A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul

Using a wealth of contemporary Ottoman sources, this book recreates the social history of Istanbul, a huge, cosmopolitan metropolis and imperial capital of the Ottoman Empire. Seat of the sultan and an opulent international emporium, Istanbul was also a city of violence, shaken regularly by natural disasters and by the turmoil of sultanic politics and violent revolt. Its inhabitants, entertained by imperial festivities and cared for by the great pious foundations which touched every aspect of their lives, also amused themselves in the numerous pleasure gardens and the many public baths of the city. The authors capture the lives of those who lived in this vibrant, violent, luxurious and cosmopolitan city through intimate portraits. While the book focuses on Istanbul, it presents a broad picture of Ottoman society, how it was structured and how it developed and transformed across four centuries. As such, the book offers an exciting alternative to the more traditional histories of the Ottoman Empire.

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A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul

Ebru Boyar

and

Kate Fleet
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Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the memory of Susan Skilliter, Lecturer in Turkish Studies at Cambridge University and Fellow of Newnham College, who on her death in 1985 left her books and money to found a centre for research in Ottoman studies. It was Dr Skilliter’s foresight, together with the imagination and strength of Sheila Browne, then Principal of Newnham College, which resulted in the establishment of the Skilliter Centre for Ottoman Studies, an institution to which we are both grateful. We are also dedicating this book to the memory of Julian Chrysostomides, an inspirational supervisor and truly generous person who lives on through the many, many students she inspired, cared for and intellectually reared.

This book grew out of a series of lectures we gave in September 2005 on the Skilliter Centre tour of Istanbul, Bursa and Edirne. The tour was for us a most enjoyable experience and we learnt a great deal both from preparing and giving the lectures and from the questions, interest and enthusiasm of those with whom we travelled. We should like to thank in particular all those who took part in the tour and who stimulated us to consider writing this book in the first place.

We should also like to thank Rebecca Gower, the Librarian of the Skilliter Centre, for her help with the illustrations and editing. Her calmness and ability are considerable assets for the Centre. We are also most grateful to Dr Tuba Çavdar, who was instrumental in procuring the cover illustration for us, to Marigold Acland, Jo Breeze and Sarah Green at Cambridge University Press, and to our copy-editor Alison Thomas. Our thanks are also due to the staff of the University Library, Cambridge, the library of the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, the library of the Turkish Historical Association, Ankara, the Principal, Fellows and Members of Newnham College, Cambridge, the Middle East Technical University, Muharrem Özsait and the Boyar family.
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Who’s who

Abdi Wrote a short account of the 1730 Patrona Halil revolt, of which he was a contemporary.

Abdüllaziz Bey (Abdüllaziz Ibn Cemaleddin) Born Istanbul 1850, died Istanbul 1918. Writer and poet who worked in various government offices and was a member of a wealthy and well-established Istanbul family. Wrote his memoirs of the late nineteenth century, which were not published until the 1990s.

Ahmed Cavid Born Istanbul, died 1803. Into palace service in 1787. Held high office and was close to Selim III.


Ahmed Midhat Efendi Born Istanbul 1844, died Istanbul 1912. Writer, novelist, newspaper proprietor. Known as close to Abdülhamid II, he taught at the Darülfünun.

Ahmed Rasim (1865–1932) Writer, journalist, librettist and composer. Wrote for various newspapers and was an MP between 1927 and 1932.


Asıkpaşazade (c.1400–after 1484) Ottoman chronicler, author of an Ottoman history to 1484.

Badoaro, Andrea Venetian ambassador extraordinaire to Istanbul in 1572.


Barbaro, Nicolò Venetian surgeon, wrote a diary of the siege of Constantinople in 1453, of which he was an eyewitness.

Basiretçi Ali Efendi Born Istanbul 1838. Prominent nineteenth-century Ottoman journalist, owner and chief writer of the important newspaper Basiret, which became very influential between 1870 and 1878. Exiled in 1878, he returned to Istanbul in 1908 and died soon afterwards.

Basmajean, Grigor Yakob Born Edirne 1853. Converting to Protestantism aged 18, he became a priest and went to the United States in 1886.
Who’s who

Bassano, Luigi Born Zara c. 1510. He was in the Ottoman empire probably between 1532 and 1540.

BeyATHI, Yahya Kemal Born Skopje 1884, died 1958. Poet, politician, diplomat. Into exile in Paris under Abdülhamid, he stayed nine years, returning to Istanbul in 1913. Considered one of the greatest poets of the early Republican era.

Bon, Ottaviano (1551–1622) Venetian ambassador 1604–08 and wrote an account of the Ottoman court.

BrasseY, Anna (1839–87) Made various voyages with her family in their yacht between 1874 and 1887. Was in Istanbul in 1874 and 1878; wrote an account of her time there.

Broquière, Bertrand de la Travelled in Anatolia 1432–33, leaving Constantinople in January 1433 for Edirne.

Busbecq, Ogier Ghiselin de (1522–92) Austrian ambassador to Süleyman I, in Istanbul 1554–62.

Cafer Efendi Active in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth centuries. Author of an account of the life and works of the imperial architect Mehmed Ağa, who built the Sultan Ahmed mosque complex.

Cemal Paşa (Ahmed Cemal) Born Mitylene 1872, assassinated Tiflis 1922. Prominent politician and member of the Committee of Union and Progress, navy minister, and commander-in-chief of the Ottoman army in Syria during the First World War.

Cemil Paşa (Topuzlu) Born Istanbul 1866, died Istanbul 1958. Famous doctor, taught in various medical schools and set up the medical faculty at Istanbul University. Mayor of Istanbul in 1912 and 1919.

Cheṣmizade Mustafa Reșid Born Istanbul, died 1770. Poet, and court historian 1766–68. A member of the ulema, he taught in medreses and held high office.

Chishull, Edmund (1671–1733) English clergyman, chaplain to the English factory at İzmir to 1702, he was in Istanbul in 1699.

Contarini, Alvise Venetian ambassador 1636–41.

Courmenin, Louis Deshayes, Baron de Born end of sixteenth century, executed 1632. Sent by the French king to Istanbul 1621.

Covel, John (1638–1722) Chaplain to the English embassy in late 1670, and in sole charge of the embassy from the death of the English
Who’s who

ambassador Sir Daniel Harvey in 1672 to the arrival of the new ambassador Sir John Finch in 1674. In Istanbul to 1677.

dei Crescenzi, Crescenzio Author of a letter from Istanbul in 1615 describing the wedding of the daughter of Ahmed I.

La Croix, Sieur de Died 1704. Secretary to the French ambassador, in the Levant 1670–80.

Dallam, Thomas (c.1575, d. c.1630) Commissioned by Queen Elizabeth I to construct and deliver a mechanical organ and clock for the Ottoman sultan. In Istanbul 1599–1600.


Destari Salih Author of an account of the 1730 Patrona Halil revolt of which he was a contemporary. Known to have been close to the palace.

Domenico (Domenico Hierosolimitano) (c.1552–1622) Third physician to Murad III, probably in Istanbul between 1578/79 and 1588/89.

Doukas Died post 1462. Byzantine historian, author of history of Byzantines and Turks from 1204 to 1462.


Ebussuud Efendi Born İstanbul 1490, died 1574. Taught in many medreses and served as kazasker. 1545 became şeyhülislam and held the position until his death. One of the most famous şeyhülislams.


Evliya Çelebi Born Istanbul 1611, died Egypt post 1683. Traveller, wrote extensive account of his travels. Held various government posts.

Fontmagne, Louisa, Baronne Durand de Died 1867. In Istanbul after the Crimean War, in 1857–58.


Foscarini, Pietro Venetian ambassador to Istanbul, 1634–37, sent as ambassador extraordinaire in 1640–41.

Fresme-Canaye, Phillipe du Accompanied the French ambassador to Istanbul in 1573.

Galland, Antoine (1646–1715) Was attached to French embassy in Istanbul in 1670.

Garzoni, Costantino Accompanied the Venetian ambassador extraordinaire Andrea Badoaro to Istanbul in 1572.
Who’s who

Gelibolu Mustafa Ali Born Gelibolu 1541, died Jedda 1600. Poet, historian and author of many works; he held high office and took part in many campaigns.

Georgievitz, Bartholomeus (c.1510–66) Captured at the battle of Mohács 1526.

Gerlach, Stephan (1546–1612) Protestant priest attached to the Habsburg embassy 1573–78.


Gürpınar, Hüseyin Rahmi Born Istanbul 1864, died Istanbul 1944. Journalist, novelist and short story writer, MP 1936–43. His stories are known for being reflective of Istanbul and mahalle life.

Hasanbeyzade Ahmed Paşa Died 1636 or 1637. Author of an Ottoman history from 1520 to 1635. Entered palace service in 1591. Held many high offices both in Istanbul and in the provinces, and was present on various campaigns.

Hayrullah Efendi Born Istanbul 1818, died Tehran 1866. A doctor from an influential medical family, he taught in medical schools, wrote an Ottoman history, was briefly minister of education and opened schools for girls. Went to Europe for medical treatment in 1863. Published his account of his visit to Europe in 1864. Appointed envoy to Tehran in 1865.

Heberer, Michael Born between 1555 and 1560. From Breiten near Heidelberg. Captured by the Ottomans in the Mediterranean, he became a galley slave between 1585 and 1588.

Hoca Sadeddin Efendi (1536/37–99) Member of the ulema, teacher of Murad III and Mehmed III, and became şeyhülislam in 1598.

Hovhannesyan, Sarkis Sarraf Born Istanbul 1740, died Istanbul 1805. Historian, teacher, author of a history of the Ottoman empire and of Istanbul.

Ibn Battuta Born Tangier 1304. Arab traveller who was in Anatolia in the 1330s.

Ibn Kemal (Kemalpaşazade) Born 1468 or 1469 in Edirne, died 1534. Came from an eminent family, became a member of the ulema. Held many high positions. Became şeyhülislam in 1526 until his death.

İbnülcemal Ahmed Tevfik Author of memoirs of his bicycle journey from Bursa to Istanbul in 1900.

Karaosmanoğlu, Yakup Kadri Born Cairo 1889, died Ankara 1944. Writer, diplomat, politician. Wrote for İkdam newspaper during the National Liberation War.

Karay, Refik Halit Born Istanbul 1888, died Istanbul 1965. Writer, journalist, known for his stories about Anatolian life. Opponent of the
National Liberation War, fled to Beirut in 1922, returning to Istanbul in 1938.

Katip Çelebi Born Istanbul 1608, died 1657. Writer and historian, held various government posts and went on many campaigns.

Kritoboulos Died post 1467. Byzantine, probably from Imbros. Went into the service of Mehmed II shortly after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and was later appointed governor of Imbros 1456–66.

Kydones, Demetrios (c.1324–c.1397). Byzantine scholar, statesman and theologian. Served John VI Kantakouzenos, John V Palaeologos and Manuel II.

Lacroix, Frédéric Died 1864. Wrote a guide book to Istanbul.


Leyla (Saz) Hanım Born Istanbul 1845, died Istanbul 1936. Composer, writer, poet. Spent early childhood in the harem of Çirağan palace. Published her memoirs of that period in Vakit newspaper between 1920 and 1922.


Ludovisi, Daniele de’ Venetian envoy to Istanbul 1533–34.


Mehmed Enisi (Yalçın) Born İstanbul 1845, died Istanbul 1936. Composer, writer, poet. Spent early childhood in the harem of Çirağan palace. Published her memoirs of that period in Vakit newspaper between 1920 and 1922.

Mehmed Enisi (Yalçın) Born İstanbul 1845, died Istanbul 1936. Composer, writer, poet. Spent early childhood in the harem of Çirağan palace. Published her memoirs of that period in Vakit newspaper between 1920 and 1922.

Menavino, Giovanantonio Captured by the Ottomans c.1501, escaped after battle of Çaldırın 1514.

Mihailović, Konstantin Serb captured in battle, served in the Ottoman army as janissary 1455–63.


Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley (1689–1762) Accompanied her husband Edward when he was sent as ambassador to Istanbul in 1716. In Istanbul 1717–18.

Moro, Giovanni Venetian ambassador to Istanbul 1587–90.

Morosini, Gianfrancesco Venetian ambassador to Istanbul 1582–85.

Müneccimbaşı Ahmed Dede (1631–1702) Chief royal astrologer from 1668. Exiled to Egypt on death of Mehmed IV in 1687. Mevlevi şeyh in Mecca from 1694, then in Medina. Died in Mecca.
Murad Efendi (Franz von Werner) Born Vienna 1836, died The Hague 1881. Writer, diplomat. Around 1854 escaped to the Ottoman empire, served in Ottoman army and went into diplomatic service.

Naima (Mustafa Naima Efendi) Born Aleppo 1655, died 1715. From janissary family. To Istanbul in the 1680s, and into palace service. c.1702 became court historian.

Navagero, Bernardo Venetian ambassador to Istanbul 1549–53.

Nedim (1681–1730) One of the most famous Ottoman poets, court poet of Ahmed III.

Nicolay, Nicolas de (1517–83) Accompanied the French ambassador to Istanbul in 1551.

Oğulukyan, Georg Armenian from Istanbul. Worked in the mint and had close contacts with people in the palace. Wrote an account of the events of 1806–10.

Orga, İrfan Born Istanbul 1908, died UK 1970. Writer and novelist. Wrote biographical work about his childhood.

Peçevi İbrahim (Peçeylu İbrahim) Born Pec 1574, died Budin 1650. Into army service in 1593; also served in various chancery positions.

Pertusier, Charles (1779–1836) Attached to the French embassy; in Istanbul 1815.

Promontorio, Jacopo de Genoese merchant at the courts of Murad II and Mehmed II.

Quiclet, M. Travelled to Istanbul 1657. His account of Istanbul was published in 1664, after his death.


Roe, Sir Thomas English ambassador to Istanbul 1621–29.


Safvet Ziya Born Istanbul 1875, died Istanbul 1929. Playwright, novelist and short story writer; worked in the foreign ministry.


Sanderson, John (1560–1627) English merchant, attached to the English embassy in Istanbul 1584; returned to Istanbul 1592–97, and was sent to Istanbul again in 1599 as consul and treasurer. Left 1601.

Sandys, George (1578–1644) Writer and traveller, in Istanbul in 1610.
Santa Croce, Aurelio In Istanbul with Venetian ambassador Marcantonio Barbaro, 1567–73.

Schweigger, Salomon (1551–1622) German Protestant priest attached to the Habsburg embassy 1578–81.

Selaniki Mustafa Efendi Held various important positions, including high office in the chancery, and attended various campaigns. Author of detailed history from 1563 to 1600.

Şerfeddin Mağmuni Born Istanbul 1869, died Cairo 1927. Doctor and founding member of the Committee of Union and Progress. Spent some years under Abdülhamid II in exile, first in Paris, and from 1901 in Cairo. Returned briefly to Istanbul in 1908, but then went back to Cairo.

Seyid Vehbi Died 1736. Important poet during the reign of Ahmed III.

Simavi, Lütfi Chief secretary of Mehmed V, 1909–12 and of Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin), 1918–19.


Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi Died 1657/58. Close to Murad IV, and served Ibrahim and Mehmed VI. Author of an Ottoman history to 1657.

Spandounes, Theodore (Teodoro Spandugino) Born probably in Venice, died post 1538. He was sent as a young boy to live with his great-aunt Mara, widow of Murad II, in Macedonia. Seems to have visited Istanbul in 1503.


Spon, Jacob (1647–85) French doctor, travelled with Sir George Wheler in the Levant 1675–76.

Tacizade Cafer Çelebi Executed 1515. Poet and writer. Held various high government positions during the reigns of Bayezid II and Selim I.


Tanpınar, Ahmet Hamdi Born Istanbul 1901, died Istanbul 1962. Well-known writer and literary historian of the early Turkish Republic.

Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste (1605–89) French traveller, in Istanbul 1631–32.

Tevfik Fikret Born Istanbul 1867, died Istanbul 1915. Famous poet, journalist, thinker.


Tokgöz, Ahmet Ihsan Born Erzurum 1868, died İzmit 1947. Publisher, writer, translator, owner of Servet-i Fünun.
Topçular Katibi Abdülkadir Efendi Active late sixteenth/first half of seventeenth century. A janissary; wrote a contemporary history.

Tournefort, Joseph Pitton de (1656–1708) French botanist; in Istanbul 1701.

Tursun Bey Born after 1425, died after 1491. Chancery official during Mehmed II’s reign.

Ubicini, Jean Henri Abdonlyme (1818–84) French political writer and historian; in Istanbul in 1848.

al-‘Umari (1300–84) Arab chronicler; wrote history, including section on Anatolia.

Wheler, Sir George (1650–1723) English botanist, travelled with Jacob Spon in the Levant 1675–76.

Wratislaw, Baron Wenzel (Vratislav Václav von Mitrović) (1576–1635). In Istanbul with the Habsburg embassy 1591.


Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi Born Edirne towards the end of the 1660s, died Cyprus 1732. A janissary, he then went into the upper echelons of government, undertook diplomatic missions, and was Ottoman ambas- sador to France 1720–21.

Zarifi, Yorgo L. Born Istanbul 1881, died Athens 1943. Grandson of Yorgo Zarifi; known as the banker of Abdülhamid II.
1 Istanbul and its environs
2 Locations within the city