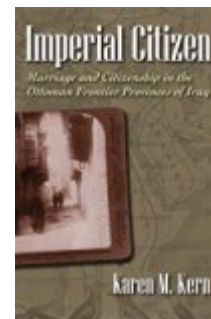


**Karen M. Kern.** *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011. xiv + 186 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8156-3285-6.



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Within the growing historiography of the centralization policies of the Ottoman Empire, little attention has focused on the role of marriage and citizenship, and no scholars have addressed their effects on the geopolitics of the far eastern frontier. The Iraqi provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul made up the southern part of this border region and also served as a point of contention between the Ottomans and the neighboring Iranians.[1] Ottoman suspicion of Iranian activity in the border regions dated back to the founding of the (Shi'a) Safavid Empire in 1501. Prior to the 1820s, the distance from Istanbul gave Iraqi provincial governors a good deal of autonomy, and there was a significant amount of movement, conversion, and intermarriage among Ottoman and Iranian peoples; as Ottoman centralization policies began to take effect, however, the state increasingly focused on the growing threat of Iranian incursions into these provinces and, hence, on ways to combat both territorial and religious expansion. Karen M. Kern's analysis of the Ottoman response to this pressing issue through the lens of

the 1874 Law Protecting the Prohibition of Marriage Between Iranians and Ottoman Citizens serves as a significant step in addressing this gap in the historiography. Kern argues that this law--the only exception to the 1869 Law of Ottoman Nationality--demonstrates the complex linkages between nationalism, citizenship, gender, religion, and geopolitics.

Women have long served as symbols of the nation, but recent scholarship has begun to focus on women's significance to state-building beyond the symbolic value assigned to them by nationalists.[2] Scholars like Frances Hasso, for one, have demonstrated how issues like marriage, family stability, and childbearing can serve as important matters for the state.[3] Kern adds to this literature by arguing that in addition to the symbolic importance of women to the nation, women also played a role in maintaining state power. The Ottoman 1874 marriage prohibition, for example, served as a way for the government to "regulat[e] its women to the roles as symbols of the nation, or markers of boundaries and models of difference"

(p. 24). Under the 1869 Law of Nationality, women took the citizenship of their husband. Such a system, however, was detrimental to Ottoman control of the Iraqi provinces. Should an Ottoman woman marry an Iranian, her children would be Iranian citizens and her property would be transferred as well. The 1874 law forbade marriages between all Ottomans and Iranian citizens, but included an additional provision specifically focused on women. That provision stated that if an Ottoman woman did marry an Iranian man in violation of the law, both she and any children from that marriage would still be considered Ottoman citizens and “liable for conscription, military tax, and all other financial obligations” (p. 90). This exception did not apply to Ottoman men who married Iranian women, nor did the religion of either party matter. Ottoman women who married non-Ottoman men who were not Iranians, however, fell under the 1869 law and took their husband’s nationality. The fear of losing land in the eastern provinces and potential military conscripts drove government interest in regulating women’s marriage in this specific context.

Kern opens the book with a discussion on early Ottoman conflicts with Iran, which centered on the religious differences between Sunnis and Shi’a. With the creation of the Safavid Empire, a number of religious opinions (*fetvas*) labeled the Shi’a and their supporters as heretics and, perhaps more importantly, a “threat to the empire” (p. 48). Prohibitions against marriage between Sunnis and “heretics” appeared during the sixteenth century, though they faded away by the seventeenth century. Because of Iraq’s large Shi’a population, however, and the location of several sacred Shi’i shrines in southern Iraq, the influx of Persian pilgrims remained an issue for the Ottomans, especially with the rise of Shi’a conversion activity in the provinces. This problem manifested itself in the return of marriage prohibitions in the nineteenth century, and the bulk of the

book focuses on the creation, implementation, and implications of the 1874 prohibition.

*Imperial Citizens* answers calls for more transnational and comparative studies on the Ottoman Empire.[4] Kern provides a brief historiographical essay in the introduction in which she situates her work in the larger literature on nationalism, citizenship, and the centralization policies of the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the book, Kern shows the interplay of international geopolitics and the empire’s policies on marriage and citizenship. For example, she notes the influence of the Napoleonic Code on the 1869 law and the dependent nature of women’s citizenship, further highlighting the uniqueness of the 1874 prohibition. In chapter 3, Kern also examines Ottoman marriage and citizenship policies toward its former territories, Algeria and Greece. Though a prohibition was enacted against marriages between Ottoman women and Algerian men who claimed French citizenship, Algerians retained the option of giving up their French passport and becoming Ottoman citizens. Such an option was not given to Iranians, and since few Algerians took French citizenship to begin with, this seems to have been a minor issue for the Ottomans. Though proposed, no prohibition was put in place regarding marriage between Ottomans and Greeks, another former Ottoman territory. These examples further reinforce the territorial concerns driving the 1874 law. Algeria and Greece were no longer part of the empire and prohibitions like that regarding Iranians could cause more trouble than they were worth. The eastern provinces of Iraq, however, were still under Ottoman control and faced a significant threat.

Kern makes extensive use of Ottoman archives to demonstrate the importance of marriage to the government. She includes the text of the relevant laws and decrees in a series of appendices, which allows the reader to trace the development of the language regarding marriage from 1822 to 1926, when the Turkish government offi-

cially ended the prohibition of marriage between Iranians and Turks. Since there are few, if any, sources that show how the people of Iraq and Iran reacted to these decrees, Kern does an excellent job using subsequent official communications and court cases to illustrate the confusion the law created among provincial governors. Though part of the centralization policies of the Ottoman government required the registration of marriages within six months of the contract signing, there were few mechanisms in place to actually enforce this law until 1902. The ability of the government to ensure that people in the Iraqi provinces followed the 1874 marriage prohibition, therefore, was greatly limited. Kern uses the existence of numerous court cases (discussed in chapter 4) regarding divorces and inheritance disputes of children of prohibited marriages to demonstrate that the law was difficult to enforce.

Kern argues that these efforts to regulate marriage based on citizenship demonstrate that the creation of Ottoman nationalism was a top-down approach. Again, due to lack of sources, there is little evidence of how individuals in the Iraqi provinces saw themselves in relation to the empire. The fact that Istanbul had to continually decide on punishments for both imams who performed such marriages and the individuals (primarily the women) who married Iranians indicates that the Ottomans struggled to inculcate a national sentiment among citizens of the provinces. Kern does an impressive job using the sources available to fill the gaps on the Iraqi perspective on nationalism, but she is at her strongest in demonstrating the connections between marriage and the geopolitical situation.

There are two points of weakness in the book. The first is the lack of inclusion of the Kurds. Kern mentions in the introduction that Mosul, which was predominately Kurdish, differed from the other provinces and generally requires a separate study. The reader might have benefited, however, from a more in-depth explanation of how the re-

gions differed and why Kurds did not factor into this study of the 1874 prohibition law. The second point of weakness is the final chapter. It focuses on the effects of the First World War and the creation of Turkey on the marriage prohibition. There is little analysis of how the war influenced Ottoman policy, other than to note the increased importance of conscription. Though Iraq became a separate monarchy in 1921, the marriage prohibition remained in place until 1926. Kern mentions that Parliament reaffirmed the law in August, 1921, but then without “fanfare or explanatory memorandum” passed a new law in 1926 revoking the prohibition (p. 143). It is unclear, however, how the law was used or why the Turkish government felt the need to keep it between 1921 and 1926, since Turkey no longer controlled Iraq. At less than ten pages and with little analysis, this chapter could have been added to the previous one or the conclusion, rather than separated into a stand-alone chapter. These are relatively minor flaws, though, and do not take away from the otherwise impressive research and analysis of the rest of the book.

Overall, this book provides a concise, well-researched explanation of the importance of marriage in both the geopolitical strategies of the empire, as well as the attempted creation of national identity. Kern’s writing style makes the work very accessible, even for the non-specialist reader, and demonstrates the myriad ways in which empires should be studied.

#### Notes

[1]. A note on terms: Though it is somewhat anachronistic, Kern uses “Iraq” to refer to the provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. This review will do the same.

[2]. See for example Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

[3]. Frances S. Hasso, *Consuming Desires: Family Crisis and the State in the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[4]. Rifa'at 'Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 2nd ed. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 6.

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