
Picknick mit den Paschas: Aleppo und die levantinische Handelsfirma Fratelli Poche (1853-1880)

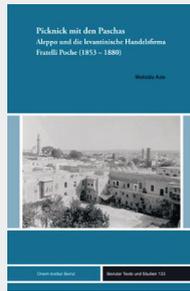
By Mafalda Ade

Beirut and Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2013, 261 pages, ISBN 9783899139631.

Reviewed by Metin Atmaca

STUDIES ON THE Europeans who lived in the Ottoman Empire have been mostly conducted through the Ottoman and European state archives. Few works on the social history are based on private papers, such as Beshara Doumani's work, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). As scholars of the Ottoman social history focus on the ethnic and religious minorities, foreigners, merchants, peasants, and women, such archives have become more precious than ever in order to reconstruct the story of understudied subjects. Ade's book takes its power from this background, as she skillfully uses the private archives of Poche and Marcopoli families, which were discovered in the 1990s. Comprised of two separate folios, the trade firms of both families kept chronologically archived accounting books, daily payments, warehouse books, and deadline records of payments from 1853 until 1921. Apart from family papers, there are memoirs, the archives of European vice-consulates, accounting and trade books, and documents from state archives in Aleppo, Istanbul, Paris and Nantes.

After the Ottomans took over Aleppo, the city became a trade terminus for the mercantile coming from the Asia and a maritime link for European merchants. In a few de-



acades time, most European consular representations and trade companies moved their centers from Damascus and Tripoli to Aleppo, which became the third largest urban center in the Ottoman realm after Istanbul and Cairo. Aleppo was not only in the middle of the empire but also a major city in the

Arab territories on the cultural boundary of the Turkish and Arab population, which was made up of Kurds, Arabs, Turks, Christians, Jews and Bedouins. The city kept its status as one of the most active trade centers in the Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire until late 19th century.

Established with this background, this work focuses on the business career of the Marcopoli and Poche families in Aleppo during the second half of 19th century, when the effects of the Tanzimat reforms were felt more in the provinces. These reforms brought new regulations for foreign tradesmen as well as their Muslim and non-Muslim partners. Through the story of the Poche and Marcopoli families in Aleppo and other cities in the region, Ade examines the practice of these trade law regulations and the representation of Europeans in the newly established commercial and mixed courts.

The book is divided into three parts. It took some time for European tradesmen to create a trade network and become familiar with

the market in the region. The first part, thus, is focused on the relocation of European tradesmen in Aleppo and the formation of a network amongst them. During the early period, Europeans remained part of a separate society and abstained from mixing with the local population. However, in time they were integrated into Aleppine society and started to settle in hans in the city center. The Poche family came in to this milieu of the city in early 19th century. After some time, their European identity evolved through generations and became more settled.

The second part is more focused on the family's trade network in the region. It shows how the trade company of the Poche family from the mid-19th century onwards started to expand its network from Aleppo to the rest of the region, as far as Baghdad, Mosul, Harput, Diyarbekir, Urfa, Maraş, Mersin, Latakia and Homs. The traffic of correspondence from the company to local partners in the region demonstrates in which cities the company was more dominant. Through this communication, one can see what products were more important, i.e., wool from Urfa and yarn from Diyarbekir, and how diverse the local partners (Muslims, Armenian Christians and Jews) were. Ways of dealing with local partners were important for the company in order to retain account stability and transfer of funds. In some places they exchanged European goods with local ones. They also gave small loans to local partners in order to secure the production of goods.

The third and last part of the book, which is the most interesting part, surveys the instruments of payments (Kambiyale: promissory notes; police: bills of exchange) and collecting debts (protesto; emirname: written order, decree). After Tanzimat was declared in 1839, commercial courts were established in 1847

and the trade law (1850-60) became more common in provinces in the Ottoman Middle East. Until this period, European tradesmen employed numerous informal ways to deal with debtors. Once the new law was implemented, formal methods of handling debt were adopted, but the informal methods did not disappear because accounts were not always closed on time. In fact, local partners utilized more informal channels, which worked better for them. Besides, lenders did not always want to go through the court since they did not wish to pay fees. In some cases, when the Poche Company took the legal steps, the debtor would declare bankruptcy. Thus, instead of using such methods which were unsuccessful and tarnished their reputation in the eyes of local partners, they waited for the debtor to improve the situation.

The Poche Company used the power of the European vice-consulates when the trade courts were unable to collect debts. As some Poche-Marcopoli Company members and partners started to work in the consulates, such as Frédéric Poche as the American vice-consular in Aleppo, their company became more prestigious among the elite and the local population. Important posts helped the Poche family deal more formally with local partners and lenders. Despite the position they held, over time the Poche Company applied more frequently to the Ottoman authorities for the collection of their debts as the trade courts became more functional. In the 1870s, informal ways of dealing with debtors were still a dominant issue, but formal methods gradually became more common both among the European and Ottoman tradesmen. During this period, the Poche family put more pressure on Ottoman officials to process the decision of the court. In time, relations between the Poche family and provincial governors became so intimate (as the title suggests) that

family members started to be appointed to court positions.

Ade's work is a great contribution to the history of European tradesmen and their role in reforms in the Middle East during the last period of the Ottoman Empire. The outcome of Tanzimat varied in every province and the progress in each area of administration was different. Therefore, the case taken into consideration here does not reflect the big picture, but presents a well-written case in order to understand the changes in the second half

of the 19th century. For scholars focusing on the effects of reforms, this book presents an excellent case through the story of the Poche family. However, since this work is dominated by the archives of the Poche-Marcopoli family and European vice-consulates, it is limited to the view of Europeans in the Ottoman lands. Therefore, one has to wait for more comparative studies on Ottoman Muslim tradesmen (Hayriye Tüccarları) and European tradesmen (Avrupa Tüccarları) in order to have a better idea of the change and continuity of both groups' status after reforms.

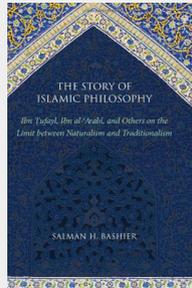
The Story of Islamic Philosophy

By Salman H. Bashier

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012, 197 pages, ISBN 9781438437439.

Reviewed by Sajjad H. Rizvi

YOU CANNOT judge a book by its cover – or even its title. Now and then, a work comes along that forces us to take notice of what the author means by giving his work a particular title. Certainly, those who pick up *The Story of Islamic Philosophy* might expect a conventional history of the philosophical endeavour in the world of Islam, starting with the translation movement and the appropriation of Aristotelianism and ending with the 'eclipse' of 'rational discourse' in medieval mysticism and obscurantism. The study of philosophy in Islam is rather polarised: the traditional academic field of 'Arabic philosophy' starts with the Graeco-Arabica and is very much in the mould of understanding what the Arabs owed to the Greeks and then what the Latins owed the Arabs. This book is a story of Aristotle arabus and then latinus, and hence it is



not surprising that the story culminates with the ultimate Aristotelian, Averroes. Many Arab intellectuals, such as the late Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, have been sympathetic to such readings and wished to revive a sort of Averroist Aristotelianism in the name of reason and enlightenment. In particular, they wished to save the Arab-Islamic heritage from its 'perversion' by the Persians, starting with Avicenna and Ghazālī who initiated the shift from reason and discourse to mystagogy and 'unreason.' The models for this tradition of philosophy are the Metaphysics and the Organon of Aristotle. However, the Greek heritage was always much more than Aristotle – Plato and the thoroughly neoplatonised Aristotle were critical. If anything, a serious historical engagement with the course of philosophy in the late antiquity period, on the cusp of the