PHILANTHROPY IN ANATOLIA THROUGH THE AGES

The First International Suna & İnan Kıraç Symposium on Mediterranean Civilizations

MARCH 26-29, 2019
A Symposium Organised in Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Vehbi Koç Foundation
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50 Years of the Vehbi Koç Foundation Film  
Erdal Yıldırım *Vehbi Koç Foundation*  
Oğuz Tekin *AKMED*  
Scott Redford *SOAS University of London* |
| 09:45-10:05 | Coffee Break |
| 10:05-10:25 | Pierre Fröhlich *Université de Bordeaux*  
Philanthropia in Context: Civic Virtues and Praise of the Officials in the Poleis of Asia Minor in the Hellenistic Period |
| 10:25-10:45 | Benjamin Gray *Birbeck College, University of London*  
Later Hellenistic Debates about the Benefits and Problems of Philanthropy in Anatolia |
| 10:45-11:05 | Mustafa Adak *Akdeniz Üniversitesi*  
Civic Notables and their Official Titles in Pamphylia and Pisidia |
| 11:05-11:25 | Discussion |
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| 11:45-12:05 | Mustafa H. Sayar *İstanbul Üniversitesi*  
Contribution of the Euergetai to the Urbanization Process and Daily Life of the Poleis in Hellenistic and Roman Cilicia |
| 12:05-12:25 | Matthias Haake *Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster*  
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| 12:25-12:45 | Aşkım Özdizbay *İstanbul Üniversitesi*  
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| 14:30-14:50 | Christina Kokkinia *National Hellenic Research Foundation, Institute of Greek and Roman Antiquity (KERA)*  
Large Epigraphic Dossiers and Euergetism in Roman Asia Minor |
| 14:50-15:10 | Recai Tekoğlu *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi*  
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Euergetia Activities at Tlos |
| 15:10-15:30 | Angelos Chaniotis *Institute for Advanced Study*  
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**SESSION VII**

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The praise of the philanthropia of the notables of the Greek cities of Asia Minor appeared at the Late Hellenistic period. This phenomenon, which has already been studied by B. Gray, is part of the evolution of the public discourse that Greek cities hold about their benefactors. We will focus here only on the officials of the poleis. It has often been said that the praise of the notables was based in the Hellenistic period on their civic virtues, demonstrated during the exercise of the public charges, whereas, from the 2nd century BCE onwards, personal virtues were promoted, outside any institutional context. However, the notables continued to hold public offices. Contrary to widespread opinion, these appear in official documents of the late Hellenistic period, decrees and honorary inscriptions, and they appear as commendable as actions in a non-institutional context.

This paper therefore addresses the evolution of the vocabulary of officials' praise, focusing primarily on that of generosity. It developed precisely in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, with a rich palette of words that reflected an apparent overbidding in the forms of evergetism. Other phenomena will be compared, such as the development of the theme of the incorruptibility of the officila, which is becoming more widespread. Here too, the vocabulary is enriched and transformed over time, taking on an increasingly pronounced moral connotation during the imperial era.
This paper will examine ancient debates about the ethical and political status of philanthropy in the cities of Anatolia in the second and first centuries BC. Scholars have demonstrated very well the central and changing role of benefactions by leading citizens in later Hellenistic civic life, including the complex, shifting relationship between mandatory and voluntary civic contributions and its implications for civic equality, scrutiny and honours. This paper will shift the focus to the competing ways in which contemporary citizens and political thinkers interpreted benefactions. By comparing the evidence of civic epigraphy, philosophy and historiography, it will reconstruct a rich debate among citizens of Anatolian cities about the advantages and potential dangers of making philanthropy central to the functioning of cities. There were differences of opinion about whether to conceptualise and judge elite benefactions in terms of justice and equality among citizens, or rather in terms of the increasingly prominent civic value of 'humanity' (philanthropia itself), which implied more universal and unconditional – and often more hierarchical – generosity. There were also debates about when to deem philanthropy and philanthropia desirable and unifying, and when to be suspicious of their possible destabilising effects, harmful to the ideal of citizen equality and power-sharing.

This paper will focus on the evidence for these debates which emerges from comparing civic honorary decrees with the Antiquitates Romanae of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who brought his experience of Anatolian civic life to bear on his interpretation of philanthropy at Rome. Citizens and thinkers from late Hellenistic Anatolia drew on the ideas about justice and generosity, which had been debated in the Athenian democracy and Athenian philosophical schools, but also developed and adapted them to take account of their own distinctive environment.
During the Imperial period, Anatolian cities transformed into an oligarchic regime partly under the influence of Rome. Local noble families, who wielded a certain economic power held the governing bodies and main public offices throughout generations in their native cities and, in exchange, covered to a certain extent the costs of these offices they assumed from their own fortunes. When we take into consideration the public offices expressed with the concepts "arkhe" and "leitourgia" and the financial contributions to the public benefit (euergetism), we can see that cities were to certain extents dependent on the fortunes of these nobles.

It is possible to identify this sharp social differentiation among nobles and other citizens in the epigraphic documents found in Southern Anatolia (Pamphylia and its immediate vicinity). The nobles of this region presented themselves as and boasted of belonging to bule and probulos classes in their funerary or honorary inscriptions.

This governing "bule class", of course, didn’t have a homogeneous inner structure. Those nobles, who were prominent with their fortunes, "love of honor” (philotimia), and "love of humankind” (philanthropia), assumed costlier public offices and contributed more to the public benefit compared to other "bule" members. The nobles, who could meet certain expectations of the public, were honored with certain official titles and received popular recognition. The most important honorary titles we encounter in the region are "protector” (kedemon), "leader” (prostates), "patronus”, “savior” (soter), "founder” (ktistes/ktistria), "benevolent” (euergetes), "father/mother of the city” (pater/meter poleos), and “son/daughter of the city” (hyios/thygater poleos).

This paper will attempt to explain which criteria were used to determine whether these official titles were granted, and which types of ties were formed between the candidates for the title and the public. The paper will be based on the selected epigraphic documents found in the cities of Adada, Sagalassos, Sillyon, Perge, Laertes, Syedra, and Termessos.
The differences in the ancient social structure were one of the reasons increasing the economic and social separation and polarization. Since none of the current social arrangements existed in the Antiquity, individual practices were used to find solutions to this large socio-economic problem. "Euergetismus", a word derived from the ancient Greek verb "euergetein" is used to describe by the modern ancient historians, as the most common social aid institution of the ancient society. Families known to be of high economic and social status were expected to do charity in the ancient city states. Many inscriptions have been found in many cities pertaining to these benefactors and charities. By means of these inscriptions, it is understood that this elites have given financial support to the construction of buildings, to the procurement of grains as well as to the arrangement of the games.

In the scope of this paper, the benefactors and their deeds will be examined in Hellenistic and Roman Cilicia, through inscriptions and buildings and will be compared with the other examples in Anatolia and Eastern Mediterranean region. In addition, sports and musical competitions and games in the region will be addressed through epigraphic finds. Especially, in the eastern Mediterranean regions, there were institutions founded to organize such games and competitions to cover expenses during 3rd century BC–4th century AD, especially during 2nd AD–3rd century AD as it is understood from the inscriptions documenting the institutions. In this paper, these activities of benefactors which were carried out with both religious and social intentions in Cilicia will be presented through inscriptions until the late antiquity.
Philanthropy is a colourful word. And even though there might be a general understanding of the meaning of the term, it has particular semantics due to the historical, cultural, religious, and social contexts in which it is used. This holds of course also true for the ancient Mediterranean world where the word philanthropia is first attested in the fifth-century Attic tragedy Prometheus Bound. Since the fourth century BCE it was an important component of the public discourse in the world of Greek cities and since the early Hellenistic period philosophers became ever more interested in the virtue of philanthropia.

However, the focus of my paper is not on the word history of philanthropia. Rather, I would like to analyse an outstanding act of philanthropia that happened circa 100 km west of Antalya in the far north of Lycia on a mountain’s crest at about 1,400 m above sea level sometime during the second century CE. It is Oenoanda, its rich citizen Diogenes and his famous Epicurean Inscription I would like to talk about. This most notable text, which originally contained about 25,000 words, was published on the walls of a stoa in the very centre of the town. For good reason, this fascinating document has been intensively studied by epigraphists, philologists, and philosophers for more than 100 years. The aim of my paper is to contextualise Diogenes’ gift to his native city, his fellow citizens and Oenoanda’ foreign residents in the highly competitive field of local euergetism even if the benefactor himself explicitly denies that his elevating donation has anything to do with this traditional practice of members of the upper-classes of Greek cities. However, this denial is part of Diogenes’ highly innovative strategy to act in an unrivalled manner in a classical field and to surpass all the other benefactors of Oenoanda.
Euergetai of Italic Origin at Perge and their Contribution to Urban Development

In Perge, the most important factor in the city’s development in the Roman Imperial Period, especially 1st and 2nd centuries AD, was the donations by rich and aristocrat families called “euergetes” (benefactor). Famous people, who gave momentum to Perge’s urban transformation have been identified with epigraphic evidence and their donations could be identified with archaeological findings. The most notable ones among such families and individuals reflecting Perge’s urbanization dynamics and socio-cultural status were of Italic origin. The most famous families were the Iulii Cornuti family, who was especially influential during Claudius’ and Nero’s reign and the Plancii Vari family who enjoyed its heyday during Hadrian’s reign. There are some benefactors, whose family relations could not be identified, such as Gnaeus Postumius Cornutus and Tiberius Claudius Vibianus Tertullus. This paper addresses families and individuals of Italic origin, focusing in particular on their activities affecting the city’s architectural development. Thus, it will attempt to present to what extent families and individuals of Italic origin contributed to Perge’s architectural and cultural transformation/development in the Roman Imperial Period, using archaeological and epigraphical evidence.
Inscriptions on stone are used widely for funerary and honorary purposes and we usually associate them with statue bases and grave stones. Stone inscriptions serve as a means to perpetuate the memory of individuals today, and they often served the same purpose in antiquity. We also associate inscriptions with conciseness and precision of expression, what we call a lapidary style. This paper deals with ancient inscriptions that were the exact opposite of lapidary. It discusses four epigraphic dossiers that consisted of many inscribed documents, including some that were wordy and repetitious. The four dossiers date from the Roman imperial period, and have been found at Kyaneai, Rhodiapolis, Ephesos and Aphrodisias, respectively. All four have been preserved well enough for us to be able to reconstruct their original design. They are connected, more or less directly, with the activities of civic benefactors, they therefore perpetuate the memory of individuals. But, this paper argues, their creation also reflected the interests of larger groups and political entities and served to perpetuate collective along with individual fame. This may be one reason why the four dossiers discussed here survived to our day, whereas Diogenes’ huge inscription at Oenoanda did not.
Euergesia Activities at Tlos

(26 MARCH, TUESDAY / SESSION III / 14:50-15:10)

As with the whole of Lycia, various-scale euergesia activities were identified at the excavations in the ancient city of Tlos. These euergesia activities are considered under various titles in this study. Being more in number, the euergesia activities containing construction and repair works ranked first. It is especially remarkable that the inscriptions related to construction and repair works for the theater are abundant. These inscriptions reveal that the theater underwent constructions and restorations at various times. Another structure that was reconstructed and repaired with the support of benefactors is the city’s big bath building. The honorary inscription for Lykiarkh Tiberius Claudius Ktesikles of Tlos, which was found at the entrance of the bath, indicates that he had the arched exedra with dressing rooms built from its foundation. Another inscription identified in the caldarium section of the big bath indicates that the bath was renovated during Constantine’s reign as the "Constantine Bath". On the other hand, the philanthropy activities observed in the theater and big bath structures took place also in the agora and gymnasium of the city, as documented again in the inscriptions. It is understood that the second type of euergesia encountered in the inscriptions in Tlos is social or public philanthropy (εὐεργέτης τοῦ δήμου). This type of philanthropy activities consisted of handing out grains or money the public needed or raising funds in order to cover the costs of religious festivals and events. For example, an honorary inscription dedicated to Opramoas states that Opramoas donated his land that generated 1250 denarii a year for the panegyris festival that was held once in five years. The inscription also indicates that he handed out more than 1 denarius to those who were receiving wheat aid. In the ancient city of Tlos, the third group of euergesia activities was distinguished by either the verb "public benefactor" (ὁ εὐργέτης τοῦ δήμου), εὐργετεῖν or the word "gift, donation" τὰ δωρεά.
Opramoas, a citizen of Rhodiapolis in Lycia (mid-2nd century CE), a true ’philanthropist’ of the Imperial period, provided funds for temples, gymasia, baths, markets, and festivals in several cities, but also responded to the urgent needs of the poor; he provided cheap grain, decent funerals for those whose families could not afford them, and dowries for girls of limited means, covered the cost of education and nourishment of the children of citizens, and donated food to the poor. His charities not only crossed the borders of cities in Lycia, but also the borders of social classes. Unlike Opramoas, Aphrodisian benefactors usually discriminated on the basis of citizenship —limiting their voluntary charities to Aphrodisias and its citizens—, social class—focusing on the elite—, and gender—addressing the needs of men, especially young men of the elite. Only in exceptional cases were their voluntary benefactions (not liturgies) directed to a larger audience that consisted of men and women, citizens and foreigners, free and slaves. This pattern, that can be generally observed in Greek cities of the Imperial period, is connected with contemporary civic and social values as well as with the role of benefactions in a system of reciprocity (benefactions in exchange for power). Aphrodisian benefactor were often philopatrides and philopolitai, always philodoxoi, hardly ever truly philanthropoi.
Many aspects of early Christianity can be studied in Asia Minor that is one of the oldest and most extent areas of its proliferation. What we generally consider as philanthropy is not confined, neither in theory nor in social behaviour, to the emergence of Christianity; it can be traced in ancient Greek philosophy down to the imperial period as well as in Christian writings from the gospels to the Church fathers. Both in theory and practice, Christian attitude seems rather ambiguous and contradictory. Martyrdom can hardly be considered as philanthropic. The accumulation of wealth or slavery are not unanimously rejected by Christians. However, although the Christian groups separated themselves from the public in the polis and repelled the general community practicing a rigorous morality, they attracted followers because of their generosity, openness, hospitality, and support for the needy, the old, the ill, the slaves, and the condemned. Evidence for outsiders’ perspectives on the real behaviour of Christians in that respect are rare. A famous passage in Lucian’s De morte Peregrini uncovers a specific Christian philanthropy that caused the author’s astonishment, because it was deviant from common sense. It appeared to be in contrast to the general philanthropia displayed abundantly in inscriptions on stone at the same time, which in the majority of cases refers to public euergetism in the context of the polis.
The article focuses on the fate of captive barbarians (Arabs, Anatolian and Balkan Turks, Slavs etc.) in Byzantium. The Byzantines continued the old Roman practice of capturing civilians during the hostilities against their immediate neighbours. Barbarian women and children were a legitimate objective of military operation. Some of the captured civilians, predominantly (or exclusively?) children, went through Byzantine philanthropic system being taught the Greek language and the principles of the Christian religion. The most important institution in this sense (but not the only one) was the system of orphanages (orphanotropheia) in which barbarian heathen children were prepared to baptism and their new life in Byzantine society. Sources directly indicate that the Byzantine authorities were concerned with the task of acculturation and Christianization of the foreign children, who were taken captive in war or bought in the slave market, through philanthropic institutions. Those barbarian children, who found themselves as domestic slaves in Imperial palace and aristocratic and wealthy mansions normally went through standard training in the Greek language, catechization and final baptism. These efforts of the masters to provide barbarian child slaves with “Roman upbringing” can also be explained by the specific Byzantine understanding of “philanthropia.” The Byzantine practice of taking foreign captives and their subsequent acculturation by means of diverse kinds of philanthropic activity finds its theoretical substantiation and explanation in the religious and cultural ideologemes postulated a specific historiosophic mission of the Christian Roman empire to disseminate the universal truth of Christianity among the entire mankind. In order to explain and interpret this ideologeme, the author puts forward the term Byzantine Missionism (do not confuse with ”messianism”). The focal motif underlying the Byzantine Missionism was the event of Pentecost, which indicated the future spread of the universal Christian truth throughout all the gentiles. The strategy of taking foreign captives in warfare and their subsequent acculturation was an important tool used for the implementation of the Byzantine missionistic ideas.
This study addresses essentially Byzantine monasteries’ perspectives on and contributions to the philanthropy concept and philanthropic activities. It focuses on the monasteries of Constantinople as its area of investigation, whereas its temporal focus is Andronicus II’s reign (1282–1328), which was the heyday of the Byzantine Empire in the post-1261 period and contained within itself many animosities. It examines the philanthropy concept which was the most prominent symbol of this period’s predicaments.

In the first part of our examination, we handled the development of monasteries in the Byzantine period, particularly in terms of their perspectives on philanthropic institutions in order to present the historical context. When we were dealing with this subject, we made a point of presenting the relationships of monasteries in particular with state and society within a historical process. We deemed it necessary to briefly address the contemporary patriarchs of Constantinople, especially Patriarch Athanasios, since they were the principal characters and shaped perspectives on philanthropy during Andronicus II’s reign.

As with any period, the most enlightening information on monasteries during Andronicus II’s reign could be obtained from extant typikons. We started off this study by relying on them as our primary resources and explained how the monasteries of this period withdrew into their shells to an unprecedented extent with survival concerns, how they moved away from philanthropic institutions or contributions, even from giving alms at their gate, how they used their limited resources only for the perpetuation of the monastery and to what extent they did so. At this point, we witnessed particularly that the monasteries started to consider being some sort of guarantee for the privileged—the ktetor and his family—as the main reason for their existence. We realized that explaining this period is important, being the last stage of the Byzantine monasteries’ perspectives on philanthropy.
Andrew Peacock

Waqf Inscriptions from Medieval Anatolia

[27 MARCH, WEDNESDAY / SESSION V / 14:00-14:20]

Waqf constituted the principal means of performing philanthropic acts in medieval Muslim Anatolia. This philanthropy was recorded not just in legally binding waqfiyyas or endowment documents, but also sometimes in inscriptions. Indeed, such waqf inscriptions constituted a public proclamation of the act of philanthropy, and interestingly, represent the earliest examples of the use of Turkish in epigraphy. To date such inscriptions have not been studied by scholarship. This paper examines the waqf inscriptions from Erzurum, Kutahya, Seyitgazi and Amasya from the 14th and 15th centuries with a view to understanding more fully their purpose and role.
This paper examines the significance of philanthropy in Seljuk Anatolia through the lens of charitable foundations that addressed the primary health concerns of the population, namely hospitals and medical schools. The turn of the thirteenth century marked an ambitious period for the Seljuks of Anatolia; their growing imperial claims were manifested through a variety of novel institutions such as medical complexes. Seljuk sultans patronized new establishments in major cities including the Gevher Nesibe Hospital in Kayseri built by Kaykhusraw for his sister that combined a madrasa, hospital, psychiatric ward, and a tomb tower for the princess (1205); the hospital of Kayka’us in Sivas that included a medical madrasa and later incorporated the sultan’s tomb (1217–20); and the ’Ala’iyya "house of cure" (dār al-shifā’) of Kayqubad in Konya (1220s?). This paper attempts to situate Anatolian developments within a broader regional context. While the most renowned case of Byzantine Constantinople was the Pantokrator Monastery, founded and expanded by the Komneni dynasty (1136), which combined the functions of the monastery and xenon, and included a hospital, church, dynastic tomb, and instruction space, in the near vicinity, the Mengüjegid dynasty built the famed hospital and mosque complex in Divriği (1228–29). As for Syria, Nur al-Din Zangi’s prominent bimaristan (1154) combining a hospital with a madrasa, may also have provided an inspiration for the Seljuks. This paper argues that the proliferation of such public services across an international geography demonstrates that royal hospital complexes were all the rage at this time.
In 1516–1517, Sultan Selim conquered Greater Syria and Egypt from the Mamluk sultans and brought the ancient cities of Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo into the Ottoman empire. The philanthropic donations he made to these cities, as well as to Jerusalem, are well known, but the work of imperial largesse in provincial capitals is less familiar. This essay focuses on the endowments made by the sultan to the province of Aintab (today’s Gaziantep), which made a voluntary surrender early in the Ottoman campaign. Selim’s philanthropy in Aintab was focused on saints and their shrines in two of the province’s villages.

In addition to archival records, the essay draws on the work of local historians and folklorists in mid-20th-century Gaziantep. Particular emphasis is placed on their collections of legends that recount interactions between the sultan and local sheikhs and babas. These include miracles, bizarre encounters, battles won, and sometimes the meeting of seemingly incompatible minds. This body of literature gives some insight into the anxieties and hopes of provincial communities as they transitioned from one overlord to another. It also suggests, on the one hand, that local notables of Aintab (like those of other key cities taken by the Ottomans) possessed a degree of bargaining power with the sultan and his advisers. On the other hand, it argues that Selim’s philanthropic endowments in Aintab furthered a core political goal of his reign—combatting Safavid Iran’s political and spiritual ambitions in Anatolia.
In the past three decades there has been a growing interest in the lives, patronage and philanthropic acts of imperial Ottoman women. While much of this interest has been framed in a discourse which is critical of the Orientalizing representations of Ottoman royal women, and suggestions have been made that their acts of philanthropy, such as the architectural projects they commissioned, serve as synecdoche for these female patrons, there continue to be works of fiction, non-fiction and film produced which employ imagined images of the mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and concubines of the Ottoman sultans. Regardless of the fact that none of the imperial Ottoman women of the early modern era would have had any chance of being accurately represented in paintings, engravings or miniatures, somehow the need to see an image of these women has outweighed the historical evidence that these representations are pure fantasy. From academic book covers to sensationalist films, the faces (and often the bodies) of Ottoman royal women continue to appear and appeal. Drawing on recent research in sensory studies and the Ottoman world, this paper presents alternative strategies for representing royal Ottoman women and their acts of benevolence in the context of a museum exhibition. The challenges of creating an exhibition about the 17th century Ottoman queen mother Hadice Turhan Sultan at the Seddülbahir fortress museum on the Gallipoli peninsula are discussed, and suggestions made for (re)presenting Ottoman women—their lives and philanthropic works—in a less Orientalizing way by using sound, scent, and the image of the word.
The Use of Sultanic Philanthropy under the Constitutional Rule: New Perceptions and Directions

Notwithstanding the significance of the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18) for our understanding of the late Ottoman period and the shaping of the early Turkish Republic, Mehmet Reşad’s reign itself is often mentioned merely as representing the twilight of the Ottoman sultanate, when it became devoid of political and financial powers. While it is true that Mehmed Reşad’s ascendance was represented by the Young Turk government as a moment of victory for the constitutionalist cause in its bitter political struggle against the previous absolutist rule, Mehmed Reşad himself is regarded as a puppet-ruler who was used by the Young Turk governments to gain legitimacy for their rule and decisions. This paper concentrates on the reign of sultan Mehmed Reşad and his use of public philanthropy to discuss the last phase of the Ottoman sultanate during the constitutional rule. I will analyze the representations of the sultan’s contribution to the restoration of Edirne’s imperial legacy and of his philanthropy towards the city’s inhabitants following the city’s liberation from Bulgarian occupation during the Second Balkan war (July 1913). My main argument is that this kind of public philanthropy enabled Sultan Mehmet Reşad, the so-called ”First Constitutional Sultan”, to promote his presence in the public sphere and to boost his image as a paternal and benevolent ruler whose acts and choices underlined his commitment to the constitution and to the welfare of his Ottoman citizens. His philanthropy essentially highlighted his continuing relevance in the new circumstances created by the Young Turk revolution.
The spread of education in the late Ottoman Empire is linked with the emergence of the Ottoman citizenship: the devotion to the country and the Sultan and the struggle for the country’s modernization and progress in defence against the West and the ethnic separatist movements. The spread of education entailed by definition the inclusion of groups that were hitherto excluded from the educational process: the poor and women.

In the case of the Greek Orthodox population, the attempts at spreading education were systematized after the 1870’s, especially at the local community level. Community education was considered a means to spread Greek culture among the populations of the Orthodox millet and thus a defence against Balkan nationalisms –especially the Bulgarian one. The fear of the growing European labour and socialist movement which the literate elite associated with Balkan nationalisms also accounts for the spread of Greek education. The aim to include the lower classes in education resulted in the latter being perceived as philanthropy.

In the context of the educational mechanisms the young generation of the poor was socialized through the values of work and social progress: progress for the millet and the Empire as a whole. Education, especially for the poor, aimed to construct a bourgeois self, essential for the integration of the new generations into the bourgeois norms imposed by the ongoing westernization process. In these terms Greek Orthodox education became a tool for integration in the structures of the Ottoman state and society.
Philanthropy in the Form of a Hair Strand: Sacred Relics in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lands

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the caliphal status and the legitimacy of the Ottoman sultans were constantly and increasingly challenged. One of the most effective and powerful tools that they utilized in order to strengthen their diminishing image in the eyes of their subjects was the re-appropriation of sacred places, either by extensive restorations or by demolishing and rebuilding them. While this was not an emergent practice, during the tumultuous moments of the long nineteenth century, these incidents proliferated. Additionally, a sacred network associated with the benevolence and religiosity of the sultans was created by the increasing mobility of the sacred relics of Prophet Mohammad. For instance, hair strands of the Prophet (Liyye-i şerif) were sent to different corners of the Ottoman geography by the court. These sacred relics were kept generally in newly built mosques or custom built and repurposed edifices that protected and made its visitation possible. Similarly, in the Capital, visiting these relics became popularized. So much that Abdülmecid I (r.1839–61) ordered the construction of a new imperial mosque (Hırka-i Şerif Camii) at Fatih. Although called a mosque, it was designed specifically for the visitation of the Holy Mantle, as a ziyara.

This article investigates the proliferation and circulation of the sacred relics in the nineteenth century Ottoman lands. It argues that these acts not only aimed to address the religious needs of the subjects but were also expected to infuse the sacredness of these relics to the imperial image.
Panel: Philanthropy Today

[28 March, Thursday / Session VII / 14.00-15.00]

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