




CURATOR'S CORNER

Report on Osark 2022: A Congress Dedicated to Ottoman Studies

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The third meeting of OSARK, an international Ottoman Studies conference founded by members of the Sakarya University History Department, was hosted and coordinated by Istanbul Medeniyet University between September 7 and 9, 2022. It was supported by TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities), the Üsküdar Municipality, and Turkish Airlines.

Since its first meeting, OSARK has sought to develop a holistic model for research on the Ottoman Empire. Unlike the other annual or biannual congresses, OSARK's panels are dedicated exclusively to Ottoman Studies, while also embracing interdisciplinarity and new research tools and techniques. To this end, the congress's third meeting was a multinational and multilingual event that brought together acclaimed Ottomanists from across the globe.

The congress began on the morning of September 7 with opening speeches on this year's theme of empire by the conference chairs: Istanbul Medeniyet University's Selim Karahasanoğlu and İsmail Hakkı Kadı and Sakarya University's Arif Bilgin, the director and the founder of both OSAMER (Center for Ottoman Studies) and OSARK. These were followed by welcome speeches from the dean of Istanbul Medeniyet University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Turhan Kaçar, university rector Gülfettin Çelik, and Üsküdar mayor Hilmi Türkmen. After the welcoming speeches, Özer Ergenç from İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University gave the official opening speech, following which the congress began with its first session of five simultaneous panels.

At the end of the first day of the congress, Virginia H. Aksan gave a keynote speech titled "Translating Ottoman Lives from the Mediterranean to New Eurasia," in which she highlighted the past's role as an ideological tool in political, religious, cultural, and national disputes and the historian's role in adjudicating these disputes. Her speech combined her academic interest in biography (ego-history) and Eurasian geopolitical imagination through the life stories of three well-known and controversial Ottoman figures: Ahmed Resmi (*d.* 1783), Hüsrev Paşa (*d.* 1855), and Ömer Lütfi (*d.* 1871). Each had



various duties both inside and outside the Ottoman Empire and played a role in revolutionizing the Ottoman military, the Ottoman fleet, and later, the whole structure of the army itself. They all had strong relations with the neighboring European and Eastern powers. These Ottoman bureaucrats sought to promote interterritorial exchange and awareness of the connections between Ottoman lands and Europe. Even though their footprint was small, they played a vital role in nineteenth-century Ottoman history, one that should encourage researchers to rethink their understanding of the late Ottoman Empire and to incorporate more life stories into their reflections on the late Ottoman experience.

One distinctive feature of OSARK 2022 was that the executive committee encouraged panel applications on the hot topics of Ottoman studies and curated pre-organized panels on them. This novelty encouraged presenters to position their work in relation to other research in their fields and to broaden their academic horizons by networking with influential scholars in their areas of study. There were 28 of these pre-organized panels in 13 categories.

The first two days of the conference had three panels on Ottoman food culture, chaired by Arif Bilgin, Özge Samancı, and Priscilla Mary Işın. Presenters in these panels tried to decipher Ottoman dietary habits between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries using diverse archival materials. Another trio of panels addressed Ottoman book culture. Chaired by Sami Arslan, Bilgin Aydın, and Ertuğrul İ. Ökten, these panels discussed privately-owned book collections, copy records (*istinsah kaydı*), and diverse archival records (e.g., waqf deeds), as well as some case studies. In addition to these panels, two other sessions on book culture were held. The first, coordinated by Tülay Artan, was on the private collection of a certain Ottoman pasha, Fazıl Ahmed (d. 1676), and dealt with his patronage, copies of the collection's catalog, and its content. In addition, on the third day, Tuğba İsmailoğlu Kaçır chaired a panel on the relationship between book culture and language, with three presentations about the effects of Ottoman Turkish translation efforts on other Turkic languages. A pair of panels dealt with translation studies, and another pair with Ottoman rhetoric. Sadık Yazar and Cemal Demircioğlu coordinated the translation panels. Yazar also chaired one of the panels on rhetoric.

Mustafa Yavuz organized a panel series on the historiography and philosophy of life sciences in the Ottoman Empire. These panels, three in total, included thirteen presentations on diverse topics and case studies. These illuminated how the Ottomans combatted contagious and agricultural diseases, how they understood the relationship between nature and illness, and the topics of psychological diseases, wild animals, and Ottoman texts on medicine. A further panel addressed a newly developing subfield focused on finding and analyzing representations of the self in Ottoman primary sources. Chaired by Selim Karahasanoğlu, this panel on ego-documents in Ottoman literature consisted of presentations of three case studies from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Five panels were dedicated to novel approaches to Ottoman estate inventories. Kenan Yıldız organized four under the title "What Do Estate Inventories

Tell Us?” Presentations investigated the sorts of information these documents contain, the methodological issue of constructing a representative sample from this information, how to study Ottoman demographics through estate inventories, these sources’ place in Ottoman historiography, and how to decipher the financial power of Ottoman women.

The congress also focused on education in the Ottoman Empire. Adem Ölmez curated two pre-organized panels consisting of eight presentations on various topics, such as women’s literacy, the establishment of the Ministry of Education, and the place of education in Ottoman modernization. In addition, two other panels were added to the program during the application period. The first, coordinated by Mehmet İpşirli, included two presentations in Arabic dealing with Ottoman education in rural areas of the empire and Ottoman Algeria. Semra Çörekçi chaired the second panel, which focused on the role of madrasas and their students in public movements and riots.

The broader topic of education was also addressed in two pre-organized panels on the theoretical sciences, one on Ottoman theoretical thought between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and another on madrasa education and curricula. These were organized and coordinated by İhsan Fazlıoğlu. Fazlıoğlu also prepared another panel titled “Science as a Social and Cultural Activity in Ottoman Modernization.” Another panel concerning the field of science was Elif Baga’s panel, “Theoretical Background of Applied Sciences in the Ottoman Classical Scholarly Tradition.” Scholars at OSARK 2022 tried to find common ground between this field and manuscripts as primary sources, presenting studies contextualizing pamphlets and texts related to specific mathematical calculations, chemistry, and zoography.

A significant series of pre-organized panels addressed the field of digital Ottoman studies. Initially orchestrated by Yunus Uğur, the three conference panels were coordinated by Fatma Aladağ, Hasan Karataş, and Sümeyye Akça. Here the presenters not only showed how digital humanities programs could be applied to diverse data sets but also addressed diverse approaches to contextualizing the outputs of such programs and analyzing the historiographical significance of their results.

Aside from the pre-organized panels, other panels covered numerous fields of Ottoman studies, including provincial administration, the history of agriculture, technologies of war, relations between religion and politics, life in Ottoman Anatolia, diplomatic relations, urbanizations, central and provincial economics, law, commerce, the rise of personal property, material culture, the Ottoman Empire as a multireligious and a multiethnic entity, social institutions and waqfs, slavery and bondage, and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. OSARK 2022 also had a particular interest in politics and life in the Arab lands in the Ottoman Empire. Chaired by Abdülkadir Özcan, a special panel on Ottoman Egypt investigated that area’s modernization between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. Likewise, M. Talha Çiçek coordinated a pre-organized panel entitled “Arab Tribes during the Ottoman Period.” In this panel, three scholars from the United States and Turkey presented papers on diverse ethnicities and communities living in eastern Anatolia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A further panel was

organized by Hilal Görgün on the Arab and African provinces during their detachment from the Ottoman realm in the twentieth century.

The final day of the conference included two panels devoted to women in the Ottoman period. The first, coordinated by Betül İpşirli Argit, had three presentations dealing with Suleiman I's women and Gülfem Hatun, women during the eighteenth century, and violence against women. The second, chaired by Nilgün Dalkesen, included discussions on women's participation and settlement in Ottoman courts and legal cases, the philosopher Fatma Aliye Hanım, and poor women and prostitutes under the Committee of Union and Progress.

OSARK 2022 also hosted a roundtable on the Tulip Age Paradigm in the first half of the eighteenth century. Selim Karahasanoğlu invited scholars working on the period in diverse fields, including the history of art and architecture, politics, and biography, to participate in the roundtable. They tried to understand the essence of this era and to contextualize it with new approaches within Ottoman studies. They also discussed the appropriateness of labeling the era "the Tulip Period," a name first coined by Ahmed Refik (d. 1937).

Titled "The Bird's-Eye View in Ottoman Studies as of 2022," the conference's closing session was coordinated by İsmail Hakkı Kadi. Several prominent Turkish Ottomanists and Erol Özvar, president of the Council of Higher Education, himself an economic historian, used the closing session to wrap up many aspects, gaps, and developments in the field. Among the presenters at the closing session were historian Suraiya Faroqhi, who argued that new directions in Ottoman diplomatic history were being charted by research into ambassadorial accounts (*seferatnames*), travelogues, and personal memoirs of bureaucrats, and noted happily that this new type of diplomatic history was well represented at OSARK 2022; Mehmet İpşirli, a well-known professor of Ottoman civilizations and institutions, commented on the variety and number of the presentations at OSARK 2022 and stressed the importance of having such a large spectrum of study areas, though he regretted the dearth of panels dedicated to historiography, which, he said, was the field best suited to binding together all the others; Erol Özvar touted the conference program for its many acclaimed scholars; Abdülkadir Özcan, a prominent historian from Fatih Sultan Mehmet University, stressed the importance of using different sources in studying the history of the empire, particularly manuscripts and estate inventories; Feridun Emecen from Istanbul 29 Mayıs University commented on the importance of the digital humanities and the impact of new technologies and methodologies; and İhsan Fazlıoğlu, an acclaimed professor of Ottoman philosophy and theoretical science, lauded the conference's many presentations on the history of Ottoman philosophy and science but critiqued their predominant Istanbul- and Muslim-centric focus, noting the need for further research into exchange and cultural interactions between the Ottomans, the empire's non-Muslim population, and those outside Ottoman borders.

Overall, OSARK 2022 aimed to promote new areas of study in Ottoman history, highlight the variety of subjects within the field, and foster interdisciplinary work within its diverse subfields. To this end, organizers arranged pre-organized panels on contentious and popular topics, such as digital

humanities, and tried to promote and encourage new approaches and techniques in Ottoman studies, including with respect to well-established sources like estate inventories, as well as relatively novel concepts, such as space. The executive committee and panel chairs will now start work on publishing the papers presented at the conference in multiple edited thematic volumes and begin preparations for OSARK's next meeting, slated for 2024.

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