

**Lellouch, Benjamin.** 2024. *Ahmed Pacha et les juifs du Caire (1523–1524), Histoire et historiographie*. Leiden: Brill. 283 pages. ISBN: 9789004688391 (e-Book).

Reviewed by **Özkan Bardakçı**  
Université de Lorraine  
o.bardakci@yahoo.fr

With this book, Benjamin Lellouch plunges the reader back into Egypt, focusing on the Jews of Cairo, victims of violence during the revolt of the Ottoman governor Ahmed Pasha (1523–1524), and on the commemoration of a local festival, Purim. The historian had already produced a remarkable study of the changes in Egypt after the Ottoman conquest, based on the Turkish chronicle of ‘Abdüssamed Diyârbakrî<sup>1</sup>. This expert on Egypt in the first half of the 16th century studied the social, political and cultural conditions of a local Jewish festival and the works associated with it. B. Lellouch examines this additional Purim (*sheni*), which followed the model of a canonical festival celebrated by all Jews. In Cairo, the Jews joyfully recalled the hardships they had suffered under the rule of Ahmed Pasha (1523–1524) and the happy ending that brought them relief. In this book, the historian adopts a philological approach that allows him to study two objects in ‘a movement of renewed comings and goings’ (p. 14): the history of the events that preceded the establishment of Purim in Cairo and the historiography of these events. The study is divided into three chapters. For this approach to work, the author had to mobilise a wealth of Turkish, Italian and Arabic documentation on the violence and the context, in order to appreciate the information provided by a Hebrew chronicle, Eliyahu Capsali’s *Hasdei ha-Shem*, devoted entirely to Ahmed Pasha’s revolt.

In his first chapter, B. Lellouch introduces the two central figures of the Cairo affair of 1523–1524: Ahmed Pasha, the Beylerbey of Egypt, and his enemy, Avraham Castro. This chapter combines the history of events with a description of social structures. After a preliminary critique of Ottoman, Arab and Italian sources, the author presents an account of Ahmed Pasha’s revolt and its background, and then paints a picture of the Jewish community led by Avraham Castro. This revolt of Ahmed Pasha gives rise to brief developments in the chronicles of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As we can see, Ahmed Pasha was the target of historiographical disqualification and falsification. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman chronicles even referred to the Egyptian Beylerbey as a ‘traitor’ (*bain*), a term that is still attached to his name today.<sup>2</sup> As B. Lellouch shows, Ahmed Pasha disap-

- 1 Lellouch, Benjamin. 2006. *Les Ottomans en Égypte. Historiens et conquérants au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Louvain: Peeters.
- 2 On Ahmed Pasha and his rebellion see: Seyyid Muhammed Es-Seyyid Mahmud. 1990. *XVI. asırda Mısır eyâleti*. Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, 77–81; Yelçe, Nevin Zeynep. 2009. ‘The Making of Sultan Süleyman: A Study of Process/es of Image-Making and Reputation Management’. PhD thesis, Sabancı University, Istanbul, 282–310; Emre, Side. 2015. ‘Anat-

peared from memory and his revolt was erased over time. But the Jews of Cairo still remember him and the hardships he caused them.

Chapter 2 is devoted to an analysis of the various techniques used by the Jewish authors in the composition of their writings. The historian shows the uneven density of information about Ahmed Pasha's revolt. The author first refers to the important contribution of *Hasdei ha-Shem* by Eliyahu Capsali (d. 1550), a Cretan rabbi. This chronicle deals with the causes of Ahmed Pasha's appointment as governor of Egypt and his desire for revenge against the Sultan; the governor's violence against the Jewish financier Avraham Castro and his clients, and Castro's flight to Constantinople; the purge of the Janissaries or Ahmed's proclamation as Sultan, which led Soliman to order the elimination of his brother in the Morea. Above all, this 'book of wars' is surprisingly accurate and, unlike the Cairo Megillah, does not follow the archetypal model of the Book of Esther. B. Lellouch invites us to read first the summary of the Megillah written by Yosef Ibn Verga, then the full text of the Megillah with its various versions. This liturgical chronicle omits certain information and compensates for others with individual and collective rewrites. When the historian compares the different versions of this liturgical chronicle, he gets the impression that the Jewish memory of Ahmed Pasha's revolt is ramified and that the rest of Jewish historiography is made up of successive germinations, cross-fertilisations with Muslim historiography and budding in sometimes opposite directions. The author deals with the historiographical divide surrounding Castro, Ahmed Pasha, a secondary figure in Jewish writings, and the Cairo Affair of 1523–1524, which became a scholarly subject at the end of the nineteenth century and continues to be so today.

After a philological and narratological study of Jewish sources in order to highlight the long-term formation of memory traditions, the third chapter, entitled 'The attack on the Jews: feared, proclaimed, carried out,' returns to history. B. Lellouch examines the question of violence against the Jews. He takes a longer view than that of Ahmed Pasha's revolt. He examines the relationship between the Jews and the authorities in the light of the available sources, which were criticised in the first two chapters. By establishing the facts, he reveals what is of the order of invention in the constructions of memory, in particular the idea that Castro fled Cairo because he did not mint money in the name of Ahmed Pasha.

A few years after Benjamin Hary's work,<sup>3</sup> B. Lellouch offers the scientific community a solid book and three important contributions. Firstly, the use of Ottoman, Arab,

omy of a Rebellion in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: A Case Study of Ahmed Pasha's Governorship, Revolt, Sultanate, and Critique of the Ottoman Imperial Enterprise'. *Osmanlı Araştırmaları/The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 46. 77–129; Lellouch, Benjamin 2006. *Les Ottomans en Égypte*, 56–60, 69 and Lellouch, Benjamin 2021. 'Hain Ahmed Paşa (m. 1524) et sa famille'. *Turcica* 52. 63–102.

- 3 Hary, Benjamin. 1992. *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic. With an Edition, Translation, and Grammatical Study of the Cairene Purim Scroll*. Leiden et al.: Brill; Hary, Benjamin. 2010. 'Cairene Purim, the'. In Stillman, Norman (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*. Vol. I. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 527.

Italian and Jewish sources clarified the chronology of events and the identity of the actors. Secondly, it places the events in Cairo in 1523–1524 in the Syrian-Egyptian context of the late Mamluk period and the early years of Ottoman rule. Finally, it allows the historian to highlight the fractured memory surrounding Avraham Castro. The book concludes with a series of valuable appendices that allow historians to move back and forth between B. Lellouch's work and the sources used and translated. This study goes far beyond its primary objective and can be seen as a model for analysing the social, political and cultural conditions in which a historiographical work is produced. The study is carried out with great mastery and is impressive for its originality and the horizons it opens up for Ottoman and Jewish historians.