

KİTAP DEĞERLENDİRMELERİ

Leslie Peirce, *A Spectrum of Unfreedom: Captives and Slaves in the Ottoman Empire*, Budapest – New York: Central European University Press, 2021, 125 pp., \$12.81 (paperback), ISBN 978-963-386-399-2.

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Leslie Peirce's book entitled *A Spectrum of Unfreedom: Captives and Slaves in the Ottoman Empire* derives from the lectures she delivered at Central European University as part of The Natalie Zemon Davis Lectures. Her lecture notes as well as the feedback she received from the audience compose the main narrative. The book can be considered as an introduction to studies on captives and slaves of the Ottoman Empire from various aspects. To start with, the title of the book reflects a deliberate consideration; *spectrum* emphasizes the narrative variety of the book as the author approaches captivity from the various perspectives of both the captives and the captors. *Unfreedom* is also an appropriate term, as it corresponds to various usages from the official elite servants of the palace to abducted boys and girls by brigands across the Ottoman Empire. As articulated by the author, the book regards "captivity as a spectrum of unfree persons" (p.3). The book was not written to fill an important gap in literature; it rather aims to provide a general framework of Ottoman captivity for those who are interested in different forms of slavery in the Ottoman Empire. As such, the title provides sufficient insight about the scope of the book and the book offers a useful compendium on the subject.

The book consists of three main chapters and it lacks both an introduction and a conclusion. In the first chapter, *An Overview of Ottoman Slavery*, the author presents the subject to the reader from a broad perspective.

After describing the crucial economic, military and social roles played by captives for the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period, she briefly addresses diverse issues around captivity and slavery across the empire. Focusing on the legal aspects of slavery, Peirce portrays four different scenarios of captivity to illustrate the complexity of the issue. However, this discussion does not develop into a thorough analysis. She also touches on various topics such as the origins of captives and their conditions, the usage and social function of slaves, emancipation and its place in Islamic law, the oppression of slaves and their appeals to the courts for legal remedies, and even methodological problems of historians who study these issues. Overall, this chapter provides a general survey, which lacks scrutiny and an in-depth analysis of its arguments.

The second chapter, *Captives and Their Captors*, concentrates on captivity in terms of the reasons and outcomes of captures and attempts for the prevention of captive taking. To stress the longevity and similarity of former captive taking practices in Anatolia, Peirce draws various examples extending from antiquity to the sixteenth century Ottoman law. However, it is a long leap from Cicero in 51 BC to the sixteenth century Ottoman Empire. Such an assertion would need firmer justification. Through the chapter, the author provides four sample petitions from Ottoman archival sources (mühimme registers) on abduction as a crime, but does not explain the ground and motivation for choosing these four specific cases. Similarly, it is not clear how and why these four petitions typify the act of abduction. In addition, the tone in some assumptions of the author are anachronistic as in: “If the governor Cicero confronted similar malfeasance in Cilicia...” Moreover, the information and cases studies discussed through the chapter generally correspond to Ottoman Anatolia in the 1500s.

The last chapter entitled *Voices of Captivity in Legend, History, and Law* focuses on captivity tales in Ottoman chronicles drawing references from Aşıkpaşazade, Mehmed Neşri, İbn Kemal, and Peçevi. The passages from these primary sources constitute one of the interesting parts of the book for the reader. The author utilizes court registers once again in this chapter; it entails eight testimonies from a legal case against a former cavalryman in the city of Harput. The author’s ability to color up her narrative through court cases is striking. However, it is difficult to ascertain the importance of these eight testimonies for the general framework of the book.

In sum, although it is about captivity and slavery in general, *A Spectrum of Unfreedom* is far from having a well-structured content. The scope and the main argument of the book is not situated in a clear context. The lack of an introduction and a conclusion could be one of the factors causing

this vagueness. The transitions between the chapters are not smooth and disrupt both the unity of the subject and the narrative of the book. The reader, nevertheless, can trace temporospatial scope of the book in parallel to the author's general research interests and field of expertise. Overall, It is a useful book for those who are interested in a general survey of captivity and slavery in the Ottoman Empire.