

the Mawlawī tekke at Sarajevo written by Hatice Oruç and Yılmaz Kurt¹ as well as the edition prepared by İsmail Erünsal of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Askarī’s *Mir’āt al-‘Ashq*, an indispensable source for the history of the Malāmī-Ḥamzawī movement during the fifteenth and sixteenth century.² I might also be tempted to mention some of my own contributions to the subject.³ Nevertheless, I heartily recommend this valuable book to students and scholars working on early modern Ottoman history, on Sufism, and on Islamization, as well as to anyone interested in the history of the Ottoman Balkans and of Bosnia in particular.

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Selim Deringil,

Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire,

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 294 p., 978-110-7546-01-1

In this highly analytical writing with abundant archival sources, Selim Deringil, one of the leading academics and historians of Turkey, examines the politics of conversion and apostasy of the “Tanzimat State” and “Abdulhamit’s State”, from 1839 to 1908, at a time when the Empire was ‘converting’.

Five thematic chapters compose the book. The first chapter shows how through the Tanzimat reforms (1839 and 1856 edicts) the Ottoman state converted from its classical sultanic bureaucracy to the legal, rational bureaucratic state. The author convincingly demonstrates that the conversion issue became a

1 Hatice Oruç and Yılmaz Kurt “İsa-begova tekija/mevlevihana u Sarajevu,” *Znakovi vremena* 39/40 (2008), pp. 107-124.

2 İsmail E. Erünsal, *XV-VI. Asır Bayrâmî-Melâmiliği’nin Kaynaklarından Abdurrahman el-Askerî’nin Mir’âtü’l-İşk’i* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2003).

3 Slobodan Ilić, *Ḥüseyn Lâmekânî. Ein osmanischer Dichter und Mystiker und sein literarisches Werk* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999). Slobodan Ilić, “Lamekani Ḥüseyn Efendi,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, 2003, XXVII, 94-95.

matter of bureaucracy and a state affair, as opposed to before when “conversion purely personal and can be carried out alone (p.44)”. Deringil points out the importance of the 1844 Law that banned the execution of apostates from Islam, which the British ambassador in Istanbul—Sir S. Canning—considered as “the main barrier between Turkey and Christendom (p. 79)”. The way this law was put into force is telling: the Ottoman elites, who “sincerely believed” that these apostates were against the “Tanzimat spirit”, did not make the law public in order to protect the honor of the Caliphate (p. 24).

The second chapter demonstrates the reason why the Ottoman state apparatus ‘converted’, concretely under the oppression of the Great Powers rather than based on a ‘sincere modernist [ideology] of the Ottoman bureaucrats’. The chapter accurately places the reforms in the global historical context of “the time when Great Power imperialism was at its peak and the discourses of the “White Man’s Burden” and “Mission Civilizatrice” ruled the international agenda. All diplomatic pressure following every conversion crisis, ended with the victory of European “civilization”. The more the Ottoman state reformed, the more the Great Powers increased their hegemony on the Ottoman State to such a degree that they even intervened in Muslim households.

The third chapter examines the ‘re-christianization demands of crypto-christians’ (first in Ottoman history) during the equality and freedom atmosphere created by the Tanzimat. Answering how the ‘Tanzimat state’ struggled with this phenomena, the chapter focuses on two communities (Kromlides and Stavritoes who had ‘converted to Islam’ to escape from ‘cizye’/head tax). These two communities demanded to return to Christianity to avoid military service, which became obligatory for all Muslims (p.112). The chapter portrays the fear of the Tanzimat men around the possible extent of this re-christianization movement among the Muslim population.

The following chapter focuses on individual and voluntary Islamization cases, mainly of Polish and Hungarian refugees in the 1840s. These conversions were for “career” purposes: the person who asked to be converted for a career that could not be “unattainable to them in their land of origin (p.192)”. The chapter argues that these “career conversions” led the state to reform its subjecthood (*te-baa*) policy. By 1869, to be Muslim was “no longer a sufficient condition” to be an Ottoman citizen, despite the fact that “in practice Islam ... remain[ed] the primary focus of Ottoman identity” (p. 157).

The last chapter examines the massive conversions, which occurred during the 1890s Armenian massacres, concretely because of the Armenians' "fear from Kurds (pp. 216, 237, 238)". Furthermore, the conversions were "organized" by the Ottoman Commander Zeki Pasha (p. 204) in the political context created by "despot" Abdulhamid's Islamist policy. The chapter points out that these demands were "not accepted as real Muslims; the sultan and his bureaucracy feared that they could serve as a potential fifth column, or they would complain to the representatives of the foreign powers that they had been converted by force (p. 198)".

My problem starts here. The argument presented on this page states that "the mass conversion of Armenians during the massacres of the 1890s was to reflect a **fundamental change** in the Ottoman politics of conversion (p. 198)". The author answers his question; "[i]n what way does the story of the conversion of the Armenians during the Hamidian era differ from the pattern seen before under the Tanzimat State ? (p. 236)" by "[t]he key seems to be the official policy that individual conversions were permissible but that mass conversions were not to be accepted (p. 237)." But, as we learn from the book there were no such demands by Christians during the Tanzimat period. If this is so, how can we argue that there was a "fundamental change"? I think that if there were such demands during the Tanzimat period, the Tanzimat bureaucrats could also not react differently than Abdulhamid bureaucrats, i.e. reject the demands of "mass conversions".

If the author means the "fundamental change", by comparing Abdulhamid period with the classical period, there is another question to ask. Where the author examines the classical period conversion policy (in 15 pages, pp. 8-22), he suggests that there was a massive conversion policy through the use of secondary sources. But paradoxically, his quotations from other scholars tell us a different story; i.e. "... 'mass conversions' did happen until the "Istanbul conquest (p. 16)," such conversions "... would have impoverished the empire (p.17)," "... the sultans had no interest in making this happen. Christians paid higher taxes (p.17)," and were "... not the rule and ... did not occur before the end of the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent in 1566 (p.20)."

Moreover, to emphasize the difference of the Abdulhamid period, the author argues that the following government of the Committee Union Progress-CUP (known as Young Turks Government in Western academia) had different

conversion policies: “conversion and its acceptance or rejection by the authorities was to take on a very different hue” (p. 239). Unfortunately, the author examines the 1915 conversions only in a paragraph—the most terrible and massive conversions in modern Ottoman history. Actually, if he had included this period, one could see that no significant difference existed between the Young Turks and Abdulhamid policies. Both did not want the mass conversions, because they did not believe in the “sincerity” of conversion demands. That is why, the official ideology in Turkey still is paranoid in regards to the “crypto-Armenians” of 1915, by conspiring that they would return to Christianity one day! In sum, I do not see a “fundamental change” of conversion policy in the Abdulhamid period. What this book convinced me about “mass conversions” is that neither of the Ottoman government (in the classical nor modern period, including Tanzimat+Abdulhamid+Young Turks) had such a policy; rather they preferred individuals, which were controllable, surveyable and ‘sincere’.

Not to be understood wrongly, I would like to explain my understanding of “mass conversion”: a demographic group in its totality (large family, tribe, or a community) or a village/town in its totality. By this, I do not mean the massive individual demands from all over the Empire at a given time. Unfortunately, the book lacks such categorical separation, and did not examine separately and compare in details the differences between ‘individual’, ‘family’, and ‘mass’ conversions. Each had different processes and consequences, and were treated differently by political powers, and absorbed differently into Muslim society. Last but not least, these questions emerged from this very valuable book and I believe the success of a book lies in the questions that emerge from it.

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