

Some Remarks on Problems and Perspectives of Research on
the Social History of Turkey
(19th and 20th Centuries)

1. Social History vs. History of Society

Any synthesis on the social history of Turkey would require a clear understanding of what the term "social history" means. Many people associate with it in the first place the history of social protest and of working class movements. Others, looking at society from the vantage point of an economist, stress the importance of economic developments for social history. Yet another approach in this context, that of the history of "everyday life", of mentality, etc., has increasingly attracted attention during the last decades. Personally, I would favour a concept of social history as has been elaborated upon by Eric J. Hobsbawm in his article "From Social History to the History of Society", *Daedalus* 100 (1971), pp. 20-45. In other words, at least our intent should be to study the history of society as a whole, without abandoning from the outset any sectors of it to specialists only.

2. The Problem of Interdisciplinarity

Such an approach would certainly necessitate close cooperation between researchers in various fields. Apart from historians, sociologists, economists, geographers, anthropologists, etc., come to mind. However, methodological problems of interdisciplinary research have to be taken seriously. I suspect that we all have to do some homework in this field.

3. Empiricism vs. Theoricism

Pragmatically speaking, "empiricism" can be understood as the rather naive expectation that by the sheer accumulation of his sources a historian would be able to find an adequate answer to a significant historiographic question. But it is a commonplace that even the most empiricist scholars start from some theoretic premises, whether they are aware of it or not. At any rate, I do not think that the group assembled here need worry about a possible "empiricist" tendency among its members. It is more likely that rather excessive theorizing will turn out to be the real handicap.

4. The Problem of Comparison

I agree with those colleagues who criticise the positivist tradition in Turkish historiography. The ideological implications of a research strategy that is bent upon proving the uniqueness of this or that aspect of the Ottoman past are well-known. No doubt, the social history of Turkey should be studied on a comparative basis. Yet, I think that none of us would insist on a social history written specifically to make the history of Turkish social formation conform with a given model.

5. The Problem of Periodization

The theme of this symposium suggests a periodization starting with the *tanzimat*. Yet I do not see a good reason for this. Both the commercial treaty of 1838 and the official proclamation of the reform programme are rather meaningless dates used in conventional historiography. If we want to focus on the transition from the Ottoman command economy to the era of free trade, then 1829, the year the Treaty of Adrianople was concluded, is much more meaningful. That year marks not only the emergence of the first nation-state on former Ottoman territory, but also the end of the Ottoman monopoly of Black Sea trade. On the other hand, if we want to focus on the beginning of the reform period, then the rule of Selim III, which also coincides roughly with the French Revolution, would be even more appropriate.

6. Focal Points of Future Research

My own interests suggest the following as some of the themes of research which deserve special attention with respect to the social history of Turkey:

- the demographic structure of the country
- regionalization (see the paper submitted by i. Tekeli)
- communal-confessional relations and ethno-social division of labour
- the *esnaf* and the decay of artisanal production
- land tenure, access to markets and the development of commercial agriculture
- structure and role of trading capital in the commercial centres of the Ottoman Empire
- everyday life in small provincial towns
- concepts of common law in the countryside (blood feud, abduction of the bride and similar practices)
- nationalist ideologies and the formation of the working class movement

(Fikret Adanır / Bochum, September 1988)