Afterword

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Abstract

The paper questions the function of the anti-Ottoman approach that, until recently, prevailed in Southeastern European historiography. This mindset and its concomitant attitudes were steps in nation building. A short comparison of the Ottoman social system with the social structures of countries in the region that did not come under direct Ottoman rule shows only minor differences. Thus, the adoption of Ottoman cultural practices including material culture was not a difficult choice. At the same time, we see individuals and whole groups whose lifestyles were oriented toward the West. Changing eating habits serve as an illustration for this phenomenon.

Keywords

nationalism – nation building – transculturality – cultural influence zones – dining habits – future scholarly tasks

Introduction

While the ancient Silk Road with its exotic wares has, time and again, been the focus of scholarly investigation, the history of another no less important trade route, the Moldavian Road, along which fascinating goods travelled to and fro, connecting cultures and sometimes ideas, has attracted much less attention.

Southeastern Europe seems to have been of little academic interest for many years, maybe because of the affiliation of its greater part to the Eastern bloc and the introversion of the countries across this region. Not many researchers on either side were lucky enough to find gaps in the Iron Curtain. In the Eastern bloc, scholars hardly had any access to foreign, especially Western, literature in their fields, and this enforced introspection yielded results that

ultimately served the interests of their respective regimes. In any case, the authorities in most of these countries saw historiography merely as legitimatory groundwork for politics, with history being a matter for state control.

Since none of the states in Southeastern Europe gained sovereignty before the nineteenth century, the process of nation building was still in full swing when the socialist takeover occurred. Although internationalism was one of the maxims of socialism, it proved to be largely irrelevant to the task of consolidating a nation state. Thus, ethnic nationalism became again, albeit somewhat unofficially, a cornerstone of political thought. There was no room left for a sober examination of the region's Ottoman past, which had lasted in some parts half a millennium. On the contrary, the Ottoman time served as a dark foil against which to highlight hopes for a brilliant and shining future. Presenting one's own past in terms of victimhood thus became central to the search for national and ethnic identity. This is far from being a trait unique to Southeastern Europe. For example, the story of the participation of Australian and New Zealand ("ANZAC") troops in the British service in the murderous battle of Gallipoli in 1915-1916 during World War I was a core element of nation building both for Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, the Australian literary historian Kathryn James speaks in this context of a blood sacrifice as *rite de passage* on the way to the eventual nationhood.[1]

A New Approach

Nowadays, a young generation of scholars no longer accepts the old notion of victimhood and passive suffering, and rightly points to the active role played by individuals and communities across Southeastern Europe in Ottoman politics, commerce and culture. The present volume is an outstanding example of this fresh approach. As so often in historiography, the available sources allow only glimpses of the lives of peasants or petty bourgeois, while tending to highlight the upper echelons of society. The "circuit of things" on which this volume focuses is a superb topic, for it inevitably presents propensities, cultural affiliations, social aspirations, and political impacts in the light of mentalities. The geographical setting at the overlap of several zones of cultural influence is a topic in its own right. After all, the flows of fashions and ideas did not end

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1 Kathryn James, *Death, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* (New York, 2009), 53. Cf. also Peter Beilharz and Lloyd Cox, "Nations and Nationalism in Australia and New Zealand," in *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, eds. Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar (London, 2006), 561.

there but were redirected to the various core areas. A number of contributions in this volume show that the regions of Walachia, Transylvania, and Moldavia formed an area of particular significance with regard to connecting cultures and ideas, and as a node of goods. Without entering the discussion of the different facets of the term's denotation, we can speak of Southeastern Europe (and in particular the Balkan peninsula) as a true transcultural space.

The present volume constitutes a vital step in laying the ground for an adequate, i.e. an unbiased, history of the material cultures in the region. Material culture has long been the turf of archaeologists, anthropologists and art historians. Historians were rather late in realizing that written sources have something to say about goods, and goods something about culture, society, economy, and even politics and moral values.

Display of Status

One of the major functions of goods travelling in these lands was to indicate the actual (or desired) status of their owner. The social structure in these lands was by no means homogenous, but it can be said that the area under direct Ottoman rule did not have a nominal aristocracy but was controlled by governors. In vassal states, such as Moldavia, Transylvania, and Wallachia, a prince who, by the grace of the Sublime Porte, reigned would have to deal with influential nobles and a small but distinct bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the consumption patterns were perhaps less diverse than it seems at first glance. The myth of a meritocracy and of a lack of corporative state structures has blurred our perception of Ottoman realities. The fact that in general privileges were not formulated in a positive manner but, rather, indirectly by prohibiting certain modes of displaying inappropriate status has contributed to this false picture. A good example of hidden privileges are the sartorial regulations repeatedly issued by the Sublime Porte (though not valid for vassal states such as Moldavia, Walachia, or Transylvania).[2] Recurrent interdictions to bestow furred robes of honor to foreign non-Muslim diplomats point in the same direction.[3] After all, only individuals belonging to the upper stratum of society would receive robes

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2 Cf. Donald Quataert, "Clothing Laws, State and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3 (1977): 403-425. For the regulations for sixteenth-century non-Muslims, see Karl Binswanger, *Untersuchungen zum Status der Nichtmuslime im Osmanischen Reich des 16. Jahrhunderts. Mit einer Neudefinition des Begriffs "Ḏimma"* (Munich, 1977), 165-186.

3 T.C. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, D.TŞF 5/26 (from 1750); D.TŞF 5/63 (from 1758); AE.SAMD III, 21812 (early eighteenth century).

of honor; people of lower rank had to be content with a piece of fabric or a modest sum of money. To the best of my knowledge, the latter feature has not been articulated as such, we can only detect it by perusing the relevant archival material.

The Ottoman ruling elite was virtually possessed by the display of its own rank. Although upward mobility was in principle possible, advancements, such as from simple shepherd to grand vizier, were extremely rare. Even gifted members of the urban bourgeoisie, such as Mustafa 'Ali[4] or Naima[5] made it only into the middle ranks of the ruling elite. A maxim of the Ottoman system, *kendü halinde olmak* (lit. "to be in one's own condition"), meaning not to transgress the limits of one's own status, patently hampered social climbing. Thus, the societal systems in the region (except perhaps the small community of urbanites in Transylvania) were not fundamentally different. A difference that remained, however, was that between the Islamicate lifestyle and a mode of living oriented to the culture of Vienna, Venice, Warsaw (roughly until the second half of the eighteenth century) and other centers of the West.

Western vs. Ottoman Lifestyle

Yet, this did not imply that religious affiliation was necessarily decisive as to whether an individual would choose "Western" or "Ottoman" objects for his or her lifestyle, as several articles in this volume illustrate. Particularly the middle and upper echelons of these societies seem to have adopted a kind of cultural eclecticism. Michał Wasiucionek's article in this volume presents a striking example of such an approach, describing a Christian prince of Moldavia who embraced many facets of Ottoman culture. In the eighteenth century, choices of lifestyle tended towards the European models, such as in the case of a prominent Wallachian boyar whose fascinating transition from an Ottomanized to an outwardly Viennese gentleman is described in Constanţa Vintilă-Ghiţulecu's paper.

This eclectic approach to lifestyle mostly involved three stages: a sufficient availability of the relevant goods through commerce; their acquisition, and eventually the decision to incorporate them into one's own style of living. We can often trace the development of trade, at least if conducted on a large

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4   See Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali, 1541-1600* (Princeton, 1986).

5   See Mehmet İpşirli, "Naîmâ," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 32 (Istanbul, 2006), 316-318.

scale (such as Ottoman cottons or French fabrics), as three articles in this volume elucidate. Mária Pákucs investigated the influx of Ottoman textiles into Transylvania, a country of transit trade. Oriental fabrics, particularly cottons, were in high demand, not only in Hungary and Poland (as in most parts of Europe) but also in Transylvania, which also had a domestic market for products travelling from and via Turkey. This enthusiasm for Ottoman materials was not necessarily connected with an orientation to Ottoman lifestyles. In a similar manner, the growing volume of French exports to the Levant, highlighted in David Celetti's article, did not trigger a rapid change in Ottoman daily life. It did, however, have a large impact on the Empire's economy, as the merchandise met the demands of Ottoman customers. The crucial relationship between commissioner, customer, and producer is clearly visible in Artemis Yagou's paper on ceramics made in Pesaro for the Epirote market and commissioned by merchants from Epirus.

Dining Manners

Singular purchases (particularly costly luxury objects) and, all the more, new choices of certain things for daily life are much harder to discern, as people tended to make such choices intuitively. For example, we do not know why, in the sixteenth century, upper-class Orthodox Greeks (Byzantines having gone over to using forks and knives at their repasts between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries[6]) adopted Ottoman dining manners, where knives and forks were banned from communal meals. About the same time, the sophisticated manner of eating with cutlery had started to spread via Venice to Central and Western Europe. Eventually, by the early eighteenth century, significant Christian groups in Southeastern Europe who were in contact with Venice tended to adopt the European way of dining.

We see, for instance, that in the first half of the eighteenth century icons from Orthodox churches in Albania begin to depict the Last Supper with knives, forks, and spoons, clearly following Western models. The collection of icons in the National Museum of Medieval Art in Korça (Albania) offers two good examples. First, an image from 1744 by the painter Konstandin Shpataraku (from the Shën Marisë church in the Ardenica Monastery) is of particular

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6   Joanita Vroom, "The Changing Dining Habits at Christ's Table," in *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry— Food and Wine in Byzantium: Papers of the 37th Annual Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, in Honour of Professor A.A.M. Bryer*, eds. Leslie Brubaker and Kallirroe Linardou (Aldershot, 2007), 198-199 and 204.

significance. While the apostles eat from several communal vessels, which was common practice in the contemporary Ottoman realm, they have Western cutlery at their disposal. Second, in a later icon (from the Metropolitan church of Korça), painted by the famous Konstandin Zografi in 1770, we see how the supper features Western style cutlery and individual goblets. These two images point to a slowly developing process of adaption, probably following Venetian eating habits and table manners. Rather similar phenomena also evolved on a number of Greek islands under Italian influence. The depiction of such a novelty in an icon suggests a widespread acceptance of the practice; otherwise, the congregation would not have been able to "read" and to understand the image.

Georg Simmel has pointed out in his "Sociology of the Meal" that the use of cutlery creates a distance to ravenousness, and also involves an aesthetic element, while the personal plate symbolizes individualism.[7] Though he does not mention individual cups or glasses, they stand for the same mindset. Nonetheless, it would be absurd to see in the changed eating habits an upsurge in individualism. In any case, several historians understand the replacement of communal with "individual" everyday objects as a concern for privacy.[8] At first glance, we might surmise a desire for more refinement, sophistication and elegance as the motivation for the "new" eating practices. Yet, the Greek adoption of Ottoman dining manners in the sixteenth century makes this explanation look less probable. On the other hand, it would be over-simplistic to ascribe such processes merely to the appeal of the empire's political and military power, even though it was ascending in the sixteenth and slowly waning in the eighteenth century. The case study by Artemis Yagou helps us to understand how changes of this type unfolded.

What Shaped a Cultural Preference?

It might have been the tantalizing image of glory and power that made the achievements of a specific culture so attractive. This image was, however, not necessarily connected with military and political strength. After all, in the eighteenth century the days of the *Serenissima* were numbered, as we know in hindsight. In this context we should think of another example and recall

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7   I used the German text: Georg Simmel, "Soziologie der Mahlzeit," in *Der Zeitgeist* (= Beiblatt zum *Berliner Tageblatt* Nr. 41, 10. Oktober 1910), 1-2. http://socio.ch/sim/verschiedenes/1910/mahlzeit.htm (accessed March 18, 2018).

8   Cf. Peter Burke, "*Res et Verba*: Conspicuous Consumption in the Early Modern World," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London 1993), 149 and the literature given on p. 159, n. 6.

the Timurid splendor that had turned into an "international style" when the vigor of the dynasty was virtually only perceptible in the patronage of arts.[9] In any case, we should scrutinize the various levels, modes, phenomena, and processes of transculturality and their effects on economic, social, and political developments, on issues of aesthetics, on the image of the individual, and much more.

Of course, an individual's background, upbringing, experiences, character, and current situation would have shaped his or her perception. Thus, whether groups found the notion of a Western lifestyle appealing and the image of the Ottoman power appalling, or vice versa, depended on many imponderables at the personal level. In the case of eating habits, we are clearly confronted with a collective phenomenon. At present, we do not have enough indications to unravel such enigmatic processes. Future research will need still more positivist groundwork. We have to search for relevant texts to analyze them. We have to find more tangible objects to build an inventory of material culture, in brief, we have to obtain hard data. At the same time, we might have to look for new methods and establish new theories. All these efforts imply a very high degree of interdisciplinarity, which is indeed a great challenge.

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9   Cf. Gülru Necipoğlu, "From International Timurid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-Century Ceramic Tiles," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 136-170. See also *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry (Los Angeles, 1989).