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EGYPTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS TURKS AND OTTOMANS
IN THE 17th AND 18th CENTURIES*

Contemporary historiography frequently tends to interpret Middle Eastern society of some centuries ago in terms of modern political issues. Thus one may get the impression that in Ottoman Egypt there was a permanent struggle between Egyptians and Turks or between the native population and its foreign Ottoman oppressors. For instance, the Egyptian National Charter of 1962 says the following: »The French occupation (of Bonaparte) found that the Egyptian people rejected Ottoman imperialism camouflaged by the name of Caliphate... it found strong resistance to the rule of the Mamelukes and permanent revolt against their attempts to exploit the Egyptian people«. ¹ In a similar vein, we read in modern writings on that period that »the land was a milchcow for foreigners abounding in riches for them while its native sons were denied livelihood«; »the army of oppressors, the helpers of the Sultan... collected taxes from the fellah for their master«; or: »the fellahs sweated and laboured for others, for the wild Turkish beast... in Istanbul and his helpers« (al-waḥsh al-turkī al-qābi'fi'l-āsitāna wa'a'wānuhu). ²

Did Egyptians in the 17th and 18th centuries look upon Turks and Ottomans as their arch-enemies? Or perhaps the opposite is true, and Egyptians did not see the Turks and Ottomans as other than fellow Muslims ruled over like themselves by a common Muslim sultan? Unfortunately, when Evliya Çelebi stayed in Cairo for eight or nine

* I wish to thank Professor Bernard Lewis for his comments on the original version of this paper as it was read at the Sarajevo Conference.

¹ al-Jumhūriyya al-'Arabiyya al-Mutahida, *Mashrū' mīthāq 21 māyu 1962*, p. 22.

² Muḥammad Qandīl al-Baqlī (ed.), *Qaryatunā al-misriyya qabl al-thawra*, Cairo, n.d. [1963], p. 9; Ḥasan Muḥassib, *Qadiyyat al-fallāh fi'l-qīṣṣa al-misriyya*, Cairo, 1971, p. 18; 'Abd al-Jalīl Ḥasan, 'Ṣawt al-ṣāmitīn ya'lū', *al-Kātib*, August 1964, p. 139.

years around 1680 he failed to distribute among the inhabitants questionnaires asking them in detail how they felt about the Turks or Ottomans, nor did 'Alī Bey Buluṭ Ḳapan, almost a century later, organize a public opinion poll on his policies. Thus we are compelled to rely on the writings of Egyptians of that time which have been preserved for our analysis.

In this paper I shall confine myself to the study of three sources referring to our question — which does not mean that additional material may not be found in other sources as well and reveal further aspects of this subject. The first is a manuscript called *Kitāb al-dhakhā'ir wa'l-tuḥaf fī bīr al-sanā'i' wa'l-ḥiraf*, kept in the Landesbibliothek of Gotha.³ This manuscript has been studied by Goldziher in his work on the *mu'ammari'n* (people with a long life), by Thorning in his book on the *futuwwa*, and by myself in connection with the guilds. The work was composed in Egypt at the end of the 16th or in the 17th century as a commentary on a didactic poem about the guilds, and the author was closely connected with the guilds of barbers and physicians. The second is Yūsuf al-Shirbīnī's book *Hazz al-quḥūf fī sharḥ qaṣīd Abī-Shādūf*, which was first published in Cairo in 1857-8 and since then again in various editions.⁴ This is an extremely interesting satire on the Egyptian fellah which includes abundant information on the social history of Ottoman Egypt in general. Its author was an 'ālim born in Shirbīn, a small place on the Damietta branch of the Nile, who lived in Cairo in the second half of the 17th century. The book has been variously interpreted during the last three decades and I have devoted to it a detailed study.⁵ The third is 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī's famous *'Ajā'ib al-āthāw fī'l-tarājim wa'l-akḥbār*, the well known and most important source for the history of Ottoman Egypt.⁶ What is perhaps not so well known is the fact that Jabartī's chronicle and biographies comprise invaluable material on the social history of Ottoman Egypt which has not yet been fully exploited.

There can be no doubt that Egyptians of the 17th and 18th centuries were clearly aware of the linguistic and cultural difference between rules and ruled. Shirbīnī's fellah who comes to town to pay his *multazim* expects him to speak Turkish with his wife, which in fact he does

³ Gotha, Arabische Handschrift No. 903 (hereafter: Gotha).

⁴ Our quotations are from the edition of al-Maktaba al-Maḥmūdiyya in Cairo (n.d.) which is based on a 1308 H. (1890-1) edition of al-Maṭba'a al-Amīriyya in Cairo.

⁵ G. Baer, 'Fellah and townsman in Ottoman Egypt', *Asian and African Stu-*

dies (Jerusalem), vol. 8, 1972, no. 2, pp. 221-56; also *Princeton Near East Papers*, no. 16, 1973. I have also written a critical evaluation of modern interpretations of the book, to be published in the near future.

⁶ See v. al-Djabartī, *EP*² (d. Ayalon). We have used the standard edition of Būlāq, 1297 H./1879-80.

in an amusing and spicy story (p. 19). In another story three youths who come to town are told by their leader that they must speak Turkish in town in order to emulate the soldiers who dominate Cairo, and when told that they did not know any Turkish he tries to teach them what he has learned, so he says, when he was sitting together with the *multazim's* Christian tax-collector and his constable (*mushidd*) (p. 20). It should be pointed out that at that time most of the *multazims* were Mamelukes.

However, Egyptians definitely claimed cultural superiority over the Turks. This was unequivocally expressed in the instructions given to guild shaykhs in the *Kitāb al-dhakhā'ir*. A guild shaykh should be initiated to his rank (*rutba*) by another shaykh with a well established pedigree of initiation by shaykhs of Arab descent, because God has chosen the most meritorious people from among Arabs. Only Arabs possess knowledge and eloquence, and therefore rank acquired through Arabs is preferable to rank acquired through Turks.⁷ Elsewhere in the same treatise the Turks are called unintelligent beasts (*al-atrāk . . . ḥayawān min ghayr idrāk*) (fol. 110b). Shirbinī's representative of the culturally inferior Turk is the *qādī*. In Ottoman Egypt the *qādī* (or *qādīs*) of Egypt were Turkish speaking judges holding their posts on annual tenures, who were appointed by the *qādī-‘asher* of Anatolia. Very few of them were acquainted with the Arabic language. The *qādī* appointed one or more judges-substitute (*nā'ib*), usually local jurists of learning and experience who bought the confirmation of their office from each new *qādī* on his appointment.⁸ In one of Shirbinī's stories it turns out that the *qādī* is unable to distinguish between verses from the Qur'ān and verses of popular poetry (p. 39), while in another story a *qādī* composes ridiculous poetry and his *nā'ib* derides him by composing extempore a persiflage on the *qādī's* verses (p. 75). The image of the ignorant Turkish *qādī* recurs in the writings of various Egyptian authors of that time. For instance, the Egyptian 'ālim Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khafājī who visited Istanbul in the first half of the 17th century says that utterly ignorant asses occupy in that city positions of *qādīs* and other 'ulamā'.⁹

⁷ Gotha, fol. 55a: 'inna al-shaykh . . . yaftaqir qabla al-dukhūl ilā al-rutba an yadhkula min bāb rajul . . . malḥūq fī sil-silat al-mashāyikh min abnā' al-'arab li'an-na Allāh subḥānahu wata'ālā ikhtāra afḍal al-khalq min al-'Arab . . . walā yakūn al-'ilm wa'l-fasāha illā ilā'l-'arab falihādḥā idhā kānat al-martaba 'an al-'arab kāna dhālika afkhar min abnā' al-turk . . .'

⁸ H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, Volume One, Part II, London, 1957, pp. 121-5. Cf. also E. W. Lane, *The Manners and*

Customs of the Modern Egyptians, Everyman's Library, London, 1944, pp. 155-6.

⁹ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khafājī, *Rayḥānat al-Alibbā'*, Cairo, 1967, vol. 2, pp. 283, 316. I am indebted to Dr. Michael Winter for this reference, who mentions the general phenomenon in his Ph. D. Thesis *The Writings of 'Abd al Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī — A Sufi Source for the Social and Intellectual Life of Sixteenth-Century Egypt*, University of California, Los Angeles, 1972 (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1973), p. 47, note 25.

True, *qāḍīs* were held up to ridicule in Turkey and elsewhere even without ethnic differences, but it is significant that Egyptians made a point of their ignorance of Arabic. Since Arabic was the language of Islamic religion and learning Arabic speaking Muslims had of course a cultural advantage over Turks; this advantage was stressed by some Egyptian authors of the 17th and 18th century – perhaps as a compensation for their inferior position in other fields. But before we deal with these aspects, we must mention one further Egyptian claim of cultural superiority, namely in sexual behaviour. A widespread stereotype of Turks in Ottoman Egypt – and elsewhere, for that matter – was that of pederasts. The guild treatise *Kitāb al-dhakhā'ir* deals extensively with sodomy, and counts the Turks as the main offenders (fol. 113a). A similar image is obtained from the stories about the Turkish *qāḍīs* in Shirbīnī's satire. One of his *qāḍīs* is found to have homosexual intercourse with a young boy in order to establish, according to his claim, whether the boy has become judicially mature (p. 40). In addition, he relates various verses dealing with this theme. One goes as follows:

A *qāḍī* considers fornication to deserve punishment
and does not consider sodomy an offence.

And another verse reads:

How can the world and its inhabitants be righteous
if the *qāḍī* of the Muslims practices sodomy.¹⁰

It may well be that this image had its origin in the behaviours of soldiers, most of whom were Turkish speaking, and who lived in Egypt and other provinces as bachelors without families. Moreover, Janissaries in various periods were not allowed to marry. Finally, Turks or Ottomans were sometimes frowned upon because of their alleged materialistic inclination. After relating how Riḍwān Bey had been offended by the Bedouin shaykh Ibn Ḥabīb and how, in revenge, he deprived him of an important *iltizām* and appropriated it himself, Jabartī moralizes saying that it is the way of the Ottomans to achieve material benefit by whatever means.¹¹

At this juncture, however, the claim to moral superiority and the acknowledgement of inferiority in the field of material civilization meet. But since all our sources are Egyptian, there are only few hints of such an acknowledgement. The most definite expression of the appreciation of Turkish material superiority is Shirbīnī's enthusiasm about Turkish cooking. One of his themes is a comparison between the rural and the urban way of cooking various dishes, and of course invariably the urban, and especially the Cairo cuisine, emerges as considerably superior to

¹⁰ *Qāḍī yarā al-ḥadda fi'l-zinā'i walā yarā 'alā man yalūtu min ba'si* (p. 223). *Matā taşluhu al-dunyā wayaşluhu ahluhā idhā kāna qāḍī al-muslimīna yalūtu* (p. 103).

¹¹ *Waṭariqat al-'uthmāniyya al-maylu ilā al-dunyā bi'ayyi wajhin kāna* (Jabartī, vol. 2, p. 144).

that of the fellah. But in some cases he adds that even better than in Cairo the dish is prepared by 'Abnā' al-Turk', whose way of cooking is the most delicious.¹² Similarly, Khafājī describes in enthusiastic terms the high palaces, blossoming gardens, and generous notables of Istanbul.¹³

If acknowledgement of Egyptian inferiority in the field of material civilization is scarce, our authors readily admit that from the point of view of martial qualities Egyptians are definitely inferior to Turks. But then this image was so common and so deeply rooted in Islamic history that it scarcely needs mentioning. Nevertheless, two rather amusing stories illustrate this attitude — one from the 17th and one from the end of the 18th century. We have mentioned before the story told by Shirbinī about the three youths who came to town and were told by their leader that they must speak Turkish. Here we would like to stress that speaking Turkish was considered by them an attribute of physical power which would intimidate the owner of the *hammām* and allow them to get away without paying. The point of the story is of course the clumsy and amusing way in which they talked and the disastrous result of their prank (pp. 20–21). While this story is taken from the realm of fiction, the other one is probably history as it really happened. When the French had occupied Egypt, Bonaparte at first tried to refrain from appointing Mamelukes to military positions and as police officers. But he was told that »the ordinary people of Cairo respected only Turks and others were unable to rule them«, and as a result some *āghās* from old Mameluke houses were appointed to these posts.¹⁴

So far we have discussed awareness of differences, images of qualities, and as a result feelings of superiority or inferiority. The question should now be asked whether there existed also a political antagonism between Egyptians and Turks, or between Egyptians and Ottoman rule as such. In other words, was there any friction or were there any conflicts between local elements and the central government in Istanbul which found their expression in a consciously »anti-Ottoman« political struggle?

It would seem to us that during the period with which we are dealing there were two kinds of clash which gave rise to a certain »anti-Ottomanism«. The first was the conflict between Egyptian guilds and the Ottoman government in Egypt during its initial period, as reflected in *Kitāb al-dhakhā'ir*. According to this treatise, the Ottoman government's interference in guild affairs was the main reason for this conflict. Gradually it had become the rule that the shaykhs of the guilds were appointed and dismissed by the *qādis*, who even usurped their power of granting the *ijāza* (license) for the performance of a profession. The

¹² *Yakūn lahu ladhdha 'azīma; wahuwa aladhdh wa'aṭyab* (Shirbinī, pp. 148, 154, 168, 172).

¹³ Khafājī, *ibid.*, p. 299.

¹⁴ *'inna sūqat Misr lā yakhāfūna illā min al-atrāk walā yahkumuhum siwāhum'* (Jabartī, vol. 3, p. 11).

more the shaykh turned into a tool in the hand of the government for the execution of their administrative and fiscal policy, the further estranged he became from the guild members and guild tradition.¹⁵ This was the background for the pronounced anti-Ottoman attitude of this treatise. The Ottoman occupation was held responsible for the growing neglect of the guild rites, which would be revived, so they said, as soon as Ottoman rule came to an end (*ba'da an tadhāb dawlat al-'Uthmānī*) (fol. 61b). The Circassian Mamelukes are described as virtuous people (*ahl al-khayrāt*) and their rule is considered to have been the golden age of the traditional organization. After the Ottomans conquered Egypt foreign and mischievous elements infiltrated into the guilds (fol. 63a-b). The Ottoman government completely destroyed the properties, the convents, and the *mashyakha* of Arabs, and it damaged the interests of Arabs in general. As against this, they preserved the convents of Turks, i.e. people of their own kind.¹⁶

There can be no doubt that this is an extremely interesting document, but in order to evaluate its historical significance one has to take into account the fact that it is unique and nothing similar has become known to us. Throughout Ottoman rule in Egypt the guilds as such did not play any political role, and from the 17th century onwards no further treatises or any other guild literature have been discovered. Thus *Kitāb al-dhakhā'ir* represents a late specimen of the *futuwwa* literature at a time of transformation of the *futuwwa* organizations into professional guilds, which seems to have taken place at about the time of the Ottoman occupation of Egypt. This transformation involved the neglect and decline of the traditional *futuwwa* rites, ceremonies and ideology. Some organizations, such as the barbers and physicians for whom this treatise was written, resented this process and put the blame on the Ottomans, who used and developed the new secular professional guilds.

The protagonists in the second kind of conflict which gave rise to »anti-Ottomanism« were, interestingly enough, not Arab speaking indigenous Egyptians but Turkish speaking Mamelukes. When the Ottomans conquered Egypt they did not liquidate the former rulers, the Mamelukes, who continued till the end of the 18th century to form a military elite with administrative and political functions within the framework of Ottoman suzerainty. Clashes between local governors, shaykhs, or elites and the central Ottoman government were a very common phenomenon throughout Ottoman history, and there would be no justification for mentioning them in our context — were it not for a certain »anti-Ottoman«

¹⁵ Cf. G. Baer, *Egyptian Guilds in Modern Times*, Jerusalem, 1964, pp. 11-15.

¹⁶ '... ilā an tawallat al-dawla al-'uthmāniyya waba'da dhālika 'attalū al-rizaq wa'l-takāyā min awlād al-'arab

'alā'l-iṭāq wa'abqaw takāyā al-arwām al-ladhīna min ajnāsihim waba'da dhālika 'aṭṭalū al-mashyakha wa'aṭṭalū umūr awlād al-'arab ajma'in (fol. 116a).

consciousness which developed here and there among the Egyptian Mamelukes. The designation *al-umarā' al-miṣirliyya* for the Egyptian Mamelukes which we find frequently in Jabartī's chronicle has more than a geographical connotation. An early expression of such consciousness among Egyptian Mamelukes, in which »anti-Ottomanism« was only implied, was a genealogy compiled in the 17th century by an 'ālim who enjoyed the patronage of a Mameluke *amīr*, Riḍwān Bey.¹⁷ The compiler of this genealogy attempted to establish a connection between his patron and the Circassian Mameluke Sultanate as well as a connection between the Circassians and Quraysh. Thus this work constituted a manifesto asserting the historical continuity of the Mameluke beys with the Mameluke sultans and a legitimization of the resurgence of Mameluke power in the 17th century. According to P. M. Holt's analysis, the genealogy implies that as *amīr al-ḥajj* Riḍwān Bey exercised his duties towards the Two Noble Sanctuaries Mecca and Madīna not as a delegate of the remote Ottoman sultan but by the hereditary right derived from Mameluke and Qurashi ancestors. However, the most conspicuous development of such a consciousness and a direct challenge to Ottoman rule occurred in the time of 'Alī Bey Bulut Kapan, who became *Shaykh al-balad*, i.e. head of the Mameluke establishment in Egypt, in 1760, and gradually dominated all potential rivals until he emerged as virtual ruler of Egypt. This situation did not fail to produce tension with the Ottoman government and its viceroy in Cairo. In 1768 Ali Bey deposed the Ottoman Paşa, assumed himself the post of *qā'im maqām*, and in 1769 he deposed the new paşa who had been sent from Istanbul. 'Alī Bey seemed about to proclaim himself an independent ruler, and in this context it is interesting to note that he tried to develop a kind of »anti-Ottoman« ideology on which to base his political aspirations. He began reading books of history, especially Egyptian history, and he is reported to have said to his intimates: »The kings of Egypt were Kurdish (!) Mamelukes like us, such as Sultan Baybars; these Ottomans took Egypt through superior force and the treachery of its people.«¹⁸ However, 'Alī Bey hesitated to break openly with the Ottoman Empire, until it was too late. Later in the century, during the open clash between the Egyptian Mamelukes and the Ottoman Empire in the 1780s, only faint echoes of such ideas remained. Late in 1786 Ḥasan Paşa warned the Egyptian Mamelukes, that if they still had ideas of Egyptian solidarity and expulsion of Ottomans from Egypt, Egypt

¹⁷ For a detailed description and analysis of this genealogy see P. M. Holt, 'The exalted lineage of Riḍwān Bey: some observations on a seventeenth-century Mamluk genealogy', in id., *Studies in the History of the Near East*, London, 1973, pp. 220–30.

¹⁸ *Inna mulūk Miṣr kānū amthālanā mamālik al-akrād mithla al-Sultān Baybars . . . wahā'ulā'i al-'uthmāniyya akhadhūha bi'l-taghallub wanifāq ahlihā* (Jabartī, vol. 1, p. 381). Cf. P. M. Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516–1922*, London, 1966, pp. 93–8.

would be destroyed for seven years and nobody would remain there.¹⁹ Two years later, in 1788, Russia still tried to incite the Mamelukes against »the treacherous Ottomans« (*Ibn 'Uthmān al-khā'in*) »who want to seize your land . . .« and urged them to drive the Ottomans out of their land and to establish independent rulers and governors in Syria, »as in the past.«²⁰ It may well be that such ideas lingered on among Mamelukes and came to the surface whenever Ottoman power waned, but we have found no further literary reflections of such trends.

In any case, it is remarkable that such ideas were found among the non-Arab Mamelukes and not among the Arabic-speaking indigenous population. No doubt, there were numerous revolts of the Cairo population against the government throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. But, as I have shown elsewhere,²¹ up to the last quarter of the 18th century the slogans raised in these revolts were concerned primarily with the supply of food, the prices of consumer goods and the value of money. Even when political issues came to the forefront towards the end of the 18th century, the attacks were aimed at individual persons, such as the chief of police, whose deposition the rioters demanded. The revolts against the French acquired a religious character and supported the Ottoman Sultan. Only in 1805, which strictly speaking lies beyond the period covered by this paper, the Ottoman Paşa became discredited to such an extent that the people of Cairo demanded his deposition and raised the slogan: »*Yā rabb yā mitgallī ahlak al-'uthmallī*« (O Lord, O Thou who has revealed Himself to man, May Thou destroy the 'Uthmanī).²² The '*ulamā'*', the only indigenous group capable of giving any conscious expression to the aspirations of the Egyptian population, were even less revolutionary or »anti-Ottoman« than the popular masses and made all efforts to evade involvement — as I have shown in detail. Moreover, Shirbinī even praises the representatives of the government, the *kāshif*, for suppressing revolts of fellahs by punishing them severely and by destroying the villages and killing all those who deserved to be killed. And he concludes: »Anyway, his presence in the countryside is a blessing«.²³

To sum up, judging from our sources, Egyptian Arabic speaking people in the 17th and 18th centuries were well aware of the linguistic and cultural difference between themselves and the Turkish rulers of

¹⁹ . . . *wataqūlūn hā'ulā' 'uthmāniyya lā rumallikuhum bilādanā . . . wa'l-misir-liyya gharāduhum ma' ba'dihim . . .* (Jabartī, vol. 2, p. 132).

²⁰ Jabartī, vol. 2, pp. 163–4.

²¹ G. Baer, 'Popular revolt in Ottoman Cairo', *Der Islam*, Bd. 54, Heft 2, 1977, pp. 213–42.

²² Jabartī, vol. 3, p. 329.

²³ . . . *fa'alā kulli hāl wujūduhum 'alā'l-iqlīm rahma'*. Shirbinī, p. 122. Cf. Baer, 'Fellah and Townsman', p. 238.

Egypt, and various images and stereotypes of inferiority and superiority of the Turks in this or that field were prevalent among them. Moreover, conflicts between specific groups in Egypt and the Ottoman government gave rise to sporadic and rather rare expressions of »anti-Ottomanism« whose main exponents were, curiously enough, Turkish speaking Mamelukes. But by no means did the Egyptians see themselves as an Egyptian or Egyptian Arab nation subject to a Turkish nation in a Turkish empire, and even less did they »reject Ottoman imperialism«, as has been claimed by some recent writers.²⁴

S u m m a r y

THE EGYPTIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE OTTOMAN TURKS IN THE XVIIth AND THE XVIIIth CENTURY

The historiography of today often tries to explain the events in the societies of the Middle East in the past centuries by using modern political terminology and this sometimes gives a wrong impression about these societies and their internal structure. So, for example, one can get impression that in the Ottoman Egypt there was a permanent struggle between the Egyptians and Turks, i.e. between the natives and the Ottoman rulers, and this is wrong. Did the Egyptians in the XVIIth and XVIIIth century consider the Turks as the armed enemies or as the Muslims headed by sultan, were there conflicts between the local inhabitants and the central authorities, those questions are of great scientific interest and are considered in this paper. The sources used are three manuscripts from this period which reflect the social and political situation in Egypt in the XVIIth and the XVIIIth century.

It can be ascertained that the Egyptians-Arabs in this period were conscious of the cultural and linguistic differences between them and the rulers i.e. the Ottoman Turks. They felt the superiority of their own culture and language over the culture and language of Turks, the administration's but not the religion's language. It can be seen clearly in the manuscripts analyzed in this paper which contain a lot of sarcasm and satire in the analysis of the Turkish administration's representatives and their ethical qualities (especially concerning the qadis).

Beside that, there is a mention in these manuscripts of the political conflicts which can be reduced on the following: 1. The conflicts between esnaph's organizations and the members of the Turkish administration (not having wider political character), 2. the conflicts between the central authorities and the Mamluks which were keeping the influential positions in the Ottomans' period too and some of them tended to become autonomic.

²⁴ For a discussion of this question see also B. Lewis, *History Remembered*,

Recovered, Invented, Princeton, 1975, especially p. 80.

The dissatisfaction of the natives was, in spite of the aforementioned, sporadic and, as the author concludes, mainly related to the insufficient amount of food, prices of goods and the value of the money. Therefore, it is understandable that Napoleon, after the conquest of Egypt, promoted Turks on the influential positions to avoid rebellions of the natives, because they preferred Turks to Mamluks and French.

R e z i m e

STAVOVI EGIPĆANA PREMA OTOMANSKIM TURCIMA U XVII I XVIII STOLJEĆU

Suvremena historiografija pokušava često da objasni događaje bliskistočnih društava prošlih stoljeća modernom političkom terminologijom što daje pogrešnu predstavu o tim društvima i njihovom unutrašnjem ustrojstvu. Tako se npr. dobija utisak da je u otomanskom Egiptu postojala permanentna borba između Egipćana i Turaka, odnosno između domaćeg stanovništva i otomanske vlasti, što je u osnovi pogrešno. Da li su Egipćani u XVII i XVIII stoljeću gledali na Turke kao oružane neprijatelje ili su ih gledali kao muslimane sa sultanom na čelu, te da li su postojali konflikti između lokalnog stanovništva i centralne vlasti, pitanja su koja pobuđuju znanstveni interes i kao takva predmet su ovog rada. Osnovni izvori tih analiza su tri značajna rukopisa iz tog perioda u kojima se reflektiraju društvene i političke prilike Egipta u XVII i XVIII stoljeću.

Sigurno je da su Egipćani-Arapi u tom periodu bili svjesni kulturnih i jezičkih razlika između njih i vladalaca, tj. otomanskih Turaka. Isto tako, oni su osjećali i superiornost njihove kulture i jezika nad kulturom Turaka i turskim jezikom koji je bio jezik administracije, ali ne i religije. To se jasno vidi iz rukopisa na kojima je utemeljen ovaj rad i koji sa dosta sarkazma i satire govore o reprezentativnim predstavnicima turske administracije, te o njihovim etičkim osobinama (posebno o kadijama).

Pored toga, u tim rukopisima se spominju i sukobi političke prirode koji se uglavnom svode na slijedeće: 1. konflikte između esnafskih udruženja i pripadnika turske administracije (Oni nemaju širi politički karakter), te 2. sukobi centralne vlasti i Mamluka koji su i u otomanskom periodu ostali na značajnim pozicijama, pa su neki od njih težili osamostaljivanju.

Nezadovoljstva lokalnog stanovništva, međutim, bila su sporadična i javljala su se uglavnom, kako to autor zaključuje, zbog nedovoljno nabavki hrane, cijena robe široke potrošnje i vrijednosti novca. Zato je i Napoleon osvojivši Egipat postavljao Turke na značajna mjesta kako ne bi došlo do pobuna lokalnog stanovništva koje je radije prihvatilo Turke nego Mamluke i Francuze.