

BOOK REVIEWS

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GERBER, HAIM. *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder (Colorado); Mansell Publishing Ltd, London 1987. vii, 223 pp. £ 26.50.

Haim Gerber's *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* represents one of the most recent and commendable attempts at introducing sociological theory into the area of Middle Eastern studies. As such it is an elaborate and sophisticated, complex and yet oversimplified attempt to place the Middle East, especially its Ottoman origins into the theoretical framework offered by Barrington Moore.

In his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Moore identified three major routes of modernization, one of which was most likely to occur in vast agrarian empires with huge peasant populations. In such structures, a large peasantry and a "weak impulse" toward modernization lead, in the long run, to peasant based revolutions and to the concomitant communist states. The Chinese and Russian Empires are prime examples of such developments in the modern world. Although the major socioagrarian empire of the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire

shared similar characteristics (a large peasant base and a weak impulse toward modernization), it did not follow the route prescribed by Moore. Instead, when it broke apart, at least two different patterns of development emerged. While military regimes took power in some of the regions democracies were established in Turkey and Lebanon. Gerber sets out to explain the differential development of the Middle East through this interesting comparative question.

According to Gerber, the system of small peasant based agriculture is the main reason why the Middle East experienced little agrarian tension and failed to follow the path of Russia and China in their peasant revolts. He argues that the Ottoman state's attempts at keeping the land regime one of small independent peasant holders, limited the formation of large estates on which peasant exploitation could have, in the long run, heated the agrarian class relations. The major change in the agrarian system, the land law of 1858, by recognizing private ownership of land cleared the way for large estate formation. Yet, the phenomenon did not take hold everywhere in the Middle East since small scale peasant ownership continued to be the rule in Anatolia and Palestine. Even in these areas, when large estates developed, they did so by encroaching on uninhabited wasteland, thereby leaving most peasant tenures untouched. In the areas where large landlordism took hold (Iraq, Syria) small peasant revolts did occur, although not significant enough to bring about large scale change.

The thesis then hinges on the careful analysis of the Ottoman land system, the identification of small independent ownership of land and the changes subsequent to the Land Law of 1858. While Gerber has to explain the absence of major peasant revolts for large portions of the empire, he also faces the task of explaining the military takeover of these agrarian societies as well as the little importance communist ideology played in Middle Eastern developments.

In the unfolding of his thesis Gerber starts with a description of the classical Ottoman land regime (Chapter 2), and proceeds to analyze its 17th century variant through archival documentation based on the western Anatolian region of Bursa (Chapter 3). Here, he carefully details the land structure of the Bursa region focusing on the prevalence of small peasant holdings. While this chapter is much more area specific, the following chapter is based on a medley of secondary information derived from various regions. It surveys the land structure of the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, dismissing arguments on the establishment of landed estates to maintain that the Ottoman Empire had a land regime of independent small holders with relatively free and autonomous villages. Chapter 5 introduces the Ottoman Land Law of 1858, while Chapter 6 sorts out its differential impact on the various regions of the empire. While in Iraq and Syria especially, the Land Law provided tribal leaders and city dwellers with the prospect of acquiring landed estates, in Anatolia and Palestine it reinforced the already existing smaller scale arrangements. In the grand finale, Gerber using the frameworks developed by Moore and Skocpol demonstrates that the Ottoman Empire did not go through an industrial revolution in the English mode, and furthermore, it did not resemble China and Russia in their long tradition of large estates with an exploited peasantry, therefore, by-passing large-scale peasant revolts. In the argument, the absence of a strong land owning class is further tied to the establishment of the military drawn from the lower classes and therefore sympathetic to the demands of the latter.

The summarized project is bold and is bound to encourage scholars in the direction of large scale comparative work. Yet certain basic problems remain and have to be dealt with. A series of assumptions of primary importance which are liable to generate debate have to do with issues of land use and land ownership which relate directly to such relevant questions as land-holding classes, taxation and rebellion.

At the outset of this book, Gerber asserts that we should not pay too much attention to the question of landownership but rather focus on access to land (p. 14). Those who effectively have access to the land, use it and pass it on to the next generation are, for him, the *de facto* owners of the land. This obviously focuses the attention on the peasantry, thereby practically excluding the prebendal landholding class which lives off the revenues of the land. The relatively little importance given to this class seems to be further understood in the context of the documentary evidence for Bursa which indicates that such landholding patterns were scarce. Some concern should be voiced with respect to the case and the data used. Although the evidence the author has gathered for Bursa is extraordinary, the area does not seem to be representative of most of Anatolia, not even western Anatolia. Neither the strong relationship between town and country, nor the absence of large numbers of timars are replicated in the rest of western Anatolia. Furthermore, I suspect that had the author used a wider variety of archival registers he would have encountered more timars. Theoretically speaking, despite the rotation system of tenure which hindered the development of strong patron-client relations and the establishment of a secure base for the landholders, the timar officials represented the backbone of the traditional system of landtenure. They lived in the villages, collected taxes and engaged in various sorts of administrative and policing functions and therefore cannot be dismissed from the land use-land ownership equation. Similarly, especially for the later period (18th and 19th centuries), the rise of tax-farming and a class of powerful local notables is not given full weight. As such, Gerber pays relatively little attention to this class of actors who may not have owned land, or may have lacked the ability to transfer land to their sons and yet entered into daily contact with the peasantry, collected taxes from them and even (especially as in the case of local notables) enriched themselves at the expense of the peasantry. In the same context, Gerber wants to exclude taxation from the balance of factors altering Middle East society. This serves a few purposes. It helps him brush aside the issue lightly to assert the "democratic" nature of taxation (p. 41) and establish the Ottoman landtenure system as a benevolent subsistence one with no overwhelming agrarian tensions. It focuses attention on the Land Law primarily as the agent of change. Finally, it differentiates the Ottoman Empire from China and Russia where exploitation of the peasantry by a well established landlord class was the main reason for revolt. In fact, it is true that the Ottoman Empire did not experience peasant revolts. However, the lack of rebellion has very little to do with the lack of exploitation. For Gerber the lack of a class of well established landowners who exploited the peasantry primarily for commercial reasons and little peasant communal solidarity represent the key to why rebellions did not occur. However, it has been shown that in the Ottoman Empire taxation was the main mechanism of exploitation and the peasant's inability to pay their dues to the state, the provincial officials and the various notables had substantially risen the tensions on land starting in the 16th century. Therefore it is

not the lack of exploitation, but rather a series of other mechanisms dealing with the peculiar relationship between the state, the land-holders and the peasantry that might help to explain why Ottoman peasants did not rebel. For example, it was shown that for 17th century western Anatolia it was the peculiar structure of provincial relations and the effects of state actions on this structure that determined peasant collective action. Gerber's attention to the village community fits in directly with this concern. However, the key to an adequate understanding of the peculiar development of the Middle East seems to require further work directed toward the structure of Ottoman agrarian society with emphasis on how state decisions and state actions filtered through the agrarian structure, creating diverse interests, conflicts, and being worked and reworked through the networks of provincial society.

Karen Barkey

BEECHER, JONATHAN. Charles Fourier. The Visionary and His World. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1987. xvii, 601 pp. Ill. \$ 49.50.

The only other study of the life and work of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837) comparable in scope to this comprehensive monograph by Jonathan Beecher is that by the Soviet historian I. I. Zilberfarb, *Sotsial'naya Filosofiya Sharlia Furiye* (Moscow, 1964). The merit of this study is doubtless that it will make Fourier better known in the English-speaking world.

For his sources the author drew not only on Fourier's complete works (*Œuvres complètes*, 12 volumes, 1966-68) and the standard biography by Charles Pellarin, published in 1843; he also consulted a large number of hitherto neglected newspaper articles and above all manuscripts by Fourier and his followers stored in the French national archives in Paris. The study was partly financed with various grants from American and French institutes and was twenty years in the making (it is described, somewhat embarrassingly, as "my climb up 'Mount Fourier'" by the author). But, it must be said, one wonders whether the result matches the effort. Beecher describes his methodology as "kaleidoscopic" (p. 11), that is, his concern is to depict Fourier in relation to "his world", the "context" of his life and thought, and the various "milieus" that influenced him (pp. xv, 6). But it would be wrong to expect from this a socially and historically oriented approach: Beecher neglects this aspect, his analysis follows his biographical interest. Accordingly, the first part of the book deals with the life of the "provincial autodidact" and unappreciated author of the *Théorie des quatre mouvements* until the completion of the great *Traité de l'association domestique-agricole* in 1822; and the third part deals with the period of the "Parisian prophet" (considered by Beecher one of theoretical decline), which saw the publication of the *Nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire* and rise of fourierism as a movement. These two biographical chapters are meticulously researched and offer new information on Fourier's life and work, although some of the cited details do not seem particularly relevant.