

## Book Reviews

Gül Şen. *Making Sense of History: Narrativity and Literariness in the Ottoman Chronicle of Na'ima* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022). Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, vol. 74. Pp. xvi, 387.

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“The science of histories (*‘ilm al-tawārikh*),” says the Ottoman chronicler Ṭāshkubrī’zādah [Taşköprü-zade], “is knowing the conditions of different human groups, their lands, ceremonies, and practices as well as the deeds of prominent personalities amongst them, their lineages, their lives and so on. The topic of this field is the conditions of past notables, such as prophets, saints, scholars, philosophers, poets, kings, sultans and so on. It aims to clarify past circumstances, learning lessons from those situations and gaining sound advice from these teachings”.<sup>1</sup>

The importance that Ottoman scholars and sultans attached to the writing of chronicles is illustrated from an episode that is said to have taken place at the end of the fifteenth century. It is narrated that the sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) demanded that his court produce historical works that glorified the Ottomans. This anecdote allowed İnalcık, in the early 1960s, to maintain that history (*tārikh/tawārikh*) befitted the sultans as an important tool, by means of which the past and present of the Ottoman polity were discussed and reconceived.<sup>2</sup>

The book under review aims to analyze an Ottoman court chronicle, the *Tārikh-i Na‘imā* (*Chronicle of Na‘imā*) by Na‘imā Muşţafá Efendi (1065–1128/1655–1716), a name not unfamiliar to learned eighteenth-century West European audiences. Aiming to excavate the process whereby a chronicle is transformed into a story, we are given a study in narratology. Investigating the representation of the events in a narrative text is a research methodology that enriches our perspectives on the historical sources.

Here is not the place to enter into Hayden White’s *Metahistory*<sup>3</sup> and the effects of the cultural turn on the study of Islamic history. It is sufficient to note that the book under review follows in the trail of this analytical shift. In

<sup>1</sup> Aḥmad ibn Muşţafá ibn Khalil Ṭāshkubrī’zādah (901–68/1495–1561), *Miftāḥ al-sa‘ādah wa-mişbāḥ al-siyādah fī mawḍū‘āt al-‘ulūm* (Beirut, 1998), 344–45.

<sup>2</sup> Halil İnalcık, “The Rise of the Ottoman Historiography,” in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (London, 1962), 152–67.

<sup>3</sup> (Baltimore, 1973).



the general introduction, Şen reviews the state of the art and offers a succinct survey of narratology, evaluating the pros and cons of this literary methodology in the field of chronicles. This is followed with a detailed study of the history of Naʿīmā's *Chronicle*, its manuscripts, printed editions, and reception in Europe.

Following Thomas's study of Naʿīmā,<sup>4</sup> the first chapter dwells on several biographical points. The first section provides a report of the author's life in seventeenth-century Aleppo, which due to its strategic location and cross-borders economy became in this time a central Ottoman city. Next, the author follows Naʿīmā's relocation to Istanbul. Court politics affected his position in the Ottoman capital, and he was exiled to Crete. Although able to secure a permit to return, Naʿīmā's position did not improve. He was forced to move to the port city of Patras, in modern Greece, which was to be his final resting place.

The second section investigates Naʿīmā's literary production, his original compilations and the works copied by him. Depending upon earlier studies, Şen enriches this chapter with references to original Ottoman documents. She provides an in-depth picture of a mid-ranking clerk who served in the sultanate's bureaucratic apparatus.

Chapter Two opens with the question: what literary criteria should be used to classify a compilation as *tārīkh*? Şen points out that Ottoman historiography was institutionalized. Patronage by the sultan's court is a recurring feature of the authors of these writings. They were players with a *siyāsa* orientation. Indeed, Ottoman chroniclers were not distant from earlier historiographical tradition. Most of the Mamluk chronicles were arranged annalistically. Some reports were dotted with stanzas. Several historians produced, in addition to a chronicle, a short biography of the sultan of their own age. In their reports on "historical events" Ottoman chroniclers followed such arrangements, which provided them with opportunities to use a fictional style while narrating "facts." Hence, they arranged the data along the timeline without hierarchy. Naʿīmā worked according to these guidelines.

Chapter Three opens three consecutive sections that focus on fictional-historical dimensions of Naʿīmā's book. The first deals with literary features of his chronology. The chapter opens with a detailed investigation of the book's style and language. Investigating a primary Ottoman source and analyzing it, Şen's survey is woven with a close reading of theoretical studies, as well as of pre-modern Arabic and Persian rhetoric research. It places a seventeenth-century Turkish chronicler within a wider picture of history production in the Abode of Islam. Chapter Four follows with an examination of poetry and chronograms, features that are visible in Mamluk historical texts. And indeed, readers of this

<sup>4</sup>Lewis V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima* (New York, 1972).



journal will also find interest in the piece that investigates Arabic insertions of the chronicle. This reinforces the impression of Islamicate historiographical continuity.

In Part 3 of the book under review here, which is divided into two chapters (4 and 5), Şen analyzes the narratology of Na‘īmā’s chronicle. Using critical literary methods, she dwells upon the structure of the work that covers the events of the period from AH 982 to 1071 (1574–1660). In order to present the events (*waqā’i*), the text is arranged in chronological order (“the events of the year”; *veķāyi’-i sene-i* in Ottoman Turkish). Arranging vast quantities of material, this literary technique enabled Na‘īmā to consolidate the narration’s framework. Mamlukists may find it resembles *ḥawādith al-zamān*.

Part 4 (chapters 7–9) deals with Na‘īmā’s concept of *tārīkh* and the purpose of his chronicle. This part of Şen’s informative and in-depth study provides the backbone of her research project. She points out that throughout the chronicle the term *tārīkh* is most frequently used in the sense of a certain date. This fits the chronicler’s working method well. Na‘īmā uses his annalistic compilation to support the legitimacy (*Herrschaft*) of the House of Osman. “In the Ottoman Empire,” Şen concludes, “the writing of history in general was closely intertwined with the legitimacy of Ottoman rule.” This is visible in the broad pictures of court ceremonies, as well as in reports on exchange of gifts.

In the introduction to *The Sultan’s Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550–1650*,<sup>5</sup> Metin Kunt tells of his studies at Princeton. Among the courses that encouraged him to look closer into the Islamic background of Ottoman institutions he mentions David Ayalon’s seminar on the Mamluk state. And indeed, students of Mamluk historiography would benefit from Şen’s meticulous research. Her insights into the motives, structure and style of Na‘īmā’s chronicle serve as an inspiring study.

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<sup>5</sup>(New York, 1983).

