

Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani-Family in Ottoman and Post-imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes

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The project traces the history of an Ottoman-Kurdish notable family, the Bedirhanis, over the late 19th and early 20th centuries until the outbreak of the 2nd World War.

It brings together two points of interest: First of all, the history of the Bedirhani family, which is reconstructed from archival material as well biographical writings and other ego-documents, serves as a prism to inquire about Ottoman and post-imperial Kurdish life worlds and opportunity structures. Secondly, the family's history can be read as a case-study to learn more about dynamics in Ottoman-Kurdish identity formation over a crucial period of transformation, immediately before and after the break-down of the Ottoman Empire.

It can be argued that with the end of the Ottoman Empire, imperial structures of solidarity and frameworks of identification did not just vanish over night or were immediately replaced by nationalist identities. Rather, the approach of the project, focusing on a family rather than individual biographies, allows to understand identity formation as a long-term process with many options besides Kurdish nationalism and to read post-Ottoman identities as a multi-layered phenomena.

To provide further evidence for this line of argument, biographical and autobiographical material as well as archival documents are collected to reconstruct individual biographical trajectories as well as network structures the Bedirhani family operated in. By comparing life stories and network structures over time, continuities and changes can be identified and crucial factors that had and impact on processes of imperial and post-imperial identity formation can be singled out.

The project can thus shed new light on dynamics in Ottoman-Kurdish history that have so far been interpreted mostly in the framework of nationalist history and have thereby glossed over alternative readings of the past.