

STUDIES ON OTTOMAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

V

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THE OTTOMANS IN AFRICA: A TRIBUTE TO CENGİZ ORHONLU

Cengiz Orhonlu, who passed away in 1976, at the early age of 49 was professor of history at the History Department of Istanbul University.¹ The way he became involved in research into Ottoman Africa is best told in his own words in the foreword of *Habeş Eyaleti*:

'The beginnings of this study go back to when I was visiting McGill University in Montreal in 1959-60. I had been unable to provide a satisfactory answer to an Ethiopian Ph. D student regarding the Ottoman presence in Ethiopia. After this I started to read the travelogues in the Redpath Library together with other related literature on the subject and to gather notes. After my return to Turkey I started to collect archival materials pertinent to the topic. This task, which I had thought I would be able to complete very quickly soon proved to be extremely slow, given the dearth of archival material. This lead me to decide that I would not limit myself as to time and would complete the study only after I had collected enough material.

Indeed Orhonlu sought his material with tremendous energy and concentration only publishing two articles until 1974 when his major work appeared. While combing the Ottoman archival sources he knew well, he also attempted to import the relevant literature from abroad. (In 1965-69, while preparing my doctoral dissertation at the University of London I was party to the difficulties he experienced in this sphere, and tried to provide what assistance I could.)

¹For two articles that correctly reflect aspects of Orhonlu's historical scholarship see : Nejat Göyünç, 'Cengiz Orhonlu: Hayatı, Eserleri, Şahsiyeti,' *Türk Kültürü Araştırmaları* XV/1-2 (Ankara 1976) pp. 7-38; Mahmut Şakiroğlu, 'Prof. Dr. Cengiz Orhonlu, 1927-1976' *Bellelen* XL/160 (Ankara, 1976) pp 669-686.

Some Comments on Orhonlu the Historian

After Orhonlu's death in 1976 one of his colleagues payed homage to him in the following words:²

Orhonlu was renowned for not allowing himself to be constricted by a narrow approach to historical material. He knew how to move flexibly from century to century and from topic to topic. While researching into the various subjects he was interested in he always stressed the multiplicity of influences operating in a historical process. He was always able to interpret the mass of material he found in the Başbakanlık Archives in Istanbul, which he treated as his second home. Apart from the works he published as books from the press of Istanbul University, he also wrote numerous articles.³

Those who knew him very well-like myself-would picture him as follows : 'Orhonlu had the most uncanny knack of producing a coherent text from his typewriter from the most disparate of sources. Often the paper he removed from the typewriter would be filled with new additions as soon as it was taken from the carriage. He was always in the utmost hurry to get the most recent findings to the public, to the extent of not allowing substantial revisions of his work. For him, History was a science, the science of unearthing the past. He was not too interested in the literary side of history.'⁴

Nejat Göyünç, his close friend and colleague, did not hesitate to add that Orhonlu was relentless in his search for evidence and had the rare capacity of inspiring research.⁵

The making of 'Ottoman Africa'

Cengiz Orhonlu's first sally into African history took the form of an article which he later incorporated into *Habeş Eyaleti*.⁶ In many ways this work constituted an introduction for his later examination of the Ottoman presence in the Red Sea along the spice route to India, and the Ottoman-Portuguese struggle for the control of this lucrative trade. In Orhonlu's own words :

²C. Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Şehircilik ve Ulaşım*, (ed. Salih Özbaran) İzmir 1984, p. III. Other works by Orhonlu are : *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Asiretleri İskan Teşebbüsü* (Istanbul 1963); *Osmanlı İmparatorlu'nda Derbend Teşkilatı* (Istanbul 1967); *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na aid Belgeler: Telhisler*, (Istanbul 1970)

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Göyünç, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-26.

⁶C. Orhonlu, 'XVI. Asrın ilk yarısında Kızıldeniz Sahillerinde Osmanlılar' *Tarih Dergisi* XII/16 (Istanbul 1962) pp. 1-24.

'(After 1517) the Ottoman state decided to take part in the eastern trade with India and points further east which it assessed to be very lucrative. One way of reviving this trade which had been somewhat stagnant during the recent wars was to revitalize the trade in gold and spices. The first thing that needed to be done here was to establish the security of the routes between the Mediterranean and India by securing the control and hegemony of the Red Sea. It has also been argued that the Ottoman push eastward was also to some extent to circumvent Safavid influence in the same area. Ottoman contact with the east, Turkestan, India etc. was thus to be established via the sea route. The greatest rivals of the Ottomans were the Portugese who claimed a monopoly on the eastern trade at this time.'⁷

For his first article Orhonlu had relied mainly on Fernand Braudel. His subsequent work became more original as he increasingly incorporated Ottoman materials. These take shape in his account of Ottoman attempts to establish control over the coastal towns of east Africa and Ethiopia.⁸ Here, Orhonlu gave particular emphasis to the Ottomans' desire to reach the sources of the gold coming into the Mediterranean basin. The expeditionary force led by Salih Paşa in 1552, when 15 camel loads of gold dust was acquired, is given as proof of this aim.⁹

'No doubt the matter of the gold trade was not the only incentive pushing the Ottomans into Ethiopia. Another factor was the monopoly of the eastern trade. The Ottomans had hoped to break the Portugese hold on the Indian Ocean by sending fleets commanded by Seyid Ali Reis and Piri Reis, but had not succeeded due to their lack of ocean going ships. To compensate for this the Ottomans chose Ethiopia as their objective. This was not accidental. As this was a land with a shoreline on both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, any power controlling it could hope to realize serious inroads into the trade with India which had to follow this coast, and ultimately control trade. This was the aim behind the campaigns of 1554-1555.'¹⁰

These two articles dealing with the Ottoman attempt to establish their hegemony over Ethiopia were later to be incorporated in *Habeş Eyaleti*, published in 1974 two years before his death. This was to be Orhonlu's most comprehensive work covering the province of Ethiopia from its inception to when it became an empty claim in the 19th century, and ending with Ottoman-Ethiopian relations after effective Ottoman withdrawal from the area. There is

⁷C. Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti*, (henceforth referred to as *Habeş Eyaleti*) İstanbul 1974.

⁸C. Orhonlu, 'Osmanlıların Habeşistan Siyaseti, 1554-1560' *Tarih Dergisi* XV/20 1965 pp. 39-54.

⁹C. Orhonlu, 'Osmanlıların Habeşistan Siyaseti', p. 40.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

little doubt that with *Habeş Eyaleti* Orhonlu ranks as the Turkish historian who has taken the Ottoman-African connection in hand in the most comprehensive manner. His diligent efforts in the *Başbakanlık*, *Topkapı*, and the *Hariciye* archives are a testimony to painstaking scholarship. His ability to pull together the plurality of documents, registers, and other archival sources have enabled him to shed light—to a certain extent—on the Ottoman presence in Ethiopia. The French historian Michel Lesure, who reviewed *Habeş Eyaleti* had this to say: 'No doubt of all the lands reached by the Ottoman expansion those of north-east Africa are the least known. M. Orhonlu's book is a useful contribution which sheds fresh light on the issue.'¹¹

As I pointed out above, Lesure has also drawn attention to the fact that there is a serious dearth of sources for the first half of the sixteenth century regarding the Ottoman attempts to establish control of the spice routes, their policy in the Indian Ocean, and towards Ethiopia. Orhonlu's statement that the Ottoman archives comprise many unused documents pertinent to the spice trade, is more applicable for the second half of the century.¹² This means that we are in need of new sources for the study of Ottoman policy in the south. No doubt Orhonlu went some way towards this aim by combining the works of historians like Lane and Braudel with the report of the Ottoman sailor, Selman Reis. Yet, it is possible to complement his work with other sources. An example of such a source are the letters exchanged between the king of Portugal, D. João III, and Süleyman II in 951/1544. These letters were exchanged by the intermediary of the Portuguese ambassadors Duarte Catanho and Diego de Mesquita, and are preserved in the *Torre do Tombo* archives in Lisbon.¹³ Although Orhonlu was not able to use these sources, they constitute a vital counterpart to the materials he found in the Ottoman sources. For instance in regard to the reasons given by Orhonlu for the Ottoman incursions into Ethiopia, we find additional information in the correspondence between the Archbishop of Ethiopia, Dom Andre de Oviedo, and the Pope. In a letter to the supreme pontif dated 15 June 1567, Oviedo stated that the Ottomans were after slaves for their galleys, provisions, iron etc. (*Porque se os Turcos vieram primeira e se fizerem senhores de Ethiopia... serão de grande periuizo a India ... porque ha nesta terra muitas cousas que lhe servem muito pera provimento de suas gales, como são escravos, vitualhas, ferro etc.*).¹⁴ In keeping with this information, Orhonlu has established that the Governorate of Ethiopia, *Habeş Beylerbeyliği*, was officially

¹¹M. Lesure, 'Les Ottomans et l'Éthiopie' *Mare Luso-Indicum* III, (Paris 1976) p. 199.

¹²C. Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti* p. 9.

¹³Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisboa) *Corpo Cronologico*, Parte 1, Maço 72, Documento 16; Maço 3, Documento 4; In the same archives, *Documentos Orientais*, Maço 1, Documentos 23, 24.

¹⁴P. Emmanuel d'Almeida, *Historiae Aethiopiae*, (Romae 1907) capitulo XVII.

established on 5 July 1555, and Özdemiş Paşa was charged with the conquest of the area.¹⁵

The Province of Ethiopia (Habeş Eyaleti)

It is known that as early as 1542 the Ottomans in Yemen were giving support in the form of firearms and troops to Ahmed el-Mucahid whom they recognized as the ruler of Ethiopia. El-Mucahid was involved in a struggle with his Christian rival, Galavdeves (Cladius) who was supported by the Portuguese. Although the Ottomans instigated a campaign from Egypt in 1555 with the aim of conquering the Sultanate of Funj, Orhonlu claims that the more effective thrust which was aiming to reach as far as Mozambique, was to be from the Red Sea.¹⁶ Indeed, the Ottoman forces advancing from Egypt combined with the forces based in the Arabian side of the Red Sea coast which was already under Ottoman control. In the campaign of 1557-1559 Özdemiş Paşa took Massawa, Arkiko, Tigre, Deberva (Debaroa), penetrating well into Ethiopia. Even though the death of Özdemiş Paşa caused the Ottoman advance to falter, and some of the territory taken was subsequently lost, the key positions along the route linking the Red Sea with Ethiopia were to remain under Ottoman control. The Ottoman-held strategic points were supported by Sefer Reis from the sea. This led to the development of a situation very unfavourable to the Portuguese. As put by D'Almeida; 'The reason for all this is Özdemiş Paşa (*Baxa Zamur*) who is now in Massawa (*Maçua*) with many Turks.'¹⁷ When P. Andre de Oivedo and his followers arrived before Massawa in four *fustas* on 17 March 1557, they found a determined Özdemiş Paşa (*Baxa do Turco*) already there preparing to take the port.¹⁸ Orhonlu estimates that the Ottomans landed a disciplined force of some 1400-1500 troops in Ethiopia. Despite their technical superiority, the Ottoman troops had difficulties with the harsh climate and terrain. (In fact the troops were given additional pay in recognition of the hardship of their mission and the long distances involved.)¹⁹ Orhonlu points out that the subsequent Ottoman expansion into the area, commanded by Özdemiş Paşa's son, Osman Paşa, does not receive much attention in the Turkish sources. This episode does however receive mention in Diogo do Couto's *Da Asia* and Pero Pais' *Historia*. After 1567, in the successive rules of the *Beylerbeys* Hüseyin Paşa, Ahmed Paşa son of İskender Paşa, Rıdvan Paşa, and Süleyman Paşa, the province went through a period of stability, Orhonlu correctly points out that the uprising of Imam Mutaahhar in the Yemen in 1569-1570, meant that the Ottoman effort in Ethiopia

¹⁵C. Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti* p. 37. *Rûûs Defter* No. 213 15 Şaban 962 (5 July 1555).

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷D'Almeida, *op. cit.*, Livro IV, capítulo XIII.

¹⁸P. Pais, *Historia da Ethiopia* II (Porto 1945) p. 276.

¹⁹C. Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, p. 40.

had to be slowed down as some of the forces stationed there had to be used to reinforce Ottoman forces in the Yemen. Like the other *Beylerbeylik*s of North Africa, Yemen, Basra and Lahsa, in Ethiopia too, effective, long term Ottoman control could not be established beyond the points held by Ottoman garrisons. In this respect the characteristics of Ottoman administration in these areas are very similar. The battle of Addi Qarro (Debra Qarro) was lost in 1578 (or 1579) during the administration of Ahmed Paşa. In the time of Hızır Paşa the victory of Arkiko was won against the combined forces of the king of Ethiopia and his Arab allies. In the 1582-89 (?) period relations with the Ethiopian ruler were relatively good but this was followed by a renewal of hostilities. This see-saw of battles and truces between the Ottomans who controlled key points along the coast and the Ethiopian ruler who controlled the interior continued until the end of the 16th century.

According to Orhonlu, the 17th century is not particularly rich in Ottoman documentary sources on Ethiopia. Generally writing from western sources, he portrays this century as a relatively quiet one compared to the previous century. Orhonlu puts the generally good relations maintained with the Ethiopian king down to the continued control by the Ottomans of the coast, and their success in levying customs duties on caravans going into the interior.²⁰

Orhonlu's major Ottoman sources for the province are weighted towards the 16th century and are mostly from the *Rûûs Defterleri* and the *Mühimme Defterleri*. The province was also to some extent a case study of the difficulties the Ottomans experienced in provisioning and controlling their more distant possessions. The communications were stretched along the route Istanbul, Alexandria, Suakin, Massawa and were bound to be somewhat tenuous. In Orhonlu's words :

'Because of the vastness of the lands and the weakness of the forces which were to maintain communications and control, this meant that the area had to be constantly reinforced. The semi-continuous state of war with the Ethiopian monarchy made this all the more necessary. The fact that the province did not have sufficient resources of its own meant that the pay of the troops had to be sent from another province—usually Egypt. Yet, this often meant the troops were not payed on time, which constituted an important weakness of the administration. These unfortunate circumstances meant that often they were not very enthusiastic in the performance of their duty.'²¹

Most of Orhonlu's Ottoman material comes from the 16th and to a certain extent the 17th centuries. The author of the *Habeş Eyaleti* has stressed that he

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 83.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 93.

was not able to find precise data regarding the administrative and financial structure of the province. He states that he does not think an inventory (*tahrir*) was ever undertaken for the province, at any rate he found no such account. Despite these handicaps he has, through his use of the *Rûûs* and the *Mühimme Defterleri*, been fairly successful in bringing to light the structure of this distant province of the Ottoman empire. The province, like many other provinces in Africa and Arabia was, as of 1555, to have the status of *salyaneli eyalet*—*salyaneli* province status meant that the province's taxes were collected directly for the centre and were transferred to the central treasury after the local expenses were deducted. The administrative centre was the *sancak* of Suakin, with Akik, Bor (Bur), Matrer (?), Hindiye, Sarace, and Ibrim (which was transferred from Egypt) making up the other *sancaks*. According to Orhonlu: 'The greatest source of income for the province was the customs duty levied on shipping calling at the ports of Massawa, Suakin, and Beylül.' Spices were the most lucrative source of duty, 'All ships laden with spices payed duty at every port of call'.²² The combined customs duty collected by all the ports mentioned above came to 15,000 *filori* in 1581, and it was collected through tax farming, (*iltizam*), Pearl fishing was another source of income which brought considerable revenue.²³

The slave trade was another important source of money. Most of Orhonlu's work on the slave trade is based on research done by foreign scholars and accounts of European travellers rather than Ottoman documents. No doubt, the lack of sources due to the failure of the Ottoman to fully control Ethiopia, meant that Orhonlu was unable to paint a more complete picture of what was, after all, a typical Ottoman *salyane* province. For instance he has no information on agricultural taxation or on *ihtisab*, — *ihtisabiye* being taxes collected by merchants and craftsmen on behalf of the market supervisor (*muhtesib*).

We learn from Orhonlu also that most of the Ottoman troops serving in Ethiopia were transferred from other nearby provinces, usually Egypt and Yemen. Two such groups were the *Mısır Kulu* and the *Garip Yiğitler* from Egypt. Also from Yemen came *seggalin*, gunpowder, cannon and firearms. Another item which had to be imported was draught animals; horses and mules had to be brought in from the other provinces of the empire. The most important element in the maintenance of the province were the war galleys that the Ottomans used to provision and defend this area until well into the 17th century.²⁴

In the 18th century Ethiopia had become something of a backwater for the Ottomans. As put by Orhonlu:

²²*Ibid.*, p. 98.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 116-128.

'The holder of the sancak of Jeddah was also usually made Beylerbey of Ethiopia. This meant that they became absentee officials who managed their affairs in Ethiopia through a representative (*mütesellim*). This was largely because the revenues of the province were very inadequate and did not cover its expenses... This development was partly due to the fact that the Ottoman centre was occupied elsewhere and therefore left the local administrators of Ethiopia to their own devices. However the reason (for the decline of Ottoman power in the area) was the increasing influence and power of the colonial empires.'²⁵

Ottoman Relations with Bornu.

Another major contribution of Cengiz Orhonlu to the study of Ottoman Africa is his article dealing with Ottoman relations with Bornu and the documents he published relating to that issue.²⁶ Orhonlu brought out in this article that the Ottoman penetration south from the North African coast occurred under the command of the Beylerbey of Algiers, Salih Paşa. The southernmost points reached by Ottoman forces were Ouargla and Toggourt. In this article Orhonlu also published documents showing the contacts the Ottomans established with the lands of the African interior. It must however be indicated that in this study Orhonlu made use of the previous research of G. B. Martin on Ottoman-Bornuan relations. His major contribution in this field has been to provide information for Turkish readers who knew very little about this aspect of Ottoman history and to complement the already existant research with Ottoman documentation. The reasons for the Ottoman-Bornuan *rapprochement*, which lived through its golden age in the reign of Idris Alawma (1570-1602) are given as twofold. First, the desire on the part of the Ottomans to make use of the prestige and influence that the Sultanate of Bornu had attained along the critical central African trade routes, second the desire on the part of the Bornuan ruler to make use of Ottoman power to secure access to the *hac*. Orhonlu's account, based on the *Divan-ı Hümayun Mühimme Defterleri*, of the Bornuan delegation which arrived in Istanbul in 1574 is as follows :

'The chief envoy was a certain Elhac Yusuf. The delegation desired the following from the Ottoman state: to secure the safety in transit of the Bornuan caravans to and from the *hac*, to provide the same safety and security for those travelling for the purposes of trade...'²⁷

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁶C. Orhonlu, 'Osmanlı-Bornu Münasebetlerine Ait Belgeler.' *Istanbul Üniversitesi Tarih Dergisi* 23, 1969 pp 111-130.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 121.

Orhonlu indicates that İdris, unsatisfied with the Ottoman directed his attention towards Morocco after 1582, even though good relations were maintained with the Ottoman empire.

Conclusion

Orhonlu's *Habeş Eyaleti* and his other studies occurred just at the time when Turkish and other (especially Arab) historians were beginning to adopt new perspectives towards Ottoman rule in the Arabian lands and Africa. Since the 1970s the subject of Ottoman Africa has received fresh attention particularly through the efforts of the Tunisian historian Abdeljelil Temimi. This type of effort has led to the deployment of funds for research of the Ottoman centuries in Africa. However Orhonlu's pioneering work made much of this subsequent interest possible, and gave it a basis from which to develop. In Orhonlu's posthumously published, *Afrika ile ilgili Türkçe Yayınlar ve Kayıtlar* (Turkish Records and Publications dealing with Africa), we note that there have been numerous publications concerning the subject.²⁸ Unfortunately however, we also see that the standard of scholarship in many of these publications is very low. (I would like to take pains to point out at this point that the well documented work of Samih İlder, and the contributions of Abdürrahman Çaycı, Ercümen Kuran and Orhan Koloğlu are a cut above the rest and are not to be forgotten.)

Orhonlu began work on a portion of African history of direct interest to the Ottomans when previous work which he could have used did not exist, and there was little or no incentive to undertake work of this kind. Taking in hand Ottoman documentation he has managed to produce a corpus of exemplary work. One could say that the major contribution to African history from Turkish historiography was made by Cengiz Orhonlu. His death at an early age meant that much of what he began has remained unfinished and we have been deprived of many of the insights he was to impart. Our hope is that his works will be translated into other languages and his research will provide inspiration for subsequent generations of African historians.²⁹

Translated from Turkish by Selim Deringil.

²⁸C. Orhonlu, 'Afrika ile ilgili Türkçe Yayın ve Kayıtlar' *İstanbul Üniversitesi Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*. 7-8 (İstanbul 1977) pp. 145-156.

²⁹For the brief English summary of a paper delivered by Cengiz Orhonlu at a conference in Rome on the importance of the Ottoman archives for Ethiopian history see : C. Orhonlu, 'Turkish Archival Sources on Ethiopia' *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici*, (Roma 1974) pp. 455-462.