noble lords and looked sympathetically towards the approaching Turks. Fernand Braudel, the author of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, writes that the Ottomans brought liberation. As noted by Hans Kohn, in *Die Welt der Slaven*, the Greek Cypriots, just before the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus, felt the same towards their Venetian masters. Nicolas Iorge, the noted Rumanian historian, underlined that the Ottomans brought unity to the Balkans without discriminating religious or national minorities among the subjects.

Ottoman policies towards the Christian subjects were theoretically tolerant. Islam's Prophet saw himself as the last ring in the chain of monotheistic messengers. Islam did not want to eliminate Christianity, but to do away with its political control wherever Islam penetrated. Not only the Christians, but Jews and other monotheists were all regarded as the *Ahl-i Kitab* (People of the Book). This basic Islamic approach was institutionalized by the Ottomans into the celebrated "*millet*" system, or minority home rule. It is well-known that each religious group lived in accordance with its own laws and customs and under its own religious leaders. The Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire adhered to their own organizations, observed their own religion and spoke in their own language.

Likewise, the Bulgarian Patriarch and the Holy Synod associated with him appointed the clergy, controlled the churches and investigated the petitions. All religious and social property were under the supervision of the Patriarch. The Church conducted marriages and divorces, and could demand taxes for itself. All these practices were considered as old customs, duly respected by the Ottoman administration. Their failures should be explained in terms other than their association with the Turks. For instance, when there was a lack of inventiveness in literature, Jewish writing flourished in Edirne, Istanbul and Selânik (Thessaloniki).

Apart from the fact that the old Ottoman Islamic tolerance allowed the survival of Christianity as a religion in the Balkans and the various national languages as the vernaculars of a variety of peoples, the Ottoman civilization was in no way behind that of the Bulgarians. The mosque built in Edirne by architect Muslihiddin had a dome that exceeded 26 meters in diameter. Boyana's dome in Bulgaria was only three meters. The long bridge in Thrace, built by the Turks in 1435, was 1,300 meters long. There was no Bulgarian counterpart that could even remotely compare with it. The Bulgarian Tsar's

palace in Tirnovo can barely compete with a modest Seljuk or Ottoman caravanserai built for the common traveller. The famous six volumes by E.J.W. Gibb on the history of Ottoman poetry was the first serious attempt to introduce to the Western world the creativity and the rich heritage of Turkish literature. The outside world, then, was ignorant of the progress of intellectual life among the Turks as if the latter were living in Mars.

There have also been Bulgarian historians with a different approach. For instance, Nikolai Todorov, in a lecture at Sofia University, delivered on the occasion of the centenary (1978) of Bulgaria's independence, rejected the terms *robstvo* and *igo*. As Kiel reminds us, Stephan Lazarevic was an ally of the Ottoman Sultan Beyazıd. His troops were on the Ottoman side even when Beyazıd fought Timur in the Battle of Ankara (1402). It was true that some Bulgarian cities in history were destroyed, but it was the Crusaders who looted and burned down Lom, Madara, Maglis, Nikopol, Petric, Shoumen and others, and also butchered the Muslim inhabitants. If there are "horror museums" in various parts of Bulgaria, there are no museums depicting the horrors of the Bulgarians, committed during the Balkan Wars or after. If the city walls and castles in Nikopol, Rousse, Silistra, Svistov and Tutrakan were blown up, these events should be associated with the Russian army under Kutuzov (1810). It was the Greeks of Mesembria who demolished the Christian basilica of the town. An earthquake destroyed some of Tirnovo's Medieval churches. The Byzantine citadel of Varna was demolished by the order of the city council after Bulgarian independence. When Tsar Ferdinand visited the city of Tirnovo, the only surviving historical gate was brought down to let his imperial coach pass. The fresco paintings in the 13th century church in Asenovgrad were destroyed by Bulgarian vandals who wrote their names on them and even put dates, which show that the plunder took place long after the exit of the Turks. The church in Jane near Sofia disappeared in 1948.

Kiel notes that there was no deliberate policy on the part of the Turks to eliminate the roots of the Bulgarian civilization. Otherwise, they would not have tolerated their language or their religion. Kiel's conclusions run parallel to those by outstanding Turkish historians like Uzunçarşılı, Barkan and İnalcık.

Machiel Kiel's book entitled *Ottoman Architecture in Albania: 1385–1912* appeared when numerous irreplaceable Ottoman Turkish monuments were being destroyed in Bosnia. Most of the latter have been wiped out intentionally mainly by Serbian gunfire. What is at stake, however, is a common cultural heritage, an artistic accumulation of centuries of creative work. The Ottoman–Muslim presence in the Balkans left behind numerous masterpieces, some of which do not exist anymore.

Albania is one of the Balkan countries where there is a considerable number of Ottoman works. But very little is known about them outside Albania. There are, nevertheless, some publications by Turks (Ayverdi, Barkan, Kuran, Yenişehirlioğlu, Yüksel), Albanians (Frasheri, Kalesi, Sratsimiri) and others (Goodwin, Hobhouse, Hughes), to name a few. Kiel's recent book, on the other hand, is a scholarly endeavour that fills an important gap. He gives a comprehensive account of monuments scattered around in Albania. He describes them and analyzes the main features reflecting Ottoman style in a historical perspective. Going much beyond an architectural study, the work traces several pertinent aspects of the Ottoman presence there.

The Ottoman centuries were perhaps the most influential period of all Albanian history, not only in terms of leaving permanent characteristics such as Islamization, but also in terms of the fact that all of the Albanians then lived within a single state, which had not been the case in the time of the Illyrians or now. The Ottoman presence dated from 1385 to 1912. When the Ottomans first came into contact with them, the Catholic North spoke the Gagh dialect, and the Orthodox south the Tosk dialect of the same language. The Albanian feudal lord (Ch. Thopia) of the central section invited the Turks (Sultan Murad) to assist him against a powerful Serbian neighbor (Balsha II), who ruled over Shkoder and northern Albania. The Battle of Vijose (1385) opened the doors for the Turk, whose sultan was also recognized by the Albanian lords as their ruler. Serbia, Venice and Naples offered alternatives to the Ottoman presence. So, the Turks had to present to the Albanians better conditions than their rivals. Their first step was to introduce the *timar* system of landholding, which won over the lower nobility but not the great lords. For instance, Prince G. Kastriot Skanderberg, brought up a Muslim at the court of Sultan Murad II, lost his privileges and rebelled. Christian *timar* holders remained loyal, however, to the Ottomans. It was the second generation of Albanians who became Islamized.

The Ottomans formed several new urban settlements, creating cities and towns like Elbasan, Korche, Kavaje, Tirana, Tepelenë and Djakovo. Some of the towns emerged around pious foundations, including a mosque, religious school, library, bath, and large commercial buildings. This Ottoman pattern promoted the establishment of new towns, the population increasing by natural birth, new settlements and refugees (such as the Jews from Spain).

The road to promotion was open to the Albanians, who gave the Ottoman high bureaucracy Grand Viziers of outstanding stature (Gedik Ahmed, Davud Pasha, Rukaginzade Ahmed, Lutfi, Kara Ahmed, Koca Sinan Pasha, Nasuh, Kara Murad, Tarhoncu Ahmed Pasha, the Köprülü, Avlonyalı Ferid Pasha and Ahmed İzzet Pasha). Most of these Ottoman functionaries of Albanian origin left behind architectural works ranging from mosques and schools to fortresses and bridges.

There were also a number of Albanians in the first ranks of Ottoman literature and science. Yahya Bey has a place in classical Ottoman poetry; Koçi Bey was a "Turkish Montesquieu"; Hoca Tahsin is acclaimed as the first chancellor of the Istanbul Darülfünun (University); Şemseddin Sami was the greatest Ottoman lexicographer and encyclopaedist. Mehmed Akif, the author of the Turkish national anthem, and philosopher Rıza Tevfik are Albanian by origin. As author Kiel underlines, their number and qualities show to what extent the Albanian nation was integrated into the Ottoman society. This fact, neglected by recent Albanian historiography, may be brought to light by the present generation of Albanian writers.

Moreover, in contrast to the religious writings of the north and the Greek works in the south, the Albanian literature, created by the Muslim population, produced the foremost artistic works in the national language. This fact proves that the Albanians lived in a cultural milieu that permitted them to maintain their own identity although they took Islam from the Turks.

It was the disruption of the old *timar* system that led to the formation of large estates and a landed aristocracy desirous to be more independent from the central government. It was under these circumstances that people converted to Islam en masse. But the viziers and pashas continued to build mosques, schools, infirmaries, fountains, bridges, tombs and even castles. Some of these, like the enormous castle of Ali Pasha, are now outside the Albanian frontiers, i.e., in Greece, Kosovo and in Macedonia. Even when Albanian nationalism grew, its leaders did not strive for complete independence but only for some autonomy within the Ottoman frontiers. The Albanians knew that their more powerful neighbors were ready to prey on their territory. This is what happened in 1912. Albania lost parts of its land and people to Balkan neighbors. The Greeks destroyed the Muslim Albanian community. Although the Greeks deny the existence of the Orthodox Albanians, Albanian can still be heard in several Epirus villages. While some Ottoman architectural relics were also wiped out in some neighboring areas, the post-1945 Albanian Government demolished some buildings as well or used them for other purposes.

In any case, Dr. Machiel Kiel's book, printed by the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (Istanbul), is the result of more than twenty years of work, offering us reliable information on works of art and conditions of living in Albania for over five centuries.

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Şamil Mansur, *Çeçenler*, Ankara, Şam Yayınları, n.d., 240 pp.

Conditions in Chechnya, situated in the Caucasus which was the scene of the sufferings of Prometheus for the ancient Greeks, threaten to be a bigger headache for Russia than Moldova or Tajikistan. The ultranationalist Vladimir Jirinovsky describes the Caucasus as "an abcess in the Russian political body". Traditionally being an area of fiercely rebellious peoples, Tsarist Russia spent much of the last century "taming" them. Tensions, presently mounting in Chechnya, especially since Javhar Dudayev came to power (1991) and sought secession from the Russian Federation, threaten to escalate into long armed conflict. Şamil Mansur is a pseudonym of the author, a professor at the Faculty of Law of Ankara University, of the book cited above. The pseudonym is conveniently a combination of Şeyh (Shaikh) Şamil and Imam Mansur, both rebellious leaders (the latter beheaded by Empress Catherine in 1794). The book on the Chechens aims to be a general reference book, covering the geography, history and the culture of this people with an accent on their past and present opposition to Russian overlordship.

The self-designation of these people is "Nakhchuo" or "Nokhcho", meaning "nation" in the indigenous tongue. They are generally mentioned together with the Ingush, both of whom speak dialects of the same Nakh language. The Ingush are considered to be western Chechens. Their dialects, which are in the Veinakh group of the northeast Caucasian branch, are mutually intelligible. Chechen itself is divided into two dialects—highland and lowland. But they, too, are related. The dialect spoken near the Dagestan border has many Dagestan and Turkic words. Chechen and Ingush were initially given separate status as written languages, but they were united (in Cyrillic) after the amalgamation of the two regions in 1934. The Chechen used the Arabic script before 1923, changed into the Latin, and later (1938) the Cyrillic. North Caucasian languages are distinguished by an extraordinary abundance of consonants, which in Cherkess (Circassian), for instance, are 57 in number. The Chechen alphabet consists of 49 letters.

The Chechen are probably over a million now. They had one of the highest birth rates in the former Soviet Union. They were deported to northern Kazakhstan in 1944 where they remained until 1957. They claim that they have suffered great losses during the transfer of population. Prior to their deportation they lived mainly in the mountainous regions, but since their return they have been resettled in the plains. It was through the Georgians, after the 10th century, that Christianity started to penetrate into Chechnya, but the whole nation embraced Islam by the 19th century. They are Sunni Muslims now.

Persistent Russian attempts to overcome Caucasia, in the last century, were met by the resistance offered by the mountain races. But once subdued,

there were wholesale emigrations to Turkey. The Chechen, like the Cherkess, arrived in two waves, the first being in 1865. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (in Russian) records that "more than 20,000 were deported" via Kars in that year. The prominent leader of the resistance, Şeyh Şamil, was so popular with the people that many considered him a Chechen although he was an Avar. There are some well-known Chechens among the citizens of Turkey. For instance, Mahmut Şevket Paşa, a former (1913) Grand Vizier who suppressed the reactionary movement of the 31st of March, was reportedly a Chechen. Now, they are mostly living in Mardin, Sivas, Muş, Maraş, Adana, Kayseri and Yozgat. The Ingush reside in smaller numbers in Istanbul.

Ordinary Chechen citizens traditionally carry arms. They now have control over the weapons, including war planes, that previously belonged to the central authorities. There is oil in Grozni, the capital, and natural gas elsewhere. One of the biggest refineries in Russia is situated there. Organized Chechen groups in Moscow and Odessa are strong and aggressive. They can express violent dissatisfaction in response to certain Russian moves.

The rebellious leader Dudayev, born in 1944, graduated from the Soviet air academy, spent 13 years in exile and became a general. Later heading the Chechen nationalist movement, he went (1992) to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where he was welcomed by the king himself, and treated like a head of state and where he became a Muslim *hadji* having performed a religious requirement of holy pilgrimage. Roslan Hasbulatov, formerly the speaker of the Russian Parliament, is also a Chechen, but reportedly not popular with the Chechen people. Constitutionally, foreign relations are handled by the Russian Federation. Turkey, for instance, does not establish direct contacts with the republic of Tatarstan, Bashkortistan or Chechenya. Chechen leaders, nevertheless, occasionally come to Turkey but as the guests of the unofficial circles.

Some Chechens have dreams for their oil-rich country. They hope to unite the Muslims of the northern Caucasus in a new federation. The vast area is a fertile plain, where there had always been a movement of peoples. Neighboring Dagestan, Northern Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and the Karachai-Cherkess lands, all in the very southern tip of the Russian Federation, Chechnya is considered the "soft belly" of the vast Russian Federation. Different from Tatarstan, none are isolated and cannot be cut off. Some circles apparently plan that they would, then, have a total population of over five million people, residing in the whole area between the Caspian and the Black seas. They seem to have good relations with circles in Iran, parts of the Arab world, Israel, Japan and Germany. Turkey has not recognized Chechenya as an independent entity, but there is a sizable Caucasian lobby in that country. On account of the ethnic mosaic, however, this project is easier said than done.

Not only Russia has interests there, but also the Yeltsin government is eager to demonstrate that they are *gosudarstvenniki*, that is, in favor of a strong state, and are able not to fall behind their nationalist competitors. Such moves, however, carry all the risks of stepping into an area of great ethnic complexities. After the American invasion of Haiti, Russia may feel a freer hand in its "own backyard", but efforts to topple the present Chechen leadership have not been successful so far.