

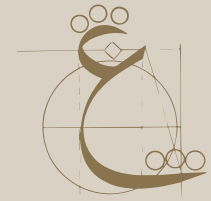


# kadim

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04



*kadim*

*“Kadim oldur ki  
evvelin kimesne bilmeye”*

*Kadim* is that no one knows what came before.

# kadim



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Esentepe Kampüsü, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi, A Blok, Ofis: 113, Serdivan/Sakarya (Turkey) 54050

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evvelin kimesne bilmeye”

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## Kursar, Vjeran. Croatian Levantines in Ottoman Istanbul.

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2021. 258 PAGE.  
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ELİF BAYRAKTAR TELLAN\*

### ABSTRACT

The presence of Catholic communities in Istanbul date back to the pre-Ottoman period, and their number increased in the Ottoman economic and political context. Even though the Levantines have been the subject of numerous popular history works, we can observe a relatively smaller academic interest in the issue. This article is a review of a recent academic book on Croatian Levantines in pre-modern and modern Ottoman Istanbul penned by an Ottoman historian from a fresh perspective.

**Keywords:** Croatian, Levantine, Istanbul, Immigration, Zellich Family & Printing House.

### ÖZ

İstanbul'daki varlıkları II. Mehmed'in fet-hinden önceye dayanan Katoliklerin sayıla-rını Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve politik koşulları bağlamında Avrupa'dan göç-lerle artırmıştır. Levantenler bir yandan popü-ler tarihçilik bağlamında görünür bir topluluk olmakla birlikte, akademik çalışma-ların nispeten daha az ele almış olduğu bir konudur. Bu yazıda, erken modern ve modern dönem Osmanlı İstanbul'unda bulunan Hırvatistan Levantenlerini bir Osmanlı ta-rihçisinin taze bir bakış açısıyla ele aldığı yeni bir kitap incelenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hırvat, Levanten, İstanbul, Göç, Zellich Ailesi ve Matbaası.



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\* Doç. Dr. İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Tarih Bölümü, elif.bayraktar@medeniyet.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-5403-7787.

VJERAN KURSAR

CROATIAN LEVANTINES IN  
OTTOMAN ISTANBUL

Studies on the non-Muslim populations of the Ottoman Empire are still in a phase of infancy despite an increasing number of publications. Linguistic and nationalistic barriers, as well as the conception of non-Muslim populations as homogenous and monolithic communities regardless of their transformations and fluidities, have prevailed and distorted our perspectives, while at the same time marginalizing non-Muslim Ottomans within Ottoman historiography. Research on Roman Catholics during the Ottoman period has been dominated by a perspective that posits the Catholic missionary activities and diplomatic relations with Europeans as the basic explanatory framework, whereas the local Catholic populations as Ottoman subjects remained in relative darkness. The limitation of research to family histories and prominent individuals

prevails in Levantine studies as is the case in literature on other non-Muslim groups, such as the Phanariots, the prominent Greek-speaking Orthodox community whose members were granted exceptional administrative posts from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Thanks to recent research, Levantines are slowly taking their deserved place in mainstream Ottoman studies. A timely contribution is Vjeran Kursar's recent book.

The introduction chapter opens with a brief but necessary discussion of terminology on identities. Before the nineteenth century, the identities of immigrants were regionally based "including [those of] Ragusans, Dalmatians, Croatians, Slavonians and Bosnians". The book focuses on these Southern Slavic Roman Catholics, referred to as "Croatians" and excludes the Orthodox Serbians from Croatia except for those in connection with Ragusan diplomats. The "somewhat fashionable" choice of the term "Levantine" in the title of the book is justified based on the existence of this term in early modern Ragusan sources. At the outset, the author clarifies his methodology and explains that due to the nature of early modern sources which document almost only important personalities, the case studies in the book are based on prominent figures in the society like merchants, diplomats, and clerics, but still, they are helpful for inferring about anonymous commoners. This chapter contains a brief overview of Ottoman-Croatian relations and the effects of Ottoman conquests in the region on local populations. The narrative is free from the usual flaws of traditional Balkan historiographies; on the one hand, it underlines the economic flourishing of Ragusa as an Ottoman vassal, as

well as the rise of Bosnian Catholicism that got organized under the Ottomans while at the same time it goes beyond the barren paradigm of tolerance and acknowledges the influence of Ottoman rule on local populations.

In the first chapter after the introduction, Kursar's detailed analysis of the situation of the Catholics of Galata brings a fresh perspective, testifying once more to the fact that the widespread conception of homogenous non-Muslim communities (the Catholics in this case) is a delusion, as the author elucidates on the different groups among the Catholics in Istanbul and their communications with the Sublime Porte, and the reaction of settled Franks towards the newcomer Catholics in the city. This chapter also shows that the consideration of Islamic law as an unchanging normative framework should be replaced by a more nuanced perspective that allowed for the adjustment of norms, in this case for the mutual benefit of the Catholics in Istanbul and the Porte. This chapter traces the Ragusan, Dalmatian, and Croatian personalities of early modern Istanbul, more specifically of Galata and Pera. Here one can find the result of meticulous research on the members of Latin Levantine families of Cingria, Barca, Chirico, and others acting as dragomans, consuls, merchants, and physicians, who were part of the social networks of early modern Istanbul. One of the facts clearly demonstrated in this chapter is that the members of the nexus of the consulates, especially the dragomans, sometimes functioned as the most influential actors in diplomacy, and in this way contributes to the claims of "new diplomatic history" that underlines the role of unconventional actors of diplomacy.

The second chapter focuses on the nineteenth-century immigrants in Istanbul, including maritime workers, laborers in fields, mines, and gardens, as well as criminal cases involving them, and the charitable and benevolent societies founded by well-off immigrants. The stories of more prominent figures who transferred their technological and scientific knowledge like Gjuro Klaric (the director of the tobacco factory in Cibali) or the famous cartographer Jacques Pervititch and their families constitute the second part of this chapter.

The third and the last chapter about the Zellich printing house, so far, an unexplored subject, is perhaps the most original contribution of the book. The Zellich printing house continued its activities for generations until the 1930s. Antonio Zellich, the first member of the family who arrived in Istanbul from Dalmatia in 1840 represents a striking immigrant profile, as he probably was a political fugitive. He is credited with introducing lithographic printing into Ottoman Istanbul. As the author explains in the introduction, this chapter is not penned from the perspective of the discussions of Ottoman modernization. Based on very rich source material, we are presented with a thorough history of the family, their printing activities, their prominent place in the Catholic society of Istanbul, and their prestigious position in the eyes of both the Holy See and the Ottoman administration. The foundation of the Turkish Republic as a nation-state initiated the gradual loss of previous extraterritorial status and privileges of the family, as a result of which the Zellichs, like the other Levantines, ceased to be an important component of the social and economic life of Istanbul.

The epilogue ponders on the Levantine identity and the Croatian Levantines, particularly through examples provided in the previous chapters as well as testimonies of twentieth-century descendants of Levantines. While marital relationships, language preferences, and choice of citizenship cross ethno-confessional boundaries, Catholicism appears to be the most profound

bond among the Levantines regardless of personal religious beliefs and more as social space, along with public and social institutions, organizations, and societies. On the other hand, the Catholic communities of Istanbul did not constitute a monolith; the book reveals that the local Catholics of Galata differentiated their identities from the foreign Catholics.

Historiography on the non-Muslim populations in the Ottoman Empire is dominated by stories of prominent figures, while the less fortunate immigrants and anonymous masses remain unexplored. Combined with an effort to justify the transfer of capital to Turkish Muslims after the Republican period, a conception of Ottoman non-Muslims as the disloyal wealthy bourgeoisie and financiers of the Empire has prevailed in historiography. Recent studies which focus on the non-Muslims of a lower economic level challenge this picture.<sup>1</sup> Even though the content of Kursar's book largely focuses on notable Ragusans, Dalmatians, and Croats, due to the nature of sources as the author explains, research presented in this book also sheds light on the less notable Catholic residents of Istanbul thanks to a fresh perspective that focuses on immigrants and workers as important actors in the economy of Istanbul, the largest commercial and financial center of the Empire.

The basic strength of the book emanates from the author's background training as an Ottomanist. This is apparent in the introduction chapter where he approaches the history of Croatian-Ottoman relations without repeating the shortcomings of traditional Balkan historiography and maintains this perspective throughout the book. Based on Ottoman documents, the author rectifies some previous conceptions of traditional historiography. For example, the book demonstrates that Federico Chirico, the last Ragusan council who has a negative reputation in Croatian Ragusan historiography, actually contributed a great deal to the Ragusan cause and the Republic of Dubrovnik.

One of the reasons that the book is an immense contribution is that the author uses a variety of sources not only from the Ottoman archives, but also from the archives of the Catholic Churches in Istanbul, including those of Santa Maria Draperis, Saint Anthony, Saints Peter, and Paul, and Saint Mary (at Büyükdere), such as baptism records and church chronicles in addition to memoirs, Croatian travelogues, newspapers, and tombstones in graveyards and churches, archival materials of Franciscan monasteries in Fojnica and Bosna Srebrena, and family archives from different parts of Europe. On the other hand, the book also incorporates the results of studies conducted in Slavic languages into Ottoman historiography which would otherwise miss the attention of most researchers due to language barriers.

The findings of research presented in the book reveal very interesting and so far undiscovered facts on the urban history of Istanbul, encompassing histories of church and consulate buildings, and residencies of early modern and modern Galata, Pera, and Büyükdere. Other interesting data such as the account of Gjuro Klaric on the fire of 1894 is especially useful for researchers of the urban history of Istanbul.

The appendices contain a list of Croatian Levantines who received awards and titles from the Ottoman sultans, the Holy See and other rulers, as well as two lists of books, magazines,

1 For cases on non-Muslim Ottomans of a modest economic background see Aleksandros Paspatis, *Balıktı Rum Hastanesi Kayıtlarına Göre İstanbul'un Ortodoks Esnafı (1833-1860)*, trans. Marianna Yerasimos (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2014); Stefo Benlisoy, *İstanbul'un İrgatları* (İstanbul: İstos, 2018).



and journals published by the Zellich printing house. The illustrations, photographs, and postcards at the end of the book are helpful to complement the text.

As regards the weak parts, the title of the book may be considered misleading, as the content offers much more than the title modestly promises, contrary to what we have experienced in the last decades, especially in cases of prestigious university press publications.

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