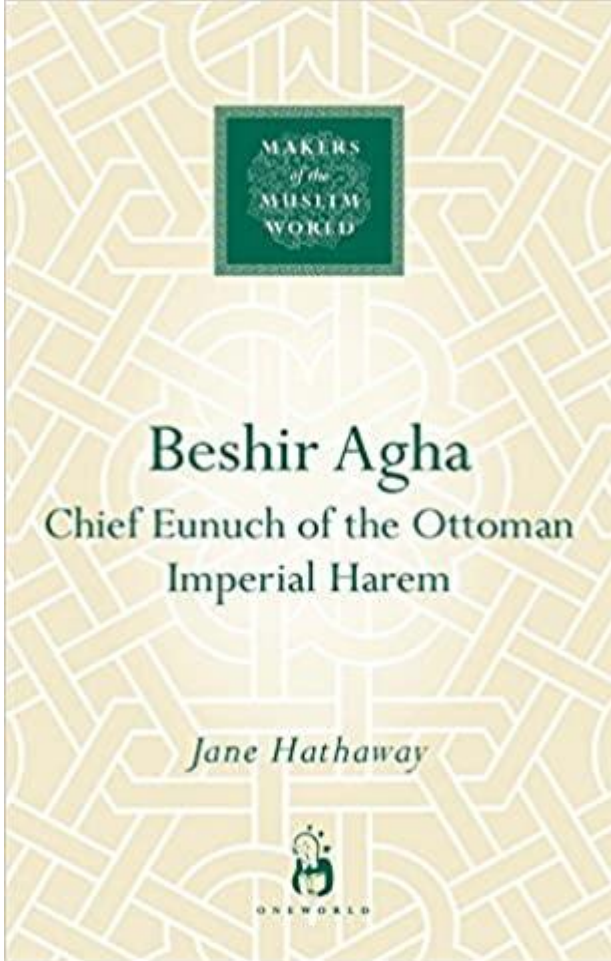


Beshir Agha: Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem  
Jane Hathaway, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2005, xv + pp.131.

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Jane Hathaway is a professor of history at the Ohio State University and is a very proficient in Egyptian history of Ottoman period and imperial eunuchs. She has many books, articles and papers written on these topics. With this book she wrote, she made an important contribution to the literature about Beshir Agha who was the most powerful harem eunuch of the Ottoman harem. There are no noteworthy works written on the harem eunuchs in Turkish. In this regard, the translation of the book is also important.

The book consists of thirteen chapters, Acknowledgments, Note on transliteration and Introduction. The first part has the title of elite slavery and household membership. Here, after a brief introduction of the eunuchs (and other slaves), having high status, their situation in Mamluk and Ottoman society is explained. Moreover, it is briefly mentioned that elit slaves were counted from the households of the owners and treated in the protector-protected relationship.

The second part deals with the eunuchs from a historical point of view, and after giving brief information about the eunuchs employed in the great empires starting from the Assyrians, and then the Mamluk and Ottoman eunuchs were discussed in more detail. The third part is titled as the origins of Beshir Agha and the process of obtaining castrated slaves from this region with Ottoman Abyssinia is covered. In the fourth chapter, the first years of Beshir Agha in the Ottoman palace and the political and daily events that affected the harem that took place during this period were briefly mentioned. The fifth chapter is about the exile years of Beshir Agha in Cyprus and Egypt. In the sixth chapter, the period was examined that when Beshir Agha was a sheikh of other eunuchs who were custodian of Masjid Al-Nabawi. Here, succinct information was given about the prevention of the destructive activities of the Shia and Zayd people in Medina, eunuchs custodian of Masjid Al-Nabawi, Ravza-yı Mutahhara, and the Köprülü reforms in Medina.

The seventh chapter explains how Bashir Aga returned to Dersaadet and was appointed here as a Darussaade agha (chief custodian of the Harem) in the harem, where he took power and appointed or dismissed of high-ranking officials. In the eighth chapter, it is stated how Beshir Agha kept his power during the reign of Mahmud I, how he protected his position without being affected by the Patrona Halil rebellion that ended the Tulip era and made an effort for a peaceful diplomacy in the state administration. The ninth chapter deals with Beshir Agha's influence in Damascus and Egypt. In the tenth chapter, the foundations of

Beshir Agha, his philanthropy, and his contributions to religious and scientific development, are dealt with broadly according to the volume of the study. In other chapters, information was provided about the funeral ceremony, contributions to the state administration and works written about him and his activities

In addition to its scientific value, the work also contains deficiency and mistake. First issue is “medical X-rays of late Ottoman eunuchs taken the early twentieth century Show fingers reaching nearly to the eunuchs’knees” and then explanation of the results (page 21). In the book, while giving information about medical results, it is not mentioned who did the work and the source is not shown. The first and only scientific research on the physiological status of the castrated slaves of the Ottoman Empire was made by Mazhar Osman Usman and İhsan Şükrü Aksel and presented to the world of science through a scientific congress held in Europe. In this case, the author does not know who did it or she knows that this kind of scientific study was carried out by a Turkish scientists in Turkey, but she ignored or refrained from saying it. There is no any citation in this regard. So, can we say that there is a plagiarism on this issue?

Another mistake is that when referring to Chorlulu (Çorlulu or Silahdar) Ali Pasha, it is stated that "In a fit of reforming zeal, he attempted to subvert the entire harem eunuch establishment, and to that end ordered the governor of Egypt to cease importing young African eunuchs. His attempt did not succeed" (p. 36). However, as it is known that this instruction was not given by Çorlulu (Silahdar) Ali Pasha (1706-1710) but Martyr (Damat) Ali Pasha, serving the later period (1713-1716), instructed as a part of the reforms to renovate the state apparatus. The writer has confused these two Ali pashas with eachother.

The book provides relatively tidy information in relation to its volume and informs the reader about Hacı Beshir Agha as the haremağası. As one of the few works on Haremağaları, it is clear that it will contribute and encourage future studies and those who want to learn more about the subject.

