



Olivier Bouquet, *Les Pachas du sultan : Essai sur les agents supérieurs de l'État ottoman (1839-1909)*

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- 1 'All the Sultan's men...', to paraphrase the old nursery rhyme, might be a fitting epithet for that class of senior government officials who embodied Ottoman statesmanship in the long nineteenth century before the Empire's demise. Olivier Bouquet has produced a remarkable portrait of this class, analyzing the Ottoman pasha both as an individual career bureaucrat and as an exponent of the late Empire's political culture. While focusing on the Tanzimat and the reign of Abdülhamid –itself an innovative junction of two periods which are often treated separately in this regard–Bouquet succeeds in situating the specific evolution of the pashas' role within a continuum of Ottoman and Turkish republican administration, on the one hand, and in the wider framework of profound social change throughout the 'Well-protected Domains,' on the other. In consequence this book not only makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the most central of Ottoman imperial institutions, but will be required reading for anyone concerned with Ottoman provincial history as well.
- 2 The core of Bouquet's study is a systematic investigation of 282 pasha-grade bureaucrats noted in the *Sicill-i AhvalDefterleri* [Register books of the conditions (of state employees)], a collection of over 50,000 professional career records compiled by the *Sicill-i Ahval Komisyonu* beginning in 1879 with a view to rationalizing the appointment process to government posts. In the past these records have been used as a source for the lives of certain individuals; Bouquet, however, has used his sample to assemble a larger, composite picture of the typical late-Ottoman pasha, his family and social background, his education and means of promotion, and finally his career in the uppermost echelons of Ottoman state service. The main study is preceded by two introductory chapters on the image of the pasha in western and Turkish literature and

on the *Sicill-i Ahval* as a historical source. If the term 'pasha' had been widely used for high-ranking commanders in previous centuries, it is with the reforms of 1830 that it became the sole title attributed to both the senior military and civilian dignitaries of the Empire. As the fez-wearing personification of the reform era, the pasha came to symbolize oriental indolence and degeneracy in the European imagination as much as progress and industry in contemporary Turkish writing. The *Sicill-i Ahval* represents the first attempt by the Ottoman state to survey its functionary corps; in chapter two Bouquet provides a detailed history of the census Commission's work and the constitution of the archival records that constitute the primary source for his study. The *Sicill* records both the transcription of a questionnaire filled out by the employee [*tescil*] and additions made in the course of his career [*tezyil*]. Bouquet's discussion of the semantics of this process may appear a little abstract, but serves his argument that the corpus is an excellent source not only for the lives of individual subjects but for the social history of the group as a whole. It also represents an important step in the development of an autobiographical genre in the Ottoman Empire, the state official being asked to narrate the significant events of his career and thus becoming in a certain sense a historian of the reform period (pp. 102-103).

- 3 Chapter three investigates which ranks in the civilian and military hierarchy received the pasha title, after 1830, and by what means officials were typically promoted to these ranks. This part of the study is based on an exhaustive statistical analysis of the 282 careers in the sample, presented in twenty tables and numerous more unnumbered tabulations, but the real strength of Bouquet's argument is to show that there was both an overall logic and a significant degree of variation in an individual's progression through the echelons of office. Most of those who were made pasha belonged to the *mülkiye*, the civilian administration emblematic of the Tanzimat era, but many civil officials in turn had been recruited from the military. The oft-invoked distinction between the *mülkiye* and *askeriye* was in fact more institutional than it was functional, and many had belonged to intermediate categories such as the gendarmerie or were scions of provincial notable dynasties co-opted into the state bureaucracy. Promotion through the army hierarchy was more tightly controlled but military pashas eventually wound up with a broader experience of authority, a contributing factor, the author surmises, to the 1908 revolution and the shift to the republican regime after 1918. The pashas of the Ottoman Empire did not form a uniform corps, their individual loyalty to the sultan outweighing their professional class solidarity, but the demonstrable regularity of their career paths (as opposed to the personal favouritism often invoked by European observers) and the fixed scales of pay, promotion and service medal applied to entitled pashas suggests that they must be treated as a coherent group.
- 4 The pasha's social background and its role in his career is the subject of chapter four. Over half of those in the sample had fathers who had been functionaries as well, suggesting there was indeed such a thing as a service aristocracy and a '*culture d'État*' among the leading families of the Empire. While the state sought to ensure the possibility of upwardly mobile recruitment, social reproduction and securing the loyalty of its elites were equally important. Many of the youths destined for a career went to ordinary neighbourhood schools, but also benefited from private tutors or confessional schools. The *Mülkiye* [school of civilian administration] and the *Harbiye* [military college] were the most common choices for higher education, but some also continued their course abroad. The pashas, according to Bouquet, belonged to a generation in between 'traditional' and 'modern' modes of learning; despite the

growing importance of Tanzimat-era schools, many acquired their concrete secretarial and language skills on the job. The average pasha spoke one other language in addition to Turkish, especially if he was of a provincial background, whereby the classical languages Arabic and Persian and Greek as a regional administrative idiom were predominant. Significantly, the importance of French, which is often described as the language of Ottoman reformism, has according to Bouquet's research been largely overstated.

- 5 The fifth and final chapter looks at the pasha's career once he had attained the title, which typically occurred after many years of service and, with the exception of those few who went on to be named 'vezir', represented the pinnacle of his professional stature. Even at this highest level there are still significant differences between individual pashas' fortunes: the most successful were those who began or established their career in Istanbul, the ineluctable centre of power and patronage. The protection of one's father or another benefactor played a key role in securing promotions and service distinctions. The pasha's social background was often his social capital; while there were enough provincial government posts in the Tanzimat period to accommodate most local aspirants to high-level office, elite circulation tended only to occur in the direction of Istanbul—one more reason, according to Bouquet, for the Empire's gradual loss of knowledge and power over the provinces. The typical post awarded to a pasha, the *sancak* governorship, was often terminal: candidates for *vali*-governorships, embassies and other high-level posts in the central administration were drawn from an inner circle of officials, while provincial posts especially in the Arab region were often left to *de facto* dynasties of locally based notables late into the nineteenth century. Neither personal disgrace, retirement or death would rupture the bond of loyalty tying the pasha and his family to the Ottoman sultanate; the title and status would not be abolished before 1934 by a man who, one is too easily wont to forget, had himself begun his extraordinary career as a pasha of the sultan.
- 6 Much of this study's appeal is its crossover quality. Bouquet breaks new ground in the use of administrative sources for social and cultural history, all the while remaining firmly anchored in the major contributions of Carter Findley, François Georgeon and others for this period. His work focuses squarely on the central Ottoman state, but he is far more sensitive to, and creative in, the use of evidence from the Empire's provinces than most historians. And, in addition to being elegantly written, it is theoretically informed but source-driven; instances where the discussion of narrative structures, linguistic discourse or Ottoman terminology veers into the pedantic are few. Perhaps the biggest criticism one can level at this book concerns the typesetting: The hierarchy of subtitles is sometimes inconsistent, and particularly in the first half there are frequent changes of font size and line spacing, while individual paragraphs are occasionally set within a black frame. These do not correspond to particular digressions or any other clear logic, and thus only interrupt the flow of reading. But that is a minor irritation, and will not detract from the fact that this is Ottoman administrative history at its most riveting.

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