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Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca,* University of Chicago Press, 2015, 273 pp., ISBN 9780226257723.

In yet another controversial move, the Turkish government recently issued a decree instructing all public offices to organize the workday schedule around prayer time on Fridays—a move which is likely to influence school schedules as well. The significance of this decree within the current political climate of Turkey aside, what we observe in this instance is a particularly poignant example of the main problematic of Avner Wishnitzer's brilliant study: the social, political, and cultural contexts, meanings, and implications of temporal organization. The very question regarding the role of the state in the social organization of time—clearly still a very valid question in contemporary Turkey—is a crucial one for this work.

Yet the scope of Wishnitzer's study is much broader, as it focuses on the "temporal culture" of late Ottoman society. Defining the term as "a historically created system of time-related practices, conventions, values, and emotions that structures the temporal dimension of social life and fills it with meaning" (7), Wishnitzer offers the reader a nuanced, detailed, and captivating analysis of the changes the Ottoman temporal culture went through in the long nineteenth century. Hence, this is primarily a book on cultural history. But the analysis it presents also draws on theoretical perspectives from sociology and anthropology, and while lacking direct references to works in this field, it also contains many insights relevant to science and technology studies. In this respect, it is a work that is significantly rich in terms of both the factual information it contains and the conceptual approaches to which it relates.

While telling the story of how Ottoman temporal culture changed, Wishnitzer is keen to emphasize one fundamental matter: the change in question was neither rapid nor straightforward. In fact, it was a lengthy process involving countless debates, tussles, creative if temporary solutions, hybrid inventions, bold moves as well as hesitations and reversals. In all these respects, this account about the meaning and organization of time in the late Ottoman Empire is also one about social and cultural struggles in all their complexity.

Wishnitzer demonstrates this complexity very well by focusing on specific arenas, rather than presenting his argument strictly chronologically. After offering a background with a chapter illustrating the basic characteristics of the temporal culture of the Ottomans prior to the changes in question, the book moves the reader from one setting to another in the subsequent chapters: the bureaucratic office, the military barracks, the school, and the Bosphorus ferry. In each of these chapters, the analysis starts from the specific setting, but

gradually expands to offer insights about changes in a broader aspect of Ottoman society and culture. In the end, the portrayals pertaining to each realm fuses in the reader's mind and forms a colorful, nuanced and comprehensive "big picture."

What was Ottoman temporal culture like in earlier periods, then? Wishnitzer is careful to avoid a simplistic account and exoticize his subject, as he notes that circular notions were never the only ones, and Ottomans were also able to imagine time in a linear fashion. Similarly, that religious conceptions and practices were fundamental in understanding and organizing time never meant that time was solely a concept with strictly religious meanings. The latter is illustrated by the discussion on the *muvakkit*s and *muvakkithane*s. *Muvakkit*s not only calculated prayer and fast times, thus fulfilling a crucial religious function, but, through this, they established the rhythm that shaped everyone's lives, as daily activities were organized around these times. The time set by the *muvakkit* was the connection between the realms of the divine and the mundane. Consequently, it was particularly important for Ottoman sultans to build *muvakkithane*s, and thus, become the true link between the earth and the heavens. Political legitimacy was linked to the power to set the time which, in this case, meant protecting the time-setters. This connection between political power and the power to regulate time is one Wishnitzer demonstrates very effectively throughout the book—unsurprisingly, Tanpınar's masterpiece novel, the *Time Regulation Institute*,[1] gets its share of references, along with many well-chosen examples from Ottoman poetry.

In this introductory discussion, Wishnitzer also highlights another of the main themes of the book: diversity versus standardization. I find it important to emphasize Wishnitzer's argument that even in the pre-nineteenth century period, it is not possible to talk about one single "Ottoman tradition." In the big cities, and particularly after the introduction of the mechanical clock, the common way of measuring time was based on the *alaturka* system in which sunset was marked as twelve o'clock, and the periods before and after sunset were each divided into twelve hours of equal length. While using hours as units with a fixed length, this system was still based on sunset, a natural phenomenon. In rural areas, however, where *muvakkit*s and mechanical clocks were much harder to come by, the system more commonly used was based on using both sunset and sunrise as frames of reference, resulting in a system of "seasonal" hours of varying length depending on the season and latitude. Hence, while both systems were different from the *alafranga* (European) model that took no natural phenomenon as a frame of reference, they were still distinct. Highlighting this is important in order to avoid romanticized notions of a monolithic tradition being crushed by an alien force.

One of the key realms that Wishnitzer locates the transformation of the Ottoman temporal culture is bureaucracy. Focusing on Ottoman bureaucracy, particularly with insights from the works of Carter Findley, is a very common approach in studies on the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, and Wishnitzer follows the well-established paths in his discussion. He shows how attempts at regulating the workday of the Ottoman bureaucrat remained only partly successful—schedules with rigid stipulations for the temporal organization of the workday that may have looked good on paper were rarely followed in reality. Efficiency was not a priority, as patronage relations remained dominant in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire. Particularly in the Hamidian era, the emphasis was more on the demonstration of patrimonial authority than in promptness. It is worth adding in this context that when stricter attempts at standardization were made in the post-1908 era,

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[1] Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation Institute*, trans. Maureen Freely and Alexander Dawe (New York: Penguin, 2013).

the fixed schedules of the state at times proved to be in conflict with local rhythms, as illustrated by the complaints of the governor of Edirne—if the fixed end of the workday was after dark in the winter, the officials would not be able to go to the market, as the closing time of the latter depended on sunset. Even though the new bureaucrats were much keener on enforcing standardization, "state-time" could not always determine how time worked in other aspects of social life.

The military constitutes another fruitful realm for Wishnitzer's analysis, not only in terms of how crucial the organization of time may be for this institution, but also for the role the military played in the production and dissemination of ideas about the meaning and significance of time. Similar to the case of the bureaucracy, Wishnitzer finds that within the military fixed timetables detailing training practices replaced task-oriented, more loosely defined schedules that took prayer times as a reference point very gradually. But starting in the 1880s, along with increased German influence on Ottoman military thinking and organization, young Ottoman officers developed what Wishnitzer aptly refers to as "timetabled minds" (85); the diaries referred to in this section are very good indications of how it had become second nature for Ottoman officers and soldiers to think of their daily lives in terms of timetables. Influenced by the Goltzian notion of "nation in arms," these men saw in themselves the virtues that they believed the entire nation should adopt: an appreciation of order and discipline, of which the ability to "use" time efficiently was but one part.[2] This discussion makes clear a theme that Wishnitzer does not, in my opinion, foreground enough, even though it is central to the book: the ideas and practices related to time management in nineteenth century Ottoman Empire have to do with the question of citizenship. The question about defining and organizing time is inseparable from the question of how to form and administer Ottoman citizens. Chapter 4, which is about education, is where the discussion on this issue is more explicit, as Wishnitzer shows how schools, lessons, and textbooks gradually changed generating increasingly more standardized, predictable, and governable practices, and disciplined bodies, in the Foucauldian sense.

Chapter 5, through an account of the development of the ferry lines in Istanbul, digs deeper into the material aspect of the changes in question. The discussion in this section can be seen as an example of what science and technology studies literature commonly refers to as co-production—what emerges with the introduction of ferries into the lives of Istanbulites is a new sociotechnical network. Wishnitzer brilliantly demonstrates the negotiations involved in the formation of this network—negotiations that involved technological factors having to do with the capabilities of ferries, spatial matters such as the capacities and locations of ferry stops, and administrative concerns regarding punctuality and efficiency.[3] Through these negotiations, ideas about routine, punctuality and predictability gradually acquired a matter-of-factness.

The final substantive chapter also contains important insights for students of science and technology, as it explores the Ottoman debates about the Greenwich Mean Time system. Many Ottomans approached this attempt for the standardization of time at a global level highly skeptically as it would necessitate the abandonment of the *alaturka* system. Wishnitzer does a great job of demonstrating how this change symbolized so much to the participants of the debate—for some within the Committee of Union and Progress, the change was

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[2] The lasting legacy of this idea was analyzed in detail in Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[3] Very helpful suggestions for studying networks such as these can be found in Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43(3): 377-391.

essentially about finally joining contemporary civilization, while for their opponents, it signified a betrayal of the authentic identity of the Ottomans. Contextualizing this debate within the cultural and political climate of the late nineteenth–early twentieth century Ottoman Empire, Wishnitzer thus offers a chapter that could also be read as a separate article on the politics of culture in the late Ottoman Empire. An important aspect of this chapter in this respect is its emphasis on the various forms of reaction. Revisionist approaches in the Ottoman intellectual historiography of the recent decades tended to focus on the shallow scientism and materialism of the intellectual and political elites of the early twentieth century, commonly as part of a critical approach to the dominant ideology of the early Turkish Republic that exalted progress and condemned the "backwardness" of the Ottoman era. As Wishnitzer's work shows, however, a very strong discourse on authenticity and nativity also emerged in the late Ottoman Empire—a discourse that was not necessarily more "accurate" in its description of Ottoman society. Understanding this discourse is at least as important as analyzing the Young Turk and Kemalist interest in scientism and social engineering.

On one hand, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca* offers very few surprises to the student of the late Ottoman era. The way Wishnitzer describes the social and political background is based on well-established perspectives in Ottoman studies; many of the names to whom the book refers are the "usual suspects" in the field, and overall the analysis is not revolutionary. But the themes that Wishnitzer focuses on and the material he uncovers do fill important gaps in our understanding of the intellectual, cultural and political atmosphere of the late Ottoman Empire. As a meticulous work in cultural history, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca* shows what a complex process cultural change is, with many zigs and zags, rapid jumps as well as long hesitations. One of the most important virtues of the book is its attention to practice: as Wishnitzer shows, that a new law is passed, or a new discourse about change achieved popularity do not by any means imply that the change actually occurred on the ground. Resistance to change arose in many forms in late Ottoman Empire, and while change did take place, what came about was rarely identical to what had been intended. Ingenious solutions and hybrids (such as the double-faced watches of the later nineteenth century that showed both the *alaturka* and the *alafranga* time) are not simply curious details in cultural change, they are essential to it—indeed, it would be apt if the academic community stopped calling such examples "fascinating." Change in cases like the one Wishnitzer analyzes involves changes in a complex network of cultural, social, political, and technological components; hence, single-factor explanations, or analyses based on portrayals of social groups as static, well-defined, monolithic entities are highly insufficient for understanding them. While it does not explicitly make these points, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca* is a work that will enable any reader to realize and appreciate the complexity in question. It should also be noted, however, that references to comparative works, or studies on comparable cases could have strengthened Wishnitzer's analysis.[4]

What is conspicuously missing from this review are references to non-Muslim Ottomans. This is because they are mostly missing from *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca* as well. This is a gap of which the author is very much aware, and it is certainly understandable that a book on a complex matter such as this cannot cover all pertinent factors. But while he focuses on the Muslims, Wishnitzer does offer several hints about the diverse "temporal cultures" of the

[4] See, for instance, Nishimoto Ikuko, "The 'Civilization' of Time: Japan and the Adoption of the Western Time System," *Time & Society* (1997) 6: 237-259; and Giovanni Gasparini, "On Waiting," *Time & Society* (1995) 4: 29-45.

Ottoman Empire, and it would be interesting to explore the extent to which non-Muslim and Muslim temporal cultures overlapped and differed, and the ways in which the changes influenced different communities.

It is not too common to come across works on Ottoman society that can appeal both to lay audiences, and to specialists in many different fields such as cultural sociology, science and technology studies, intellectual history, Middle Eastern studies, and of course, cultural history. I am certain that Avner Wishnitzer's splendid work will inspire many more studies in this genre, and contribute to the ongoing transformation of Ottoman history into a field of research within comparative global history.

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