

Economy, Morality and Choices Made by Ordinary Ottomans in the Long-Seventeenth Century

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This panel contributes to a broad understanding of moral economy in the Ottoman context of the long-seventeenth century. Political turmoil, fiscal challenges and provisioning concerns bring forth the evident components of moral economy such as just price and standard currency in this period. A wider approach to the concept, however, leads to a deliberation of expansive reactions based on a capacious understanding of moral values that were voiced by an array of actors who took positions and made life choices vis à vis existing material circumstances, opportunities, social dynamics, and governmental policies.

The theoretical framework of this panel builds on the scholarship on moral economy, specifically as the concept is treated in the works of E. P. Thompson and Karl Polanyi. Thompson's analysis of the "moral economy of the poor" finds resonance in our examination of the creation of popular consensus as to what were considered legitimate or illegitimate practices and policies in the economic realm. Polanyi's principles of double movement and embeddedness relate to a discussion of how the possibilities of the integration of ethics and economics and finding an equilibrium between authority and the crowd were imagined in the Ottoman context in the long- seventeenth century.

The papers of the panel provide new insights that transcend the limited conception of the moral economy around the market by looking at livelihood strategies that surfaced in public debates and discourse, risk aversion through hierarchical institutionalization of, otherwise marginal, corsairs, and illustrative and representative realistic anecdotes employed in Islamic prescriptive literature on procedures and transactions. Besides, in Near Eastern History, the term 'moral economy' is key to understanding the complex interplay between the political regimes and the communities of peripheral rural areas in making a legitimate political structure. In relation to the Ottoman case, the recognition of the moral values of the peasant economy was a discursive tool for legitimizing the Ottoman sovereignty or 'Sultanic Despotism' in the eyes of the masses from rural areas.