

Tarih: Graduate History Journal
Inaugural Issue: Representation

EDITORIAL

With the publication of this inaugural issue, we are very pleased to launch *Tarih: Graduate History Journal*. *Tarih*, published yearly under the auspices of the Department of History at Boğaziçi University, is a peer-reviewed electronic scholarly journal that fosters a lively academic forum for discussion among graduate students in the field of history. The main aim of the journal is to provide a unique academic platform for graduate students to publish research papers, essays and book reviews associated with the discipline of history. A distinctive feature of the journal is its regular interviews with prominent scholars in the field, which encourages a high level and quality of discussion and debate. *Tarih* is committed to the world-historical and comparative perspectives, covering a wide range of areas and periods, and representing diverse approaches to the study of the past.

For our inaugural issue, we have decided upon the topic and title of “representation.” Central to our choice of the title is the fact that the concept of representation has increasingly been at the core of discussions in the field of history. The very notion has generally been problematic for the historian, especially when confronting the epistemological question of how to know the past; the past from where the historical object, subject or narrative have been borrowed to be made present again (re-presented). The historian has to face the challenge of representing something from the past, and bear in mind that these objects of research are not suspended in a circumstantial void, and are thus not complete or independent in and of themselves. For what are re-presented as objects of research bear the stamps of the conditions of their production and the embedded values of their contemporary ideologies. Finally, the objects of research have often appeared in the narratives of preceding historians, each with their own ideology, methodology, and historicity.

It is clear that, in our twenty-first century, postmodern world, there are no longer solid and stable claims to absolute value or truth, which carries with it the impossibility of objective, neutral and exterior perspectives on the nature of history and history writing. It has not been a long time since the enlightenment idea that history is a discipline with a claim to scientific objectivity has fallen from professional grace. Likewise, the claim that history has shifted from being the “representation of the past” to being “historical thinking” is a recent phenomenon. Now, one might claim that the center of gravity of research is no longer on the object itself, but rather on the

object's ideologies and social contexts. There are still archives, texts and art works for the historian to interpret, but these are no longer understood as transcendental or self-contained entities; a critical approach is required to make their real determinants visible by exploring the social contexts in which they were produced and consumed, and the ideological purposes to which they were created.

Even though scientific objectivity has apparently fallen from professional grace, there still remain a considerable number of historians who insist on seeing history as a rigorous science. And, not surprisingly, there were – and are – historians who fall into the fetishism of textual sources in that sense. Yet the preliminary question we should raise here is that of what counts as a “significant” source? How do historians choose their sources? What is selected and what left behind? And how do the selected sources frame the representation of past events? Such questions are surely valid for all textual sources, of all history writing, and in any culture, at any time. Historians, in their public speeches and publications, can assist in the dissemination of racist, nationalist and sectarian ideas which can provoke and prolong social conflicts. Thus, there still remains the problem of misinterpreting, even misrepresenting the past, by error or willful omission or distortion. Not for nothing did the excluded and muted subjects and narratives of history come to represent the inferior, the dangerous and the fearful “other.” The question of what and who have been excluded and misrepresented by the canon of history is thus still a central one for the committed historian. The historian should never forget to challenge the dominant discourses of representation where these perpetuate the distorted representation of social minorities, the inferior representation of women, and the stereotypical and a-historical representation of Eastern cultures. I would like to believe that *Tarih* will be a place to stand and speak for what has been muted, distorted or silenced on the pages of history.

For our first issue, we are delighted to publish two interviews, three papers and five book reviews. The first interview is with Professor Gülru Necipoğlu, the Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at Harvard University, and it was a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to discuss Necipoğlu's research and intellectual project with her. Our interview was conducted in August of 2009 during Prof. Necipoğlu's sabbatical leave here in Istanbul. Among other issues, we were concerned with Ottoman visual culture, the cultural production of the Classical Era, Ottoman historical sources and the role of the art historian.

The second interview is with Professor Jay Winter, Charles J. Stille Professor of History at Yale University, and was conducted by Suzan Meryem Kalaycı in April of 2009 during Kalaycı's period as Fox International fellow at Yale University. Kalaycı asked questions about the impact and influence of conceptual frameworks such as memory, silence and

representation on historical writing and focused on how these multi-faceted concepts influence the way history and historical events are represented and how collective memory is re-produced.

The interviews are followed by three highly interesting and diverse papers which deal in different ways with the theme of representation; art-historical representation, political representation and textual representation. The first paper “The *Nakkaşhane*” by Sinem Erdoğan places emphasis on the notions of “classicism” and “uniformity” that have been ascribed to the works and organization of the *nakkaşhane* in the Ottoman Empire. By looking at the designs which appear on tiles, manuscript illustrations, and textiles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, her study explores how this institution has been rigidly and distinctly represented within the discourse of classicism. Erdoğan poses a counter argument to the notion of “classicism” in the domain of imperial arts. E. Melek Cevahiroğlu Ömür’s paper, “The Sufi Orders in a Modernizing Empire: 1808-1876,” discusses how the modernization process of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century brought about crucial changes in the structure of the Sufi orders and their relations with the state. By focusing on Sultan Mahmud II’s reforms and the regulations of the *Tanzimat*, Ömür’s paper shows us how the modernization and bureaucratization of the Sufi orders became subject to strict regulations by the state mechanism. The third paper, “Anabasis: ‘The March of the Ten Thousand’ into Modernity” by İsmail Keskin, confronts the problems of translation, summarization and representation with regard to Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, a classic of Ancient Greek Literature. Drawing critically on the notion of genealogy in Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, Keskin explores, firstly, the uses of *Anabasis* for pupils by the Anglo-Saxon World in the early twentieth century; and secondly the translation of the book as part of a post-WWII translation mission by the Turkish state; and finally the Marxist-nationalist approach to the book with regard to its role in founding a national identity and the construction of a national past in different phases of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Keskin’s paper elaborates the “long march” of *Anabasis* into modernity through an analysis of the various translations/ appropriations of this text.

We have five book reviews for this issue. Lee Beaudoen reviews the *Byzantium: The Surprising life of a Medieval Empire*, an important book which contributes to the studies of cultural, social and political history of the Byzantine Empire. Melis Süloş reviews the Turkish language book, *Cumhuriyet’te Çocuklar (They were Children in the Republic)*, the outcome of an oral history project organized by Ankara University. This is followed by Merve Tabur’s review of another Turkish book, *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak (Becoming a Man Through Crawling)*. *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak* is also formulated around an oral history project, yet focuses on the experiences of Turkish men’s compulsory military service. C. Taylan Acar reviews

Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture, which takes us to China and its experience of modernity. And, finally, Yan Overfield Shaw reviews *Muslims in Modern Turkey: Islamism, Modernism and the Revolt of the Islamic Intellectuals*, which is an important study of how a group of popular public intellectuals define a discourse of Muslim identity and resistance within Turkish secular society.

Tarih has principally been a work of genuine interest, done with enthusiasm and dedication. Many people played a critical role in the accomplishment of this Journal. I am greatly indebted to the referees, editorial board and authors. I am also grateful to the faculty members of the Department of History for their critical interests and overall encouragements. I thank Bora Özü Türk and Erdem Dilbaz for designing both the cover and our website. And finally, I must gratefully acknowledge my special thanks to Prof. Gülrü Necipoğlu, Prof. Jay Winter, Prof. Edhem Eldem, Prof. Selim Deringil, Dr. Ahmet Ersoy, Dr. Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu, Dr. Oya Pancaroğlu, and Dr. Derin Terzioğlu without whom this journal would not have been what it is now.

Gizem Tongo

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