



Tobias P. Graf.- *The Sultan's Renegades: Christian-European Converts to Islam and the Making of the Ottoman Elite, 1575-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 286p

In 2017, Tobias P. Graf published a very interesting book entitled: *The Sultan's Renegades: Christian-European Converts to Islam and the Making of the Ottoman Elite, 1575-1610*. Until very recently, superficially discussed in Ottomanist scholarship's studies of the presence of originally Christian individuals in the Ottoman Empire in the period between 1575 and 1610 are Christian-European renegades and their mobility into Muslim rivals' lands. As regards Graf's choice of this study, it derives its importance and significance from a considerable attempt to slice the silence on Ottomanist writers' unconcern about infrequently recording the converts' drive to become renegades. Thus, a careful reading of the evidence is needed in this study to draw out the inharmonious voices, the rifts between discourses, expectations, and practices, and the ambivalences and ambiguities, all of which, when carefully contextualized, allow a glance at the world behind the discourse. To push this exercise much further, Graf has developed a transcultural perspective, allowing himself to express his potential in making his work challenge the boundaries between the "inside" and "outside" approaches provided by different sources to look beyond language and audience as the only markers of relevance for this distinction. Specifically, Graf's systematic search for converts seems restricted to a period from the last two decades of the sixteenth century to the end of the first decade of the seventeenth one, a choice which, due to the occurrence of violent encounters, has pushed Graf to consider the period under scrutiny as a stage that offered Christian Europeans ample opportunities to eagerly accept Islam as their new religion, either as a result of captivity, migration, or defection. The book's main concern is about how these Christian-European renegades became part of the Ottoman elite and how they related to the Ottoman imperial enterprise.

Graf's research is particularly intended to shed light on the personal ties and associations of renegades in the Ottoman Empire, focusing on issues such as their socialization within the Ottoman elite. Chapter one starts with a historical outline of the development of the Ottoman military-

administrative elite from the early days of the Empire until the second half of the sixteenth century. In an ardent manner, Graf tries all the harder to deal with the renegades' depiction in Christian-European documents. Generally, the Ottoman society in Graf's work is divided into born Turks who worked in the field of judiciary and religion and renegades who worked for the Turkish army and government. The allure of the Ottoman forces' advance remained present even in the cultural productions of those who denounced renegades. Interestingly, Graf stresses that the Islamization of the elite created and extended the relationship between political loyalty to the sultan and obedience to a specific faith which offered the basis for later initiatives aiming at the religious homogenization of this group in a way which bears striking similarity to processes of confessionalization in parts of Christian Europe. The stories of the Christian-European converts in the period between 1575 and 1610 all fell within the scope of an Ottoman elite composed of Christian migrants who converted to Islam.

Chapter two explores how early modern European Christians and Jews faced situations in which it turned out to be promising for renegades like Niccolo de Bello and others to be Muslims. A journey from a Christian-European country to Istanbul, for instance, implied departing from Christian territory to a Muslim area. Indeed, the renegades' conversion to Islam entailed an unexpected cultural transformation of the convert at the level of type of dress, circumcision, changing names and eating habits. This shallow look of Christian-European renegades was altered to match the appearance of Muslims in the areas where they renounced their old religions. Interestingly, by successfully showing entirely official membership in the community of believers, the "*umma*," on those formerly either regarded as second class, for example "*dhimmis*" and "*muste'mins*," or, as "*harbis*," totally outside the range of protection offered by Islamic law, the transformation experienced by converts included not only their physical appearance but their legal rank as well. Did these superficial transformations reflect the converts' secret intentions? The fact that scholars have pondered over the converts' matter whether they really remained Christians who stealthily followed their faith, or whether they committed themselves to their Muslim sultan's religion means that the phenomenon of mobility of converts needs careful excavations to find more wonderful stories on the motives behind converting their religious identities.

Chapter three investigates the political dimension of conversion. Using the model of the renegade Ladislaus Mörth as an accurate example of a rare testimony, the renegade phenomenon seems to be contextualised within

what has been called “the age of confessionalization,” resulting into socio-political and material consequences. Unsurprisingly, such apostate, in a formal request, openly associated his tendency to become a Muslim with a frank acknowledgement of an unquestionable loyalty to Sultan Murad III. Undoubtedly, enthused by the stories of bounties generously offered to the Christian Europeans who left their properties behind them and headed for the Ottoman Empire, renegades were conscious of the fact that the key to prospect for social progress was the converts’ increased mobility. Graf observes that the devotion of converts, such as Rüstem Paşa, Justus Lipsius, and even Ladislaus Mörth, to a certain faith or confession may have been theoretically outward, cleverly raising an important question which goes as follows: “But how are we to determine whether renegades underwent a change of heart rather than merely a change of hat (113)?” It seems it is really important for renegades to don the Muslim headgear as a symbol of embracing Islam in order to get rid of any possible trial they could face outside their countries. *The Sultan’s Renegades* invites us to experience the inevitable difficulty when attempting to find out whether religious conversion was internally honest or purely instrumental.

Chapter four focuses on how Christian-European renegades were naturally integrated into the position of the Ottoman elite. The Ottoman Empire was a melting pot, where people from different countries, races, religious backgrounds, or social classes came to live together with Muslims. They left their homes for a variety of motives. They acted as such to flee from the predicaments they had experienced in their homelands or to cross the Ottoman borders with the intention of improving their personal and familial situations in their religious rivals’ lands. For those Christian-European migrants, a successful integration into the military-administrative elite took place within the sultan’s household. However, what is striking was the exception exposed by some recruits who enjoyed necessary talents, skills and resources. To a certain extent, these necessary gifts had been attained before conversion to Islam, especially as far as grasp of Christian-European languages and connections in Christian Europe were concerned. Interestingly enough, converts’ origins had also great impact on their socialization within the Ottoman elite. Equally important in Graf’s perception of the renegades’ regional and cultural origins, common linguistic backgrounds, shared histories and interests as significant associations in the Ottoman elite since these relations emphasize the limits of the transformation inherent in “becoming Turk.”

The relationships between renegades and people from their former homes, particularly family and Christian-European diplomats are extensively studied

in chapter five. Importantly enough, mobilizing individuals of their families to move to the Ottoman Empire was a means for Christian-European converts to expand their family circles with reliable and devoted followers and thus improve their relative standing in the constant competing strongly to get into the best position or situation. Additionally, hostage taking also played an important role in sustaining alliances with other monarchs, especially Roman Emperor. In a logical extension which was due to their birth's chance outside the Ottoman Empire, many renegades like Ciğalazade, Gazanfer, Fatima, among others, simply acquiesce to well-established patterns among members of the Ottoman elite. Perhaps interestingly enough, calling upon shared religious and regional origins was one of so many schemes Christian-European countries developed so as to get intelligence and manipulate policy making inside the sultan's domains. As renegades reached positions of influence and command in the sultan's service, they became both more dangerous as foes and more helpful as friends and collaborators.

While the Muslims and the Christians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries struggled to make religious demarcation between their dominions, Christian-European converts' movements towards the Ottoman Empire destabilized the religious lucidity between Islam and Christianity as a solid limit between the two religious rivals. *The Sultan's Renegades* is a very interesting book about how apostates became part of the Ottoman elite in the period between 1575 and 1610. It is an attempt to change the direction of the scholarly discussion of renegades. The latter in the lands of the Muslims could be precious collaborators with Christian Europeans because these renegades' new ranks allowed them to openly control Ottoman politics as well as policy making and its implementation. Really, such integration entailed consequences in the form of conversion to Islam and a cultural transformation intended to wipe out two of the most directly clear symbols of strangeness: names and clothing styles. Overall, Graf provides us with insightful conclusions about a highly significant source on renegades and the positions they attained, the talents they enjoyed, and the admission to important information which they hold. All these are encompassed in a well-written book.

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