

Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, Stefan Weber, eds. *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*. WÖrzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2002. xi + 375 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-935556-89-7.

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Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire

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This volume is a most welcome addition not only to the literature on Ottoman cities, but also to the more general study of the political, social, and cultural relations between Istanbul and the Arab provinces. The seventeen articles contained in this volume, which were presented at the conference Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire, organized by the German Orient Institute in Beirut in April 1999, comprise a range of disciplinary approaches, primarily socio-historical and architectural, that together challenge prevailing interpretations of late Ottoman history. Ottoman cities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, earlier historians argued, suffered marked economic and political decline as their economies were integrated into a world economy dominated by Europe and as the Ottoman state, even while undertaking organizational reforms (the *Tanzimat*), either allowed the cities to languish or throttled their development with authoritarian and/or inept policies. The articles in this volume represent a concerted attempt to rescue Ottoman cities in general, and the Arab provincial capitals in particular, from this interpretation, arguing instead that Arab cities were centers of economic growth, dynamic intellectual activity, cultural innovation, and urban planning.

Editors Hanssen, Philipp, and Weber frame the collection of articles with an excellent introduction highlighting the need to view late Ottoman cities not as the

degradation of an earlier Ottoman ideal but rather as continuously evolving, hybrid urban centers that deserve scholarly attention in themselves. Key to maintaining this argument is their call to ever widen the range of sources used for urban history. The volume in particular illustrates the value of various architectural and photographic evidence. In this regard, the photographic reproductions and illustrations accompanying the discussions are substantial in number and of excellent quality.

The book is divided into seven parts. The first part, entitled "Discourse and Practice of Ottomanism," provides the ideological context for much of the remainder of the book, containing a stimulating dialogue of two essays on the origin and nature of Ottoman rule. In his article, which finds elaboration in later publications (see the *American Historical Review* [June 2002]), Ussama Makdisi contends that in the nineteenth century the outlook and institutional practices constituting Ottoman domination over provincial populations and territories took on many features of modern European imperialism. Taking what is today Lebanon and Syria as case studies, he argues that "the nineteenth-century *tanzimat* reflected the birth of a distinctly modern Ottoman imperialism," characterized, first, by the articulation of cultural and racial difference between the modernizing elite and peripheral populations, and second, by the systematic use of violence (pp. 29-30). Makdisi takes an imperial perspective, showing how Ottoman officials thought and carried out their "mission civilisatrice." Hanssen, on the other hand, steps

back and surveys the range of administrative practices that made up the processes of reform in the nineteenth century, principally inspection tours, petitions, provincial councils, and model provinces. He concludes that Ottoman modernizing reforms were not impositions of a modernizing elite but rather the results of “processes of negotiation between imperial local interest groups and their representations” (p. 74). More to the point, the reforms marked neither a return to older Ottoman practices nor a wholesale adoption of Western models, but rather a pragmatic approach incorporating solutions emerging in the process of negotiation. According to this argument, the imperial project of Ottomanization on the one hand, and the maintenance of provincial interests on the other, were simultaneous, and not mutually exclusive.

The second part, “The Foreign and the Ottoman in the Local Context,” groups together a set of essays on diverse topics relating to the intervention and presence of Europeans in geographical Syria from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. In his article on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Acre, Thomas Philipp points to the apparent contradiction that prior to the *tanzimat* reforms the governor Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar cultivated the image of a loyal Ottoman servant through his ambitious architectural projects even while building his economy on intensive commercial ties with European merchants. Leila Fawaz reminds us of the persistent European rivalries in Beirut, particularly that between the British and French, that complicated any Ottoman attempts to maintain and extend state control in that area. Ralph Bodenstein, a student of architectural history, thoroughly examines the culturally hybrid elements of a nineteenth-century Beirut house, showing how an European expatriate at turns orientalized and improvised on the Ottoman provincial periphery.

Entitled “Participating in Empire, Shaping Surroundings, and Challenging Authority,” the third part demonstrates the various forms of agency and independent expression in which provincial populations engaged. Both Christoph Neumann and John Chalcraft provide examples of provincial groups who were able to assert their interests in imperial decisionmaking, Neumann examining the process of petitionmaking and collection action in pre-*tanzimat* reforms, and Chalcraft the potential power that organized and semi-organized professional groups could wield in late-nineteenth-century British-occupied Egypt. Most notable from a methodological perspective is Stefan Weber’s study of wall paintings in domestic spaces of Ottoman Damascus. The inclusion of scenes from Istanbul and European cities in these paintings re-

flect an expanding geographical frame of reference and the internalization of empire; likewise, the representation of new technology and world events reflect Damascene curiosity and concern for global affairs.

Part 4, “Urban Institutions Between Centralization and Autonomy,” focuses on charitable endowments, or *waqfs*, as a site of contestation between modernizing authorities and provincial interest groups. With emphasis on the Syrian provinces, Astrid Meier charts the conflicts and turning points in the history of the *waqf* institution, especially as *waqf* shifted from a flexible category under Islamic law and Ottoman sultanic law to the rigid definition developed under the modernizing nineteenth-century reforms. While Meier’s analysis suggests that provincial *waqf* institutions eventually bent to the will of the central state, Randi Deghilhem argues that in Damascus the central authorities made accommodations with local administrators, allowing them considerable freedom of action.

The one essay in part 5, “Portraying a New Ottoman Response,” by Wolf-Dieter Lemke, considers the production and circulation of photographs as a way of visually re-ordering and re-inscribing public space in Arab provincial capitals. Taking as an example a collection of official photographs, he argues that imperial officials consciously represented public urban spaces and ceremonies with an interest to buttress the legitimation claims of the Ottoman state.

Part 6, “Empire, Patrons and Domestic Architecture,” examines, in different cities of the eastern Mediterranean, relationships between people and the houses they build. Filiz Yenisehirlioglu examines the historical formation of the city of Mersin, now in Turkey, and argues that while the Ottoman state provided contemporary authoritative models for town development, it was the migration in the nineteenth century of merchant families, notably from Beirut, that informed the organization and dynamics of urban space. Comparing the cities of Beirut and al-Salt, the latter located today in Jordan, Anne Mollenhauer traces a curious shift in the spatial organization of nineteenth-century eastern Mediterranean homes: the growing popularity of the central hall house.

Finally, Julia Gonnella analyzes the architecture of a notable house in Aleppo to answer questions about its enigmatic builder, a high religious official and to this day controversial figure among the notable families of the city. As such, the essay constitutes the innovative use of architecture to study personal identity. In the seventh and final part, “The Ottoman Civilizing Mission,” the

book addresses the question of the extent to which Ottoman rule in its most distant provinces, that of Baghdad and of the Yemen, could be considered a form of modern colonialism. Christoph Herzog, surveying an array of travel and other literature written by official Ottomans regarding Baghdad, shows that certain Ottoman writers adopted racial and cultural categories of European provenance. Studying Yemen, Thomas Khn, in a finely nuanced account, observes a similar discourse in Yemen, but additionally discerns a subtle shift in attitudes during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-19). While Ottoman administrators in Yemen in the final decades of the nineteenth century regarded Yemenis as equals, whom they only had to “ottomanize” for integration into the empire, by 1908 some administrators showed an inclination to classify Yemenis as an inferior, subject people who were unworthy to be Ottoman citizens. Also focusing on Yemen, Isa Blumi examines the complex interplay of imperial and local political actors in the final decades of Ottoman rule. His primary intent is to illustrate the risks of using conventional sociological terms to describe and explain political transformation taking place in colonial situations, especially since such terms were manipulated

and misused by the political actors in their internal and external communications.

The Empire in the City represents a significant contribution to our understanding of the late Ottoman Empire and of the Arab provinces. Historians of modern colonialism and of modern Middle Eastern history will find it of great value. The direct treatment of gender is limited to a few short discussions relating to the usage of architectural space and the administration of pious foundations (*waqfs*). The articles by Filiz Yenisehirlioglu and Anne Mollenhauer include the examination of house plans, which can be used to study the relationship between gender and the layout of domestic space. Randi Deguilhem for her part notes a certain “gender blindness” in the decision-making of imperial *waqf* administrators, though she is careful to add that administration at the local level was more conditioned by gender differences. Historians of gender may find the present volume of use not only in these direct ways, but also indirectly in its ability to depict the larger political and architectural context in which men and women of the late Ottoman period interpreted themselves and their society.

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