AN INTRODUCTION TO STUDIES OF AFRO-OTTOMAN HISTORY IN TURKEY

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Abstract: This introductory article maps the emergence and institutional consolidation of Studies of Afro-Ottoman History within Turkish academia over six decades. Beginning with Cengiz Orhonlu's pioneering efforts in the 1960s and Ahmet Kavas's revitalisation in the early 2000s, supported by key institutions including İSAM, IRCICA, ORDAF, AFAM, and TTK, Turkish academia now produces multilingual scholarship involving several young researchers drawing from Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, English, and French sources. This article documents the chronology and genealogy of the last twenty-five years of research conducted in Turkey. Despite progress, colonial legacies persist through restrictive visa regimes and closed-access publishing that marginalise Turkish and African researchers. Works on Studies of Afro-Ottoman History in Turkey continue to remain out of reach of Anglophone research literature. This Special Issue bridges these divides by presenting three contributions in English that retain their multilingual source bases. Collectively, these articles recover previously marginalised African agency, challenge colonial historiography through local and Ottoman archives, and illuminate a five-century span of transcontinental connections between Istanbul and the African continent and African people.

Keywords: *Afrikâ-yi Osmânî, African diaspora studies, North Africa, West Africa, global history*

Recent scholarship in the United States and Europe has increasingly highlighted the significance of the Ottoman Empire, and its archival material, for the historiography of North Africa, the Maghreb, and the broader African continent. This renewed interest has culminated in recent Special Issue publications, such as *Toward a Maghribi Turn in Ottoman History* by Jessica Marglin and Youssef Ben Ismail in 2024 as well as *The Ottoman Africa and the Ottomans in Africa* by Nicola Melis in the same year (Marglin and Ben Ismail 2024; Melis 2024). The editors of these Issues have argued that the Ottoman contribution to African history has been largely omitted, or

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even erased, from Anglophone and Francophone scholarship. Such neglect stems chiefly from the historic rivalry between European powers and the Ottoman rulers, which prompted European writers to depict the Ottoman presence as marginal or illegitimate, thereby casting Africa as a vacant arena awaiting European colonisation (Marglin and Ben Ismail 2024; Melis 2024). As a result, roughly three and a half centuries of Ottoman activity in Africa have been downplayed or neglected, leaving many scholars in the United States and Europe under the impression that Ottoman sources yield little insight into African history.

In recent years, however, Ottoman historians have begun to turn their attention toward African Studies, while an increasing number of African scholars have acquired proficiency in Turkish. This linguistic and disciplinary convergence has generated considerable enthusiasm within academic circles across the United States and Europe, as researchers recognise the vast, yet "untapped," corpus of Ottoman documents pertinent to African history. Accordingly, some scholars now contemplate the emergence of a distinct subfield, "Afro-Ottoman Studies," and advocate for fresh interpretative frameworks within African historiography.

Nevertheless, this represents merely a fragment of the broader picture. In fact, more than a quarter-century has elapsed since the Studies of Afro-Ottoman History emerged as a newly established discipline within Turkish academia. Today, the field is no longer a nascent, promising avenue of inquiry in Turkey; it has been incorporated into the regular pedagogical curriculum. This raises the question of what transpired during these twenty-five years within Turkish scholarly institutions concerning African research, a development that appears largely overlooked by academic communities in the United States and Europe. Accordingly, the purpose of this introductory article is to outline the evolution of the Studies of Afro-Ottoman History in Turkey, while the overarching aim of the present Special Issue is to offer a snapshot of contemporary scholarship on Afro-Ottoman topics within the Turkish context.

The Long Way in Establishing Studies of Afro-Ottoman History (1965-2006)

Research on African history, particularly as derived from Ottoman archival material, was not a novel undertaking within Turkish academia. Indeed, a number of Ottoman scholars, such as Aziz Samih İlter, Ercüment Kuran, and Celal Tevfik Karasapan, had produced influential monographs on the

subject dating back to the 1930s (İlter 1934; Kuran 1957; Karasapan 1960). Nonetheless, the primary orientation of these historians remained centred on the broader narrative of the Ottoman Empire, and thus on North Africa. Given the empire's centuries-long presence across the region, it was a logical extension for them to examine the African dimensions of Ottoman history, and not the other way around.

However, Cengiz Orhonlu was the first who aimed to create a field of Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, bringing African and Ottoman history together in 1965. His effort was unique in the sense that he was trying to move beyond North Africa in discovering the relations between African states south of the Sahara with the Ottoman Empire. Deeply interested in African history that left traces in the Ottoman archives, he disclosed his ambitious plan in an article on "Afrika İle İlgili Türkçe Yayınlar ve Kayıtlar [Turkish Publications and Records Regarding Africa]" (Orhonlu 1965). In 1967 and 1969, he published the first concrete works in this field, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Habeş Siyaseti (1540–1560) [Ethiopian Politics of the Ottomans, 1540-1560]" and "Osmanlı-Bornu Münasebetlerine Ait Belgeler [Documents Regarding Ottoman-Borno Relations]" (Orhonlu 1967, 1969). In 1970, Abdurrahman Çaycı joined his efforts with his ground-breaking work *Büyük Sahra'da Türk-Fransız Rekabeti (1858–1911)* [Turkish-French Competition in the Great Sahara (1858-1911)] (Çaycı 1970). In 1974, Orhonlu published a prominent work *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti, Habeş Eyaleti* [Southern Politics of the Ottoman Empire: Province of Ethiopia] (Orhonlu 1974). However, the sudden death of Orhonlu in 1976 put an end to this newly established field. These contributions hold distinctive significance within the broader field of African historiography. They articulated a distinctly global dimension to African historical trajectories, extending well beyond frameworks centred solely on European engagement. Furthermore, the source materials employed by these works offered an innovative interpretive lens that navigated between indigenous documentary traditions and Eurocentric or colonialist archives, a binary opposition that has long occupied a central position in African historical scholarship.

Following the years from the 1980s to the 1990s, many scholars, such as Orhan Koloğlu, Gheder Ammar, Mahmud Ali, Atilla Çetin, and İbrahim es-Sanafiri published important works on the history of the Ottoman presence in North Africa (Koloğlu 1981; Ammar 1982; Ali 1982; Çetin 1987; es-Sanafiri 1993). Yet, their interest was not aligned with the efforts of Orhonlu, as they framed their work as part of Ottoman Studies rather than of Afro-Ottoman relations.

In the early 1990s, Tunisian historian Abdeljelil Temimi, independently of Orhonlu's short-lived ambitions, pushed for the establishment of two fields that indirectly connected the Ottoman Empire to Africa. In 1994, he published *Etudes d'Histoire Arabo-Africaine* [Studies on the History of Arab-African Relations], and *Etudes d'Histoire Arabo-Ottomane 1453–1918* [Studies on the History of Arab-Ottoman Relations, 1453–1918] (Temimi 1994a, 1994b). Indeed, his aim was to create a triangular relation, such as Afro-Arab-Ottoman relations, rather than simply Afro-Ottoman relations. While the field of Arab-Ottoman relations to this day has gained great popularity in Turkish, Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, and Egyptian academies, the efforts for Afro-Arab-Ottoman relations has not produced the same results, as this field is still waiting to be reactivated. One of the challenges for Orhonlu and Temimi was the lack of a supportive environment from the institutional side. That is why, following the death of Orhonlu, there was no institutional continuity. Temimi, facing the same problem, came up with the solution of establishing his own association. Still, the challenge reduced all these efforts to being a one-man-driven project, preventing a systematic continuity.

This radically changed in the early 2000s, when Ahmet Kavas found the best conditions to reactivate the failed ambitions of Orhonlu. After completing his studies in Islamic theology at Ankara University in 1987, he received a scholarship from the Turkish Religious Foundation (TDV) to pursue graduate research in France. At the University of Paris Diderot, under the mentorship of Jean-Louis Triaud, renowned for his research on the Sanusi movement in Libya, Kavas earned his doctorate in 1996 with a dissertation entitled *The Evolution of Modern Arab-Islamic Education in Francophone Africa: The Madrasas of the Republic of Mali: The Case of Bamako, 1980–1994* (Kavas 1996). That same year he joined the Centre for Islamic Studies (İSAM) in Istanbul as a researcher. His doctoral thesis was subsequently published in 2003 by the Istanbul Research Centre for Islamic Culture and Arts (IRCICA) under the title *L'Enseignement islamique en Afrique francophone: Les médersas de la République du Mali* [Islamic Education in Francophone Africa: The Madrasas of the Republic of Mali] (Kavas 2003b). In 2006, he secured a faculty appointment at Istanbul University, Turkey's oldest university and a historic hub for Ottoman studies. In 2013 he was designated the inaugural Turkish ambassador to Chad, stationed in N'Djaména, and served as Turkish ambassador to Senegal from 2020 to 2023.

These particulars are far from trivial footnotes; they are essential for grasping the scholarly milieu in which Kavas produced his works. His doctoral training at the University of Paris Diderot immersed him in a broad French academic

network dedicated to the study of Islam in Africa, a field still shaped, in part, by the region's colonial legacy. The Centre for Islamic Studies (İSAM), which offered Kavas his initial professional appointment, remains one of Turkey's preeminent research institutions. Established in 1988 by the Turkish Religious Foundation (TDV), the same organisation that funded Kavas's scholarship to France, İSAM was originally conceived as a component of the expansive *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Islamic Encyclopaedia of TDV) project, a thirty-three-year endeavour that produced forty-six volumes and to which Kavas contributed over one hundred entries about Islamic parts of Africa. Between 1988 and 2012, TDV, in partnership with İSAM, dispatched numerous PhD students abroad in order to cultivate a research environment in Turkey that met international standards. After 2005, İSAM broadened its scope beyond the encyclopaedia, supporting investigations of Ottoman legal documents and the critical edition of seminal Arabic texts in Islamic history. Many of these initiatives intersected with African history at various levels. Yet, recently, İSAM has launched the *Afrika Ansiklopedisi* (Encyclopaedia of Africa) project under the directorship of Hatice Uğur (a contributor of the present Special Issue). Today, İSAM is an important institution for Studies of Afro-Ottoman History.

Another pivotal institution that has worked closely with Kavas is the Istanbul Research Centre for Islamic Culture and Arts (IRCICA). Founded in 1978 by a resolution of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) adopted in Dakar, Senegal, IRCICA operates under Turkish leadership. Although formally an OIC body, its headquarters have remained in Istanbul since inception, and it continues to function there today. The centre's core mission encompasses the organisation of conferences, workshops, exhibitions, research projects, and the publication of scholarly works pertaining to the global history of Islam. From its earliest days, IRCICA has placed particular emphasis on the study of Islam in Africa, organising myriad international colloquiums and published their proceedings (see the following table of colloquiums and their proceedings).

Editor	Name of Colloquium	Place of Organisation	Year of Organisation	Year of Publication
Samba Dieng	La civilisation islamique en Afrique de l'Ouest	Dakar, Senegal	1996	1999
Halit Eren	*Proceedings of the International Symposium on Islamic Civilization in Eastern Africa*	Kampala, Uganda	2003	2006
Halit Eren	*Proceedings of the International Symposium on Islamic Civilization in Southern Africa*	Johannesburg, South Africa	2006	2009
Halit Eren	*Proceedings of the International Congress on the Maghreb and the Western Mediterranean in the Ottoman Era*	Rabat, Morocco	2009	2013
Halit Eren	*Proceedings of the International Symposium on the History of Islamic Civilization in Eastern Africa*	Zanzibar, Tanzania	2013	2018
Halit Eren	*Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Islamic Civilization in Southern Africa*	Durban, South Africa	2016	2019
Halit Eren	*Proceedings of the International Conference on Islamic History and Civilization in West Africa*	Abuja, Nigeria	2018	2020
Halit Eren	*Actes de la Conférence internationale sur L'histoire et la civilisation islamiques en Afrique de l'Ouest, Bilād as-Sudān*	Niamey, Niger	2019	2020
Halit Eren	*Al-tārīkh wa-l-ḥadhārāt al-ʾislāmiyyah fī minṭaqat wāṣṭ Afrīqiyā*	N'Djaména, Chad	2019	2021
Mahmud Erol Kılıç	*Proceedings of the 3rd International Congress on Islamic Civilasation in Southern Africa: History, Contemporary State & Future Perspectives*	Cape Town, South Africa	2020	2024
Mahmud Erol Kılıç	*Proceedings of the International Conference on History of Islamic Learning and Scholarship in Africa*	Kaduna, Nigeria	2023	2024
Mahmud Erol Kılıç	*Histoire de la connaissance et de l'érudition islamiques en Afrique centrale et occidentale*	Yaoundé, Cameroon	2024	In publication[1]

These successive meetings illustrate IRCICA's distinct international character: publications appear in four languages, and the centre maintains collaborative networks with hundreds of African scholars. The centre also published one monograph of Mamadou Ndiaye, titled *L'enseignement Arabo-Islamique au Sénégal* [Arab-Islamic Education in Senegal] (Ndiaye 1985) and one

edited volume under the title *Al-Sudān Khilāl al-Fatrāt al-ʿUthmāniyyah kamā Tazhar fī al-Maḥfūẓāt al-ʿUthmāniyyah* [Sudan during the Ottoman Interregnum as Reflected in the Ottoman Archives] (Demirbaş et al. 2007). Consequently, IRCICA stands out as a significant research institution not only within Turkey but also on the global stage. At present, the centre is planning additional international colloquia throughout Africa, creating ideal conditions for researchers who work on Studies of Afro-Ottoman History.

Another pivotal actor in the development of Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, but also more generally, African Studies within Turkey is the Turkish state itself. In 1998 the government inaugurated its first *Afrika Eylem Planı* (African Action Plan), marking the commencement of formal diplomatic outreach toward African nations. This initiative culminated in the designation of 2005 as *Afrika Yılı* (African Year) and the organisation of an inaugural Turkish-African Summit in 2008, which attracted delegations from forty-six African countries. Although Turkey developed its first African action plan in 1998, due to economic challenges, activities began mainly after 2008 (Akyar 2019: 64–77). In the wake of that 2008 summit, Turkey accelerated the establishment of consular missions across the continent; between 2009 and 2014 twenty-five new Turkish consulates were opened in Africa, a period during which Kavas received his initial appointment as ambassador (Daban 2021: 937).

This diplomatic, political, and economic focus on Africa slowly resonated within Turkish academia, prompting universities to establish new African Studies departments and research centres. Consequently, by 2025 Turkey hosts twenty-two active African Studies units.[1] Given the anticipated proliferation of additional programmes in the coming years, Turkey appears poised to become an important hub for African scholarship on the European continent. Although not all these centres focus on Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, their increasing activities create favourable conditions for researchers in this field to find a broad audience.

Returning to the role of Kavas in the evolution of Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, within this vibrant and evolving scholarly milieu, he commenced the publication of seminal contributions after 2000. Early in his career he turned to *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* (The Journal of Ottoman Studies), a periodical founded in 1980 that remains a principal outlet for Ottoman research in Turkey. In 2000, he presented an article examining the history of Rabih ibn Fadlallah in Borno (present-day Nigeria) and its interactions with the

1 https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/

Ottoman Empire, integrating secondary literature in English and French with primary Ottoman documents (Kavas 2000). The following year Kavas contributed a comprehensive study of the Kuloğlu communities in North Africa, again juxtaposing sources in English, French, and Ottoman Turkish (Kavas 2001). Recognising the wealth of Ottoman archival material pertinent to African history and the legacy of Orhonlu's work, he authored the 2003 piece "Türkiye'de Osmanlı Afrikası Araştırmaları [Studies on Ottoman Africa in Turkey]" (Kavas 2003a), which surveyed prior Turkish scholarship on Afro-Ottoman relations and highlighted the archival richness of the field. This article served as the second founding manifesto for Studies of Afro-Ottoman History after Orhonlu, delineating a prospective research agenda. This article also coincided with Hatice Uğur's master's thesis in English *Understanding Afrikayi Osmani in the Late Ottoman Period: The Case of Zanzibar* submitted at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul in 2003, and subsequently published in 2005 as a monograph in Turkish (Uğur 2005). One of the most important contributions of her work was about considering "*Afrikayi Osmani*" (Ottoman Africa) in a much broader context, showing the global role of the Ottoman Empire in Africa, being active far beyond its imperial borders in the continent. One year later, Kavas assembled his previously published articles into a volume entitled *Afro-Ottoman Relations*, thereby providing a centralised reference work for subsequent researchers (Kavas 2006a). In this regard the period of 2003 to 2006, with the ground-breaking contributions of Kavas and later Uğur, was a reactivation of the period of 1970 to 1974, when Orhonlu and Çaycı had opened the field of Studies of Afro-Ottoman History.

The Rise of Studies of Afro-Ottoman History after 2006

Following 2006, Kavas maintained a prolific output, publishing influential works on Afro-Ottoman history on an almost annual basis (for instance, see Kavas 2004, 2006b, 2007, 2008). Following his appointment at Istanbul University, he assumed supervisory responsibilities for doctoral students, including Muhammed Tandoğan, Abdullah Erdem Taş, Aydın Özkan, and İsa Gökgedik, in collaboration with his colleague Nurettin Gemici. He urged these students to focus their dissertations on Afro-Ottoman history and organised them to edit extant Arabic and Ottoman-Turkish primary sources concerning African history.

In partnership with the Association of Middle East and African Researchers (ORDAF), founded by Zekeriya Kurşun in Istanbul, the group around Kavas published the 1913 Ottoman-Turkish chronicle of Mehmed Nuri and

Mahmud Naci in 2012 (Nuri and Naci 2012). The following year, ORDAF released a volume containing two chronicles, one in Ottoman Turkish and the other in Arabic, authored by Nehicüddin Efendi and Hasan Safi (Taş, Tandoğan and Özkan 2013). Also in 2013, Kavas and his students, working directly with Kurşun, produced a second landmark publication since the 2003 manifesto, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Afrika Bibliyografyası* [African Bibliography from the Ottoman Era to the Present], which offers a comprehensive catalogue of Ottoman-Era and modern Turkish works on Africa (Kurşun et al. 2013). That same year, under the editorship of Şakir Batmaz with an introduction by Kavas, an influential bilingual volume appeared: *A History of Ottoman Africa: Black Pearl and White Tulips / Afrika'da Osmanlı Asırları* (Batmaz 2013). In 2015, continuing their collaboration with ORDAF and Kurşun, they edited a volume dedicated to the history of the Tuareg peoples of the Sahara: *Afrika'nın Asil Göçerleri: Tuaregler* [The Noble Nomads of Africa: The Tuareg] (Kurşun 2015).

In the meantime, around 2013 the Turkish State Archives Directorate (DAB) released two edited volumes that collected and transcribed pivotal Ottoman archival documents concerning the histories of Libya and Sudan (Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı 2013a, 2013b). These publications have since become essential reference works for scholars investigating the past of these regions. Collectively, these edited volumes of Ottoman primary sources constituted a substantial contribution to African historiography. Through these editorial endeavours, numerous Turkish travel accounts and chronicles pertaining to Africa became accessible to scholarly inquiry, providing historians with a critical opportunity to analyse information derived from European travel narratives that had otherwise dominated the field.

Between 2015 and 2020, scholars mentored by Kavas successfully defended doctoral dissertations on a variety of Afro-Ottoman topics (see Tandoğan 2015; Taş 2015; Özkan 2017; Gökgedik 2020). Concurrently, Kavas extended his supervision to additional PhD students, such as İlhan Zengin and Tuğrul Oğuzhan Yılmaz, who pursued Afro-Ottoman research at other Turkish universities (Zengin 2018; Yılmaz 2020). With an emerging cohort of specialists dedicated to Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, Kavas, together with his previous students Muhammed Tandoğan, Aydın Özkan, and İsa Gökgedik, established "The Association of Researchers on Africa" (AFAM) in Istanbul in 2016. Building on years of collaboration with the Association of Middle East and African Researchers (ORDAF), this newly formed association, wholly committed to African Studies, began publishing edited primary-source editions under its auspices. In 2016, AFAM released a modern edition of a

1910 Ottoman-Turkish travel narrative on Sudan authored by Muhammed Mihri (Mihri 2016). The following year, in partnership with the Research Association of Islamic Science (İSAV) and Istanbul Medeniyet University, AFAM organised the international conference *Afrika'da İslâmiyet: Dünü, Bugünü, Yarını* [Islam in Africa: Past, Present, and Future], subsequently issuing a comprehensive edited volume exceeding 800 pages that gathered the presented papers (Kavas, Tandoğan, and Yılmaz 2017). In 2018, a Turkish firm TAM Group, highly active in Africa, founded the publishing house Alelmas in collaboration with AFAM to disseminate the association's scholarly output; this press later published two monographs by Kavas (see Kavas 2018, 2019). Finally, in 2019 and 2020, AFAM members produced two edited volumes focusing on prominent individuals and communities in Islamic Africa (Kavas and Tandoğan 2019, 2020).

Following 2020, the Turkish Historical Institution (TTK), founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Ankara in 1931, has markedly intensified its engagement with Afro-Ottoman scholarship, issuing a series of seminal publications. In that year the institute released an edited volume with papers presented at a conference in Djibouti: *Uluslararası Afrika'da Türkler Sempozyumu* [International Symposium on Turks in Africa] (Şenel and Çavuş 2020). Subsequent years saw the appearance of three influential monographs on Tripolitanian history spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, authored respectively by Abdullah Özdağ, Cemal Atabaş, and Abdullah Erdem Taş (Özdağ 2020; Atabaş 2021; Taş 2022). Also in 2020, TTK published a bilingual work by Halim Gençoğlu entitled *Ottoman Cultural Heritage in South Africa / Güney Afrika'da Osmanlı Kültürel Mirası*, which examined the Ottoman imprint on South Africa (Gençoğlu 2020). Most recently, in 2024 the institution issued İsa Gökgedik's study of diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and West African sultanates: *Afrika'nın Sultanları: Bilâdüssûdan'da Çad Havzası Sultanlıkları ve Osmanlı ile Münasebetleri* [Sultans of Africa: Sultanates of the Chad Basin in Bilad al-Sudan and Their Relations with the Ottomans] (Gökgedik 2024).

Collectively, these outputs have positioned Ankara as a secondary hub for Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, complementing Istanbul's pre-eminence. Concurrently, numerous Turkish researchers, such as Hatice Uğur, Halil Kaya, and myself, have defended dissertations about the history of Afro-Ottoman relations at African and European universities, contributing English and French-language scholarship to the field, opening up the Studies of Afro-Ottoman History to European academic circles (for instance, see Uğur 2022; Kaya 2025; Duymus 2025).

Consequently, today, the field of "Studies of Afro-Ottoman History" in Turkey is a well-established field through many years of systematic research that has been supported by several associations and institutions. One of the core characteristics is its multilingualism. The researchers mentioned above use mostly sources in four different languages, such as Ottoman/Turkish, Arabic, English, and French.

Nevertheless, obstacles remain. Studies of Afro-Ottoman History, similar to African Studies more broadly, continue to be hampered by persistent colonial legacies. Turkish scholars and graduate students encounter highly discriminatory visa regimes comparable to those faced by their African counterparts, severely limiting their ability to travel to European research institutions, libraries, and archival repositories that house extensive collections on African history. Moreover, the prevailing closed-access publishing model within U.S. and European academia further marginalises Turkish researchers, who struggle to obtain the latest scholarly outputs because their home institutions cannot shoulder prohibitive subscription fees imposed by major publishing conglomerates.

Additional hurdles impede the advancement of this field. Numerous scholars cited earlier recognise a pronounced deficiency in collaborative ties with African counterparts and a general scarcity of African source material. A pivotal policy response to this shortfall consists of newly instituted scholarship programmes targeting African nations, offered by several Turkish bodies, including the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), the General Directorate of Foundations (VGM), and TDV. Moreover, Turkey's liberal visa regime for African countries facilitates the arrival of African students and researchers. As a consequence of these initiatives, the 2023-2024 academic year recorded 49,413 African students and researchers enrolled in Turkish higher-education institutions and research centres.[2] By contrast, German institutions hosted 38,063 African students and researchers during the same period.[3] Accordingly, it is reasonable to anticipate that the next substantial expansion of the Studies of Afro-Ottoman History will be driven by a markedly increased participation of African scholars in the field, especially considering the fact that many of those earlier students now teach the history of Africa as lecturers in several Turkish universities.

2 https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/

3 https://www.wissenschaft-weltoffen.de/de/interaktiv/auslaendische-studierende-in-deutschland-nach-herkunftslaendern/

Keeping this historical overview and challenges of this new field in mind, the primary objective of the present Special Issue is to introduce the work of several highly active Turkish scholars in the field to the Anglophone scholarly community. For this, every contribution in this issue is presented in English, yet each retains a multilingual source base, thereby affording readers beyond the Turkish academy a window to recent investigations of Afro-Ottoman history.

The Special Issue

The trajectory of the Studies of Afro-Ottoman History in Turkey is a testament to the resilience of scholarly vision and transformative power of institutional support. What began as the solitary, pioneering efforts of Cengiz Orhonlu in the 1960s, briefly interrupted and subsequently revived in the 1980s and 1990s, has blossomed over the last quarter-century into a robust, multilingual, and institutionally anchored discipline. Through the dedicated efforts of scholars like Ahmet Kavas and the foundational support of institutions such as İSAM, IRCICA, ORDAF, AFAM, and the TTK, Turkish academia has successfully unearthed a vast corpus of Ottoman archival material that also contains numerous diplomatic letters and chronicles from Africa. This wealth of primary sources, both African and Ottoman/Turkish, offers an indispensable, non-Eurocentric lens through which to view the African continent's history, challenging long-held colonial narratives and revealing the deep, multifaceted connections between Africa and the Ottoman Empire.

As this introductory article has demonstrated, for too long, linguistic and historiographical divides have obscured these vital narratives from Anglophone and Francophone academic communities. The primary objective of this Special Issue is to dismantle these barriers. By presenting the meticulous, archive-based research of highly active Turkish scholars in English, while retaining their multilingual source bases, this collection seeks to bridge the gap between Turkish academia and the global scholarly community. It invites historians of Africa to look beyond the traditional colonial archives/European traveller accounts and engage with rich Turkish and Arabic documents in Ottoman archives that have long waited to be integrated into the broader African historiography.

In pursuit of this objective, the present Special Issue assembles three contributions, each authored by scholars representing distinct generational

cohorts within the historiography of Afro-Ottoman relations, as their names were mentioned in the previous pages. The inaugural article, "Beyond Barbary Piracy: Ottoman Policy in the Sixteenth Century Maghreb through Ottoman Archival Sources," is written by Abdullah Erdem Taş, a member of the field's second generation of researchers. Drawing primarily on Ottoman *Mühimme* Registers, this article re-examines Ottoman governance of the North African provinces (*Garp Ocakları*) through the imperial centre's perspective rather than through Eurocentric "Barbary piracy" frameworks. Taş argues that these provinces were not semi-independent corsair polities but strategically organised frontier provinces integrated into Ottoman administrative, legal, and military structures. Documentary evidence reveals consistent normative language emphasising frontier defence, justice, public welfare, and accountability of provincial governors. His study demonstrates that interpreting Ottoman North Africa primarily through European diplomatic correspondence and colonial literature obscures the political and administrative realities of Ottoman provincial order in the 16th century.

The second contribution is co-authored by myself, as a third-generation scholar in this field, and Abdoul Karim Hamadou of Mali. Titled "A Global Historical Overview of Ottoman–Senegambia Relations: From the Historical Context in the 15th Century to Direct Relations in the 19th Century," this collaborative article examines transregional connections spanning multiple centuries. This article reconstructs Ottoman–Senegambian connections from the 15th to early 20th centuries, challenging the historiographical assumption that no meaningful engagement existed between the Ottoman Empire and West African Islamic states. The authors identify three phases: (1) Ottoman corsair presence in Atlantic waters (late 15th–mid-18th centuries) who strategically avoided West African coasts due to legal status ambiguities; (2) the rise of Fulbe-led Islamic states in Senegambia (Bundu, Fuuta Jaloo, and Fuuta Tooro) that integrated the region into transregional Islamic networks centred in Mecca and Istanbul; and (3) direct Ottoman diplomatic and commercial outreach following the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), including the establishment of consular offices in Dakar. Using a global Afro-Ottoman perspective, our study demonstrates how Ottoman and Senegambian agencies connected these distant regions through merchant networks, pilgrimages, and intelligence-gathering.

The concluding article, "Connecting Here and Hereafter: The Harem Ağalar Teavün Yurdu (1919-1941)," is authored by Hatice Uğur, who belongs to the first generation of specialists in the Studies of the Afro-Ottoman History. Her article examines the Harem Eunuchs' Mutual Aid Society (1919–1941),

founded by former court eunuchs of African origin during the Ottoman Empire's transition to the Turkish Republic. Analysing previously unstudied minute books, she shows how Afro-Ottomans, displaced by the abolition of the harem and empire in 1924, established institutional resilience through collective welfare, religious services, and adaptation to the new Republican regime, including conversion to the Latin alphabet, renunciation of imperial titles, and rebranding as a civilian association. The study foregrounds the African dimension of Darüssaade eunuchs and proposes "Afro-Ottoman" as a more historically grounded framework than "Afro-Turk" for understanding the longue durée of African presence in Ottoman spaces.

Collectively, these articles advance the scholarly discourse on Studies of Afro-Ottoman History while simultaneously expanding the field's reach to international academia. Their contributions include: recuperating previously marginalised African agency within Ottoman imperial and post-imperial contexts; contesting Eurocentric and colonial historiographical frameworks through engagement with Ottoman and indigenous archival materials; illuminating a five-century span of Ottoman-African interactions (fifteenth through twentieth centuries) across West Africa, North Africa, and Istanbul; and illustrating the institutional continuity and adaptive transformation of Afro-Ottoman relations throughout the transition from imperial to republican political formations.

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