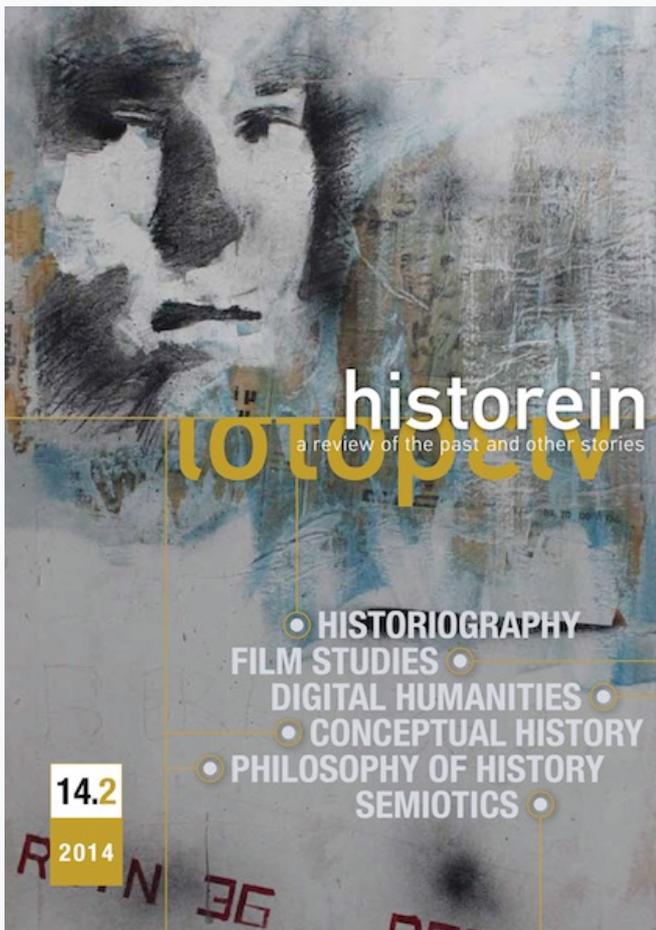


Historein

Vol 14, No 2 (2014)

Historein 14/2 (2014)



Review of Antonis Anastasopoulos (ed.), Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire

Virginia Aksan

doi: [10.12681/historein.270](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.270)

Copyright © 2015, Virginia Aksan



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Aksan, V. (2014). Review of Antonis Anastasopoulos (ed.), Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire. *Historein*, 14(2), 136–139. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.270>

"scene for a new 'theatre of death'", that is the Lévy affair (29). However this argument is not systematically followed. A firm contextualisation of seventeenth-century Catholic policy and religiosity was required throughout so as to establish the Lévy affair as the first recorded condemnation for ritual murder in the counter-Reformation period.

Despite these choices, this is a well grounded and comprehensive treatment of the less-known case of Raphaël Lévy which widens the scope of enquiry into the blood libel and other anti-Jewish myths, although it contributes few fresh insights into the construction of the ritual murder myth, which the author surveys bibliographically in his introduction. However, this is not a study strictly confined to the field of early modern history. It has something to offer to both early modernists and modernists alike interested either in Christian–Jewish relations or the conceptualisation of the past or the politics of memory and public history.

NOTES

- 1 "Un village lorrain réhabilite un juif brûlé en 1670," *LeFigaro.fr*, 19 January 2014, <http://goo.gl/47GCjx>.
- 2 Recent historiography has critically engaged with the traditional view of the absolutist early modern state as a neutral force that mitigated the religious conflicts of the period. See, for instance: Wolfgang Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment," *The Catholic Historical Review* 75/3 (1989): 383–404.
- 3 Robin Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

Antonis Anastasopoulos (ed.)

Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire

Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2012. 453 pp.

Virginia H. Aksan

McMaster University, Ontario, Canada

Ottomanists like me, who have just endured the longest, coldest winter in North America in recent memory, dream about attending the next Halcyon Days, a gathering of scholars every three years in January at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies in Rethymno, Crete. The conferences reflect the interest of the scholars at the institute, initially under the direction of Professor Elizabeth Zachariadou, and more recently organised and edited by Professor Antonis Anastasopoulos. The focus of the early gatherings was on the formative and golden eras of Ottoman history in the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean (the Ottoman emirate, or the office of the kapudan pasha come to mind). Beginning with the fifth conference, provincial elites and local urban and rural politics in the Balkans in the period 1650–1800 have dominated, reflecting the interests of Anastasopoulos. The papers offer a window into the deepening scholarship on inter- and intraregional relations during the transformative period of Ottoman history. I have found *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire* (2005), the product of Halcyon Days V, particularly useful for my own research.

The study of the pre-1800 Ottoman/eastern Mediterranean is currently rich in novel approaches to some old questions posed by an increasingly diverse community of scholars, whose research builds on the seminal generation of the 1960s and 70s and the more

recent broad accessibility and digitisation of the archives. For some, the Mediterranean is about the economy and environment, port cities and hinterlands, with a Braudelian focus. For others, questions of legality and identity, and the long-standing study of Muslim-minority relations, are reflective of a couple of decades of sustained research on the shari'a court and other archival records. Of particular note are recent comparative efforts on the nature of borderlands and frontiers; Mediterranean encounters (piracy, captivity, prisoners of war, conversion, the European obsession with the Turk/Muslim), and the human ecology and ethnography of empire.

The volume to hand, *Political Initiatives "From the Bottom Up" in the Ottoman Empire*, is a collection of papers presented at Halcyon Days VII, held in 2009. This is an impeccably organised and edited collection of 19 articles, taking as its inspiration a foundational article published by Suraiya Faroqhi in 1986, in what could be construed as the inauguration of Ottoman subaltern history.¹ Anastasopoulos cautions us about using the term for the period under study (7) as perhaps over-estimating the political toolkit available to the populations, but why not? As students of violence and rebellion in Europe have come to agree, protest and politics are intertwined in the pre-1800 period and tracing the "political voice" has been complicated of late by studies which draw in women, children, the street as well as the demobilised soldier.²

The papers are organised into five parts, roughly from the micro to the macro. Part one, "Starting in the Provinces", includes papers by Leslie Peirce on Harput; Hülya Canbakal, who moves her inspiring work on Ayntab forward into the eighteenth century; Elias Kolovos on peasants and protests in villages around Salonica, and Eyal Ginio on Jews in the same city,

both situated in the eighteenth century; Sophia Laiou on political factions on eighteenth-century Samos, and Andreas Lyberatos on Orthodox participation in Ottoman officers in eighteenth-century Plovdiv. As noted by their authors, all of whom make a serious effort to situate their contributions in current debates, particular regional cases raise a host of questions. For example, whether or not Ottoman social history is enhanced or diminished by our understanding of the kadi court culture of legality is explored by Peirce. Her contribution concerns a *celali* (military irregular, rebel) whose level of abuse became noisy enough to reach the ears of Istanbul. Boğaç Ergene, in part five, "Going Macro", reflects more generally on the methodological problems facing those who use shari'a records, now a large body of work which, he argues, has generally ignored the extra-court mediation which was integral to so much of Ottoman justice, and not necessarily visible in the record. To what extent, he asks, does that mediation represent complicity of local jurists in corruptive processes?

The articles by Kolovos, Ginio and Lyberatos ask us to consider whether the Ottoman terminology of political representation, for example, *vekil* (deputy) and *archon/çelebi* (honorific for lay elites) in Salonica and Plovdiv respectively, determines civic-mindedness and political maturation. Finally, Laiou sees the impact of globalisation as central to the disintegrating stability of insular Mediterranean communities. Threats or perceived threats to livelihoods and traditional practice could easily mobilise otherwise disparate groups, as James C. Scott has argued throughout his work on the essential tension between populations and the emerging bureaucratic state. While the observation may be a truism, it is one element of bottom-up politics that is clearly demonstrable in these examples. A corollary to that is the emergence of leaders, when identifiable,

functioning as middlemen and forcing political realignments and the creation of new offices representing the voiceless, also a theme that underwrites European and much Ottoman history about the eighteenth-century *ayans* (local elites, warlords).

The second part of the volume then explores how those voices petition the government, again with four effective regional/material settings to guide us: Nicolas Vatin on the cemetery of Kasımpaşa (sixteenth century); Rositsa Gradeva on permission and denial of building/restoring churches in the Balkans; Demetrios Papastamatiou on the Peloponnese and the right of appeal in the eighteenth century, using the Mora Ahkâm defterleri, and finally, Evthymios Papataxiarchis on the language of print culture in the Tanzimat. The latter's discussion of the 1842 uprising in Ayvalık reveals the extent which the discourse of nationality had penetrated Ottoman local consciousness of the Orthodox Greek community. Looking at an anonymous petition manuscript to Sultan Abdülmecid, known as *Ta Kyondia-ka*, Papataxiarchis argues for the existence of a brief moment in the early Tanzimat when political hybridity could be conceived of, that is, before republicanism and ethnoreligious nationhood trumped notions of sultanic justice. How very different that was from the Morean context of a hundred years earlier, when petitions (*arzuahals*) to the sultan, understood as political instruments, blended public and private in very personal appeals.

The third part examines interest groups and elites in closer proximity to the centre of power, be they Sufis (Dimitris Kastritsis), fundamentalists (Marinos Sariyannis), Janissaries (Baki Tezcan) or *yamaks*, that is, local recruits/auxiliaries of the Istanbul fortress system (Aysel Yıldız). All deploy a deep reading of contemporary manuscripts as well as archi-

val records, and operate on two levels: analysing their particular group cohesion (and resistance) and speculating on the meaning of the cohesion/resistance spectrum as represented in contemporary and later histories. I find Sariyannis' exploration of who the *kadizadelis* were, and his willingness to entertain their aspirations to the so-called "mercantile" or "Protestant" ethic of Europe, refreshing, as he works out many of Baki Tezcan's provocations in *The Second Ottoman Empire*.³ Yıldız does a data analysis of the demographic base of the *yamaks* of the fortresses of the Bosphorus, who are generally blamed for initiating the rebellion that brought down Selim III in 1807. Her speculative conclusion about the nature of the revolt is that it was amorphous and leaderless, but she ends by noting that the unspecified discontent was easily mobilised (manipulated?) into regicide within a year.

Two articles make up the fourth part. The first, by Suraiya Faroqhi, is a microcosmic study of how an empire handles labour to man and maintain a far-off fortress like Hotin. Frontiers, borderland policy and control of fractious populations are subjects worthy of further pursuit through such tantalising archival bits. I am reminded of Victor Ostapchuk and Caroline Finkel's collaboration on the fortress of Ochakov,⁴ and Peter Boeck's work on Azov.⁵

The second piece, by Svetlana Ivanova, ruminates on the circulation and impact of sultanic orders (*fermans*), also focusing on the nature of Ottoman control over far-flung provinces. Here, reactions gleaned from annotations on local manuscripts and records, reflecting on larger empire-wide events and concerns, are used to rehearse the Ottoman need to persuade as well as coerce. Both pieces in this section offer pathways into fruitful avenues of research about Ottoman latter-day survival strategies.

The final part contains the article by Ergene mentioned above as well as two more by Eleni Gara on general practices of political participation in the Balkans, using Athens as her example, and Antonis Anastasopoulos on the nature of Ottoman civil society, respectively. Gara includes a very useful anatomy of violence in Athens as an appendix, contributing to the ongoing impressive accumulation of literature on the politics and economies of the ayans. Anastasopoulos has the last word, literally, on Ottoman political life and participatory politics. Pairing his reflections with Palmira Brummett's reflections on household paradigms⁶ makes for a very provocative set of questions about negotiations around Ottoman publics and politics.

Anastasopoulos' discussion, indeed the work of the whole, reflects the degree to which the field of Ottoman studies has been drawn into larger historical trends about imperial, world and subaltern history. I look forward to Halcyon Days in Crete IX in January 2015.

NOTES

- 1 Suraiya Faroqhi, "Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire: Some Evidence for their Existence," in *Osmanistische Studien zur Wirtschaft- und Sozialgeschichte: In Memoriam Vančo Boškov*, ed. Hans Georg Majer, 24–33 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986).
- 2 Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 3 Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 4 Victor Ostapchuk and Caroline Finkel, "Outpost of Empire: An Appraisal of Ottoman Building Registers as Sources for the Archaeology and Construction History of the Black Sea Fortress of Özi." *Muqarnas: an Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 22 (2005): 150–188.
- 5 Peter Boeck, "When Peter I Was Forced to Settle for Less: Coerced Labor and Resistance in a Failed Russian Colony (1695–1711)," *Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008): 485–514.
- 6 Palmira Brummett, "Placing the Ottomans in the Mediterranean World: The Question of Notables and Households," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 36 (2010): 77–96.