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An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1914 by Halil Inalcik; Donald Quataert

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“Islam as a historically transcendent object of inquiry” (9)—a habit for which Chamberlain gently chides the field—he successfully situates his study of the transmission of knowledge in the hurly-burly of social competition of the place and period.

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*An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1914*. Edited by Halil Inalcik with Donald Quataert (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995) 1026 pp. \$120.00

This great encyclopedia of a book contains a summary of the life-time scholarship of four of the most distinguished historians of the Ottoman Empire: Inalcik—the doyen of Ottoman studies—who deals with the period 1300–1600, Suraiya Faroqhi (1590–1699), Bruce McGowan (1699–1812), and Quataert (1812–1914). In addition, there is a very useful appendix called “Money in the Ottoman Empire, 1326–1914,” by Sevket Pamuk.

The book’s stated task is to provide an overview of the economic and social history of the territories governed by a world empire that expanded, changed, and contracted during four centuries. This aim requires each author to try to do justice to transformations in the pattern of central administration in Istanbul, as well as in the material conditions to be found in the empire’s three main component parts: the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Arab provinces. The authors provide a great deal of new information, as well as a summary of much of their own earlier work, to be found in such publications as Inalcik’s *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600* (London, 1973) and Quataert’s edited *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500–1950* (Albany, 1994).

Their task proves difficult for a number of basic reasons. First, the Ottoman archives, upon which all rely, provide patchy coverage, at best, in highlighting such subjects of official interest as taxation, while largely ignoring (at least until the nineteenth century) the equally important question of production. Second, when dealing with such a heavily centralized system as the Ottoman, it is necessary to sketch the administrative and political background before treating the economic and social aspects—a constraint that takes a lot of time and encourages all four authors to view the structure of economy and society in primarily statist terms.

Even more important is the question of how to give shape to this vast enterprise at a time when the field itself is in the midst of a paradigmatic shift from the old idea of an empire and society in decline from the late sixteenth century to one that lays greater stress on the state’s ability to reorganize itself as a way of adapting to changing circumstances. Some of the authors prove to be more revisionist than others, but all continue to rely on some of the basic features of the old

paradigm, such as the role of crises in promoting change and the basic distinction between “reformers” who wanted to modernize government and society and conservative social forces that stood in their way.

This situation, in turn, produces a new challenge—how to replace the old notion of Ottoman retreat before an advancing Europe with an understanding in which the relationship between the two and, just as important, the comparisons and contrasts between the two, are more carefully nuanced. On the evidence presented in this book, the work has only just begun. Comparisons are made, but they are still conducted largely on the assumption that there was just one Europe with a relatively unproblematic historical trajectory.

It would be unrealistic to suppose that a general uniformity of approach could have been imposed on four such experienced scholars. However, the tendency to downplay the implicit contradictions between them will only confuse student readers. It would have been more fruitful to bring such contradictions out into the open rather than treating them as subjects for discussion and debate in random and haphazard fashion.

One last criticism refers to the problems still surrounding the analysis of the late sixteenth-century crisis, which continues to loom large as the major turning point in Ottoman history. Inalcik, Faroqhi, and Pamuk all stress different causal factors—inflation, depreciation of the currency, wars, rural overpopulation, and so on—without suggesting any way to resolve the matter eventually. What is needed—as in the similar case of sixteenth-century European economic and social history—is a much better sense of the realities of rural agricultural life, based on a model that transcends the present emphasis (represented by a long line of thinkers from Thomas Malthus to Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie) on immobilism punctuated by crisis.

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*The Making of Early Medieval India.* By Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994) 270 pp. \$24.00

This work of original scholarship will be read with interest by anyone concerned, in the author’s words, with “the selection of variables which would purport to separate one historical phase from another” (2). The analysis of the historical experience of the Indian subcontinent has undergone enormous changes in the past fifty years, and Chattopadhyaya’s opening chapter is an erudite and searching examination of modern Indian historiography relating to his field of specialization. His justification of his designation of that field as “early medieval India” leads into many of the most debated issues in the writing and teaching of Indian history.

When the history of India began to be written in the nineteenth century by Westerners as well as by Indians, it was generally divided