

Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, *The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire: Loyalty, Autonomy and Privilege*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022, 368 pages.
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Nilay Özok-Gündoğan's pathbreaking book, *The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire: Loyalty, Autonomy and Privilege*, is a scholarly masterpiece that deconstructs and reconstructs conventional ways of viewing Kurdish and Ottoman history through a focus on one noble Kurdish family in the emirate of Palu, in the eastern reaches of the Ottoman Empire. Through an exploration of the Palu emirs, the book chronicles the history of the Kurdish nobility in the Empire from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and contributes the first in-depth historical study of the hereditary nobility of Kurdistan. The book focuses on the mid-nineteenth century, a time in which the Ottoman Porte was attempting to reign in the power and prestige of the Kurdish nobility in the east of the Empire by confiscating their landholdings. This upheaval in the long-standing local balance of power would set the groundwork for tensions between Kurdish landlords, the central government, local Muslim and Armenian farmers, and Armenian moneylenders, and would eventually end in the 1895 massacres of Armenians in Palu and the surrounding regions. Through the history of the Palu emirs (alternatively known as begs or beys), the author outlines the seismic shifts taking place in the Empire in the nineteenth century that transformed Palu and the broader region from an ethnically and religiously diverse and economically prosperous town into a homogeneous and underdeveloped locale.

The book is organized into three parts. The first part, "A Tenuous Accord," explores the period before the Tanzimat era. Chapter 1 focuses on the sixteenth century and the first interactions between the Palu begs and the Ottoman state during the period of conflict between the Empire and the Safavids to the east. Chapter 2 examines the hereditary privileges of the Palu begs granted by their noble status and outlines the rights and responsibilities that this position entailed. The second part of the book, "A Quasi-Rift," explores the early Tanzimat era (1820s–1840s), during which the Ottoman state's policy towards Kurdish noble families drastically shifted. Chapter 3 examines how the Ottoman state attempted to abolish the hereditary privileges of Kurdish noble families by undermining their long-standing economic and political power. Chapter 4 focuses on how the hereditary privileges of the Palu begs were negotiated on the local level among a variety of actors. Chapter 5 provides a micro-history of the Weşin incident—a local conflict with wider repercussions—and its aftermath along with an analysis of how local actors shaped the course of broader historical trajectories. The third part of the book, "Restructuring and Violence," analyzes the period following the official abolishment of the hereditary privileges of the Palu begs. Chapter 6 discusses conflicts over land ownership by delving into the official decree that confiscated the land of the nobility and examines the subsequent land sales from the 1850s through the 1870s. Chapter 7 explores the role of the Palu begs as the central state began to deepen its control in the district through establishing a new administrative order. Chapter 8 focuses on the 1895 massacres in Palu, including a discussion of the tensions that laid the groundwork for violent attacks on Armenians and an analysis of the role of the Palu begs during the massacres.

The book opens with a gripping anecdote of the burning of the village of Weşin in 1848 by Abdullah Beg, the emir of Palu, and it is written in such evocative prose that the reader is drawn into that time and space. Throughout the book, the author introduces each chapter with an equally vivid anecdote, which she proceeds to analyze with a wealth of archival material. The result is a manuscript that is not only empirically rich and powerful in its arguments, but also captivating and often surprising in the historical stories that it relates. This book contributes many important interventions in the fields of Ottoman, Kurdish, Armenian, and Middle East history, in addition to studies of local nobility as intermediaries between the central government and local actors in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond.

This book fills a gap in the literature on Kurdish emirates by widening the scholarly lens beyond those that are commonly referenced, such as the Bohtan Emirate in Cizre, as the author focuses on the lesser-known Kurdish emirate of Palu. Through this example, the book recounts three interconnected stories – first, it details the transformation of the relationship between the Ottoman center and the Palu nobility from the time that they were incorporated into the Ottoman realm in the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century. Second, it considers the primary role of land possession in the formation of the Palu hereditary nobility and their subsequent conflicts with the Ottoman state. Finally, it examines the relationship between the Palu nobility and local populations, including Kurdish tribes, Ottoman officials, and Armenians of various social positions – including wealthy Armenian moneylenders (*sarrafs*) in İstanbul as well as local farmers.

The book highlights the changing role of the Palu hereditary nobility over time and outlines their shifting relationships with various actors, local and beyond. The author emphasizes how local actors, including villagers, were not silent bystanders but instead played an active role in challenging the power and prestige of the nobility, as they attempted to mobilize the reforms of the Tanzimat to their advantage through writing petitions and opening court cases. Finally, the book demonstrates how the upending of a previous balance between the Palu begs, state officials, and local Armenians and Muslims eventually created the climate of violence in which the massacres and widespread destruction of the 1890s took place.

This book provides a refreshing critique of many of the standard narratives about Ottoman and Kurdish history and offers convincing alternatives through rich archival evidence. For instance, in the discussion of the historical autonomy of the Kurdish emirates, the book critiques the anachronistic, presentist nation-state fallacy that portrays relations between the Ottoman state and Kurdish elites as a zero-sum game or a struggle between autonomy and control. Instead, the author offers a nuanced study of the varied and surprising ways in which the Kurdish nobility negotiated their position as local powerbrokers to their advantage. The book carefully avoids ethnocentric and teleological narratives of Kurdish history and instead focuses on the historical imperial context. Rather than portraying two opposing sides of a competition in which the Kurdish elite and the Ottoman Porte are antagonistic towards one another, the author positions the nobility as an intermediary between the government and common people.

The book highlights many histories and communities that have been marginalized – if not silenced or altogether written out – of Ottoman and Kurdish history. As the focal case study of the book, the author chooses a group – the Palu nobility – that is marginal

even in the history of the Kurdish emirates and within the narrative of the contemporary Kurdish movement regarding historical Kurdish autonomy. The author writes, “the history of the Palu begs is not one of heroic resistance but of a noble family who justified their fiscal, military, and administrative privileges by referring to the imperial state’s recognition” (p. 18).

Finally, the author excavates the interconnected histories of Kurds and Armenians in the space of Palu, which she notes is of great import in both Armenian and Kurdish collective memory – for Armenians, it is the birthplace of Meshrob Mashtots, who created the Armenian alphabet in the sixth century, and for Kurds, it is the birthplace of Shaikh Said, who led a rebellion against the nascent Turkish Republic in 1925. The author carefully deconstructs the common trope of Kurds and Armenians as living separate from one another and interacting only in exceptional spaces of violence and genocide. Rather, the author illustrates the everyday interactions between Kurds and Armenians, which were characterized by both competition and cooperation. The book outlines, for instance, how in some cases Armenians supported the Kurdish begs in their conflicts with the Ottoman state; how Armenian sarrafs lent money to Kurdish begs in support of the begs’ economic projects; and how, in subsequent years, wealthy Armenians tried to buy the lands of the begs that had been confiscated by the state. The author’s careful reconstruction of these intertwined histories contradicts common narratives that read ethnocentric divides back anachronistically into the past.

The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire provides both a granular history of a single Ottoman Kurdish noble family as well as an overarching view of Ottoman Kurdistan during a period of monumental transformation in the political, social, and economic landscape. The book is based on extensive archival research – including Ottoman, British, and American archival sources along with interviews that the author conducted with the descendants of the Palu begs. The book is written in beautiful and accessible prose, and will be of interest to not only scholars, but also students of all levels and the interested public. It represents a significant contribution to Kurdish, Armenian, Turkish, Ottoman, European, and Middle East history, and provides an important foundation for future studies of the hereditary nobility in Ottoman Kurdistan.

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Claudia Liebelt, *Istanbul Appearances: Beauty and the Making of Middle-Class Femininities in Urban Turkey*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2023, xiii + 321 pages. doi:[10.1017/npt.2023.37](https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2023.37)

What is the political relevance of beauty? How can we locate the debate on feminine appearance, sexuality, and morality in a context of rising conservatism and authoritarianism in Turkey? How do we relate the exponential growth of Istanbul’s beauty industry to this context? What do the efforts of beautification and self-fashioning tell