

Helen Pfeifer,

Empire of Salons: Conquest and Community in Early Modern Ottoman Lands,

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Soon to be published in Turkish translation (trans. Faruk Akyıldız and Abdullah Sami Sümer, Ketebe Yayınları), Pfeifer's book is based on the author's doctoral thesis. The book examines the process that developed with the Ottoman Empire's conquest of the Arab lands by focusing on Salons. Thus, it shows how the existing scholarly knowledge was transferred with the conquest of Arab lands and how it was integrated with the imperial center through the Salon culture. The two cities that the work focuses on are Damascus and Istanbul. Throughout the book, an original study has emerged by focusing on the Salon culture, which directly affected the socio-cultural and administrative organization and whose effect was traced in the sources of the period, but which has not been the subject of independent research until today. In this framework, the central figure the book deals with is Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (d. 1577), who was a living witness of the Salon culture of the period.

The book consists of six chapters, the Introduction and the Conclusion, and at the end, there is a short section with short biographies of significant figures in the work. In the Introduction, it is stated that the meetings held in the Salons were an integral part of the political, social, and intellectual life of the empire, and it is pointed out that the Salons were the most important places of socialization in the Islamic world. The name on which the work is based al-Ghazzi was one of the authoritative scholars in Damascus. The author states that the existing literature mainly focuses on coffee houses and madrasahs. However, she argues that these two places are essentially based on the idea of private and public spheres, and since there was no such distinction in the 16th century, the issue cannot be fully grasped by focusing on these two structures. At this point, Salons appear where this transitivity is achieved without distinguishing between private and public, offering us a more suitable ground to understand the process better. In this context, many informal meetings where the unemployed seek new patrons job seekers visit the power holders in Istanbul. Many similar ones can be met with the word Salon, and the word Salon includes all types of elite assemblies.

The first part of the work (A World Divided) begins ten years before the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands. It follows the stories of 'Abd al-Rahim al-'Abbasi

(d. 1555), a close friend of al-Ghazzi, and Mü'eyyedzade 'Abdurrahman (d. 1516), born in Amasya, the son of an Ottoman bureaucrat. The idea at the center of the chapter is that Salon culture was a shared value in the two empires even before the conquest of the Arab land. This shared Salon culture was, of course, not the same in the Ottoman and Mamluk empires. There were also some differences. The Mamluk Empire considered itself to be the scholarly center of the Sunni Islamic world, and it was only within this framework that the Ottomans felt closer to the Iranian world.

For this reason, while the meetings in the Salons in the Mamluk Empire took place in Arabic, in Ottoman circles, Turkish or Persian was spoken more often. Most of the lives of both figures, al-'Abbasi and Mü'eyyedzade, were shaped in unofficial assemblies. As seen in the example of Mü'eyyedzade, who was sent from Anatolia to the Arab land, a well-educated scholar's literary and scientific background allowed them to quickly find shelter in the places they went to. One of the issues pointed out in this chapter is the Persian influence in the Ottoman Salons. It is claimed that Arabic was not as influential as Persian in the Ottoman elite.

The second chapter (*An Empire Connecting*) shows how the Salons gained political functions with the conquest of the Arab land and their importance in disseminating ideas. A dual process can be mentioned here. On the one hand, the conquerors realized they lacked the necessary knowledge to rule in this new geography and needed to establish contacts with Arab scholars and bureaucrats. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the conquered region had to communicate with their new rulers. This is precisely where the Salons were able to provide the desired gatherings. The exchanges in the Salon's ultimately gave the new conquerors legitimacy and the information they needed to rule, while the local population sought patronage to gain status. One of the essential points that this chapter has sought to clarify is that Salons also established social hierarchies. Indeed, this was one of the most urgent concerns in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of Arab lands. The issue in this chapter is exemplified by al-Ghazzi's search for a remedy in the new capital following his father's death in 1529. al-Ghazzi's main reason for traveling to Istanbul was his appointment as a muderris, for which he had to visit the necessary people. The strength of the social network that al-Ghazzi, his father, and his family had acquired before him is remarkable and can be traced in his travel book and other biographical sources. These sources show that the relationship between the Arabs and the Rumis was based on mutual interest. The relationships established by al-Ghazzi and his family, and others like them, also played an essential role in stabilizing the imperial center in the provinces.

The third chapter (A Place in the Elite) shows how important a function the Salons played in determining and maintaining the social status of people from many different backgrounds who interacted with each other. Their administrative position, age, education, and lineage were the main factors determining their status. Thus, the position of these individuals in the Salons also allowed them to think about their position in the Ottoman Empire. Salons were places where social status was displayed, and they reinforced vertical hierarchy. In this chapter, al-Ghazzi's adventure on his return from Istanbul shows how important the contacts developed through the Salons were and how useful they were. After traveling to Istanbul, al-Ghazzi's position in Damascus rose rapidly, and in addition to his position as a muderris in several madrasas, he became the imam of the Great Mosque and took his place among the most prominent jurists of the city. al-Ghazzi's entourage thus began to enlarge with very important bureaucrats, one of the primary measures of social status.

Chapter Four (The Art of Conversation) focuses on how the Salons, which were so crucial on administrative, social, and intellectual levels, came to the fore and what expectations were placed on the participants. In addition to being exemplary in etiquette, the participants were also expected to be scientifically gifted and able to read improvised poetry. Having explained so far, the functions of the Salons and what requirements one had to have to stand out in them, in Chapter Five (The Transmission of Knowledge), the author shows how Arab scholars passed on their cultural and intellectual authority to their Rumi counterparts and how the Salons played a key role in this. For example, as the historian Hasan al-Burini (d. 1615), a student of al-Ghazzi's, notes in his biographical works of the early 17th century, home visits were seen as important opportunities for book's reviews. Thus, the Salons circulated books and ideas throughout the empire, showing how the Rumis inherited the existing Arabic heritage. This interaction soon yielded fruit, and by the 1570s, al-Ghazzi's student Muhibb al-Din al-Hamawi (d. 1608) could depict the empire as a unified common elite culture. One of the issues that draws attention in this chapter is the Rumi scholars who asked for an *ijazah* from al-Ghazzi. The list of al-Ghazzi's students, including names such as Çivizade Mehmed (d. 1587) and Kınalızade 'Ali (d. 1572), shows the importance and dimensions of this transfer of knowledge. The main field of this interest in al-Ghazzi was Hadith. This *ijazah*, which was given especially through the discipline of Hadith, provided Rumi scholars with a very valid authority. Beyond the *ijazah*, what was transmitted was universal and meaningful, and this authorized Ottoman scholars to protect and transmit the heart of Sunni Islam, the legacy of

the Prophet Muhammad. These informal gatherings in the Salons, therefore, fundamentally shaped the intellectual life of the Ottoman Empire.

The focus of Chapter Six (An Empire Polarized) is the development of the patronage network in the empire. The Ottoman Empire's policy of rotating its bureaucrats reached a much larger human capacity with incorporating the Arab land into the empire. The Salons were central to establishing, maintaining, and sometimes destroying such patronage relationships. The economic stagnation of the period was also an essential factor in this process. For example, while al-Ghazzi could lecture to Çivizade Mehmed, a high-ranking Ottoman bureaucrat from a prominent Istanbul family, al-Ghazzi's student al-Hamawi could only participate in the patronage of such an official as a clerk (*kâtib*). In other words, in the process, the employment of scholars from the Arab land in the imperial center became considerably more complex, and the visibility of the Arab scholars of al-Ghazzi's generation diminished significantly in the next generation.

In conclusion, the informal meetings in the Salons demonstrate the importance and power of the Salons in shaping Ottoman society, culture, and administration. The Salons increased the circulation of culture and knowledge in the empire. Thus, to properly understand the nature of imperial administration, it is crucial to look at the bureaucracy and the Salons, where many kinds of relations took shape.

One of the central claims of this study, centered on al-Ghazzi and its environment, is that the relations between Arabs and Rumis can be illuminated. The existing literature has focused chiefly on the relations between different religions, and the contact between Muslims has not been the subject of in-depth research regarding the same religious background. For this reason, Helen Pfeiffer argues that the relationship between Arabs and Rumis has been greatly simplified due to the Quran and epistemological framework. Pfeiffer argues that this common framework, far from simplifying, in some respects made the relationship much more difficult. For example, with the conquest of Arab lands, Arab scholars often criticized the Ottomans for their interpretation of Islamic law and adherence to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. As this example shows, the tension in post-conquest relations did not diminish despite their common religion but was exacerbated by it.

In this framework, the book, which deals with a phase of the relationship between Rumis and Arab scholars, shows how these two groups of scholars, with

the conquest of the Arab land, got to know each other in unofficial gatherings, namely the Salons, and how they mutually endeavored to transform the dominant culture. According to the author, the Salons are where this transformation process manifested itself most clearly.

The work's attempt to understand and make sense of the exchanges that developed around Salon through the narratives of al-Ghazzi as a specific example and through the network of relations established by this name and his family creates a suitable ground for a better evaluation of the issue. Considering the geography and duration of the empire's rule, it is vital to show that there were many examples, like al-Ghazzi and his family and how the central authority used such examples functionally in establishing governance in the provinces. This situation not only shows the dominance of the center over the provinces but also the relationships that provincial administrators entered to strengthen their positions. This, to a large extent, refers to a process shaped around the Salons.

Another critical issue is how Arabic, which had been central in the first two centuries of the empire, and the scholars trained in the Arabic world gave way to Turkish and the scholars trained in the madrasas of the Ottoman Empire. Especially in the last chapter, towards the end of al-Ghazzi's life, the imperial center no longer needed Arabic scholarship and legitimacy as much as it did in the first half of the century, so the privileged position that al-Ghazzi was able to enjoy was unimaginable to those who came after him. This transformation shows the influential position of Istanbul and Turkish, not only in terms of administration but also in terms of language and scholarly competence.

In conclusion, in *Empire of Salons*, Pfeifer shows that Salons, where the elite displayed their knowledge and status, contributed as much to the political stability of the empire as any official institution. By identifying and describing how these central sites of Ottoman culture, society, and politics helped people to build relationships and exchange ideas across the vast Ottoman territory, the author shows the central role of Salons in the Ottoman social and cultural conquest of Arab lands after the political conquest in the 16th century. Thus, the Salons functioned as critical institutions of the empire and contributed significantly to the Ottoman administrative system.

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