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Review
Reviewed Work(s): A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul by Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet
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tic communal identity under Islam, and the more recent sense of the nation-state (*al-jinsiyya*) which challenges but is itself challenged by earlier themes of Arab membership and identity.

All three levels establish group participation by birth (*jus sanguinis*), but each interprets an individual's specific rights and duties in distinct ways. Parolin pursues these levels in almost overwhelming detail, a gold mine for the specialist but a bit daunting for the less involved reader. The latter would find Chapter 4, "Citizenship and the three levels of membership" (pp. 115–129), more rewarding.

Parolin presents several interesting points of contrast between Arab and Western customs. She discusses, for example, the considerable difficulty for foreigners, and especially non-Muslim foreigners to obtain citizenship in Arab states versus the relative ease of naturalization for foreigners in Western societies. She also discusses the rights of non-Muslims in many Arab states to be judged in their own confessional courts versus the requirement of everyone in most European states to follow universal secular law.

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PRE-20TH CENTURY HISTORY

A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul, by Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet. Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xxi + 331 pages. Bibl. to p. 343. Index to p. 354. $33.99.

Reviewed by Nina Ergin

It is rare to find a scholarly book so captivating and engagingly written that it is hard to put it down; this is the case with Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet's *A Social History of Istanbul.* In spite of the maturity of the field of Ottoman social history and Istanbul's significance as imperial capital, this is one of the first monographs to examine the topic thoroughly.[1]

The authors do not assume that their readers are familiar with Ottoman history. Accordingly, the book opens with a chronology, several maps, a *who's who*, and a brief, basic outline. The first chapter begins with the Latins' and Byzantines' reaction to the Ottoman conquest of 1453 and also sets the tone for the remainder of the book: the authors heavily rely throughout upon primary sources — official histories, archival documents, travel accounts, and Ottoman literature — to convey developments and events through the voice of contemporary observers. Arguing that the empire was not merely a war machine, Fleet and Boyar point to textual evidence revealing the early Ottomans' attention to economy and Istanbul's resulting importance for them.

Chapter Two, "The Palace and the Populace," debunks the idea of the Ottoman sultan, secluded in the Topkapı Palace, ruling over the empire as he pleased.

1. See Ekrem Işın, *Istanbul'da Gündelik Hayat* [*Everyday Life in Istanbul: Social Historical Essays on People, Culture and Spatial Relations*] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), a collection of previously published magazine columns. For popular histories of Istanbul, see also Philip Mansel, *Istanbul: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (London: John Murray, 1995), and John Freely, *Istanbul: The Imperial City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998). For an overview of Ottoman social history, see Halil Inalcık *et al.*, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and relevant chapters in the different volumes of the *Cambridge History of Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006–2009).

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Rather, "[t]he relationship between the sultan and the city was a symbiotic one: the city was the capital because of his presence, and his power as a successful sultan was influenced by his reception by its populace" (p. 29). To support this claim, the authors examine petitions and punishment, sultans wandering the city in disguise, popular reaction to specific events, and the power of rumor. The description of pageantry — "pure celebration and an important release valve on the pressure cooker of the city," as much as "a raw display of power, wealth and legitimation of the ruler" (p. 63) — constitutes one of the book's high points, transporting the reader into a crowd watching a parade of exotic animals and *nahıl*s (towering, colorful sugar sculptures), marveling at fireworks, and cheering for the sultan.

"Fear and Death" describes the numerous calamities that befell the city: earthquakes, floods, storms, plagues, and fires. Rounding out this bleak image is a discussion of violence in the form of revolts, fighting between different social groupings, and criminality, as well as the government's and the populace's coping mechanisms. The fourth chapter, on welfare, offsets this image: the pervasive system of charitable endowments (*vakıf*) attempted to ensure the Istanbulites' well-being by distributing free food and medicine, providing mosques, and facilitating many other services.

"The Consuming City" straddles the topics of supplying basic necessities at controlled prices and luxury consumption (dress, tobacco, opium, coffee, alcohol, sexual services). Together with the subsequent chapters, "Outings and Excursions" and "The Hamam," it creates a vivid picture of *homo Ottomanicus* at leisure — savoring coffee in a coffeehouse; promenading through Istanbul's pleasure gardens; socializing and washing in the bathhouses. The last chapter, "The Nineteenth Century," contrasts the city's continuing traditional life — still shaped by fires, plagues, poor road maintenance, street dogs, and superstitions — with a simultaneously changing life-style reflected in the adoption of European dress, furnishings and urban concepts, of leisure activities such as swimming in the sea and frequenting Beyoglu's dance halls.

Three points of criticism might be raised. First, the authors often collapse events from very disparate periods into general statements; although they carefully word these passages, less knowledgeable readers may receive the impression that Istanbul remained unchanged from 1453 to *circa* 1800. Second, including a greater number of secondary sources in the footnotes and bibliography would have been useful for readers wishing to use this book as springboard for further research. (In all fairness, one should add that the authors do not claim to provide a historiographic overview.) Third, more images could have been added (e.g., from the *Surname-i Vehbi* to illustrate festivals). To be fair, however, publishers nowadays restrict the use of images due to cost considerations. Overall, lay readers, specialists on Ottoman history and other academics will profit from this book as an introduction to Istanbul's history, a primary source-based overview of Ottoman social history, and a backdrop against which to project a history of events unfolding in the imperial capital.

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