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Introduction

Between them, the four quotations above roughly indicate how Ottoman Izmir has been approached by modern historians. They have not been reproduced here because they capture current debates on historical urbanism in the Islamic world, but because they reflect the attitudes prevalent in most European travelers’ accounts and diplomatic and mercantile correspondence from the city, as well as informing the analytical frameworks of modern historiography on it. The city’s Ottoman past and its meanings have always been, and are still, reconstructed and reinterpreted overwhelmingly from precisely these two categories of sources. The problem is not that historians of Izmir wish to neglect local Ottoman sources, but that they are hard-pressed to find ones suited for the task. This has two causes, the first being the repeated loss to earthquakes and fires (in 1688, 1743 and 1922) of most quantitative (or readily quantifiable) Ottoman local records, and the second being the experimental quality of the city’s fiscal and administrative role within wider Ottoman administration – which meant that significant reforms in the administration of the Ottoman realm, as prompted by regional and world historical developments, were invariably tested and then quickly introduced in Izmir – the most valuable Ottoman nexus where these developments interacted. This has significant consequences for the consistency of Ottoman records from and on the city. Therefore, although a sprinkling of Ottoman records (always the same few) is often applied, it invariably fails to shake the city’s historiography from its European foundations and framework and to reconstruct it as the Ottoman city that it was, with a history that is at once Ottoman and European.

The history with which we are left is in essence external: with one or two notable exceptions (though not for the 17th century), it speaks of Europe in Izmir and the world, not of Ottomans in Izmir and the world, nor even of Izmir in the Ottoman Empire. But most surprisingly, it does not really speak of Izmir as a city with its own history and culture, demography and geography. Forced to take most of its cue from contemporary European sources that display a – perhaps dissembled, but all the same – marked disinterest in the workings of their Ottoman surroundings, it reduces Ottoman Izmir to life and trade along the European thoroughfare Frank Street. And assisted by the problematic and increasingly abandoned paradigm of the Islamic city, it treats the rest of the city as an uncivic and loose collective ruled haphazardly

and arbitrarily by a representative from the imperial center. The levers and buttons of this dark and somewhat cumbersome urban machine (often along with the region and the empire of which it was part), then, are operated at will by the Europeans to dispense and absorb goods as they required. Their capability to do so is supposed to have started from the second half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and to have subsequently drawn in so much of the wider Ottoman economy that it became irreversible, i.e. the West all-powerful, by the 1670s, after which followed a golden age for cosmopolitan Izmir, but a long and dark one indeed for the Ottoman Empire. Even the occasional historian who does attempt to treat Izmir as a city in its own right and restore some agency to it, is in the end forced by the sources and a succession of paradigms at least partly predicated on them, to regard the urbanization of Izmir as a European phenomenon.

Given the fact that the European quarter of 17\textsuperscript{th}-century Izmir took up a tiny fraction of the urban area, that a more balanced and skeptic reading of diplomatic and mercantile correspondence reveals their narrativity and suggests a far less uneven distribution of power in mercantile relations, and that it seems unlikely that crosscultural trade would have thrived in a context so thoroughly segregated and skewed, we are left to ask what can be done about this predicament. Given the available sources and scholarship, is it possible to attain a more realistic representation and understanding of how 17\textsuperscript{th}-century Izmir’s Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Jewish and European communities, inhabitants and visitors related to each other; of the degree to which they were and were not interdependent; of the role played in this by an urban history and culture particular to Izmir; of how this history and culture was reproduced because and despite of that intercultural dynamic; of how Ottoman administration regarded it; and of the consequences of this?

An answer to these questions clearly has relevance beyond Izmir’s history. An overdue analytical shift away from national-communal historiography and the interaction of economic systems, to crosscultural contact and such relations of power as we can manage to identify within them, will enable us to question the near-absence of everyday crosscultural relations in European sources and the historiography which has sprung from this absence. What’s more, since the problematic nature of the pertinent primary sources has all too often left outdated historiography and paradigms to stand in for new research in approaching early modern Izmir (and through it western Anatolia and the Ottoman Empire), a reconstruction of this history from the ground up might in itself pose a wider challenge to the large body of scholarship in which our one-sided understanding of the transformation of Izmir plays a significant part.

What is needed to achieve such a shift is a comparative analysis of cultural, social and political-administrative relations as presented in the ubiquitous
diplomatic correspondence on the one hand; and the cultural, social and political-administrative realities buried beneath these same narratives – but shining through in times of crisis – on the other. The strategy through which this comparison might be achieved, and its wider meaning interpreted, is one that brings together the hidden references to European crosscultural contact in that correspondence with a broad reconstruction of early modern (specifically, late-17th-century) developments in European and Ottoman history to show how their interaction played out in Izmir. With any luck, the resulting image will differ sufficiently from previous presentations to cast doubt on the appropriateness of the cultural and economic paradigms that have so dominated the historiography of Izmir and its uses.

Therefore, we will attempt to formulate our answer to the question of power in these crosscultural relations by relegating economic power and its deficient indicators to the background and focusing our attention on such other indicators of that power as we might be able to identify – i.e. legal, fiscal and administrative developments, and the history of urban demography and geography.

To this end, a number of previously unused and new sources will be tapped in addition to the archival series (European diplomatic archives and the Ottoman registers for land-lease, foreign affairs, and imperial orders), historical travel accounts (Tavernier, Spon, Tournefort, e.a.) and learned works (Ottoman, European and world histories, economic or otherwise) that are commonly used for studying historical Izmir and its place in the world. Most notable among these are scores of Ottoman fiscal miscellanea (Maliye'den müdevver defterler) and a crucial Ottoman endowment deed (vakfiye) from the Köprülü and Süleymaniye libraries detailing a major overhaul of Izmir’s infrastructure, as well as many recent historical, legal, anthropological, sociological and demographical studies.

Our primary hypothesis will be that Izmir’s culture and political economy were purposefully manipulated by the Ottoman and European centers and their various representatives in their quest for dominance, but that these found themselves consistently resisted and thwarted by Izmir’s cultural and institutional dynamic. We will posit that this distinctly crosscultural urban culture had its own political economy, with its own logic and trajectory.

From this primary hypothesis immediately follows another – which holds that the image of Izmir as a segregated and administratively neglected ‘city’ was a façade. Willfully constructed by the Ottoman and European centers and their local representatives, it was maintained to hide from view a world of crosscultural compromise and mutual dependencies. This hidden ‘middle ground’ and the urban culture it fostered, differed significantly enough from that in other Ottoman places of crosscultural trade to effectively constitute a distinct urban culture.
We will have succeeded if, by the end of this text, the existence of such a specific urban culture and politics – not always understood in Istanbul and the European capitals but prevalent within Izmir’s society and institutions – can carry your conviction. And if it does not seem at all farfetched to claim that this specific society and its institutions absorbed, internalized and transformed the systemic shocks delivered to it instead of simply giving way to them.