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Cultural Encounters and Adaptations in the Late Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire: Theater, Portraiture, and Knowledge Transmission

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The late seventeenth century witnessed a dynamic phase of cultural exchange between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, particularly in the realms of theater, portraiture, and intellectual engagement. European theatrical performances gained prominence in Ottoman diplomatic circles, with plays staged in Galata as early as 1612 and later at the French embassy in Istanbul. In 1675, efforts to introduce Venetian opera at the royal circumcision and wedding festival in Edirne reflected the empire's growing interest in European entertainment. Although logistical obstacles prevented the performers' arrival, Armenian and Turkish actors presented Persian style plays, showcasing the empire's established theatrical traditions.

Portraiture similarly emerged as a significant medium of artistic exchange, with European-style depictions of Ottoman rulers, including Mehmed IV, circulating in diplomatic settings. Meanwhile, intellectual interactions with Europe intensified through figures such as Panayiotis Nikousios and Alexander Mavrocordatos, who facilitated the transmission of European works into Ottoman Turkish. Scientific knowledge also permeated Ottoman intellectual circles through scholars like the French orientalist Antoine Galland and the Italian physician Giovanni Mascellini, whose Latin medical treatise was published in Vienna in 1673.

This paper aims to highlight how these cultural exchanges were not instances of passive reception but rather processes of selective adaptation. By examining the transmission of artistic and intellectual traditions, this study demonstrates how the Ottoman elite actively engaged with European influences, integrating them into existing frameworks. This process of adaptation shaped the empire's evolving cultural and scientific landscape, demonstrating both receptivity and agency in knowledge transfer.

Short Biography

M. Fatih Çalışır, Ph.D., is a historian specializing in early modern Ottoman intellectual and environmental history. Currently a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies under the TÜBİTAK 2219 Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Abroad, his research explores the intersections of Ottoman and European intellectual traditions in the early modern era.

Dr. Çalışır earned his Master of Arts from Bilkent University in 2009 and his Ph.D. from Georgetown University in 2016. Before pursuing his doctorate, he worked as an assistant specialist at the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage at the Topkapı Palace Manuscripts Library and the Istanbul Museum of Islamic Science and Technology History.

Throughout his academic career, Çalışır has held various positions, including faculty roles at Ibn Haldun University (2017–2019) and Kırklareli University (2019–2023). Since February 2023, he has been a full-time faculty member at Istanbul University's Institute of Islamic Studies.

His scholarly contributions include a monograph on Mehmed I and several edited volumes, such as works on the era of Suleiman the Lawgiver (with Suraiya Faroqhi and M. Şakir Yılmaz), the history of the Turkish war industry (with A. Sefa Özkaya), and the Köprülü era in Ottoman history. He is also known for his translations of academic works on environmental history, Ottoman military history, and the Baburid Empire.

Dr. Çalışır is the founder of the Bilkent History Society and the Environmental History Society of Turkey. He

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