

LECTURES AT THE MOONLIGHT MONASTERY ON CUNDA

Summer 2016



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Suzan Sabancı Dinçer CBE
Chairman and Executive Board Member, Akbank

I am happy to introduce a new season of history lectures at the Moonlight Monastery in Pateritsa, on the northern shore of Cunda Island. We were all encouraged by last year's very successful series, and my hope is this will now become an annual summer event. There could be no better setting and at no better time. In July and August, the renovated old monastery buildings are at their finest with the sharp green of the surrounding olive groves in bright contrast to the blue of the Aegean Sea we overlook. This summer we will be welcoming a group of internationally distinguished historians and writers who will have a chance to talk about their passions and their expertise.

These lectures, like the previous ones, are intended for the general public. The intention is also to motivate young students to widen their horizons and further their research. The subjects this year are wide ranging, but ultimately I hope that the spell of the Moonlight Monastery will work to inspire interest in the important cultural legacy of the Northern Aegean.

I want very much to thank the speakers and all those who have worked hard to make everything work so well. It is not just sea and wonderful landscape but commitment and goodwill that have put the Moonlight Monastery lecture series on the map.

Istanbul, June 2016

Suzan Sabancı Dinçer CBE
Chairman and Executive Board Member, Akbank

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Foreword

“It is not just the sea and the wonderful landscape but commitment and goodwill that have put the Moonlight Monastery lecture series on the map”. With this phrase Ms. Suzan Sabancı-Dinçer concludes her introduction in the booklet on this year’s academic lectures, the second year in succession, providing me with the opportunity to repeat something I pointed out last year: “it is our wish that this historic place of rare beauty, Ayışığı Manastırı (Moonlight Monastery), a place of prayer and spiritual uplift, should in modern times continue to play the same role. To be converted into a cultural centre, where distinguished scholars from various disciplines can present topics from their field and their research to our guests from Cunda and Ayvalık, to the students from foreign universities who are studying at the Intensive Summer School of Ottoman and Turkish Studies”.

This year, as last, our lectures are aimed at disseminating research findings among the wider public. Their topics cover various historical fields, which not only constitute important research objectives but also due to their relevance to a contemporary reality,

constantly provoke discussions by exciting people’s interest. So taking as a starting point the context of a multicultural, multiethnic Ottoman Empire, financial crises, modernization efforts and their impact in the late 19th century are explored, and using examples from Ottoman history, relationships between form and content in historical writing are discussed. Holding these Lectures at the Moonlight Monastery for two summers running, sponsored by Suzan Sabancı-Dinçer, has given our work, as historians, Ottomanists, economists, and also as writers, a wonderful opportunity to become more intelligible and interesting to a wider audience.

The lectures are divided into three topics:

The first session discusses History and Fiction; or to be more precise, the uses of History in Fiction. During recent decades there has been a growing interest in studying the interaction between the concepts of History and Fiction, and not only in the framework of critical discourse analysis. The large number of studies

on the topic highlights the ways in which History and Fiction have mutually defined each other, both by their shared qualities and their differences. The term “historical fiction” has become widely known over recent decades to denote any work of literature that not only places its plot in the past, but also seeks to reconstruct daily life and details of that period of time. But isn’t this the historian’s task as well? Isn’t History the attempt to reconstruct societies of the past? And isn’t History a subjective process, as is commonly held for the literary process?

In fact, both genres, History and Fiction, have common roots originating way back in time. Homeric poetry about the Trojan War stands on a thin line between literature and history. Similarly, the hundreds of hagiographical accounts and *chansons de geste* from the Middle Ages, which modern research has come to acknowledge in many ways as a literary genre, described the deeds and activities of people who live no more. Red Warren, during an academic discussion published in 1969, described the difference between historians and fiction writers thus:

The historian says, “*It was in the past. I prove that it happened*”.

The fiction writer says, “*I’ll take it as it happened, if it happened at all – which it probably didn’t*”.

Of course, since 1969, historians have advanced far more than we could ever imagine towards the words of the fiction writer and use methodological tools from the study of literature to approach historiographical sources, such as narrativity and discourse analysis. But still, a thin line remains. In this session, two distinguished scholars and novelists specializing in the Ottoman period, Victoria Rowe Holbrook and Jason Goodwin, address the conundrums of “history” and “fiction” in literature. They will explain how the boundary between fact and fiction is still blurred, and how this has been recognized and represented by novelists in contemporary society.

The second session is dedicated to the financial crises faced towards the end of the 19th century by the Ottoman Empire and the new Greek state. The study of the Ottoman state financial crises during the European 19th century can offer important insights not only at a local level, but in a wider European scope, as it appears that the rise of centralized and major powers brought a series of conflicts that put pressure on all aspects of the states’ economies, but mostly on industry and, particularly the military industry, which was in constant need of funds. Şevket Pamuk refers to the reasons for the bankruptcy of the Ottoman Empire, which can be traced primarily to the inability of the Ottoman financial

mechanism to modernize its tax system in time and for the benefit of central authorities, in order to avoid losing revenue necessary for meeting the various needs of the Empire. Later efforts made to recoup the losses did not bring the expected results. The rising deficits and the dependency on external sources in order to finance the Crimean War and other warfare activities brought a first large foreign loan in 1854. The money was not well-spent and the debt kept growing as more loans were needed to maintain fiscal liquidity. Thus, in 1875, the state declared bankruptcy, and more than half of its revenues were committed to the debt service. In 1881, Sultan Abdulhamid II issued the Decree of Muharrem establishing the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, the main purpose of which was to avoid placing the Ottoman economy in the hands of foreign investors, and, consequently, Western powers. Foreign lending, however, could not be avoided, as military expenditure and fiscal pressures increased. This is a path witnessed up until World War I.

Kostas Kostis presents a contemporary, but smaller in scale, crisis. He analyzes the financial crisis in Greece during the final decades of the 19th century. He reveals how the modernization policy of the gifted politician Charilaos Trikoupis, who aspired to reorganize Greece's state mechanism, to strengthen its defenses, to revive its economy by constructing major infrastructure projects that led to increased

public revenue (rail network, drainage of Lake Copais, building of the Corinth Canal, etc.), ultimately drove the country to bankruptcy. The main cause of the country's financial collapse was the fact that the realization of this great political vision was based on loan agreements, as Greece's economy was not in a position to fund such projects. Between 1879 and 1890 eight external and five domestic loans were taken out, while at the same time the Raisin Crisis arose, which deprived the Greek state of considerable revenue from the export of raisins. Trikoupis tried to save the country from financial collapse without undermining its growth path, and sought the refinancing of old loans by requesting a new loan from England. But as Greece's credibility had been damaged due to accumulated debts, the Greek Parliament declared a moratorium in 1893 with the country being placed under International Financial Control as a direct result of state bankruptcy. The financial collapse in turn also undermined Greece's political position in the Balkans and its military power against the Ottoman Empire.

The two last lectures discuss issues concerning the very nature of the Ottoman state system and the role it played in bringing closer or – in some cases perhaps – alienating, the Empire with the West. The focus points will be Bureaucracy and Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire. What is the

context of Bureaucracy when it comes to the Ottoman Empire? Did the Ottomans have a similar state structure like the one we find in Western Europe? And how did it affect decision-making and Ottoman representation, especially towards the West? The dawn of the 19th century found almost all state institutions in a need of change. The Enlightenment, as a revolution of the mind, gave way to a revolutionary stance towards the way people interacted with their governments. The Ottoman bureaucratic system, forged through older realities mainly after the mid-15th century, underwent in the 19th century a series of reforms that made possible the profound changes in infrastructure and economy. During this process, a new elite arose ready to take the running of the state into its own hands. Men with a solid education and an open ear to western culture-waves led the Empire into the modern era, implementing reforms on infrastructure and economy, and organizing the transition from a fragmentary localized mechanism to a centralized authoritative system. In this respect, the Diplomatic Corps, a new body based on a model that sprang from the new demands that followed the Congress of Vienna (1815), replaced the older traditional state ambassadors, usually non-Muslim subjects, with a hierarchal professional entity which had the knowledge and the experience to deal with the more complicated issues of world diplomacy. In this respect, the talks by Sinan Kunalalp and

İlber Ortaylı will definitely be a moment to look forward to.

Many persons have kindly supported the Lectures of 2016 at the Moonlight Monastery. First of all I wish to express my gratitude to the distinguished scholars who have contributed to this scholarly endeavour. Thanks to the shared commitment we have succeeded in issuing a small booklet in which ideas and research experiences on topics chosen to be presented this summer are briefly set out. Special thanks go to my team of colleagues who accompanied me throughout my journey to publication. Carol-Ann Haros and Nicholaos Livanos did a fine job editing the papers, unifying and standardizing them. I also wish to thank Maria Stefossi, for her part in bringing this book into being and for designing the invitations, poster and the programme of events with such cheerfulness and creative imagination. Last but not least I owe a great deal to my excellent cooperation with Ms. Evrim Taşkın Shapiro and Derya Bigalı, who oversaw the project and answered all my questions and concerns with great care and consideration.

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