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Cross-Cultural Knowledge Transfer in Military Reform: The Impact of Rochefort's 1717 Proposal on the Ottoman Empire

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In 1717, the French officer Rochefort presented a proposal to the Ottoman authorities aimed at establishing a specialized engineering corps composed of foreign experts. His plan included military aspects such as fortifications, artillery calculations, technical training and economic recommendations to reduce the Ottoman Empire's dependence on foreign trade. Although Rochefort's proposal was not accepted at the time, it resurfaced years later through Comte de Bonneval, who arrived in the Ottoman Empire in 1731, converted to Islam as Ahmet Pasha, and played a significant role in founding the Humbaracı Ocağı (Bombardier Corps) and a Hendesehâne (Engineering School). The reappearance of these ideas highlights the complex processes of cross-cultural knowledge transfer and the adaptation of foreign expertise within the Ottoman context. This study explores how Rochefort's proposals contributed to early Ottoman military modernization and their long-term influence on military education. By examining the transmission and transformation of European military knowledge in the Ottoman Empire, this research seeks to shed light on the broader global connections that shaped early modern statecraft, engineering practices, and educational reforms.

Short Biography

Alper Atasoy is an independent researcher focusing on the history of mechanics, technology, and engineering in the Ottoman Empire. He holds a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Istanbul University, where his dissertation examined the development of modern mechanics education in the 19th-century Ottoman Empire. He also completed an M.A. in Philosophy at Istanbul Medeniyet University, writing a thesis on the concept of mechanics in the Hellenistic period. His undergraduate degree is in Electrical Engineering from Yıldız Technical University. His research interests include the cross-cultural transfer of technical knowledge and its influence on Ottoman modernization, the history of engineering education in the Islamic world, and the role of mathematics in Ottoman scientific traditions. He has published articles and book chapters on biographic and bibliographic studies of Ottoman mathematicians as well as a discussion on paradigms in the history of technology. His book chapter "Science of Mechanics in the Ottoman Classical Period (14th–18th Century)" was recently published in "Explorations in the History and Heritage of Machines and Mechanisms" by Springer. He is currently working on an entry on "mechanics" for the forthcoming "Encyclopedia of Science and Technology in Contemporary Islamic Societies (17–20 centuries)" to be published in Turkey. He continues to pursue independent research, focusing on the connections between European and Ottoman scientific traditions and how knowledge transfer shaped early modern education and statecraft.

Keywords

Knowledge transfer, global connections, military reform, Ottoman engineering, engineering education

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