

Catherine Pinguet, *Les chiens d'Istanbul*, Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu Autour, 2008

Özde Çeliktemel-Thomen

Catherine Pinguet's *Les chiens d'Istanbul* (The Dogs of Istanbul) explores the history of stray dogs in Istanbul. The book sheds light on a neglected facet of the past – the perception of dogs by different cultures and religions. Pinguet tells the readers about the massacre of Istanbul's stray dogs in 1910 by offering accounts from travelogues and from residents of the city, along with visual materials such as photographs and cartoons. She also covers contemporary issues such as animal shelters, animal rights and societies for animal protection. *Les chiens d'Istanbul* reflects on a silent aspect of history and interjects itself well into the history of animal welfare as a whole. Pinguet's humanitarian tone and comparative analysis powerfully relate the story to readers.

Why does Pinguet begin with the story of the Istanbul dog massacre of 1910? The use of this incident provides a concrete and heartbreaking backdrop to the history of dogs in Istanbul. This is a powerful way to introduce the topic and to map out different aspects of stray dogs in the city and their relationship with its residents. This tragic incident relates directly to the socio-political circumstances of the time. Pinguet does a good job of situating the massacre within these larger events. After the proclamation of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918) introduced the new practices of political organization of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the ruling party during the late Ottoman Empire. This bureaucratic change focused on modernization and transformation initiatives towards a Westernization policy. Many CUP leaders considered the stray dogs of Istanbul as representations of the uncivilized existing culture. The resulting 'solution' was to take the dogs to a deserted island, Sivriada, in the Sea of Marmara, and leaving them there to starve and die. This act was seen as 'a good solution' by the policy makers to bring social order into the streets of Istanbul. This policy was also proposed during the reigns of Mahmut II (r.1808–1839) and Abdülaziz (r.1861-1876) respectively, but it was not put into action. Pinguet opens up her book with this atrocious account to demonstrate the different ways in which dogs have been perceived in Istanbul. She discusses the actions taken by the government against the so-called chaos and danger caused by stray dogs in the city. Pinguet also explains other perceptions of dogs by ordinary *Istanbullus* – be it as loyal guards or as a means to eliminate rubbish in the streets, among other things. The only source consulted on the numbers of

dogs is a report by the director of Istanbul Pasteur Institute, Doctor Remling, which claims that there were 60 to 80,000 dogs in Istanbul in 1910.

The author relies heavily on travelogues of Westerners and on the memoirs of residents of the city. She uses the sources to vividly narrate the massacre and to provide an analysis of the perception and treatment of stray dogs in Istanbul. Some of the travelers, such as an American teacher named Mary Mills Patrick and an unnamed American linguist, consider the existence of high number of dogs in the streets as backward and unhealthy. These travelers appreciated the policy of the CUP and believed that the culling of the dogs was an act of civilization and order. Yet there was strong opposition to the massacre by the Levantines and Europeans living and working in Istanbul, such as Pierre Loti, Sir Mark Sykes and P. Colomban, who harshly criticized the CUP's policy.

Many Muslim residents also protested the action against the dogs. Pinguet argues that the Muslims of Istanbul were against the cull of the stray dogs because of their religious beliefs. For instance, the conservative daily newspaper, *Volkan*, blamed the CUP for being cruel and disloyal to Muslim traditions while copying the West. In the end, growing tension between the locals and the CUP, along with the criticism of European states, led the CUP to put an end to the collection of stray dogs for transportation to Sivriada.

While Pinguet's *Les chiens d'Istanbul* is certainly not the only work on the history of stray dogs in Istanbul, its central arguments and use of historical and anthropological sources make the book one of the best on the subject. Previous works on the stray dogs include articles written by Taner Timur ("Köpekler", in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, vol.5, [İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1994]: 89) and Hakan Akçaoğlu ("Karabaşname-i İstanbul", *Tombak*, vol. 16, [1997]: 22-32). Some historical works open up a larger framework on the history of animals in the Ottoman Empire and tell us more about the dogs within a broader perspective, as in the case of works like Ekrem Işın's *İstanbul'da Gündelik Hayat: İnsan, Kültür ve Mekan İlişkileri Üzerine Toplumsal Tarih Denemeleri* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995), Palmira Brummett's "Dogs, Cholera, Women and Other Menaces in the Streets: Cartoon Satire in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press 1908-11", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1995): 433-60) and Cihangir Gündoğdu's "Doksan Yıl Önce İstanbullu Hayvanseverler", *Toplumsal Tarih*, August, no. 116, 2003: 10-17).

One of the elements that enrich this book is its visual sources in forms of photographs and cartoons. The photographs not only serve as pieces of evidence, but also help to reconstruct the reality of the situation. The book offers various photographs from different people such as Sigmund Weinberg, one of the most important photography entrepreneurs and film-makers of the time, and various anonymous postcards. The photographic images powerfully show the reader the historical context and various elements involved in the

massacre. There are photographs of a pack of dogs huddled together on the coast of Sivriada awaiting starvation. There is another scene of Roma people, who were charged with the collection of the dogs from the streets, trapping the dogs in wooden cages. The author is careful when interpreting these images and provides extensive historical background about the entire process. This helps the reader learn about the mechanics of the cull and the circumstances surrounding the action. Satirical cartoons are also included in the book to illustrate the opposition to the CUP's stray dogs' policy. These include illustrations that were published in periodicals like *Kalem*, *Cem*, and *Karagöz*.

Pinguet relies on extensive quotes from historical sources but does not provide page numbers along with these references. The author assesses views and anecdotes about dogs in different holy books, and also discusses prominent dog lovers from history – such as Mavroyeni Paşa, and prominent cynophobes – such as Abdullah Cevdet. The comparison between these figures is rather weak, but the criticism is constructive.

In terms of periodization, the book focuses on the Second Constitutional Era of Ottoman Empire, but also includes rich anecdotes from ancient Greek and Egyptian periods as well as from modern times. For instance, Pinguet discusses the poisoning of stray cats and dogs during the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1996 by the Istanbul Municipality under the leadership of then mayor and now Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The original French edition of *Les chiens d'Istanbul* was translated into Turkish by Saadet Özen and published by Yapı Kredi Press in 2009. This book offers a unique perspective of the historical relationship between dogs and humans and includes cultural, moral and religious angles to the story. Pinguet suggests that readers learn from the mistakes of animal cruelty in the past. It is an important perspective as even presently, at times of economic or personal crisis, some pet-owners are known to abandon their pets to the streets with little consideration. This book could serve as a motivation to policy makers to introduce long term solutions such as neutering programs, the establishment or improvement of animal shelters, and adoption policies in Istanbul. *Les chiens d'Istanbul* is a well-argued, interdisciplinary source showing the silent actors of the past to the students of history. Overall, Catherine Pinguet expands the boundaries of historical writing and successfully presents this unconventional subject.

Özde Çeliktemel-Thomen is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Intercultural Studies at University College London, University of London.