

## **Middle-Class Culture in Cairo Under Ottoman Rule – Perceptions of Power and Knowledge**

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As part of my participation in *Islamic Art and Empire of the Early Modern Age*, taught by Dr Aimee Froom and Dr Lisa Balabanlilar in Spring 2018, I set out to explore cultural trends in Cairo under Ottoman rule (1517-1798).

I was interested in the ways in which economic and political environments can shape and be shaped by contemporaneous forms of cultural production, especially for the emerging Cairene middle class, which began to detach itself from state-sponsored apparatuses and take a life of its own in the economic field.

I was faced with multiple challenges in this project, which included acquiring and analyzing manuscript-form documents in Arabic (manuscript-writing was the predominant medium of literary and poetic production at the time), surveying academic scholarship on the intellectual, social and political transformations Cairo witnessed in the transition from Mamluk to Ottoman rule, and inspecting Arab and Muslim historical accounts, and Western and Ottoman travel accounts, that discussed the various facets of life in Cairo under the Ottomans.

In consultation with the humanities librarian at Fondren Library, Anna Shparberg, I was able to gain digital access to such manuscripts, found in the Arabic collection of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. I obtained several manuscripts that directly addressed my research questions and enriched my analysis.

In the understanding of the academic treatment of the period I was greatly assisted by several services provided by Fondren Library:

- Interlibrary Loan (ILL) – I ordered and received in a timely manner several books and articles about the topic (such as: *Artisan entrepreneurs in Cairo and early-modern capitalism 1600-1800*)
- Databases – Access to digital databases and online journals enabled me to paint a rich picture of how modern academic scholarship treated Egypt under the Ottomans.
- I was able to use several historical works found in the Fondren Library collection, such the chronicles of Ibn Iyyas, al-Jabarti and al-Damurdashi, and Mustafa Ali's descriptions of Cairo.

The resources provided by Fondren Library made it possible for me to write a multi-layered paper that looks into the nexus between the political, economic and religious in examining the roots and cultural world of the Egyptian middle class.