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BOOK REVIEW

PHILANTHROPY IN ANATOLIA THROUGHOUT HISTORY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Introductory Comments: Philanthropy in Anatolia through the Ages

Greco-Roman Philanthropy
Benjamin Gray

Debating the Benefits and Problems of Philanthropy in Later Hellenistic Anatolia
Pierre Fröhlich

Philanthropia in Context: Civic Virtues and Praise of Officials in the Poleis of Hellenistic
Asia Minor
Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen

Civic Philanthropy in the Cities of Roman Anatolia
Christina Kokkinia

Large Epigraphic Dossiers and Euergetism in Roman Asia Minor
Mustafa Adak

Civic Notables and their Honorific Titles in Roman Pamphylia and Pisidia
Mustafa H. Sayar

Local Donors and Euergetism in the Cities of Cilicia Pedias between the First Century BC
and Second Century AD
Aşkın Özdzibay

Euergetists of Italic Origin in the City of Perge and Their Contributions to Urban
Development
Recai Tekoğlu and Taner Korkut

Activities of Euergesia from the Ancient City of Tlos
Angelos Chaniotis

Benefactors in Aphrodisias and the Socio-Cultural Limits of Philanthropy
Matthias Haake

Philosophy and Philanthropy: Diogenes of Oenoanda and an Act of Mega-Euergetism
Early Christian and Byzantine Philanthropy
Christian Marek

Philanthropy and Early Christianity in Asia Minor
Rustam Shukurov

Barbarians, Philanthropy, and Byzantine Missionism
Esra Güzel Erdoğan

Philanthropia in the Byzantine Monasteries of Constantinople Medieval Islamic and Ottoman Philanthropy
Suzan Yalman

Hospitals and Philanthropy in Seljuk Anatolia
A.C.S. Peacock

Waqf Inscriptions from Medieval Anatolia
Leslie Peirce

Sultans, Saints, and Philanthropy: Selim I and the Province of Aintab
Lucienne Thys-Şenocak

(Re)presenting Royal Ottoman Women Through "Other" Sensory Modalities
A. Hilâl Uğurlu

Philanthropy in the Form of a Hair Strand: Sacred Relics in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lands
Efi Kanner

Education as Philanthropy within the Ottoman Modernization Project: Aspects of Educational Activity in Greek Orthodox Communities During the Reform Era
Eyal Ginio

The Use of Sultanic Philanthropy under Constitutional Rule: New Perceptions and Directions

Epilogue
Amy Singer

Concluding Reflections: Philanthropy in Anatolia/Anatolian Philanthropy?

Contributors

Index

About the book

The Vehbi Koç Foundation holds a significant place in the philanthropic landscape of the Republic of Turkey as the country's first private foundation. Established in 1969, the foundation has played a pivotal role in promoting social welfare, education, healthcare, cultural preservation, and various other areas of public benefit. Founded by Vehbi Koç, a prominent Turkish businessman and philanthropist, the Vehbi Koç Foundation has been instrumental in supporting numerous initiatives that have had a transformative impact on Turkish society. The foundation operates with the goal of contributing to the country's development and progress through strategic philanthropic endeavors. In 2019, Foundation celebrated its 50th anniversary with a three-day symposium called the "First International Suna&İnan Kıraç Mediterranean Civilizations" in Antalya, Turkey. The symposium focused on exploring the historical and cultural significance of Mediterranean civilizations through academic presentations and discussions. It aimed to deepen understanding of the interconnectedness and rich heritage of the region. Academic presentations were delivered by experts in various fields, examining philanthropic understanding during the Hellenistic and Roman Empire periods. Additionally, in-depth analyses were presented on the concepts of philanthropy and generosity within the Anatolian city-states, the Byzantine period, the Anatolian Seljuk period, and the Ottoman period. The findings and insights from the symposium were compiled and published in a book in 2020. This publication encompasses the 20 scientific research papers presented during the symposium, providing valuable illumination on the philanthropic history of Anatolia spanning thousands of years.

Criticism and Comments

Philanthropy in the Ancient Greek and Roman World

The concept of philanthropy in ancient Greece encompassed the virtue of philanthropia, reflecting ideals of good citizenship and urban life, particularly in the late Hellenistic period. During this time, the philanthropic role within society was primarily assumed by Hellenistic kings. Following the destruction of the Hellenistic kingdoms by the Romans, this responsibility shifted to the affluent elite families in society (Gray, 2020, p.4). The book draws upon inscriptions as a primary source for interpreting philanthropic practices during this period. These inscriptions highlight individuals who gained prominence and recognition within society due to their commendable and virtuous behavior. Their acts of philanthropy and benevolence led to their being honored. For instance, one inscription mentions Polemaios and praises him for his assistance to refugees who sought refuge in Colophon. Another inscription reveals that Polemaios generously forgave the debts of those in need (Gray, p.5-6). The book characterizes these behaviors as philanthropic, as they exemplified virtuous conduct in the context of that period. However, it is worth noting that the examples provided in the inscriptions primarily commemorate individuals of high social standing. This raises the question of whether philanthropic activities were exclusively limited to the elite class, or if there were also contributions from wealthy individuals outside of the privileged circle. The critique highlights the reliance on inscriptions as the main source for analyzing the society of that period, potentially overlooking the philanthropic engagement of non-elite segments. To foster a more comprehensive understanding, it would be beneficial to incorporate additional sources beyond inscriptions, enabling a broader examination of philanthropy within the society of the time.

The book highlights numerous Anatolian decrees from the Roman era, indicating that the residents of Roman cities aimed to achieve the highest moral standards through acts of kindness towards those in need (Gray, p.11). A comparison between the late Hellenistic period and this period reveals a shift towards a more universal perspective. In this context, the analysis correctly identifies the concept of philanthropia virtue (philanthropy) as being appropriately understood during this period. The emphasis on benevolence and compassion reflects the evolving societal values and the recognition of philanthropy as a virtuous and morally commendable behavior during the Roman era.

According to Pierre Fröhlich (p.13), the term philanthropia in ancient contexts refers to acts of philanthropy performed by rulers, citizens of city-states, or individuals from foreign city-states. In comparison to Gray's specific conceptual definition, Fröhlich's definition adopts a more inclusive approach. Accordingly, the manifestation of civic virtue, whether by a citizen or a foreigner, signifies philanthropic behavior. This broader definition aligns more appropriately with the notion of global philanthropy, emphasizing that acts of benevolence and virtuous conduct can be displayed by individuals regardless of their citizenship or origin.

During the Roman period in Anatolian cities (133 BC-AD 395), philanthropic behavior took on various forms distinct from the late Hellenistic period. When a wealthy Roman individual passed away, a significant portion of their property would typically be inherited by their heirs. However, it was also common for secondary beneficiaries to be included in the will. Including a friend in one's will was a way of expressing gratitude towards them. Additionally, faithful slaves could be granted freedom through the provisions of their owners' wills (Bekker & Nielsen, p.33). Such acts of donation and emancipation constituted the prevailing charitable practices of that era. While acknowledging that the slavery system prevalent during that time is not accepted by contemporary standards, it is noteworthy that philanthropic donations could serve as catalysts for the emancipation of slaves, thereby marking positive strides in an otherwise complex social context.

In addition to the aforementioned practices, the establishment of foundation funds was another form of philanthropic behavior during the Roman period. An example of such an initiative can be observed through the actions of Pliny, who, during his lifetime, devised a charter to finance a significant portion (one-third) of the operational expenses of a school in his hometown of Comum in northern Italy (Bekker & Nielsen, 2020, p.33-34). It is

remarkable to observe that philanthropic donations similar to those witnessed today have roots dating back two millennia. The author's clarification regarding this historical continuity is indeed gratifying, shedding light on the enduring nature of philanthropic endeavors throughout history.

Ancient city inscriptions from the Lycian region provide insights into charitable activities referred to as "euergesia" during that time. Although the exact construction date and the builders of the Tlos Theater are not specified, the names of 53 individuals who made donations to the theater are inscribed on one of its walls, accompanied by expressions of special gratitude towards them (Tekoğlu & Korkut, p.97). Typically, donations to the city were made by family members belonging to the elite class, who were subsequently bestowed with titles and decrees issued in their honor. However, it remains unclear whether these 53 donors associated with the theater were from elite families or held a different social status. If these individuals indeed belonged to a different social standing, it would potentially indicate a variation in the philanthropic perspective of that period. At this juncture, it could have been advantageous for the author to provide more specific and in-depth investigation into the social backgrounds of these donors, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the philanthropic landscape during that era.

In the city of Aphrodisias, located in the current Aydın province of Turkey, philanthropic activities were observed in various forms. Notably, the creation of special funds designed to assist those in need was perhaps one of the earliest instances of such initiatives within this city. One example of philanthropic action was the provision of bail for individuals requiring financial assistance (Chaniotis, p. 117). These types of philanthropic practices, as evidenced in the inscriptions from Aphrodisias, bear similarities to contemporary understandings of philanthropy. It would have been appropriate for the author to provide specific examples highlighting this parallel. However, the author clarifies that these voluntary aids were exclusively extended to the citizens of the city, with non-citizens being ineligible to benefit from such assistance. This approach stands in stark contrast to the inclusive and universal nature of modern philanthropy.

Philanthropy in Early Christianity and Byzantium

The historical practice of abducting foreign civilians during times of war can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Within the context of military conquest, the mass enslavement of individuals in conquered territories was a common outcome. This pattern persisted throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and it continued into the Byzantine era as well (Shukurov, p. 141). It is important to note that among these enslaved individuals, both boys and girls were included. To address the needs of these young individuals who found themselves orphaned and in captivity, specialized institutions were established. For instance, the Orphanotropheion of Saints Peter and Paul in Constantinople, which was reconstructed by Alexios I, served as a refuge for foreign orphaned children. Furthermore, this institution also functioned as a school, providing education to orphan children of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Shukurov, p. 143).

According to the author, the orphanages in the Byzantine period not only provide care and shelter for children but also had a religious aspect. The children in these orphanages were instructed in catechism, a form of religious education, and later baptized. This suggests that the institutions also played a role in fostering religious beliefs and practices among orphaned children (Shukurov, p. 143). Furthermore, during the Byzantine period, there were also facilities known as widows' houses, which accommodated widows. These institutions served as places of support and refuge for women who had lost their husbands (Shukurov, p. 143). Interestingly, the author highlights that in the Byzantine period, philanthropic activities in philanthropic institutions were motivated by missionary purposes. This stands in contrast to ancient Greece, where philanthropy was often seen as a display of noble families' prestige. The shift towards a missionary focus in philanthropic activities during the Byzantine period may be seen as surprising. However, it is important to note that the primary objective of charitable acts should ideally be to extend assistance to all individuals equally, regardless of their religion, language, or race. Respecting and valuing the diversity of individuals should be inherent in philanthropic endeavors. The purpose of such activities should be driven by a genuine desire to provide aid and support,

without any form of disrespect or discrimination based on religious, linguistic, or racial differences.

During the Byzantine period, a distinct understanding of philanthropy existed within the monasteries. The author refers to this as "Monastic Philanthropia." In the 11th century, monasteries assumed philanthropic functions by obtaining the right to accept donations, acquire land, and expand their holdings. Within the monastic context, specific structures, such as separate nursing homes, were established to serve philanthropic purposes (Erdoğan, p. 154). In the monasteries of the Andronikos Period (1282-1328), a wider range of philanthropic actions took place. For instance, the Makharias monastery had a guesthouse-caravanserai, where anyone who approached the monastery's door was welcomed and provided with support. While the poor were not allowed inside the monastery, they were able to have a satisfying meal at the soup kitchen located outside the monastery (Erdoğan, p. 155). These examples demonstrate that within the Byzantine monastic tradition, philanthropic activities were not limited to basic acts of charity. Monasteries played an active role in providing various forms of support and assistance to those in need, including offering shelter, food, and other forms of care. The monasteries embraced a holistic approach to philanthropy, considering the diverse needs of individuals and extending their support beyond the confines of their own walls. The Monastic Philanthropia of the Byzantine period highlights the significant role that monastic communities played in the social fabric of the time. Their philanthropic endeavors exemplified the values of compassion, care, and generosity, serving as important sources of support for the wider community.

The author's mention of rulers providing bread and food to the monasteries suggests a religious motivation underlying monastic philanthropy in the Byzantine period. Similar principles emphasizing the provision of sustenance to those in need can be found in various religious traditions, including Islamic teachings. Religious motivations often serve as a driving force behind acts of philanthropy, inspiring individuals and communities to engage in charitable activities based on principles of compassion and care.

Islamic Middle Ages and Ottoman Philanthropy

During the 13th century Anatolian Seljuk state, philanthropy was demonstrated through the establishment of charitable foundations, including hospitals and medical schools. One notable example is the Maristan Complex in Kayseri, which encompassed a hospital, madrasah (educational institution), a mental illness building, and a masjid (mosque). This complex, founded by philanthropist Melike Gevher Nesibe, is considered the first medical institution in Anatolia. Inscriptions within the construction refer to charitable acts and helping the poor and needy, drawing inspiration from Quranic verses such as Surah Al-Baqara (Yalman, p. 167, 169). Melike Gevher Nesibe, a benevolent individual, established a foundation and oversaw the construction of the Maristan Complex. Similarly, İzzeddin Keykavus Hospital in Sivas, another foundation hospital, was built during this period. The construction inscription of this hospital described it as a "health home" (Yalman, p. 171). These examples illustrate how philanthropic endeavors in the Anatolian Seljuk state involved the establishment of medical facilities with a focus on providing healthcare and education to those in need.

The establishment of charitable institutions, such as hospitals, in both the Byzantine and Anatolian Seljuk periods, was motivated by religious beliefs. However, the understanding of philanthropy in Anatolian lands has transcended religions and cultures throughout history, highlighting its universal nature as a shared human value. Acts of philanthropy in Anatolia reflect a deep-rooted tradition of compassion and care that extends beyond specific religious or cultural boundaries.

During the medieval period in Anatolia, foundations played a central role in philanthropic activities. The surviving inscriptions of these foundations reveal expressions of gratitude towards the philanthropic founders. One notable example is the Yakutiye Madrasa in Erzurum province, which contains one of the oldest surviving foundation inscriptions. Another example is the Battal Gazi Foundation located in Seyitgazi, near Eskişehir, in western Anatolia (Peacock, p. 183-187). These foundations serve as testament to the

enduring tradition of philanthropy in medieval Anatolia and highlight the recognition and appreciation for the philanthropic contributions made by their founders.

Through the examination of inscriptions in Ancient Greece and foundation charters from medieval Anatolia, we can gain insights into the philanthropic understanding of these periods. The foundation charters, which outline the conditions and provisions of the foundations, offer a valuable source for interpreting the philanthropic practices of medieval Anatolia. These charters often contain references to the Qur'an, emphasizing generosity and philanthropy. Such evidence underscores the longstanding culture of giving in the region, indicating that philanthropy has deep roots in Anatolian lands that span across centuries.

Sultan Selim I, a prominent commander of the Ottoman Empire, was renowned for his philanthropic endeavors. Following the conquest of Ayntab (now Gaziantep) in Southeast Anatolia, the Ottoman sultans demonstrated their appreciation for the city and asserted their sovereignty over it (Peirce, p. 195-196). Selim I himself made two enduring donations to Ayntab during the 16th century. One involved the restoration of the old tomb of Dülük Baba, while the other entailed transferring all the village's income to Mevlana Muhiddin, a notable figure from Sam village (Peirce, p. 198). These philanthropic donations by Selim I had distinct purposes compared to other periods. The author implies that the benevolent actions of the sultans towards the conquered people were politically motivated, aiming to win the hearts and loyalty of the populace. While the author does not explicitly label these behaviors as political, their context suggests a connection between philanthropy and political motives during that time.

During the 16th and 19th centuries, Ottoman women, including those from the sultanate, played prominent and philanthropic roles. Surprisingly, 37% of the foundations in Istanbul were established by Ottoman women, challenging the perception that Muslim women had limited societal influence. Their active engagement in philanthropy highlights their agency and the significant contributions they made to charitable causes, reshaping social welfare in their communities.

During the 19th century, Ottoman sultans implemented various strategies to uphold their image as protectors of Muslim lands and servants of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. These strategies included frequent restoration projects for the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina and the pilgrimage sites in Mecca (Uğrulu, p. 215). The primary objective behind these charitable donations to sacred cities was to bolster the palace's power and strengthen the bond between the citizens and the ruling authority. The author aptly acknowledges this perspective, highlighting the political motivations underlying these philanthropic actions.

During the 19th-century Ottoman period, the presence of community schools representing various religions saw a notable increase. Examples of such schools included the Chalcedon Greek Mercy Association, Sarmasik İnyet Education Association, and Fener Education Association. These associations played a crucial role in providing financial support to these community schools. Wealthy individuals also contributed by offering scholarships to underprivileged students through these associations (Kanner, p. 226). The establishment and financial backing of these community schools served as an important means to promote education and support students from diverse backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and accessible educational landscape.

Charitable donations were the primary source of widespread education mobilization in the 19th-century Ottoman period. Communities of different religions freely engaged in philanthropic activities, aligning with the essence of philanthropy itself.

In 1913, Sultan Mehmed Reşad visited the region to commemorate the liberation of the city of Edirne from Bulgarian occupation. During his visit, the sultan generously donated to schools and hospitals. Various civil and religious organizations were established to assist refugees, and the Ottoman Red Crescent received explicit support from the sultan. In 1912, he personally safeguarded the Red Crescent and bestowed an honorary presidency upon his cousin (Ginio, p. 237-238). The sultan's philanthropic gestures and endorsement

of humanitarian organizations demonstrated his commitment to supporting and providing assistance to those in need.

During this period, there is evidence of the formation of civil society, indicating a shift away from a society that solely relied on the state for support. The increase in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can be attributed to the weakening of state influence and the preservation of organizations like Kızılay (the Ottoman Red Crescent). While the author does not explicitly mention it, Sultan's actions may have been motivated by a desire to enhance his image and portray himself as generous, religious, and philanthropic during this time.

Conclusion

The origins of philanthropy in Anatolia transcend religious, cultural, and belief boundaries. This realization challenges the notion that philanthropy is solely rooted in religion. It becomes evident that acts of benevolence have existed in various forms across different religions and cultures throughout history. Exploring examples of charitable behavior that were previously unknown expands our understanding of philanthropy's diverse manifestations. The concept of philanthropy, as we learn, is as ancient as human history itself. It takes on different meanings in different societies and evolves over time. Prior to reading the book, the misconception of philanthropy as a singular concept was shattered, opening our eyes to its multifaceted nature.

Charitable and generous behaviors have been observed in various societies and under different systems of governance, serving different purposes. These acts of generosity have sometimes been driven by noble families engaging in competitive displays, sultans seeking to showcase their power to the public, individuals aiming to demonstrate their religious devotion, organizations pursuing missionary activities, or individuals aspiring to earn prestigious titles. Prior to this new knowledge, it was easy to adopt a singular perspective on philanthropic activities. However, discovering the diverse motives behind charitable actions highlights the rich complexity and multifaceted nature of philanthropy throughout history.

This scholarly endeavor has proven highly stimulating for my Academic Research Project (ARP), engendering a profound comprehension of pivotal concepts such as philanthropy, benevolence, and generosity. The breadth of examples elucidated has underscored the diverse manifestations of philanthropic endeavors. Crucially, it has emerged that philanthropy transcends narrow confines, surpassing the boundaries of religion, temporal constraints, and belief systems. This transformative experience has effectively shattered preconceived prejudices, prompting a recalibration of my ARP to embrace a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, facilitating a nuanced analysis of the subject matter.

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