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# Mehmet Genç (1934-2021)

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News of the death of the country's foremost Ottoman economic historian, Mehmet Genç, on March 18th, 2021, made the front pages of newspapers in Turkey. Television crews filmed his funeral held the following day at the historic Fatih Mosque in Istanbul. An outpouring of memorials appeared in print and on the web, from obituaries in the pro-government media and in Turkish academic journals to testimonials by former colleagues and friends that were posted on liberal and left-leaning online newsletters. A gifted lecturer who inspired his students to take unconventional approaches to the study of history; a public intellectual who as a frequent guest on talk shows and the subject of a documentary,[1] charmed audiences with his descriptions of the Ottoman legacy; and a doyen professor whose modesty and gentle demeanor inclined him toward self-deprecating humor rather than self-promotion, *hocamız* (our teacher) was a national treasure.

Genç's fame in Turkey and renown among scholars of the field of Ottoman studies notwithstanding, his signal contributions to economic history, sociology and global history remain little known beyond his native land. Born in 1934 to a large family of modest means on the eastern shores of the Black Sea (near Artvin), his tal-

[1] Turkish Radio and Television Documentary, "A Life in the Light of History", (Tarihin Işığında Bir Ömür: Mehmet Genç), broadcast on 12 October 2011.

ents were cultivated by the republic's public educational system. Mathematical ability earned him a place in Istanbul's Haydarpaşa boarding school. In 1958, he gained entrance to the storied *Mülkiye*, the Faculty of Political Science of Ankara University. After completing a degree in its Department of Economics and Finance, he found his true calling in economic history in the course of graduate studies at Istanbul University.

As a research assistant to the pioneering scholar of early modern Ottoman legal and economic history, Ömer Lütfi Barkan[2] (1902-1979) and later as lecturer in economics for the Institute of Turkish Economic History, a unique institution that Barkan founded in 1955, Genç, studied alongside an exceptional team of students. Among the Institute's prominent alumni were two of his classmates Halil Sahillioğlu (1924-)[3] and Mübahat Kütükoğlu (1932-)[4] and later, a young German graduate student, Suraiya Faroqhi (1941-) in Istanbul on exchange in the 1960s who would become not only a prolific historian but an author of some of the most widely-read accounts of the Ottoman past.[5]

Genç never completed his proposed doctoral thesis on the topic of "The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Ottoman Industry." Nevertheless, his questions concerning the great divergence between regional economic paths over the modern period and issues of development set him on the path of his academic career. Of course, many of these concerns he shared with both Turkish and Anglo-

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[2] Before completing his training in Istanbul, Barkan studied in Strasbourg, with Marc Bloch, among other scholars of the *Annales* school. For Barkan's view of the Braudelian project: Ömer Lutfi Barkan "La 'Méditerrannée' de Fernand Braudel vue d'Istamboul", in *Annales*, no. 9, 1954, pp. 189-200.

[3] For a collection of his essays: *Studies on Ottoman Economic and Social History*, Istanbul, 1999.

[4] In addition to her research on the *narh* pricing system and early modern foreign trade, see her volume on Ottoman paleography and bureaucratic conventions: *Osmanli Belgelerinin Dili (Diplomatik)*, Ankara, 2013.

[5] Faroqhi's *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, Munich, 2000, is now in Italian and Croatian editions; *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around it, 1540s to 1774*, London, 2004, has been translated into Arabic and Greek.

American economic historians of his generation, notably Charles Issawi (1916-2000), Roger Owen (1935-2018), and even the early work of Donald Quataert (1941-2011)[6] but their research relied primarily on the evidence contained in European archives. While Abdul-Karim Rafeq (1931-) explored the Arabic language records left by the empire's extensive Islamic court system in his economic histories of early modern Syria,[7] as a student of Barkan, Genç regarded the central archives, most importantly the Prime Minister's Archive (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi) in Istanbul, the repository of much of the state's nearly half-century long recordkeeping of its territories in Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Black Sea region, as the indispensable source for understanding the interlocking mechanisms and often moving parts of the empire's political economy, and a necessary compliment to Ottoman provincial archives, European sources, and contemporary narrative accounts.[8]

Today, given the enormous growth in scholarship on Ottoman topics,[9] with students and faculty combing archives throughout the Mediterranean and beyond as well as benefiting from the advances in the cataloging and publication of Ottoman Turkish archival sources (often transcribed into Latin script), it is easy to overlook the

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[6] Roger Owens, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820-1914: A Study in Trade and Development*, Oxford, 1969; Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914*, Chicago and London, 1966.

[7] *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783*, Beirut, 1966.

[8] For an overview, see Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*, Cambridge, UK, 2009.

[9] While the publication of Halil Inalcik (with Donald Quataert)'s *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge, 1994, should be considered an inflection point for English schools of Ottoman economic history, İnalcik's twenty years of teaching (1972-1993) at the University of Chicago played a major role in the development of Ottoman economic history in the United States. At the same time a new generation of intellectuals in Turkey, spurred by debates in political economy and Marxist theory, raised new questions about the socio-economic past of the Balkans and Middle East. See in particular, Huricihan İslamoğlu and Çağlar Keyder, "Osmanlı tarihi nasıl yazılmalı?: Bir öneri", in *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 1, 1977, pp. 49-80; and Ilkay Sunar, "Anthropologie politique et économique: l'Empire ottoman et sa transformation", in *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, no. 35, 1980, pp. 551-579.

obstacles that faced earlier generations of economic historians. Although the use of central state documents by historians dates back more than a century, the scope of research on the Ottoman economy, until very recently, was narrowly focused (urban studies, land tenure, population change and settlement patterns, agrarian production, and military organization) and was confined chronologically to the period that the great Ottoman historian Halil İnalcık (1916-2016) labeled the "classical age" (1300-1600).[10] Cursory attention, at best, was paid to later centuries especially the eighteenth century, long regarded as the beginning of the empire's irremediable economic and political decline.[11]

In the 1960s and 1970s, Genç found that the obstacles to his research were not only a dearth of secondary sources on the eighteenth century but the absence of specialized methodologies for working with a distinct body of Ottoman source materials.[12] Scholars investigating the Balkan and Middle Eastern provinces of the sixteenth century could take advantage of a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data, given the existence of thousands of regularly updated cadastral surveys (maintained for the transfer of imperial resources and the coordination of its military forces); researchers on the later nineteenth-century economy would find, thanks to the multiplication of Ottoman administrators and technocrats, that the volume and diversity of archival documentation in the archives and libraries of Istanbul and Ankara bearing on economic life and policy grew exponentially larger, offering quantifiable, detailed and precise in-

[10] Halil İnalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, London, 1973.
[11] Although Christopher Clay's comment, in his review of two works on Ottoman economic history ("Nineteenth Century Ottoman Economic Realities", in *Business History*, no. 31, 1989, pp. 68-71) that the eighteenth century remained the "extremely dark interior…" was generally true, there were notable exceptions: in masterful studies, such as *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au xviii^e siècle*, 2 vols., Damascus, 1973, André Raymond (1925-2011) demonstrated that detailed and nuanced reconstructions of the urban economies of the Ottoman period were possible using local, Arabic source materials.
[12] On the methodological challenges facing pre-modern economic historians: Boğaç A. Ergene, "Roundtable: Ottoman Sources for Economic History", in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 44, 2012, pp. 546-548.

formation. And yet, during the long eighteenth century bridging these periods, at the eve of the industrialization of the West and the expansion of imperialism across Asia, the archive seemed to deny access to economic inquiry. The preparation and regular updating of cadastral surveys had largely ceased after the mid-seventeenth century. Although one might find isolated examples of customs registers for inland entrepôt and border stations,[13] in the absence of a chronological series for comparative reference, longitudinal analyses were impossible. Major agricultural revenues were assessed through approximate fiscal units[14] while tax collection was "outsourced" to entrepreneurs and members of the Janissary corps.[15]

Making headway in reconstructing the economics of the empire's eighteenth century using Ottoman sources required more than the usual complement of skills. To the requisite linguistic competency, an understanding of the structure of state institutions, and mastery of paleography (including versions of *siyakat*, the Persianate bureaucratic shorthand), Genç added the sleuthing abilities of a critical historian and the analytical tools of a trained economist. Even so, it would take decades of painstaking sifting, gathering and evaluation of a wide variety of eighteenth-century documents and registers to fully appreciate their content, decipher fiscal taxonomies, and, ultimately, realize their potential for qualitative analysis. In numerous entries for the 44-volume Islamic Encyclopedia (*Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*) published by Turkey's National Re-

[13] For an analysis of the changing volume and composition of the transit system between Iran and the Ottoman Empire in the mid-eighteenth century drawn from these scarce documents, see Neşe Erim, *Osmanli Doğu Ticareti: 18. Yüzyilda Erzurum Gümrüğü*, Istanbul, 2019.

[14] For an attempt to employ such approximate units to document agrarian change over the long eighteenth century, see Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade and the Struggle for Land, 1600-1800*, Cambridge, 2010.

[15] For comparative perspectives on tax farming see, Ariel Salzmann, "An Ancien Régime Revisited: 'Privatization' and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire", in *Politics & Society*, no., 21, 1993, pp. 393-423; and Eliana Balla and Noel D. Johnson, "Fiscal Crisis and Institutional Change in the Ottoman Empire and France", in *The Journal of Economic History*, no. 69, 2009, pp. 809-845.

ligious Foundation, he furnished scholars and students with cogent explanations of the century's distinctive economic conventions and an understanding of the modifications of the state's organizational logic and structure with respect to earlier institutions.[16] Employing both economic methods and conceptual insights that he shared with theorists of the "new fiscal sociology," he and his collaborator Erol Özvar advanced approaches to the interpretation of early modern Ottoman budgetary systems.[17]

Among the many forms of revenue contracting that had become an ubiquitous feature of later Ottoman fiscality, Genç took note of a new form of long-term contracting (spanning the life of the contractor) termed *malikane mukataa*.[18] From 1695, when these contracts were first introduced to remedy the consequences of repeated turnover in short-term tax-farming, until their phasing out after 1830, these leases became one of the primary instruments of imperial finances. Administrative positions, revenues on herds, the tithes due on villages, duties on manufacturing and commercial activities (such as dye houses and internal customs stations), as well as excise taxes on consumer goods, including tobacco, snuff and coffee, among the different revenue and income sources, were assigned or auctioned as life term contracts. In Istanbul, an efficient system of financial intermediation facilitated transactions between the Ottoman fisc, *ma-*

[16] Genç's contributions to the *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* [DIA] (Ankara: Diyanet Vakfı 1988-2016) include: "Esham", *DİA*, vol. 11 (1995), pp. 376-380; "İltizam", *DİA*, vol. 22 (2000), pp. 154-158; ""Malikâne", *DİA*, vol. 27 (2003), pp. 516-518; "Malikâne-Divanî?", *DİA*, vol. 27 (2003), pp. 518-519; "Mukataa", *DİA*, vol. 31 (2005), pp. 129-132; "Nâzır", *DİA*, vol. 32 (2006), pp. 449-450; "Osmanlı/İktisadi ve Ticari Hayat", *DİA*, vol. 33 (2007), pp. 525-532; "Yed-i Vahid", *DİA*, vol. 43 (2013), pp. 378-383. On the internal tariff system, see his "Osmanlı Devletinde İç Gümrük Rejimi", in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, Istanbul, 1985, vol. 3, pp. 786-790.

[17] Genç and Erol Özvar (eds.), *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Kurumlar*, 2006, 2 vols. Compare: Isaac William Martin, Ajay K. Mehrotra and Monica Prasad (eds.), *The New Fiscal Sociology: Taxation in Comparative and Historical Perspective*, Evanston, Illinois, 2009.

[18] Genç, "Osmanlı Maliyesinde Malikâne Sistemi", 1973; for a recent study on the life-lease, see Fatma Önce, "Land, Tax and Power in the Ottoman Provinces: The Malikane-Mukataa of Esma Sultan in Alasonya (c. 1780-1825)", in *The Turkish Historical Review*, no. 8, 2017, pp. 54-74.

*likane mukataa* contractors, who were overwhelmingly Muslim, and their Armenian, Greek and Jewish bankers. In addition to providing credit guarantees, these bankers frequently acted as account managers for large-scale investors based in the capital, receiving remittances from sub-farmers and agents who collected revenues in provinces across the empire.[19]

At first glance, the records of this contracting system did not seem particularly useful for economic analysis. In central state and provincial budgets, the income recorded from these contracts was static. In fact, after initial purchase, the lease-holder was responsible for remitting only a nominal annual payment to the imperial treasury. However, Genç suspected that individual bids for specific contracts, which he found scattered in registers, certificates, and bureaucratic correspondence, and which fluctuated widely over the years, might tell a different story. In fact, successful bids on life-term contracts did not relate to current income but rather reflected years of anticipated income from these revenue sources. Combining statistical information from European sources on the volume of Ottoman exports of raw and partially worked textile materials, such as thread and undyed cloth, with his compilations of data on auction prices for revenue contracts on the same or similar commodities, he was able to generate an econometric model for gauging the changing volume of domestic production in manufacturing over the century.[20]

Genç's model and the studies based upon it triggered a paradigm shift. Thanks to his method, the Ottoman eighteenth century ceased to be the blank canvas upon which teleological accounts of civilizational decline could be projected. His reconstruction of Ottoman consumption and production patterns depicted an uneven century: of initial recovery, impressive growth and later contrac-

[19] Yavuz Cezar, "The Role of the Sarrafs in Ottoman Finance and Economy in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", in Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (eds.) *State, Province, and the West*, vol. 1, *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies*, London, 2005, pp. 62-76.
[20] Genç, "A Study of the Feasibility of Using Eighteenth Century Ottoman Fiscal Records".

tion.[21] Emerging from the long war with the Holy League (1683-1699), the empire's manufacturing sector recuperated in the first half of the century. The cotton and woolen industries of Anatolia, Syria and Kurdistan diversified, as evidenced by a proliferation of cheaper cloth produced in smaller urban centers. But war again interrupted this period of expansion. Renewed conflict with a more powerful Czarist Russia (1768-1774) ended Ottoman dominance of trade within the Black Sea region. These conditions, followed little more than a decade later by the global reverberations of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the continental blockade, took their toll on the Ottoman market and manufacturing. The state's role in this contraction was not insignificant: direct requisition of military-related supplies drastically affected the availability of raw materials and cut profit margins, as manufacturers of woolen cloth and sail cloth were required to provide these goods to the military at or below cost.[22]

Never satisfied with the refinement of his models or the accuracy of the evidence at his disposal, Genç continued his search for sources in Turkey and abroad. He discussed theories concerning the early modern economy with colleagues in Turkey, including his fellow economist and historian, Murat Çizakça[23] and former students, including Neşe Erim, Fehmi Yilmaz and Said Salih Kaymakcı. Although he spent his career in the Turkish academy, beginning as instructor of economics at Istanbul University, and continuing as a full or part-time faculty member in departments of history, economics, and sociology, at Marmara, Bilgi, Istanbul Technical and ultimately Istanbul Şehir universities, invitations to conferences and to deliver lectures in the United States, Europe, and Japan offered

[21] Genç, "18. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Ekonomisi ve Savaş", in *Yapıt, Toplumsal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, no. 49, 1984, pp. 52-61; no. 50, 1984, pp. 86-93.
[22] Genç, "Economie Ottomane et la Guerre au XVIII[e] siécle", in *Turcica*, no. 27, 1995, pp. 177-196.
[23] Murat Çizakça, "Mehmet Genç ile Beraber İktisat Tarihi Araştırmalarında Geçen Bir Otuz beş Yıl", in Alper Çeker (ed.), T*ürk Tarihçiliğinde Dört Sima: Halil İnalcık-Halil Sahillioğlu-Mehmet Genç-İlber Ortaylı*, İstanbul, 2006, pp. 99-107.

opportunities for comparative reflection and global vantage points on the Ottoman past. He read widely in English and French, translating Carlo Cipolla's classic, *The Economic History of World Population* (1962) into Turkish.[24] His many publications and conference papers addressed theoretical perspectives on economic history, development economics, and historical sociology; articles and talks addressed topics ranging from the Ottoman guilds, the trade of port-cities, research methodologies and the founding of state industries to consumption patterns, and the circulation of commodities within the empire.[25]

In 2000 Genç distilled his broad-ranging, decades-long research and reflection – a feat of intellectual endurance that he likened to the progress of "an ant making the pilgrimage from Istanbul to Mecca" – into a new conceptual framework for understanding the long eighteenth century of the Middle East and the Balkans. *State and Economy in the Ottoman Empire* (*Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Devlet ve Ekonomi*)[26] presents and discusses the key principles governing imperial intervention in the economy under three general headings: traditionalism, provisionism, and fiscalism. Each rubric should be considered shorthand for sets of policies affecting markets, money, and manufacturing, as well as his characterization of the bureaucracy's rationales with respect to economic activities and actors. Although there were overarching patterns, he also observed that the degree and nature of state intervention varied according to the sector of the economy which resulted in discrete timetables and trajectories of change.[27]

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[24] Carlo Cipolla, *Dünya Nüfusunun İktisadi Tarihi*, 6th reprinting, İstanbul, 2021.

[25] For a complete list of his publications and public talks, see Coşkun Çakır, "Vefeye: Mehmet Genç (1934-2021) Imparatorlugun Ikitsat: Hayatı, Kişiliği,, Eserleri», in *Divan*, no. 1, 2021, pp. 253-281.

[26] Currently in its 8th reprinting; his interviews and talks have also been published: Genç *Osmanlı Ekonomisine dair Konuşmalari*, İstanbul, 2021.

[27] Genç, "Tarihimize Giydirilen Deli Gömleği: Osmanlı Tarihinde Dönemlendirme Meselesi", in Mustafa Armağan (ed.), *Osmanlı Tarihini Yeniden Yazmak Gerileme Paradigmasının Sonu*, İstanbul, 2011, pp. 319-326.

Genç's formulation differed critically from earlier assessments of the Ottoman economic system. Fernand Braudel, for one, considered Asian states like the Ottoman Empire to be "world economies," polities beyond the pale of an increasingly globalized capitalist, European-dominated market system.[28] The idea that the imperial economy was embedded in a unique social formation and bounded by seemingly impervious socio-organizational forces was, initially, embraced by Immanuel Wallerstein as well.[29] In Genç's view such generalizations were untenable: they reified Ottoman institutions and dismissed the dynamism of state-society relations. Although Ottoman fiscal institutions were designed to assured the flow of raw materials and the circulation of goods and services between politically sensitive nodes, especially those supporting elite consumers in Istanbul and the military, imperial policies necessarily responded to domestic pressure as well as to flux in inter-state conditions. Although he would agree with Inalcik, with whom he engaged in a type of friendly rivalry, that Ottoman bureaucrats did not share the mercantilist philosophy of their early modern European counterparts,[30] they did recognize the state's vulnerability to certain global market conditions, compensating for this exposure through a variety means, including the use of state monopolies, assigning special privileges to domestic merchants, currency manipulation, and bi-lateral (not unilateral) commercial agreements with European states, including the empire's most-favored-nation, Bourbon France.[31]

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[28] Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*, Vol. 3, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, Berkeley, 1992, pp. 21-22.

[29] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Ottoman Empire and the Capitalist World-Economy: Some Questions for Research", in *Review*, The Fernand Braudel Center, no. 2,1979, pp. 389-398. By contrast, Faruk Tabak, *The Waning of the Mediterranean, 1550-1870: A Geohistorical Historical Approach*, Baltimore, 2008, postulates largely integrated markets which witnessed concurrent environmental and economic transformations.

[30] Halil Inalcik, "Capital Formation in the Ottoman Empire", in *The Journal of Economic History*, no. 29,1969, pp. 97-140.

[31] For an appreciation of the complexity the Ottoman-European commercial relationship, which defied the logic of mercantilism in many areas, including in the export of bullion, see Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century*, Leiden, 1999.

Genç's reorientation of the questions concerning later Ottoman economic history, as well as the wealth of supporting evidence he summoned to support it, calls into question models that continue to attribute Middle Eastern "underdevelopment" to ideological or religious causes. Despite the publicity given to Timur Kuran's *Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (2010), it is interesting to note that religion, per se, does not figure in Genç's model.[32] The predatory nature of the Ottoman command system with regard to capital accumulation, whether in terms of recycling the fortunes of officials by means of expropriation, through direct requisition of supplies during wartime, or by skimming revenues from domestic circulation of goods by means of internal tariffs, did not depend on Islamic jurisprudence. It is true that not a few Ottoman economic conventions derived from Islamic sources: while price controls on raw material in the urban marketplace may have limited the profits of wholesalers, and while the specificity of Islamic inheritance laws did fragment patrimonies, Ottoman subjects were able to concentrate and perpetuate wealth by other means: they invested in and inherited urban real estate, purchased orchards, turned large farms and plantations into family endowments (Arabic, *waqf*, Turkish, *vakif*), and used an adaptation of the same Islamic institutions to generate income for pious activities and personal profit by taking interest on loans made in cash.[33] "Traditionalism," in Genç's use of the term, did not block innovation.[34] The gradual centralization of revenues and state institutions discernable over the

[32] Genç recognized that Islamic precedents to some degree shaped the empire's fiscal policies toward the markets and taxation; however, the degree to which an Ottoman form or a purely Islamic version of these policies prevailed, was a source of ongoing discussion with Murat Çizakca, exchanging their ideas in forums held on 11 and 25 May and 22 June 2013 under the title, "İslam Ekonomisi ve Osmanlı Uygulaması" (Islamic Economy and Ottoman Practice).

[33] For an in-depth study, see Murat Çizakça, "Cash Waqfs of Bursa, 1555-1823", in *The Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, no. 38, 1995, pp. 313-354.

[34] Genç, "Esham", *DIA*, vol. 11, (1995) pp. 376-380; Genç, "State and The Economy in the Age of Reforms: Continuity and Change", in Kemal H. Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, Leiden, 2000, pp. 180-187.

empire's long eighteenth century paralleled transformations across Europe, as both Şevket Pamuk and this author have noted.[35]

Although well past retirement age, Genç continued to teach, research, write, lecture, and grant interviews. As much as his demanding teaching schedule would allow, he continued to dedicate time to work in the Prime Minister's Archive, a hub of Turkish and international historical scholarship. His generosity with his time and expertise was legendary. He treated visiting scholars from the Middle East, Europe and the United States to tea in the archive's cafeteria or lunch at his favorite kebab restaurant on *Divan Yolu*. In the reading room, students took turns in approaching hoca's desk to ask for help in deciphering script or to seek advice on their projects. In the late 1980s, I myself was one of those student-supplicants, one of many women scholars whose research he supported in historiography and social sciences. Concerned for his students' welfare as much as for our academic success, he cautioned us about the rigors of the life of the intellectual. On this subject, too, he spoke from personal experience: the effort to keep abreast of foreign publications often exhausted his salary. Most evenings were spent in solitude: puzzling out documents, compiling graphs, and composing essays and talks at the large desk that occupied the better part of his living room, encircled by shelves bursting with books, photocopies, and files overflowing with notes from the archives while listening to his favorite opera, Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Late in his career, Genç's extraordinary contributions to the nation's intellectual life were recognized. The University of Istanbul awarded him an honorary doctorate in sociology. The City of Istanbul celebrated his accomplishments in history, designating him as one of the four greatest living Turkish historians of the Ottoman Empire.[36] In 2015, Recep Tayyib Erdoğan bestowed on him the nation's

[35] Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State*, Leiden, 2004, and Şevket Pamuk, "The Evolution of Fiscal Institutions in the Ottoman Empire, 1500-1914", in Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla and Patrick K. O'Brien (eds.), *The Rise of Fiscal States. A Global History, 1500-1914*, Cambridge, UK, 2012, pp. 304-334.

[36] See essays in honor of Genç, Alper Çeker (ed.), *Türk Tarihçiliğinde Dört Sima: Halil İnalcık, Halil Sahillioğlu, Mehmet Genç, İlber Ortaylı*, İstanbul, 2006.

Presidential Grand Prize for Culture and the Arts. Professionally, too, he found a particularly welcoming academic home on the faculty of the new Department of History of Istanbul's Şehir University, an institution founded in 2008 by former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Working closely with Engin Deniz Akarlı and other faculty, Genç helped to advance its innovative curriculum. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences provided students an inclusive intellectual oasis for their studies in a politically turbulent and increasingly polarized decade.

Tragically, this academic oasis could not withstand the increasingly anti-democratic winds sweeping across Turkey and eastern Europe. On 30 June 2020, after its founder broke with the president's Justice and Development Party, the university's bank accounts were frozen and its operating permit was withdrawn. Overnight, the university was shuttered; students were summarily transferred to another university while the staff and faculty found themselves jobless. In an interview given after this event, Genç shed his characteristic circumspection with respect to politics, commenting caustically: "It is very rare in Turkey to find a university that produces original research, rather than merely serving as a conduit for the transfer of ideas from the West... Şehir University did this. And, I am afraid, this was one of its offences and the reason, ultimately, for its closure."[37] Less than a year later, he was again in hospital for a recurring illness. Although his spirits were buoyed by reading the manuscripts submitted for a special volume in his honor, he witnessed with sadness the government's escalating assault on Turkish academia, this time targeting Boğaziçi University, an institution that he admired greatly and among whose faculty counted some of his most valued friendships.

It was a faculty member from Boğaziçi who delivered the news of his passing to me. A brief text-message in English – "Mehmet is gone" – on the day of his death appeared on my telephone. It was

[37] This interview (in Turkish), given after the closing of the university, was originally posted on *YouTube*, but has now been removed.

as much a cry of grief over the loss of a dear friend as it was an expression of shock and disbelief that this one-man fortress of intellectual integrity, whose generous spirit, reassuring presence, and love of nature and learning had survived through and despite the worst excesses of Turkey's regimes, military and civilian, Kemalist and Islamist, was no longer. To his daughters, Elif and Zeyneb, his students and colleagues in Turkey, and the international community of scholars who mourn him, *başımız sağolsun*.

**Selected Writings**

(1981), "18. Yüzyıla Ait Osmanlı Mali Verilerinin İktisadi Faaliyetin Göstergesi Olarak Kullanılabilirliği Üzerinde Bir Çalışma", in *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 2, pp. 1033-77.

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