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Book Review

Seyfullah Aslan, *İmparatorluğun Tuna Donanması, Teşkilât ve Faaliyetler (1683–1718)*, İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2024.

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Recently, remarkable progress has been made in the historiography of the Ottoman navy, particularly in the eighteenth century. Numerous studies focusing on the local fleets and clarifying the characteristics of the Ottoman Empire's naval power have been published.[1] However, studies on the Danube, which flows over a vast area, including the regions of Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine, are limited.

During the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the Danube River was part of the Ottoman Empire. During the war with the Habsburg Empire, the Danube was the significant supply line for logistics from Istanbul to the frontlines, as well as a line of defense with several important fortifications for the Ottoman Empire. Despite its importance, few scholars had examined the Ottoman Danube fleet. However, recently, several studies have been published on this topic.[2] Among them, this review focuses on the book titled *İmparatorluğun Tuna Donanması, Teşkilât ve Faaliyetler (1683–1718)* [The Danube Fleet of the Empire, Organizations and Activities (1618–1718)] by Seyfullah Aslan in terms of its coverage of the earliest period of the Danube fleet

[1] Taşkaya, Arzu Baykara, "Local Shipyards in the Ottoman Empire: Lemnos Island (1780–1862)", *Journal of Universal History Studies,* 4/2 (2021), pp. 251–83; Sevinç, Tahir, *Osmanlı İdaresinde Süveyş Donanması: Süveyş Tersanesi'nde Gemi İnşası, 16–18. Yüzyıllar*, İstanbul: İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, 2021; Depe, Enes, *18. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Taşra Tezgâhlarında Kalyon İnşa Organizasyonu*, İstanbul: Kriter Yayınevi, 2022; Sevinç, Tahir, *Basra Donanması, Birecik ve Basra Tersanelerinde Gemi İnşa Faaliyetleri: 16–18. Yüzyıllar*, İstanbul: İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, 2022; Taş, Mehmet, *Osmanlı Donanmasının İnşası (18. Yüzyıl)*, Ankara: Atayurt Yayınevi, 2023.

[2] Bostan, İdris, "Osmanlı Sefer Organizasyonundan Bir Kesit: 16. ve 17. Yüzyıllarda Tuna'da Kurulan Askerî Köprüler", in *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller*, Kayseri: Not Yayınları, 2015, pp. 15–30; Yıldırım, Filiz, *Nazlı Tuna'nın İnce Donanması (18. Yüzyıl)*, İstanbul: Hiperyayınları, 2019; Kaya, Ali İrfan, "XVII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İdaresindeki Tuna Nehri (1683–1700): Donanma, İskeleler, Zahire Alımı ve Nakliye", *Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 16/32 (2022), pp. 369–96; Taş, Mehmet, "18. Yüzyılda Tuna Donanması ve Donatımı", *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 15/2 (2020), pp. 1399–1418.

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and its comprehensive investigation of historical sources. This book offers the detailed insight into the actual structure and operations of the Danube fleet. It covers the Great Turkish War after the Second Siege of Vienna in 1683, the Armistice period following the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, and the vigorous period after 1711, including the Prut River Campaign against Russia in 1711, and the Austro-Ottoman war between 1716 and 1718. The author worked on the Danube fleet for over ten years, including his early study on the Danube fleet during the reign of Süleyman.[3] This book is a revised version of doctoral dissertations submitted to the Department of Social Science at Istanbul University in 2022.

It is composed of four chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, the author describes the conditions of the Ottoman Danube fleet prior to 1683. This study is based on several published literary sources, such as Silahdâr's chronicle, and non-published historical materials, which were mainly financial documents preserved in *Maliyeden Müdevver Defterler*, *Ali Emiri*, *İbnülemin*, or *Cevdet* registers at the Ottoman Archives. It is especially noteworthy for its examination on the salary registers (*Salyâne Defterleri*) written in a special financial-register style in Ottoman Turkish. The author provides a brief overview of previous studies and points out that some are based on insufficient or incorrect information. Therefore, he argues for need to clarify the organizations and operations of the Danube fleet with a careful analysis of archival materials.

Chapter 1 examines the administrative structure of the Danube fleet. The head commander of the fleet was called Danube Admiral (*Tuna Kapudânı*), and this position became standing after 1683. In proportion to the military tension with Hapsburg, the rank of the person appointed varied from the captains of local place, the sub-provincial governors (*sancakbeyi*), to the provincial governors (*beylerbeyi*) with the title of Pasha. The author also considers an individual holding the title of *başbuğ* as the head commander in the absence of a designated Danube Admiral. Its headquarters was in Ruse (Rusçuk) during the period when the provincial governors were appointed as Danube Admiral, or in Belgrade (Belgrad) at other times. After an overview of the Danube Admiral's duties, their careers, wages, and main achievements are examined, focusing on their titles and ranks. Following the officers, such as *başbuğ* or Danube Vice Admiral (*Kapudân Kethüdâsı*), the ordinary captains are examined according to their ship groups, which classified by its financial resources and the place of constructions. The first group, known as the *firkateciyan filosu*, was composed of *kalyata* (a war galley smaller than the Ottoman main war galley, *kadırga*), *firkate* (a war galley smaller than *kalyata*) and *mîrî şayka* (a state-

[3] Aslan, Seyfullah, "Tuna Donanması'nın Kuruluşu Meselesi", in *Kanûnî Sultan Süleyman ve Dönemi, Yeni Kaynaklar, Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, İstanbul: İbn Haldun Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020, pp. 77–104.

owend Danubian riverboat). It was constructed and dispatched from the Imperial Shipyard (*Tersâne-i ʻÂmire*) in Istanbul. The second group was transporters commanded by *Üstüaçıklar Ağası* while third groupe was known as *şaykas*. *Şayka* was a riverboat characteristic of the Danube. According to the author, it can also be classified into some groups. State one (*mîrî şayka*) was from Istanbul, *ocaklık şayka* was constructed in the specific place in exchange for tax exemptions, and *Vakıf şaykası* was provided by specific foundations in the local area. In adittion, local citizens (*reʻâyâ*) and Eflak Voyvoda provided the ships: the former was called *zî-kudret şaykalar* and the later was called *Eflak şaykaları*. The area between Fethülislam and Güvencilik Fortress, where the Danube is at its narrowest such that it causes whirlpools, was considered by the Ottomans to be the key of the river owing to its military and traffic importance. To safely pass through the whirlpools, the ships were sailed by stretching ropes from both the banks. Eflak Voyvoda provided the ropes, and an officer with the title *Girdap Ağası* managed to ensure the safe passages. The soldiers and workers on the Danube fleet also are examined in this chapter.

The financial resources for the Danube fleet are discussed in the Chapter 2. The author reveals that the fleet was sustained by not only expenditures from the central treasury but also the revenues from various tax systems in the Ottoman Empire. The Danube fleet budget has been discussed; however, the author cautions that it is difficult to obtain a full picture because the documents do not include all the expenditure items. Despite these material limitations, the author closely examines the financial documents and organizes them chronologically according to the sources of taxes transferred to the Danube fleet and its expenditures. Most of the revenue of the fleet was generated from the state treasury (*Hazîne-i ʻÂmire*). It covered the salaries (*salyâne*) for the captains, the expenses of shipbuilding ordered by the Danube Admiral, the wages for soldiers; lowers; and craftsmen, inspection costs, and repair costs.

The management also preferred that would reduce the transportation of cash. In particular, the revenues from the tax farms (*mukāta'a*) of the Danube pier and the poll tax (*cizye*) in the Danube Basin were used. A few examples suggest that some tax revenues came from places that far from the Danube, such as Tokat, Thessaloniki, Egypt, or Holy Cities. Rather than cash, the materials or ships primarily collected from the local basin were subject to tax exemption. This *ocaklık* system, was used to pay the wages for the crew members boarding on the *ocaklık şayka* and the ships. Twelve specific cities along the Danube provided a total of 13 *şayka* ships each year. In some cases, the tax farms and the poll tax in the Danube basin were divided into salaries or provisions for these ships. The Danube Admiral retained the tax farms of the pier at Nikopolu (Niğbolu) in addition to his salary from the state treasury. It can

be said that the Danube fleet tended to receive higher budgets from the state treasury during the wartime, as its importance increased during such periods.

Chapter 3 describes the shipbuilding activities in the Danube Basin. The Ottoman shipbuilding activities in this area were primarily carried out in Ruse and its opposite bank Yerigörü as well as Svishtov (Ziştovi), Nikopolu, and Silistra. The author examines the capacity for the Ottoman Danube fleet for ship utilization each year and at each location. The total number of ships in the fleet fluctuated between 61 and 628 from 1690 to 1699, 3 and 32 from 1700 to 1710, and 7 and 595 from 1711 to 1718. It is evident that the operational opportunities declined following the Treaty of Karlowitz, which was signed in 1699. The fleet's strength was reinforced in response to the needs of the Pruth River Campaign between 1710 and 1711 and during the Austro-Ottoman war between 1716 and 1718. Every year, before the river froze in winter, it was necessary to unload cargo from the ships, pull them out of the water, and store them at sheltered places, such as Belgrade and Vidin. Similar to the Imperial Shipyard, The Danube fleet had groups of craftsmen responsible for ship construction and repair, including shipwrights, blacksmiths, and caulkers, albeit on a smaller scale. These craftsmen were dispatched from the Imperial Shipyard also recruited locally.

In addition, Chapter 3 introduces the types of vessels used in the Danube fleet. The *kalyata*, equipped with two cannons and approximately 22 rowing benches, and the *firkate*, equipped with around 10–17 rowing benches, were primarily constructed at the Imperial Shipyard and dispatched to the Danube River. The author discusses the characteristics and shipbuilding districts of each type of vessel: the *şayka,* favored in the Black Sea region; the *üstüaçık,* used for carrying heavy munitions or grain; the *tombaz,* primarily utilized as *ad hoc* bridges by laying several themselves across the river; and the *borozan,* used to transport large quantities of grain. Both sails and oars were used to propel the ships. Furthermore, the author reveals how the materials required for shipbuilding were supplied to the fleet, such as lumber, mast and sail girders, raw iron, tar and pitch, oars, sails, tents, anchors, gunpowder, cannons, and cannonballs. Some were supplied by the Imperial Arsenal or the Imperial Armory in Istanbul while the others were provided by the nearby provinces, such as Wallachia, Bosnia, or Buda. Some materials were obtained by means of *ocaklık* and the poll tax, or purchases by the Danube Admiral.

Chapter 4 begins with the consideration of the actual number of vessels and crews in operation in the Ottoman Danube fleet. Following it, the activities of the Danube fleet are chronologically examined primally based on the literature sources. The main military activity of the fleet from 1688 to 1691 was conducted in the whirlpool area. The Ottomans and the Hapsburgs repeatedly fought over the Fethülislam Fortress and the İrşova Fortress due to their strategic importances. They

were not only a steppingstone to Timişoara and Transylvania for the Hapsburgs but also the key point of supply network for the Ottomans. The Danube fleet clashed with the Hapsburg force in addition to handling their tasks of maintaining the logistics of ammunitions and grain for the Ottoman army between Nikopolu and Vidin. In 1711, the Danube fleet joined the Prut River campaign, and, in this time, it assumed the responsibility for the logistics from west to the east through the Danube. During the Astro-Turkish War of 1716–1718, the defense of the whirlpool region became a strategic priority. Additionally, during the Habsburg siege of Belgrade in 1717, the Danube fleet directly engaged in combat against Austrian force. After the fall of Belgrade in the same year, the fortresses in the whirlpool region also came under Austrian control. The Danube fleet, which had taken refuge in the Belgrade Fortress, was all seized. The other available ships on the Danube were gathered at Vidin, which became the new frontline for the Ottomans. As a result of the treaty of Passarowitz in 1718, the loss of Belgrade and some parts of the Danube Basin, such as Feyhülislam and Boriçe, which had previously supplied the *şayka* with *ocaklık* system, compelled the Danube fleet to restructure its organization.

The expected defensive duties of the Danube fleet during the aforementioned wars are examined. The author points out that the equipping and manning of ships as well as the transportation duties were carried out under the responsibility of the Danube Admiral in coordination with various levels of land-based commanders and administrators. The operational range of the Danube fleet extended as far as the Black Sea, Sava River, and Prut River, and it participated in the defense fleet of the region. Additionally, small garrison troops were stationed on land to support the fleet in river defense. In sections with strong whirlpools that slowed the navigation, it was necessary to protect the grain transport vessels from attacks and plundering. The author examines specific cases of these operations commanded by the Danube Admiral in chronological order.

The role of the Danube fleet in logistics is also examined in detail, sequentially focusing on the transportation of military supplies and soldiers and the shipment of grain, biscuit, meat, and horse fodder. The author points out that the advantage of Ottoman force in the frontline over Habsburg was this logistics that effectively used the Danube. River transport was considered superior to land transport because of its cost-effectiveness; it did not require provisioning for a large number of personnel or pack animals in terms of their food, and it could make transportation faster, more stable, and lager. Additionally, the Danube Admiral played a key role in constructing temporary bridges by aligning ships, supporting fortress construction, and conducting maintenance activities.

In the conclusion, the author underscores the strategic significance of the

Danube River within the Ottoman Empire and revisits the key findings discussed in the preceding chapters. The Ottomans brought their maritime expertise, developed in the Mediterranean, to the Danube, adapting it to the local conditions. The Ottoman Danube fleet adopted the *şayka*, a slightly modified version of the locally used riverboat known as the *nasad*. The fact that Danube captains also oversaw the operations of coastal fortresses and bases suggests that these installations on land were considered integral parts of the naval structure. This administrative and strategic approach was consistent with practices in the Ottoman Mediterranean.

The Danube fleet was not merely an auxiliary force but played a central role in the military operations. This effectiveness was made possible by the Empire's ability to rapidly procure a large number of suitable vessels, which was supported by the organizational strength and efficiency of the Ottoman bureaucracy. Both materials and labor were mobilized from across the empire, and the author argues that, in this regard, the Ottomans outperformed their contemporary counterparts. In addition, the Danube fleet consisted of diverse human resources from many organizations, including fortress garrisons, subjects of client state, or coast inhabitants, and the fleet was relatively well controlled by the middle-rank officers under the Danube Admiral. The author concludes that the Ottoman Danube fleet was well-controlled naval forces by central administration, as it maintained its unique administrative and financial structure as well as employed specialized naval techniques.

One of the crucial contributions of this book is its meticulous depiction of the Danube fleet based on an exhaustive examine of documentary sources in the Ottoman archives during the period between the outbreak of the Great Turkish War in 1683 and the fleet's organizational changes in 1718. It offers a detailed examination of the Danube fleet from the perspective of central administration. The Danube River traversed multiple administrative divisions within the Ottoman Empire, connecting different regions, or occasionally serving as a natural barrier for the armies to advance. In this complex setting, the central administration sought to use the Danube fleet as efficiently as possible. Through this study, the measures of this central endeavor become evident. An illustrative example is the correspondence between the rank of the appointed Danube Admiral and the level of tension along the borderlands. This correspondence can be understood as an administrative measure aimed at mitigating friction arising from the fleet's operations, which spanned multiple administrative divisions and required coordination with officials at various levels of authority. By appointing high-ranking commanders as admiral, the empire ensured that the fleet could perform its duties with clear aim and minimal obstruction. A comparable practice was observed in the Mediterranean, where the Ottoman Navy, which also operated across multiple administrative divisions, was typically commanded by a

figure with the rank of vizier after the second half of sixteenth century, ensuring the efficient execution of naval operations. In contrast, as this book reveals, the Danube fleet assigned high-ranking officials only during periods of heightened tension with the enemy.

In addition to these measures, the frequent adjustments in the number of ships and personnel were one of the characteristics of the Danube fleet, and the author makes it appear as a bureaucratic ingenuity for overcoming financial constraints. However, it can also be considered as evidence of the Ottoman Empire's organizational adaptability. Moreover, this observation implies the Empire's significant capacity for procurement. The decision not to maintain a large fleet at all times would have been impractical without the ability to collect the necessary vessels instantly. Some examples presented in this study indicate that the number of ships fluctuated by several hundred in a year, supporting this view. As the author points out, the tends shifting in the eighteenth century was particularly noteworthy. Previously, the Danube fleet acquired raw materials through the tax systems and then built ships under state initiative. However, it gradually introduced to purchasing fully built *şayka* ships using the same system. This tends not only reflects changes in Ottoman administration but also signals broader social and economic transformations within the Empire. The author's identification of this development represents a crucial contribution to the understanding of the empire's evolving procurement strategies and administrative reforms in the first of eighteenth century.

Although these contributions, the book presents several issues. One of them is structure of its chapters. For example, the examination of the number of the ships at each base is presented in the section titled "the existence of the Danube fleet" in Chapter 3. If this discussion pertained to the number of ships built, its placement in Chapter 3 would be suitable. However, since it addresses the number of ships "in existence", it would be more appropriately situated within the discussion of administration in Chapter 1 or fleet operations in Chapter 4.

The book also gives the impression that certain topics have been repeatedly examinated in different sections. A notable aspect is the component of discussions between the administrative and the financial matters. Since the administrative structure in Chapter 1 is presented according to the financial divisions classified by the author, the discussion of the Danube fleet's finances in Chapter 2 appears to overlap with the content of Chapter 1, which may cause confusion for the reader. The section on the salaries of each post in the financial chapter is also covered in the administrative chapter. The section on *ocaklık şayka* in the administrative chapter provides detailed examples of its financial resources. Consolidating these discussions into a single section would have been more suitable. Alternatively, it would be

necessary to analyze the financial structure in more in-depth manner. For instance, a pertinent question is whether each financial resource, such as the poll tax and the *mukâta'a* of pier customs, exhibit any patterns in terms of their specific uses. While most of the bases between Silistra and Vidin were located on the Bulgarian side, except for Yerigögü opposite Ruse, the fact that the financial and material contributions came from Wallachia appears to be a critical point. Was there a regional disparity in the revenue sources? One reason for this structural confusion may be that the Danube fleet's finances were not managed by a single specific treasury. They were sustained by securing financial resources at various levels under central oversight, drawing from different regions, particularly along the Danube. This complexity makes it difficult to analyze the fleet's financial system as a single entity. However, this complicity itself is a significant result of this study. These endeavors to effectively operate a provincial fleet are crucial to understanding the Ottoman Empire's social structure and the relationship between the central government and the provinces. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis by the author on this topic would have been valuable.

While this book provides a detailed picture of the Danube fleet from the perspective of the central administration, its relationship with the local provinces is worthy of further consideration. This study shows that local notables (*â'yân*) were already involved in shipbuilding activities in the Danube Basin around the late seventeenth century. Recent studies of local shipyards in other regions have revealed the significant role played by the local notables.[4] Further exploration and discussion are needed to better understand the interactions between the Danube fleet and regional actors, including the notables. From the same perspective, the discussion about the relationship between central and local administration should consider the internal dynamics, particularly the interactions between "outsiders" deployed to the Danube fleet as members of *firkateciyan filosu* and local captains, such as the *şayka kapudanları*. Understanding the dynamics between these diverse groups will offer deeper insights into the fleet's operational structure and socio-political dimensions.

Despite these weaknesses, this book significantly contributes to the extant literature in that it elucidates the reality of the Danube fleet from the perspective of the central administration. This study serves as an essential reference for future research in this field and will interest a wide readership, including educators, students, and researchers.

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[4] Yakay, Sinan, *Kdz. Ereğli'de Tersaneciliğin Tarihi ve Tersaneci Ağalar*, İzmit: Kdz. Ereğli Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Yayınları, 2004; Soyluer, Serdar, *Bodrum Tersanesi'nde Osmanlı Donanmasına Gemiler İnşası (Tevfîr-i Merâkib-i Bahriyye Teksîr-i Süfün-i Mansûre)*, İstanbul: Okur Tarih, 2023.