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**Urban Development and Its Impact on Public Life and Social Dynamics
in the Late Middle Ages: A Study of the Ottoman Empire**

Throughout human history, the physical space and living environment have been principal factors that shape the qualities of life and social dynamics in society; over time, such forces evolve and intensify to establish mechanisms for wealth distribution and power structures that directly impact inhabitants' experiences. Owing to a lack of scholarly research until recently, a discussion of urban development across the Ottoman Empire serves as an insightful discourse to understand the ways in which authoritative figures of the Late Middle Ages built urban spaces and how their interests affected people and society. Regarding Balkans urbanism, several existing scholarly works have emphasized economic forces and institutions as important relationships that shaped urban space, as in the studies of Kontolaimos and Boykov. In addition, Boykov also highlighted architectural patronage as an instrument for urban development and a means for Ottoman elites to affirm their power. While the aforementioned perspectives are correct, a complimentary mention of the key roles played by the Ottoman military expeditions at the time would make the conversation more inclusive and complete; which is achievable through a better understanding of the size, scope, and importance of the Ottoman army that heavily contributed to civic planning and spatial organization across the peninsula. The combination of economic forces, socio-political conditions, and military strategies is more convincing because

these factors influence growth, the placement of urban components, and private, dominant interests that constitute the backbone of life in Ottoman cities.

A common attribute of a well-functioning society characterized by superior power, longevity, and prosperity, is the capacity to facilitate fruitful public-private relationships for the mutual benefit between people and authoritative institutions. Beginning from the mid-14th century, early Ottoman urban planning practices illustrate the former through the development of the *bazaar*, local markets, and the *vakif*, pious endowments, that provided numerous integral functions for the growth, operation, and sustainability of Ottoman cities. For example, in most Ottoman cities, all trade, manufacturing, and sales activities took place at the heavily-supervised central market funded by the Ottoman elite, or the sultan; in which the central markets were great sources of tax revenue (Kontolaimos 145). By investing in the central markets, Ottoman authorities effectively created spaces for the exchange of goods, either from the region's surplus or the transregional trade routes, where the lucrative profits from their operation were significant contributions to the empire's rise to its peak slightly after the Late Middle Ages. While city dwellers benefited from the new norm of economic activity, the increased tax revenue and resources were also critical as investments for the Ottoman army to fortify the empire against foreign attacks, which was a significant factor considering the tension caused by territorial and religious conflicts at the time involving the Turks and Christian states (Jefferson 181). Furthermore, the importance of the market is stressed by Kontolaimos in his counter-argument towards Kuran, an author cited in "Small Place, Large Issues", in which he introduced a perspective where Ottoman urban development took place around the *bazaar*, and not the castle, for most social interactions and economic activities took place outside of the city walls (150);

this shows that the market facilitated a great degree of economic transformations and societal changes that substantially propelled the empire to new heights.

Complementary to the central market, another major urban component in Ottoman society were pious foundations, *vakifs*, that were funded and administered by warlords, who possessed powerful voices in the empire for their immense contributions in Ottoman conquests. Notably, *vakifs* were charitable endowments that served as essential catalysts for public welfare, social cohesion, and urban growth by distributing agricultural production and dedicating their land revenues to reinvest in urban regeneration and develop new spaces (Kontolaimos 147). From the administrative standpoint, the *vakifs* were highly attractive towards the Ottoman warlords as religious endowments were exempt from regular taxation and donors were highly honored; these attributes meant that the warlords could avoid taxation while maintaining the high honorary status of their ancestors and lineage (Kontolaimos 154). It is evident that the *vakif*, as a social institution, typifies a successful public-private relationship as it offers the resources to sustain and improve the social fabric of Ottoman society, while aligning the interests of the people and the Ottoman elite. It is clear that urban revitalization and inhabitants' needs were factors of important consideration in Ottoman town planning. Despite such an early practice of functional urban planning by an influential superpower as the Ottoman empire, narratives of fairness and caring for people remain in question for many planners today. An understanding of the *vakifs*' roles in Ottoman cities is imperative to assessing their impacts on people across varying social strata in the empire. Although the real intentions of powerful Ottoman figures are unclear, the *vakifs* nevertheless improved standards of living by reinvesting in public infrastructure while providing people in charge the necessary incentives to do so.

As demonstrated in the aforementioned components of Ottoman society, the effective cooperation and functioning between the city dwellers and Ottoman authorities permitted the emergence of urbanism in the modern context; more specifically, one that relies on a mixture of fiscal investments and a market-oriented economy. Although it is undeniable that having an “open market” system and prioritizing inhabitants’ needs and interests contributed greatly to the rise of the empire across the Late Middle Ages, the argument would not be complete without considering the private interests and intentions of the Ottoman elite and authorities, where incorporating a discussion of the Ottoman army would provide convincing geopolitical contexts to understand the complex forces behind Ottoman urbanism, and its influence on people and power dynamics. For instance, an analysis of the Ottoman bath reveals interesting connections between different aspects of Ottoman urbanism. Since Mesopotamia, communal bathing has long been a prominent spiritual practice throughout the region for cleansing and religious purposes. Hence, it was common for a bathhouse to have an accommodating mosque or temple; as such, excavations around an Ottoman bath in the city Didimoteicho unearthed a *medrese*, an Islamic education institution, in the same complex. Despite seeming ordinary, the presence of an Islamic school by the bath raises intriguing questions concerning the, perhaps secretive, interests of the Ottoman authorities as pupils of the *medreses* would serve in the emerging Ottoman bureaucracy (Kontolaimos 156). In response, one compelling stance expressed by Kontolaimos involves a comprehensive conclusion of several indicative urban components of an emerging central authority, the author specifically mentioned: “Through the operation of crucial institutions, such as central taxation, a stratified bureaucracy,...an organized sultanic army of janissaries..., central administration managed to...gradually turn them into agents of a central policy” (149). While the reasons mentioned by Kontolaimos strongly signify a growing centralized system of governance,

a more detailed emphasis on the Ottoman army introduces a more compelling rationale for the observed power shifts in the empire. To illustrate, in the Ottoman empire, slaves were educated to convert to Islam and join the army of janissaries (Lecture 8); considering that the Late Middle Ages was a period of frequent religious and territorial disputes, it seems convincing that the shifts in power dynamics across the empire were intended to strengthen the Ottoman army and the empire's dominance in the region, rather than for the consolidation of power among the powerful few. Furthermore, the peculiarly high degree of social mobility for Ottoman slaves through education indicates a pivotal role of the *medrese* as educational institutions, and the *vakif* as funding sources, in serving as planning instruments to develop and recruit future bureaucrats for the continuity and growth of the empire.

In a similar manner, the substantial influence of Islam is also shown in the land uses and spatial organization, where the placement of Islamic institutions served as the key expansion mechanism and driver of power dynamics in Ottoman cities. For example, in the city Edirne, dervish convents, architectural predecessors of the T-type *zaviye/imarets* (Islamic multifunctional buildings), were built by local emirs to replace the mosques; their efforts were attempts to increase their popularity and affirm their legitimacy with local residents (Boykov 33). Given the immense value religion holds in people's physical and spiritual life, having control over religious institutions was clearly an effective way to build rapport with nearby residents, thereby shifting the power dynamics in favor of individuals in possession of religious institutions. Additionally, Boykov quoted Necipoglu, author of "The Age of Sinan," in his study: "The socio-religious complexes, grouped around the T-type *zaviye/imarets* aimed at incorporating uninhabited areas through "the concept of improvement by cultivating, building, inhabiting, populating and civilizing"" (34). Evidently, besides serving as a determining factor of power and legitimacy, the

T-type complex was also a socio-religious instrument to expand urban space, which was heavily utilized by the Ottomans to expand newly conquered cities beyond existing boundaries. In effect, physically, the T-type buildings become urban nuclei connected by central axes with accompanying commercial infrastructures, such as a market and a bathhouse, built in each cluster. Boykov's argument is convincing in regards to the physical organization of space, land use, and private interests of the Ottoman elite, where architectural patronage of the T-type *zaviye/imarets* prevailed as the primary device for Ottoman urban transformation. However, Boykov's argument is limited as it fails to incorporate the Ottoman military functions at the time, where the size and scope of the army play a significant role in determining the layout of cities. Specifically, the records of traveler Brocquière contains an estimated size of the Ottoman field army with a maximum between 100 and 120 thousand men (Jefferson 184). Since large cities, such as Edirne, were convening places for the Ottoman army; this is depicted in a painting of the city Tabriz by Matrakci Nasuh, a contemporary of the empire, that shows the Ottoman army's entrance to the city (Balilan Asl 168). In extrapolation, the presence of an entrance dedicated to the army indicates that Tabriz was among the cities with the capacity to host the empire's army; in light of this, it is highly unlikely that the army had a little effect on the development and organization of the city. Therefore, including the ways in which Ottoman cities accommodated the empire's sizable army would make the discourse more inclusive and complete by providing the relevant contexts behind the spatial arrangement of different urban components and their functionalities.

As a counter argument, some may argue that Boykov's stance involving the significance of the markets and architectural patronage is sufficient to explain the Ottoman urban transformation, and that Nasuh's painting is not applicable to Edirne because it was about a

different city, Tabriz. Additionally, it is reasonable to presume that not every Ottoman city had, or needed, the capacity to host the empire's army; therefore, an explicit mention of the army's influence is perhaps unnecessary. While it is true that not every Ottoman city was directly impacted by the empire's military operations, they were all affected by the empire's strategies, such as through taxation and contribution of human capital, these are factors that are intricately interconnected with urban planning and power dynamics. Furthermore, Jefferson noted: "In 1444,...every district were to dispatch the janissaries (and other troops) in their areas to assemble in Edirne no matter where they were stationed" (193). Evident in the quote, Edirne was among major cities where the Ottoman army assembled for strategic operations; considering this, it is imperative to incorporate the army's impact on Edirne in order to construct a complete picture of how the city developed as it did, including its significance on Ottoman life and social dynamics.

According to the perspectives of Boykov and Kontolaimos, the central market played a critical role in triggering the Ottoman empire's transition from a purely feudal state to a market-oriented one, where the availability of surplus and flourishing trade economy, combined with investments from the Ottoman elite, brought about the *bazaar*, a vibrant marketplace that became an economic and cultural symbol of the empire. Boykov went further by accentuating the importance of architectural patronage as the key expansion mechanism with profound impacts on the spatial configuration and power dynamics in Ottoman cities. Notwithstanding the validity of the perspectives mentioned, given that the Ottomans were known for their might in military conquests, as well as defense against foreign invasion, integrating relevant viewpoints on the impacts of the Ottoman army on urban development, such as how Ottoman military strategies affected planning decisions pertinent to empowering the bureaucracy through

recruitment and expansion, including the spatial requirements in cities for military operations, certainly enhances the rationality and inclusiveness of the discussion.

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