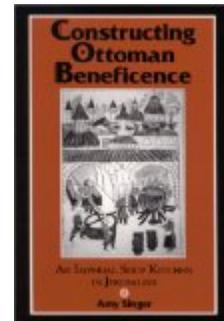


Amy Singer. *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. xv + 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-7914-5352-0; ISBN 978-0-7914-5351-3.

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Published on H-Turk (May, 2003)



An Imperial Soup Kitchen Provides Food for Thought

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In the still growing stream of research on Ottoman social history, pious foundations stand out as a relatively well researched phenomenon, which has received attention from several of the greatest scholars in the field. Attempts of stocktaking in *waqf* studies towards the end of the last century have turned up numerous promising trajectories of research.[1] Yet, Amy Singer's study of the Hasseki *waqf* in Jerusalem is novel in several aspects. It will be a major landmark in this field, and in the social history of the Ottoman Empire at large. Its clear and concise style will help to make it a standard assignment for undergraduate and graduate courses.

The Hasseki *waqf* was established by Hurrem Sultan (d. 1558), the powerful concubine and then wife of Suleyman the Lawgiver, in order to provide food for the poor and needy in Jerusalem, at that time a remote provincial town which mostly lived off its importance as a pilgrimage site. For the *waqf*'s location, Hurrem Sultan chose a (destitute?) house in downtown Jerusalem, dating back to Mamluk times, known as the House of Sitt Tunshuq. It was repaired and enlarged, and an imperial food kitchen (*'imaret*) was established there which continues to serve food to needy people of Jerusalem to this day.

As it turns out, this particular *waqf* is extraordinarily well documented. Preserved are the building itself (albeit not without alterations), the foundation deed (*waqfiye*) in several versions in Turkish and Arabic, and the title deeds (*temliknames*) for the property which the founder

then turned over to the foundation. In addition, the functioning of the *waqf* in the next few decades can be traced through reports sent by the administrators to the central authorities in Istanbul, and account books of the endowment. Thus building activities, day-to-day procedures, and the expansion of the economic basis can be traced in illuminating detail. Finally, the perspective of the outsider is provided by a number of travel reports.

Extraordinary documentary wealth is not the only asset of Singer's book. It is structured along two main axes of investigation. On the one hand, she demonstrates the process of founding and running a *waqf*; on the other hand, she seeks to explain the notion of beneficence, and the social practice based on it in the Ottoman Empire. Singer claims that the institution of *waqf* can only be understood properly if one moves away from normative texts and bases the study on actual practices. Her study of *waqf* should help to understand how "philanthropy is used to achieve various aims," how beneficence works as interaction between the donor and the needy, "need being defined by the donor" (pp. 5f.). The concentration on only one instance enables the author to trace all those ties, and to reconsider the prevailing historiographical myths about *waqf* (p. 7). The diachronic scope is limited to the mid-sixteenth century, to the process of founding and firmly establishing the *waqf*, with very few glimpses past 1600. Chapters on general and theoretical issues frame the empirical part on the Hasseki *waqf* proper.

The first chapter presents a survey of the development of *waqf* in Islam in order to situate the Hasseki 'imaret in the "historical stream of waqf-making" (p. 37). Chapter 2 analyses the *waqfiyes* in order to understand the founder's intentions in imperial and local politics and society (p. 9), and the whole process of setting up the *waqf*. Chapter 3 discusses the aspect of gender in the business of beneficence, setting the founder of the Hasseki 'imaret in the context of Ottoman social structures, in particular the imperial household. Singer ponders possible connections to earlier examples of beneficent women in Islam, and speculates about the potential continuity between women benefactresses in the location of the Hasseki 'imaret. In chapter 4, she narrows the focus down to Jerusalem, studying the day-by-day and year-by-year management of the *waqf*. Chapter 5 broadens the perspective again, putting the preparation and distribution of food into a comparative perspective across the empire. The final chapter on "practicing beneficence" investigates how the Jerusalem *waqf* was part of a specifically Ottoman concept of beneficence, and how this differed from other concepts in history, and thus also poses a question about how the *waqf* actually served the purpose for which it was designated in the foundation document.

Singer's findings about the practice of *waqf*-making are particularly important for a larger understanding of Ottoman legal and administrative thought, as she demonstrates the deep gap between the normative construct of *waqf* as found in the legal tradition of Islam, and the practice in the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman context, "*waqf* was one form of property, of capital investment, of patronage, of beneficence," and Singer insists that these aspects have to be considered together. She shows that, against all legal norms, Ottoman *waqf* goods were traded and exchanged frequently. She could have added that *waqfs* were occasionally transferred from one beneficiary to the other (for example, from one *sheykh* to another), just like *timars* were transferred from one *sipahi* to another.[2] Singer rejects the age-old criticism, which depicts family *waqfs* as an abuse of the system, arguing that family *waqf* and beneficent *waqf* (*ehli* or *dhurri* versus *hayri*) should not be construed as two mutually exclusive categories, as has often been done by legalist writers, starting from Qo=i Beg. Instead, most *waqf* combine both family and charitable aspects in one way or another.[3]

Imperial *waqf*-making is a special form of pious foundations, since the family aspect is excluded by definition. Singer emphasizes the function of *waqf* as part of

an imperial project, and even claims that the competition in *waqf*-making was part of the dynastic succession. Though the concept of *waqf* is setting up a permanent institution, Singer shows that the very act of founding itself was a long-term process, and the endowment remained more flexible than previously thought. The time from the transfer of the first landholdings to Hurrem Sultan to the second of the two foundation deeds spans seven years, and the soup-kitchen was active even before the official foundation deed was issued. Modifications of the endowed property continued, as new sources were added, or more suitable sources were exchanged for more remote ones.

This book does not fully spell out the consequences of some of its findings. The kinds of revenue sources—that is, taxes and tithes from land that had been *miri* land, the supervision of all imperial *waqfs* by the *dar= s-sa'ade agasi*, and the appointment of military personnel to collect revenues—demonstrate the overlap of "state" functions with the endowment. Singer argues that beneficent works of the sultan "were not only those of individuals, but also the work of their offices" (p. 166). The ease with which state land and state sources of income are assigned to a *waqf* which is set up in the name of an individual member of the dynasty calls into question the notion of a state as an institution distinct from the persons who embody it.

This link becomes clear also in the discussion of the business of the administrators, as Singer traces the career and performance of the five administrators of the endowment in the years 1550-58. Each administrator had his independent income from a *ze'amet*, which, at least in one case, was carved out of the *waqf* properties. He had to take care of collecting revenues, expanding the sources of income, overseeing new constructions, ordering repairs, and allocating resources. One of these administrators was a local notable, who invested some of his personal funds in the Hasseki 'imaret. Nor did economic wisdom guide all administrative decisions. It is important to note that the income for the *waqf* was not only generated by extracting surplus from agricultural production, but also by engagement in other economic fields, including the bath (though there seems to have been little demand for one in Jerusalem), soap factories (which turned out to be less profitable than expected), or long-distance trade in grains (probably in order to evade export restrictions) (p. 123). Purportedly a representative of sultanic power, an administrator was able to forge particular ties to the villages allotted to the *waqf*, so that peasants felt a direct loyalty to it. This linkage is an important ex-

ample of how institutional bonds were conceptualized through personal connections in pre-modern Ottoman society. The reports by and about these administrators do not easily add up to a coherent picture, as collectors boasted of their own successes in collecting revenue, and accused their predecessors (who in turn had claimed to have done outstanding service) of neglect. Distinctions between a truthful report, opportunism, and rhetorical topoi of loyalty towards the central supervisor at the Porte are almost impossible to distinguish (see pp. 100, 116, and *passim*). Such contradictions call for heightened care in the use of seemingly objective archival sources.

Due to the detailed documentation, Singer can give the reader a colorful picture of the day-to-day problems encountered in running a *waqf*. These range from obtaining supplies for the kitchen, including expensive firewood, to the water supply for the public bath which was supposed to yield income for the *'imaret*, to collection of revenues from peasants and bedouins. Despite the precise specifications in the *waqfiye*, administrators often had to act on their own, which gave greater importance to their local and personal ties.

Starting from the logistic problems of the *'imaret*, Singer turns to the broader issue of provisioning. Ottomans did not understand their economy as a free-market system. It was heavily regulated, as is evident from the sophisticated arrangements established to provide major cities and institutions, such as the palace, with supplies. Equally, the provision of the army on campaign or of the pilgrimage caravan required organizational skills. These examples illustrate some cases parallel to the needs of an *'imaret*, and constitute a handy sample, but do not much illuminate the problems of running a *waqf*. Though the foundation deed sets standards for the amount and quality of food, it is hard to know what was actually served, since here we are left with only the normative regulations of the endowment deed, without documentation about how these stipulations were put into practice.

This detailed picture of the establishment and administration of a pious endowment is a major accomplishment of the book. Nevertheless, it makes larger claims as it seeks to locate the Hasseki *'imaret* also in the mental and intellectual Ottoman world. The larger ideas of beneficence and gender are the key concepts used by Singer to this end.

The starting point for the analysis of the underlying ideas is the assumption that *waqf* is a “chief vehicle of philanthropy” (p. 16). This close link between *waqf* and

philanthropy derives from the normative idea of *waqf*, and is partly disproved by the practice especially among the Ottomans. Nevertheless, it certainly holds true for the case of the Hasseki *'imaret*. In the footsteps of Marcel Mauss’s anthropological classic “The Gift,” Singer makes it clear that beneficence is never an expression of pure altruism, but is always practiced with some sort of benefit in mind: “Non-material ways: *qurba*, prestige, legitimacy, and patronage were their reward” (p. 35). The order of serving and the specified size of portions speak for an elaborate hierarchy among the beneficiaries of the *'imaret*, with its personnel as well as the inhabitants of a nearby *tekke* at the top, and the “400 poor and needy” mentioned in the foundation deed at the lower end, so that rank instead of need determines access. In other words, beneficence does not compensate for social inequalities, but reaffirms them, which reveals a fundamental difference from contemporary ideas of charity. Unfortunately, about those 400 “poor and needy” next to nothing is known. Therefore, statements about the social effect of the *'imaret* are hard to make. Singer points out that the term “poor” also includes pilgrims and travelers, so that it cannot only mean the economically poor, but includes respectable personalities as well.[4]

The distribution of food as a means to gain followers is another of Singer’s central ideas. The most pertinent example mentioned is the janissaries, for whom the cauldron is a symbol of allegiance to their ruler. To turn the cauldron over, to reject the ruler’s food, was the symbolic act with which mutinies began. Examples from “mirrors-for-princes” (*Qutadgu Bilig*, *Siyasat-name*) and epics (*Kitab-i Dede Qorqud*) illustrate further cases of rulers’ distribution of food. Singer is aware of the disparate character of this body of sources, yet claims they are related. Nevertheless, these sources show a king feasting with his nobleman as a *primus inter pares*, whereas Mehmed II abolished the time-honored custom of eating with his retinue, thus signifying a major transformation of the Ottoman idea of sovereignty.[5]

These examples bear witness to a norm of generosity which may go back far into pre-Islamic political thought. It seems to me, however, that it is fundamentally different from charity or philanthropy as manifested in an *'imaret*. Generosity is an important symbolic capital in a legitimating discourse which involves the ruler and his vassals or followers. The poor and needy fed by an imperial soup kitchen do not qualify as addressees of such a discourse. Beneficence towards the poor provides gains for the benefactor not in this world but in the hereafter. Singer spends much time arguing that the *waqf* was a

tool of power, especially since the founder retained control over it, while charity through the alms tax (*zakat*) was controlled by state agents. The point she misses is that *waqfs* were set up for eternity, and the founder's control lasted only until her or his death. There were even cases when a *waqf* was founded by the heirs, after the death of the benefactor.[6]

The religious context of beneficence would have deserved a more thorough discussion. There is no reason to believe that concerns about salvation are a less compelling argument for beneficence than gains of patronage and power. The problem can be phrased as one of mentality: Jacques Le Goff once argued that economic ignorance was insufficient as an explanation for the economically absurd abolishment of the hearth tax by the French king Charles V on his deathbed in 1380. Rather, the king's Christian *mentalit*—that is, his anxiety not to be confronted with the complaints of his subjects on judgment day—prevailed over political and economic reason.[7] Similarly, the fact that officials established more than 90 percent of Ottoman *waqfs* might have to do with the fact that worldly power was deeply suspicious to the pious, and that one incentive for piety was redemption from sin in the service of this world. Even though the rhetoric of the *waqfiye* might have provided a starting point for closer analysis, Singer limits her comments to a brief reference to *qurba*, closeness to God, as a motivation of beneficence, before returning to her examination of social practice.

Religious studies might also have provided deeper insight into the conceptualization of charity. If the practice of gift-giving is based on an idea of “do ut des” in the social realm, so is the idea of sacrifice in the religious sphere. Recent studies have emphasized the tension between the economic and the uneconomic way of the sacrifice (and, by extension, the gift), that is, the contradiction between the concept of barter and the deliberately incurred loss, the giving *away*. [8] In Islam, the sacrifice has largely lost the original notion of compelling God through gift, but instead is in a conspicuous way linked to charity, since one third of the sacrificed animals is to be distributed among the poor. This aspect is completely absent from the book.

Singer rightly points to the dervish lodge as another important venue of hospitality and distribution of food, yet misses the one element which would nicely explain why this charitable tradition took on a particular dimension in the Ottoman realm (p. 152). That element is *akhiliq*, the ideology of the guild-cum-fraternities which

flourished in, and actually ruled over, several Anatolian towns in the late Middle Ages. Self-sacrificing generosity and hospitality were part and parcel of *akhi* ethics, and travellers like Ibn Battuta experienced these in practice. Although some of its traditions can be traced back to Iranian origins, the Anatolian manifestation of *akhiliq* seems to be quite unique. On the other hand, *akhiliq* is a distinctly male phenomenon. Its consideration would probably demand a re-assessment of the gendered aspects of Singer's study.

The connection of charity to women in Ottoman culture is largely unsubstantiated in Singer's study. She does not clearly state whether Hurrem Sultan's engagement was actually part of her exceptional status in the house of Osman, or more or less representative. In the same vein, the significance of her choosing a site which was named after a Mamluk woman is far from clear. There seems to have been some charitable activity in Mamluk times, but it is not possible to establish a link to the Hasseki *'imaret*. Even more speculative is the connection to the Byzantine Empress Helena, who is mentioned as a benefactress by several Western travelers, but not in domestic sources. The fragility of this evidence makes Singer's speculations about possible local traditions appear rather daring. Although she makes the fascinating observation that those wives of sultans who are known as *waqf*-makers were all of non-Muslim origin (p. 85), on the whole her findings on women and beneficence lack cohesion. While she first states that a survey of foundations reveals “no dramatically gendered division of choices in the types of endowments created” (p. 93), she later insists that “Ottoman imperial beneficence was clearly gendered” (p. 96).

These remarks are not meant to detract from the merits of this book. In its attempt to bring together the historiography of social and political life in the Ottoman Empire, and that of ideas and mentalities in order to understand the function and impact of one institution like the Hasseki *'imaret*, it breaks important new ground. I believe that the lack of symmetry between those two aspects which I noted is symptomatic of Ottoman studies in the last decades. It is striking to see that practical and administrative aspects of the Ottoman world are studied through a close reading of first-hand archival sources, while much of the analysis of Ottoman ideas rests on a somewhat eclectic combination of anthropological theory, a few incidentally available primary sources, and secondary literature referring to other periods (such as Mottahedeh). Ottoman literature of ethics and piety exists, but remains to be employed. My comments should

be understood as an indication of how engaging *Ottoman beneficence* is, and as an encouragement to develop this approach further.

Finally, a note for the publisher: This book includes more than 30 pages of notes. Page headers in the text give titles of chapters, but the notes are arranged according to the number of the chapter. So a reader who wants to find note 68 referred to on page 92 of the text must first find the number of the chapter in the table of contents in the beginning, and then find the note in the back of the book. This treasure hunt is needlessly time-consuming. After all, what is wrong with footnotes? [9]

Notes

[1]. Miriam Hoexter, "Waqf Studies in the Twentieth Century: The State of the Art," *The Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41 (1998): 474-95; Faruk Bilici, "Bilan des études sur les waqfs ottomans et perspectives = la fin du XXe siècle," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 18 (2000): 105-26.

[2]. Vera P. Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, CCLI, 1988), pp. 94 ff. The policies of Bayezid I and Mehmed II on large-scale confiscations of *waqfs* would have been of interest in this context as well.

[3]. Nevertheless, a brief look at a few published *waqfiyyes* casts some doubt on her claim that, differently from imperial *waqfs*, dignitaries "generally assigned the management of their *waqfs* to their family members" (p. 35). See Klaus Schwarz and Hars Kurio, *Die Stiftungen des osmanischen Grosswesirs Koga Sinan Pascha (gest. 1596) in Uzungaova/Bulgarien* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, Is-

lamkundliche Untersuchungen, 1980); Gerd Winkelhane and Klaus Schwarz, *Der osmanische Statthalter Iskender Pascha (gest. 1571) und seine Stiftungen in Ägypten und am Bosphorus*, Islamwissenschaftliche Quellen und Texte aus deutschen Bibliotheken, 1 (Bamberg: AKU, 1985); and Klaus Schwarz and Gerd Winkelhane, *Hoga Sa'deddin, Staatsmann und Gelehrter (gest. 1599), und seine Stiftung aus dem Jahr 1614*, Islamwissenschaftliche Quellen und Texte aus deutschen Bibliotheken, 5 (Bamberg: AKU, 1986).

[4]. It should also be mentioned that *fuqara*, literally "the poor," is often used to denote dervishes.

[5]. See most recently Michael Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 126 ff., following G. Necipoglu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

[6]. Klaus Schwarz and Gerd Winkelhane, *Hoga Sa'deddin, Staatsmann und Gelehrter (gest. 1599), und seine Stiftung aus dem Jahr 1614*, Islamwissenschaftliche Quellen und Texte aus deutschen Bibliotheken, 5 (Bamberg: AKU, 1986).

[7]. Jacques Le Goff, "Les mentalités: Une histoire ambiguë," in *Faire de l'histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff, Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

[8]. See, for example, Jill Robbins, "Sacrifice," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 289.

[9]. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

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Citation: Gottfried Hagen. Review of Singer, Amy, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem*. H-Turk, H-Net Reviews. May, 2003.

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