

Epilogue

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The contributions to this volume demonstrate the important strides recently taken by the field of labor history in both Ottoman and post-Ottoman studies. In common with history writing generally, the number of Middle East labor history practitioners researching on an ever wider scope of topics increased significantly. Topics merely touched upon by researchers back in the 1970s and 1980s, including this writer, have emerged as subjects of study in their own right. The authors in this volume have performed many important services, not only for labor history but for social and political studies as well. And so much of the following discussion highlights their achievements in the hopes of guiding and encouraging additional research.

Their overall insistence upon workers as agents in their own right and not pliable and hapless tools of the state underscores a growing trend among Ottomanists in general. For some years now, they have increasingly demanded an alternative to viewing the state as the exclusive focus of academic attention and the agent of virtually all change. Rather, their research has demonstrated the presence of actors and agents independent of and sometimes oppositional to the state. These individuals and groups shaped events and policies and redirected history. That is, to understand why the government adopted a particular piece of legislation, scholars now understand that multiple actors including workers and peasants played roles, often crucial ones. Increasingly, state-worship is being abandoned but much work remains.

More specific to labor history are the authors' critiques of institutions as the main or sole repositories of action and change. Here institutions include labor unions, syndicates and guilds. While, obviously, these often centered workers' lives, more recent scholarship has also correctly looked elsewhere for the dynamics that explain labor activism or its absence. Markers for more powerful representations of labor might, but do not necessarily, include such unions and guilds. Also, as several authors indicate, households formed truly crucial sites for workers. Obviously, they provided locales of production, both waged and non-waged. And, they were places of economic and non-material support for porters,

boatmen, miners, peddlers and manufacturers who remained simultaneously tied to and identified with their households and their worksites.

Similarly, the absence of socialist and other progressive organizations does not preclude the presence of activist workers struggling against capital and/or the state. And yet, I need to say, workers' history does not require activist workers engaged in visible struggles. That is, workers' history is valid, vibrant and alive even when they simply working or resting from their labors at home or elsewhere.

The article on Ottoman workers abroad is remarkable not least for the light it may shed on intercommunal labor relations in the homeland. First of all, there is the simple fact of Ottoman Muslims, and not only Christians, working abroad. In addition, there are wonderful comparative history opportunities here. How did the presence of so many other ethnic groups in these Massachusetts towns impact relations between Ottoman Muslims and Christians? What light does the nature of these relationships abroad shed on interactions at home?

Furthermore, the occupational patterns of these sojourners could readily be instrumental in exploring the still exciting topic of the so-called ethnic division of labor. On this topic, the article on the Istanbul fez factory also is quite useful. It demonstrates, e.g., the inconsistent role of government policies in shaping the labor force. This case shows the state blocking Muslim women's and non-Muslim men's entry into the fez factory work and promoting the hiring of non-Muslim women and Muslim men. My own research earlier demonstrated how the state alternately favored Muslims, Christians, then Muslims, and finally Christians again in recruiting the porters of the imperial capital.¹ The main lesson for historians is not the enduring alliance of one particular group with the state, but rather the shifting alliance as governments and groups made different choices over time.

Furthermore, as several of the articles illustrate, regional alliances or, as I would put it, chain migrations, rather than innate aptitudes explain the presence of a particular group at a worksite. Such studies are providing a firm foundation for building an empire-wide profile of the ethnic, regional, and religious character of labor and the absence of empire-wide patterns.

The tobacco factory article centers gender as a tool of analysis, a perspective gravely missing from many, nay most, Middle East labor histories, and from that area's historiography in general. We should not leave gender studies to our female compatriots. This article also fruitfully discusses both

1. See my "Labor Policies and Politics in the Ottoman Empire: Porters and the Sublime Porte 1826–1896", in Heath W. Lowry and Donald Quataert (eds), *Humanist and Scholar: Essays in Honor of Andreas Tietze* (Istanbul, 1993), pp. 59–69.

the usefulness and shortfalls of photographs in labor history. While photographers mainly focused on elites and their monuments, there is a great abundance of such visual materials waiting for labor historians. Proud governments, factory and mine owners alike recorded their own accomplishments and often, incidentally in their minds, captured workers as well. Historians need to be creative in searching out such materials and in digging for photographs still held by families, unions or guilds.²

The article on the compulsory labor of the Zonguldak coalfield is valuable for two distinct reasons. First, it provides a quite vivid and powerful description of working conditions. And, it lucidly traces the role of the grassroots in social, economic, and political change. While the Turkish state described in this article often flexed its power, the worker-villagers continued to create areas of autonomous action. The research also demonstrates the non-linear nature of labor history – how coerced labor coexists with wage labor and is a regular feature of modern capitalism. While this is hardly a surprise to modern researchers, it is noteworthy, nonetheless, for the light it sheds on the flexible nature of labor, capital, and the state. It bears repeating that there is no single outcome along the path to industrialization or labor formation in the modern era.

The fine piece on state enterprise workers similarly adds to the mounting body of evidence about workers' successes in improving laboring conditions when confronted with a neglectful and often abusive state. Indeed, this article frontally assaults the lingering optimism that still prevails among Turkish specialists when they view the republican state. Their views of positive and benevolent state agency stand at striking odds with their colleagues in Iran and the Arab lands – and for that matter in the wider world – who are far more suspicious of government interventions. Indeed the rosy republican world view is intricately intertwined with an Ottomanist historiography that thankfully knelt before a kindly state offering justice and protection to its loyal subjects. Instead, the Ottoman and Turkish, as well as the modern Egyptian, Iranian, Israeli, and Bulgarian states, to randomly name a few, could and did act brutally when deemed necessary. While this statement will surprise few outside Ottoman and Turkish studies, it does reflect an uncommon view in these fields of inquiry.

The article on department stores has an importance beyond its truly fascinating subject. How can one not be compelled by the picture of children making umbrellas in the attic workshops of the stores? This image, I insist, is as much a part of Ottoman history as the Battle of Plevna. I find the article significant also for its caution about the value of

2. The following contain many pictures of Middle East workers, c.1850–1950: <http://bingiwas.binghamton.edu/~ottmiddl/>; <http://bingweb.binghamton.edu/~coal/index.htm>

data. The author, on the one hand, extracted such data from the primary sources to construct a vivid picture of department store employees. On the other, the author warns us that entire categories of store workers – porters and the umbrella makers – are *not* so recorded and thus are absent from the written record but not from the workplace. Thus, researchers must balance their desire for the certainty of statistics with the uncertainty that much history can never be quantified but is nevertheless important and real.

And finally, the research on newspapers offers fine insights into the non-material factors involved in class formation. The author is correct in stressing the role of the print media that, for the first time, offered a place to present workers' issues and concerns. Even in a political environment, republican Turkey during the 1940s and 1950s, that was very hostile to workers, the presence of a forum for the (partial) expression of their views played a vital role in their promotion and development.

But it is important to note that generally lacking in this collection are studies of workers in non-centralized sites. By definition these workers are scattered, in both urban and rural areas, and are hence difficult to investigate. But, historically and at the present time, home and small workshop workers remain significant in numbers and economic importance. Factory labor is indeed important and became more so over time but we cannot neglect the less visible workers in the smaller worksites.

Notably, the article on the Zonguldak coalfield provides an exceptionally vivid example of the powerful Ottoman heritage persisting in the modern Middle East. Such an approach – linking the post-Ottoman and Ottoman eras – goes begging in the Balkan and Arab regions, at least partly because of a lack of scholarly interest among, e.g., Arabs, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Turks. Nation-state ideology has prevented too many from seeing the reality of the connections between the Ottoman Empire and the successor states including Syria, Egypt, Bulgaria, and Greece, and not merely Turkey. These states may be new in their nationalist ideologies but their labor formations have far deeper historical roots and owe much to the Ottoman past. As labor historians, we have a particularly rich opportunity to reconnect these histories. And, there is a side benefit – a fuller appreciation of the links and continuities will help us to understand the ruptures when they are present.

The present volume, for all its many contributions to Ottoman labor history, lacks a truly Ottomanist dimension. On the one hand, it is unfair to level such a criticism when the specified intent was to produce a collection of essays presenting Ottoman and republican Turkish labor history. But by neglecting the European and Arab provinces, the editors are promoting, despite their expressed intentions, the ongoing trend to consider Turkey as the “real” Ottoman successor state. My caution comes at a crucial time. In modern Turkey and elsewhere, large numbers of

scholarly and popular writers are insisting, often implicitly, that Turkey and the Ottoman Empire are one and the same entity. We must resist this, for to do otherwise is to falsify history. As the editors and authors of this volume know, the Ottoman Empire was a rich multi-ethnic, multi-national entity until the day it disappeared from the earth. And so we professional historians must insist on retaining the broader perspective. Thus, even though it is often difficult to locate scholars of the Balkan provinces for conferences, we must work doubly hard to do so. Historians of the Ottoman Arab provinces, on the other hand, are both abundant and productive. Indeed, these historians have produced some of the best Ottomanist scholarship and we ignore them at our peril.