

European Archives by Other Means: The Ottoman Registers of the “Foreign Nations” in the 17th Century



Friday, January 6, 2023



Philadelphia Marriott Downtown - Independence Ballroom III (3rd Floor Headhouse Tower)

Abstract

Historians have reconstructed the European-Ottoman encounter primarily on the basis of European sources which are more plentiful. A source that is increasingly being used to address this imbalance and provide the Ottoman point of view of this encounter are the Ottoman “registers of the foreign states” (del-i ecnebi defterleri) located in the Prime Minister’s Archive in Istanbul; starting in the late sixteenth century, the registers contain summaries of orders from Istanbul pertaining to European communities living and trading in the eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, from the early seventeenth century onward, the registers also regulated the affairs of certain Ottoman Christian and Jewish subjects in European service whose subjecthood and allegiance was often contested. A critical property of the registers has been underestimated: they are not a purely “Ottoman archive”. Through a comparative survey of the seventeenth-century Venetian, French, and Dutch section of the registers, this paper argues that a significant percentage of the entries contained in the registers were produced after a petition or a formal complaint had been submitted by a European ambassador, and that, although the registers followed the established Ottoman conventions in terms of form and chancery practice, they also reflect European agency in terms of content. In tandem with the often-ambivalent legal status and identities of the historical actors that made the European-Ottoman symbiosis possible, we should take into account the “hybridity” of some of the relevant archival sources.

Presenting Author



Constantine Theodoridis
Princeton University

View Related

