

KASABA, REŞAT. *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees*. [Studies in Modernity and National Identity.] University of Washington Press, Seattle [etc.] 2009. x, 194 pp. \$70.00. (Paper \$30.00.); doi:10.1017/S0020859010000350

This recent publication is the latest contribution in the series “Studies in Modernity and National Identity” edited by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba. The book provides a thematic perspective of the history of the Ottoman Empire, one of the extremely long-lived polities of the Mediterranean basin. The fact that the Ottoman Empire survived the turmoil of more than half a millennium makes its history a challenging subject of enquiry, especially in relation to migration. Kasaba takes up this challenge, but instead of limiting his scope to a narrow period or focusing on a limited geography, he aims to cover the eventful history of the Ottoman Empire of approximately seven centuries in three continents from the perspective of migration.

This is a timely undertaking since, with its global entanglements, migration history recently reached a critical mass, upon which monographs on time- and location-specific histories of migration or migration histories can be more easily written than earlier. A recent issue of the present journal (52:1 (2007)) and a brand new contribution on the subject are good examples of the level and depth of the scholarship achieved by studies on the history of migration.¹ Kasaba did not, however, benefit from this scholarship to the extent that he could have. In his chronologically well-structured study he does not situate his own work in this new literature.

In his brief but helpful introductory chapter he provides details of the structure of the book and makes almost exclusive use of literature on Ottoman history; the exceptions to this do not include the most recent scholarship on nomads, migrants, and refugees. One important point he addresses in this respect is the understanding of tribes and people on the move not necessarily as remnants of an early or less developed stage of human history but as “a constantly changing, integral part of the modern world” (p. 7). In the following four chapters he narrates Ottoman history from its early beginnings until its end through an axis of migratory people.

The second chapter covers early Ottoman history from its beginnings in the fourteenth until the end of the sixteenth centuries. For this period Kasaba identifies Ottoman society as one of fluidity and indeterminacy. Its characteristics, he claims, served well the purposes of consolidation or could have been instrumentalized by the central administration of the empire for such consolidation. In the third chapter he argues that the Ottoman centre’s perspective on its migratory population shifted and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the central administration regarded nomads and migrants as a liability and struggled to settle them. In the fourth chapter the author argues that the Ottoman state pursued a sedentarization policy, with limited success, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Interestingly, in the fifth and final chapter he does not provide the reader with a conclusion but continues to cover major changes in Ottoman/Turkish demography in the twentieth century: the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, World War I, the uprooting and mass killings of the Armenian population of Anatolia in 1915, and the mandatory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1924.

1. Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, and Patrick Manning (eds), *Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden, 2010).

The periodization and subsequent chronological sequence the author has elected to follow accord with the well-established rejection of the decline paradigm in Ottoman historiography. Historians of the Ottoman Empire no longer follow such a trajectory of rise, apex, and fall of the empire which has been a by-product of modernist historical writing. Yet in his narrative Kasaba relies heavily on secondary literature and, through this literature, indirect use of Ottoman official sources. Although he also makes use of documents from British archives, those documents are very limited in number and cover only the nineteenth century. Heavy reliance on documents from state archives is a central problem in Ottoman historiography, and one for which no easy solution can be found, especially for a general study on migration covering the whole lifespan of the Ottoman Empire.

An eminent scholar such as Kasaba is definitely aware of this shortcoming, yet he does not address the issue of the state-centred perspective in his book. One of the drawbacks of the heavy representation of the Ottoman central administration in the book – stemming either from the analysis of the documentation produced by its bureaucracy or from the reading of the secondary literature based upon that same documentation – is the rigid representation of the state apparatus as benefiting from, refraining from, or settling migratory parts of the population throughout the centuries. Neither the people on the move nor the political entity juxtaposed alongside them remained monolithic in the long period that Kasaba analyses. The book, however, ascribes a certain continuity to the Ottoman administration in its efforts to contain movement.

This study certainly provides the general or non-specialist readership with a new perspective on Ottoman history. In this regard it is a welcome contribution, at the intersection of migration studies and Ottoman history. It is lucidly written, and includes two well-prepared maps giving the geographical information necessary to the general reader. The extensive references offer suggestions for further reading. In this respect it is a useful source for introducing Ottoman history to non-specialists. Nevertheless, for specialists in the field of the history of migration or the Ottoman Empire the study has some limitations.

Historians specializing in migration who would like to identify time- and location-specific patterns of Ottoman migration might find the chronological narrative of the book somewhat problematic. Since Kasaba does not discuss the differences between nomads, migrants, and refugees in the Ottoman context, it can be difficult for non-Ottomanists to assign particularities to subgroups of the migrating Ottoman population over the centuries. At the same time, for historians of the Ottoman Empire, the book does not attempt to link the new literature on migration with Ottoman history. Nor does it utilize newly accessible sources at the Ottoman state archives. As noted earlier, such documentation has the obvious disadvantage of over-representing the role of the Ottoman central administration in the process of movement within the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, thanks to continuing efforts to catalogue the state archives in Istanbul, especially in the past two decades, access to documentation has improved to such an extent that a monograph on migration should include some of those new collections, at least for the nineteenth century. One last remark regarding the secondary literature drawn on in the book is that in some cases the author could have accessed the quoted sources directly instead of using indirect references.

This book has taken up the challenge of combining the history of migration and Ottoman history, two fields of academic inquiry which have hitherto not been connected. It should be seen as a first step along a new and promising avenue of research.

M. Erdem Kabadayi