

The Impact of Donald Quataert's “History from Below” on Ottoman and Turkish Studies

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This special section of *CSSAAME* is dedicated to the life and work of Professor Donald Quataert, who died in 2011. Quataert was a pioneer of Middle Eastern and Ottoman social and economic history whose work has influenced countless young and senior scholars in these fields. He was also a dedicated advisor and mentor not only to his own students, but to many graduate students and junior scholars throughout his career. Over the course of his long and impressive career, he received numerous awards, convened many conferences and workshops, and published scores of books and articles—all associated with what he termed “history from below”—not only for specialists in his field, but also for general audiences. I now have the distinct honor to follow in his footsteps at Binghamton University and to continue its tradition of Ottoman and Turkish studies, which he was instrumental in founding.

Mainly through the scouring of state archival documents in the Imperial Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, Turkey, Quataert worked to “read between the lines” in order to uncover the neglected voices of average people. Even in his final book, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire* (2006), he wrote that “a clear view of the everyday lives of Ottoman subjects has been an important and elusive goal for me.”¹ In *Miners and the State*, however, Quataert managed to articulate the lives of these coal miners and fit them into a larger context that included the spread of capitalist market relations in the Ottoman Empire, labor movements, modern state construction, and imperial transformation, thus bringing the macro- and microhistorical together in all its nuanced intricacies. Ottoman history, in particular, has been intensely state-centric, and he sought to overcome this tendency and bring societal actors in conversation with broader imperial and global forces. He also worked diligently in bringing other scholars together to collaborate and share their work not only in Ottoman and Turkish studies, but also on broader issues affecting the contemporary Middle East. He published several edited volumes on topics such as consumption studies, economic and social history, manufacturing, workers and peasants, contemporary Syria, and even Turkish studies in the United States.² Additionally, thousands of undergraduates and the general public

1. Quataert, *Miners and the State*, xi.

2. See Quataert, *Consumption Studies*; İnalçık and Quataert, *An Economic and Social History*; Quataert, *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire*; Quataert and Zürcher, *Workers and the Working Class*; Antoun and Quataert, *Syria*; and Quataert and Sayarı, *Turkish Studies*.

continue to be introduced to the world of the late Ottoman Empire through his survey text now in its second edition and translated into several languages, including Turkish, Korean, Arabic, and, recently, Hebrew.³ His works on economic, labor, manufacturing, technological, and social history and his survey of Ottoman history are mainstays in the training of any graduate student who aspires to be a first-rate Ottomanist.⁴

The articles included in this section represent the rich legacy left by Professor Quataert. The first article is a reproduction of his final public lecture given as the Dean's Distinguished Lecture at Binghamton University on 5 November 2010, which is titled "History from Below and the Writing of Ottoman History." The lecture exemplifies Quataert's scholarly and personal philosophy. It also exemplifies the impact he had on the field of Ottoman and Turkish studies in terms of scholarly rigor and a reliance on archival sources. His impact on these fields is no more evident than in the six contributions that follow his own. All are from his most recent doctoral students, and they represent the type of scholarship he encouraged and the mentorship he freely gave to both his undergraduate and graduate students. The subjects range from labor activism to the relationship between landholders and peasants, transhemispheric migration and smuggling, the social politics of road construction, and urban policing and social control to power politics of land tenure and village protest. These articles represent various socioeconomic and ethno-religious groups in the empire, including Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Jews, Muslims, Christians, peasants, pastoral nomads, sharecroppers, merchants, local governmental officials, landowners, and workers. In one way or another, all of the articles in this section bring local, regional, imperial, and international actors and forces together to demonstrate the nuanced intertwined reality of the late Ottoman Empire. Each is meticulously researched, clearly argued, and

firmly anchored in archival and primary sources. This was the mainstay of Quataert's training in social and economic history: archival sources must be at the center of one's work. What is most inspiring about these articles is that while all are rooted in primary sources and social history, all have branched out beyond what Quataert did as a scholar. He encouraged his students to pursue creative and ambitious scholarship on a range of topics outside of his own immediate interests, and even though his strong influence on their methodology and approach to history is clear, he was by no means a stifling mentor or doctoral advisor. If these articles are any indication of what the future holds for the field of Ottoman and Turkish studies, then it is in very good hands.

The one limit to this collection of articles—and to Quataert's own work—is its circumscription to the regions of Ottoman Anatolia and the Balkans. None of the articles here engage the Arab-speaking lands of the Ottoman Empire. (Quataert's scholarship rarely ranged beyond Turkish language sources, but many of his students went beyond this to include Greek and Kurdish.) Instead, they focus mainly on what could still be considered the purview of Turkish studies, albeit expanded beyond the traditional linguistic scope. Needless to say, these articles do engage more than just Turkish-speaking populations of the empire. Ottoman studies is now being reconceptualized to include the entirety of the empire in all its regional, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity. As teleological nationalist narratives break down, the view of Ottoman history as more inclusive of all its populations is encouragingly expanding. These articles clearly demonstrate this, as many of them do utilize multiple languages of the empire both on a local and imperial level. This is the future of Ottoman studies that Quataert envisioned and encouraged his students to embrace, one that incorporates the entirety of the empire in which local and imperial, state

3. See Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*.

4. See Quataert, *Social Disintegration; Manufacturing and Technology Transfer; Ottoman Manufacturing; Workers, Peasants, and Economic Change*; and *Miners and the State*.

and society, and elites and nonelites are studied in conjunction with one another. He also envisioned an Ottoman history that expands into new territories and regions and integrates the empire and its peoples into broader regional and geopolitical contexts. ■■■■

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