

**Tekgül, Nil.** 2023. *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire: Politics, Society, and Family in the Early Modern Era*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 192 pages. ISBN: 9781350180543.

Reviewed by **Melis Sulos Akyelli**  
Graduate Center, History Department, CUNY  
msulos@gradcenter.cuny.edu

In her book *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire*, Nil Tekgül attempts to answer questions about what it meant and how it felt to protect and to be protected in the early modern Ottoman Empire. Tekgül suggests that emotions helped attribute meaning to the concept of protection. The book meticulously tackles the highly challenging subject of Ottoman emotionology, reflecting the author's deep knowledge of both Ottoman Turkish and English. The author demonstrates that the relationship between the Ottoman state and society depended on the notion of protection, shaped by an extensive vocabulary of emotions. Tekgül explores the terminology through which the Ottoman state conceptualized its responsibilities as the protector of its subjects and, in relation to this, how Ottoman subjects conceptualized their right to protection in a hierarchical world.

Moving between the imperial and the familial, the book skillfully explores how the concept of protection was historically built and depended on emotional knowledge. The availability and diversity of emotional vocabulary determined how people felt and how they defined those emotions. Therefore, linguistic expression was fundamental to materializing, multiplying, and historicizing emotions. The impact of language, particularly the diversity of the Ottoman-Turkish vocabulary in defining emotions, stands at the heart of the book. Semantics also served as a useful tool in ranking hierarchies of emotions in Ottoman society. For example, compassion, an emotion shown by superiors towards subordinates, defined the meaning of protection between rulers and the ruled. The emotional codes in political relationships between rulers and the ruled were characterized by emotions such as love and affection.

One of the book's interventions in recent historiography is its engagement with emotional knowledge to reinterpret intercommunal relations in the Ottoman Empire. The book asks: 'What was the role of emotions in a world of differences in social and legal status, wealth, faith, ethnicity, and settlement practices?' (p. 68). Tekgül's approach focuses on the notions of *rıza* and *şükran* (being pleased and feeling grateful) in interpreting intercommunal relations in Ottoman society. While the book highlights the impact of emotional vocabulary on intercommunal relations, the author offers only limited engagement with questions of how these relations were shaped by complex political dynamics and hierarchies in the social, political, and legal realms. The reader cannot find an answer to the above question in the book and is left wondering about the role of emotions in social hierarchies that were largely determined by religion and ethnicity. The book would have benefitted from a more critical engagement with the historical narrative that interprets intercommunal relations within a

romanticized framework of supposed tolerance, co-existence, harmony, and diversity. The academic audience would expect to hear Tekgül's engagement with the highly criticized narrative of *tolerance* in the Ottoman studies.

The author relies on Ottoman archival sources such as judicial court records, imperial decrees, and advice manuals, as well as a rich array of secondary literature with a methodological focus on the history of emotions. With an impressive knowledge of the available primary and secondary sources, Tekgül urges readers to reconsider the classical Ottoman era through the lens of the history of emotions. While using archival material, Tekgül also reminds readers of non-written sources, raising awareness of silences in the archives. The book is also significant in reminding us of the power of language and the diversity of vocabulary in defining and recording emotions in the Ottoman Empire.

The book covers a broad time period, from the 16th to the 20th century. Departing from conventional historical narratives, Tekgül's work is not structured along a linear timeline of historical events. In the first chapter, Tekgül scrutinizes 'emotional knowledge' by utilizing a sixteenth-century book of ethics, *Ahlak-i Ala'i*, written by Ottoman scholar Kinalizade Ali Çelebi. In the second chapter, the author takes two emotional terms, compassion (*merhamet*) and love (*mahabbet*), to analyze the relations between the state and its subjects that were based on the concept of protection. In the third chapter, Tekgül focuses on the emotions of *rıza* and *şükran* (being pleased and feeling grateful) to explore the concept of protection in intercommunal relationships. The fourth chapter discusses the expression of shame, while the fifth explores how the concept of protection functioned in marriages and in balancing familial relations. In the last chapter, Tekgül examines the 19th-century transformation of the concept of protection, associating it with justice, equality, and belonging.

Tekgül's book is one of the first Ottoman history works to take a clearly defined approach to the history of emotions and scrutinizes what it *meant* and how it *felt* to be protected on three levels: political, social, and familial. It introduces not only a new approach but also new literature to Ottoman studies. Emotions in the Ottoman Empire is a timely contribution to the fields of Ottoman history, the history of emotions, literary history, and linguistics. The narrative is fluent, and the chapters are well-structured. It is a novel and worthwhile read for anyone interested in modern historiography, Ottoman history, and the history of emotions.